

## GLOBALIZATION, EXPLOITATION, AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

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Introduction: Can Religion Speak to the Market?

In his seminal 1926 work, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, R.H. Tawney explores the silence of the church in the face of the rise of capitalism in sixteenth century Europe, particularly in England. Given a new situation of massive exploitation of the poor for the benefit of the wealthy, the church of that day knew “we should love our neighbor” but had nothing to say about the specifics of how it might be done in a time when profit-making and markets became a law unto themselves. In other words the church was unable to connect its social teachings with the new economic system. Tawney's sharp judgment is this: “In an age of impersonal finance, world-markets and a capitalist organization of industry, [the church's].... traditional social doctrines had no specific [remedies] to offer, and were merely repeated, when, in order to be effective, they should have been thought out again from the beginning and formulated in new and living terms.”<sup>1</sup> These words are easily applied as well to today's church, largely silent about moral issues around money, while systems of economic exploitation roll on unencumbered by religious hesitations. The implicit teaching of these systems (that exploitation in the name of profit is acceptable, even wise) effectively overrides and silences explicit religious teaching about the moral imperative of commitment to the common good.

According to Tawney, the expansion of finance and international trade in the 16th century was of such a scale that conventional religious teachings, tailored to acts of kindness toward persons one could see and to warnings against the evils of usury, were useless in the face of impersonal finance systems, world markets, and capitalist management of resources. To be effective the old doctrines needed to be thought out in the new situation and recast in vivid challenging terms. Alas, they were regularly trotted out for exhibition, becoming more and more incomprehensible and even ludicrous. The sad result: the practical ineffectiveness of the old teachings

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<sup>1</sup> R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism: A Historical Study* Holland Memorial Lectures, 1922] (Gloucester, Mass, Peter Smith, 1962), p. 184. For background on Tawney himself, see, Asa Briggs, “Tawney, Richard Henry,” *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1961-

eventually led to their theoretical abandonment.<sup>2</sup> They ceased to count as means of guiding practical decisions. What took their place were the new practices of maximizing the profits of those who held capital. In effect the “for profits” system in place defined for almost everyone not only how things should work but also their unspoken theoretical justification. The system was the justification. For those who practiced them, these new ways of capitalizing non-monetary holdings like land became quasi-religious, unshakable truths, even for people who claimed to be religious. These ways seemed to be saying, “The use of money cannot be subjected to religious critique.”

To an extent the same situation exists today, with the economic procedures in place being awarded the powerful legitimacy of taken-for-grantedness, even for religious people whose sacred texts question and challenge the legitimacy of those procedures. Today the wealthiest in society are drifting dangerously from spaceship Earth. Isolated in their individualized, computerized life-support systems and talking only to one another via privileged electronic communications systems, they are in danger of losing their human base and with it their own capacity for responding to situations of misery. Maintaining human connectedness is a major task of all in our time, but especially of religious people in the Jewish and Christian traditions. However, to focus my argument, “religious people” will for the most part refer Christian religious people. What fundamentally drives my reflections in this essay is the matter of “exploitation” named in its title. The exploitation at issue is, to be sure, the diminishment of human relationships and human life in the pursuit for profits but the diminishment of the earth’s ecosystem as well. Exploitation is not just an abomination when viewed in religious terms. It is an abomination as well on purely humanistic grounds, and is to be resisted whether one considers oneself religious or not. The question today for religious people is: how will they expose, confront, and oppose exploitation of victimized persons whose faces they will never see? Another way of posing this

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1970 E.T. Williams and C.S. Nichols, eds. (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 994-998.

<sup>2</sup> Tawney: “All insist that Christianity has no more deadly foe than the unbridled indulgence of the acquisitive appetite. Hence the claim that religion should keep its hands off business encountered, when first formulated, a great body of antithetic doctrine, embodied not only in literature and teaching, but in custom and law. It was only gradually, and after a warfare not confined to paper, that it affected the transition from the status of an odious paradox to that of an

question is: how can they bring their sacred writings and the commitments those writings call for to bear on the global economic system's dysfunctional, dehumanizing aspects? The church has something to say to the current situation, and, as Tawney implies in the above quote, even in the sixteenth century it had a fund of very important things to say about what it means to be human and how humans should use their resources. The church had religious resources for reflecting on the use of economic resources but it did not apply those doctrines to the new situation. Today the Jewish and Christian traditions can shed light on the dysfunctional aspects of global capitalism and provide needed pointers toward reform, though not by means of neat formulas.

The method of the first part of this essay is to examine two periods—the 11th-13th and the 16th–18th centuries--- when the European Christian church was challenged by crises involving economic shifts and then to look for angles from which the contemporary dysfunctions of globalization might be critiqued, especially by Christians. The essay is exploratory, being the work of a non-economist theologian alarmed both at the misery in the world and the nonchalance toward it of many who gather in the name of God. Important work remains for church leaders to bring issues around money and finance to the religious scrutiny of all believers, particularly at the local level of face-to-face conversation. The church has done this throughout its history, but sometimes in a stumbling manner.

#### 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 movements that until recently were not recognized for what they actually were: a religious reformation and an awakening to the significance of the gospel for eve-

ryday living, especially on the issue of sharing wealth.<sup>3</sup> At root these movements all sought to apply religious teaching to codes of actual behavior. Various groups 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.”<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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 wisdom of the money and profit economy on its

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<sup>3</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

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...<sup>6</sup>

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 monied 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

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

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.<sup>7</sup>

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.

[A]round 1250 Hugh of Digne...helps us gauge how thoroughly the Order of Friars Minor changed its social location in several decades. 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....<sup>8</sup>

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

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<sup>7</sup> “I suggest that the Church of the future will need to draw its moral strength not from /92 its international presence but from 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.

<sup>8</sup> “Foreword,” *Poverty in the Middle Ages*, p. 10.

meeting hall had sprawled across it the bodies of sixteen slain delegates.<sup>9</sup> For the gentle sons of Francis of Assisi, their religious conviction about non-violence was obviously not self-maintaining. Religious insight must be carefully nurtured to endure—something that is true of many kinds of meaning. The possibilities of 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup> 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

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<sup>9</sup> John J. O’Riordan, Irish Catholics: Tradition and Transition (Dublin: Veritas, 1980): 33-34. Martin Kennedy gave me this reference.

<sup>10</sup> 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).

<sup>11</sup> Tawney, xiii.

natural environment, indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society.”<sup>12</sup> 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 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.<sup>13</sup> By 1830 England had roughly 670,000 families of agricultural laborers and among these families 300,000 persons were on poor-relief,<sup>14</sup> figures that give some idea of how harshly British land-holders squeezed the poor. In a more accessible 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.<sup>15</sup> 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

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<sup>12</sup> Polanyi, 73.

<sup>13</sup> Williams, p. 96.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, p. 185.

<sup>15</sup> See, Williams, 96-97, 169-179, and 185-187.



its colonies. 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

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.<sup>16</sup> 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 11-13<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> century and later, pulpit thunder was quietly tolerated 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 11<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>16</sup> Tawney, p. xii.

Though that conviction 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.

At this point I move to a new section of this essay in an effort to consider the guidance Christian communities might offer on a major outcome of the globalization of market capitalism: individualism. Ironically 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.

### Individualism

A striking aspect of Tawney’s account is his connecting the rise of capitalism in 16th century England with the rise of individualism, and its devastating consequences for social relationships.<sup>18</sup> Centuries of Christian teaching about the centrality of human connectness as the key to one’s relationship to God were eroded over a relatively short period, replaced by an alternate

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<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Tawney’s Chapter III “The Church of England” has three sub-sections: 1) “The Land Question” which deals with shifts in the way land ownership came to be understood; 2) “Religion and Social Policy,” about the land owner’s responsibility for the common good; and 3) “The Growth of Individualism.” This last section provides an interpretative lens for understanding the previous two. Lacking a sense of the dangers of individualism, one cannot think in an other-centered way about either one’s land holdings or one’s obligations to foster just social policy. Section 3 (173-193) deserves careful study.

way of view the self and the self's place in the world. While the rise of capitalism was rapid, recognition of its consequences for attitudes and practices was comparatively slow. Except for the inhabitants of the convents and monasteries dissolved by the Reformation in England, people seem to have been initially unconcerned with the handing over of vast tracts of land to the handful of persons the Tudors wanted to reward. Most common folk may even have been unaware of these transfers. What did shock them, eventually, was the new creed that followed in the wake of these new vast holdings: that the individual, once given title to property, was the absolute master of that property, without any obligation to put off profits when profits harmed the well-being of neighbors or people living on the land. In effect, property holders saw no obligations to those who depended on that property for their subsistence.

These convictions embedded themselves in actual practices of dealing with property long before they were articulated as a "market" creed to be followed. Among the propertied class, there began a progressive suppression of any sense of obligation to the well being of one's fellows, one's neighbors. The maintenance of profits from one's properties became a sacred duty while one's obligations to one's fellows, once considered set by God, were easily set aside. Once in place, the doctrine of absolute property rights was able "to silence the preaching of all social duties save that of submission. If property be an unconditional right, emphasis on its obligations is little more than the graceful parade of a flattering but innocuous metaphor. For, whether the obligations are fulfilled or neglected, the right continues unchallenged and indefeasible."<sup>19</sup> And so it happened that not only moral law was set aside, but also "legal law." Tawney's historiography shows how the legal restraints set in place by the Crown itself to protect the common good were again and again violated by those with the greatest wealth.

It would take decades before these shifts in ownership and in attitudes about property created among the poor a level of misery some Reformation church leaders like Wolsey would denounce. But in the long run such preaching was of little help. The inability of the denunciations to address practical processes regarding wealth led to their being ignored, and the church's teachings about social obligations ceased to count.<sup>20</sup> Village relationships once represented a cir-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 147-148.

<sup>20</sup> See Tawney, Chapter III "The Church of England" (pp. 138-185) for an account of

cle of care for those in the community, particularly those who fell on hard times. Sufused with the moral teachings of earlier scholastic theology, village life had safeguarded the rights of the community and maintained the obligations of charity toward the weak.<sup>21</sup> Eventually the village as a network of commitments to the common good and of help for families in trouble was made into a desert where the rule of survival was “each for oneself.”

### The Economic Critique of Individualism

Many are unaware of the important questions about human connectedness put to market capitalism from within economics itself, by persons concerned about the devastating consequences of markets steered only by the maximization of profits. Exploring this literature would require a book in itself. If such questions can be asked by specialists in economics, surely similar questions can be asked by religious people whose traditions prize human connectedness as being of God. Here I confine myself briefly to three works which focus on the outcomes market capitalism can have for social relationships.<sup>22</sup> The first is The Great Transformation, written during the Second World War by Karl Polanyi, a Romanian-born Canadian citizen. Polanyi writes as an economist who is also an anthropologist and economic historian, whose historiography has been influenced by R.H. Tawney. A central concern of Polanyi’s writing is the evaluation of economic systems by their effect on human relationships. The third chapter of Transformation, “Habitation versus Improvement,” opens with the devastation caused by the rise of capitalism in

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fiery preaching against the exploitation of the poor. Gradually the emotional intensity of condemnation subsided, then retreated before both the massive organization of markets and shifts in religious doctrine. Protecting the poor via preaching became a kind of “pious antiquarianism.” The inability of the teaching to address practical processes regarding wealth led to its being abandoned. A fiery but comic attack on greed in the papacy is Erasmus’s satirical essay, Julius Exclusus, in which he depicts Pope Julius II, who died in 1513, trying, with the aid of his spokesperson, Genius, to gain entrance to heaven. St. Peter, keeper of the gate, objects to Julius on a wide range of specific grounds. See, The “Julius Exclusus” of Erasmus. Trans. Paul Pascal. Introduction and notes by J. Kelly Sowards (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).

<sup>21</sup> One gets a glimpse of these relationships, but in my view an idealized, uncritical, and ultimately unconvincing glimpse, in Part One of Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Karl Polanyi’s The Great Transformation (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980) [original copyright 1944]; Gregory Baum, Karl Polanyi on Ethics and Economics (Montreal, London and Buffalo: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), and Robert J.S. Ross and Kent C. Trachte,

England, and the first work he cites is a 1912 volume by R.H. Tawney, The Agrarian Problem in the 16th Century. Polanyi's basic argument in this chapter echoes Tawney's but is more insistent that the sixteenth century's deepest evil was the disruption of human relationships and a humanizing social order. I underscore this theme in the following passage from Polanyi's Transformation:

Enclosures have appropriately been called a revolution of the rich against the poor. The lords and noble were upsetting the social order, breaking down ancient law and custom, sometimes by means of violence, often by pressure and intimidation. They were literally robbing the poor of their share in the common, tearing down the houses which...the poor had long regarded as theirs and their heirs'. The fabric of society was being disrupted; desolate villages and the ruins of human dwellings testified to the fierceness with which the revolution raged, endangering the defenses of the country, wasting its towns, decimating its population, turning its overburdened soil into dust, harassing its people and turning them from decent husbandmen into a mob of beggars and thieves.<sup>23</sup>

Based on his studies in anthropology, Polanyi saw an economy as submerged in social relationships. The primary natural interest of persons is not to safeguard their possession of material goods but to foster social standing, social claims, and social assets. Material goods have value in the light of social ends. An examination of the processes of production and distribution of goods shows social interests are the deepest motivating ones, even though those social interests may differ depending on the size and kind of social system. Whether in a fishing village or metropolis, non-economic social motives, he claims, are more basic than purely economic ones. By taking this position, he named social relationships as at the heart of the human and as prior to economic ones. His focus, then, is not so much on the exploitation of workers a la Marx but on the dehumanizing cultural influences of the free market system. Once the unregulated market became a supreme force, it had powerful--and dehumanizing--cultural consequences. Where culture and the market clashed, the market over-rode culture. People found themselves "disembodied" from their own social support networks and torn from their culture, where their basic

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Global Capitalism: The New Leviathan (SUNY Press, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> Polanyi, p. 35.

understandings of themselves as persons connected in significant ways with other persons.<sup>24</sup> In the face of these oppressions, Polanyi was not without hope because he saw that social movements tend to evolve to restore human connections of care to their proper place in culture.<sup>25</sup>

What Baum finds so interesting in Polanyi's writing is this emphasis on the emergence of these political and cultural counter-movements. Society moves to protect itself: the people and their relationships with one another and with the land. This is the meaning of the "double movement" that Polanyi finds in history. The dangers of the unregulated market system, spinning on relentlessly, and eroding human connections and the relationship of people to the land, seem to call for protective action for preserving the humanum (my word). The devastation created by unregulated markets provokes almost immediately a counter-current aimed at protecting social relationships and the land. Polanyi finds in this counter current an indication that social forces have a tendency to protect the people, their culture and the land.<sup>26</sup> Readers can ask themselves whether such counter-movements exist today.

Another "relational" critique of capitalism steered by the so-called free market is *Global Capitalism: the New Leviathan*,<sup>27</sup> by Robert Ross, a sociologist and Kent Trachte, a political scientist. The old leviathan was the absolutist state, which initially got its power from its need to protect the nation from invasion. The new leviathan is the corporate power behind a new kind of financial system. In it global corporations and financial institutions are able to enforce their will globally, by setting up a state of economic war of each against all and using the weapons of capital movement to enforce their corporate will. For my purposes in this essay, what is most interesting about this book is its focus on the social relations of capitalism. In capitalism, Ross and Trachte find three sets of social relationships: 1) the relationship of capital to labor, i.e., of owners and workers (a relationship of struggle), 2) the relationship of capital to capital, i.e., among corporations and between corporations and sources of financing (a relationship of ownership and competition), and 3) the relationships between classes, especially (but not only) between the dominant class, who control the bulk of "capital") and the state which is committed to all the

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<sup>24</sup> See Baum, Polanyi, p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> On this question see Baum, "Exploring Polanyi's proposal," pp. 49-53.

<sup>26</sup> See, Baum, pp. 5-7 and Chapter 3, "Polanyi's Contemporary Relevance," pp. 39-62.

people (a relationship between private accumulation and social capital). For capitalism to succeed as a way managing the world's resources, all three relationships need to be maintained as mutual and respectful, even while operating as struggle-relationships. One of the strongest cautions made by these authors—and it runs throughout their book—is about the danger that the forces of capital can actually come to control the state and its political apparatus so that it works in the interests of capital and not in the interests of the state's larger body of citizens. When state power meant to serve the interests of all classes is eroded so as to serve the interests of the "capital class," all citizens need to pay attention.<sup>28</sup>

#### The Religious Critique of Individualism: the Proposal of the Neighbor as God's Proxy

Tawney rails against the displacement of care for others by a turn to the individual self and the self's satisfactions, because he sees this care for the neighbor as a central matter of the Jesus tradition. How does such a displacement take place? Philosopher William Christian's distinction between the primary and secondary doctrines of a religion—any religion—offers a helpful way of grasping the religious significance of this displacement.<sup>29</sup> A religion's primary doctrines are about how to be a person in the world, based on that religion's imagination of life's purposes. These doctrines are about life's specific circumstances and how to deal with them in religiously wise and coherent ways. These are not so much the doctrines to be memorized or recited as the deeper core message to be internalized and direct one's reactions to events in life. Primary doctrines are found in the community's exemplary persons whose courses of action and dispositions disclose what the core religious insights mean for actual living. The Primary doctrines are the well from which religious reactions and attitudes bubble forth. They form the religion's sense of what is "truly right and proper" in life, how to think about life and death, what can be named as good or as evil.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See note 11 above.

<sup>28</sup> See Ross and Trachte, Chapter 4, pp. 51-61.

<sup>29</sup> Here I am following some of the ideas of William A. Christian, Sr., Doctrines of Religious Communities (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), chapter 1.

<sup>30</sup> See, Ellen T. Charry, By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine (NY: Oxford University Press, 1997).

When they in fact become primary to us, primary doctrines have gotten inside us and determine how things “hit us,” creating in us a particular sensibility or way of being in the world and of interpreting it. Sensibility names a person’s life-stance and points to the shape of one’s affective life. So primary doctrines shape not only vision but also “stance” or “way.” They provide a pair of religious lenses indispensable for seeing with greater clarity and thus for walking a more careful path. Secondary doctrines are the religion’s rules about doctrines, rules for determining which doctrines are “authentic” and rules for practices supporting the primary doctrines. These second order matters are the rules and principles for maintaining coherence in the community’s belief system, by establishing which claims about the community are authentic and which are not. Second-order doctrines help maintain community identity. It is possible for someone to have a solid grasp of the secondary doctrines (the doctrines about doctrines) but little grasp of the habits of the heart and basic gestures and behaviors fostered by the primary doctrines.

To be more specific: when second-order doctrines, e.g., about who can be “saved,” replace the primary ones of how to live a life of fidelity to the religion’s core insights, religious gold has been replaced with religious tin. In effect what happens, seen clearly in Tawney’s examination of 16th century England, is that the implicit teachings of a social system (the quest for maximum profits) take on the character of “religious” importance and “religious” certitude, while religion’s deepest convictions become secondary or “impractical” in the social system, at least for those who prosper in that system. In other words, the economic system, not the core religious insights, shapes the sensibility of those of a certain class.<sup>31</sup> Sensibility is about how things hit us, about our reactions at an affective level. As Tawney, a devout Christian socialist, obviously saw, individualism has about it a quasi-religious conviction that displaces authentic religious conviction. When Francis of Assisi publicly stripped off his costly clothes and put on rags, he engaged in street theater that sharply contested the sensibility that wealth is a sign of God’s love.

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<sup>31</sup> See, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, "The Economy Produces the People: Introduction to Post-Liberal Democracy," in Michael Zweig, ed., Religion and Economic Justice (Philadelphia: Temple U. Press, 1991), pp. 221-244.



One can engage in the religious practice called worship but in a way that disengages from the primary doctrines embedded in that practice. Thus, one could follow the requirement to be present at the Eucharist without ever appropriating its deep primary conviction that human unity is the sign of the presence of the Spirit of Jesus—even when that message is central to the Eucharistic prayer itself. Primary doctrines only become truly primary when they are actively used to interpret situations and to direct behavior. When a religious group's espousal of its secondary doctrines loses touch with its primary doctrines, its inner life and outer coherence are endangered and compromised. Tawney documents well this loss of coherence in his book. The rest of this essay deals with the possibilities of maintaining the coherence of Christian life in a market economy that tends to foster an individualist life stance and diminish the centrality of the neighbor as proxy of God.

My conclusion about those possibilities: they do not come easy and will be as shocking as Francis's public stripping, the sign of his troubling commitment to the poor as the proxies of Jesus. The five practical steps advocated by the Canadian Catholic Bishops for encountering the actual victims of poverty, when followed would the potential for shock that Francis himself might applaud. These steps are active ways of finding out who our poor brothers and sisters actually are. At the same time, anyone reading this essay can imagine how each of these inconvenient and troubling steps might be resisted by the very people happy to gather in churches and sing of their love of God.

1. Being present with and listening to the experiences of the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed in our society (e.g., the unemployed, the working poor, the welfare poor, exploited workers, native peoples, the elderly, the handicapped, small producers, racial and cultural minorities, etc.);
  2. developing a critical analysis of the economic, political and social structures that cause human suffering;
  3. making judgments in the light of Gospel principles and the social teachings of the church concerning social values and priorities;
  4. stimulating creative thought and action regarding visions and models for social and economic development;
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5. acting in solidarity with popular groups in their struggles to transform economic, political, and social structures that cause social and economic injustices.<sup>32</sup>

### The Religious Proposal of the Neighbor

At this point, I wish to be clear that Christianity is not unique in prizing the sacredness of the other. Many other religious traditions have the same insight. Still, the heart of the Christian gospel preached by Jesus of Nazareth poses the question, “Who is my neighbor?” The answer to this question is sown so deep in the Christian sacred writings that it seems impossible to reduce it to any one text. Actually it establishes—or should— not so much the text but the deepest context of Christian worship and living. The answer to the “question of the neighbor” as proposed in the “Parable of the Jew Lying Wounded at the Wayside and the One Who Neighbored Him” seems to be this: my neighbor is the one in greatest physical need. The maintenance of human connectedness is central to God’s wishes for humankind as proposed by Jesus. Christian identity is an identity based on sister- and brotherhood in the Spirit of Jesus.

A similar issue is behind another of Jesus’s parables: the parable of the rich man and his five brothers. Here a man of great riches dines sumptuously while a poor beggar lies starving at his gate, pleading for table scraps. But these are given, not to the starving man but to the household dogs. These dogs show more compassion than the householder, for they at least lick the beggar’s wounds. The beggar and the uncompassionate rich man die. The beggar goes to “the bosom of Abraham,” the wealthy one to fiery torment in an afterlife, where he himself becomes a beggar pleading that the beggar Lazarus be allowed to bring him a drop of water to relieve his thirst. When this request cannot be met, he asks that Lazarus be sent to warn his five wealthy brothers about the dangers of greed and callousness, showing that even in his desperation his concern is only for his own social class, not for the deeper brotherhood he shares with all. Here, Jesus proposes powerfully the other person as the presence of God’s call to humankind.

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<sup>32</sup> Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ethical Choices and Political Challenges, Canadian Catholic Bishops' Reflection on the Future of Canada's Socio-Economic Order (1984), p. 2.

The most powerful religious critique of any actual or potential excesses of consumer capitalism lies in this proposal of the neighbor. However, for Jesus's proposal of the neighbor as the proxy of God to have the communal power of a primary doctrine, it must be maintained as primary. My point in bringing these well-known parables forward is this: such maintenance is not automatic in any age, though in a time of self-serving individualism, that maintenance will be both a conceptual and a behavioral achievement of intentionality. To repeat, the proposal of the neighbor as God's proxy is not exclusively Christian or even exclusively religious, since our connectedness to others in a common humanity is also a deeply philosophical notion, found in Greek philosophy and numberless modern works such as John Macmurray's *Persons in Relation*.<sup>33</sup> The late Jewish philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas reminded us that "The material needs of my neighbor are my spiritual needs."<sup>34</sup> Levinas as a Jew is in the same tradition as Jesus of Nazareth, who hands that same conviction on to his followers, Christians. One could easily assemble a library of books about the centrality of the proposition of the neighbor in Christianity, but here I will reflect on the ritual context where the proposal is pressed on believers with special power: the Christian Eucharist.

#### The Place of Worship and its Relation to Questions of Globalization

Christian Eucharist is a ritual celebration of what God has disclosed in Jesus of Nazareth. Basically an act of worship, the ritual makes present the core reality of Jesus's life and teachings as they apply to those gathered. A central theme of this ritual is the unity of all persons as seen from the perspective of God. The Eucharistic ritual is a thematic expression, not so much of individuals' grasp, as of an assembly's grasp of unity among peoples. Introducing the Eucharist prayer, as a kind of overture, is a hymn of praise and thanks called the Preface. It has several versions, all of which have a counter-market posture: thanksgiving to God is the human vocation in a world filled with unearned gifts. The Preface I follow here is the Preface of Reconciliation II. The core gift, but also the means of giving praise, is Jesus of Nazareth sent to heal the world through the power of God's Holy Spirit. In Jesus, God's Word turns people's minds from con-

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<sup>33</sup> John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).

<sup>34</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings* [Annette Aronowicz, trans.] (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 99.

flict and division to peace. “Your Spirit changes our hearts; enemies begin to speak to one another; those estranged join hands in friendship, and nations seek the way of peace together.” God’s Spirit is at work, this particular Preface says, when understanding stops strife, when hatred is replaced by mercy, and when forgiveness replaces vengeance. For these realities, the assembly gives thanks to God aloud and in unison.

As an introductory prayer, the Preface signals the major themes of the Eucharistic Prayer, which comes next. The assembly comes before God, named as Father, to ask that the gifts offered be accepted. They are the gifts of bread to be eaten in common and wine to be drunk in common as a sign of the way the assembly hands itself over as a corporate gift to God—the Body filled with the Spirit of Jesus. Here the assembly prays for peace and unity throughout the world, as fostered by the pope and bishops and “all who hold and teach the Catholic faith.” Remembered here also are the holy ones of the past who embodied in a special way the spirit of unity in the church and in the world: “Father, accept this offering from your whole family.” After repeating the words Jesus himself may have used in establishing the Eucharistic, the prayer remembers “those who have died and have gone before us.” Finally the assembly remembers themselves and their own special needs for God to fill them with life and goodness. This is obviously a prayer deeply aware of unity.

Embedded in this ritual is the matter of sacramentality. Sacramentality is a way of looking at reality as disclosive of the presence of God. God presence was disclosed in the life, ministry, and death of Jesus. God’s presence is also disclosed in every other human being we meet: God’s proxies. God’s presence is powerfully revealed in the material reality of the world created by God: in bread and wine shared in love; in the beauties of the natural world; in the loveliness of an assembly living out the message of Jesus. The sacramental consciousness is not an Enlightenment consciousness focused on control of the world. It is a consciousness of the sacredness of the world that calls for the response, not of control but of reverence. This consciousness gives priority to the world and all living things that inhabit it. Though it does not negate human project and rational planning, they are to serve the flourishing of all forms of life, not diminish such flourishing.

My point in this overview of the Eucharistic Prayer is to exhibit its global themes: the connectedness of those gathered to pray, united by bread and wine with the entire world, and their connecteness with all of creation. At least the prayers themselves exhibit an acute consciousness of the call to human unity and of the assembly's commitment to a more-than-us vision of global unity. They also present concrete material things, like bread, wine, and the world inhabited by human beings, as brimming with the sacredness of God's own self. The question, of course, is this: in a time of individualism, does this prayer actually affect the consciousness of those who pray it and participate in it. My answer is that the prayer of itself—divorced from a community of risky deeds seeking to live out its vision of unity and solidarity—is insufficient for maintaining any deep commitment to the neighbor one might never actually see. "Pastoral action" is the church term for the deeds needed to maintain the proposition that the neighbor is, in fact, God's face for me, but it also extends to the conceptual strategies for maintaining that proposition. When not backed up by practical and conceptual strategies, the ritual's power becomes as diminished as birdsong drowned out in the blare of traffic.

For a religious group to deal with human exploitation from the perspective of its prayer, the connections between the ritual and the exploitation need to be brought to awareness and named. Documenting and examining the overall conditions of exploitation, local and international, will be an important part of this process but not less important than finding lines of corrective action, local and beyond the local. The process advocated by the Canadian bishops is a good example of such a process. Whatever steps are taken toward solidarity with the poor, they are educative activities whose fruits are to be brought back to the context of worship, as a kind of reality check that we live what we pray.

#### Clarifications About Money And Everyday Decisions

In a church gathering for worship three sets of texts are to be mutually coherent: the text of the ritual, the sacred writings that guide the assembly, and the text of the community's actual commitments. The mutual coherence of these texts establishes a context of religious meaning. However, any religious group also exists in a wider context of meaning, the cultural context shaped by a society's economic structures and by the communications structures that support the economy. Raymond Williams' definition of culture perhaps brings the idea out most clearly.

“Culture [is ] the signifying system by which a social order [and especially the economic engine of that social order] is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored.”<sup>35</sup>

There are tensions between these two signifying systems, the religious and the cultural. Religion makes an explicit claim that its meanings are the ultimate ones, worth struggling for, even dying for. Culture makes the same claims for its meanings, but implicitly rather than explicitly. Religion says greed is a false god; the culture of market capitalism says desire for goods and wealth is the essential engine driving the social order. The religious context becomes vital when it provides a framework for interpreting and judging the cultural context. In the sixteenth century religion in England lost that vitality when it lost its ability to speak to the new economic order.

In a complex world economic system that prizes money and profits while often hiding the complex systems by which profits are produced, maintaining religious vision is complex.<sup>36</sup> A Christian cannot be true to the gospel without struggling to understand the meaning of money, in whose interests it functions, and what implications money’s use has for religious fidelity. However, these issues are rarely engaged in religious contexts, especially at the local level. Many local churches invest the funds not immediately expended from weekly collections. It is not impossible that this money could actually be invested against the church’s own principles, in the weapons industry or in some country with a despicable human rights record. “Pray for peace; pay for war” is a phrase used to shock religious people into facing such questions. Do such matters get raised when pastors talk among themselves or when bishops consider diocesan investments? The complexity of this one issue of financial investments is such that few have the opportunity or even the capacity to master it, but groups of religious people working together can achieve considerable wisdom and ethical guidance.

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<sup>35</sup> Raymond Williams, The Sociology of Culture (NY: Schocken Books, 1982), p. 13. This definition, while helpful, needs the elaboration found in William’s many writings, where the definition is endlessly exfoliated.

<sup>36</sup> The “hiding” is done by the system, not by subterfuge. A person puts money in a “money market account” and have little idea of the principles behind the investments made by the fund or what ethical lapses there may be in this complex moving around huge sums of money for the greatest return.

A matter wider and more complex even than investments is money itself.

Money is the universal language, the only one. If we use religious language in speaking about our human connectedness but ignore the unseen but active “language” of money for its influence on human sociality, we have overlooked an important part of our connectedness. As Nicholas Boyle points out, money is the expression of all the social relations of which we are unconscious.<sup>37</sup> A citizen may declare nationalist loyalties but when she moves her wealth from property into money invested, that money makes its own commitments once it has entered the complicated international financial chain. The political animal is nationalist. The economic animal is internationalist, not in the sense of working for a unified world but only in the sense that the money goes where the system takes it. The enlightened nation or state is the realm of the conscious, rationalist mind. The system by which money goes wherever it can prosper embraces, as Boyle says, the unconscious social relations that exist in the world. No one person's consciousness can comprehend the economic system as a whole or predict its directions. The economic system is ineffable, beyond full articulation. Even astute economists, students of the system, cannot fully grasp or predict its operations precisely. Because market economics is based on desire, it is fundamentally irrational.<sup>38</sup>

A metaphor for the distinction between the political animal and the economic animal might be the difference between traveling by means of a road and by means of a river. You take the road. It has been mapped out and laid out according to careful calculation. Of course the original track may not have been so laid out; it might have meandered along the route found easiest for horses or oxen. Eventually, however, the road has been rationally calculated and corrected. It has been made to intersect with other roads, so as to create a network of connected routes of travel. New roads are regularly being planned to improve on the original calculations: they are widened or straightened or rerouted. So you take a road, but you recognize that the road also takes you--except that you can get off that road when and if you find it doesn't suit you,

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<sup>37</sup> Nicholas Boyle, Who Are We Now? Christian Humanism and the Global Market from Hegel to Heaney (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), p. 104.

<sup>38</sup> Boyle, 104-107.

and find alternative routes. Once you set out on most roads you have before you many possible choices of routes.

However, should you plop yourself on a raft or a tube into a fast moving river current (e.g. the economic system) that river takes you where it wants, where its force takes you. You may, if you want and are lucky, land your craft and get off for a scenic stroll, but you also might not be able to. There may be connecting streams off the river but the current may not permit you to enter and explore those. To be on the river while pretending you are on a road--or trying to convince yourself you are on a road--is folly. Our political commitments are like the road. To an extent we can name them; we can plot them; we can work consciously and conscientiously to achieve our political goals amid the complexities. But our financial commitments are not of the same character. Only in a limited way can you control where and how money goes. It tends to go where the system takes it, and that system has the kinds of irrationalities that the river has. Once you have put that money into the system it may actually work counter to your political commitments—and of course, counter to your religious commitments. True, you can remove your money from that system, but regardless of where you choose to put it after that, once you commit it, it goes "with the flow" and you don't have the same control over it that you may have with "state-related" political decisions. (Of course, most of us are aware that as a single voter, even exercising our maximum organizing capacity and our ability to influence others about their decisions, there is no full control in political matters either.)

Money tends to have no loyalties except to profit. Some investors know this well, and that is why they keep a wary eye on their investments, lest their money be lost in pursuit of an illusory promise of profit. They know investments are "risky business," and they feel responsible for those investments. In a quite different sense of being responsible, others know they themselves are "attached" to their investments, deeply attached via ethical responsibility for those investments. They try to ensure their money won't find its way into industries polluting the environment, producing weapons, or exploiting the poor in sweatshops. For some this ethical sense of being attached to their investments has a religious base. For many religious persons, however, the connection between their religious commitments and the commitments of their investments has not been considered, not having come up in discourse about the practical implications of



their faith. The freedom we are encouraged to have today is economic and consumerist, that is, the freedom to choose, as consumers, from what the market offers while our enslavement to the demands of the market is hidden from us. And so there can exist the anomaly where religious people can have many reservations about how the state uses their money, but none about how corporations might use their money. Where this is so, it is likely true not just of those in the pews but of the leaders who help direct their religious assembly.

How can the churches help their people consider the possible disjunction between their economic loyalties and their religious commitments? To commit one's money is in fact to commit oneself in ways many people do not in fact commit themselves when they shout "Amen" to this or that creedal statement. The religious implications, including the religious contradictions, embedded in the way we think about money and investments--especially about the actual "distant" and "unseen" uses of that money-- must not be pushed aside. Following the "money trail" and our own hand in it is key for those wishing to direct their investments along ethical lines. Having seen where the trail has led will not lead to formulaic conclusions. Today's equivalent of the question Tawney raised about the emerging market system of the sixteenth century may well be: What wisdom does the Christian tradition offer for the specifics of our way of investing money? Probably there is no definitive single answer but only the contextual examination of investments and of who profit from them and who are diminished or impoverished by them. This is the kind of reflection going on today, especially by young people concerned about the exploitation of people and of the land.<sup>39</sup>

My own sense is that religious teaching from on high is not enough, just as it was not enough in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for the kind of resistance to global exploitation needed today. Small groups joyfully living an alternative way rooted in commitments to the common good can fire the imagination and expose the social contradictions of global free markets. Such groups, like the Christian base communities of Latin America can become living good news to the poor. Whether religiously based or not, they can work together and forge alternatives

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<sup>39</sup> See the New Yorker interview with Juliette Beck, a second-year student at The University of California, Berkeley, for her ability to name exploitation. William Flanagan, "Our Far-flung Correspondents: After Seattle," The New Yorker 17 April 2000, pp. 40-51.

## CONCLUSION—REVIVING PUBLICS AND RETRIEVING TRADITIONS

In continuing to reflect on the current situation of globalization--markets without borders—readers may want to keep in mind the three publics involved, all of which need to maintain the voice of their wisdom: the “public” of capital, the public of the church and other religious groups, and the “public” of democratic political discourse about power. This last public operates at national and international levels, and as I write, it is from this public that come the most powerful voices dissenting against the abuses of some corporations and for new international restraints on predatory capitalism.

There are at least two traditions operating to provide a counter-wisdom to that of the so-called “free markets.” The one I have highlighted here is the religious tradition, a tradition as varied as it is ancient. Its call today is to use its wisdom for discerning what is “toward the human” and what is “against the human” in the current romp of corporate capital to control international law, national political discourse, and the scrutiny of the news media. The second tradition is the scholarly examination of the origins of exploitation so ordinary people can understand whose plans envisioned the present situation and whose hands helped it happen. Richard. Henry Tawney was clearly in that tradition, as was Raymond Williams. Noam Chomsky may be its current master, as seen in his essay, “Power in the Global Arena,”<sup>40</sup> with its detailed documentation of U.S. governmental and corporate plans to control the world economic scene.

This conference brings together two of the publics mentioned above, the religious public and the public of discourse about power, plus the two traditions: of scholarship and religious discourse. We meet in a university that grew from the work of one of the great religious protestors against economic injustice in the seventeenth century, Vincent de Paul. In my view the university itself represents the contradictions of the current situation. It could not prosper without enormous efforts around money: public, corporate, and private money, and yet it is conducted along the knife-edge of a public commitment to the poor. The university seems positioned in the middle of contradictory imperatives but called to remain faithful to its origins in service to the

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<sup>40</sup> Noam Chomsky, “Power in the Global Arena,” New Left Review 230 (July-August, 1998): 3-27.

poorest of the poor. In exposing some of these dilemmas, this conference could be a step toward practical wisdom.

#### A PSYCHOLOGICAL AFTERWORD

I want to tell those reading this essay about my struggles in writing it. Consistently I found in myself a great reluctance to write—a kind of massive writer's block. I kept telling myself that, since I was outside the area of my expertise, I didn't know what I was talking about. Better to say nothing than to speak out of the ignorance generated by a one-year sabbatical. And so, ironically, the writer himself came to be an example of the inability--or at least a sense of the inability—to bring religious thinking to economic questions, the very issue with which I started my essay.

In the end I was greatly helped by going back to a little 1995 book, The Crisis of Vision in Modern Economic Thought,<sup>41</sup> 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 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.

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

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Heilbroner and William Milberg, The Crisis of Vision in Modern Economic Thought (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 1-24, passim.

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 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.