

Toward Civic Justice & Economic Empowerment

**The Promising Responsibility of
Christians Committed to Community**



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For many people, the words “justice” and “economics” conjure up stifled yawns over tedious definitions or glassy-eyed stares at indecipherable graphs. It is not a simple subject. But today’s world is small and intricately interconnected. Jobs and joblessness in Detroit are connected to oil output in Saudi Arabia and to telecommunications services in India. Hunger in Africa is connected to European farm policies. Budget problems in our school districts are connected to tax and spending decisions of the U.S. Congress. Pursuing justice and prosperity through economic policy-making is a difficult craft. Should the minimum wage be raised, or might that worsen unemployment? Who decides what a so-called living wage should be? Should trade policy protect American jobs or create fair opportunities for Third World farmers? If government regulates banks more stringently, will we see fewer foreclosures or more rejections of mortgage applications by first time homebuyers?

Indeed, economics is a complex, often intimidating subject—one that we may wish to dismiss as less “spiritual” than others, so we can get on with “real” Kingdom work. The problem is that as Christians, and especially as disciples who are working for the revitalization of distressed communities, it is not an option to shelve the tough topic of civic justice and economic empowerment informed by the rule of law.

The Bible is saturated with God’s concern for economic life. The Creation narrative reveals our foundational identity as stewards of all God has made. The Law spells out God’s passion for a flourishing community life in which society’s vulnerable members are treated with dignity and compassion. The prophets articulate God’s hatred of economic injustice. The Gospels reveal Jesus Christ talking frequently about money and possessions, sloth and diligence; the Epistles paint pictures of Christians loving the poor and sharing material possessions sacrificially and joyfully. Revelation speaks of a New Heaven and New Earth in which work and cultural creativity will be redeemed, stewardship will be expanded, poverty will be eliminated, and every person will rest secure under his own vine and fig tree. If we’re going to be biblical Christians, then we must attend to this complicated subject of economics. Careful reflection on the Scripture’s teaching on this topic is part of faithful Christian discipleship and an unavoidable duty of those who seek God’s shalom for their cities.

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Step one: Foundational Principles

Careful thinking about economics begins with focus on the Bible's big story. A biblical perspective on economic life doesn't come from random proof-texting. Rather, it is rooted in queries about God's intentions for His people and all He has made.

The Way Things Ought to Be

Christians have at least two places to look in God's Word to understand what His normative intentions for life are—the story of Creation and the story of the consummated Kingdom. Both of these offer paradigms for understanding “the way things ought to be.” In both paradigms, humans are free from sin. In them, we see our high calling as God's vice-regents, His delegated stewards over all that He has made. We see our delight in Him and complete commitment to living for His glory, His original plan for the common good. Creation teaches us a vast amount about our relationships to God, one another, and the earth; about work, marriage, family, and culture. We also learn much about economic life. Consider these key themes:

1. Creativity — humans are made in God's image (Gen 1:26). And what is the central attribute of God revealed in the Genesis narrative? Surely it is His creativity. God creates all things, including creative human beings. Thus, a huge part of what it means to be God's image-bearers is that we are creative beings, capable of, among other things, entrepreneurship (imaginatively combining intellectual effort and material resources). God has endowed each of us with unique talents and abilities to be used for His glory, our good, and the good of our neighbors. We are designed to creatively develop God's creation.

2. Stewardship — God has granted humans—male and female—dominion over the earth to steward with authority, responsibility, and care. God tasks Adam with the naming of animals and tells Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, to rule over the earth, and to care for and tend the garden (Gen 1:28-30; 2:15; 2:19). God gives us real responsibilities—real decision-making capabilities. Ours is high calling. As the Psalmist celebrates in poetry:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens. . . .
You made [human beings] a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild,
the birds of the sky, and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas. (Ps. 8:1, 5-8, TNIV)

3. Real Authority to Steward — There is no genuine stewardship without responsibility. God grants us real authority to manage the resources He delegates to our care and usage. Freedom to act is thus a characteristic feature of being human, enabling men and women to be able to execute their responsibilities. Responsible freedom isn't just a Western or an American value. It is a Biblical value and an irreducible part of a just and flourishing society in which humans are able to actually behave humanly, that is, in the full splendor of their God-given reflection, talents and responsibilities. This Biblical freedom is not unqualified, of course, and looks different from what secular libertines might think. It is not freedom to do completely as one wishes, regardless of God's good laws. Rather, it is the freedom that a loving Father permits us, to enjoy the dignity of exercising responsibility for good in the world He created. We are not robots or serfs; we have real authority to steward.

4. Work — God's charge to humankind to work precedes the fall. In God's creation, work is a gift; it is pleasurable, fruitful, meaningful, productive, and satisfying. It is good.

5. Interdependent relationships — Humans don't create themselves; God creates us and gives us life. We are dependent upon Him. He owns everything; we are simply allowed to hold it in trust. We are also dependent on the earth to nourish us; yet the earth also needs us to tend it (which is why God gives us the job of being gardeners). And after God creates Adam, He says it "is not good" for Adam to be alone. So God creates companionship and friendship by creating Eve. Now men and women are joined in harmony and interdependence and are capable of exercising a wide range of extraordinary responsibilities through many generations. Since it is impossible for humans to exercise a diverse range of responsibilities simultaneously without being in a political community, which requires the distinctive human talents and capabilities of governing—of making, administering, and adjudicating laws that bind and organize everyone in a particular territory—we can root government also in God's creation. Assuming the growth of human community, we would also expect to see the development of commerce. Thus the market, too, finds its origins in Genesis. And since human flourishing expresses itself through associational relationships beyond the family, and apart from the state or the market, mediating institutions can also be understood as being rooted in the vibrant, interdependent human community God intends. Although political community, the market, and intermediate associations are not explicitly present in Genesis 1-2 (in terms of being identified in a particular verse), their existence as part of God's ideal plan is shown by their presence in the consummated Kingdom.

God's intentions are seen again in the glimpses Scripture gives us of the consummated Kingdom. Old Testament "preview" passages such as Isaiah 65:17-25, Psalm 72, Zechariah 8:3-13, and Ezekiel 34:25-31 depict life in the re-created paradise of the eternal Kingdom. As in the very beginning, before the Fall, shalom abounds—peace between people, peace with God, peace with nature itself. Health, prosperity, justice, joy, and love are the new humanity's hallmarks. Revelation 21 promises us the dawning of a New Earth inhabited by God Himself, ruled by King Jesus, with all evil abolished and sin, suffering, and death conquered.

Not surprisingly, since God's intentions for humanity will be attained in the New Heavens and Earth, the themes bearing on economic life that were evident in the Creation narrative are seen again in the Consummation narrative. For example, our roles as stewards or "vice-regents" of God's domains is reiterated; Revelation 22:5 discusses how we will reign with Christ over the earth. Jesus speaks of the faithful disciple's expanded stewardship responsibilities in His Kingdom – those who have been faithful over a few things will be given charge over many. Human creativity, too, continues to be celebrated. Revelation 21:24 talks of the kings of the earth bringing their splendor into the New Jerusalem, a reference to the ongoing, delightful value production of human culture. We see commerce in the New Earth and there continues to be a role for human government, which is why Revelation speaks of the presence there of "judges" and "rulers."

The Way Things Are

Tragedically, because of sin, the way things ought to be is not what we experience here and now. The story of creation's unfolding does not get very far before humans foolishly disobey their Creator. By violating the bond of trust and love in which God placed us, we turn on one another and against God. The sinful disobedience of our first parents in Genesis 3 has enveloped all subsequent generations, leading brother to kill brother, and to every other kind of breakdown in human community and service to God. Human life ever since has been burdened with pain, tragedy, and death. The rotten fruits of our sinfulness surround us: environmental degradation is growing; hunger and starvation stalk millions of people throughout the world; millions more are left without education and the opportunity to develop their talents; economic institutions and market practices become distorted; governments fail to uphold justice and often contribute to injustice; and the twentieth century was the bloodiest century on record.

Thankfully, God, in His goodness, did not abandon us after Genesis 3. Instead, through His restraining and upholding grace, He provided important guidelines by which to live in our now fallen, less-than-perfect, sin-cursed world. We could call those guidelines "the Wise Law Paradigm." This is the teaching of God revealed in His Law (the first five books of scripture) and in what theologians call "the wisdom literature" (Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job). Although humans no longer enjoy the perfect shalom of paradise, God wants us to attain a measure of that wholeness and flourishing. He calls us to repentance from sin and wants us to be as healthy as possible in this broken world, giving us guidelines for attaining that.

The Wise Law Paradigm offers numerous principles bearing on economic life. These include such things as:

- being diligent, not lazy; saving and investing money rather than spending foolishly and going into debt;
- making adequate provision for the disabled poor through charitable giving;
- creating opportunities for the able-bodied poor to exert their labor to glean food;
- using just weights and measures so that consumers are protected from fraud;

- setting boundaries for both state and market that limit activities in each sphere that could undermine people's full participation in community (e.g., year of Jubilee, commands against “joining house to house,” allowing people to “live beside you in the land.”); and
- granting authority to political rulers to restrain evil and promote good.

Despite the fall, God did not rescind human responsibility. In this fallen world, He continues to grant us freedom and authority over the possessions He owns but delegates to our stewardship. Private property is assumed in this paradigm, as the Law commands people not to steal. Ultimate ownership belongs to God, of course. But He distributes His goods to humans and gives them actual authority and responsibility for their management. Then He holds each individual accountable for his or her actions. God wants people to enjoy economic freedom—to exercise their stewardship, their creativity, and their God-given talents—but that freedom is always tied to personal responsibility to “act justly and love mercy.”

The Way of the King

Having discussed God's intentions for economic life as depicted in the creation and consummation accounts, and then His guidelines for life in the sin-stained world we actually live in, it seems we'd be ready to move on to some practical applications. But there is yet another paradigm to consider. In between the way things are and the way they are supposed to be is the strange but exhilarating season we inhabit, the season of history inaugurated by the incarnation of Jesus.

John the Baptist heralded Jesus' coming by preaching, “The Kingdom is *Near!*” Jesus Christ began His adult ministry proclaiming, “The Kingdom is *Here!*” Reliable Bible scholars agree: Jesus' primary message was about the Kingdom of God. And what Jesus taught about the Kingdom was that it is “now, but not yet.” That is, the Kingdom is *now* because, through the incarnation, God came to earth in Jesus and began rolling back the curse. This is the meaning of the miracles of Christ. Through them, Jesus reaches into the future, consummated Kingdom, and draws a foretaste of it back into the present. Since there will be no blindness or disease in the consummated Kingdom, Jesus healed lepers and returned sight to the blind. In doing so, He gave them a taste of the future; He made the Kingdom a present reality. Jesus taught that, through Him, the Kingdom has come to earth. But He also taught that this Kingdom had *not yet* arrived in all its fullness. There is a future reality to the Kingdom as well. We will experience it in all its fullness only at the end of history, at the consummation of the Kingdom in the creation of the new heavens and new earth.

Therefore, our present age is marked by a certain newness: the Kingdom is here! But it is also marked by the remaining realities of a still-broken world—because the Kingdom is not yet here in all its fullness. What are the implications of this?

First, because the curse is still here, the principles from the Wise Law paradigm are still relevant. In particular, we understand that in the “not-yet-ness” of the Kingdom we must pay heed to those places of abuse that continue to exist, as powerful people sometimes exploit the weak. We listen attentively to the warnings of the prophets about

greed, injustice, and indifference to the poor and seek to be aware of the needy and hurting, and stand ready to give aid. We remember that God's Wise Law spoke of the need for special safeguards for the alien, the oppressed, the poor, the orphan, the prisoner, and widow and we work hard to create economic opportunities by which poor people can gain sufficiency, health, and hope.

Second, because the Kingdom is now here among us, we also affirm that while the Wise Law principles are necessary, they are incomplete. There is something different, something new, about our world, post-incarnation. And that should affect how we think—as both church members and citizens of the nations in which we live or are from—about all aspects of life, including economic life.

Energized by the promise of our imperishable inheritance in the world to come, we might take higher risks and make sacrificial investments in people and places regarded as unsalvageable by non-Christians. Taking cues from the deep community and radical generosity of the early Christians, we will seek creative ways to address ongoing challenges in our communities. We will go beyond the minimum expectations of those who received their economic training at mainstream business schools or within the for-profit sector, and will instead marry sound economics with great hope. We might loan out money at below market rates to ex-gang members to launch new businesses, and work creatively to turn such a risky endeavor into a viable and profitable enterprise. We might invest in Community Notes instead of CDs in order to make credit affordable to Christian organizations that want to build low-cost housing for low-income families. We won't abandon the Wise Law's "proverbial prudence," but in many ways will seek to infuse the resurrection power of Christ into our efforts to address poverty by developing people and communities.

As citizens, we will be vigilant to address injustices in the marketplace and the political sphere. In the fully consummated Kingdom, God makes all things new, and all things right. There will be no more injustice—no more insider trading, no more bribery, no more human trafficking, no more systematized racial discrimination. Anticipating that great future, we will work now to fight these and other injustices, joining King Jesus on His mission to purify and reconcile all social systems to Himself.

Step two: Practical Applications

The Bible's grand narrative—creation, fall, redemption, and Kingdom consummation—shapes the contours of how we should think about *everything*—including economic life. Christian discipleship is not merely about the protocols of Bible study, prayer and worship; it is about whole-life stewardship and whole-life service. We are called to love God with all that we are and have, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. That call encompasses every dimension of our lives, for it is the merciful, forgiving call from God to follow Christ as disciples in all we do. Nothing that is part of our humanity may be left aside. Whatever we do—including everything related to economic life—is to be done to the glory of God.

So how might we begin in our daily work as American Christian community members to apply practically the principles and guidelines for economic life that the Scriptures offer, and avoid what might be politically correct, or socially popular? The following eight principles, while not exhaustive, provide a helpful launching pad.

Eight Principles of Christian Economic Empowerment

1. Following God's lead, we embrace a high view of human dignity, human potential, human creativity, human freedom, and human responsibility.

We affirm that God has fashioned humans in His image, called us into His service, and commissioned us to develop and use our gifts and capabilities in service to Him and our neighbors. We affirm that work is a gift, not a curse. In concert with God's intentions, Christian community developers work in our cities for human flourishing. We emphasize human development, seeking to help all persons to identify and grow their God-given talents, often through education programs or job training. We lament that one of the tragic consequences of our sinful turn from trust in God is that our marvelous God-given talents are sometimes left undeveloped or turned to evil ends. Too many of us are not maturing as we should be and are not becoming what God wants us to be. Thus we commit our ministries to deep investment in people. We are not satisfied with handouts; we want everyone to be able to discover and exercise their talents and to live with hope, including the hope of hearing the words, "Good job." To develop human capabilities, we believe our ministries should strive to move beyond mere relief functions (handing out food) to development-oriented programs (job training, GED classes).

Taking human creativity seriously, we celebrate entrepreneurship and the value-creating work accomplished by those who combine human intelligence and natural resources to produce goods and services that meet needs. We affirm the suitability and necessity of economic practices that respect human freedom. Specifically, we recognize the value that market economies have offered because of the way they have encouraged the development of more and more kinds of human talents and helped make room for a growing number of organizations and enterprises in which people can exercise a wider range of responsibilities. The productive, profitable fruits of economic production and exchange have made it possible for individuals, companies, and governments to invest more than otherwise would have been possible in the common-good-advancing work of science, technology, education, social service, and public infrastructure. Thus, a market economy that opens opportunities for people and companies to make independent decisions about what to produce, what services to offer, and how much to charge or to pay for products and services is essential to the expansion of responsibilities and the flourishing of society.

None of this is to suggest that a market economy has some kind of salvific power of its own to make all things good and efficient despite human selfishness and evil practices. Rather, on the basis of God's common grace, we can affirm that these are good features and consequences of markets in the wider context of just government, healthy families, sound education, and other good things for which God has made us. The fact that in all these dimensions of life we find human distortions and degradations due to sin does not deny the normative purposes for which God created us.

2. Recognizing the fundamental importance of our identity as stewards, we will create genuine opportunities for the youth we disciple to practice genuine resource management.

To be fully human is to be God's steward. Teaching youth about stewardship is as important as teaching them about prayer or service. As the great evangelist Charles Finney once said, "It is as much as a matter of discipline for a church member practically to deny his stewardship as to deny the divinity of Christ." With this in mind, Christian community developers should work creatively to provide youth not only with lectures on stewarding all that they have, but also with real, hands-on opportunities to practice resource management. This can be done with real money or with virtual currency through a token economy system. It can also be accomplished by creating opportunities for youth to have real decision-making power within ministries, such as granting students input into the ministry's budgeting and spending decisions.

Furthermore, in the context of the ubiquitous presence of payday advance loan shops, rent-to-own stores, and paycheck cashing vendors in most urban neighborhoods, Christian community developers should teach financial literacy as part of discipling young stewards. Such financial education programs should specifically help equip people to avoid these common, disadvantageous financial institutions.

3. We acknowledge God's affirmation of human community and the beautiful, amazing diversity and complexity of the individual and social relationships He embeds us in.

We agree with our Maker that we are not made for ourselves alone; rather, we are made for God and for others. We reject "rugged individualism." We assert that we are most fully human through a trusting dependency on God and a healthy, loving interdependence with others. We acknowledge the positive role healthy competition can play in producing better solutions and better products to meet human needs. We also affirm the necessity of cooperation, recognizing that we can often do better for the common good when we collaborate, pool resources and talents, and "seek the needs of others ahead of our own."

We acknowledge that economic life is complex because God has given humans many, diverse, and sometimes overlapping responsibilities and relationships. He has set us in a wide range of human relationships: we are often simultaneously spouses, daughters, and friends, co-workers, teachers and students, owners and consumers, investors and savers, employers and employees, givers and recipients, citizens and taxpayers, voters and public servants. As Christians, we are also part of a special, world-

wide Christian family, the Body of Christ. All of these connections and relationships bear on our economic decisions. We take seriously the charge to steward all we have in a manner consonant with God's call to love our neighbors, to care for the weak, and to show "special concern for the household of God."

We also affirm voluntary associational life. Christians celebrate community and are repeatedly called into fellowship and mutual service and accountability. The Scriptures urge us to exercise individual responsibility, but in our life together we will also co-labor, locking arms together in each arena of social responsibility—education, the workplace, social and medical services, the media, and political life. In this way, as a fellowship of believers we can act as an organized "we" and not only as separate individuals.

Moreover, we believe that not only individuals and voluntary associations are granted responsibilities. Institutions—families, schools, businesses, and governments—also each bear distinct kinds of responsibilities and are all interconnected. Their mutual health and functionality is the measure of civic justice. This complicated reality demands that we eschew simplistic thinking. Some people seem to think that if families are healthy then everything else will go well almost automatically. Others think that if the local church congregation is vital then everything else will develop as it should. And there are those who believe that the free market represents the disciplinary key to creating solutions and happiness for all. Finally there are those who believe that a benevolent government is the key to establishing social justice. Civic justice principles, however, guide us to the idea that no single sphere of responsibility can carry all the others. We bear many kinds of responsibility and must discern how to exercise the God-given responsibilities appropriate to each sphere of life.

4. We affirm that in that quest for more just, healthy, and prosperous communities, governments, individuals, families, and the associations of civil society all have important responsibilities.

As some people see it, the problems of our broken society are all due to individual irresponsibility. *Individuals*, then, must change their hearts and their habits to become more responsible, and when they do so, then crime will ebb, education will improve, families will grow stronger, and more work will get done. As others see it, solutions to society's problems must come from *government*. Governments should alleviate or try to overcome the problems identified.

Christians should reject this simplistic thinking. Of course we should care deeply about solving problems, meeting needs, and pursuing civic (and thereby) economic justice. But simply saying that "something should be done about X" is insufficient. The first challenge is not solving problems but identifying *who* is responsible for *what*.

It is imperative to be clear about the nature of government's responsibility *in relation to* the responsibilities that belong to other organizations and institutions. Governments do indeed bear responsibility for the police, for zoning ordinances, for

transportation systems, for taxation, and more. Consequently, to address a problem of crime or the degradation of a community, the appropriate level of government must take action.

Yet, behind the problems of criminal behavior and public degradation, what may be even more important for bringing down crime rates, encouraging responsible employment, and improving the quality of a city's life are the efforts of parents to strengthen their families and of businesses and nonprofits to cooperate in promoting more employment opportunities in declining neighborhoods. Many of these changes may also require some action by government but not apart from cooperation with families, churches, businesses, and/or voluntary neighborhood groups. Government cannot make parents love their children; governments cannot compel people to work hard; governments do not create human talents and capabilities. At the same time, however, the just governance of a city, state, or nation is one of the most important God-given responsibilities that humans bear. To overlook or belittle that responsibility is a grave error, for without the trustworthy rule of law and just governance human society cannot flourish. Therefore, when it comes to unjust tax policies, or lack of investment in public infrastructure, or enduring, structural poverty, Christians should be active in appropriate ways to seek public policy changes, to call government to exercise its responsibilities.

If we are to take seriously the biblical revelation that God calls all of us into service with our diverse responsibilities, then we must begin any quest for a healthier, more equitable, more just, more prosperous, and more loving community by clearly identifying the kind of responsibility that each person and institution bears. The Biblically consistent and brilliant reflection below from Abraham Lincoln helps us wrestle honestly with the paradox this principle produces:

“You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift. You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. You cannot help the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer. You cannot further the brotherhood of man by encouraging class hatred. You cannot help the poor by destroying the rich. You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than you earn. You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence. You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves.”

Abraham Lincoln

5. *We celebrate entrepreneurial activity and commercial exchange—they are the fruit of the human development of God's creation. Economic enterprising—despite its potential to be sinfully misdirected—is among the many human responsibilities we are called to pursue as we seek to serve God and neighbor with all that we are and have in Him.*

Business activity in the free market (a free market is not a wild market, as it is bound by two strong restraints—individual morality and institutional rule of law) has broadened the horizon of human opportunities for service and multiplied the kinds of work we can do to bring out the riches of creation and thereby to serve God and our neighbors. In our sinful disobedience we sometimes distort and misuse our talents and achievements, leading to all kinds of wastefulness, oppression, and maltreatment of our fellow human beings and the natural world. Yet the degradation of God-given talents does not do away with the good meaning and purpose of the talents themselves, or with the liberty endowed from God.

The production and exchange of goods and services in the marketplace are not the aims of marriage or family, of a church or a school. Nor does the political community exist for that purpose. This is one of the reasons why government should not try to run or control the work of entrepreneurs and laborers and why government should not be controlled by the most powerful interest groups or corporations in society. It's the same reason why even a family-run business must function as a business and not as a mere extension of family life. It is why church authorities should not try to make the decisions of parents for their children and why business people should not run churches or social-service ministries like businesses. Different vocations entail different kinds of responsibilities.

Two of the most important connections that Christian social-service organizations should make, as part of their asset-based community development strategies, are with employers who offer employment and with those who can help people with job training and starting new businesses. Reaching the point where one can hold a job on one's own and manage a personal or household budget is essential for living in a complex society such as ours. And those who understand the job market, who know the skills that are needed in particular jobs, and who offer apprenticeships and jobs should be close partners with organizations and institutions that are working to help people develop their talents and put their capabilities to work.

6. *We emphasize the need for Christians to bring a distinctly Christian perspective to business endeavors.*

Christians affirm that businesses exist not only to make profits (though that is Biblical, important, legitimate, and necessary) but also to offer people opportunities to develop and exercise their talents. Self-interest (not selfishness) dictates that all businesses exist not only for their stockholders but also for their stakeholders. Healthy, God-honoring business leaders care about their employees, their customers, and the members of the community in which they are located. But non-Christian-owned firms more often than not can make a similar claim. Indeed, as Christian economist Bob Goudzwaard has written: “As soon as [companies] are regarded as institutions bearing responsibility for their actions, and comprising workers as members, it becomes obvious that the suppliers of capital cannot lay exclusive claim to the activities of the enterprise.” (Bob Goudzwaard, *Capitalism and Progress*, 216.)

7. We affirm that governments bear unique responsibilities to restrain evil and reward good (Romans 13, I Peter 2)

Christians can and should appreciate the great value of economic organizations and the contributions that good business can make to human development. But that is not to assert that free-market enterprising leads to every other social good and that government should, for that reason, simply leave the market alone. Free-market capitalism is no more capable, by itself, of achieving public justice, or family well-being, or educational excellence than is government, by itself, capable of achieving a flourishing economy. The rule of good law is essential to restrain evil and reward good among market participants. Millions of business people, workers, and consumers need to be free to make production-and-exchange decisions so that an efficient economy can flourish. And governments must be free to exercise the responsibility of upholding the just treatment of all citizens and to promote the healthy order of the political community.

A justly governed polity, in other words, is essential if humans are to live together with a measure of harmony in a society where all kinds of non-governmental as well as governmental responsibilities must be able to flourish alongside one another. The marketplace, in which production and exchange take place is itself part of the public realm. To speak of “the market” is to speak of an arena in which an immense variety of economic decisions are made by producers, consumers, investors, business managers, salespeople, and more. To uphold the value of a market economy means that the decisions of all these economic players should be theirs to make. Yet, the possibility of enjoying such economic responsibility depends on the market being justly governed. Government, for example, must uphold laws of contract and property ownership, maintain a sound currency, and protect against the kinds of monopolies that could eliminate market freedom. Moreover, even the definition of a corporation is a matter of public law. In addition, government must collect taxes (whether corporate, sales, excise, property, or some other) in order to be able to do its work.

Wise and just (good) governance will certainly be beneficial to economic health, education, family life, and every other kind of responsibility. But government’s job is different from all the others. Its responsibility is to uphold a community of citizens by maintaining public health and safety standards, protecting life and property, protecting the independence of non-government institutions and organizations, and addressing injustices that may arise from any quarter.

For all these reasons, the work of independent Christian social service organizations should be closely connected not only with churches, families, and businesses, but also with civic organizations that are working to promote good government and thereby good community. To serve Christ with all that we are and have is to live with the whole world in view, with a vision of how everything in all of its diversity and complexity exists to praise and honor God.

8. *We acknowledge the responsibility of Christians to protest against economic injustices.*

In this “post-Incarnation” season, the power of the risen Christ has been released into this world and He is at work actively rolling back the curse. (Think about the Christmas hymn, Joy to the World: “He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found.”) He abides in His church and His church is to be a force for justice and shalom in this world. We are to be about the work of transforming our communities to look more and more like heaven; we are to participate with Jesus in the work we ask Him to do in the Lord’s prayer; namely, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This means that we will each be active in fighting against economic injustices. When opposing insider trading, the shutting out of minorities from the market, or discrimination against people in jobs or credit on the basis of race or religion, the Christian works for God’s Kingdom to come. Since typically in the Scriptures injustice is a matter of the abuse of power, a proper response is to identify such abuses and declare, “These ways are not the ways of the Kingdom, and we oppose them.”

Engagement with the complex topics of civic justice and economic empowerment is necessary for the Christian community developer in the 21st Century. This engagement is all the more vital when we consider the great need to empower young people to take responsibility in their individual lives, in their churches, in their communities, and in civic life. Studied reflection on the Step One “Foundational Principals” and the Step Two “Principles of Christian Economic Empowerment” will lay a framework by which we may disciple young people and adults to follow Christ wholistically, evaluate emerging economic justice platforms Biblically, and influence their communities effectively.

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