

Chapter Fourteen: An Evaluation of the Western Church's Teaching on Social Stability and Financial Security

We can now evaluate whether the church was faithful to the teaching of the apostles about wealth. The church rapidly became more lenient than Jesus regarding wealth, and unfortunately made three major accommodations to the human desire for economic security.

Land

The Western church made its first accommodation to material insecurity by endorsing land ownership in the agricultural economy. Although it is difficult to generalize about the Middle Ages and medieval European Christendom, I believe it is possible to say that *they moved from 'disinheritance' and 'universal giving' to 'property stabilization' and 'predictable giving' for the sake of social stability.* Every citizen had a role to play in the grand vision of social unity, so the use of wealth was subsumed into that concern. Political officials and nobles played an important role in maintaining social cohesion and peasants, too, were not insignificant. They economically supported the manor, which organized the resources for defense and warfare. William H. McNeill, in *The Rise of the West* relates the development of the European feudal system to nomadic incursions, mostly from Asia. McNeill believes the feudal manor system developed because it was the most effective way to organize agricultural and military resources to resist this threat.¹ Peasants were taught to submit to their landlords, and everyone in turn needed to submit to the priests. Significant economic inequalities could be tolerated because of this overriding emphasis on social unity.

At its inception, Christianity made very minimal concessions to this desire for land. Private property was seen as necessary but sometimes as a hindrance because it sometimes obstructed the Christian vision of devotion to the poor, to Christ, and to the new community in him. Then, as the church grew large, private property was accepted as necessary for social unity. Society was seen as an organism; the metaphor used was the same as Paul's for the church, the human body. This use of metaphor was no accident. Having baptized society through Constantine's Edict of Milan, the institutional church now took responsibility for the Empire. Everyone had their place in the social body. This concern for unity dominated theological and philosophical work all the way through Aquinas and the Scholastics. In the church's effort to maintain this unity, economic stability became a major concern. The church defined itself as a property owner.

In AD 506 in Southern Gaul, the Council of Agde forbade abbots or bishops to sell the property of the church, lest they reduce the church's wealth. Positively, the Council did encourage bishops to free slaves and instructed them to supply manumitted persons with money and land. And, perhaps the Council was concerned for transitioning from operating within the stability of the Roman Empire to the uncertainty of the Germanic tribes. Nevertheless, the Council defined the church itself as a property owner. The Code of Justinian, which that Emperor and his aides finalized in 529 AD to systematize the existing body of Roman law in supposed conformity with orthodox Christianity, and which influenced policy in the west for a millennium, made sweeping changes in property law. Says historian Will Durant, 'The property of the Church, whether in realty or movables, rents, serfs, or slaves, was declared inalienable; no member, and no number of members, of the clergy or the laity could give, sell, or bequeath anything belonging to the Church. These laws of Leo I and Anthemius, confirmed by the Code, became the legal basis of the Church's growing wealth: secular property was dissipated, ecclesiastical property was accumulated, in the course of generations.'² Similarly, in regards to land, as the church became an owner of property, it repaid donors of land with a stipend, or rented property to people loyal to it, and offered stern spiritual warnings against those who might have sought to take lands by force.

The transition from priestly marriage to priestly celibacy was intertwined with Roman Catholic property concerns. With concerns rising to protect church property from inheritance, children of priests were banned from inheriting church property. Later, all sons of priests were declared illegitimate. In 1022, Pope Benedict VIII banned marriages for priests, and the idea of the celibate priest emerged. Finally in 1139, in the Second Lateran Council, Pope Innocent II voided all marriages of priests and all new priests had to divorce their wives. All this was done to protect money and church property.

To peasants and tenant farmers, the church preached submission. In so doing, it reinforced the legitimacy of social inequality. Large landowning families became increasingly wealthy. While the church certainly served the poor and set up hospitals and the like, it saw social inequality as serving the social body; laborers were its feet and hands while other, wealthier groups were its mind, mouth, etc. And it saw social harmony as a higher goal than any other. The church meanwhile needed financial stability the larger and more bureaucratically complex it became.

¹ William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1963 and 1991), p.361 – 416

² Will Durant, *The Age of Faith* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), p.113

Since land was the absolute basis for security in ancient and classical civilizations, providing harvest, rents, and inheritance, the church gradually, in one form or another, stabilized land ownership. The church put its stamp on the arrangement of land between people, meddled with questions of who owned what, and formulated property rights and violations. In fact, by the 1300's it claimed as a central belief that Jesus and the apostles owned land; not believing this was punishable by excommunication.³ Whereas Jesus fundamentally challenged Jews in his day to sit loose to their ancestral lands, the church eventually articulated the opposite.

Iberians, more so than any other European Christians, imitated Islam in its view of land as possession. Portugal and Spain had very extensive conflicts with the Muslim Moors in the Iberian peninsula, starting from 711 AD when the Muslim Berber commander Tariq ibn-Ziyad led an army of seven to ten thousand Muslims from Morocco across the Mediterranean at its narrowest point to conquer Spain. To resist the Muslim advance, the Iberian Christians retaliated in kind, first militarily. They developed a territorial conviction that the land and people of the Iberian Peninsula should be 'Christian.' This *Reconquista* sensibility did not exist in Christian faith before, since Jesus called his followers to be 'pilgrims' and to give up land. But it was an imitation of the Muslim vision of the unity between land, people, and faith in the Muslim God.⁴

Medieval European Catholicism was consumed with a passion for social unity and stability, the guardianship of an order that, ideally at least, encompassed all institutions and people in European society. Catholic priests embodied the unity of that church society and offered society's forgiveness by reenacting the cross through a variety of actions: administering the Eucharist, hearing confessions, pronouncing pardon, selling indulgences for redemptive purposes, etc. This resulted in an elevation of the priesthood as the true agents of Christian work. They offered forgiveness and maintained society's unity, both symbolically and actually in the formal church bureaucracy. The desire for unity by itself, however, cannot explain the complexity of medieval Christian teaching on work and society. That is why we must examine the church's attempt to stabilize and secure economic resources for itself and the society it created, European Christendom.⁵

Generally, the pattern is as follows. The church first dilutes Jesus' invitation into complete material insecurity and sacrifice, then it justifies the possession of some material security, and finally it makes the development of that material security a Christian virtue. Criticism of that accommodation is then attacked viciously because it now has the power of sin, fear, and anxiety behind it. Christians evidenced a desire for predictability from the gospel, in a word, its *domestication*. Whereas in Acts and Paul's letters, giving and sharing of resources seems to be very fluid, dynamic, ad-hoc, and rather uncertain, the church in response to that uncertainty gradually began to emphasize an Israel-like way of living where most people owned land, worked, took sabbaths, made money, tithed, and supported their vocational/occupational clergy. What we have is *complete negligence towards the theological continuity-discontinuity between Jesus and Israel* regarding land, material wealth, sabbath, tithing laws, etc. in favor of a church-centered hermeneutic where everything in the Bible was read as being for the church, including Israel's organizational structures. In the Catholic tradition, where the church simply had more authority, this was justified by simply referring to the church's mission to bring salvation to people and people into the church. In the Protestant tradition, where authority for land ownership often had to come from Scripture more explicitly, the tendency was to develop a biblical theology of wealth out of Old Testament Israel's occupation of the Promised Land.

Colonial America is an example of how Christians justified and promoted land ownership in their theology. John Winthrop's sermon *A Model of Christian Charity* was an invocation of Deuteronomic imagery preached by the pastor-governor on the verge of landing on New England's shores. The Puritans believed that they had made a covenant as a nation with God. Just like Israel, their crossing of a sea was in search of the freedom to worship God. Just like Israel, they arrived at an abundant land thinking they would own it. And just like Israel, they proceeded to exterminate or push aside the inhabitants of the land, the Native Americans. This coincided with their misguided theology about land. An early example occurred during the Pequot War (1634 – 1638). Captain John Mason massacred 600 – 700 Pequot women, children, and older men by setting the village of Misistuck (present day Mystic) on fire. Mason justified his action against the Pequot by saying it was the act of a God who 'laughed his

³ Lewis Mumford. *The Condition of Man* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.), p. 182

⁴ The Iberian Christians later acted on anti-Jewish sentiment, which led to Spanish Catholics forcing Jews to convert to Christianity, which led in turn to the suspicion that the Jews of Spain had converted nominally and were not, in fact, loyal to the Spanish crown. The racial idea of 'blood purity' developed as a way to identify darker skinned Jews as an ethnic group. This sensibility would carry over to the conception of race in the Americas.

⁵ Although Roman Catholicism exhibited these characteristics most strongly, it was by no means unique to the western Mediterranean: I suspect that the same features emerged in eastern Orthodoxy and Nubian Christianity in Africa as well. Perhaps the impulse was particularly strong in the western Mediterranean because the Roman church exercised such a strong role in rebuilding Roman civilization after the barbarians sacked Rome, or because the Roman Christians inherited and baptized a secular political vision from the Roman Empire.

Enemies and the Enemies of his People to scorn making [the Pequot] as a fiery Oven... Thus did the Lord judge among the Heathen, filling [Mystic] with dead Bodies.' He then quoted Deuteronomy 20:16, which referred to Israel's conquest under Joshua: 'The Lord was pleased to smite our Enemies in the hinder Parts, and to give us their land for an inheritance.'⁶ The very next verse, Deuteronomy 20:17, is implicit because of Mason's readers' assumed knowledge; it reads, 'You shall utterly destroy them.' This demonstrates how European American Puritans read themselves into the story of Israel's conquest. In spite of the fact that this acquisition of land was often grossly unfair and involved mass killings, intentional spreading of diseases, broken treaties, and the banishment and confinement of native peoples to other parts of North America, in spite of the corruption that resulted from this deep association with materialism, the church made its first accommodation. It also accommodated peoples' desire to feel financially secure and spiritually innocent, so it ignored the radical teaching of Jesus and went on to teach about owning land.

Labor

The Western church made its second accommodation to material insecurity by exploiting labor. Slavery was – and continues to be – a complex social phenomenon, and surprisingly difficult to define. Slavery in other time periods varied greatly by gender roles, different terms of entry (e.g. war captive, penal servitude, kidnapping or piracy, birth to slave parents, voluntary indenture, etc.), the nature of service (e.g. political-military vassalage, household servant, civil servant, soldier, surrogate mother, sex slave, plantation worker, ship worker, apprentice, etc.), various rights of slaves and limits of owners, and different terms or possibilities of exit, just to name a few aspects. Nevertheless, despite this complexity, and despite what some have taken to be Paul's 'naïve endorsement' or 'humanization' of slavery in Ephesians and Colossians,⁷ Christian faith led to the dismantling of forced labor slavery in Europe in the medieval period and then again after New World slavery. This was an incredible achievement. Bearing in mind that other belief systems always persisted with different definitions of what 'humanity' was, that the earliest Christians had to navigate being in non-Christian households and societies and governments, that Christians were called by Jesus not to judge non-Christians or hold Christian ethics over non-Christians, that Christian ethics cannot be and were never simply translated into public policy, and that law enforcement and policing even for the most beneficial laws were very challenging issues, 'Slavery ended in medieval Europe only because the church extended its sacraments to all slaves and then managed to impose a ban on the enslavement of Christians (and of Jews). Within the context of medieval Europe, that prohibition was effectively a rule of universal abolition.'⁸

Evidence abounds that the early Christian practiced emancipation of slaves in various ways. Clement of Rome (30 – 100 AD) observed, 'We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that they might ransom others. Many, too, have surrendered themselves to slavery, that with the price which they received for themselves, they might provide food for others.'⁹ This observation was made despite Paul's admonition to 'not become slaves of men' (1 Cor.7:23). Polycarp (69 – 155 AD) and Ignatius (~50 – 117 AD), second generation Christian leaders, freed their slaves.¹⁰ According to Western church tradition, Onesimus, a former runaway slave (who Paul returned to Philemon, writing that Philemon set him free) becomes bishop of Ephesus after

⁶ John Mason, *A Brief History of the Pequot War: Especially of the Memorable taking of their Fort at Mistick in Connecticut in 1637*

⁷ Though I do not have the time and space to fully develop my understanding of the Old and New Testament passages on slavery, and the relation between them, I will give a brief outline of Paul's treatment of slavery. Paul's teaching – especially in 1 Corinthians – that the individual human body belongs solely to God, was designed to be His dwelling place (i.e. 'temple'), and will be resurrected in glory like Jesus' resurrected body. Hence Paul loosens social relations, including marriage and slavery, 'to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord' (1 Cor.7:35): 'Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that' (1 Cor.7:21). This is absolutely consistent with the overarching question of how we must live if our bodies are the Lord's. The practical criterion is discretionary independence to serve the Lord, since there may be situations in which being a slave gives you more discretionary time and energy for relational ministry, though it may conflict with any call of God to a new people or geography. Paul's example in Philemon to free Onesimus reflects that principle, I believe. His teaching about slaves and masters in Ephesians and Colossians actually limits the power of the master for as long as the relationship exists. For my full treatment of the subject of slavery in both Old and New Testaments, please see <http://nagasawafamily.org/article%20slavery%20in%20the%20bible.pdf>.

⁸ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (Random House: New York, 2005), p.28

⁹ *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, ch.55

¹⁰ Edward Roger, *Slavery Illegality in All Ages and Nations* (1855). Unless otherwise mentioned, most of the information in this outline comes from Roger's work

Timothy, from 80 AD. According to Eastern Orthodox church tradition, however, this same Onesimus became the third bishop of Byzantium, from 54 – 68 AD. Although one of these traditions is surely confused, it is significant for this purpose that the stigma of slavery was overcome in the claiming of Onesimus as a very significant church leader. Then the practice of emancipation became tied to baptism. Sometime during the reign of Trajan (98 – 117 AD), a Roman prefect named Hermas received baptism at an Easter festival with his wife and children and twelve hundred and fifty slaves. On that occasion, he gave all his slaves their freedom and generous gifts besides.¹¹ Ovidius (died 135 for martyrdom), bishop of Braga under Pope Clement I, emancipated five thousand slaves. Several epitaphs in the catacombs mention the fact of manumission of other slaves, though the exact dates are unknown.¹² Sometime during the reign of Diocletian (284 – 305 AD), a wealthy prefect named Chromatius embraced faith in Christ and emancipated fourteen hundred slaves after they are baptized with himself, because their common status as children of God put an end to their servitude to a man.¹³ And so on.

Church leaders soon began to challenge slavery as a general category, though as we read their written legacy, we should probably interpret them as meaning slavery resulting from kidnapping, raiding, the purchase and sale of human beings as a commodity, oppressive debt-bondage, and most forms of self-indenture. Cyprian (208 – 258 AD), bishop of Carthage condemned a local slaveholder: ‘You, man of a day, expect from your slave obedience. Is he less a man than you? By birth he is your equal. He is endowed with the same organs, with the same reasoning soul, called to the same hopes, subject to the same laws of life in this and in the world to come. You subject him to your dominion. If he, as a man, disregard or forget your claim, what miseries you heap upon him. Impious master, pitiless despot! You spare neither blows nor whips, nor privations; you chastise him with hunger and thirst, you load him with chains, you incarcerate him within black walls; miserable man! While you thus maintain your despotism over a man, you are not willing to recognize the Master and Lord of all men.’ Gregory of Nyssa in a sermon during Lent in 379 said, ‘Since God’s greatest gift to us is the perfect liberty vouchsafed us by Christ’s saving action in time, and since God’s gifts are entirely irrevocable, it lies not even in *God’s* power to enslave men and women.’¹⁴ In addition, he said that God has given dominion over the creation to each person, so to possess a slave’s material possessions is contrary to creation. Ambrose (337 – 397 AD), bishop of Milan, ordered church property to be sold to purchase slaves and set them free. Chrysostom (presbyter at Antioch from 386 – 398 AD, and then archbishop of Constantinople from 398 – 407 AD), preached, ‘In Christ Jesus there is no slave. Therefore it is not necessary to have a slave. Buy them, and after you have taught them some skill by which they can maintain themselves, set them free.’

In addition to ‘humanizing’ slavery, which is no trivial matter, Christians, just as importantly, handled different terms of entry into slavery differently. Within both Old and New Testaments, kidnapping people and enslaving them – a practice that was widespread among people neighboring the Jews and then the church – was morally heinous (Ex.21:16; 1 Tim.1:10). This was, and is, the most reprehensible form of enslavement. One of Constantine’s most interesting pieces of legislation was prohibiting kidnapping and enslavement by threatening the death penalty; this surely had Christian influence because no Roman law prohibiting kidnapping was known before. Self-indenture as a source of slavery became regulated and limited, gradually yielding to serfdom rather than outright slavery. Birth to slave parents as a source of enslavement was mitigated over time: the Emperor Justinian, in the Code of Justinian developed from 529 – 534 AD which impacted the rest of Roman law for centuries to come, declared that if a pregnant woman was free at any time during her pregnancy, her child was free;¹⁵ the Council of Orleans in 549 AD declared that children born to the union of free people and self-indentured slaves were free; and eventually inherited slavery was abolished *de facto*. Slavery by war captivity was seen as both a punishment for warfare and a form of mercy. In Europe and the Middle East throughout ancient times to the medieval period, standard military convention for a city that refused to surrender was to kill all inhabitants of that city. So taking

¹¹ Philip Schaff, ‘Christian Life in Contrast with Pagan Corruption: The Church and Slavery,’ *History of the Christian Church*, Volume II

¹² Schaff

¹³ Schaff

¹⁴ Hart, *Atheist Delusions*, p.178 – 179. Thus, Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.225 is historically incorrect when he says that ‘it was not until the start of the seventh century that we find the first forcefully articulated theological statement that manumission in general was an act of piety’ through the pen of Gregory the Great. Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century and Cyprian in the third provide literary evidence that such statements were being produced much earlier than the seventh century. In addition, the pattern of owners at their baptism freeing slaves existed from the first century, strongly suggesting that there was oral (preached) tradition in the early Christian community of the importance of manumission in general, and the importance of conferring freedom upon the slaves because of the symbolic death of the owner in Christian baptism. Patterson’s treatment of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians on p.227 shows his lack of experience as a biblical exegete.

¹⁵ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.231

slaves can be considered a moral improvement to killing them; sometimes such slaves were ransomed back to their people of origin as well. Christians prior to Augustine critiqued war itself, thus implicitly condemning war captivity. It is also important to point out that this form of slavery has not actually been abolished. The United States, for example, detains terrorists at Guantanamo Bay because they are perceived to be too dangerous to be released. Even though we do not officially call this 'slavery,' we should not be confused by the lack of this nomenclature. We need to be very careful about condemning past generations, Christian or not, for actions they 'should have abolished,' while we continue, in point of fact, to take those very actions in principle, even adding torture to the overall picture. Slavery as a sentence for criminal wrongdoing, whatever we may think about the morality of such an act, actually continues as well. There were no large prison complexes at most other time periods, and by this definition, slavery still technically exists in the United States, since many of our large prisons are now run by private corporations who utilize inmates to make commodities and pay them very little to nothing. Furthermore, we are very concerned today about the internal culture of prisons, which often harden inmates further, leading to high recidivism rates and great difficulty integrating an ex-con back into society. The choice of people in earlier times, including biblical times, to sentence some criminals to slavery, typically in a household, immediately integrates that person back into society, in the context of constructive human relationships.

I point these things out because after the abolition of slavery internationally in the 19th and 20th centuries, many people became disenchanted with the Scriptures themselves – Christians who wanted to still believe in the divine inspiration of the biblical text who were flustered by the outspoken critics who did not. However, this disenchantment is rooted in two errors. First, it is a failure to recognize that we have simply shifted the definition of the word 'slavery' over time. Second, it represents a gross overestimation of, and perhaps an intentional self-blinding to, the ugliness of the institutions of our own culture. At times, it is pure arrogance: We make a very hasty condemnation of earlier time periods, thinking that we have achieved a solution inherently better than the institutions of yesterday, which is entirely debatable in any larger, meaningful sense. So we condemn earlier generations and the biblical text for not 'abolishing slavery.' But we have not abolished it. We have only redefined it.

Christian church leaders, perhaps encouraged by the model of Constantine decreeing the death penalty for kidnapping, then tried to influence political figures. Remigius (437 – 533 AD) wrote to Clovis, king of France, 'Let the gate of your palace be open to all, that every one may have recourse to you for justice. Employ your great revenues in redeeming slaves.' Patrick of Ireland (possibly 387 – 493 AD) wrote a scathing letter to a Welsh chieftain, Coroticus, condemning his massacre and enslavement of newly baptized Irish Christians in a coastal raid. When Clovis II, king of the Franks from 649 – 657 AD, fell in love with his British slave Bathilda, he freed her and married her in 649 AD. Clovis and Bathilda halted the slave trade among the Franks and redeemed slaves. Charlemagne, king of the Franks from 768 AD and Emperor of the Romans from 800 AD, opposed slavery. After the tenth century, slavery in Europe, particularly northwestern Europe, had virtually disappeared. It was only located in the places where Christians and Muslims had extensive interaction with each other. '[Slavery] had essentially disappeared from Europe by the end of the tenth century.' But 'in Spain, Christian and Muslim armies continued to enslave each other's captives taken in battle, and slave trading involved northern Italian export firms and Muslim buyers persisted into the fifteenth century, in defiance of the church... They were purchased from Slavic tribes in the Caucasus (the word 'slave' is a corruption of the word 'Slav'). A few were kept as a form of luxury goods by very wealthy Italians such as the Medici, but most were exported to Islam – white slaves being 'more precious than gold in trading with Egypt.' Late in the eleventh century, Christian faith became rooted in the Scandinavian peoples. The church influenced the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden to stop the fearsome Viking raids in the North Sea and Irish Sea. Raids continued into the 12th century under the kings of Norway, but eventually slavery was outlawed. In 1102, the London Church Council outlawed slavery in England. Iceland followed in 1117, and Ireland in 1171. By 1500, people in England, France, and the Netherlands boasted that slavery existed everywhere else in the world except on their soil.

However, the development of plantation products, especially sugar, for the global market resulted in the vicious trans-Atlantic slave trade. Sugar had been grown with great difficulty first in India, then Persia, then by the Arabs throughout the Arab Empire, including the Eastern Mediterranean, the Mediterranean islands, and Spain. Cyprus developed sugar in the tenth century, then Sicily under the Arabs (who occupied Sicily from 965 – 1072 AD) developed sugar as well. The crown of Aragon continued the development of sugar in Sicily, following the Normans and the French there. Due to the difficulty of growing and harvesting sugar, they used the now-recognizable combination of slaves, relatively large land plantations, and well-developed long-range trade. In relatively small but telling numbers, 'From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, Christian Spain once again relied on this trading system [from the Black Sea region throughout the Mediterranean] to increase its slave population. The typical slave in

Spain came from the Black Sea slave trade: Greece, Sardinia, Russia, the Crimea, and especially from among the Turks, Armenians, and Balkan peoples. There were also slaves from Africa and the Canary Islands.’¹⁶

Portugal and Spain developed chattel slavery to compete economically with Islam. During the early fifteenth century, the Portuguese kidnapped people from the Canary Islands to work sugar plantations of the Azores and Cape Verde Islands.¹⁷ The Portuguese and the Spanish both looked to Sicily as a model to follow in the Iberian peninsula and in their colonies, and in 1420 AD, Prince Henry of Portugal called upon Sicily for sugar cane plants and experienced sugar growers. ‘The Portuguese had established a slave market at Arguin in northern Africa in 1448 shortly after they rounded the bulge of Cape Verde, and it is possible that Arguin supplied the first black slaves taken to Europe and America. In any case, on Cape Verde itself the Portuguese founded San Iago, a slave market from where slaves were taken to Lisbon and Spain. D’Albuquerque, eventually the Portuguese viceroy of India, wanted to maintain a lifeline to India, which required control of three strategic points: Socotra, on the Red Sea; Hormuza, the entrance to the Persian Gulf, and Malacca, at the western end of the Chinese trade. Portugal also conquered Mozambique in 1507 and ruled from there. ‘The Portuguese conquest of East Africa was the first example of the brutal use of military force by a European power for imperial purposes.’¹⁸ Portugal also conquered the western shores of Africa with great savagery in 1500 – 1509, taking captive peaceful Arab towns and forcing them to pay a tribute to the Portuguese king. Portugal wanted to outflank Muslim sea forces and break Muslim sea power in the Indian Ocean.¹⁹

Portugal also had a slave base in the Kongo kingdom under the king of the Kongo, Afonso I, who converted to Christianity after becoming king in 1506. King Afonso wrote a letter to the king of Portugal attempting to stop the enslavement of his people, but his plea fell on deaf ears. Thus between 1513 and 1516 just under 3,000 slaves were transported to Lisbon and over 370 to Spanish ports. The impact of the voyages of Columbus on the slave trade, however, was considerable and tragic. On his third voyage of 1498 to the Caribbean, for example, Columbus spoke of the economic value of introducing African slaves to replace Indian labor, saying it could all be done in the name of Christianity.²⁰ Native Americans were being decimated by diseases carried by Europeans, while Africans had had prior exposure and therefore resisted, and showed great endurance working in the heat of the plantations. As a young man, Columbus was trained in the Madeira sugar trade. He became romantically involved with Beatriz de Bobadilla y Ossorio, governor of Gomera of the Canary Islands, who gave him sugar cane plantings; these plantings were the first sugar canes in the Caribbean in 1493. Europeans took sugar canes to Santo Domingo, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. By the 1530’s, the sugar crop was firmly established in Brazil.

To worsen the situation, some of the Popes actively sanctioned enslavement of Africans for a critical eighty-five year period. Even though Pope Eugene IV in his 1435 declaration *Sicut Dudum* had condemned the use of African slaves in the Canary Islands, sadly, in 1452, Pope Nicholas V completely retracted that position: he issued the papal bull *Dum Diversas*, giving Portugal the right to reduce any ‘Saracens, pagans, and any other unbelievers’ to hereditary slavery. Then, Pope Pius II in 1462 condemned the Portuguese for enslaving Christians, but sanctioned the enslavement of non-Christian Africans. In 1493, following Columbus’ discovery of the Americas, Pope Alexander VI granted ‘official ownership’ of the New World to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, again making the fatal and arrogant mistake that the Catholic Church owned land and people, as opposed to coordinating Christian missionary activity. Francis I of France challenged this decision, saying greedily and sarcastically, ‘The sun shines on me as well as on others. I should be very happy to see the clause in Adam’s will which excluded me from my share when the world was being divided.’²¹ In 1514, Spanish conquerors issued ‘the Requirement,’ an ultimatum by which Native Americans were threatened with slavery and persecution if they did not acknowledge ‘the Church as the Ruler and Superior of the whole world.’²² By 1537, Pope Paul III issued *Sublimis Deus* saying that all peoples, even those outside the faith, should not be deprived of liberty, but by that time it was too late. The damage was done and the floodgates were opened.

Then, in another puzzling and grievous move, Catholic Christian leaders and theologians made a racial exception for Africans in their condemnation of slavery, ostensibly to keep the plantations going and their coffers

¹⁶ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.152.

¹⁷ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p.116 – 117

¹⁸ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World* (New Amsterdam Books: New York, 1989), p.138

¹⁹ Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World* (New Amsterdam Books: New York, 1989), p.138 – 9

²⁰ Lamin Sanneh, *Abolitionists Abroad: American Blacks and the Making of Modern West Africa* (Harvard University Press: Harvard, 1999), p.2

²¹ L. Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, PA, 1949), p.148

²² L. Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America*, p.33

filled. Even the great defender of the Native Americans, Bartolomei de las Casas, and the Salamanca School which followed him, argued that African slaves be used to replace Native Americans. Las Casas later recanted of his endorsement of Africans as slaves, thankfully,²³ but the damage had been done. From 1534 – 1549, Pope Paul III condemned the slavery of the South American Indians, but not the Africans. In 1542, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V issued the New Laws of the Indies setting all Native American slaves free, abolishing slavery among them, and declaring them to be citizens of the Empire with full rights. But the plight of the African went unheeded. In 1639, Urban VIII likewise condemned the slavery of the South American and East Indians, but not Africans. The ‘curse of Ham’ was invoked, as Europeans interpreted dark skin to be the result of Noah’s curse on Ham, which in the biblical text contains no mention or hint of a change in skin pigmentation. In the U.S. in 19th century, defenders of racial slavery cited this idea frequently against the Christian abolitionists.

For the sake of time and space, I will focus on subsequent developments in the Protestant traditions in British and American contexts, highlighting key theological currents and emphases. The first recorded African slaves arrived in English North American colonies in 1619. Initially, they were brought over as indentured servants with a term of servitude for 3 – 7 years. Once they completed their terms, they were set free, were allowed to buy land, and even own indentured servants of their own. Other Europeans were also indentured in this way. However, the desire for permanent, inexpensive labor became too great in the British colonies, and slavery for blacks turned into lifetime servitude. In Britain, Christian anti-slavery efforts culminated in politically unified abolition throughout the British Empire and beyond. This was largely because slavery had already been abolished on English soil, and that on explicitly Christian grounds, making slavery in the British colonies a subject of existential unease and dissonance for British citizens back home the more they learned about it. For the sake of space and time, I will only mention that there was of course resistance among some Anglicans to the abolition of slavery, not least in the Parliament of Wilberforce’s era, but unlike Christians in the U.S., especially in the South, Christians in Britain were ultimately much more willing to suffer economic loss to free slaves.

In 1655, Puritan Richard Baxter condemned those who ‘catch up poor Negroes...and...make them slaves and sell them...one of the worst kinds of thefts in the world...such persons are to be taken as the common enemies of mankind.’ In 1657, George Fox, founder of the Quakers, began to lead the Quakers in a long and strenuous protest against slavery that continued into the 19th century. In 1676, Quakers in West New Jersey outlawed slavery in their region. In 1683, Anabaptists condemned the slave trade even as they sold themselves into slavery to minister to the Africans captured by slavers. In 1688, the Mennonites of Germantown, Pennsylvania declared their Resolution against Slavery. In 1691, Cotton Mather published *The life and death of the renown’d Mr. John Eliot, who was the first preacher of the Gospel to the Indians in America*, which contains anti-slavery sentiments. In 1693, the Quakers published an abolitionist work called *An Exhortation & Caution to Friends Concerning the Buying or Keeping of Negroes* – the first printed pamphlet directly attacking North American slavery; then in 1696, they protested publicly against slavery, and excommunicated those of their members who import slaves. In 1723, the German Baptist Brethren started to oppose slavery. In 1784, the Methodists passed an anti-slavery resolution. In 1789, freed African Olaudah Equiano published his spiritual autobiography, which was also the first slave narrative, and an argument against the slave trade, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, which had multiple editions and translations, and had a decisive impact on the British abolition movement; in that same year, William Wilberforce delivered his first abolition speech to the British House of Commons. From 1806 – 1811, three bills were passed in England which stopped the British slave trade. In 1833, the British abolished slavery altogether in all the lands of the British Empire. In the 1830’s, British Foreign Secretary Henry Palmerston, a committed abolitionist, along with Thomas Fowell Buxton, who was the spiritual heir of Wilberforce, and the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (formed 1839) brought the trans-Saharan slave trade to the public attention. In a somewhat surprising move, the British, with British Christian support, began to block slave ships from landing in Muslim ports. British and French influence abolished the slave trade in Muslim countries. It is now widely understood that the British committed ‘econocide’ – a kind of death of their economy – in order to stamp out slavery.²⁴ This is significant because what tends to be the last argument in a series of pseudo-theological rationalizations of forced labor slavery originating in abduction – ‘our way of life depends on slavery’ – was defeated through debate, mobilization, and political action, as opposed to civil war as in the United States.

In the United States, however, the issue of slavery divided Christians more bitterly, just as it divided the Union. This division started from colonial times. The Puritan theology of a covenanted political nation, which I

²³ Junius P. Rodriguez, *Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (ABC – CLIO), p.xix.

²⁴ The argument put forward, mostly by Marxist scholars, that abolition was in Britain’s economic self-interest, and commonly connected to Caribbean scholar Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), has been decisively disproven by Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (1986).

mentioned above, affected the Puritans' willingness to engage with slavery. Anglo-American culture was not distinguished from the gospel, thus creating a cultural barrier and an implicit racial barrier to Africans participating in Puritan society; this barrier was intentional since Puritans did not want to dilute the political 'covenant' they had supposedly established between their polity and God.²⁵ Africans and Native Americans were simply treated as outsiders, and while not necessarily enslavable in theory, were enslavable in practice. Thus, 'in whatever ways plans for a Puritan holy community in New England differed from other early English ventures, a prohibition of slavery was not among them. In the Puritans' Caribbean colony of Providence Island, servitude was the linchpin of their labor system. As soon as indentured labor fell short of expectations, the Company turned to African slaves. Their colony became the first English Settlement in the Americas to identify African slaves as its labor of choice.'²⁶ By contrast, Roger Williams – a Protestant theologian and founder of Providence Plantation, eventually part of the state of Rhode Island – opposed slavery of Africans and the mistreatment of Native Americans. Significantly, Williams did not believe in the Calvinist idea of a covenanted political nation; he argued with Puritan John Winthrop of Massachusetts that a perfect church-state union was neither theologically nor practically possible, and thus he argued for the individual's religious freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state. In Providence, he therefore sheltered Baptists, Quakers, and Jews and became the father of religious liberty in the United States. Significantly, his personal desire early in his life to share Christ with the Native American peoples in a way that respected their cultures, led to his great interest in Native American cultures and languages: he published *A Key to the Language of America* in 1643, the first dictionary of any Native American tongue in the English language, which became an instant best seller in England. Regarding slavery, in 1652, Roger Williams and Samuel Gorton spearheaded the passage of a law forbidding slavery in 'Providence Plantations' (the towns of Providence and Warwick). Unfortunately, the towns of Newport and Portsmouth (what was then chartered as 'Rhode Island') refused to observe the law; the joining of the four towns into the colony of 'Rhode Island and Providence Plantations' made the anti-slavery law a dead letter.

This great disagreement between Christians over politics continued. Georgia had banned slavery from 1735 – 1750, but George Whitefield, the tireless evangelist who helped spark the Great Awakening, argued for *reintroducing* American-style plantation slavery in Georgia, which it did in 1751. Whitefield thought he was *upholding the authority of Scripture*. He also thought that the plantations of Georgia, which he believed was economically fragile, would never flourish without slavery. Georgians also thought that the Spanish presence in Florida was a military threat, since Spain offered freedom to slaves in exchange for military service. So Whitefield wrote and spoke with the Georgia Trustees on many occasions, advocating for the reintroduction of slavery. Whitefield himself became a slave owner, using slaves to staff his Bethesda Orphanage and his plantation called 'Providence.' Also in Georgia, Wesleyans were observed to have 'learned to subdue their critique [of slavery], in order to grow in membership...Unlike Calvinist intellectuals such as Charles Colcock Jones, Methodists rarely used the Old Testament patriarchs and their hierarchical values to buttress the pro-slavery case. Relying mainly on the letters attributed to Paul, Georgia Wesleyans argued that slavery was scripturally allowable, but not necessarily ideal. In the ante-bellum era their theoretical position was neither proslavery nor antislavery, but neutrality. Christians lived in an imperfect world where slavery was sanctioned by law; therefore, the church should coexist with slavery, just as it did in Paul's day.' I use this statement as an example, since this position was held by many other American Protestants and not just George Whitefield and the Wesleyans of Georgia. Although Whitefield was known to treat his slaves well and was critical of the abuse and neglect of slaves by other masters, the fact remains that Whitefield elevated financial and international interests above the overarching biblical teaching on basic human rights and the absolute condemnation of kidnapping and forced enslavement as an ultimate source of slaves. Whether Europeans instilled conflict and exploited differences among Africans so as to buy Africans enslaved by other Africans, or whether Europeans abducted Africans directly, is irrelevant. In either case, kidnapping and forced enslavement was involved, so their position treated slavery as a neutral phenomenon disconnected from how people actually became slaves. This was typical of how American Protestants engaged with the biblical texts and the issue of slavery. Whitefield, the Georgian Wesleyans, and other Christians like them also sundered 'church growth' and 'evangelism' from Christian ethics. The fact that Christians today permit a profound rupture between evangelism and Christian ethics, as if ethical formation can be delayed or sacrificed for the sake of either 'personal evangelism' or 'church growth,' finds common root here. So from 1750 to 1775, Georgia's slave population grew from less than 500 to approximately 18,000 people. Most were forced to work the physically demanding rice fields.²⁷

²⁵ Mark Noll, *America's God* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2005) describes the theological convolutions in which European American theologians engaged by trying to uphold both a believers' covenant and a national covenant.

²⁶ Seymour Drescher, *Abolition*, p.71 – 72

²⁷ 'Slavery in Colonial Georgia,' *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*

In 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church under the leadership of John Wesley denounced slavery and asked its members to free their slaves within twelve months, but the regulations were suspended the following year. In 1789, some Southern Christian churches begin to embrace abolition, and some plantation owners freed their slaves. In 1791, Jonathan Edwards published the abolitionist work 'Injustices and Impolicy of the Slave Trade and of the Slavery of Africans.' In 1807, the first black Methodist church, the African Union Church, was incorporated in Wilmington, Delaware; it opposed slavery. In 1808, the United States abolished its slave trade and criminalized importation of slaves, although an estimated 250,000 to 1,000,000 slaves were brought in illegally between 1808 and the end of the Civil War. In 1816, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded in Philadelphia PA, and in 1821, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; both oppose slavery. In the 1820's, Congregationalists, Quakers, Mennonites, and Methodists, along with some Unitarians, organized the 'underground railroad' to help slaves escape northward towards Canada and southward into Spanish held territories. In 1829, David Walker, a free-born African-American and member of the AME Church, along with other black Christian activists, published the first major U.S. anti-slavery publication, which was very influential: *David Walker's Appeal in Four Articles Together With A Preamble, To The Coloured Citizens of The World, But In Particular, And Very Expressly, To Those of The United States of America*. He criticized Christian denominations for staying relatively silent on slavery and racism on theological and moral grounds in a literary format much like the Declaration of Independence. Notably, he said, 'Whites gave nothing to blacks upon manumission except the right to exercise the liberty they had immorally prevented them from so doing in the past. They were not giving blacks a gift but rather returning what they had stolen from them and God. To pay respect to whites as the source of freedom was thus to blaspheme God by denying that he was the source of all virtues and the only one with whom one was justified in having a relationship of obligation and debt.'²⁸ He also criticized those white clergy who supported slavery.

In 1831, Nat Turner, a Baptist slave pastor, led a major slave revolt in Virginia, which moved from house to house freeing black slaves and killing fifty-six whites. He was inspired by the messages of the Old Testament prophets and their calls for justice. But the reaction was strong. The state of Virginia executed fifty six blacks in connection with the revolt, while white militias and mobs beat and killed about two hundred blacks. 'The notion that slavery was God's will gained momentum after the Nat Turner slave rebellion of 1831. In hundreds of pamphlets, written from 1836 to 1866, Southern slaveholders were provided a host of religious reasons to justify the social caste system they had created.'

Church organizations then underwent massive splits. In 1838, the Presbyterian Church split over slavery. Pro-slavery Presbyterians erroneously believed that New World slavery and the authority of Scripture went hand in hand. In order to defend the Scripture, they felt they had to defend not only New World slavery, but civil government and civil society, private property rights, and traditional gender roles including non-suffrage for women.²⁹ They failed, as with many Christians before them, to condemn the forced abduction and slave-trading, among other issues, and failed to consider the historical and sociological shifts in the definition of slavery between the biblical time and their own. Conveniently, they also failed to distinguish why the American Revolution itself was different from a black slave revolt. In 1841 to 1844, the Baptist movement in the U.S., which had attempted to carefully avoid discussing slavery, split and the Southern Baptist Convention, which supported slavery, was formed; it eventually grew to become the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. In 1844, the Methodist Church split into northern and southern congregations, primarily over whether members should be allowed to own slaves. 'In 1843, 1,200 Methodist ministers owned 1,500 slaves, and 25,000 members owned 208,000 slaves.' Subsequent splits occurred in the Methodist Church. Of course, the Union split during the Civil War from 1861 – 1865, with

²⁸ Peter Hinks, 1997, p.220 – 221

²⁹ In 1838, the *Princeton Theological Review*, the journal of Princeton Seminary, at that time the defender of Calvinism and biblical inerrancy, published an article entitled 'State of the West Indies before Emancipation' saying: 'The leading characteristic doctrine of [the abolitionists] is that slaveholding is in all cases a sin, and should, therefore, under all circumstances, be immediately abandoned. As nothing can be plainer than that slaveholders were admitted to the Christian church by the inspired apostles, the advocates of this doctrine are brought into direct collision with the Scriptures. This leads to one of the most dangerous evils connected with the whole system, viz., a disregard of the authority of the word of God, a setting up a different and higher standard of truth and duty, and a proud and confident wresting of Scripture to suit their own purposes (emphasis original). The history of interpretation furnishes no examples of more willful and violent perversions of the sacred text than are to be found in the writings of the abolitionists. They seem to consider themselves above the Scriptures; and when they put themselves above the law of God, it is not wonderful that they should disregard the laws of men. Significant manifestations of the result of this disposition to consider their own light a surer guide than the word of God, are visible in the anarchical opinions about human governments, civil and ecclesiastical, and on the rights of women, which have found appropriate advocates in the abolition publications. Let these principles be carried out, and there is an end to all social subordination, to all security for life and property, to all guarantee for public or domestic virtue.' (PTR, 1838, p. 603 – 04)

slavery being one of many causes. Slavery of this sort was finally abolished in the United States when the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed in 1865.

I narrate that history not simply to regurgitate a painful history of sin but in order to reframe issues of ongoing importance, at least in the United States, but in most other countries as well wrestling with a post-slavery society and questions about labor. The main motivation for New World slavery was clearly financial. Yes, there was also personal racial prejudice and other motivations. Fundamentally, however, in both the American South and the North, the main motivation for slavery and all the sins attached to it was the desire for cheap labor to sell goods on the global market to maintain 'our way of life.' And the plain fact is that Jesus would have been totally unsympathetic to this fundamental rationale. By placing this discussion of slavery into the context of the New Testament's larger evaluation of wealth, and its call to generosity and sacrifice for others, I believe we can see slavery and the post-slavery legacy in a clearer light and a broader context.

First, the post-Civil War struggle of black Americans for equality must be seen as the failure of white American Christians to heed the teaching of Jesus on wealth and generosity, which was one of the underlying problems to begin with. Southern whites reasserted white supremacy through Jim Crow segregation and created apartheid-like conditions where blacks were denied land, education, loans, banks, job opportunities, and other resources.³⁰ Lynchings were terrifying in the South, and the horrific fact is that many Christians were members of the Ku Klux Klan and relied on Christian language and pseudo-theology.³¹ But whites in the cities of the north were also deeply rooted in the sins of racism and greed, which were revealed when blacks migrated north in large numbers. Whites then formed housing agreements to prevent blacks from purchasing homes in certain neighborhoods, first for overtly racist reasons and then for the reason that blacks in their neighborhood would lower property values. Once again, we find an overtly financial justification, despite all Jesus said about greed opposing love. Other institutional arrangements were made to protect white wealth from fair participation and economic competition from blacks. Whites funded public schools by local property taxes while maneuvering municipal and school district boundaries to their advantage; hence wealthy white neighborhoods had well-resourced schools while poorer neighborhoods – both white and black – had poor schools.³² In the recent housing market speculation of the early 21st century, poor and lower middle class families were disproportionately hit with home foreclosures. A tactic called 'predatory lending' once used by banks against black families, giving them very risky mortgage loans that they would default on, was mainstreamed. Predatory lending was repackaged as 'adjustable rate mortgages.' Then banks used derivatives to bet that lower and middle class families – disproportionately black and Hispanic – would default on their mortgage payments. The list goes on and on.

Yet in American political discourse, these institutional forms of advantage are covered up by ideological language. It is defended by a right-wing American evangelical pseudo-theology where national economic growth and personal liberty are given higher theological priority over distributive economic justice and restitution for past injustice. My earlier analysis of Genesis 1 – 11, Leviticus 25, and many other foundational Scriptures would reverse that ordering of priorities. For example, Wayne Grudem, a best-selling author in the realm of systematic theology, in his recent book, *Politics According to the Bible*, draws ill-formed conclusions about economics from Leviticus 25 and other biblical passages.

In his chapter on Economics, Grudem takes the Bible as affirming private property. He takes this as an absolute: in fact, the right of the individual to acquire as much wealth and private property as possible by all lawful and moral means. He begins by quoting the prohibition on coveting (Ex.20:17) as assuming private property in the sense that he means it. He immediately condemns communism, or public ownership, on the grounds that it seeks to abolish private property. He cites Leviticus 25:10 as an example of how God returns land and property to individuals – a quotation I will evaluate below. He quotes 1 Samuel 8:10 – 18 (the warning of Samuel to Israel that a king will tax, take, and enslave) as evidence that big government power is an evil. Grudem believes that economic development is God's clear intention for the creation. He affirms the money currency and free markets as direct derived from biblical principles. He affirms the Bible's concern for the poor but critiques government attempts at alleviating poverty. He believes government should encourage businesses. He believes taxes should be as low as possible for all individuals, and lower than 20% for corporations. He comments on capital gains taxes, income tax rates, and eschews a higher tax rate on the rich. Based on his reading of selected Scripture, Grudem believes that God gave people the unlimited right to pass on economic inheritance to their children (Proverbs 19:14; Numbers

³⁰ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (Anchor Books: New York, 2008)

³¹ Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 1997), ch.2 – 3.

³² See also Jonathan Kozol, *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (Crown Publishing: 2005)

27:8 – 11) and that government should not interfere with that (Ezekiel 46:18). He says, ‘The Bible clearly takes the side of individual ownership of property. My conclusion is that the estate tax should be permanently repealed.’³³

For the moment, I will set aside the fact that American wealth is, to a very significant degree, built on stolen land (from Native Americans, Chicanos, and Mexican Americans), stolen life and labor (from African Americans), stolen wages (from underpaid immigrant strikebreakers to today’s migrant workers, with underpaid women throughout), and stolen health (from people affected by pollution, toxins, harmful products, workplace injuries, etc. who went without legal defense). If we were to draw out the implications of the restitution principle from Exodus 21:1 – 15, that a thief will return two to five times as much as he stole, how, I wonder, would Grudem and other political conservatives feel about that? However, I will only address Grudem’s misuse of various Scriptures which undergirds his thinking about economics and private property.

Even though we cannot reinstate the Law of Moses as if we were Mosaic Israel, it is still valuable to discern principles that we will find developed further in the rest of Scripture. One lesson is that in Israel, wealth was God’s blessing for all, including future generations. Leviticus 25 is quite significant because in this section we find the clearest statement about God’s desire for Israel’s use of the land over time and as it relates to family and ‘private property.’ But Grudem truncates it down to the individual.

Leviticus 25 demonstrates that God’s vision for biblical Israel was virtually the opposite that Wayne Grudem has for America. Israel divided its land up by clan and family in a roughly even distribution, starting from the point they settled the Promised Land. The fiftieth year was called a ‘Jubilee year’. It was a ‘reset button.’ During the Jubilee year, people returned to their ancestral lands (Lev.25:13), even if they were indentured to someone else in a debt-contract. They did not pay for the remainder of the debt contract that they left unfulfilled. Land, too, would return to its original tribal and familial boundaries (Lev.25:14 – 28), so people could not be permanently displaced from their ancestral lands. In other words, land could not be permanently bought or acquired. If an Israelite fell upon hard times and was forced to sell family property, a kinsman-redeemer was required by Law to intervene (Lev.25:25 – 28). But even if there was no kinsman-redeemer, that Israelite would be restored to his ancestral land at no expense!

This also means that children and grandchildren would not be penalized for the laziness or misfortunes of their parents and grandparents. Because land was wealth, there were very strong measures taken to ensure that, over time, no family and no individual could accumulate land at the expense of someone else (which was, incidentally, the only way to accumulate it). God was weaving a deep principle into Israel’s existence: ‘The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are but aliens and sojourners with Me’ (Lev.25:23). God was reminding Israel of their status as ‘aliens and sojourners.’ They did not, in fact, own the land. God did. And their experience of that reality lay in the fact that God pushed a ‘reset button’ every fifty years on land boundaries, so that every Israelite could enjoy their ancestral land as a gift from Him as if they were first settling the Promised Land! This was something like what humanity should have experienced had the fall never happened: God was bestowing the garden land to humanity and every family would have their own portion.

Imagine if the United States followed a policy of land restitution to Native Americans, African Americans, and Chicanos. We would have a very different situation to say the least! Or, imagine if we could design a social system such that the children and grandchildren of parents who fell on hard times would not be punished for what happened in the generations before them. Instead, our social system forces children of lazy and criminal parents to swallow their parents’ choices, as if we could safely assume that children of those people will share their parents’ characteristics. And, we perpetuate myths that many of the poor are poor because they keep having children. Historically, European American people infected by the disease of racism allowed children of black slaves and sharecroppers to inherit all the unmitigated disadvantages they could handle, and more. Even for people who claim to be without racial prejudice, which may be the case on a personal level, they fail to see how the economic and legal system we have perpetuates injustice by forcing children and grandchildren to bear the brunt of all their ancestors’ misfortunes and choices. From 1979 – 2007, the income gap tripled. In roughly the same period, the racial wealth gap between white families and black families increased by fourfold. But the Mosaic arrangement of land and wealth in ancient Israel would have alleviated all that.

I am incredulous, then, that Grudem can read Leviticus 25 and still say, ‘My conclusion is that the estate tax should be permanently repealed.’ How can he wrench the idea of ‘private property’ out of its context and foundation in Leviticus 25? For people to have the unlimited ability to accumulate wealth and pass it on to their children is precisely the opposite of what Leviticus 25 says. And quoting Proverbs or any other Old Testament passage about ‘inheritance’ or ‘hard work’ is of absolutely no use for his case. That is because every other Old Testament passage takes Leviticus 25 as the starting point and foundation. So ‘inheritance’ in Proverbs includes God’s ‘reset button’ of

³³ Wayne Grudem, *Politics According to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), p.309

land redistribution to its original intended boundaries and nothing beyond it. It most certainly does not imply that parents should have the ability to pass down unlimited amounts of wealth and property to their children, especially when they gained it at someone else's expense, but even when they gained it 'fairly.'

Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly said on his TV show on August 6th, 2010, 'White Americans fear government control. They don't want the feds telling them what to do. And they don't want a bankrupt nation. For decades, African-Americans have supported a bigger federal government so it can impose 'social justice.' The vast majority of Blacks want money spent to level the playing field, to redistribute income from the white establishment to their precincts.'³⁴ This candid admission oversimplifies what black Americans have truly called for, since they have not wanted to stay in 'their precincts' but rather wanted to end discriminatory practices and institutional biases in public schools, housing, banking, policing, employment, the behavior of corporations, etc. But O'Reilly accurately puts his finger on the fears of white Americans: loss of money. He acknowledges that political slogans like 'strict constitutionalism,' 'small government,' or 'fiscal responsibility' is often code language for something else. It actually means, 'I want the wealthy segment of white America to be able to maintain our money and privilege without being accountable to black Americans.' As one small piece of evidence for this, consider that 'fiscal responsibility' was not a cry of political conservatives when the George W. Bush administration started two wars in the Middle East, expanded the Medicare prescription drug program for seniors, and still cut taxes especially for the super-rich, vastly increasing the federal deficit. Yet when black American Barack Obama was elected President, suddenly Republicans and 'Tea Party' enthusiasts erupted with outcries of 'fiscal responsibility.' That cry was accompanied, of course, with suspicions that Obama was a socialist, not born in the United States, a 'secret Muslim,' and perhaps even a radical anti-colonialist secretly bent on dismantling American power, despite all evidence to the contrary. Whether or not this type of political language is coded language for racial prejudice can be debated. Without a doubt, it is a cover-up for the sin of greed. The vast majority of white Americans – and certainly white American Christian theologians – have never really dealt with the trauma in the black community due to slavery, segregation, and now institutionalized forms of disadvantage. Nor have they dealt with the materialism, greed, and sheer irrationality which erupt in the white American community whenever its institutionalized privileges are threatened. They certainly have not wrestled with whether capital has moral equivalence with land and labor as factors of economic production, which I discuss below.

Second, slavery was not – and is not – the only form of unjust labor practice. European serfdom and the theological justifications that Christians put forward to hold people to land must be critiqued as well. In the U.S., the abuse of cheap labor runs through virtually all of the political and economic phases of American history. Powerful American corporate interests used Irish, black, Italian, and Chinese strike breakers against each other and labor unions. Many industries related to food, energy and infrastructure abused labor: coal-mining, steel manufacturing, building construction, railroad construction, etc. Slave-like conditions still exist for undocumented immigrants in the U.S., such as migrant farm workers who work long hours in hot fields for very little pay. The true cost of our food is hidden from U.S. citizens, because food companies do not want to pay U.S. citizens the wages they would demand for doing such work. Hence, market prices for food and other goods are distorted at a very fundamental level, making obesity and luxury seem more affordable than they actually are. Christians fought against child labor, oppressive and unsafe work conditions, extremely long work days, racial and gender discrimination, extremely low wages, etc. While Catholic theologians have reflected extensively on the role of labor in the Social Magisterium of the Catholic Church, Protestant evangelical theologians and ethicists in the U.S. have generally not commented very much on this at all, despite the fact that Christian faith has had a significant role in labor movements.³⁵

Today, we must also include the prison-industrial system and prison labor as a concern for theological ethics, because many prisons are now run by for-profit corporations who have no real interest in rehabilitation. The Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished forced labor slavery, allows for slavery as punishment for a crime: 'Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.' Private corporations now utilize inmates to make commodities and pay them very little to nothing. 'They're assembling computers, making women's lingerie, booking airline flights over the phone, telemarketing for major corporations, and doing all kinds of tasks that free Americans used to be employed at doing. What appeared to be a normal plant closing by U.S. Technologies when it sold its electronics plant in Austin, was actually the company relocating its operations to a nearby Austin prison. One hundred and fifty 'free' employees lost their jobs to the new slaves.'³⁶ Do privately run

³⁴ Bill O'Reilly, *The O'Reilly Factor*, August 6th, 2010

³⁵ Darren Cushman Wood, *Blue Collar Jesus: How Christianity Supports Workers Rights* (Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press, 2004)

³⁶ <http://www.greencommmons.org/node/770>

prisons have an incentive to rehabilitate prisoners? Or to acquire a larger slave labor force that they can pay 25 cents an hour, and not pay for overtime, sick days, health benefits, pensions, and unions? Furthermore, we are very concerned today about the culture of prisons, which often harden inmates further, leading to high recidivism rates and great difficulty integrating an ex-con back into society. In earlier times, including biblical times, people sentenced criminals to slavery in a *household*, and that immediately integrated that person back into society, in the context of constructive human relationships. The U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country in the world, as a percentage of population. In absolute numbers, we lock up more people than China, India, and Iran combined. Plus there is racial bias: Black and Latino men are disproportionately stopped by police, tried, convicted, given longer sentences, and imprisoned. We imprison more black men as a percentage of black men than South Africa did during Apartheid in 1993.³⁷ In fact, some people believe the prison-industrial complex is a way to control the inner city.³⁸ We are building more prisons. California, for example, had 19,600 inmates in 1977. As of 2007, it has over 170,000, which is more than France, Great Britain, Germany, Japan, Singapore, and the Netherlands combined.

Third, slavery (outside of war captivity and penal servitude, which must be evaluated very carefully as well) is an ongoing problem in the world today. People kidnapped and trafficked for purposes of cheap labor or sex slavery has mushroomed. Human trafficking is the second most lucrative criminal activity worldwide, second to drug trafficking. What are we to do? The New Testament, Christian history prior to New World slavery, and also Christian resistance to New World slavery, give us a mandate and ample basis for action. Abduction and slave-trading must be halted, for it is repugnant to God, for every person's physical body was designed by the Triune God to house the Spirit of the Son of God and to freely respond to him as Lord (1 Cor.6:12 – 7:35). Police, military, and international intervention seems appropriate in some situations to shut down human trafficking. Our relationship with countries with large populations of slaves (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Pakistan) must be shaped more and more by this concern for human rights, not simply cheap oil. Christians must help their brethren in underdeveloped countries engage in intelligent, non-colonialistic economic development so that slavery and poverty can be combated. On a personal level, Christians must liberate slaves wherever people can maintain their freedom without threat of re-enslavement, and give money to causes related to micro-financing and microenterprise development, rehabilitation of ex-slaves, etc. When possible, Christians can influence public policy or contribute to the enforcement of good, protective laws.

Fourth, American slavery posed a deep theological crisis to American theologians and America as a whole from which evangelical scholarship and practice have not recovered. The 'liberal' position on Scripture was grounded in the view that the ordinary, civilized person could now do better than the New Testament in ethics; after all, the U.S. abolished slavery, which not even Paul had done. All of which is thoroughly rebutted by an able British evangelical scholar, Goldwin Smith, in his 1863 book, *Does the Bible Sanction American Slavery?* and American Christian abolitionist Theodore Weld, Smith's scholarship, treating both Old Testament and New Testament passages on slavery and most of the attendant topics related to it, was phenomenal, and demonstrates the fact that brilliant biblical scholarship was possible and in fact done by British evangelicals looking at the American scene.

Capital

This brings us to the third accommodation of Western Christianity to the human desire for financial and material security. *The church in the West made its third accommodation to material insecurity by endorsing interest rate lending and progress over justice in the early capitalist economy.*

Because of the teaching of Jesus regarding care for the poor, his teaching against lending, and the traditional Old Testament and Greek cultural aversion to lending money at interest, Christians in the early and medieval periods took a strong stand against usury, the cornerstone of banking and the driving force of technological and economic development. The early Councils of Arles (314), Nicea (325), Laodicea (372), and many others forbade clergy from trafficking in usury. John Chrysostom, bishop of Antioch from 389, thundered against it. The Councils of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries forbade it to both clergy and laity, and laid down the punishments for such behavior. Usurers were not to be given communion or Christian burial, their offerings were not to be accepted, and clergy who fail to punish them were to be suspended until they made satisfaction to their superior.³⁹ The Council of Lyons (1274) and the Council of Vienne (1312) effectively made the usurious money-lender an outlaw and extended the

³⁷ <http://www.prisonsofamerica.com/> notes South Africa under apartheid (1993), Black males: 851 per 100,000. U.S. under George Bush (2006), Black males: 4,789 per 100,000.

³⁸ Georgia law now treats children as adults in criminal courts. 'Children convicted under this law usually serve their time in adult prisons and SB 440 allows children to be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Ninety percent (90%) of children sentenced under SB 440 and its companion legislation, SB 441, are African American.'
<http://www.greencommmons.org/node/770>

³⁹ *Corpus Juris Canonici*, Decretal. Pope Gregory IX, lib. v, tit. xix, cap. i.

church's attack on usury to its highest pitch. Anyone renting a house to a usurer had to expel that individual within three months, the will of a usurer was invalid, rulers and magistrates legally permitting the practice of usury were to be excommunicated if such legislation was not revoked within three months, and anyone declaring usury to not be a sin is to be punished as a heretic. Pope Innocent IV, considered to be quite savvy in business and politics, reasoned that if usury were widely practiced,

Men would not give thought to the cultivation of their land, except when they could do nought else, and so there would be so great a famine that all the poor would die of hunger; for even if they could get land to cultivate, they would not be able to get the beasts and the implements for cultivating it, since the poor themselves would not have them, and the rich, for the sake both of profit and of security, would put their money into usury rather than into smaller and more risky investments [which includes, in this context, assisting the poor].⁴⁰

A strong commitment to a fairly simple rural way of life is found here ('the cultivation of their land'), with much greater consideration for stability and continuity than for progress. Human freedom and justice were still thought to be important, but usury was actually thought to detract from both. This is the life the church thought was normative for the average person. In his study of how Catholic teaching effectively stymied the advancement of industrial capitalism whereas Protestant teaching facilitated it, British economist R. H. Tawney describes the general attitude of medieval Christendom:

On the iniquity of payment merely for the act of lending, theological opinion, whether liberal or conservative, was unanimous, and its modern interpreter, who sees in its indulgence to interesse the condonation of interest, would have created a scandal in any age before that of Calvin. To take usury is contrary to nature, for it is to live without labor; it is to sell time, which belongs to God, for the advantage of wicked men; it is to rob those who use the money lent, and to whom, since they make it profitable, the profits should belong; it is unjust in itself, for the benefit of the loan to the borrower cannot exceed the value of the principal sum lent him; it is in defiance of sound juristic principles, for when a loan of money is made, the property in the thing lent passes to the borrower, and why should the creditor demand payment from a man who is merely using what is now his own?⁴¹

Only the Jewish merchant, the landless wanderer caricatured as avaricious and despicable, was thought to be the appropriate merchant and money-lender of the medieval world. The anti-Semitism is inexcusable and very unfortunate; it converged with the distrust of usury, which was an independent factor. But the one reinforced the other. In general, one can see how technical and economic progress in these conditions was greatly suppressed. Destabilizing land ownership, in particular the manor, was not taken lightly. Yet despite the union of the medieval church with the Roman Empire, despite the reluctance of the medieval church to question materialism absolutely, the church nevertheless bore witness in a limited and partial way to Jesus' ethics of 'disinheritance' and 'universal giving.'

We find in the Protestant Reformation a profound break with this tradition. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow argues that the ability of each city to accept the Reformation and change religious policies on a national level was greatly dependent on its political autonomy from the landowning class,⁴² and he makes the following observations. First, we must look at where the Reformation was institutionally successful. The Reformation took hold in Central Europe, from the German principalities to the Swiss cantons and the Low Countries. Denmark and Sweden later accepted Lutheranism as their official ideologies. England broke with the Roman Catholic Church with Henry VIII.

Second, we must observe why all of these regions were poised to break away from the Holy Roman Empire for political and economic reasons. The landowning class was the class that loyally supported the Roman Church. In return, they received benefits, material and symbolic, from the Church. They presided over local assemblies that made decisions about communal property and taxation; they benefited from religious rituals that reinforced the moral order of the village and reaffirmed the relationship between peasant and landlord. Hence, when the Church doled out fiefdoms and ecclesiastical positions, it received rents and loyalty from the propertied class.

Third, as a result of a large population increase, exploration, and other social changes, new commercial activity sprang up in Europe. Trade in spices, textiles, metalware, glassware, cloth, wine, and grain increased, and certain cities were on the trade route. The rising economic fortunes of merchants, manufacturers, traders, financiers, and artisans had a decisive role in the fate of the Reformation. If a region was economically self-sufficient, and if the city princes had enough autonomy from the landowning class, they were able to better resist the landowning class

⁴⁰ Pope Innocent IV, *De Usuris. Apparatus*. v

⁴¹ R. H. Tawney. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1926, 1954), p.44 – 45

⁴² Robert Wuthnow. *Communities of Discourse*.

and thus the central authority of Rome. Take the Swiss city of Basel for example. In 1499, Emperor Maximilian unsuccessfully tried to force Basel to associate more closely with the Empire; but in 1501, Basel joined the Swiss Confederation, securing more political autonomy for itself. The economic growth of the fifteenth century had enlarged the city's financial resources so that by 1521 Basel was able to ban the episcopacy from being involved in temporal affairs and it made taking an oath to the bishop illegal. The influence of nobles and patricians declined as the influence of merchants, manufacturers, bankers, and tradesmen grew. Zurich, Geneva, Strasbourg, and Berne all experienced similar circumstances. On the other hand, regions where the landed gentry (sympathizers to Rome) still held stiffly resisted the Reformers. Lucerne, Uri, and Fribourg are good examples.

Wuthnow's thesis helps explain why the Reformation was successful in certain parts of Europe and not others. As cities grew in population and commerce, their councils benefited. A cash flow was created that enabled the larger cities to make alliances with other cities, strengthen their fortifications, and exercise more political influence in the area. In fact, some cities favored the Reformation simply to annex church lands for themselves. Of course, Reformation preaching and the excitement of spiritual awakening played a large part, but motives for embracing the Reformation were complex. Interestingly enough, in areas where the landowning class still had a tenacious grasp on the political bodies, the Reformation generally failed. This was true in Eastern Europe, France, and to a lesser extent, Spain. In these regions, economic expansion did more to strengthen the landed nobility than the merchant class. This is not to say that Reformation preaching did not have a grassroots appeal in these areas, but that the city councils and such were not able to institute religious policies that favored the Reformers and allowed for Reformed teaching.

This relationship between the Reformation, local government, and trade laid the groundwork of the church for centuries to come. The Reformation is generally viewed as a period of spiritual renewal, of enlightenment, of the freshness of the Spirit coming upon the church again. But also, the Reformation required a vast sum of resources for printing, distribution, facilities, organization, and political leverage. For all practical purposes, the important institutions were the secular nation-state and the secular market. The more economically prosperous the merchant class was, the better equipped the city was in resisting the landowning class that favored the Roman Church and Roman Emperor.

One important shift caused by the Reformation was the change in public attitudes towards the artisan, banker, and especially the merchant. Medieval society had despised the merchant class, and work previously had been an obligation, not a source of fulfillment. But since the merchant and artisan class became extremely significant with the Reformers, the Reformers then said that being a baker, banker, farmer, or manufacturer was just as dutiful an occupation as being a clergyman, and that God could be honored and served simply by being a Christian in these professions. Doing well at one's job took on great importance. Being industrious was a way to honor God and a paramount necessity. The true Christian, said Calvin, 'must conduct his business with a high seriousness as in itself a kind of religion.' Such was Calvin's concept of 'calling.' This theology neatly coincided with the revenues from commerce pouring in to the city councils, by which Rome could be fought off or bought off. As has been amply studied, here we find the beginning of the Protestant work ethic and our modern emphasis on vocation. Work and industry further weakened the political ties to the Holy Roman Empire. Commerce went to benefit the smaller European nations. By the time the Puritan movement gained a significant following, this work ethic was prevalent, as was the nationalistic materialism that accompanied it. We can follow this line of thought straight through the Puritans in the preaching of John Cotton and John Winthrop. Benjamin Franklin, the deist hero of the colonial Americas, encouraged frugality and industriousness, and he sums up the mood of many early Americans in regard to material prosperity: 'God helps those who help themselves.' Thus, we find again the same pattern. The church first dilutes Jesus' teaching, then justifies the basis for wealth or financial security, then actually encourages that erroneous thinking and behavior further.

Transgressors of this civil religion were then held up as unrighteous. Max Weber notes that Calvinism destroyed traditional forms of charity. Almsgiving, which had until then been regarded as a good work in Christianity, and an imperative in Luke and Matthew, was replaced by a contemptuous attitude towards beggars because Calvinism stressed that a man proved his salvation and his holiness in his occupational work.⁴³ As we noted earlier, there was a historic pattern of Christians making accommodations for financial security involving land, which in turn gave rise to hostility towards those who endangered that ideology. The same underlying desire for security factored into Calvinism's promotion of the idea that wealth accompanied election, which led to the conclusion that the most sovereign God distributed His gifts unequally, and that therefore wide disparities between rich and poor were acceptable and even ordained by God's mysterious and inscrutable sovereignty. A passive acceptance of the status quo set in.

⁴³ Max Weber discussed this in *The Sociology of Religion* (p.220 – 221) and also *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Then, the Enlightenment did two important things: It cut European political and economic enterprise loose from most of its religious constraints and exacerbated the modern concept of 'race' which had already been introduced by pseudo-Christian theology, particularly in Spain and Portugal. Enlightenment science invented the category of 'race' and argued for the inferiority of non-white peoples and civilizations on the basis of physiology and political-economic development. With the Enlightenment, European civilization began to compare itself to the rest of the world and see non-Europeans as superstitious, primitive and backward. Europe, weary of its Wars of Religion, started to envision philosophy, science, ethics, and government apart from ecclesial influence. John Locke, though he was a churchman, was instrumental in this. Locke argued that government existed to protect humanity's essentially unconstrained right to acquire and develop private property. Locke's political and economic philosophy would be very influential, not least with the later founders of the United States. In the eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution occurred in England and spread to various places around the world. Victorian capitalism spread quickly, bringing more wealth to the very fluid merchant and banking sectors. Inventors in Europe and America became popular heroes.

In the U.S. in particular, the legal development of the corporation caused American capitalism to accelerate faster than in Great Britain and continental Europe, particularly in the late 1800's. In the U.S., corporations became legal 'persons' because of a peculiar interpretation of the 14th Amendment. The 14th Amendment was designed to allow black people to appeal to and sue in Federal courts if the State courts were not protecting their civil rights. The firm definition established in Federal courts that a black person was legally a full person was the great accomplishment following the Civil War, one of the greatest legislative milestones in this country because it established that the Bill of Rights would in fact be the law of land, in every State. Ironically, the 14th Amendment came to be used in ways that undermines the black community in particular and people in general. In 1886, corporate lawyers for a railroad company in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company* won a legal case that established Southern Pacific Railroad Company and all other corporations as 'persons' under the 14th Amendment, with corresponding 'rights.' Previously, Western jurisprudence in Britain and the U.S. had thought of the corporation as a charter which had a fixed purpose or fixed duration. But this decision dramatically changed all that. Corporations then began to dominate American, and then British, life because corporations could limit a person's liability for any actions they took, essentially shifting the responsibility for negative effects to someone else. The industrial Robber Barons developed steel, oil, coal, railroads, and other industries like tobacco. Banking also developed rapidly under J.P. Morgan and others. The American public by and large hated these businessmen for amassing incredible fortunes at their expense. While they created some goods and services which were helpful, they also put laborers in harm's way, paid low wages which periodically needed to be protested, manipulated new immigrant and black strikebreakers to pit them against already vulnerable laborers, exploited children, overworked people, created harmful products, misled people, advertised falsehoods, polluted local towns and environments, etc.

As Marx had pointed out, in capitalist societies, the three factors of production – land, labor, and capital – are assumed to be morally equal in significance. Yet they have very different interests. The struggles between labor and capital became constant and infamous. Capitalism allowed the capitalists' and corporations' interest in profit to far outweigh the moral interest of labor in fair wages and dignity, and the moral significance of land vis-à-vis ecological sustainability. Thus, the so-called 'right' of capital to seek the cheapest land and labor, to find the least regulated environmental and labor environments, to accept losses in human life and health so long as profits exceed lawsuit losses, etc. is morally problematic from a Christian standpoint.

In the U.S. in the 20th century and the early 21st, capitalists – and banks in particular – developed a proven track record of damaging the parts of the economy that greatly affect the middle and lower class. Through the many corporate and institutional forms in which the rich keep their money, they make high-risk financial investments in pursuit of higher and higher returns. In the 1920's, it was stock market speculation which helped contribute to the Great Depression. In the 1980's, it was junk bonds and corporate mergers and acquisitions which resulted in President Reagan bailing out the failed Savings and Loans banks which bought those junk bonds. In the 2000's, deregulated financial systems worldwide caused a global financial crisis and a Great Recession. For example, in the U.S., the repeal of Glass-Steagall legislation which separated commercial banks from the much more unstable investment banks, a lesson the Great Depression taught us, allowed home mortgages to be bundled with complex, risky derivatives. The U.S. and other countries engaged in a subprime mortgage crisis bundled with derivatives which resulted in President Obama rescuing certain 'too big to fail' banks, continued to pay their executives huge bonuses, and continued to be 'too big to fail.' Iceland, which until recently had a stable banking system, collapsed. Greece sold government bonds underwritten by investment bank Goldman Sachs and then had a completely dysfunctional government which became bankrupt.

During all these episodes connected to the great financial meltdown of 2008, middle class and lower class people were (and are) disproportionately affected. For example, homebuyers who got subprime mortgages, or even relatively normal mortgages, suddenly found that the value of their homes was worth less than their mortgage, and

they were stuck. Jobless people in this kind of situation then cannot migrate to find jobs elsewhere, because they are stuck with a huge mortgage they cannot pay and a house they cannot sell. Foreclosures have been even higher in Black and Latino communities than others. Then, the single greatest asset that helps parents pay for their children's college tuition – their home equity – is destroyed. This pattern, compounded with the lack of oversight of financial institutions (like banks) or other corporations (like Enron), along with tax loopholes that favor the rich, contributes to our current problems and the growing gap between rich and poor. They do, in fact, reflect the influence that corporations, banks, and the wealthy have over government policy.

To make matters worse, much of the Protestant evangelical and Pentecostal community simply endorsed this concentration of power in capital through corporations and, especially, banks. Protestant evangelicals, although they were rural, anti-industrialist and anti-banking in the early 20th century, largely because they were populists, became enamored by the white American suburban dream which ballooned in the post World War II era, and then, during the 1980's, largely accepted the rhetoric of the Religious Right which was a political alliance cultivated by President Ronald Reagan to undo New Deal welfare state. White evangelicals, with few exceptions, became a backbone of the Republican party, equating personal liberty with corporate capitalism and unregulated finance, even attributing legal personhood to corporations and calling unlimited political campaign contributions 'free speech.' Even worse, during the first decade of the 21st century, Pentecostal Christians tended to interpret getting a risky subprime loan as receiving God's favor.⁴⁴ The Catholic Social Magisterium, however, had already gone far deeper than any Protestant reflections on the capitalist system. For example, Pope John Paul II, in *Centesimus Annus*, writes:

'The original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (Gen.1:28). God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone. *This is the foundation of the universal destination of the earth's goods.*⁴⁵ In this sense, it is right to speak of a struggle against an economic system, if the latter is understood as a method of upholding the absolute predominance of capital, the possession of the means of production and of the land, in contrast to the free and personal nature of human work... Such a society is not directed against the market, but demands that the market be appropriately controlled by the forces of society and by the State, so as to guarantee that the basic needs of the whole of society are satisfied. The Church acknowledges the legitimate role of profit as an indication that a business is functioning well. When a firm makes a profit, this means that productive factors have been properly employed and corresponding human needs have been duly satisfied. But profitability is not the only indicator of a firm's condition. It is possible for the financial accounts to be in order, and yet for the people — who make up the firm's most valuable asset — to be humiliated and their dignity offended... In fact, the purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but is to be found in its very existence as a community of persons who in various ways are endeavouring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society. Profit is a regulator of the life of a business, but it is not the only one; other human and moral factors must also be considered which, in the long term, are at least equally important for the life of a business.'⁴⁶ In addition to the irrational destruction of the natural environment, we must also mention the more serious destruction of the human environment, something which is by no means receiving the attention it deserves.⁴⁷

Power once accumulated around people who owned land, but power reconsolidated around people who owned capital and could hire other people for labor. For the middle class, mobility and the never-ending need to acquire fresh job skills became important; evangelical theology on 'vocation' kept pace by individualizing the issue and rarely considering the vocation of the church as a whole. What makes people feel secure has also changed. What is important is not land nor job skills, but the rate at which we acquire new job skills in the ever-changing information and service economy. In 1990, organizational development specialist Peter Senge, in his book, *The Fifth Discipline*, argued that the success of corporations will depend on each individual person's ability to continually and constantly learn. No longer is it the case that we become a master or a journeyman in one trade. We cannot rest content with what we know today. We must constantly learn. Why? Because the development of the

⁴⁴ Hanna Rosin, 'Did Christianity Cause the Crash', *The Atlantic*, December 2009

⁴⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, IV.31

⁴⁶ *ibid*, IV.35

⁴⁷ *ibid*, IV.38

service sector, high technology, and complex information systems have made it absolutely necessary. In order to add value to the corporation, to feel like we are making a contribution, to ward off becoming obsolete, we must constantly hone our skills and acquire new ones.

Some Christians have now changed their rhetoric to match the new fashion. The traditional ‘work ethic’ concept, whereby we view our career as a way to serve God, came from a society where people stayed in one profession for a long time, if not a lifetime. That mood has existed in the church until recently. However, this type of thinking is largely irrelevant today, as Miroslav Volf points out in his theological reflection on vocation and work, *Work in the Spirit*. Often, we do not stay in the same job or even the same career area. Now that careers per se are not constant, we cannot throw our careers (and every single career switch) under the banner of God’s calling because that would be almost ridiculously absurd. It is difficult to say with seriousness, ‘In 1994, God called me to work for a start-up company; then in 1996, God called me to work for a major supplier of global communications products; then in 1997, He called me to take a promotion to become a manager; then in another six months, I went to work for another startup...’ The changes are too quick and the rhetoric seems too hyper-spiritual even to ourselves. Therefore, another paradigm for spiritualizing our pursuit of security must arise.

Rather than focusing on the job itself, we elevate the internal characteristics and abilities that contribute to job success. We elevate the same character qualities that today’s popular books about getting ahead and managing for success are elevating, but the church does it in the name of God. While the world calls it continual learning and continual improvement, the church calls it faithfulness and diligence. While the world calls it ownership of your skill set, the church calls it stewardship of your natural abilities or even cultivating gifts of the Spirit (Volf). While the world calls it upward mobility, the church finds the stories of Joseph and Daniel tantalizing hints of God’s approval of upward mobility, even though upward mobility is not at all what is meant by those stories, and is flatly contradicted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. So we are hearing in the church the emphasis on using our natural abilities, fulfilling our responsibilities in the world, being diligent in everything, being faithful with what is put before us, working as if for Christ, etc. This is driven, at least in part, by our material insecurity and is a corruption of God’s revelation in the same pattern that preceded this new phase of economic development.

For the owners and managers of large amounts of capital, control over the entire wealth-creation process is now overwhelmingly important. The Enlightenment ideology of ‘progress’ has become virtually unquestioned. I believe that the values of progress and control over the wealth-creation process through scientific management have become imbedded in Christian teaching; this constitutes a grievous problem.

A question that has been consistently raised is whether technology, driven by capital investment and the interest of capitalists in efficiency, productivity, and profit, is moving so fast that it is displacing people from the job market completely. Two MIT professors, in their 2011 book *Race Against the Machine*, argue that this is undoubtedly the case today. People cannot keep up with the speed at which technology is displacing them from their jobs. If labor is part of human dignity, then it is clearly more morally significant than capital in the creation of jobs. Land, too, because we keep discovering more and more ways in which we are biochemically dependent on the land and the health of the land, is more morally significant than capital.

The most troubling problem with the modern financial system, interest rates, and modern banking is that this economic system misrepresents the cost of actions taken in the present that will be borne by future generations. In Western Enlightenment philosophy and political-economic theory, the cost of economic actions is assessed and borne by individuals *in the present*. In market theory, the cost of an economic good is simply the cost of labor plus more profit to comprehend the risk involved in producing it and bringing it to market. The cost of borrowing or loaning money at interest is interpreted as the cost to the borrower or lender to take an economic risk *in the present*. The problem is that our future children are never accurately represented. Since the idea of ‘individual rights’ undergirds the Western philosophical, cultural, legal, and economic system, if our actions impact future children in some unforeseen way, or an insidious way that we deny, our future children are not here to voice their objections to our actions. Hence, Western civilization depletes the future of the natural world in a race for present-day comforts. To be precise, the West pushes off to the future enormous problems: environmental pollution, global warming, the energy crisis, the global food shortage, the global water crisis, massive government deficits, and so on. And Western civilization provides interest rate profits to convert the natural world into money *in the present* to ‘keep our economy growing.’ The truth is: we have not inherited this earth from our parents. We are borrowing it from our children. And we are leaving nothing left for them. This is taxation without representation across time. The idea of ‘individual rights’ combined with an interest rate-driven growth economy is likely to be the fatal flaw of the West, especially since we give huge corporations more ‘individual rights’ than our future children.

Luke – Acts and Occupational Work

I will finish this section with some summary observations about the impact of Luke – Acts on our study of occupational work.

Jesus' Vision of the Kingdom Community

1. Commitment to Jesus' ethics in principle, especially in regards to wealth and loving enemies, is a pre-condition of authentic conversion.
 - a. Moral perfection is not the issue; acknowledgement of Jesus' ethical direction and authority is.
 - b. In evangelistic proclamation, the individual needs to understand that s/he is joining a community that tries to live by Jesus' ethics. In simple terms, the Christian community is prior to the Christian individual.
2. Jesus' teaching on loving one's enemy flows out of his vision of his disciples being the new covenant community, which is a transnational reconciliation movement reaching all nations and demonstrating unity in the face of forces that pull it apart.
 - a. This means Christians cannot ultimately be driven by identification with their nationality or ethnicity, although resistance to certain forms of evil (e.g. racism, imperialism, neo-colonialism) may align partially and temporarily with some concerns of the nationality and ethnicity of oppressed groups.
 - b. When our job commitments overstep the boundaries of Jesus' kingdom community (e.g. warfare), it oversteps the boundaries of Jesus' lordship. The job must be relativized and/or sacrificed.
3. Jesus' teaching on generosity and sacrifice also flows out of his vision of his disciples being an actual community voluntarily sharing wealth as needed; he calls us to care, in particular, for the poor in both the church and the world.
 - a. Jesus invites us to resist hoarding and accept financial insecurity.
 - b. John the Baptist and Jesus recognize situations of oppression and injustice, for example with tax collectors. While they do not condemn them categorically, they also personalize their professional responsibility for participating in structural injustice. We are therefore invited to examine and own up to areas of structural injustice in our professions.
4. Jesus does not appear to recognize a dichotomy between private and public lives, professional and personal. His ethics appear to be intended for us in all aspects of life.

Jesus' Kingdom and Creation

5. Jesus' kingdom proclamation takes up and renews themes of 'creation,' but in a nuanced and contoured way that directs his disciples to reach the whole world.
 - a. For example, Jesus' use of 'creation theology' agrees with our study of Genesis 1 – 11. Jesus uses 'creation theology' as an argument to love enemies and care for the poor, in spite of human civilization, because human civilizations marginalize outsiders (e.g. enemies) and insiders (e.g. the poor) in an attempt to build permanence.
 - b. In calling for 'disinheritance' and 'universal giving,' Jesus holds to a 'pilgrim' ethic in relation to the material wealth of the creation. He thus invites us to look forward to a physical new creation as a home. We will continue to see this in the next chapter, particularly in Paul's writings.

Jesus' Kingdom and Mosaic Israel

6. Jesus resolves the tension Mosaic Israel faced in being 'pilgrims' versus being 'settlers' in favor of being 'pilgrims.'
 - a. This does not invalidate rural/agricultural forms of work; rather it challenges permanent claims on land in favor of kingdom mission and generosity.
7. Jesus appeals to Israel's Scriptures in a way that challenges ethnocentric hermeneutics in favor of one that preserves concern for and mission to the whole world.

Jesus' Kingdom and Gentile Civilizations

8. In Acts, Jesus' lordship is primarily examined through the lens of the gospel message interacting with Gentile political figures in urban settings.
 - a. This is evidence of both the progress of the gospel and resistance to it.
 - b. It may be reasonably assumed that the teaching of Jesus in Luke's Gospel is being carried over to challenge these officials in Acts.
9. Jesus' lordship challenges occupations built on idolatry and sorcery, which are often foundational to Gentile society.

- a. Since the New Testament unequivocally views greed as idolatry (clearly also Luke's view), Christians must resist and challenge the institutionalization of greed in work and economic systems.
10. Thus, Jesus' lordship continues to be fundamentally in tension with concerns of empire or nation. Though this is not always a live issue, it is always potentially present.
 - a. While Christians are not 'bad citizens,' they are not necessarily 'the best citizens' either.
 - b. Nationalistic and imperial ideologies behind work must be thoroughly examined and challenged.
11. We will again continue to see this in Paul's writings, especially 1 Corinthians.