

ECONOMICS

There is much in the Bible that the economist would recognize. All sorts of trades and professions occur including *primary production* (extraction) such as mining and fishing, *secondary production* (transformation) such as house building, carpentry, and tent making and *tertiary production* (distribution and services) such as merchants and tax collectors undertake. Merchandise, trading, barter, and tax gathering are frequently mentioned in the Bible. The use of money is obvious from the mention of various denominations of Jewish and Roman currencies. The Bible and archaeology are veritable stores of ancient economics, little different in principle from our modern times.

I. LAND AS A RESOURCE

The economist uses the word 'Land' to describe air, land and sea with all the associated non-human minerals, vegetable and animal life. According to Genesis 1, all these existed before man. Interestingly, even the secular theory of evolution came to the same conclusion in general terms. Man stands apart from his environment as an intelligent user and developer of 'Land' as opposed to being no more than a part of it functioning instinctively. The economist recognizes this in classifying man separately from his environment as 'Labour'. Two spiritual comments are in place.

A. Land involves ownership

Subsequent to the migrations from Babel, land was progressively possessed by the advancing settlers. The lawyer refers to a "title absolute", where a person or persons do not merely lease but are outright owners. Spiritually speaking, the Scripture never concedes that man is ever more than a *tenant* here. All 'Land' in the sense of territory and resources belongs to God. David begins Psalm 24 with the words, 'The earth *is the Lord's*, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein'. When Israel conquered Canaan they were to recognize the divine ownership and their occupation of it as God's tenants. In Leviticus 25.23 we read, 'The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and

sojourners with me'. This aspect of Divine ownership is an uncomfortable truth for our modern generation that seeks to leave God out of the picture. This spiritual lesson must not, however, undermine the Scriptural right of private property. There is no argument here for communal ownership of everything as a moral principle. The law of God given by Moses was just as emphatic on this point. Ultimate divine ownership and a 'title absolute' in the legal sense are perfectly consistent. In Deuteronomy 19.14 we read, 'Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it.' (Compare Deuteronomy 27.17, Proverbs 22.28, and Proverbs 23.10). God made man to live in communities not in communes in the communistic sense. The word 'commune' acquired the latter sense in 1871, when a revolt took place in Paris in support of communistic government.

B. The importance of conservation

Christians and secularists can unite in concern for conservation. Depleting fish stocks, dirty beaches, air pollution and many other cases of environmental damage signalled a need for change. The uncontrolled excesses of the Industrial Revolution, spreading over the Globe, have had serious consequences that are still with us on a big scale. Francis Schaeffer addressed this problem in his writings on Ecology and traced it to its spiritual root in man's alienation from God. God is the great conservationist as we learn from Deuteronomy 11.11-12: 'But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: *A land which the Lord thy God careth for*: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year'. The Christian's concern for conservation does not begin with the secularist's humanism but is theological. We must pattern after our Maker. He who had perfect knowledge of our heavenly Father's character and will, when he had fed the 5000, instructed his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments that remain, *that nothing be lost*' (John 6.12). Surely, our throw-away society has something to learn from this? '*Nothing* be lost'! It was reprehensible that the Prodigal Son '*wasted* his substance with riotous living' (Luke

15.13) and that the unjust steward '*wasted* his (master's) goods' (Luke 16.1).

I do not suggest that we take 'make do and mend' to impractical extremes but do commend to you the Saviour's example that *nothing* be carelessly discarded for all that we have is of God's bounty to be used for God's glory. Our society can find no ultimate meaning aside from him. Even if we were to prioritize love and compassion above economic objectives it would be to imitate our Maker for, 'God is love'. John exhorts us to love on this basis: 'Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another (1 John 4.7-11). The highest manifestation of love is at Calvary. At the cross we see the greatness of God's love for sinners such as we. He gave his only begotten Son that unworthy sinners might have eternal life through the Saviour's atoning death to appease the wrath of God. Our love is at its highest when we remember this for 'herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins'. When this truth motivates us to love God and our neighbour, our economic endeavour is on its highest plain.

II. LABOUR AS A RESOURCE

Scripture has much to say about labour in the economic process. Human resources come into it both in the entrepreneurial function and in connection with organized workers. For both, rewards and motivation are important but we must go further than financial returns. Very high salaries do not necessarily result in happiness. True and lasting happiness must have a spiritual root. Psalm 144.15 states, 'Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God'. Proverbs 16.20 adds, 'He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he'. We rightly view a saving knowledge of God as the

foundation of true blessing in our daily labours.

A. Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs are the organizers of economic activity and must identify opportunities and deploy resources to achieve profitable outcomes. Such entrepreneurial activity is used as a spiritual lesson in both the parable of the pounds and the parable of the talents. In Luke 19 we find that the first man had been very enterprising and from one pound had gained ten pounds (verse 16). To him his Lord says, 'Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities' (Luke 19.17). In Matthew 25.16, the man that 'had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents'. Both men saw the *opportunities* and were *effective* in taking them. In this they were fitting examples of the spiritual man who seizes his opportunities to use the gifts given to him to serve the Lord. Thus, in Matthew 25.21, we read of the effective servant that 'his lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord'. We are to recognize that enterprise in itself is good and not evil and the same can be said for profit. The problem arises when men and women make enterprise and profit ends in themselves leaving God out of the picture. Their activities might be lawful but their motivation falls short of God's standard and their labour is ultimately in vain 'for what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' (Mark 8.36). The rich man was enterprising in building greater barns but God said to him, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?' The Saviour explains, 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God' (Luke 12.20-21).

B. Workers

We can see from these parables the importance of *measurement*. It is by accurate recording and analysis that gains can be calculated and reported. Such measurement is also important for the *distribution* of the fruits of production. The parable of the vineyard in

Matthew 20 is based upon labourers paid a *daily* rate. The householder went out to hire labourers for his vineyard and contractually agreed with them for a penny a day. At the third hour he employed others 'and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you' (verse 4). He did the same about the sixth, ninth and eleventh hours. When evening came all received one penny, the daily rate. Those who had worked all day 'murmured against the goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day' (verses 11-12). The master 'answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?' (verses 13-15). Matthew Henry gives three applications of the parable:

(1) 'The Jews should be first called into the vineyard, and many of them should come at the call; but, at length, the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles, and they should receive it, and be admitted to equal privileges and advantages with the Jews; should be fellow-citizens with the saints, which the Jews, even those of them that believed, would be very much disgusted at, but without reason.'

(2) 'That God is debtor to no man.'

(3) 'That many who begin last, and promise little in religion, sometimes, by the blessing of God, arrive at greater attainments in knowledge, grace, and usefulness, than others whose entrance was more early, and who promised fairer.'

Incidentally, the parable teaches that contractual agreements without coercion are an acceptable process in the distribution of the rewards of production and that envy at generosity is reprehensible. If a generous employer pays the same salary to a lame man whose output is lower than his fellow workers should not all recognize the legitimacy of compassion?

The Bible has much to say about *employee relations*. Employers should be considerate (Job 31.13-14), just (Colossians 4.1), non-threatening (Ephesians 6.9) and prompt in paying wages (Deuteronomy 24.15, James 5.4). Employees should be obedient (Ephesians 6.5), faithful (Colossians 3.22), respectful (1 Timothy 6.1), pleasing (Titus 2.9), patient (1 Peter 2.18), hardworking (Ecclesiastes 9.10), and quiet (2 Thessalonians 3.12).

III. CAPITAL AS A RESOURCE

The economist views 'capital' as accumulated wealth in the form of productive resources. The farmer would think of his barns, the fisherman would think of his boat and the carpenter would think of his workbench and tools. These things are necessary equipment for their trades and enable them to produce to sell and increase their wealth.

A. Capitalism

The Bible does not see private ownership of the means of production as morally wrong. We read of righteous Job that 'His substance... was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east' (Job 1.3). We read of Abraham that he 'was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold' (Genesis 12.2). Clearly, if these godly men were 'capitalists', there is nothing wrong with the private ownership of capital in itself.

B. Capitalists

The Books of I and II Kings illustrate that an institution can be righteous but the occupant wicked. After monarchy was instituted by God, the Jews had good kings and bad kings. Saul was a mixed blessing but David was a man after God's own heart. Both reigned but Saul did not reign well and persecuted David; whereas David reigned well and was a blessing to the people. Monarchy was not the problem but sinful sovereigns. So it is in economics. Capitalism is not the problem but selfish or dishonest capitalists. In Acts 5 we

learn that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not the private possession of a business asset but deceit in the sanctuary of God. Peter's reproof is clear on this point. Note the words, 'why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, *was it not thine own?* and after it was sold, *was it not in thine own power?* why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God' (Acts 5.3-4). What was good in itself, the ownership of a business asset, was polluted by personal sin.

C. Economic reformation

Like monarchy, fundamental reformation begins in the heart. Quakers, such as the Rowntrees, were benevolent industrialists because they had new hearts and their industry was motivated by a sense of stewardship to God and modified by compassion to one's neighbour. Manasseh was one of the Jews' worst kings. 'He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel' (2 Kings 21.2). However, 'when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers' (2 Chronicles 33.12). He returned a changed man and 'took away the strange gods' and 'repaired the altar of the Lord' (2 Chronicles 33.15). The Prodigal returned a changed man when he recognized his folly and repented of his sin. Zaccheus, when he believed and received Christ into his home, was a changed man and said, 'Behold, Lord, the *half* of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him *fourfold*' (Luke 19.8).

Conclusion

We do not say that all secular capitalists are unfair or dishonest. The press reports on not a few that are but what we affirm is that faith in Christ lifts business enterprise to a completely new level and the more extensive the renovation the more wonderful the outcome.

The Psalmist in Psalm 67 prays thus, 'Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. *Then shall the earth yield her*

increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him' (Psalm 67.5-7).

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