

# CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR'S REVIEW

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## NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

## REFLECTIONS ON THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE *CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR'S REVIEW*

## ARTICLES

CLIVE BEED AND CARA BEED, *Assisting the Poor to Work: A Biblical Interpretation*

MARSHA DAIGLE-WILLIAMSON, *Dante: A New Pauline Apostle?*

JAN E. EVANS, *Does Miguel de Unamuno's Doubt Keep Him from Faith? Some Considerations with Glances to Pascal and Kierkegaard*

## REVIEW ESSAY

JAMES K. A. SMITH, *The (Re)Turn to the Person in Contemporary Theory*

## REVIEW AND RESPONSE

NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF, *Escaping the Cage of Secular Discourse*

STEVEN D. SMITH, *A Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff*

## REVIEWS

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# Assisting the Poor to Work: A Biblical Interpretation

By Clive Beed and Cara Beed

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## Introduction

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Widely accepted by Christians is the principle that the poor should be helped socially and economically. Victor Claar and Robin Klay put it that “there is no way for Christians to get around the biblical principle that care for the poor is an obligation, not an option.” John Schneider agrees “that the God of Scripture has a peculiar interest in setting the poor free from poverty.” More dramatic is John Stapleford, who says that “as God is on the side of the poor, the weak and the oppressed, clearly he wants his people to fight economic injustice.”<sup>1</sup> How this care should be exercised is a matter of disagreement among Christians. Consensus breaks down on at least two fronts. One is in ascertaining whether further biblical principles can be discerned to suggest more specific ways by which the poor should be helped, and economic injustice thwarted, in terms of the normative teachings of God and Jesus in the Bible. A second front on which Christian consensus weakens is whether application of such principles would impair the functioning of the advanced free market economy, the focus of this paper. The argument here is that God and Jesus do provide further normative principles intended to improve the socio-economic lot of the poor, and that they are meant to be applied. Moreover, if these principles were applied, the advanced free market system would operate differently from

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A conviction accepted broadly by contemporary Christians is that the poor should be assisted economically and socially. Despite the variety of Christian and secular assistance programs, little consensus occurs about how the poor *should* be helped. **Cara and Clive Beed** argue in this essay from three sets of biblical material (Genesis, the Mosaic Law, and Jesus’ teachings in Luke), assisted by the interpretations of biblical exegetes and commentators, toward the importance of providing paid work for the poor in the advanced economy, and for these jobs to be developed via particular organizational structures. The biblical discussion does not proceed further than Jesus’ teaching during His lifetime. The penultimate section considers how these structural features of work for the poor might be encouraged by Christians in the advanced economy, and gives examples of where this has been done. Mr. and Mrs. Beed are respectively retired Senior Lecturer in Economics, University of Melbourne, Australia, and retired Lecturer in Sociology, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia.

how it does currently, but it cannot be demonstrated that it would function less efficiently or equitably than without them.

In Christian discussion care and help for the poor in advanced economies encompasses ad hoc support both within and outside the state welfare system to enable the incomes of the poor to reach socially sustainable standards. Disagreement occurs within Christian and secular circles about what these levels might be, as well as in identifying the poor and determining why they are poor. Typical help in advanced free market economies includes income tax concessions, social insurance payments, subsidized health care, child care, transport to and from work, food stamps, job search assistance, and job-skills training, including poverty-to-work programs. The assistance encompasses food banks, homeless shelters, financial advice, tutoring, subsidized student loans/grants, and drug rehabilitation, among all of which faith-based initiatives are important. In addition, programs are directed toward maintaining intact family structures against current tendencies to disintegration, given the occurrence of poverty in fractured families. All these approaches are valuable from a Christian perspective. However, less practiced and perhaps more basic normative guidelines concerning the importance of work in relieving poverty are found in the didactic teachings of God and Jesus in the Bible.

These teachings, examined below, point to the primacy of work as being a crucial gift to humankind from God, standing alongside "all the other loving structures" God "has created for us—marriage, friendship, family, and nature." This being so, people are expected to work, for "Scripture makes it clear that if they are able, it is better for men and women to work rather than to depend upon the state or charity." Forms of private work organization are important, for especially in the developed economy, "businesses—small and large—are the single most powerful agents of economic growth needed to reduce the scourge of poverty."<sup>2</sup> Even though the theology of work enterprise has not addressed the issues here typically, this paper can be regarded as part of the theology of work project. This is because, as Miroslav Volf points out, "a theology of work is a critical reflection on the reality of human work," while for David Jensen, it "aims to recover a Christian theological vision of ordinary work, a vision that grounds human labor in God's initiating activity."<sup>3</sup>

Many contemporary Christians recognize the importance of work as the way out of poverty in the advanced free market economy. To Stapleford, "basic needs are to be met primarily by productive work" so that "work is the primary path out of poverty among the non-elderly." As Claar and Klay emphasize, "getting or losing a job, or experiencing a divorce are the two most prominent characteristics of

<sup>1</sup>Victor Claar and Robin Klay, *Economics in Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 189; John Schneider, *The Good of Affluence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 66; John Stapleford, *Bulls, Bears and Golden Calves* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2002), 116.

<sup>2</sup>Bill Heatley, *The Gift of Work* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2008), 25; Stapleford, *Bulls, Bears, 127*; Claar and Klay, *Economics*, 162.

<sup>3</sup>Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 25; David Jensen, *Responsive Labor* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), x.

those moving into or out of poverty—jobs being the more important.”<sup>4</sup> The basic problem is to restore the “productive capability” of the poor, “providing productive work, enabling people to be self-sufficient.”<sup>5</sup> We believe that God’s and Jesus’ teachings suggest that the poor are to be encouraged into forms of work organization exhibiting particular characteristics and structures that are of optimal benefit to humankind.

## Genesis as a Starting Point

The ethical prologue of the Bible, Genesis, is a necessary starting point for insights into God’s intentions for how humans are meant to relate to Himself and to each other at the personal and social level carrying implications for work organization. Just as God’s work of creation is described as “very good” (Gen. 1:31), so was human work to emulate this goodness (Gen. 2:8, 15). As Gen. 1:26 and 2:15-16 imply, work is a gift from God, “man’s sober destiny even in his original state,” “a God-given assignment and not a cursed condition.” Thus, work is not a consequence of sin, but pre-dates it.<sup>6</sup> The necessary behaviors for humans to achieve this goodness and thereby attain optimal development from work (and otherwise) were given by God for the first human workplace described in the Bible, the Garden of Eden. Genesis 1 and 2 exemplify the required qualities, in which the relationship of God to people was to be “one of free, gracious commitment and invitation” indicating “the task of human beings and their relationship to God,” in an “unfolding of creation.”<sup>7</sup>

The work of tending the Garden and caring for other species was to be done by Adam and Eve in voluntary cooperation with God and each other in a state of unconstrained obedience to God (Gen. 2:16-17), in freedom, liberty, and enjoyment. In this workplace, “God will do his part and man will expedite his responsibilities.” Kenneth Mathews puts it that in the Garden, “all life benefits mutually from this harmonious relationship” between God and humankind; it “is the meeting place where God and mankind interact in fellowship and trust.” Claus Westermann points out that Gen. 2:16-17 suggests that “a personal relationship to God is part of

<sup>4</sup>Stapleford, *Bulls, Bears*, 116, 119; Claar and Klay, *Economics*, 192.

<sup>5</sup>Ronald Sider, *Just Generosity* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 73; Kent Van Til, “A Biblical/Theological Case for Basic Sustenance for All,” *Journal of Markets and Morality* 7.2 (2004): 459.

<sup>6</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* revised ed. (London: SCM, 1972), 80; Kenneth Mathews, *The New American Commentary* vol. 1A, Genesis 1-11:26 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 209; Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 171.

<sup>7</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 27; Bernhard Anderson as cited in Thomas Keiser, *Genesis 1-11: Its Literary Coherence and Theological Message* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2007), 93; Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 44.

human existence as a whole."<sup>8</sup> Gen. 1:27 is interpreted by Westermann as saying that "humanity exists in community, as one beside the other," while Gen. 2:18-24 suggests that "people find the meaning of life only in human community; it is only this that makes true humanity." Franz Delitzsch is cited to the effect that "human beings cannot fulfill their destiny in any other way than in mutual assistance." For Victor Hamilton, this mutual partnership of Gen. 2:18-20 between man and woman in the Garden is to be one of equality and solidarity.<sup>9</sup>

Adam and Eve, the collective expressions for humankind, were to work on the God-given land (Gen. 1:29 and 2:9) in conditions of personal autonomy, with God as their guide. They were to be individually responsible for their own work (and life) choices (reflected in Gen. 3:12-19). No master or employer other than God had any role in the organization of Adam and Eve's work. Schneider points out in Genesis 1 that there is no "clear ground in this text for building anything like" the hierarchy that God sought between Himself and human beings, between "any human beings" themselves.<sup>10</sup> Adam and Eve's was to be a state of permanent self-employment and mutual equal partnership, without hierarchy (Gen. 2:18-23), guaranteeing the fullest human fulfillment and purpose. Bill Heatley notes that this work environment would be characterized by "love, care, joy, garden, lasting good, mutual benefit, and support."<sup>11</sup>

This nature of work organization did not last. The necessary requirements of obedience to God were fractured by the Fall, so that to Hamilton, "Gen. 3ff introduce the theme of God's judgment, which is the withdrawal of his blessing." Disregarding their relationship with God meant that human relationships themselves became distorted from those God intended (Gen. 3:10-13). As Gerhard von Rad interprets Genesis 3: 8-13, sins committed individually or socially isolate people from God and each other. For Mathews, Chapter 4 of Genesis "details the moral as well as the familial descent of the human family."<sup>12</sup> The examples described in Genesis 3 and 4 underline the terrible effects of human disobedience toward God. For von Rad, Gen. 4:23-24 exemplifies "the increase in sin and the more and more profound disturbance of the original orders of life." In seeking to become his own god, man moves his decision making from "the range of God's directives," as Hamilton summarizes Gen. 3. Domination of one person by another becomes the rule, symptomatic of "human dislocation with a higher design."<sup>13</sup> Cooperation between people became supplanted by disruption (Gen. 4:8-12), power and control of one by the other, domination, avoidance of personal responsibility (Gen.

<sup>8</sup>Hamilton, *Genesis*, 153, in relation to Gen. 2:5; Mathews, *Genesis*, 185; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 223.

<sup>9</sup>Westermann, *Genesis*, 169, 226, 227; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 175, 181.

<sup>10</sup>Schneider, *The Good*, 52.

<sup>11</sup>Heatley, *The Gift*, 28; original emphasis.

<sup>12</sup>Hamilton, *Genesis*, 52; von Rad, *Genesis*, 92; Mathews, *Genesis*, 186.

<sup>13</sup>von Rad, *Genesis*, 111-112; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 212, 211; Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 85.

3:12-13), inequality (Gen. 4:23-24), subordination, and hierarchy.<sup>14</sup> The disruption to the relationship between the man and woman in Gen. 3:16 epitomizes these derangements, so that the basis of equality is broken and turned into a relation of "servitude and domination."<sup>15</sup>

These qualities in human relationships ran counter to those God intended pre-Fall, where harmony, mutuality, co-operation, and peace were emphasized. God is described as being enormously grieved and angered by the prevalence of sin. The comparison of pre-Fall Genesis with Gen. 3:16-19 (or Gen. 6:11-13) yields a clear inference that post-Fall is not how God wanted humankind to live and work. As Westermann puts it for Gen. 1:1- 2:4a, "creation as we know it and creation as intended by God are in opposition to each other." In a work context, the bifurcation of employment and service to God has produced the contemporary oxymoron of "secular vocation." Instead of this situation, people are meant to "carry out the Eden mandate" by "practice of the presence of God."<sup>16</sup> In line with this and the thinking above, we infer that Gen. 1 and 2 express the normative behaviors God requires for humankind's optimal development. However, this is not the same thing as regarding pre-fall Eden as the ideal society. Clearly God intended humans to use the creative abilities He gave them to construct more complex societies with His assistance, but it is the pre-Fall principles that are crucial and integral to such developments. We assume further that without the Fall, hierarchies and the aforesaid disruptions to human life would not have emerged naturally as the creation was disclosed. This distortion from a higher ideal has been noted by many "religions, philosophies and the social sciences [which] agree that the world is not as it should be, that there is a problem with human existence individually and corporately." Christians believe that only God through Christ can make the world right again.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, God was not content to let humankind remain in the unredeemed and disrupted situation in which it found itself after the Fall. From perhaps 1250 BC, God gave the people of Israel the Mosaic Law to guide them in a settled society to return to closer relationship with Himself, and to live and work with each other in conditions closer to those He required for humankind. However, His chosen people did not follow the necessary requirements, leading to the disintegration of the state of Israel between 800 and 600 BC.

## Helping the Poor through Work via the Mosaic Law

God's pre-Fall intentions for human existence and work were characterized

<sup>14</sup>See Hamilton, *Genesis*, 194.

<sup>15</sup>Hamilton, *Genesis*, 202.

<sup>16</sup>Westermann, *Genesis*, 174; John Walton, *The NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 192, 196 in relation to Gen. 2:4-2:5.

<sup>17</sup>Mark Biddle, *Missing the Mark: Sin and Its Consequences in Biblical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), vii.

by harmony, mutuality, co-operation, and peace between people. They were to enjoy permanent self-employment and personal autonomy with God. To an imperfect degree these qualities were reflected in some aspects of the Mosaic Law. The economic provisions of the Law disclose how the triune God proposed to care for the poor through work among the people of Israel on their settlement in the Promised Land (as revealed in the Book of the Covenant: Exodus 20-23; the Deuteronomic Code: Deuteronomy 4-31; and the Holiness Code: Leviticus 17-26), perhaps spanning 1250 BC to after 620 BC. This point is made, for example, by Claar and Klay: "The law called Israel to institute certain practices to meet the immediate and longer-term needs of the poor." The view is accepted widely that Jesus upheld these (and other) intentions of the Law and that He "brought the message forward in his teaching."<sup>18</sup> Jesus is the sole authoritative interpreter of the Law, and it is clear that He reinterpreted certain of the Law's provisions. Nevertheless, the view is held also that the Mosaic Law embodied God's instructions for how Israelite society should be organized to function as a light to the world. Christopher Wright's interpretation is that Israel was to serve as a paradigm or model of a society seeking to live by God's injunctions, that "here is the kind of society the LORD God wants. This God's desire is for a holy people, a redeemed community, a model society through whom God can display a prototype of the new humanity whom he intends to create." In like vein, John Mason and Kurt Schaefer "argue that in the Mosaic provisions designed for early Israel lie intentions the God of creation holds for all peoples." Kent Van Til suggests also the continuing "global applicability of covenant law," as does Sider: "The basic paradigm...is normative for us today." Schneider echoes these viewpoints, noting that "as Jesus made clear," "specific laws" contained in the Mosaic Law "may pass away, but the universal truths embodied in the laws will not pass away."<sup>19</sup> Many Christians believe that part of their task is to help institute the new community based on the underlying intentions and truths of the covenant law, both within and outside the body of believers, despite the fallen and sinful nature of humankind.

The specific detail of the Law can be analyzed to discover God's help orientation to the poor. Although the detail is not applicable to modern societies, the underlying truths, intentions, norms, principles, or guidelines of the Law are, embodying the purposes and orientation of the legislation. With this assumption in mind, the minutiae of the Law have been dissected by many scholars.<sup>20</sup> We rely on

<sup>18</sup>Claar and Klay, *Economics*, 188, 189.

<sup>19</sup>Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 364; John Mason and Kurt Schaefer, "The Bible, the State, and the Economy: A Framework for Analysis," *Christian Scholar's Review* 20.1 (1990): 47; Van Til, "A Biblical/Theological Case," 451-452; Sider, *Just Generosity*, 90; Schneider, *The Good*, 80.

<sup>20</sup>See Walter Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983); John Mason, "Biblical Teaching and Assisting the Poor," *Interpretation* 4.2 (1987): 1-14; "Biblical Teaching and the Objectives of Welfare Policy in the United States," in eds. S. Carlsson-Thies and J. Skillen, *Welfare in America: Christian Perspectives on a Policy in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 145-85; Stephen Mott and Ronald Sider, "Economic Justice: A Bib-

their conclusions rather than seeking biblical exegesis for each point we make. Despite the difficulty of hermeneutical interpretation, one of their conclusions is that the joint effect of the Law's injunctions (had they been practiced) would have been to ensure that most able-bodied Israelites were involved in permanent remunerative work in extended family-owned farm units. Some native Israelites and aliens would serve as full-time laborers on these farms or as periodic laborers on them. All able-bodied persons would be employed in some capacity. A variety of safeguards applied so that all persons were expected to be able to earn sufficient in kind to enable them to participate fully in the religious, social, and economic life of the Israelite community. A minimum standard of living would have been generated for each member of the society. Any idea of a permanently poor stratum of the society outside the mainstream of life, burdened by debt and inadequate income, was anathema to the provisions of the Law.

Aliens, orphans and widows were singled out as at risk of poverty, aliens because they had no part in the initial land distributions, more or less equally divided among tribes, clans and families (Num. 26:53-56; 33:54). Orphans and widows were also at risk because they received no initial land unless they were part of an extended native Israelite family. This latter situation might not have been uncommon. Israelites who became widows or orphans after the land distributions were also probably part of kin-related extended families and earned their keep within them. Whatever the state of these people at risk to poverty, their material needs were looked after in additional ways. If they were not part of a farm household, aliens, orphans and widows at risk could eat free food from the fields of farmers at any time, while gleanings at harvest time belonged to these people who had to gather them (Dt. 23:24-25, 24:19-21; Lev. 19:9-10, 23:22). A ten-percent produce tax (the tithe) at the end of every third year also accrued to these people (shared with the Levite priests), as did the fallow produce every seventh year, again to be harvested (Dt. 14:28-29; Ex. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:1-7). Those at risk had to work regularly to gain these benefits in the sense that gathering food required manual labor. The three-year tax distribution was not sufficient on its own. In addition, interest-free loans were mandatory from better-off farmers to Israelite orphans, widows and other poor Israelites, with the outstanding balance to be cancelled every seventh year (Ex. 22:25-27; Lev. 25:35-38; Dt. 15:7-11, 23:19-20, 24:6, 12-13, 17, 15: 1-7). All these provisions imply attempts to get the at-risk into self-managed, self-directed work, akin to Genesis pre-Fall creation. Finally, aliens, orphans, widows and poor Israelites would be taken on by the owner-farmers as hired laborers, either on a daily basis or as bonded servants where they functioned as part of the native Israelite extended family (for example, see Lev. 25:35-46).

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lical Paradigm," in D. Gushee, ed. *Toward A Just and Caring Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 15-45; Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*; Kurt Schaefer and Ed Noell, "Contract Theory, Distributive Justice and the Hebrew Sabbatical," *Faith and Economics* 45 (2005): 1-19; Clive Beed and Cara Beed, *Alternatives to Economics: Christian Socio-Economic Perspectives* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006); Sider, *Just Generosity*.



A different set of beneficial provisions in the Law applied to Israelite owner-farmers who did not prosper, perhaps because of insufficient application, death/accident to a production member of the extended household, or weather misfortunes. Moreover, interest-free loans from the better-off were required. The struggling farmer could temporarily sell his land (Lev. 25:25-28), but it was redeemable at a fixed price any time up to fifty years, hence in the Jubilee when it reverted without additional charge to the original owner (Lev. 25:8-17). In the meantime, the indigent Israelite and his family were to be employed as farm laborers or bonded servants (Lev. 25:35-55), while other provisions assisted Hebrew slaves (Ex. 21:1-11; Dt. 15:12-17). Kurt Schaefer and Ed Noell summarize the "primary goal of the laws" as "enabling each family to maintain a base of resources with which to provide for itself," including the provision of work.<sup>21</sup>

The Genesis 1-2 intentions were not met perfectly in the Mosaic Laws. For instance, consider the issue of hierarchy. This is usually taken to mean a system of identifiable, graded order of some attribute within an organization, by which power and authority is exercised. Genesis 1,2 precluded the existence of hierarchy as the ideal pre-Fall norm, but this norm was fractured by the Fall. This dislocation was exhibited in the Mosaic Law. Thus, although farms were run as family self-owned/self-managed units by the head of the extended family, hierarchy within the family was not eliminated, although hierarchy between families was. Insofar as the Jubilee provisions were designed to restore each Israelite family to its farm, they also worked in the direction of maintaining low inter-farm hierarchy and inequality.

Notwithstanding these qualifications, at least three main principles or guides might be gleaned from the Law's ways of helping the poor, even though no definition of them was provided. These three principles were sympathetic to those from early Genesis. First it is likely that all members of Israelite society were to be provided with permanent, productive full-time work. No concept existed of a dependent able-bodied group relying on regular free handouts to support them (Levites aside). Second, for Israelites, their work context was predominantly to be within self-owned and self-managed extended-family units, with wage labor serving as a temporary expedient and second-best condition. Third, a limited egalitarian bias pervaded the regulations for helping the poor, so that all Israelites and aliens would enjoy more equal outcomes than without the regulations. This bias derived mainly from the given organization of production with redistributive transfers unrelated to production playing a secondary role. Productive capital or "wealth is [to be] distributed to all the people and not hoarded by a few," where "all the people" means the heads of the Israelite extended families, while free and slave aliens did not fare as well as Israelites.<sup>22</sup> Had God's instructions toward the at-risk groups been followed, "the immediate and long-term needs of the poor" would have been

<sup>21</sup>Schaefer and Noell, "Contract Theory," 10.

<sup>22</sup>Jim Halteman, "Productive Capital and Christian Moral Teaching," *Faith and Economics* 44 (2004): 27.

met.<sup>23</sup> We might presume then that the problem of the “poor” would have become of minor import in Israelite society. The discussion below is mainly about the second of the above guidelines. Since self-owned/self-managed work organization seems to have been the priority choice for God, the Law-maker, this orientation requires comment.

Perhaps God’s preferred option for work organization existed merely because of the nature of agriculture. Self-owned farms, then and now, tend to be the most efficient form of agricultural production. Nevertheless, this has not stopped much agriculture in the past and now from being organized on tenancy lines. Probably, most ancient Near Eastern agriculture was so structured as it is currently in the developing world. However, God-given issues were suggested in Genesis to help explain God’s preferences, and these are re-emphasized and extended by Jesus.

### Jesus as Interpreter of Genesis and the Law

The normative inference for work organization in pre-Fall Genesis is toward autonomous decision-making with God as guide, and each person in personal relationship with God. God was the only employer in the pre-Fall work context. Between people, mutually supportive relationships, self ownership and management, permanent work, no hierarchy, and co-equal partnership describe intra- and inter-workplace relationships, in which people were to be responsible to God and each other for their actions.<sup>24</sup> Cooperation between people, and between people and God, was to be voluntary, marked by obedience to God, as the path to optimal enjoyment of work in conditions of liberty, freedom, peace, and harmony. Maximum human fulfillment and purpose would be achieved by these requirements. Expressions such as love, care, joy, lasting good, mutual benefit, and support describe workplaces intended by the original Creation.

These intentions to guide inter-personal and social relationships were consolidated and reinterpreted by Jesus and are consistent with the original creation mandates. The assumption underlying the discussion below is that Jesus’ normative teachings directed to both the twelve disciples and His wider body of followers are intended to be a guide and exemplar for how Christian-based organizations should be structured. These are organizations that seek to put into practice principles of Christian belief, discussed further in the section following.<sup>24</sup> Businesses seeking to

<sup>23</sup>Claar and Klay, *Economics*, 188.

<sup>24</sup>Applied to the business firm, Heatley’s interpretation of the concept of “Christian-based” and “Christian-run” firms is that they are made up of “people who embrace this philosophy of work as God intended,” something “sorely missing from our world” (*The Gift of Work*, 38). Joseph Macariello argues that in such firms, “executives who are Christians” should “seek to infuse the management systems of their organizations with values that are derived from the Christian faith.” In the biblical view, “management is viewed as a process of developing people through work,” whereas in the secular view, “management’ is defined as the process of getting work done through people.” Cited in Joseph Macariello, “Business and Empowerment: Management Systems with a Heart for the Poor,” in *Toward a Just and Caring Society*,

have an explicit Christian orientation need to be cognizant of the mandatory principles to which Jesus directs His disciples.

First, it is no accident that the organizational model advocated by Jesus conforms in part to that by which Jesus spent the first thirty years of His life in work. Schneider says that "through Jesus' natural involvement in his trade and business, the Incarnation gives divine approval to and redeems human economic culture from all the powers of evil that seek to claim it."<sup>25</sup> In Joseph's self-owned family carpentry firm, general business promotion and trade would be involved. By the possession of property, Jesus' family was able to function. In the same way, at least five of Jesus' twelve disciples were employed in self-owned family businesses. In His teaching Jesus extends this organizational model for the body of believers.

At least nine teachings by Jesus in the first three gospels relate to these issues, but attention here is confined to Luke, as interpreted by biblical exegetes (other gospels are examined elsewhere<sup>26</sup>). A first Lucan text concludes a dispute among the disciples at 9:48, with Jesus saying, "the least among all of you is the greatest." Joel Green interprets the background, to the conclusion noting that "*the exercise of redemptive power and authority is not related to normal canons of honor and status and kinship.*" Instead, "*this topsy-turvy social ethic is grounded in the divine purpose.*"<sup>27</sup> To honor those of lowest status—a child in the example here—is to honor Jesus. In a Christian organizational work context, then, those of lowest status are to be honored; the social pyramid of conventional control is upturned. If status assesses the professional/social standing or position of a person/worker in relation to others, there is no place for it in Christian organizations. Jesus' selection of a child (representing complete helplessness) to demonstrate greatness in the kingdom "illustrates how greatness comes by grace via the Great Reversal," for greatness "is the gift of God to those who serve the lowly."<sup>28</sup> Darrell Bock interprets the text says that "unlike the world, status is not a virtue," since "greatness and exclusive power do not coexist" in Jesus' mission. "Jesus refuses to compare the disciples to each other;" indeed, the only greatness relevant in Jesus ministry is "through knowing Jesus."<sup>29</sup> Even the functional specialization of the Twelve is open to others to minister.

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David Gushee, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 427, 434. An example of a Christian-based and Christian-run U.S. firm is Reell Precision Manufacturing that is "dedicated to the purpose of operating a business based in the practical application of Judeo-Christian values." Cited in Helen Alford and Michael Naughton, *Managing As If Faith Mattered: Christian Social Principles in the Modern Organization* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 35. Examples are given in the next section of how this works out in practice.

<sup>25</sup>Schneider, *The Good*, 129.

<sup>26</sup>Clive Beed and Cara Beed, "Applying Judeo-Christian Principles to Contemporary Economic Issues," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 8.1 (2005): 60-61.

<sup>27</sup>Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 387; original emphasis.

<sup>28</sup>Arthur Just Jr., *Concordia Commentary: Luke 1:1-9.50* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 414; John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary* Vol. 35B, Luke 9:21-18:34 (Dallas: Word, 1993a), 521.

<sup>29</sup>Darrell Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 891, 893.

Luke 22:24-28 contains other of Jesus' sayings directed toward installing correct attitudes about status and authority among the disciples. Again, the context is a dispute among the disciples about which of them is the greatest. As above, Jesus reverses the "normal social protocols" of "those for whom the use of authority is itself a means for gaining status honor." Instead, among the disciples, "their manner of ruling and benefaction must be utterly transformed;" they are "to give without expectation of return." The disciples "are to turn from their obsession with their own status to a comparable attentiveness to the needs of others."<sup>30</sup> In the world, "the normal practice of sinners (ancient and modern) is to seek to be the greatest and lord it over each other." Exactly the reverse is required of the disciples, for "Jesus does not extol (what the world calls) 'leadership skills' for those in the ministry."<sup>31</sup> In a similar vein, "elitism is not the Twelve's call, but service and community among equals. The contrast to the world's definition of leadership could not be greater." Accordingly, "greatness is defined as service, not authority. It is not found in the power to take or exercise control, but in the ability to give and share." Jesus presents Himself to the disciples as the model leader, who "instead of making his power felt, is to behave as one whose role is to serve the needs of others."<sup>32</sup>

Two further teachings by Jesus in Luke pertaining to authority and status are epitomized at 14:11 and 18:14: "All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." The first text concludes a teaching on required behavior at a wedding banquet, the second, on the prayer patterns of a Pharisee and a tax collector. As biblical exegetes point out, the implications of Jesus' conclusion extend far beyond the two contexts portrayed. Darrell Bock emphasizes that "humility is to mark the disciple," and that "humility expresses itself in ignoring issues of class or rank," for "God honors the one who befriends the poor, the lame, and the blind." If humility means to be modest and of little pretension, of not exaggerating one's importance, of avoiding self-promotion, and being without pride, structural features of Christian organization, discussed below, can be directed toward encouraging these qualities.<sup>33</sup> The model is Jesus who "opens up the community of relationship so that no boundaries of class or rank exist." Just as in Luke's social world, so in ours today, "the only commendation one needs comes from the God who is unimpressed with such social credentials...as family lineage, network of friends, and wealth."<sup>34</sup>

In the discussion of Jesus' sayings, of Genesis, and the Mosaic Law, the role of power relations between people is important. "Power" can be defined as "the exer-

<sup>30</sup>Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 767, 769.

<sup>31</sup>Arthur Just Jr., *Concordia Commentary: Luke 9.51-24.53* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 846, 844.

<sup>32</sup>Darrell Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke Vol. 2, 9:51-24:53* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 1738; John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 35C, Luke 18:35-24:53* (Dallas: Word, 1993b), 1067.

<sup>33</sup>Bock, *Luke Vol. 2*, 1260; Nolland, *Vol 35B, Luke*, 748.

<sup>34</sup>Bock, *Luke Vol. 2*, 1267; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 552.

cise of constraint and compulsion against the will of an individual or group,"<sup>35</sup> and "power relations" means relationships where "the powerful significantly affect others to produce, or contribute to, outcomes."<sup>36</sup> Power and power relations did not exist in the pre-Fall creation. God works in cooperative relation with the first humans, but He does not exercise constraint or compulsion over them, nor do they over each other. The Fall changes this situation. God exercises power over the first humans, expelling them from the Garden, for example. Humans exercise power over each other, such as Cain's murder of Abel. Power relations are one distortion from the original creation. A product of the post-Fall world, the Mosaic Law cannot eliminate power relations. They continue to exist in the hierarchies within the extended families of Israel. Jesus, however, is determined to suppress power relations. The forms of business organization we advocate for the advanced modern economy also have as one aim to reduce power relations.

The themes running throughout Jesus' example and teachings above extol the virtue of authority as unrelated to normal standards of status. Instead, to honor those of lowest status is to honor Jesus. Status as denoting the relative position of a person on a publicly recognized scale or hierarchy is out of place in Christian organization. Greatness comes only by the grace of knowing Jesus, and is not attainable through exclusive power. People/workers are not to control each other, and hierarchies are anathema. The Twelve, or any group of them, do not constitute a hierarchy, defined as a system of identifiable, graded order of some attribute within an organization or group for the purpose of exercising power and authority. The presence of a hierarchy presumes the existence of power and top-down authority within the organization, and Jesus sought to eliminate these attributes. Instead, Jesus promotes equality of status and authority among those who commit themselves to him. Greatness and leadership in Christian organizations are to be assessed as service to Jesus, so that secular standards of merit carry little weight. Those of lowest status are to be honored, and authority is to be shared among all participants. If these precepts are those Jesus promotes, the question arises as how best to encourage them in work organizations seeking to function by Christian standards. What manner of Christian-based work organization allows these criteria to be approached in the advanced economy (even if not achieved, given fallen human-kind), and how can they be promoted for the poor?

### Christian-based Work Organization for Helping the Poor

The unfractured paradigm of Genesis 1 and 2, the imperfect expression of these orientations in the socio-economic forms favored in the Mosaic Law, and Jesus' interpretations of these guidelines, underlie God's model for how work should

<sup>35</sup>Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan Turner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Penguin, 1988), 16.

<sup>36</sup>Steven Lukes, "Power," in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth Century Social Thought*, eds. William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 505.

be organized to generate human socio-economic needs optimally. One of these needs is that work was intended pre-Fall to be a "fundamental structure of love in the kingdom of God," so that people would come together in loving community to benefit from and support each other.<sup>37</sup> Against God's intention has been the harsh reality of "how very brutally oppressive existence has been for most human beings in most societies throughout history."<sup>38</sup> To mitigate this disaster, how can God's model be approached for the firm in the fallen world today?

For a business seeking to operate on Christian principles, variants of the following might be sought within the firm:

1. Voluntary cooperation between workers, each exercising her/his personal autonomy with God.
2. Regular reliance on individual and corporate prayer as intrinsic to productive activity.
3. A low degree of power and control of one worker over another; non-authoritarian structures.
4. Status is renounced.
5. The social pyramid of conventional control is upturned.
6. Each worker has an equal share in formulating firm activity, consistent with firm efficiency.
7. Intra-firm service is to be among equals; the ability to give and share defines greatness.
8. No separation between capital provider and worker. Otherwise, division of responsibility, hierarchy, and unidirectional authority relationships are produced.
9. Those who provide the capital do the work.
10. Those who work provide the capital.
11. Authority stems only from performing work tasks.
12. Work is to be predominantly self-owned and self-managed.
13. Mutually-supportive relationships should characterize the workplace.
14. Each worker is responsible for the results of her/his work tasks.
15. Diversity still exists between worker function.
16. Employment security is sought, requiring retraining within the firm.
17. The development of the worker as person is as important as the nature and results of the work.
18. The growth of Christ-like attributes characterizes the development of the person.
19. Constant reiteration/application of Christian values within the firm.
20. An intrinsic interrelationship is sought between spiritual, social, and economic capital in the firm.

Debate could be made over each of these items. For instance, item 6 might

<sup>37</sup>Heatley, *The Gift*, 24-25.

<sup>38</sup>John Schneider, "Christian Theology and the Human Ontology of Market Capitalism," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 10.2 (2007): 287.

seem improbable. However, enough instances of forms of its operation occur in Christian-led or inspired firms and in secular ones to suggest its practicability (for example, within the Italian Lega cooperatives, the Daily Bread Co-operative, the Rainbow Grocery, San Francisco, and the Spanish Mondragon cooperatives). These can include all equal worker-owners electing committees to perform particular tasks. Item 8 suggests the absence of separation between providers of capital and workers with this capital. It is possible to find examples in biblical texts where this requirement is not met. For instance, Jesus accepted gifts to support His ministry, and the Levites distributed the triennial tithe. However, these are descriptions of events that occurred outside work functions, and cannot be read as having normative force related to productive activity within the firm of the time or now. Items 9 and 10, that those who provide the capital do the work and those who work provide the capital, might seem to be contradicted by the Mosaic Law provision on gleanings, the Levitical provisions for charging interest on trade ventures, and by Jesus' work in Joseph's shop. The gleaning provisions and the triennial tithe were safety nets in the Mosaic Law intended to help maintain the poor in a reasonable lifestyle. They did not relate to methods of organization of agricultural production. The provision for interest on trade does not necessarily contradict items 9 and 10; traders might well meet both requirements. Finally, Jesus' work in Joseph's shop would also apply to all family members working on the extended-family farms of Mosaic Law times. What items 9 and 10 imply is that the head of the family who manages the capital represents the family unit as a whole—he is to act as steward and servant to all. In Jesus' time, sons worked in the business under the care and direction of their fathers. They are part and parcel of the one extended-family entity. Jesus extended this form of operation beyond the extended family for His movement's organization.

Item 12, that work is to be predominantly self-owned and self-managed, does apply to Joseph's joinery business. Who their customers were is a different matter from the self-owned/self-managed nature of the business itself. Item 13, that mutually-supportive relationships should characterize the workplace describes the ideal qualities by which work is performed within the firm. Just as calling God "Father" is the nearest that humans can think of as an ideal, the mutual cooperation that should characterize the redeemed workplace is described best but imperfectly by good family interrelationships, especially in marriage. Finally, item 16, that employment security is sought, is an implication of Genesis 1 and 2, that Adam and Eve were intended to tend the Garden of Eden forever. It also stems explicitly from the first conclusion above about the Mosaic Law that all members of Israelite society were to be provided with permanent productive full-time work. The only way of trying to achieve this condition in the advanced economy is to foster worker retraining in the firm, as practiced by the Lega and other Italian and Mondragon cooperatives that, so far, have avoided having to reduce their workforces.

To approach the qualities of the list above in a sin-ridden world, a necessary step seems to be to ensure that those at risk of poverty be protected by ensuring

them access to capital with which they can perform paid work. Thus, if we go back to the Mosaic Law, one provision God required for the pre-monarchical Israelites was that their extended family capital (land, livestock and buildings) be protected from one generation to another via the Jubilee. As Claar and Klay point out, "with access to land they [poor families] would again be able to take care of their basic needs, without resorting to begging, borrowing or indenture."<sup>39</sup> No place was provided in this set-up for landlordism, tenancy, or usufructuary practices. The transposition of God's requirements to contemporary Third World agricultural organization is clear. An example of its operation is the San Lucas Toliman Mission in Guatemala buying agricultural land and donating it to the local population to enable them to become food self-sufficient. Given that lack of private property and capital have long been recognized as a major cause of poverty, the remedy is to extend private capital ownership. With this orientation, all manner of Christian, other religious, and secular projects are underway in the Third World to extend private capital ownership and work to the poor, such as the Indian Self-Employment Women's Association with 800,000 members, providing micro-credit for enterprises like cleaning and street vending.

This approach is also relevant to the poor in advanced economies. The transposition depends on God's purpose for people to retain ownership of, and control over, the capital with which they work, with earnings related only to personal work effort. Only in this way can they approach work conditions of greater autonomy, lower hierarchy, more freedom and liberty within the workplace, practicing participative leadership, reciprocal responsibility, cooperation, and mutual support. Freedom in the workplace is to be sought by an equitable distribution of workplace property. A transposition of God's preferred orientation to the advanced free market economy suggests that self-employment, partnerships, 100% employee stock ownership companies, and worker cooperatives are those by which employee self-ownership/management, embodying a low degree of internal hierarchical control, can be sought.

The poor in advanced economies do not appear to lack the entrepreneurial skills to start their own businesses, as evidenced by the magnitude of the informal, underground, black, or hidden enterprise economy, in which sweatshop conditions are atypical. Thus, Steve Balkin documented that with sufficient capital at their disposal, a greater likelihood arises that homeless men can organize themselves into self-owned/self-managed work.<sup>40</sup> What the poor do lack is capital to start businesses. Partly, this is because the distribution of wealth in the U.S. is so unequal. In 2004, the poorest 40% of households owned a negative 1.1% of the total value of non-home wealth, and the poorest 80%, a positive 7.4%.<sup>41</sup> However the

<sup>39</sup>Claar and Klay, *Economics*, 189.

<sup>40</sup>Colin Williams, *The Hidden Enterprise Culture* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006); Steve Balkin, "Entrepreneurial Activities of Homeless Men;" *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 19.4 (1992): 129-50.

<sup>41</sup>Edward Wolff, *Recent Trends in Household Wealth in the United States: Rising Debt and the*



poor are defined, they cannot access even modest capital to start businesses. They have no security to offer for loans; the capital market does not work for them. One survey of low-income single mothers and of noncustodial fathers, for example, showed their desire but inability to be able to purchase for their self-employment:

A sewing machine in good working order, catering equipment, roofing tools, exterminating equipment, a home that meets code requirements and can be used for an in-home day-care facility, a car or truck, a lawn mower and a pair of hedge clippers, and a forty-foot ladder.<sup>42</sup>

The popularity of self-employment by the poor was also one finding of the American Dream Demonstration project that encouraged very poor participants to save regularly: the largest number of withdrawals was for microenterprise, followed by home purchase.<sup>43</sup> As John Butler notes, entrepreneurship as a way of capital accumulation by the poor also teaches other helpful habits, such as putting "aside a reserve for difficult times ahead and to make long-term investments" like purchase of a home or life or health insurance.<sup>44</sup>

To foster Christian principles either in single-worker or multi-worker self-owned firms requires further strategies. For starting/operating a Christian-based firm—one that might try to encourage some of the twenty principles listed above—lack of business experience or training might not necessarily be a barrier,<sup>45</sup> even though not all employees might be Christians. But funding issues are still a problem. The experience of U.S. government-funded faith-based initiatives suggests they might not be good candidates for starting Christian businesses because of restrictions on the religious side of their activities, such as not evangelizing on the job.<sup>46</sup> Conversely, pointers can be gained from the experience of non-government funded faith-based poverty-to-work initiatives that assist "in creating community and in providing social support."<sup>47</sup> It is these that might encourage development of firms with a Christian orientation.

One implication of God's work organization preference is that the joint stock

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*Middle-Class Squeeze* (Working Paper no. 502. Annandale: The Levy Economics Institute, 2007), 11.

<sup>42</sup>Kathryn Edin, "More Than Money: The Role of Assets in the Survival Strategies of Material Well-Being of the Poor," in eds. T. Shapiro and E. Wolff, *Assets for the Poor: The Benefits of Spreading Asset Ownership* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), 217.

<sup>43</sup>Michael Sherraden, "Asset-Building and Programs for the Poor," in *Assets for the Poor*, 316.

<sup>44</sup>John Butler, "The Benefits of and Mechanisms for Spreading Asset Ownership," in *Assets for the Poor*, 359.

<sup>45</sup>Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen, *Great Commission Companies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 132, 141.

<sup>46</sup>Stephen Veltri, "The Faith-Based Initiative and the Freedom of the Church," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 9.1 (2006): 147-160; John Forren, "Government Support of Faith-Based Social Services: A Look at Three Potential Pitfalls," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 9.1 (2006): 161-170.

<sup>47</sup>William Lockhart, "The Added Value of Religion in Poverty-to-Work Programs: A Framework for Analysis," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 6.2 (2003): 511.

company does not seem to serve as a satisfactory vehicle for His intentions. This is because invariably, those who work in such companies do not own the capital with which they work, and consequently are able to exercise only limited or minimal control over the firm's operations and their own conditions of work. The situation is even more fragmented, for typically, capital owners (stock holders) play little part in the company's operations, having surrendered control to executives/directors (who may not be owners), and who need take little cognizance of owners' wishes (as long as they generate acceptable share yields). A further fragmentation is the division of stockholders into individual persons, and legal institutions, such as other corporations. Often the voice of personal stockholders is overwhelmed by corporate stockholders in matters like takeovers and employee tenure. Excluding government and suppliers/customers, there are at least three groups of people involved in the production activity of the joint stock firm (workers, executives/directors, stockholders). Between these groups, interests need not be consonant, coordination may not be straightforward and responsibility for firm outcomes need have little personal implication. For example, stockholders might be far more interested in share value than in the conditions of work of employees or the ethical nature of products. Maciariello suggests that "the management systems of many, if not most, public companies are guided predominantly by shareholder values" that "are to be contrasted to management systems guided by biblical values." Christian founder of Lincoln Electrics, James Lincoln, went further in holding that for established firms, "the stockholder does not do much to contribute to the success of the company and is not terribly committed to the company, its customers and workers;" they have "very little loyalty."<sup>48</sup>

Workers in joint stock firms are too far removed from the capital ownership side of the equation to be able to exercise adequate personal responsible stewardship over the capital. Furthermore, these firms rely too heavily on hierarchical structures that are inimical to the egalitarian tendencies Jesus proposes. Also separated from adequate stewardship of their capital in joint stock firms, investors (especially institutional investors) are too removed from being accountable for employees' working conditions, remuneration, responsibilities, product quality, marketing, environmental outcomes of production, and so on. The empowerment of both groups to meeting their responsibilities for mutual care of, and service to, each other is harmed. Since the wealthiest 20% of U.S. households owned 90% of the value of company stock in 2004, it does not seem that this restricted number of investors is in a position to play a greater part in the operation of the millions of joint stock companies.<sup>49</sup> By necessity, they have to remain passive investors, enjoying property rights but bearing little other responsibility for their companies' operations. Conversely, the remaining 80% of households who own 10% of stock are spread too thinly to affect company function. These barriers to personal account-

<sup>48</sup>Maciariello, "Management Systems," 433, 457, 460.

<sup>49</sup>Wolff, "Recent Trends," 43.

ability and responsibility by owners (gaining dividends) and workers (gaining wages) seem to contradict the Christian principles determined above. Lacking ownership rights, workers cannot get close enough to managing their work tasks, while owners are reduced to coupon clippers. Even seemingly benign corporate stockholders, such as superannuation funds, are remote from playing an active role in the companies in which they invest. To the extent that workers owned the private capital with which they worked (and assuming flatter pay scales common in worker-owned firms), a more even distribution of wealth among the population would help to be generated (something Jesus and the Mosaic Law upheld). This contrasts with the extremely uneven distribution that exists currently in the U.S., and that seems to be coming more uneven as time goes by.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout history, attempts have been made within the joint stock company to mitigate the adverse effects of low worker participation in control. For instance, in the first decades of this century, Filenes department stores formed

a system of self-government for employees, administered by the store co-operative association. Working through this association, the employees have the right to appeal from and to veto policies laid down by the management. They may adjust the conditions under which employees are to work, and, in effect, prescribe conditions for themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Admirable as such intermittent efforts have been, they have not been typical of arrangements within the joint stock company. The separation of ownership from control (management) and from operation (workers) in the joint stock firm continues to be associated with a variety of alleged workplace ills. One, emphasized in Catholic Social Thought, is the alienation of workers from feeling part of the firm, since workers experience a low degree of personalization and belonging that helps undermine productivity and community within the workplace. Michael Naughton and Robert Wahlstedt write:

John Paul II advocates worker ownership not only because it distributes wealth, but also because it serves well as a means of personalization by positively affecting the formative dimension of the person and creating stronger social relationships between worker and employer.<sup>52</sup>

Christian organizations and Christian business/social entrepreneurs, were they to be convinced by the biblically-based arguments here advocating self-employment, partnerships, worker cooperatives and 100% employee share ownership plans, would have a crucial part to play in the formation of these firms. Christian business entrepreneurs from the twentieth century in advanced economies have served

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 11, 41-42.

<sup>51</sup>Heatley, *The Gift*, 160, quoting Louis Brandeis, *Business: A Profession* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co, 1914).

<sup>52</sup>Michael Naughton and Robert Wahlstedt, "Implementing Just Wages and Ownership: A Dialogue," in eds. H. Alford, C. Clark, S. Cortright, and M. Naughton, *Rediscovering Abundance* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 322.

as important models in encouraging Christian principles in business, one effect of which was to improve conditions for their and other workers. Obviously they were influenced by their belief that "the business and its employees are some of the 'talents' for which they one day [would] be asked to give an account."<sup>53</sup> Names like Leon Harmel (d. 1915), John Spedan Lewis (d. 1963) (John Lewis Partnerships UK), Enrique Shaw (d. 1962), Ernest Bader (d. 1982) (Scott Bader Chemicals UK), Francois Michelin (Michelin Tyres), and Robert Ouimet (Ouimet-Cordon Bleu Foods, Canada) come to mind. Cordon Bleu, for instance, practices at least ten Christian-relevant principles, including provision of a silent meditation/prayer room for workers. Other U.S. Christian entrepreneurs also run their businesses on Christian principles, such as ServiceMaster, Lincoln Electric, Reell Precision Manufacturing, and Herman Miller. Herman Miller, a large manufacturer of office furniture, enjoys excellent employer-employee relations, with "the most productive workforce in its industry," exhibiting "egalitarian wage and salary structures, profit sharing, and stock ownership programs which affect practically all" employees.<sup>54</sup> However, these conventionally-organized firms do not always ride recessions well, as the recent experience of Herman Miller suggests. Further Christian instances are described by Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen, including one case where some of the biggest accounts were turned over to "otherwise unemployable converts." Ken Eldred also cites examples, like the Riverview Community Bank and R. C. Wiley Home Furnishings in the U.S.<sup>55</sup>

There may well be Christian entrepreneurs/organizations sympathetic to venturing into encouraging self-owned/self-managed business targeting the poor in advanced free market economies. Unlike state-sponsored Welfare/Poverty-to-Work or start-up loans/grants for self-employment/small business (valuable as these are), contemporary versions of the above Christian entrepreneurs/organizations would have the responsibility of motivating the unemployed and dissatisfied employed into the favored forms of employment, and ensuring the firms were run on Christian principles. Capital would need to be loaned to the workers, for as John Bolt points out, "the poor need to have property of their own, property for which they can be responsible and productive stewards."<sup>56</sup> If these sorts of firms could be developed, perhaps the observed tendency for loss of job interest among the unemployed, and their ability to get jobs yielding only low wages, might be mitigated.

One suggestion is for the Catholic hospital system to use its institutional strength "to replicate New York's Cooperative Home Care Associates," a success-

<sup>53</sup>Rundle and Steffen, *Great Commission*, 116.

<sup>54</sup>Alexander Hill, *Just Business: Christian Ethics for the Marketplace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 156; Maciarello, "Management Systems," 463.

<sup>55</sup>Rundle and Steffen, *Great Commission*, 190; Ken Eldred, *God Is at Work* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2005), 91, 99.

<sup>56</sup>John Bolt, "Christian Obligations: 'The Poor You Will Always Have with You'," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 7.2 (2004): 477.

32 ful secular worker cooperative providing 1,600 jobs, many for formerly unemployed African-American women.<sup>57</sup> Catholic orders, like the Maryknoll Mission, the De La Salle Christian Brothers, and San Lucas Toliman, already work with the poor in various types of economies, organizing quasi-production activities in less developed countries, and invariably are ready to share their expertise in other contexts. With their orientation to community development programs via micro-credit/finance and rotating credit associations, they are joined by ecumenical groups, like World Vision, Opportunity International, Tear Fund, and the Mennonite Economic Development Associates, although so far these organizations have directed their attention to less developed countries. Other business experience exists in the world Christian movement. Focolare's Economy of Communion encompasses 769 small- and medium-size businesses spread throughout the world, including 48 in North America.<sup>58</sup> Even though they are not run on the basis advocated here, they have certain features in common, such as providing a third share of profits to the poor. Further Christian scope exists in advanced economies, encompassing Christian business entrepreneurial associations, Christian social entrepreneurial groups, business faculty in Christian universities and colleges, large churches, religious orders, Christian credit unions, Jobs for Life, Good Samaritan Ministries and so on. Some of these already have been involved in production activities, such as the Circle Christian Development Corporation that has restored/built some hundreds of residential units in Chicago.<sup>59</sup> These organizations might well be able to work with secular encouragers of multi-worker self-owned enterprise, especially in the United States. Many states continue to have employee ownership programs, encouraging, for instance, retiring owners "to sell their businesses to their employees when there was no heir eager to continue the family business."<sup>60</sup> Non-profit employee ownership encouragers could also be collaborators, such as the Industrial Cooperative Association, as might for-profit companies, such as Ownership Associates Inc., and the numerous private sector consultants who specialize in organizing employee ownership.

To date, few Christian-based exemplars of the favored firm types exist in advanced economies so that the advocacy here might seem like a pipe dream. However, there are numerous secular versions of them, which suggests the advocacy is not utopian.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, cases of firms run on Christian self-owned/managed

<sup>57</sup>John Logue, "Thinking Globally, Acting Locally: Subnational Strategies to Promote Employee Ownership," Paper to Capital Ownership Group Conference: Fix Globalization: Make It More Inclusive, Democratic, Accountable and Sustainable (Washington D. C., October 2002), 10.

<sup>58</sup>Lorna Gold, "The Roots of the Focolare Movement's Economic Ethic," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 6.1 (2003): 149.

<sup>59</sup>Merrill Oster and Mike Hamel, *Giving Back* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2003), 47; others are described in Helene Slessarev, "Organizing the Poor," in *Toward a Just and Caring Society*, 396-426.

<sup>60</sup>Logue, "Thinking Globally," 6.

<sup>61</sup>Martin Ricketts, *The Economics of Business Enterprise* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003),

lines do exist. One is the Daily Bread Co-operative in Northampton, UK, marketing low-processed wholefoods.<sup>62</sup> Growing “out of a house group attached to a local church,” the co-operative started trading in 1980 with three co-operators, expanding to sixteen in 1998 with sales of near one million pounds. The ratio of current assets to current liabilities was then 3.5, “compared to an industry average of less than 2.” Workers are “Christians from various denominations,” with half an hour every morning devoted to worship and Communion every fortnight. These activities are viewed as integral to the day’s work and production decisions. A high degree of employment security is enjoyed by co-operators, salaries are the same for everybody, supplies derive from fair trade agencies, and over one hundred thousand pounds has been donated to good causes. In addition, support has been given to other worker co-operatives via soft loans and on-the-job training. The relevance to employees from the poor in this case is that part of the working group consists of people recovering from mental illness.

One thing the poor need is security and stability in their employment. Stapleford notes that “it is rare for a person to get into the labor market, stick with it and remain poor.” We might extend this comment from the labor market to the firm. The observation resonates with those of Claar and Klay. Although their comments are directed to macroeconomic stability—that “the welfare of the poor depends on long-term growth and short-term stability”—it is also true that at the firm micro-level, “without stability, the poorest among us will experience the greatest disruptions.”<sup>63</sup> Just because job turnover rates have been increasing in modern economies in the past few decades does not mean this is either necessary or a good thing.<sup>64</sup> The challenge for the Christian firm is to foster employment security (incorporating retraining) as well as innovative development.

The advocacy above might seem to disregard the importance of educational level in affecting job entry for the poor unskilled. After all, the relationship between low education level/skill training and poverty has been noted repeatedly. The usual way of trying to ameliorate this link is to encourage people from poor backgrounds to higher educational attainment. As Claar and Klay point out, “education and jobs would appear to be keys for poverty reduction.”<sup>65</sup> However, there may be other ways of breaking the nexus without subjecting poor people to the sometimes-tyranny of ex-work formal education. At times, on-the-job-training can suffice. The CEO of Habitat International Inc. (manufacturer of synthetic grass and indoor/outdoor carpet) explained his company was so successful because “I hire

341-344; Andrew Crane, Dirk Matten and Jeremy Moon, *Corporations and Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 104-110.

<sup>62</sup>Roger Sawtell, “Co-operatives: Regenerating Business in the Twenty-first Century,” in eds. D. Hay and A. Kreider, *Christianity and the Culture of Economics* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 62-66.

<sup>63</sup>Stapleford, *Bulls, Bears*, 120; Claar and Klay, *Economics*, 141.

<sup>64</sup>See Barbara Andolsen, *The New Job Contract* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998).

<sup>65</sup>Claar and Klay, *Economics*, 193.

34 the people no one else wants to hire.'" People with schizophrenia

drive forklifts next to those with Down syndrome, autism, and cerebral palsy. Recovering alcoholics, deaf employees, and homeless people cut floor runners alongside co-workers who have suffered strokes, severe head injuries, or loss of an arm. All are cross-trained on every task in the plant. "We have practically no absenteeism and very little turnover. We've also seen higher production, increased profits, better morale, greater respect from the community, and better customer relationships."<sup>66</sup>

In this case, a pursuit of in-firm excellence rather than seeking a competitive edge has been the path to optimal firm performance and a way out of poverty for the disabled, even though the example is not Christian-based. Nevertheless, the ideas resonate with those of some Christian business entrepreneurs. Robert Oiumet, within his own firms, observed that workers on assembly lines and in warehouses often have a better intuitive grasp of their work tasks than MBA-educated managers. ServiceMaster, a Christian-run joint stock company, has "enjoyed widespread success in hiring low-skill, untrained employees...and offering them numerous opportunities for education and on-the-job learning" leading to higher-paid jobs in the company.<sup>67</sup> These examples are indicative of the "tremendous energy and knowledge that are embedded in ordinary people everywhere."<sup>68</sup>

One objection to the deductions above about God's preference for self-owned/self-managed/low hierarchy employment can be noted. This is the claim that the joint stock company has been the driving force and vehicle for technical innovation over the last few hundred years, without which we would not enjoy the high living standards of today. This is sometimes related to the claimed requirement for modern corporations to be large: "Modern economies require large organizations in order to accomplish very complex tasks."<sup>69</sup> Only they can assemble the large amounts of private capital necessary to maintain economic growth. An inference from this observation might be that the size of modern firms has to be greater than the optimum size that might be envisaged for self-owned/self-managed firms to function effectively. The optimal size criterion need not carry great weight, for the size of Christian-inspired instances of such firms varies widely. John Lewis Partnerships currently employ 69,000 partners, and Scott Bader Chemicals, 450 workers. These firms have good innovation-producing and capital-generating records, as do smaller Christian-instigated worker-owned firms, like the 132 Spanish Mondragon co-operatives, each averaging 379 co-operators. Non-Christian-based cooperatives of 3,000 workers occur in the Italian Lega federation, while partnership size also varies widely, with 2,500 partners in Andersen Consulting in 2000.<sup>70</sup> Entrepreneurial incentives seem to have been preserved in these diverse environ-

<sup>66</sup>Quoted in Heatley, *The Gift*, 37.

<sup>67</sup>Sider, *Just Generosity*, 109; Maciariello, "Management Systems," 452.

<sup>68</sup>Claar and Klay, *Economics*, 35.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>70</sup>Gregory Dow, *Governing the Firm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 47, 50.

ments, tallying with the concept of "cooperative entrepreneurialism."<sup>71</sup> Even if there was a constraint for modern economies to require large firms, ways could be envisaged by which worker-owned versions of them could function. For example, large firm car manufacture could be constituted by co-operating worker-owned entities, deriving from pre-existing work teams in a plant. Other alternatives exist by which work tasks in a large corporation could be subdivided into co-operating worker-owned firms. Enterprise networks, like the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation with its important research and development arm, enable relatively small individual co-operatives to enjoy the flexibility of small business with economies of scale deriving from the whole group. Similarly, large co-operatives segment divisions into smaller co-operatives to avoid diseconomies of scale. Aside from this, it is possible that economies of scale are becoming less important in the advanced information economy than in the older manufacturing-based economy.

If the types of firms advocated here are good things, the question arises why more of them do not exist. In fact, the majority of secular firm numbers in developed countries are of the advocated type, especially self-employment and partnerships. Worker cooperatives are more difficult to form, requiring workers willing to risk putting capital into their firm. Ideally, they need an umbrella organization to shepherd their formation, and the large and growing world examples demonstrate this propensity. In Italy, over half a million workers (including mentally ill people) are employed in 11,000 cooperatives, and 50,000 by the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation in Spain, with the cooperatives cooperating with each other. Both these cases have relied on institutional mechanisms for the regular creation of new cooperatives. One mechanism in Italy is the Lega Federation, operating its own large bank, Fincooper, while the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation runs its Caja Laboral Popular, the fourteenth largest bank in Spain. Both help research and finance new cooperatives, and both have been able to compete successfully with conventionally-organized banks. Unions have had an ambivalent attitude to worker cooperatives, some believing it helps make workers "little capitalists." Historically, unions in the U.S. and U.K. have been lukewarm toward worker cooperatives. On the other hand, unions and the Catholic Church in Italy have been staunch supporters of worker cooperatives since the 1880s. Further, unions in advanced countries now encompass such a small proportion of the workforce (11% in U.S.) that they are unlikely to be willing to risk their members' funds, even if they could be persuaded to the advantages of worker cooperatives. Interestingly, the U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives ([www.usworker.coop](http://www.usworker.coop)) does not appear to have unions among its affiliated members.

<sup>71</sup>Joel Schoening, "Cooperative Entrepreneurialism: Reconciling Democratic Values with Business Demands at a Worker-Owned Firm," in V. Smith, ed., *Worker Participation: Current Research and Future Trends* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006).



## Conclusion

The argument in this essay has been that normative principles can be deduced from the teachings of God and Jesus designed to mold the organization of remunerated work throughout history. They are applicable to all contemporary economies, although the focus here has been on how they relate to providing work for the poor in advanced free market economies. The principles emerge in the pre-Fall chapters of Genesis, are applied imperfectly in the Mosaic Law, perhaps first formulated around 1250 BC, and then are reapplied and reinterpreted by Jesus. Throughout this long period of time, the principles speak of the need for worker co-operation with God, co-partnership, co-equality and mutuality between workers, a low degree of domination and exercise of power by one participant in the workplace network over another, autonomy of workers in action with God, and preparedness to accept responsibility for one's actions. One Christian entrepreneur puts this last requirement "that, as a matter of biblical principle, 'people need to know that there are consequences to their actions'," that extends beyond remuneration.<sup>72</sup> All these principles may be summed up as love in action, with everyone seeking to do to others as they would want done to them. Practicing these principles is the optimal path toward the "physical and material delightfulness (superfluity) [that] is needful for healthy human well-being everywhere."<sup>73</sup>

It might be thought dubious to relate God's injunctions formulated thousands of years ago to contemporary life. Yet, if we believe that the triune God is consistent through space and time, as the biblical evidence suggests, there is every reason why His desires, plans, preferences, principles and paradigms should relate to every instance of human history. Despite the fallenness of humankind, the triune God is constantly calling people out of sin toward the guidelines He provides for human improvement. It would make no sense and have no appeal to envisage a God whose precepts were restricted in time and place. The challenge is to relate them to circumstances other than those in which they first were formulated. If we decide this task is too difficult because of the greater size, impersonality, and complexity of modern society, we are virtually throwing in the towel. We might be driven to the conclusion then that the Christian belief system has little to offer life today outside of personal, privatistic devotion and partial attempts to help the poor (via homeless shelters and soup kitchens, valuable as these are). The idea that Christian socio-economic policies cannot be formulated should drive Christians to examine more fully the socio-economic implications of God's requirements for human life. *A priori*, it is likely that the triune God who seeks to improve the spiritual and material lot of people indeed would provide guidelines for humanity to organize itself in work and elsewhere. Since "God has given humanity responsibility for the management of his creation," we should also expect it for business

<sup>72</sup>Rundle and Steffen, *Great Commission*, 115.

<sup>73</sup>Schneider, *The Good*, 61.

organization, and that God's ways would "be more effective and more just in dealing with the problems of management."<sup>74</sup>

The biblical deductions and advocacy for the orientation of work here comport with the understanding of God's work in the theology of work projects of Volf and Jensen. They observe "a general crisis of work" in contemporary society, characterized by "the negative attitude of workers toward their work," by the high personal and social costs of unemployment and by alienation. This last consideration is important because "alienation from God is the root cause of all other forms of alienation."<sup>75</sup> Both deduce that God's economy, on the other hand, "operates with odd assumptions about the nature of work: labor is meant to be shared, work is meant to enrich and sustain the life of creation, work draws us into communion with each other and God." For Jensen, "God's economy displays no hierarchy of work other than that between the Creator and creation" so that "the attempt to elevate one worker over another ... is theologically misguided," and "any system that fosters the domination of others through work is suspect on theological grounds." One start on the road to God's economy "would be to expand worker/employee ownership of firms and amplify worker voices in management."<sup>76</sup>

The most appropriate ways of fostering the desired qualities with God, concerning paid work in advanced free market economies, was argued here to be via Christian-based forms of self-employment, partnerships, worker co-operatives, 100% employee share ownership plans and other variants of these firms. The examples of Christian-instigated and/or operation of these types of firms suggest that opportunity exists for Christian entrepreneurs and organizations to assist the poor into employment in these firms. Since jobs are the basis for overcoming poverty, ways can be designed from the normative biblical paradigm to increase the take-up of jobs by the poor. Confident in God's guidance, Christian-based firms of the types advocated would be better placed than joint-stock firms to offer livable wages, employment security, and on-the-job training, thereby increasing the innovation-generating potential of the firms. Run on Christian lines, they can also present to the market as light to the world, fostering market-wide qualities of honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility and ethical behavior.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup>Maciariello, "Management Systems," 428.

<sup>75</sup>Volf, *Work*, 35, 53, 165.

<sup>76</sup>Jensen, *Responsive*, 49, 56, 101.

<sup>77</sup>The helpful comments of three referees are acknowledged gratefully.