

**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup>D. Morris, *The Naked Ape* (New York: Dell, 1967).  
<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.  
<sup>3</sup>H. J. Morowitz, "The High Cost of Being Human," *New York Times*, 11 Feb. 1979, p. 41.  
<sup>4</sup>J. Monod, *Chance and Necessity* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1971).  
<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 112-13.  
<sup>6</sup>F. Schaeffer, *Back to Freedom and Dignity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972).  
<sup>7</sup>Monod, pp. 172-73.  
<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 180.  
<sup>9</sup>Schaeffer, p. 14.  
<sup>10</sup>J. Monod, quoted by J. C. Hess, *New York Times*, 15 Mar. 1971, p. 6.  
<sup>11</sup>Schaeffer, p. 15.  
<sup>12</sup>B. F. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1971).  
<sup>13</sup>Monod, quoted by Hess, p. 6.  
<sup>14</sup>F. Crick, "Why I Study Biology," a lecture delivered in St. Louis (March 1971) and quoted by Schaeffer, pp. 16-22.  
<sup>15</sup>Monod, *Chance and Necessity*, pp. 112, 180.

**Recommended Reading**

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## Chapter 4 Christian Doubts about Economic Dogmas

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*J. David Richardson*

What is meant by "The Christian Alternative to Secular Dogma" in the sphere of economics? What does economics believe which could in any way be construed as an alternative to Christian belief? My answer is threefold and will serve to outline my talk.<sup>1</sup>

First, economics has views on the nature of man that are shared in common by most economists worldwide but differ from Christian views.

Second, economics has views on the desirability of certain "economic systems" (a term I will define later) which can be classified broadly along a continuum from individualist to collectivist systems. In Christian belief, however, far more important than the systems themselves are economic relationships among individuals and groups *within* an economic system.

Third, some economic historians, commentators and a

group of people we might call economic humanists have charged that the Christian faith (especially in the West) has been used to justify attitudes toward work, property and the environment which have caused significant injury and suffering. To that indictment the Christian must respond that the Christian faith has not been *used* to justify those attitudes, but *abused*.

### **Economic Man**

What is the economist's view of the nature of man? It is this: A person's economic well-being depends on the amount of goods and services at his or her personal command; each person's goal is to achieve maximal personal economic well-being. Thus the creature whom we call "economic man" is materialistic, egocentric and immoderate (or you might say just plain greedy).

Now believe it or not, Christians *can* accept that as a useful characterization of human beings in their actions before they have encountered and surrendered to the living, loving God. But Christians reject it as a *complete* characterization of humanity. Even unredeemed persons are not *just* materialistic, egocentric, immoderate and nothing more. As Jesus himself said, quoting the Old Testament, "Man cannot live on bread alone" (Mt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3—both TEV). Of course careful economists also reject "economic man" as a complete characterization of the nature of man—because careful economists recognize the inability of the logic called economics to explain *all* human behavior. Even so, we have had a spate of articles lately on the economics of crime, cheating and lying, child production, extramarital affairs and even, in a recent textbook, a chapter called "Dying: The Most Economical Way to Go."

Christians go even further than careful economists in rejecting "economic man" as an adequate characterization of human nature. Christians believe that even if you could devise an economic system that would finally make all in-

dividuals materially prosperous by their own definitions—including among material things child production, extramarital affairs, method of dying and so on—you would not thereby have made them happy. Nor would you necessarily have made them happier than they were before they became prosperous. Christians believe that the only lasting happiness comes from drawing close to the living, loving God through Jesus Christ, whom Scripture calls "the exact likeness of God's own being" (Heb. 1:3 TEV). And when men and women draw close to God through Jesus Christ, he inhabits them in such a way that the most important things to them in life are *not* material anymore. They are able to look *beyond themselves* to other men and women around them, see them through God's eyes and love them in imitation of his love ("as they love their own selves," the Bible says). For a Christian, the whole materialistic, egocentric, immoderate nature of man is replaced by a *new nature*.

### **Economic Systems**

A second area in which Christians may disagree with economics has to do with "economic systems," by which I mean institutional structures within which economic men and women conduct their business. In fact, economists disagree among themselves on the desirability of alternative economic systems. Even economists will admit that *this* aspect of the field cannot be value free.

On the far right within economics are the defenders of "economic individualism." That system, in which every man and woman is free to compete in a marketplace, features voluntary action. Prices, and not the policy decisions of any government or bureaucracy, determine the allocation of privately owned resources to various economic activities. Prices determine the amount of production and the distribution of that production to members of the society, who then own it privately as individuals. Defenders

of economic individualism are able to show that under certain conditions, an economic system based on private property, markets and voluntary transactions maximizes the material goods available to the system as a whole.

Defenders of “economic collectivism,” the opposing perspective within economics, doubt the realism of those conditions.

What *really* happens, say the defenders of collectivism, is that systems based on markets, private property and competition invariably produce a large set of “losers”—people who are forced into *involuntary* action by the individualism of others. Losers don’t have the strength, wealth, position, intelligence or aggressiveness that “winners” have. The result for the losers is a cycle of indignity, weakness, dependence, poverty and exploitation that leads to alienation from the winners, and to bitterness, sullenness and lack of self-respect. That vicious circle is perpetuated from generation to generation.

That circle, in the eyes of collectivists, can be immoral. The losers are in a sense disenfranchised by the individualistic market system. The so-called freedom inherent in an extreme individualistic market system could equally well be described as “license,” or as “freedom to exploit.”

In a collectivist economic system, the vicious circle is broken in principle by having a representative government to overrule, and maybe even replace markets, in order to assure a “fair” distribution of wealth, consumption, position and education.

We can immediately see the awkward problem in collectivism of deciding what is *fair*. This is a moral problem which Christians do not believe that people on their own have the right to solve. But we see just as clearly the equally awkward identification in economic individualism of *fairness* with what the system actually produces—that is, the identification of what *should be* with what *is*, which Christians reject, as Prof. Becker made clear in the preceding lecture.

So what *do* Christians believe about economic systems? It seems at first blush to depend on where in the world those Christians live. Many Christians in the U.S. and Canada feel strongly that Christianity and systems of economic individualism go together hand in hand. Radical Christians, a minority worldwide, feel strongly that Christianity and systems of economic collectivism go together hand in hand. Both groups of Christians support their views adamantly and stridently and cite appropriate biblical passages to buttress them.

But I am afraid that both have “added to the Christian faith” what does not belong—in a way that Scripture explicitly prohibits. The Bible itself holds out with approval primitive models of *both* economic individualism *and* economic collectivism. With reference to individualism, much of Jewish law, beginning with “thou shalt not steal,” revolves around private rights and conduct in the marketplace for private employers of labor, private lenders of financial capital, individual farmers and individual merchants. With reference to collectivism, Scripture records how Joseph nationalized production and property during the great Egyptian famine (Gen. 47:13-26). It records that the early Christian church in Jerusalem held all property and goods collectively, distributing it among themselves under the direction of governing apostles and deacons “as any had need” (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-35; 6:1-7). That scriptural phrase, incidentally, reappears in the writings of Karl Marx.

The Bible, which Christians believe to be God’s own word, is also evenhanded in its disapproval of certain aspects of economic systems. It indicts economic exploitation of the weak by the strong under economic individualism as well as exploitation of the governed by the economic governors under economic collectivism (Eccles. 5:8; Ezek. 22:25, 27; 34:1-10). This discussion reveals that the most important economic imperatives in the Christian faith relate to the ways that individuals treat individuals and the

ways that groups treat groups under *any* economic system—wherever it lies along the continuum between individualism and collectivism.

For example, the economically strong and rich are specifically enjoined again and again through Scripture to provide for the economically weak and poor. Creditors are specifically forbidden to deprive debtors of clothing or the means of livelihood as collateral for loans; they are instructed to cancel all debts every seven years. Employers are specifically enjoined from depriving employees of just wages. Slaves are instructed to “work heartily” for their masters (Col. 3:23), as if their master were God himself. Slave owners are reminded that they themselves are like slaves to the Master/Creator (Col. 4:1) and must treat their slaves with the same love and provision that God has shown to them.

A Christian hopes and prays that such biblical economic imperatives for *relationships* will be observed in every economic *system*. Simultaneously, a Christian doubts that the economic morality which God ordains will be brought about more or less predictably by *any* particular economic system or any economic set of institutions.

### The Work Ethic

That brings us to the third area in which Christians and some secular economists disagree. The Christian faith is sometimes castigated by secular commentators for creating and defending a “work ethic” in which material wealth and prosperity are the direct rewards for economic ambition and diligence. Even if that work ethic sounds okay, the other side of the coin is that material poverty and destitution are then the direct result of indolence and sloth. The sinister implications of the so-called Christian work ethic (say the commentators) are undeniable. First, property becomes the *right* of the propertied classes, no matter how attained; “he who violates my property violates my rights.”

Second, poverty becomes the “just deserts” of the impoverished; “if only they were more ambitious and more diligent they would rise from poverty.” A third sinister implication, say these commentators, is that nature itself is seen as private property, to be polluted, defoliated and made extinct as the propertied classes see fit.

Too all those accusations a Christian responds a resounding “not guilty.” If we are sensitive Christians, we do so repentantly, however, recognizing that we are partially responsible if we ever allow *abusers* of the Christian faith to claim its sanction and power without our strong challenge. It is really abuse of the faith on which the secular view is focused.

In the matter of indolence and the work ethic, the Christian faith is not what the secular view thinks. Admittedly, Scripture is clear on the inevitable consequences of laziness. But Scripture is equally clear (a) that there is *no* salvation through hard work or effort; (b) that material wealth and prosperity are often *not* the direct results of diligence or ambition, but rather a freely given gift of God to those whom he chooses to bless with them; and (c) that people are often *not* responsible for their own poverty and destitution. Often they have inherited it from earlier generations or have been victimized by the economic manipulation and aggression of the rich and strong.

The writer of Proverbs said: “Be wise enough not to wear yourself out trying to get rich. Your money can be gone in a flash, as if it had grown wings and flown away like an eagle” (23:4 TEV). The writer of Ecclesiastes said: “I have . . . learned why people work so hard to succeed: it is because they envy the things their neighbors have. But it is useless. It is like chasing the wind . . . it is better to have only a little, with peace of mind, than be busy all the time with both hands, trying to catch the wind” (4:4-6 TEV). The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews said: “Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what

you have. For God has said, 'I will never leave you; I will never abandon you' (13:5 TEV). And Jesus Christ said, "Watch out and guard yourself from every kind of greed; because a person's life is not made up of the things he owns, no matter how rich he may be" (Lk. 12:15 TEV).

What is the Christian response to the secular accusation that Christians feel that all their property is theirs by right? The Christian answer is that all property is the Lord's. We are at best only temporary stewards of it under his watchful eyes and under his ultimate judgment. The psalmist said, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (24:1 NIV). The apostle Paul made personal application of that divine-ownership claim even more graphic in his first letter to the Corinthians (6:19-20 TEV): even one's own body is not one's property, he said. "You do not belong to yourselves but to God; he bought you for a price." And Moses predated both by declaring, "To the LORD belong even the highest heavens; the earth is his also, and everything on it" (Deut. 10:14 TEV).

C. S. Lewis, the late British medievalist and Christian apologist, expanded on these biblical themes in an engaging way in the *Screwtape Letters*, which might be regarded as a set of professorial lecture notes for distribution to all students—only the professor is a satanic scholar and the student is a junior devil.

Here is what the satanic scholar says to his young advisee:

The sense of ownership in general is always to be encouraged. The humans are always putting up claims to ownership which sound equally funny in Heaven and in Hell, and we must keep them doing so. Much of the modern resistance to chastity comes from men's belief that they "own" their bodies. . . . It is as if a royal child whom his father has placed, for love's sake, in titular command of some great province, under the real rule of wise counsellors, should come to fancy he really owns the

cities, the forests, and the corn, in the same way as he owns the bricks on the nursery floor. . . .

And all the time the joke is that the word "mine" in its fully possessive sense cannot be uttered by a human about anything. In the long run either Our Father [Satan] or the Enemy [God] will say "mine" of each thing that exists, and specially of each man. They will find out in the end, never fear, to whom their time, their souls, and their bodies really belong—certainly not to *them*, whatever happens. At present the Enemy [God] says "mine" of everything on the pedantic, legalistic ground that He made it. Our Father [Satan] hopes in the end to say "mine" of all things on the more realistic and dynamic ground of conquest.<sup>2</sup>

Some Christians may mistakenly think that the Lord's injunction to "subdue the earth" (Gen. 1:28) provides some justification for despoiling and destroying the environment, or may mistakenly think that the animal kingdom is to be exploited and disposed of at human whim. They should be reminded of the words spoken by the psalmist about God himself: "You show your care for the land by sending rain"; "Men and animals are in your care" (65:9; 36:6 TEV). It is sobering to remember that God found his created universe *good* and it is not our place to destroy it, but God's.

I have been speaking extensively of the *biblical* imperatives for economic behavior and economic relationships because a Christian goes to the Bible as the primary source of God's revealed will for humankind. In the next lecture Prof. Keith Schoville from the university's department of Hebrew and Semitic studies will discuss the desirability of using the Bible that way, and why it can be trusted.

### **A Christian Alternative**

So far I've made Christian economic imperatives an alternative to secular economic imperatives, but not necessarily

a *compelling* alternative.

As Prof. Becker stated, however, we are taking part in this lecture series because we find Christianity compelling as an alternative to secular dogma. The most important reason we find it compelling is that a Christian *can* answer the question, "Why *this* system of economic values and not some other?" The answer is, because the Christian set of economic values is based through and through on the principle, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." Of course so are some other systems of values. But they, unlike Christianity, rarely have an answer to the awkward further question, "Why *should* I love my neighbor as I love myself?" The Christian answer to that question is this: because God loves your neighbor and insists that we as Christians see as much in our neighbor as he himself does.

The Bible teaches that God is *every* man's and *every* woman's suitor. His love is not always returned, but when it is, and an "engagement" takes place, there is rejoicing in heaven and on earth. The implication of God's "courtship" of human beings for Christian economic morality (and for any other social morality) is that God will be as enraged as any suitor or fiancé when we mistreat the ones he loves. His love is essentially the same for the nonbelievers he courts as for the believers he plans to "wed." Hence our Christian economic conduct should be essentially the same toward non-Christians as it is toward Christians.

Further, God's potential anger if we disobey is only one factor that motivates Christian social and economic morality. The other is his plan that his love should *inhabit us*, that we should be transformed by his indwelling presence to become suitors and fiancés ourselves of all other men and women—because we want to, not because we have to.

What do Christians mean when they say "God *loves* all men and women?" The Bible answers that in the book of Colossians in beautiful *economic* terminology: "You were at one time spiritually dead because of your sins. . . . But God

has now brought you to life with Christ. God forgave us all our sins; he canceled the unfavorable record of our debts . . . and did away with it completely by nailing it to the cross" (2:13-14 TEV).

My wish for each of you is that you have seen or will see the heavy ledger of your debts to God nailed to the cross of Jesus, so that he bears the weight of that ledger, canceling your debt. That is why he came—in love.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>I would like to express thanks to John Dodge, one of our graduate students, for his critical input into this discussion, and for a very useful set of bibliographical references.

<sup>2</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 97-99.

**Recommended Reading**

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## Chapter 5 The Reliability of the Scriptural Documents

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*Keith Schoville*

I am part of the faculty of the humanities division of the College of Letters and Science. The humanities are concerned with art, architecture, history, philosophy and literature, among other things. Since literature is one of the humanistic concerns, and since I work with literature, it seems appropriate that I should speak about the Bible, the fundamental literature—in terms of pervasive influence—of western civilization.

More specifically, I want to discuss the historical reliability of the scriptural documents because in our contemporary society there is a widely held viewpoint, a dogma if you will, that the Bible is irrelevant to the needs of humanity.

**Secular Dogma**

Today's secular dogma about the unreliability of the Bible appears in three basic forms: in modern critical scholarship, in atheistic humanism and among indifferent individuals.