

Spirituality and Wealth: The Burdens of Silence

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The Question of Spirituality

A contemporary Irish poet and philosopher has written:

“[I]t seems to take hundreds of years for a folk culture to weave itself, and yet so often, with the infusion of the consumerism virus, such a cultural fabric unravels in a very short time. In Connemara [a rural Irish-speaking area], the people say... ‘the nature is going out of people.’ When people have very little, it is natural for them to be close. I am /156 not romanticizing poverty; it is a horrible thing, full of drudgery. Think of all the people who had to emigrate because there was nothing for them. But yet there was some kind of nadur or closeness. It seems to be impossible for a culture to develop economically and get really rich and yet maintain the same nadur and closeness. So the question is: Where could we find new places to awaken something is us in order that we do not lose that sense of nadur and of belonging with each other?¹

A powerful claim here: consumerism, money, wealth (however you name this reality) can corrupt or diminish our humanity, leading us to move away from the very connections and commitments to one another that define the “humanum.” One of the sorriest lines in the gospels is the one that tells us Judas betrayed Jesus for “thirty pieces of silver,” just enough to buy land in which to bury the bodies of strangers. This paper is written out of the conviction that maintaining the possibilities of closeness and compassion so central to human nature is possible, surely, and a major task of religious people concerned for the vitality of the humanum. Riches of themselves do not undercut human connectedness, though an economic system based on competition might tend to. An economic system is what supports a particular culture and its particular ways of being human. But a religion, though not exactly an economic system, fosters a way of living one’s life, that is, of seeing one’s relationship between self and others, self and the earth, and self and God.

¹ John O'Donohue, "Is Balance a Myth? Creativity Awakens Only At the Edge," in Harry Bohan and Gerard Kennedy, eds., Working Towards Balance: Our Society in the New Millennium (Dublin:Veritas 2000), 155-156. A striking confirmation of O'Donohue's claim that a folk culture could be lost easily is: Ron Suskind, “For One Distant Island, a Plunge into the Present,” NY Times Magazine 2 December 2001. Suskind begins, “Twenty-five years ago, the inhabitants of Babuyan Claro, a tiny unapproachable island that lies a hundred miles of churning Pacific north of the Philippine mainland, were animistic and without written language. Called the Ibatan, they lived I almost total isolation for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, a quirk of ocean currents, geography and fate. In just over two decades, since the arrival of a pair of headstrong, freewheeling missionaries, they are raced up man’s 5,000-year developmental arc, embracing monotheism, free enterprise and CNN. They have evaluated each step with the fresh, appraising eyes of the arriviste.”

O'Donoghue's warning is frightening, because indeed folk cultures in a time of electronically communicated images do die out as Suskind's "distant island" demonstrates.² Religious people have two great resources for maintaining their religious culture: those of hope and those of contestation. Will they use these resources? This question in my view is about spirituality. Will religious groups use their resources of hope and of contestation to maintain their vision in a time when all values seem based on productivity?

RESOURCES OF HOPE AND OF CONTESTATION

My first task here is to describe what I mean by "spirituality." Though Sandra Schneiders has sketched the most complete theoretical description of the spirituality as a field³, for my purposes here, Gustavo Gutierrez's words will suffice: a spirituality is a concrete manner, inspired by the Spirit, of living the Gospel; it is a definite way of living 'before the Lord,' in solidarity with all persons. . ."⁴ [emphasis mine.] Here Gutierrez sees spirituality as broader than prayer, though his elaboration of this matter was to wait almost fifteen years until the publication of *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, his nuanced description of the Christian spirituality of the oppressed. As the metaphor in its title implies his book sees spirituality as a religious culture, that is, as a way of perceiving and of structuring one's commitments.⁵ Prayer is authentic only in the context of the wider way of life called for by a

² Just as cultures are imperiled via cultural pollution, caused by the reckless pursuit of profit, so species are imperiled via environmental pollution, permitted by the push for higher margins of profit. Songbirds took thousands of years of evolution to develop their extraordinary characteristics, not just of song, but of mating, nesting, and migrating patterns, but they can become extinct within a thirty year period of environmental carelessness.

³ See, Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Study of Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline," *Christian Spirituality Bulletin* 6:1 (Spring 1998): 1/3-12; "Religion and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?" *Santa Clara Lectures*, 6:2 (Feb. 6, 2000).

⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1973): 204.

⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People* (New York: Orbis, 1984). Gutierrez never actually uses the term, religious culture, but I find the idea as an important assumption throughout the book. The explicit way he describes spirituality is as a "way," one that he equates with discipleship: "Discipleship is rooted in the experience of an encounter with Jesus Christ. . . in which the Lord takes the initiative, and it is the point of departure for a journey . . . A spirituality is the terrain on which 'the children of God' exercise their freedom" (pp. 35-36).

particular religion.⁶

Today, however, “spirituality” has become what Andrew Pierce calls “a slippery term to define.” It is in danger of becoming marketable as a means of psychic enhancement, adrift from participation in a religious tradition and its practices. Pierce names a current “Orwellian” motto regarding spirituality, this way: “Religion (or theology, or church) bad, spirituality good.”⁷ Spirituality in this reading is not about participation in a tradition and its practices but about individual self-enhancement and the calming of personal anxieties. In a commodity culture, the culture tends to make “spirituality” another commodity. Commodification is what the consumerist culture does. For Andrew Pierce, the market-friendly character of much that goes under the category “spirituality” is verified by a visit to a bookstore or a glance at the catalogues of religious publishers. To that I would add, an examination of the summer programs in “theology” for teachers and ministers run by seminaries and retreat houses.⁸

⁶ Aloysius Pieris, S.J. notes how the integral dialogical contact of Christianity with Greek culture found in the first five centuries of Western Christianity diminished when Christianity moved into Europe, via the power not of dialogue and incarnational praxis but of law and governmental authority. Authoritarianism had replaced the dialogue with people’s actual lives needed to lead them to discipleship as a way of life. The practice of the people was not considered as important as the theory of the theologians. It took another eleven hundred years for Europe’s religious leaders to recognize that the living practice of the old folk religions had perdured in the pre-Christian religious ways (spirituality) of the common people. Thus the Reformation and Counter-Reformation were in part programs of *conversion*, i.e., of entire life orientation. See, Albert Mirgeler’s Mutations of Western Christianity and John P. Dolan’s, History of the Reformation.

Pieris traces Christianity’s mistake of being more interested in religious thought than in religious practice and way of life back to the early Christian apologetics of Iraeneus and many others. Pieris’ argument is worth close study; see Aloysius Pieris, “Western Christianity and Asian Buddhism: A Theological Reading of Historical Encounters,” in Love Meets Wisdom (New York: Orbis, 1988) 17-42, esp. 18-23.

⁷ Andrew Pierce, “Christianity--A Credible Presence?” in, Dermot Lane, ed., New Century, New Society: Christian Perspectives (Dublin: Columba Press, 1999), pp. 11-17. Johannes Metz makes a similar observation, about “a religion-friendly godlessness...in an era of a religion without God” whose motto might be “religion, yes—God, no.” Johannes Metz, “Suffering Unto God,” Critical Inquiry 20 (Summer 1994): 613.

⁸ For those willing to endure a shock to their theological system, I recommend Aloysius Pieris’s bracing essay, “Spirituality in a Liberative Perspective,” Chapter 1 of An Asian Theology of Liberation (NY: Orbis, 1988), pp. 3-14. Don’t miss his comments in a later essay (pp.42-43) about the commercialization of spiritual practices from the East, turned into “dollar-spinners” in the West: “a tendency to create or perpetuate a ‘leisure class’ through ‘prayer centers’ and ‘ashrams’ that attract the more affluent to short spells of mental tranquility rather than to a life of renunciation.” p. 42 In many places in his writings, Pieris points out that the monasteries of the feudal era became islands of communal affluence (not individual affluence) in a sea of desperate poverty. The voluntary poverty of the monks did not commit itself to reduce or counter the forced poverty of the multitudes. I presume resistance to this challenge perdures in today’s monastic communities. See, “The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of Third World Theology,”

One characteristic of the “spirituality market” is its lack of social critique. I claim this lack tends to be as true of graduate theology’s renditions of spirituality as it is of the materials found in the bookstore “spirituality” section. Most of the material is directed to the self as individual, whereas a distinctive aspect of the Christian tradition is the self as member of a wider body: a church and, as the Eucharistic ritual clearly affirms, a body of persons struggling to endure in the inconvenient tasks of discipleship, but also a wider body--a people—and an even wider matter of the World. Pierce finds striking “the overlap between a cultural ethos suspicious of institutions, and the popularity of spiritualities which treat social institutions as optional.” Aptly, he cites Margaret Thatcher’s 1988 address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland: ‘The distinctive marks of Christianity stem not from the social but from the spiritual side of our lives.’”

Important for thinking about spirituality is the fact that everyone has a spirituality, in the sense of being a person marked by choices and commitments. Hitler surely had a spirituality but it was not a Christian one certainly or even a humanizing one. But his spirit stood for something—something almost unthinkable. Spirituality best not be used as if it were only a positive term. The term needs to be problematized if it is to be rescued from dangerous vagueness. In my examination of spirituality’s dilemmas in a time of extraordinary polarities of wealth and impoverishment, spirituality will have the meaning Gutierrez gives it: a concrete manner, inspired by the Spirit, of living the Gospel; it is a particular or specific way of living ‘before the Lord,’ in solidarity with all persons.⁹

Implied in Gutierrez’ “concrete manner” is the ability to speak to and about the lived dilemmas of being in solidarity with all persons. I find that, at least in comparison with other issues affecting the church and disciplined living, there currently exists a general silence about wealth, not as a general term but in its concreteness and its effect on “definite ways of living in solidarity with all persons.” One of the reasons I chose the topic of this paper was to see what, if anything I might, say to disrupt the dis-

Ibid., 87-110.

9 In *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (NY: Orbis, 1988), Aloysius Pieris comments, “Spirituality... is not the practical conclusion of a theology but radical involvement with the poor and the oppressed, and is what creates theology. We know Jesus the truth by following Jesus the way.” p. 37.

empowering ineffableness of wealth in our time. The task has all the daunting character of trying to topple the statue of Baal.¹⁰

Speaking About Wealth

In order to qualify for a full-year's sabbatical, I recently set for myself the following goals:

Within a broad-based, interdisciplinary study, to develop skill in naming and describing, in language accessible to ordinary churchgoers, how aspects of the economic system function, how they affect everyday life, and how they might be interpreted and judged in the light of our sacred texts. By means of this study, to foster in people of ordinary education skills in speaking of and to the current economic system, skills they can hone in their religious congregations.

At the end of my study, my final accounting for their generous support ended this way:

I must confess, that after a full year of preparing for my study and the year of actual study, I am still struggling to find my own voice on these matters. I have found new meaning for the word "ineffable."

And so, I begin this exploration of spirituality and wealth vividly aware of the difficulty of finding a language by which to speak about wealth and a convincing indicative-mode voice describing for persons concerned for discipleship today's dilemmas around wealth. Early in the sabbatical study mentioned above I presumed it was my ineptness with language that made the writing so difficult, until I saw the deeper difficulty was one pointed out by the late French social thinker, Pierre Bourdieu, who studied closely the way social influences configured the daily life patterns of ordinary people. These patterns imprint in people's consciousness convictions they are unable to notice or contest: they can't be questioned.

Some might find absurd some of his metaphors for the way social reality functions. One of these is: a full orchestra playing without a conductor. Such a feat seems almost impossible. How could the coordination of so much talent in such a variety of instruments be achieved without the coordination exacted by a conductor? Lacking a signal, how would players know the precise moment to enter the flow of the written orchestration, especially in a long piece of music like a symphony? And yet,

¹⁰ My own understanding of spirituality is found in Chapter 5 of Faith, Culture, and the Worshiping Community (Portland, OR: Pastoral Press, 1993)

Bourdieu claimed that “conductorless orchestration” is precisely what happens to class-based behavior in society. His point: a vast amount of social reality is beyond speech and discourse, taken-for-granted in the total social context. It has moved into behavior without going through discourse, and precisely because of that it will never move out of behavior except by going through discourse, and possibly intense discourse. One who becomes an alcoholic gradually and without discussion will achieve sobriety only via struggling discussion.

Bourdieu shows¹¹ how the actions and practices of members of a particular social class tend to be far more similar than dissimilar--as if dictated by some unseen, even unacknowledged director. The data he offers for his claim are convincing¹². In a sense G.B. Shaw’s witty play, *Pygmalion* dramatizes the same point about class “location” being found in ordinary speech, a point underscored by the market research daily trotted out in the business sections of our newspapers. The behavior of people in particular social classes is directed by common codes of which they are quite unaware, even when following them almost slavishly.

For religious people, Bourdieu’s “conductorless orchestration” hypothesis seems interesting but not compelling until you see he is talking not only about behavior but also the mental and affective tendencies we call dispositions and preferences. Such dispositions are affective, i.e., operating from one’s inner life or spirit. In this sense they are spiritual, even when quite in opposition to the gospel. They could be called habits of the heart. In fact Bourdieu names these dispositions as “class habitus.” “The habitus...[is] a system of lasting transposable dispositions which... functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions...¹³ (Emphasis his.) For religious persons con-

11. See, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pp. 80-81.

12. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

13. Ibid, pp. 82-83. Some will quickly see Bourdieu is describing spirituality, but one I will call a “lower case” spirituality, lived but not named. Upper-case spirituality is a way of being in the world that is named, pursued, and lived. Though some upper-case spiritualities may be religious, by no means are they all. A dedication to non-violence might well be religious, while the absolutizing of profits, undeniably a spirituality in my view, could not be religious. For more on the creation of gospel sensibility, using Bourdieu’s ideas, see, Christian B. Scharen, “Baptismal Practices and the formation of Christians: A Critical Liturgical Ethics,” *Worship* 76:1 (January 2002): 43-66.

cerned about spirituality as a distinct configuration of affect, judgments, and stances toward the world, Bourdieu's position bristles with implications. Those committed to the christian tradition and the practice of its sacred texts will likely find those implications troubling: class "affect" or dispositions bypass consciousness, or at least tend to. They don't sneak past your individual guard stations, exactly because they don't seem to need noticing or guarding against. They don't have to sneak. They stride boldly into your psyche, into your soul.

The dispositions we consider most individual: sympathy, friendship, or love, are set in place by the "objective structure of social conditions" and its "imperceptible cues."¹⁴ Social position constructs inner disposition. Those **naively**[4-03] sanguine about the power of liturgy in people's lives may find themselves pondering the social conditions of worship and the class biases of those who assemble. Bourdieu himself uses a daring Eucharistic metaphor to underscore his point:

The principles embodied [sic] in [the habitus] are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable and, therefore, more precious, than the values given body, made body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy [added], capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy, through injunctions as insignificant as "stand up straight" or "don't hold your knife in your left hand."¹⁵

Suppose we were to grant Bourdieu, for the sake of his own argument, the accuracy of his dictum: "Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness."¹⁶ What then? Is human agency stymied? Is it denied its capacity to question and contest what is ordinarily taken for granted? Not at all. The whole purpose of Bourdieu's lifework has been to open up that agency to deeper reflection on the conditions that hinder reflection and questioning.

Questioning unspoken convictions is difficult but not impossible. Bourdieu encapsulated the difficulty this way: What goes without saying—or contestation, questioning, contradiction, even—

14. Outline of a Theory of Practice, p. 82.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 94

16. *Ibid.*, p.164.

“does so because it comes without saying.¹⁷ Implicit claims never articulated, because they are the “stuff everyone knows,” become a tradition exponentially powerful because it is silent. The “unspoken tradition” takes its power from its assumed, unquestioned legitimacy. The most effective conceptual disguise is the disguise of not existing. I would think that at least half of all psychotherapy involves retrieving such unspoken “truths” for a first but critical interrogation toward diminishing their power. The question Bourdieu’s writings raise is: how can such unquestioned legitimacy be disrupted? His answer is: through alternative speech and alternative claims of legitimacy. In other words, the question of rightness or wrongness, of truth or falsity, comes only by way of competition between claims and the conflict of claims. If “Sez who?” is a potentially humanizing question, it is even more so a robustly religious one.

Religious groups, because they award their sacred texts the ultimacy of being from God or of God, have power to question the legitimacy of much social wisdom, including conventional wisdom and conventional practices. In Bourdieu’s words, “The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation,” has the possibility of demolishing what had been conventional wisdom by “breaking the immediate fit between subjective structures (of thought) and objective structures”¹⁸ of social practice. The “breaking of this fit” in issues of money and wealth is now the task of religious people in an international consumer-capitalism economy that puts profits above all other considerations. What will “breaking this fit” mean? How will it be done? What are some of the principles that might guide it? Before moving to sketch two crisis periods when concern for issues of wealth and poverty erupted within the church, I turn here to the radical proposals of Aloysius Pieris and his review of the gospel mandate on this matter.

Money/Mammon and the Undiscussed Gospel Agenda

All readers of this essay are well aware that the gospels subtext is concern for the poor and for the distribution of the world’s resources. For Jesus, steeling one’s heart against the beggar, the imper-

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 167. See also the elaboration of these ideas, in, Language and Symbolic Power (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Outline, pp. 168-69

iled or wounded one, the mentally or physically impaired is an abomination. Critique of wealth peppers all four gospels so thoroughly that if one fails to recognize it, then it is “hiding in plain sight.” Before those gospels can be applied to everyday living in a consumerist society, those texts will have to be brought forward for intense discussion. The earliest anchorite tradition was a response to those texts, as was the earliest monastic tradition. The Jesuit, Aloysius Pieris, summarizes the call and response this way:

A Christian is a person who had made an irrevocable option to follow Jesus [here and below, all emphases his]; this option necessarily coincides with the option to be poor; but the "option to be poor" becomes a true "following of Jesus" only to the extent that it is also an option for the poor. Christian discipleship or "spirituality," is therefore, an overlapping of all these three options.

The (theo)logical force of this argument is derived from two biblical axioms: the irreconcilable antagonism between God and wealth, and the irrevocable covenant between God and the poor, Jesus himself being this covenant. These two principles imply that, in Jesus, God and the poor have formed an alliance against their common enemy: Mammon. This is what justifies the conclusion that, for both Jesus and his followers, spirituality is not merely a struggle to be poor but equally a struggle for the poor.¹⁹

Pieris goes on to explain the “irreconcilable antinomy” between God and money (citing Matt. 6:24), i.e., between “Abba” and “Mamona,” words so emotionally loaded in Aramaic they cannot be translated. These two realities are in such opposition that a pact with one means turning one’s back on the other. “Growing intimacy with the one and constant repudiation of the other characterize the whole mission of Jesus.”

Dance with Mammon and you lose fellowship with Abba, the Father. Why? Because Jesus is God’s covenant with the poor. Pieris’s argument is not for the faint-hearted or squeamish. “Poverty...is not merely a material rejection of wealth, because mammon is more than just money. It is a subtle force operating within me, an acquisitive instinct driving me to to be the rich fool whom Jesus ridicules.... [M]ammon is what I do with money and what it does to me.”²⁰ Money is quantifiable and specific. It is relatively easy to become moneyless. Mammon is much more subtle and can per-

¹⁹ Aloysius Pieris, S.J., *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (NY: Orbis, 1988), p. 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16. In a later place, Pieris offers another description of Mammon: “That undefinable force that organizes itself within every person and among persons to make material wealth antihuman, antireligious, and oppressive.” (p. 75)

dure when one's pockets are quite empty. And so you cannot get at poverty via consideration of money alone. Mammon is spiritual, in the sense that it infects one's spirit, one's sense of self, one's, let us say, never-spoken, never questioned, and possibly, one's psychologically-unaware sense of superiority and entitlement. It is what helps us sense we are better, at least better than that creep in the sycamore tree. The slender piece of thread attached to the canary's claw, that keeps it—in the famous ascetical metaphor-- from flying into the sky, is mammon. One's sense of power and of prestige, sense of security and of success, these too are of mammon.

Mammon is the move that seeks to make a god of the Self. To put it ironically, it takes the hymn of praise to God that begins the Eucharist Prayer: "It is truly right and fitting to give thanks and glory"—and misapplies to the Self. The very option to be monetarily poor could be an expression of mammon: Look at me in the "wealth" of my poverty. In Pieris's examination of the Abba—Mammon polarity, poverty is not just a personal option but a social agenda. That means a spirituality of poverty is clearly a spirituality of struggle, with oneself but also for the poor. In my view, the implication of Pieris retrieval of the radical call of the gospel for spirituality is this: When people hear the name, Jesus, they are to think: "Oh, yes, God's visible, unshakable, to-the-death pact with the poor." However, Pieris's view is not new. Testimony to these conviction are found in every age of Christian history, with some periods, like the late Middle Ages yielding convincing historical records that the poor knew of Jesus as God's pact with them.

Religion's Voice on Wealth and Poverty in the Late Middle Ages

In the 11th through the 13th centuries, there erupted in Europe severe critiques of the use of wealth. The context of those critiques was a population increase and the start of urbanization. In these centuries Europe's population tripled, from twenty million to sixty million. Gradually urban populations grew, and since an urban economy is a predominantly moneyed economy, those who lacked money in these emerging cities could not pay for lodging, food, clothing--anything. In this context religious critique erupted in blistering condemnations of the exploitation found in growing situations where the few had much and the many had nothing. The critique took the form of religious move-

ments that until recently were not recognized for what they actually were: a religious reformation and an awakening to the significance of the gospel for everyday living, especially on the issue of sharing wealth.²¹ At root these movements all sought to apply religious teaching to codes of actual behavior. Various groups, mostly lay, set forth radical readings of the New Testament, holding that no person could preach the gospel who did not live a life of voluntary poverty as Jesus did. Some went on to assert that anyone who embraced poverty showed thereby that she or he was fully credible as an announcer of the gospel, in one stroke pointing unfavorably to clerical privileges and questioning clerical lifestyles. This was clearly a critique of concrete behaviors around wealth. Well-to-do clerics and others were not amused. As historian Lester Little wryly puts it, these movements “were not serving anyone’s economic interests, even less those of some social class.”²² To illustrate his point, Little offers a three-page list of those, lay and clerics, who preached against economic exploitation and what their fates were. The account is horrific for the savagery visited on these persons.²³

A famous and well-documented critique of the new urban monied economy was that of Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. Francis grew up in the new commercial world that had started in the tenth century’s rise of urban populations. He and his followers, the Franciscan Friars, offer an accessible example of the ability to talk back to an economic system that seemed out of control. Unlike some earlier reformers, Francis had two strategies that positioned him squarely within the church: he avoided denunciations of the rich while providing a powerful example of serving the poor; and he confronted the rage for money with a passion for voluntary poverty. Underlying both strategies was a commitment to living with the poor and as the poorest of the poor. Such a commitment turned the

²¹ An authoritative treatment of this period is, M-D. Chenu, O.P., Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West [selected, edited, and translated by Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little] (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968). See especially Chapters 6 and 7: “Monks, Canons, and Laymen in Search of the Apostolic Life,” pp. 202-238 and “The Evangelical Awakening,” pp. 239-269.

Many recognize that the early monasticism of the desert ascetics was itself, as least in part, a critique of wealth. See Douglas Burton-Christie, The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism (NY: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²² See Lester Little, “Evangelical Poverty, the New Money Economy and Violence,” in David Flood, ed., Poverty in the Middle Ages (Werl/Westfl.: Dietrich-Coelde-Verlag, 1975), p. 19.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

wisdom of the money and profit economy on its head, as can be seen in Chapters 8 and 9 of the Rule of 1221, the definitive guide to fledgling Franciscan practice.

Chapter 8:...[A]ll the friars, no matter where they are or where they go, are forbidden to take or to accept money in any way or under any form, or have it accepted for them, for clothing or books, or as wages, or in any other necessity, except to supply for the urgent needs of those who are ill. We should have no more use or regard for money in any of its forms than for dust. Those who think it is worth more or are greedy for it, expose themselves to the danger of being deceived by the devil. We have left every thing we had behind us; we must be very careful now not to lose the kingdom for so little. If ever we find money somewhere, we should think no more of it than of the dust we trample under our feet, for it is vanity of vanities, and all vanity [Ekkles.1:2).

If any of the friars collects or keeps money, except for the needs of the sick, the others must regard him as a fraud and a thief and a robber and a traitor, who keeps a purse, unless he is sincerely sorry. The friars are absolutely forbidden to take money as alms, or have it accepted for them; so too they cannot ask for it themselves, or have others ask for it, for their houses or dwelling places. It is also forbidden to accompany anyone who is collecting money for their houses.

Chapter 9: The friars should be delighted to follow the lowliness and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ, remembering that of the whole world we must own nothing; About having food and sufficient clothing, with these let us be content (1 Tim. 6:8), as St. Paul says. They should be glad to live among social outcasts, among the poor and helpless, the sick and lepers, and those who beg by the wayside. [emphasis added.] If they are in want, they should not be ashamed to beg....²⁴

What I find so interesting about Francis's rule is its implicit decision to embrace the conditions of those suffering most from the dysfunctions of the 12th century economic system as it affected urban people. It was a strategy for attracting attention to those dysfunctions and holds clues to how religious people today might respond. The friars exhibited an alternate economic imagination to that of the monetized economy. That imagination knew the resources of their society could actually be shared to relieve the misery of the desperately poor. It also saw the suffering other as a brother or sister, that is, in relational terms. Unlike the poverty-embracing desert hermits of old, the friars entered the urban environments and dealt with their new challenges from inside these situations. And so, the core of Franciscan practice was solidarity, a relational strategy that can open the way to structural change. The practice of solidarity with the suffering is an effective way of calling attention to their misery.²⁵

²⁴ St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis Marion A. Habig, ed. Third Revised Edition (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), pp. 38-39.

²⁵ "I suggest that the Church of the future will need to draw its moral strength not from /92 its international presence but from

Franciscan efforts show that the practice of embracing the conditions of the poor proved to be neither easy nor self-maintaining. The lure of comfort and ease that comes from money all too soon proved troublesome for later Franciscans, and so their practice of being poor with the poor tended to slip, not once but often. In his *Foreword to Poverty in the Middle Ages*, David Flood attends to that slippage.

Around 1250, Hugh wrote a commentary on the Franciscan rule in which he entered a hard plea for pure Franciscan living. ...Hugh laid down the gospel references of the order surely and clearly, as the rule had them. In the course of his explanations, Hugh often confronted what he found the actual weaknesses of the order. It lay not in the friars' theory but in their public practice, and especially in the display of their poverty.... 26

As the Middle Ages sagged, the poor ceased to evoke the presence of Christ as in earlier centuries. They aroused suspicion rather, and society lumped them together with vagabond and criminal elements. Reform movements among religious continued to pursue the ideal of poverty, but the orders in general sought both poverty and social status.

Even more troubling slippage showed itself in 1291 at a legislative gathering of Irish Franciscans in Cork City, where a dispute about leadership erupted among the supposedly gentle followers of Francis. At its end, a mere 70 years after the famous Rule of 1221, the floor of the meeting hall had sprawled across it the bodies of sixteen slain delegates.²⁷ For the gentle sons of Francis of Assisi, their religious conviction about non-violence was obviously not self-maintaining. As with many kinds of meaning, to purdure religious insight must be carefully and endlessly nurtured. The possibilities of

its claim to represent people as they are locally and distinct from the worldwide ramifications of their existence as participants in the global market.... [T]he moral authority of the Church in future will lie...with the College of bishops. It will be the bishops, rather than specifically the papacy, which will challenge the claim of the global market to express and exhaust the human world.... [T]he little narratives of the victims of the grand process, the stories of what the big new world is squeezing out or ignoring, they will be told on the small scale, and full of details which the new world will dismiss as superficial and inessential. In terms of church structure, the little narratives will be told at diocesan, parochial, or base-community level.” Nicholas Boyle, *Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney* (University of Notre Dame, 1999), p. 91-92.

26 “Foreword,” *Poverty in the Middle Ages*, p. 10.

27 John J. O’Riordan, *Irish Catholics: Tradition and Transition* (Dublin: Veritas, 1980): 33-34. Martin Kennedy gave me this reference.

maintaining religious convictions about our obligations to the poor in the face of global markets are a central concern of this essay.

The Rise of Capitalism in Sixteenth Century England

I have noted that studies of European society in the 10th to the 13th centuries show a wider and more intense use of money as a means of exchange than in earlier societies, a shift that caused severe social problems for some. Though connected to money as a medium of exchange, the rise of capitalism beginning in the late fifteenth century represented a leap--a revolution--in the way money, and indeed, wealth itself, was understood. The great explorations at the end of the 15th and the start of the 16th centuries were themselves not so much searches for land as for wealth--a kind of wager, underwritten with extraordinary sums of money, that great wealth could be squeezed out of the new lands. The aspect of the rise of capitalism I concern myself with here is the one that began in England during the Reformation, in the commodification of labor, land, and money.²⁸ However, unfettered market mechanisms did not become “normal procedures” overnight, but over a period of two centuries.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, “the whole fabric of society and the whole range of its activities...had to justify themselves at the bar of religion.” Society as a whole agreed that Christianity has no deadlier foe than the “unbridled indulgence of the acquisitive appetite.”²⁹ The new commodification of labor, money, and especially of land was devastating not just for the above conviction about the evil of greed but also for human relationships, because allowing “the market mechanism to be the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society.”³⁰ King Henry VIII’s policies led the way to this demolition.

As a reward for loyalty in his Church of England/Church of Rome dispute, Henry gave his military officers, and others loyalists, generous grants of land that included not just pre-Reformation

²⁸ The sources for this section are three: Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (NY: Octagon Books, 1980); R.H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism; and Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (NY: Oxford University Press, 1973).

²⁹ Tawney, xiii.

³⁰ Polanyi, 73.

Church holdings but vast tracts that had been seen as owned by the public. Those given title to these lands saw their potential for great profit via two strategies: 1) by charging the peasants who had farmed them for generations rents for their use and 2) by enclosing the land and having it farmed by hired laborers who lived elsewhere. The enclosures started slowly but over the next two hundred years, the majority of these tracts were enclosed, with the families who had lived on them for eons being commonly sent off into the roads to make do with whatever they could find. The injustices and misery of the poor, the callousness of the rich, and the protests against these injustices in the 16th and 17th centuries have been well-documented, thanks to Tawney's careful scrutiny of local governmental documents of the period in his classic study. Indeed, the injustices, callousness, and protests continued well into the 19th century, where the misery of policies begun centuries earlier are more clearly seen because documented nnot just by historians but also by the writings of poets and novelists.

Between 1730 and 1835 nearly six million acres of land were enclosed.³¹ By 1830 England had roughly 670,000 families of agricultural laborers and among these families 300,000 persons were on poor-relief,³² figures that give some idea of how harshly British land-holders squeezed the poor. The workings of the system of handing on wealth, called "a living," provide a vital backdrop in the novels of Jane Austen. Austen clearly understood the system, but apparently she did not grasp that such "livings" were amassed on the backs of the poor of England and its colonies. In a more critical vein, the long-standing suffering that resulted from this rise of "everything for profit" is found vividly described in various 19th century British novels, particularly the protest-laden novels of George Eliot, Charles Dickens, and (to a lesser extent) of Anthony Trollope.³³ My interest here is the religious side of this "rise of capitalism" between 1550 and 1750, and to get at it I will follow Tawney but in brief summaries of what happened and how.

Tracing the Silencing of Religious Critique

³¹ Williams, p. 96.

³² Williams, p. 185.

³³ See, Williams, 96-97, 169-179, and 185-187.

For Tawney the historian's task is not so much to judge the validity of an idea as to trace its development. He asks how it happened that the position: "Trade is one thing; religion is another" came to be an assumption unquestioned in his day (and in ours). First intoned as an irreligious audacity and a heinous blasphemy, it slowly but eventually became the accepted truth, guiding the lives of most and unquestioned by almost all. Whereas church and state had for centuries been seen as complementary aspects of a single society, by the end of the seventeenth century in England the churches were subordinate to the secular state and had made an implicit bargain not to "meddle with the external fabric of the political and social system," which was the concern of the state.³⁴ The theories of justice worked out by earlier Scholasticism, the denunciations of greed by the left wing of the Reformation, the appeal of Tudor statesmen to traditional church doctrines against exploitation of the weak were bit by bit over a two hundred year period shelved out of sight. To repeat: these doctrines were kept out of sight more by religion's silence about the uses and abuses of money and finance than by any explicit rejection of religion by those at the center of the finance system, some of whom professed to be devout. What replaced the convictions behind earlier theories, denunciations, and appeals was a counter-conviction: the business of business is not the business of the church.

It is worth noting at this point the difference between the two "crises of money" I have looked at. In the 11-13th century crisis, small groups opted to bond with the poor and to choose a gospel-based life of simplicity. They were such a threat to business-as-usual that they were harshly, horribly treated. In the 16th century and later, pulpit thunder was quietly tolerated or ignored and people went their way. Except for peasant revolts there were few groups working specifically on religious grounds for change, using the power of radical religious living to question the social system, such as the radical "heretics" of the 11th century.³⁵

³⁴ Tawney, p. xii.

³⁵ In two of his essays in *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, "Spirituality in a Liberative Perspective," and "To Be Poor as Jesus Was Poor?" Pieris shows that Ignatius's spirituality fundamentally contested the profit-driven, individualistic ideology of his time. But then so did all the emerging religious orders and their commitments to poverty.

Though the conviction that business and religion are quite separate realms seems firmly embedded in the modern psyche, it may now find itself countered by another alternate conviction, this time a conviction of religious people: the need to bring the wisdom of religion to the business of the market. Their religious voices can be joined to the biting critiques of environmentalists, literary artists, and some economists as well. As indicated implicitly in the very writing of his book, Tawney sensed religious thinkers of his own day were becoming increasingly restive in their compartment, unwilling to let practices of the free market go unchallenged.³⁶ Of course he himself is an example of his own hunch: a religious person able to challenge from a historical angle these “free market” practices and expose the processes by which the free market “gospel” became so set in place. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, reprinted so often, helps keep the matter of religion’s challenge to the free market alive and open some seventy years after its first publication. Those who continue to take up the challenge have the aid of his astute historiography and humanistic principles to guide them. And to this matter of the challenge of capitalism to people of the gospel, I now turn.

Eucharistic Resources of the Local Churches

In this final section, this paper comes full circle, back to the issue of commitment to our human bonds with one another that form the heart of the humanum, or, in Irish, the “nadur,” or the closeness to one another that marks the human. As Gutierrez reminds us, the church’s spirituality is not a set of thoughts but a “way”: a concrete manner of living Jesus’s good news. The following are some lines for considering what the church might/must do. They are largely catechetical suggestions. At those five words eyes will roll in some heads, especially the head that consider catechesis a matter of helping children prepare for sacraments. But if catechesis is understood as a ministry to the insights of the Jesus-way and to the practice of those insights, then communities can begin to embody in action what Jesus called the Kingdom of God.³⁷ I call these “Eucharistic resources,” because they are found in the

³⁶ See Tawney, pp. 146-149 for its underlying critique and the final two pages of his book, 286-287 for his final word about this question.

³⁷ For an elaboration of this point, see M. Warren, *At this Time In This Place* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International), Chapter 6: “Spirit Resonance: the Achievement of Practice.”

Eucharistic ritual and are rooted in the gifts and blessings named there. These resources, in my view, are largely unused. They fail to connect with people's daily lives in any profound way. Apparently the resources of Eucharist do not connect unless they are connected to events outside the ritual of the Eucharist. The lay reformers of the 10th-13th centuries made that connection. Lacking it, these resources of transformation, personal and social, remain inert and unnoticed. Why? Because they cannot be activated or brought to meaning without a body of persons agitated by them, troubled and uncomfortable in the face of its own very words.³⁸ One could say that to participate in the Eucharist and not be agitated about justice issues means you do not grasp the significance of the words being said or the signs being used. The Eucharist is not a conceptual ritual but a convictional one.

The Resource of Gift-- and Wealth

A major spiritual or attitudinal outcome of market capitalism is individualism. This virus is the focus of powerful critiques of consumer capitalism by Tawney, Karl Polanyi, and Gregory Baum.³⁹ As we saw in Tawney's history of capitalism, individualism has various edges to it but basically it comes down to this: "It is none of anybody's business how I spend my money. When it comes to fulfilling my desires by means of money, I do what I like, no matter the harm done to persons or the earth itself." The new global connections do not produce global commitments among human beings; instead they foster greater focus on the self and the profits accruing to the self.

³⁷ In an early section of his Asian Theology of Liberation, Pieris makes an interesting suggestion that the liturgical renewal of the ritual was only able to be completed when the spirituality lived by the assembly had moved from an individualistic to a communal spirituality of action. Though he never uses the word catechesis, he does use the words "the liturgy of life" to name the indispensable counterpart of the liturgy of word and symbol. "Spirituality, then, is not a prelude to or an accompaniment or a supplement to liturgy but is itself co-extensive with liturgy or Christian worship." Catechesis is the ministry that makes the co-extensiveness possible—or better, that makes possible the living-action-of-justice embodiments needed if worship is to be alive. As he points out, Vatican II realized that a change of rite was insufficient for the shift they wanted in worship; it had to be accompanied by a "change of life." See, pp. 4-7.

³⁹ See, R.H. Tawney, The Acquisitive Society (NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1920); Equality [the 1929 Halley Stewart Lectures] (NY: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1931); Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980); Gregory Baum, Karl Polanyi on Ethics and Economics (Montreal, London, and Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996). See also, Robert J.S. Ross and Kent C. Trachte, Global Capitalism: The New Leviathan (SUNY Press, 1990).

The Christian sensibility, however, when it takes on a Eucharistic sensibility, is suffused with a sense of gift. The very word “gift” is a running stitch throughout the Eucharistic ritual. Jesus is God’s gift. These “gift-signs” of bread and wine are part of a prayer that we ourselves might become gifts of God to our fellow beings. “May we become gift” is one of the underlying “motif” prayers of the Eucharist. The core idea of gift and grace is “unearned.” Gift undercuts market calculations. When and if gift gets inside one’s consciousness, it changes one’s perspective on reality.

In a consumerist culture, however, all giving is calculated by the expectation of a return, as Stephen Webb notes in *The Gifting God*.⁴⁰ You don’t have to read about the Bob Cratchetts of Dickens’s novels, dutifully toting up the profits of the week’s transactions to know that calculation is a central business concern. Today calculation has also become a relational concern for young people in dating, where “what will I get out of it” is often the unspoken but central issue. The commodification of relationships fundamentally undercuts the nature of human closeness.⁴¹ According to Webb,

Modern Western culture has undertaken a prolonged and massive rehabilitation of the terms egoism and selfishness, while the very purity of the ideas of altruism and sacrifice has become the easy target of ridicule and rejection. In this linguistic climate, the very grammar of giving is threatened. How can we speak about giving without invoking the theological vocabulary of sacrifice? Moreover, what is the plausibility of theology if giving--a terms so closely related to grace--is illusory?⁴²

If Webb is right, then we could expect that “the massive [negative] rehabilitation” has also negatively “rehabilitated” the understanding of gift among those in our pews. Some have claimed the unsaid bargain with God at work in many Eucharists is this: “I’ll give you my fifty minutes, but you stay off my back for the rest of the week and make sure nothing bad happens to me.” Webb, however, suggests that real giving is the opposite of calculation and a kind of squandering, an extravagant uncalculated gesture that defies reasonableness. The Eucharist is about this sort of extravagance. **Obviously, even to some who glow on about “spirituality,” this extravagance is not connected to our faith.**

⁴⁰ Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting God: A Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (NY: Oxford U. Press, 1996)

⁴¹ See, Margaret Talbot, “Girls Just Want to Be Mean,” *NY Times Magazine*, 24 February 2002, pp. 24-29 ff. Talbot describes the commodification of friendship among Junior high girls, as a kind of relational capital able to be manipulated for relational profit.

⁴² Webb, p. 7.

To move from the calculated bargain to the lavish, “irresponsible” gift will take serious catechesis about God’s gifts—and about God’s lavish creation. Wealth cannot be permitted to signify “monetary means” only, because such thinking actually trivializes the issue of God’s goodness. In fact, one might claim that we cannot understand the core realities of our existence without a deep sense of the giftedness of creation and what that giftedness calls from us. The very world given us is to be adored and cherished. That, I say, is the Eucharistic mindset. The Eucharist is a celebration of this gift of God: the man whose life disclosed an extravagant imagination of what it means to be human. Not everyone who assembles for the Eucharist has this mindset. To remind me of how distorted “thanks” can be, and of how endless is the catechesis of gift, in my copy of Bonino’s *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* I keep a bookmark found in a second hand bookstore. It bears the following printed message.

A Thankful Heart

America has 6% of the world’s population
 Yet we are blessed with:
 33% of the world production power
 33% of the world’s college enrollment
 49% of the world’s telephones
 50% of the world’s air travel
 60% of the world’s automobiles.

Television, running water, electric washers and dryers are common among even the poorest people, while the average of underprivileged countries struggle for their most basic food and shelter.

We have FREEDOM to learn,
 and FREEDOM to earn,
 We have FREEDOM to move
 and FREEDOM to improve;
 We have FREEDOM to gather
 or not, if we’d rather;
 We have FREEDOM to believe,
 to write, talk, give or receive.

WE have the greatest freedom and the
 most of the world’s goods. Here freedom
 and abundance counsel together.

WHAT MORE CAN I ASK?

“Lord, Thou hast given me many things,
 now give me yet one more....

A THANKFUL HEART

Rev. Allan Berg

How will a proper catechesis of gift be done to counter such a misplaced sense of superiority? The ways of doing catechesis are actually as open-ended as this question. The ways are limitless. Ronald Knox once gave a series of homilies at Mass that were actually catecheses on the Eucharist itself, later published as The Mass In Slow Motion. Whatever it may have lacked in homiletic “political correctness,” it made up for in its invitation to participate in the Eucharist in a more conscious way aware of the ritual’s implications. It was a needed catechesis.

The Eucharistic Resource of Relatedness Via the Spirit of Jesus

A scriptural and Eucharistic appreciation of gift fundamentally undercuts individualism, not automatically but when the words and symbols of the ritual are understood, instead of misunderstood, and above all, when they are embodied in the life of the local ekklesia. This is now one of the prime catechetical principles flowing from Vatican II.

Catechesis is essentially an ecclesial act. The true subject [agent] of catechesis is the Church which, continuing the mission of Jesus the Master and, therefore animated by the Holy Spirit, is sent to be the teacher of faith. The church imitates the Mother of the Lord treasuring the Gospel in her heart. She proclaims it, celebrates it, lives it, and she transmits it in catechesis to all these who have decided to follow Jesus Christ. This transmission of the Gospel is a living act of ecclesial tradition: the church transmits the faith she herself lives. [General Directory for Catechesis (1997) # 78.]

This passage of course also implicitly questions the character of the faith a local church actually lives. Is it the self-congratulatory faith in one’s own goodness, sometimes found among the middle and upper-classes? What would be the character of a local church that effectively functions as a “life-style enclave” by being positioned within a “gated-guarded area,” excluding those other classes and life-styles?⁴³ To go back to Bourdieu, what people actually live shapes their consciousness, regardless of the shape of the church building or of its interior space for worship. The interior attitudes of those as-

43 See, Monique Pincon-Charlot and Michel Pinchon, “Ls Derniere Classe Sociale: Sur la poste des nantis [Hunting for Security], Le Monde Diplomatique September 2001: pp. 1, 24-25. This description of these enclaves in France points out how the Sunday routines in such gated communities are pleasantly structured, with “two masses, one following the other, each one filling the church.” As described by the two authors, there seems to be a kind of formation of consciousness and “affect” going on in such situations. Might the title of the U.S. bishops recent pastoral on adult formation : Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us be re-stated for this situation as “Our Hearts Were Frozen Within Us”?

sembled fundamentally determines what the meaning of the ritual can be for this assembly. Contemporary catechesis is all about this question.

One could ask how it could be possible that the extraordinary claims in the Eucharistic prayer itself could be overlooked? Again and again, the prayer reminds us that we are, like the gifts of bread and wine, to “become the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” In Eucharist Prayer 2, “Let your Spirit come upon these gifts [the way the Spirit of God came upon Mary] to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” Consider the astonishing proposal of Eucharistic Prayer 3:

Father, you are holy indeed, and all creation rightly gives you praise. All life, all holiness comes from you through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, by the workings of the Holy Spirit. From age to age you gather a people to yourself, so that from east to west a perfect offering may be made to the glory of your name.

Surely these words are about allegiances and commitments. “A people gathered to yourself,” a particular kind of people, a gospel people, a holy people, a people given as gift, a people whose lives glorify God. How is it possible not to “get it”? One can wonder if even the liturgiologists who write glowingly about the metaphysical bases of “Eucharistic Presence” get it: **the discernable presence 4-03** of the Spirit of Jesus in a people whose group life attests to the holiness of a gospel lived day-by-day. Again Bourdieu gives us clues as to how the “not getting it” works. The formation of a gospel sensibility in the group life of the local church in an on-going, indeed, never-ending, project of the local church.

The Ministry to Wealth and Holiness

Many who read this paper will themselves be involved in ministry to the meaning of the assembled community or to the understandings of those who will ministry to the meanings of the local communities. Perhaps we all have to reconsider our efforts on issues about money, finance, economics, wealth, debt, and poverty (voluntary or forced). I have already, as writer, announced my own capacity to silence myself on these matters. In the end I was greatly helped by going back to a little 1995

book, The Crisis of Vision in Modern Economic Thought,⁴⁴ by Heilbroner and Milberg. They examine the disconnection between analysis and vision in U.S. economics writing and explain analysis as a process using rigorous chains of reasoning to deduce consequences from a set of initial conditions. This analytic process, a massive one considering the numbers of trained professionals engaged in it at all levels, has, in their view, lost its way, being unable to get behind the human decisions and the often unspoken criteria that led to the decisions in the first place. And so the economic system spins on, producing its mutations that become "givens" in their own right. These unexamined givens become the reality economists theorize from. Also unexamined is the human toll of those consequences.

Milberg and Heilbroner seem to be saying: thinking like a machine imagines a machine-like economic system, because the underlying sensibility of the one who imagines is mechanistic. I ask, Will the church minister to a different sensibility of common commitment to common good? This is a pastoral catechetical question and the kind of question these two economists suggests to theology. 4-03

What Heilbroner and Milberg find missing in this systemic operation is “vision,” or “our individual moral values, our social angles of perception.” They elaborate thus: “By vision we mean the political hopes and fears, social stereotypes, and value judgments--all unarticulate, as we have said--that infuse all social thought, not through their illegal entry into an otherwise pristine realm, but as psychological, perhaps existential, necessities.”(p.4) Vision is a word fueling the examination and evaluation of assumptions for the way they produce certain conditions in the actual lives of particular persons at particular times. Lacking vision, procedures in place have about them a taken-for-grantedness that allows them a fixity and unquestioned character difficult to get at, let alone question.

These two economists seem to be giving permission to non-experts like me and other church people-cum-scholars to question the “sacred doctrines” of economics for their wisdom or lack of it, their usefulness or lack of it, based on norms outside the economics mainstream. And so, I came to

44 Robert Heilbroner and William Milberg, The Crisis of Vision in Modern Economic Thought (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 1-24, passim.

ask, if Heilbroner and Milberg can follow such heretical ways, why not Warren. At least their words gave me permission to pursue and complete this paper, and so I pass them along to others as permission to think and question.

Skeptical readers may these words and the end of a longish paper with: That is all well and good, but what do I do to bring these matters into discussion? My only answer is: This paper and the one that preceded it [“Globalization, Exploitation and the Local Church,” April 2001] is what I have done. There were no hot coals applied to my lips to unseal them. What was done was a process of trying to speak by stammering, stuttering, saying it over, trying to say it better, learning to speak by trying to speak. The biggest effort was refusing to be silenced by experts—or people whom I put on pedestals as experts. Of second greatest help was to read material that seemed over my head or outside my “field.” The greatest help came from gathering ordinary folks, raising with them my own questions about spirituality and money or wealth, and learning together with them. Every person reading this essay may have to travel that same route.

A friend who gathers parishioners to discuss questions around money and life structure, and so forth, told me a new strategy she has used to get at the deeper dimension of wealth. She asked her group to seat themselves in a circle in a slightly darkened room, and imagine themselves in their own most favorite chair in their favorite place. When she had gotten them in that chair and place, she told them she was inviting them to do a “gentling exercise.” She asked them to take their time and make a mental list of the five persons in their lives they knew without question loved them. “We all have people whom we knew—many of them no longer living—who we also knew loved us. We saw it in their eyes when they met us, and so forth. What are those people. Can you name five? If you can, imagine that one of them comes through the door of the room where you imagine yourself sitting, and comes before with a great smile, and takes a bow, and you just smile back, a smile that says “I am who I am because you loved me.” That person come in looks you in the eyes with that look of love and affection, bows and leaves. All five come in. Now think of another five: think of those who you knew loved you when you were a small child; another five when you are in school, etc, etc.

She told me that the room became quite still—eerily so. She finally said, When you have finished being honored by these people, and honoring them, you can open your eyes. When the group all had their eyes open—though very still—she quietly said, “That is what wealth means. Wealth should never be trivialized to refer only to money or financial reality. These people were/are the free gifts of a gifting God.” Apparently this exercise made a profound impression of her group. But the exercise was part of her ministry to spirituality and wealth. There were questions to be struggled with about how we all use our resources, about what we do about the great global and local inequities of our time. She was also dealing with these by teaching people how to read the newspaper with a scissors in hand and follow issues about justice. But she seemed to be giving these people permission to stare and to ache over situations of injustice.

She shared with me a handout sheet she distributed to her group, and I reproduce it here, for its specific information about how many people use money.

from, Timothy L. O'Brien, "Giving Credit Where Debt Is Due," NY Times Sunday, 14 December 1997, p. wk 14. \wealth &

A recent survey...by the American Bankers Association found that...among those who were late with credit card payments, 44% earned more than \$50,000 a year, while only 4% earned less than \$15,000. American consumers are carrying about \$1.2 trillion in installment credit, up about 50% from just four years ago, and the average credit card holder has four cards and about \$4,000 in high-interest debt.

From Yes! A Journal of Positive Futures Spring 2001

Cited in the Sidebar by Leona McQueen for an article by Juliet Schor, “Real Vacations for All,” p. 17

Amount of revolving consumer credit in the U.S.—mostly credit card debt—as of October 1999: 584.3 billion, three times as much as 1990.

Amount of overdue debt in early 2000: 135 billion.

Average growth in median family income, 1947-1973: 2.8% a year

Average growth, 1973-1997: 0.35% a year.

Average work year of a middle-income, married-couple family in 1998 compared to 1989: 6 weeks longer. Compared to a family in 1969: 14 weeks longer.

Number of U.S. billionaires in 1989: 66

Number in 1999: 168

Number living below the poverty line in 1989: 31.5 million

Number in 1999: 34.5

Her point, she said, in handing people this sheet is that big debts for most people mean that they minds and imaginations are constantly preoccupied with the issue of money. That was something she wanted them to reconsider and possibly correct.

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APPENDIX: SPIRITUALITY AND ACTION FOR JUSTICE

Spirituality, Lifestyle, Justice: Prayer and Action in Spirituality

Some Actions We Might Consider: [Remember: the first power is the power to pay attention, in this case, to injustice; second power, to name the injustice and work for change.]

1. **Time-Tithing for the Poor: Giving your time to be physically present with the:**
 - ill
 - confused
 - hungry
 - homeless
 - imprisoned.

Or those in need of

- companionship
- comfort
- help
- education/tutoring
- skills

Time-tithing by means of educating yourself about one justice issue, and bond intellectually with those who suffer this injustice. Or by other ways of calling attention to the injustice: via letter-writing or by organizing a letter-writing group to meet one morning each week and writing letters to those who should be using their elected power to correct injustice.

2. **Traveling for Transformation** [Pilgrimage to expose injustice by witnessing it, protesting it, and describing it to others. OLQM Nicaragua initiative is a great example.]
 - School of the Americas
 - Various kinds of protest assemblies
3. **Reading the alternative press or alternative sources of information, like:**
 - a. **“The Catholic Worker,” NYC, 36 E. First Street, NY, NY 10003. Phone 212/777-9617. Cost: twenty-five cents for a year.**
 - b. **“Houston Catholic Worker,” Casa Juan Diego, P.O. Box 70113, Houston, TX 77270 [free]**
 - c. **“The Servant Song,” Agape Community, 2062 Greenwich Road, Ware, MA 01082-9309. 413/967-9369 [PITCH the catalogues; replace them with these.]**
 - d. **Z Magazine, 18 Millfield Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543.**

4. Exercise your “click” power to turn off the TV and instead read about the world we are in, especially the stuff those in power don’t want you to read.