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From the Editor:

The Study Group meeting in Oxford in July was once again an interesting and thought provoking meeting. I hope very much that the papers presented there will appear in print before too long.

In this issue there are two articles and one review. The first article by John Atherton is his survey of Christian social thought which he presented as the "post-prandial seminar" at last year's Study Group meeting. I am very pleased that he has found time to "put fingers to keyboard" so that those who were not present can enjoy it, and those who were have an opportunity to consider it again. The second is by John Mason and appraises US welfare policy from a biblical point of view. It is equally pertinent to the British context. The article appeared in a slightly different form in the Fall 1993 issue of the North American ACE Bulletin, and he has very kindly given permission for it to be reproduced in the ACE Journal for the benefit of British members. Finally Esmond Burnie has contributed an invited review of Oxford political philosopher John Gray's important IEA monograph: "The Moral Foundations of Market Institutions".

The latest issue of the North American ACE Bulletin (Spring 1994) contains four papers from their workshop held in January in Boston along with discussant comments. The papers are "What Should Christian Economists Do? Doing Economics, But Differently" by John Tiemstra, "Passing Judgements" by Paul Heyne, "What Should Christian Economists Do? ... Economics!" by David Richardson, and "Whose Theology? Which Economics?" by Bruce Webb. They are selling individual copies for \$9 (includes postage to the UK). The easiest way to obtain a copy is to send cash to Prof. John Mason, Gordon College, Wenham, MA 01984, USA.

North American ACE members have also established an Internet email reflector (called ace-net) for promoting discussion/questions about Economics and Christianity. Anyone who has email facilities can send in an email message and it will be "reflected" on to all those who are currently "subscribing" to the group. To obtain further information send an email containing the single line:

info ace-net

to majordomo@ux1.cso.uiuc.edu ; to join send the single line message:

subscribe ace-net

to the same email address.

As always I am keen to hear from anyone who has a paper to contribute or would like to write for the Journal, and from anyone who has found a book worth reviewing.

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WHERE DO SPIRITUALITY AND ECONOMICS MEET?

John Atherton, Canon Theologian, Manchester Cathedral and Hon. Lecturer, Manchester University

To suggest strong convergences between spirituality and economics, which are to their mutual benefit, appears, at first sight, to be a contradiction in terms. Spirituality is still considered to be a predominantly personal matter, focused essentially on the inner life of individuals; economics is concerned with resource allocation and transcribes the personal into economic man. Yet both understandings have been challenged in this generation. Since the 1960s, there has been a growing Christian commitment to social involvement, and to the formative place of spirituality within it. Vatican II, and the emergence of the liberationist perspective after Medellin in 1968, and the Keele Conference (1967) and subsequent events in the evangelical tradition, witness to the strong relationship between Christian social witness, spirituality, and the need to address critically, modern economic trends. These developments have been paralleled by growing criticisms of economics from within the discipline, including criticisms of the divergences between economic technicalities and human and environmental issues. In this regard, I think immediately of the work of Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (1973), Herman E. Daley (ed) *Towards a Steady-State Economy* (1974), and the liberal critical position running from Keynes to Galbraith.

Despite these signs of convergence between spirituality and economics, it would be unwise for a non-economist to approach the subject of spirituality and economics too directly. In seeking to elaborate the nature and importance of that relationship for Christianity and economics, I therefore propose to illustrate my argument from work on the development of contemporary Christian social thought and practice as it relates to economic affairs. In doing so, I will point to its implications for the link between spirituality and economics, and suggest fruitful avenues for further work. What I am convinced about, is that an adequate spirituality of economics is of central importance for the future development of Christian social thought and practice in contemporary societies.

Learning from the Story of Social Christianity

My own work on Christian social thought and practice has taken place in the same generation which has witnessed the changing understanding of economics and spirituality. The

results are described in two volumes, *Christianity and the Market: Christian Social Thought for our Times* (SPCK, 1992) and *Social Christianity: A Reader* (SPCK, 1994). The latter especially reflects a journey into major Christian responses to the emergence of modern urban-industrial societies. In doing so, it focuses particularly on economic affairs because of their central role in the modernisation process. It has been a rewarding and humbling journey not least because it has revealed the great stature of the most formative exponents of social Christianity. It has been a revealing experience, too, because time and time again, I observed the surprising but central place of spirituality in the Christian response to economic change. It is therefore on these experiences that I intend to concentrate my energies in the hope that they will provide a rich source for elaborating the relationship between spirituality and economics and its implications for the contemporary Christian task.

I will examine the story of social Christianity in two stages, the first addressing social Christianity directly, and the second recognising the different but related contribution of Christian political economy.

The first stage: the story of social Christianity

Most public attention has been focused on the critical response of social Christianity to the emergence of urban-industrial societies in the UK and USA. It is important to recognise that that response reflects a spectrum of opinion which varies from the radical rejection of the market economy and its replacement with a socialist command economy, to a grudging toleration of the market as mechanism, subordinated to wider social and political purposes (it regards the market at best as a servile drudge). The latter stance, as Christian social reform, has come to dominate official Church opinion on economic affairs in the UK and USA, and is reflected in such statements as *Faith in the City*, *Mission Alongside the Poor*, and *Economic Justice for All*. It is best represented in its recent development as Christian social ethics, and through its principal exponents, Ronald Preston in the UK, and J. Philip Wogaman in the USA. The former stance, as radical Christian socialism, is only thinly present in the UK, through the work of Ken Leech (also one of the foremost exponents of a social spirituality - see his recent *The Eye of the Storm*, 1992). This stance has a stronger presence in the USA, through the work of people like Gary Dorrien, firmly in the tradition of a Christian democratic socialism, and increasingly through the development of liberationist thinking as it affects race (James Cone's *The Black Church and Marxism: What do they have to say to each other?* 1980), and sexuality (Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* 1983). Its major flowering, of course, has been in the growth of Third World liberation theology, particularly in Latin America, through such Roman Catholic conferences as Medellin (1968)

and Puebla (1979), and through the work of Gutiérrez, Sorbrino, the Boff brothers and Segundo (in the Catholic tradition), and Bonino (on the Protestant side). It is this strand which dominates WCC thinking on economics in general, and market systems in particular. In this connection, the work of Ulrich Duchrow has been particularly formative (see his *Global Economy*, 1987).

It is in this radical strand of social Christianity, that a social spirituality has been most influential, and continues to inform its understanding and contribution to Christian social witness. Essentially, it can be described, in a capitalist world; as a spirituality of protest, of resistance, of developing a counter-culture and alternative communities. It has been strongest in the more Catholic-oriented traditions - I think of the Anglican work of Stewart Headlam, and his Guild of St Matthew (1877), with their strong emphasis on sacramental socialism; the Christendom Trust and the work of Maurice Reckitt and V.A. Demant, and their links with Guild Socialism and Major Douglas' social credit schemes; and into the present with the work of Ken Leech in the UK, and the Roman Catholic Gustavo Gutiérrez in Latin America. The last two in particular have emphasised the importance of the link between spirituality and radical social action - indeed Gutiérrez's revolutionary approach to Christian social thought and practice, and its emphasis on *praxis* as the primary Christian act, and theological reflection as secondary, is imbued throughout with a deep commitment to and understanding of spirituality. To Gutiérrez, 'our method is our spirituality'. (See especially his *We Drink from our own Wells: the Spiritual Journey of a People* 1984). Yet the Protestant tradition of spirituality has also had some strong witnesses in the development of radical Christian socialism - in this regard, I call to mind the work of the great Baptist pastor, and leader of the American Social Gospel, Walter Rauschenbusch. His organisation or community, the Brotherhood of the Kingdom (1893), and his book *Prayers of the Social Awakening* (1910) are impressive testaments to social spirituality. Ulrich Duchrow, a German Lutheran theologian has developed equivalent modern examples, through his discipleship groups.

In emphasising the radical Christian socialist strand, I do not underestimate the contribution of the more moderate Christian social reform strand to our understanding of spirituality. The lives and work of F.D. Maurice, Brook Foss Westcott, Charles Gore, and William Temple represent the substantial evidence for the nature and power of a social spirituality in the critical Christian engagement with contemporary society. The development of this strand, increasingly dominated by the professional Christian social ethics of Preston and

Wogaman, has not continued this serious involvement in practice or spirituality.

The tradition of social Christianity, and especially as radical Christian socialism, is therefore of particular importance for the construction of a relationship between spirituality and economics today, because of the significant role played by spirituality in its radical critique of market economies in general, and by implication, of modern economics. It stands as a continued reminder of a primary Christian commitment to social justice, peace and the integrity of creation (the latest WCC slogan), and to the critical shortfall between that gospel standard, and the disturbing consequences of a global market economy for the great bulk of the world's population and environment. In support of such a confessional stance (as Duchrow sees it), it has developed a social spirituality resourced:

- a) by communities of resistance (from Maurice's Bible study group in 1848, Gore's Holy Party in 1875, and the Community of the Resurrection, 1894, to Gutiérrez's base communities and the evangelical Jim Wallis' Sojourners today);
- b) by a militant reading of the Scriptures (from Maurice's reflections on the Lord's Prayer in the light of the 1848 revolutions, to Duchrow's reflections on the Exodus today, and Jim Wallis' *Agenda for a Bible People*) and
- c) by a deep commitment to prayer and sacraments (from Headlam's view of a holy communion for holy communists, through Rauschenbusch's prayers for workers and a co-operative society, to the Trappist monk Thomas Merton's linking of contemplation and radical social action).

The strengths of radical social Christianity, and its contribution to a spirituality related to economics, are clear, and relate to its criticism of market economies and economics. Its weaknesses are also equally clear - it often has little detailed understanding of, or sympathy with, the work of modern economics.

The second stage: the story of Christian political economy

It is through the story of the Christian political economists that that imbalance in social Christianity was addressed. It was only after I had become conversant with the tradition of social Christianity, that I came to realise the existence of a quite different tradition of Christian social thought and practice which predated Maurice's Christian socialism by exactly fifty years. Beginning in 1798 (according to Tony Waterman's *Revolution, Economics and Religion*, 1991) with the publication of Malthus' *Principle of Population*, there emerged a strong Christian contribution to the development of early modern economics and the market system. The key exponents, besides Malthus, were Sumner and his *Treatise on the Record of Creation*, Copleston, Whatley and Chalmers. Its contemporary exponents include the biblically based

work of Brian Griffiths in the UK, and the Roman Catholic Michael Novak in the USA (the latter's work on a theology of economics has, like Griffiths, a strong apologetic character in support of more free market economies. Novak is very aware of the nature and importance of spirituality in the Roman Catholic tradition, and is reported to be a close adviser of the present Pope). As neo-conservatism, it has been particularly influential in the UK and USA, since 1980.

The strength of Christian political economy lies essentially in its understanding of modern economics, and its supportive interpretation of market economies. Its weakness lies in the inadequacy of its criticisms of market economies and economics. It is out of this tradition, that I will develop what I regard as a very necessary appreciative understanding of modern economics in relation to spirituality, to complement the spirituality of the criticism of market economies and economics.

Learning from the relationship between the stories of social Christianity and Christian political economy has been a formative influence on the development of my understanding of Christian social thought. For example, it has suggested my working model for contemporary political economy. This consists of a recognition of market economies and economics as the least harmful way as yet known to us for the operating of advanced economies. Yet because of their intrinsic limitations, market economies have to be held in an interactive relationship with the great challenges in our world, including poverty and the environment. The outcome of that interaction has consequences for the market economy, including its internal dynamic between social purposes and market mechanism, and its continuing interaction with the external global forces of poverty and the environment. Both interactions will require at least a continual reform and development of market economies and economics in the foreseeable future. At most, the processes could lead to their replacement on a longer time scale.

What is important for our agenda, is the need to recognise the implications of this model for the relationship of spirituality and economics. For example, it suggests the need to take account of the two perspectives on spirituality which derive from a consideration of the two stories of Christian political economy and social Christianity, relating, as they do, in turn, to the market economy, and to the global challenges. It therefore requires a Christian stance which is able to hold both stories and perspectives in a creative tension. So a commitment to the

preferential option for the poor should be in dialogue with the spirituality of market economics; equally a commitment to market economics must be in dialogue with the spirituality of an option for the poor. At this point in our history, I now find little excuse for the intentional pursuit of either perspective to the exclusion of the other.

At this stage in my argument, it will perhaps be helpful if I give a brief resumé of the two perspectives on a spirituality of economics which have to be held together. First, the spirituality associated with the global challenges is integrally related to the continuing history of social Christianity, especially (but not exclusively) to its more radical strand. It can be seen to centre, in today's global Church, on the commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation - and its extremely critical stance against market economies. As we have already noted, it is a spirituality perspective richly elaborated in terms of commitments to community, scripture, prayer and sacraments. The literature in this tradition is very powerful in terms of quality and quantity, including in the corpus of spirituality itself (for example, see Terry Tastard, *The Spark in the Soul: Spirituality and Social Justice*, DLT 1989; Gerard W. Hughes, *God of Surprises*, DLT 1985; Donald Dorr, *Integral Spirituality: Resources for Community, Justice, Peace and the Earth*, Orbis Books 1990).

The second spirituality perspective is involved directly with market economies and economics. It is therefore of great importance for developing the relationship between spirituality and economics. Yet it is precisely in this area that existing resources are weakest - a point noted by Novak, in his *Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. What he fails to do, however, is to develop his arguments beyond the defence of a free market economy, to address market economics itself. That is what I want to explore now.

Notes for the development of a theology and spirituality relevant to market economies and economics: the contribution of a reformulation of natural theology

I have already noted that such a theology and spirituality must include a serious dialogue with social Christianity, and therefore what I am about to elaborate, must be developed in an interactive relationship with this other perspective on spirituality.

I have found it helpful to explore a reformulated natural theology, and its implications for spirituality and economics, for two reasons:

- i We should recognise its strategic role in the historical development of Christian political economy, and beginning not with Malthus, but with William Paley. Beside Paley's main works, *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*

(1785), and *Evidences: A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794), and *Natural Theology* (1802), note M.L. Clarke, *Paley: Evidences for the Man* (University of Toronto Press and SPCK 1974), and D.L. Le Mahieu *The Mind of William Paley: A Philosopher and His Age* (University of Nebraska Press, 1976), and *The Role of Providence in the Social Order*, Jacob Viner (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, Volume 90, 1972).

- ii We should note its reappearance and reformulation in the works of contemporary scientists. Particularly helpful is John Polkinghorne's splendid trilogy, *One World: The interaction of science and theology* (1986 SPCK), *Science and Creation: The Search for Understanding* (1988 SPCK), and *Science and Providence: God's Interaction With the World* (1989 SPCK). Obviously, the natural sciences must be clearly distinguished from the social sciences, but it is worth exploring possible resonances between them, as a contribution to the reformulation of a natural theology and spirituality for economics. I feel drawn in this direction, given the strong emphasis in social Christianity, especially in the Social Gospel movement in the USA, on the use of sociology as a dominant mediating tool for presenting Christianity in an industrialised world (a trend continued with the use of Marxism in liberation theology). My hunch is that these developments need to be complemented by the use of insights drawn from the debate between the natural sciences and theology, noting their relevance for the development of a theology and spirituality relevant to economics. In doing so, I am trying to hold together two perspectives, represented by opposing views on natural theology in the eighteenth century. So Bishop Butler wrote to Wesley, "Sir, pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing." Opposing him was Shelley in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, "I had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than get to heaven with Paley and Malthus."

In discussing natural theology as a potential Christian source for interpreting economic affairs, I will use Polkinghorne's definition: "the search for God through the exercise of reason and the inspection of the world." (*Science and Creation*, p. xii). For our concern, it should be noted that natural theology provided the principal area of interaction for the origins of modern science and theology. For example, the doctrine of creation, including as elaborated by Puritans in the seventeenth century, is regarded as an inspiration for the early origins of modern science. The Creator's mind promoted the view of an intelligible world, and God's freedom through the

human suggested the contingent character of nature, and the requirement of discovery rather than speculation. The theological and scientific tasks were therefore united, so that it was required of theology that it must "take account of all that we know about the world, in the course of its enquiry." (*Science and Creation*, p. 15). It fostered a view of theology supportive of scientific endeavour, and, I would argue, of economic endeavour. The world was seen as not "just a neutral theatre in which these individual revelatory acts take place." Rather it was "the creation of God, and so potentially a vehicle also for his self-disclosure." (*Science and Creation*, p. 3).

Of course, the process of discerning the nature of God and his purposes for the world by rational reflection on the world was not a seventeenth century discovery. It was rooted in the Scriptures. For example, the Wisdom literature expressed a clear preference for patient observation rather than charismatic enlightenment, deriving a knowledge of God from general rather than particular experience. It promoted a universal character to thought, based on reflection on nature as well as man: "Behold, Behemoth, which I made as I made you" - as the Lord reminded Job. (40:15) It therefore also offered religious thought deliverance from a narrow anthropocentricity. In Moltmann's words, "no theological doctrine of creation must be allowed to reduce the understanding of belief in creation to the existential self-understanding of the person." (*God in Creation*, p. 36). The relationship of Wisdom literature to the interpretation of Christ as *logos*, completes this view of the Scriptures as a firm basis for natural theology. For Paul "Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature, namely his power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made". (Romans 1:20) It is a profound confirmation of von Rad's recognition that God used "quite different means, besides prophets and priests, whereby he could reach men, namely the voice of primeval order." (*Wisdom in Israel*, p. 163). It was this tradition which also flourished in the middle ages, reaching its climax in the work of Aquinas.

The quite different resurgence of natural theology in the late seventeenth century was build on the achievements of the renaissance and reformation. Its methods and assumptions were compatible with, and supportive of, the new scientific breakthroughs. It therefore recognised the insightfulness of Newton's second rule, "to the same natural effects we must, as far as possible, assign the same causes." (Le Mahieu, *The Mind of William Paley*, p. 37). By therefore seeking to find understandings of God in the certainties of nature, it submitted beliefs to logic and reason. For Bishop Butler, it allowed the linking of abstract reasoning and the observation of facts. By disciplined reflection on nature, it allowed a delineation of the attributes of God (his intelligence, unity, and goodness). It enabled theologians, like Paley, to see God in all things. Indeed, it was Paley, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, who represented the maturity of this stage in the history of natural theology. He recognised that "The

change is no less than this: that, whereas formerly God was seldom in our thoughts, we can now scarcely look upon anything without perceiving its relation to him." (Le Mahieu, *The Mind of William Paley*, p.8; W. Paley, *Natural Theology*, p. 375). It suggested a religion based on 'fact' as well as feeling. It became the spiritual core of the enlightenment.

It is this perspective on the material world, on the structures and regularities of nature, which nourished the rich Christian relationship with modern natural sciences. What we should reflect on, is that it could engender a similar relationship between Christianity and the emergence of modern economics. For example, it is of some interest, that the formative opinion of Paley influenced Whately, who with Malthus, founded the Statistical Society in 1834. It was in the radical revision of his *Principles of Population*, that Malthus also drew on Paley's *Natural Theology*. Not for nothing did Keynes regard Parson Malthus as a founding father of modern economics, and Paley as his theological complement. What I am suggesting is that we learn from these theological and spiritual perspectives on both "scientific" developments. For Paley's natural theology and theological utilitarianism were far more than the dubious rational demonstration of God's existence, using the argument from design. It was even more than an exploration of God's attributes through the natural order, using scientific skills and discoveries. For all these arguments were "the visible and comprehensible expression of an inward, mysterious, and powerful faith." (Le Mahieu, p. 53).

For partly convincing reasons, well before the end of the nineteenth century, the natural theology of Paley had fallen into disrepute. Hume and Darwin between them demolished the intellectual thrust of the argument from design, the evangelical and anglo-catholic revivals marginalised the spiritual, ecclesiological and theological perspectives of natural theology, and the rise of social Christianity, particularly Christian socialism, condemned it as a fellow-traveller of an immoral laissez-faire capitalism. Their cumulative indiscriminate effect was to remove from the development of modern economics the potential support of discerning theology and spirituality related to the development of natural theology.

The attempt to reformulate a natural theology in the light of contemporary scientific discoveries, and therefore to face up to these historic limitations, should be welcomed as offering a possible source for developing a theology and spirituality relevant to the world of contemporary economics. For example, through the work of scientists like Polkinghorne, the post-enlightenment character of modern science is used to correct the earlier dependence of

natural theology on Newtonian physics. The new world of quantum theory and complex dynamic systems, postulates a fitful, probabilistic world, intrinsically unpredictable, yet alongside a world of regularity, order and intelligibility. It is that dynamic, conflictual and yet creative interaction which Polkinghorne captures so well. Eroding enlightenment confidence, it also rejects the extreme relativism of much post-modernist thinking. His summary of post-enlightenment science, has therefore, I believe, most fruitful implications for our task in exploring the relationship between a post classical economics and spirituality. He observes, "To acknowledge the limits of rationality, objectivity, and determinism is not to relinquish a belief in reason, a respect for reality or a search for order." (*One World*, p. 5).

It is in this spirit, that I note four insights which pave the way for this development of a reformulated natural theology, relevant to economics, with powerful implications for spirituality.

First, in reflecting on modern market economies and economics we should take seriously the scientific recognition of a world "characterized by order, intelligibility, potentiality, and a tightly knit structure." (Polkinghorne, *One World*, p. 13). Many scientists have seen such a perspective as verging on the religious. So Einstein observed that "In every true searcher of Nature there is a kind of religious reverence," (*op. cit.*, p. 64) and much more recently, Paul Davies noted how science offers a surer path to God than religion. From William Paley to Teilhard de Chardin, the patterns of the material world have been seen as disclosing some of the wondrous nature and purposes of God. The world of economics is at least partly related to that historical world and therefore shares in that potential for reverence. It is also a reminder that our spirituality includes the personal, but moves far beyond it. It includes an encounter with the material world as a whole including its resources, mechanisms and systems.

Secondly, such a perspective also performs "an antiseptic role", undercutting pretentious claims to esoteric knowledge. (Polkinghorne, *One World*, p. 65). The commitment to rational endeavour is a quite vital corrective to the excesses of much speculative and biblical theology. It is the reflection, in my *Christianity and the Market*, on such rational, scientific and economic autonomies, and the recognition of their contribution to illuminating the divine nature and purposes, which has caused some offence to those who restrict their reflections to the perceived moral values discerned in and through the particular acts of God, and to the normative character of economics.

Thirdly, such a natural theology should be affirmed as a legitimate and indispensable

complement to revelation theology. Its particular contribution to understanding God's nature and purposes, is, in Polkinghorne's words, "insightful rather than demonstrative." (*One World*, p. 78). As a rational response to the world science discloses, it represents "the search for God through the exercise of reason and the inspection of the world." (*Science and Creation*, p. xii). It therefore also protects us against an undue emphasis on the introspective view of spirituality and the Christian life. In Torrance's words, it is an integral part of theological endeavour, "a necessary infra-structure of theological science." (*Science and Creation*, p. 14).

Fourthly, the role of such natural theology as insightful is creatively conflictual. So it includes its disclosure of the intelligibility of the world, its patterns interlocking with our patterns of thinking, and in turn, with the reason of the Creator. Yet it also discloses a world in "which chance (including as the precariousness of love) and necessity (as God's faithfulness) symmetry and its spontaneous breakdown, interlace with each other." (*Science and Creation*, p. xiii). It suggests not the unfolding of an inexorable plan, ordained by God of necessity, but rather the "evolving potentiality of a universe in which choice and necessity maintain this fruitful interplay and within whose open process the immanent activity of God is at work." (*Science and Providence*, p. 97)

I believe such an interactive view coincides, in a creative way, with my understanding of market economies and economics interacting with the great challenges of poverty and environment. It provides a necessary complement to the social justice of social Christianity, as natural theology is to revelation theology. Both are essential for the development of the relationship between spirituality and economics. What must not be attempted, is such a development without the perspective to which I have linked natural theology. For far too long, the reality of the relatively autonomous world of economics has been neglected by social Christianity, or Christianity has engaged it by relying unduly on revelation (or biblical) theology. My reflections have sought to begin to correct these deficiencies.

BIBLICAL TEACHING & THE OBJECTIVES OF WELFARE POLICY IN THE U.S.

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Introduction

Few public programs have come in for as much criticism in the U.S. during the latter decades of the twentieth century as has welfare policy. From the nature of the attention paid this issue in recent political campaigns it is clear that a majority of citizens view long-term welfare "dependency" to have reached crisis proportions, requiring reforms to impose some form of work requirement ("workfare") as a condition for receiving public assistance. A prominent Clinton campaign theme in 1992, for example, was "two years and out" for those who go on welfare - after two years of receiving welfare a recipient would be expected to take a job to maintain eligibility.

On the conservative side of this emerging majority view lie those who would restrict welfare eligibility even more stringently than the current attempts at reform. At the least a tough form of workfare should exist, forcing recipients to take "just any job" as a condition of continued public assistance. At the extreme some critics would eliminate the state provision of welfare altogether, forcing the poor to rely on traditional forms of extended family support and charitable assistance.² Conservative critics share an assessment of socio-economic reality which combines the perception that sufficient employment opportunity exists within the American economy (for those willing to expend the necessary effort) along with great confidence in the capacity of virtually anyone (when pressed) to scrape by.

Liberal critics of the majority view today are either content with existing welfare structures or at most would allow a soft form of workfare - work encouragements and

1. The arguments of the paper have been informed by all members of the Welfare Responsibility team, with specific suggestions for improvement coming from Stanley Carlson-Thies, Lawrence Mead, and James Skillen. My colleague Stephen Smith made numerous suggestions to improve the presentation. I remain solely responsible for any remaining errors in analysis and awkwardness in presentation.

2. See C. Murray's substantial editorial page article, "The Coming White Underclass" Wall Street Journal (10/23/93).

expectations, but not tough requirements to take "just any job". Liberal critics argue that labor market prospects for lower income workers have diminished amidst a structural transformation away from high-paying manufacturing jobs and towards service sector jobs that pay high wages only for well-educated workers. To enforce anything approaching a harsh form of workfare in this economy would confront already discouraged poorer citizens with the unacceptable choice of terribly demeaning jobs or the loss of the only financial assistance available to them.

What ethical guidance can be brought to this important debate that would help the U.S. discern whether to embrace a soft or hard form of workfare, to remain with the existing system of welfare, or to seriously restrict if not eliminate the availability of welfare/workfare altogether? To confront these questions - as with all difficult questions facing a democracy - it is important for each ethical community in society to revisit and sharpen the instruction of its ethical tradition. Having done so it can re-enter the public square of contesting ethical traditions with a better understanding of the trade-offs it is willing to make, and lay the foundations for resolving the problems facing the administration of welfare in the United States.

This paper revisits the ethical foundations of those communities which seek contemporary guidance in the biblical (and especially pentateuchal) provisions concerning the proper treatment of the poor within society. In the late twentieth century this might seem to restrict its relevance to the theologically conservative branches of the Jewish and Christian traditions. The fit is too tight. From the colonial period to the present, to understand the American sense of moral obligation for the poor, whether expressed privately through charity or publicly through welfare, we must interact with the culturally conservative sympathies of orthodox Christianity.³ These sympathies have been strongly influenced by the biblical materials under examination in this paper. Hence a better understanding of the biblical provisions regarding treatment of the poor will allow us broader insight into the range of feasible options constraining current welfare policy and into the role that could and should be played by private assistance to the poor.

The paper develops in the following way. Section 1 argues that in order to wend our way through the numerous debates surrounding the administration of welfare, it is helpful to

3. See Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses & Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

discern the essential purpose of assistance to the poor in the social and economic order. The remaining sections of the paper take up our primary concern, an appeal to biblical teaching in the search for fresh ethical insight. Section 2 considers the structure of the welfare system commended by the Law of Moses for early Israel. This is followed in section 3 by an assessment of the normative objective(s) of that system. A concluding Section 4 applies the arguments drawn from the Bible to the current debate over American welfare policy. The essential argument of the paper is that assistance to the poor should have as its primary objective establishing and maintaining economically and socially secure families. This objective, as obvious as it sounds, has been deemphasized if not (in the design of some programs) abandoned altogether in the development of U.S. welfare policy in the twentieth century.

1. The Objectives of Welfare in the U.S.

Our appeal to the Bible is motivated by the dilemma we face as a society over how best to assist the poor in our midst. It will be helpful therefore to give some initial attention to the system of welfare in America, and especially to the basic objectives of this system as it has developed since the 1930s. First, what is meant by "welfare" in the latter decades of the twentieth century? In the popular mind welfare typically means three basic programs: 1) AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) - cash assistance to primarily single-parent, low-income families; 2) Food Stamps - coupons that can be used to purchase food; 3) Medicaid - in-kind (as opposed to cash) medical assistance. Casting the net a bit wider would draw in: 4) SSI (Supplemental Security Income) - cash assistance for those aged and disabled not adequately assisted by Social Security; 5) the EITC (Earned Income Tax Credit) - a reduction in the tax owed on earned income for poorer families; 6) access to publicly subsidized housing.

The broadest possible definition would embrace all state-mediated assistance helping those who would be poor without it, including many within the general Social Security system (including Medicare), a number of those receiving cash as unemployment compensation, publicly-funded education (Head Start, public schools generally), and numerous other programs.⁴

Tax-payer attention of late has focussed primarily on whether too many welfare recipients are being allowed to receive public assistance without having to work - and hence

4. Government-mediated income redistribution in general scatters benefits far wider than to the poor ("welfare" for the non-poor?), both earlier in our nation's history (as in government-enforced slavery) and at present (as in subsidies to farmers, educational funding, import protection, and many more).

the plea for "workfare". Other contested pieces of the welfare puzzle in recent years include the following. What are the legitimate rights of welfare recipients in their dealings with state agencies? Should a woman on welfare be granted increased assistance when she bears additional children? What should be the appropriate levels of financial assistance provided to the poor, and should individual states be allowed to establish substantially different support levels (thus creating incentives for welfare recipients to relocate among states in order to receive more adequate assistance levels)? Should the state aggressively identify and pursue non-supporting parents (even teen fathers?) and force them to contribute financially towards the support of their children?

A danger resides however in becoming so focussed on any one issue that we fail to maintain a clear vision of what the system of welfare properly is designed to achieve within society. This tendency has led us too often to outcomes contrary to what was intended in the flush of initial concern, thus contributing to what some have called a "patchwork" or "band-aid" system of welfare. For example, out of an earlier concern not to provide public assistance to employable males, we created incentives for some families not to form in the first place and for some marriages to officially break up in an effort to gain eligibility for public assistance. This generated a higher level of welfare assistance, along with who knows what other undesirable outcomes because children are being raised in single parent households. If we now fail to increase financial assistance for a subsequent child once a mother is receiving welfare, might the end result be greater funding through other programs (criminal justice perhaps) because the mother is not able to offer proper care?

Certainly each piece of the welfare puzzle warrants the popular attention assigned it, along with rigorous ethical and socio-economic analysis, if we ever hope to reach a broadly accepted resolution to the administration of welfare. However to evaluate properly the separate pieces of the welfare problem in a way which lessens the potential for counter-productive reforms, it is necessary to have a firm grasp on welfare's purpose in the social and economic order. How do we find ethical touchstones with which to examine each important issue? The argument I advance here is that having a clearer grasp on the overall social purpose of welfare should help us develop the needed criteria. In this regard it is useful to consider several expert assessments of the objectives of the American welfare system as it developed since the 1930s.

Numerous scholars have pored through the historical records and policy frameworks which define the origins and development of welfare in the U.S., seeking to discern what it is that we as a nation have intended in this controversial institution.⁵ Working from the debates and commentary of the time, historian James Patterson assesses the first substantive federal commitment to welfare in the 1930s as follows:

The most obvious characteristic of the new order was its primary reliance on contributory social insurance and its concomitant distaste for welfare, a reliance reflecting the age-old distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. The American emphasis, moreover, was unique; other western nations developed a blend of social policies, including family allowances, health services, housing allowances, and assistance, that benefited poor and nonpoor alike and obscured the distinction between social insurance and welfare. The separation of the two policies in the United States narrowed severely the scope of welfare, segregating general assistance and categorical aid as the cash-relief, means-tested programs and making the stigma for those who participated all the greater.⁶

From Patterson's description of what was said and done by different actors, we can piece together the following outline of his view of welfare: (1) because of a general confidence that most citizens could provide for themselves with a normal amount of effort, any welfare assistance (as opposed to public insurance programs like Social Security) should be limited and submit recipients to stigmatizing treatment; (2) nonetheless, extended depression conditions had convinced most that some centralized welfare assistance was required; (3) granting the necessity for welfare, this should be as localized as possible, with numerous concessions to individual state distinctives.

5. Most of these conclude that "elimination of poverty" has not been the sole objective of welfare policy. After all, it is argued, a nation as wealthy as the U.S. in the late twentieth century could eliminate poverty were this the overriding objective. Clearly other goals have existed, if not predominated - and for a few observers, elimination of poverty has never been one of them. The best-known work in this regard is F. Piven & R. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Random House, 1971), who argue that welfare programs were created reluctantly in the face of social unrest (brought on by unemployment) and offer niggardly assistance; preventing social unrest is the objective, not eliminating poverty. W. Trattner (ed.), *Social Welfare or Social Control? Some Historical Reflections on 'Regulating the Poor'* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1983) presents a historical evaluation of this thesis. A useful work in the tradition of Piven & Cloward is M. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), which advances four purposes of American-style welfare: relief of misery, preservation of social order and discipline, regulation of the labor market, and political mobilization.

6. J. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1980* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981), p. 76.

As Patterson and others have observed, the objectives of the welfare system changed during the 1960s,⁷ with greater liberalization of benefits and in limited areas (especially medical care) the creation of entitlements - all in all a "softening of attitudes toward the poor".⁸

Amidst failed efforts in the 1970s during both Republican and Democratic administrations to create an assured basic income for any low income family, followed by successful reforms in the 1980s reversing several of the liberalizing changes made during the 1960s (tightening the administration of AFDC and initiating work requirements), it can plausibly be argued that a generally consistent set of American values has constrained welfare administration from the 1930s to the present. Discerning these best is achieved by sifting among the numerous programs put in place over the decades, and then extracting from these what we have in fact intended to do with welfare.

Robert Lampman, a sage observer of these programs, boiled down the immediate goals of the broadly conceived public assistance system to : (1) offsetting income losses (Social Security, unemployment insurance); (2) helping people to buy the essentials (education, food, health care); (3) reducing income poverty (cash transfer programs such as AFDC); (4) sharing the tax burden fairly (a "progressive" income tax [and today, the Earned Income Tax Credit].⁹ Lampman uses verbs like offsetting, helping, and reducing, rather than outright elimination of poverty.

Working from a similar experience as Lampman, Irwin Garfinkel has assessed the welfare system as seeking to balance three conflicting basic values shared by all members of American society, including the poor: (1) a compassionate concern to help those less fortunate than ourselves; (2) a constraining concern to promote self-reliance among welfare recipients;

7. The best known proponent of this view is Charles Murray in his work *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). During the 1960s, Murray argues, welfare policy was modified to reflect a changed view of the causes of poverty: theretofore poverty was understood to result primarily from personal failure; the new view attributed poverty primarily to the structure of the economy. Subsequently policy was revised to extend assistance from the non-employable to all the poor, to make welfare a right rather than a reluctant and constrained provision, and to seek equal outcomes rather than provide the tools for more equal opportunity.

8. Patterson, *op.cit.* (note 6 above), p. 171.

9. R. Lampman, "Goals & Purposes of Social Welfare Expenditures" in P. Sommers (ed), *Welfare Reform in America: Perspective & Prospects* (Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff, 1982), pp. 3-14.

(3) a thrifty concern to do whatever we do as inexpensively as possible.¹⁰ It has been cheaper, for example, to give the poor money rather than provide the necessary programs to help them become self-reliant - and hence the third-mentioned value dominates the second. Similarly, out of a concern for thrift and self-reliance, we established categorical programs that typically denied assistance to employable males. In both these cases the outcome appears to have been some marital disruption and greater dependency upon welfare than otherwise, thereby tending to make welfare mothers less self-reliant.

In his influential book on poverty and welfare David Ellwood argues that though Americans are willing to use the state to help the poor, they have come to hate welfare as a means for doing so. Given this unhappy state of affairs we need a fundamental reconception of state-mediated assistance in order to assist the poor both more effectively and in socially acceptable ways.¹¹ Sifting through the public and academic discussion of what Americans believe about poverty and helping the poor, Ellwood discerns the following recurring themes or values: (1) that people can provide for themselves if they are willing to make the necessary sacrifices (autonomy of the individual); (2) that people should work hard both to provide for their families and as a mark of strong character (virtue of work); (3) that the nuclear family remains the primary social and economic unit (primacy of the family); (4) that people have a desire for community - seen in everything from religion to neighborhood - which manifests itself in compassion for others (sense of community). As with Garfinkel's recounting, Ellwood views the welfare system as unnecessarily forcing these values into conflict. Offering greater financial assistance to poorer families, for example, weakens the resolve to work, and in the case of single mothers weakens the commitment to form and maintain two-parent families. Though in his assessment of American values the family receives strong affirmation, the structure of welfare in fact has done little to reinforce the family.

Patterson's assessment of the origins of the contemporary welfare system suggests a more constricted and possibly harsher set of objectives than is true for the others cited; Americans had a "distaste" for welfare and therefore sought to stigmatize it. It is interesting,

10. I. Garfinkel, "Income Support Policy: Where We've Come From & Where We Should Be Going" (Discussion Paper No. 490-78 of the Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin, April 1978).

11. "Welfare is a flawed method of helping people who are poor and disadvantaged. Welfare brings some of our most precious values - involving autonomy, responsibility, work, family, community, and compassion - into conflict." D. Ellwood, *Poor Support: Poverty in the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), p. 6. Note that "welfare" as Ellwood speaks of it is a *specific* set of current programs, and not a generic term for government-mediated assistance programs as we use the term in this paper.

even troubling, that in the lists from Garfinkel and Ellwood compassion is seen as different from a concern for work and self-reliance. Can one not promote self-reliance and a strong work ethic out of a compassionate concern for those involved? Certainly this seems to be true within most families, for example. In considering the several *lists* of likely objectives that define and constrain public assistance one wonders if part of our difficulty as a nation with administering welfare may lie in trying to satisfy too many objectives. But which of the cited objectives should dominate? What criteria do we offer Americans to help them prioritize the objectives that should constrain welfare? Questions such as these motivate examination of the biblical tradition.

2. A Biblical Welfare System?

In that we draw on biblical materials that are in some cases at least three millenia old to inform contemporary welfare policy, an initial word about the propriety of this task is in order.¹² An ethical assertion found systematically throughout the Bible is that Yahweh is the God of all creation and all peoples, and the instruction He provides to early Israel and the early Christian community is intended to inform all nations: Gn. 18:18, II Kgs. 19:15, Job 12:23, Ps. 22:27f, Is. 2:2-5, 42:4ff, Dan. 7:27, Micah 4:1ff, Zech. 8:20ff, Matt. 25:32, Gal. 3:8, Rev. 2:26, 21:24, 22:2, among many other similar citations.¹³ Commentators through the ages have divided over precisely how this material is to offer contemporary insight. Some within the Christian community argue that little ethical guidance is found in the Pentateuch, and find more helpful

12. For a more complete presentation of this argument, see sections I and III of J. Mason and K. Schaefer, "The Bible, the State, & the Economy: A Framework for Analysis" *Christian Scholar's Review* XX:45-64 (Sept. 1990). Examining particularly Dt. 15 - and the remainder of the sabbatical laws in that context - J. Hamilton uses a very different hermeneutical approach. Rather than seeking to set these laws in the early centuries of Israel's life in Palestine, he emphasizes the much later date during which the texts of Scripture were compiled and edited: a time in which Israel was in exile. Accordingly he examines the texts in terms of the deliberately chosen literary construction and rhetorical devices, presuming they were designed to convince a people out of power to take these laws seriously. Even so, he comes to many of the same conclusions developed here. See J. Hamilton, *Social Justice & Deuteronomy: The Case of Deuteronomy 15* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

13. See: D. Van Winkle, "The Relationship of the Nations to Yahweh & to Israel in Isaiah XL-LV" *Vetus Testamentum* XXXV:446-58 (No. 4, Oct. 1985); C. Scobie, "Israel & the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology" *Tyndale Bulletin* 43:283-305 (No. 2, 1992), which extends the primarily Old Testament emphasis of this theme to New Testament affirmation and refinement.

instruction in the prophetic concern for justice and the New Testament emphasis upon love as the fullest expression of the Mosaic Law. Others claim contemporary ethical guidance for all of the Bible, nonetheless confining much of the pentateuchal materials to relevance primarily to the Christian community today and not to the broader society.

The interpretation advanced here is that God encoded, within the numerous legal and extra-legal provisions designed to inform life in early Israel, ethical emphases which form a normative foundation which the remainder of the Bible develops.¹⁴ It is these ethical urgings, along with the fuller understanding and greater refinement provided by the totality of the Bible and informed by commentary from the Jewish and Christian faith communities over the centuries, which are to be held up before all nations at that time and today as a measuring rod for discerning what are just and righteous institutions and dealings.

Christopher Wright describes the position taken here as paradigmatic: "What God did with Israel in their land functions for us as a model or paradigm from which we draw principles and objectives for our socio-ethical endeavor in secular society".¹⁵

The purpose of redemption is ultimately to restore the perfection of God's purpose in creation, that perfection which sin and the fall have corrupted. Israel, as God's redeemed community, was to have been a "light to the nations+ - not just the vehicle of God's redemption, but an illustration of it in actual historical life. Israel's socio-economic life and institutions, therefore, have a paradigmatic or exemplary function in principle. It is not that they are to be simply and slavishly imitated, but rather that they are models within a particular cultural context of principles of justice, humaneness, equality, responsibility, and so forth which are applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to all people in subsequent

14. Throughout the paper we refer synonymously to the Mosaic Law, the pentateuchal provisions, the Laws of Moses, of God providing his Law through Moses - and no doubt other similar expressions. We are quite aware of the long debate, at least since Alt's argument in the 1930s, that many of the pentateuchal provisions have counterparts in the law codes of other early Near Eastern societies - which for some suggest that these laws were not given by God through Moses, but were dictated by the ordinary circumstances of life in that region. We embrace the traditional view that in ways which may not be clear to us today God delivered through Moses at least the foundations for (Ex. 19 and 20), if not the totality of, all of the legal and extra-legal provisions in the Pentateuch that were to instruct early Israel. Regarding this debate, see E. Otto, "Town & Rural Countryside in Ancient Israelite Law: Reception & Redaction in Cuneiform & Israelite Law" *Jrnl. for the Study of the Old Test.* 57:3-22 (March 1993), which argues that uniquely Israelite laws from the villages were later formally codified in urban centers in which Mesopotamian cultures were more influential, giving the laws foreign glosses that were not part of the original.

15. C. J.H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, & Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), pp. 175-6.

cultural contexts.¹⁶

That love is the fulfillment of the "Law and Prophets" (Mk. 12:28-31, Rms. 13:9, Gal. 5:14) was made clear in Lev. 19:18. Stephen Mott helpfully explains that such a broad norm as love must be given specific content in any particular situation.

It is the Law of God that love brings to completeness. Love is a commitment to the good of the other, but it does not in itself specify what that good is. The implementation of love must depend upon a theory of human needs and of values and of how one loves. The morality that directs the way in which ones loves in the Bible is the Law of God, articulated in the Old Testament and clarified in the New.¹⁷

That the biblical provisions have special applicability to God's people yesterday and today does not prevent the ethical urgings embedded within these provisions from offering guidance to all peoples and nations - particularly if this is how the teaching was intended (as the repeated reference in one form or another to Israel as a "light to the nations" would clearly suggest).

What then are the ethical emphases found within the pentateuchal passages dealing with treatment of the poor, and how does the fullness of the Bible help us understand them? Given the substantial amount of teaching in this regard, it is clear that some type of systematized response is commended. Is the normative response however to be a system of "welfare,+ with the government-mediated income redistribution implicit therein? If so, what fundamental objective or objectives was that system designed to achieve? Or should the commended system arise from private action without government mediation, whereby families and larger voluntary

16. Ibid. p. xviii. Similarly, "[T]he law affords an insight into the contours of God's own ideal will for his people and for all mankind. . . . To do good, on such a view, is to imitate God, to do the things he would do, if he were a human being; and what these things are can be read off in some measure from the things he has done, especially his acts of love and faithfulness towards Israel in the crucial early years of her existence - . . . [F]or the Old Testament as we have it ethics is a matter of imitating the pattern of God's own actions, in salvation and in creation, because these spring from a pattern which always exists in his own mind and by which he governs the world with justice and mercy. Torah - in one aspect simply the law of Moses - is in another aspect the design according to which the world was created, and which makes sense of it; and by adhering to it human beings form part of God's plan, and enjoy a kind of fellowship with him." J. Barton, "Approaches to Ethics in the Old Testament" in J. Rogerson (ed.), *Beginning Old Testament Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), pp. 128-30.

17. S. Mott, *Biblical Ethics & Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 49; see also pp. 76-78, 99-100, 192ff (esp. 199).

gatherings manifest their faith by sacrificial giving to those in need? In sharpest relief, these are the two options before us.

The argument made here is that the system of assistance commended in the Law of Moses most likely did involve government-mediated income redistribution, albeit the purposes of and constraints on this system take it some distance from the current U.S. welfare system. Whether the interpretation of government-mediated assistance is accepted or not, what must be granted is that the presence of debilitating poverty within society represents the likely potential for an organized system of community response beyond the person or family involved.

Occasional adversities are the stuff of life, confronting each family at one time or another: a field receives too little rain and the harvest is ruined; a factory closes with little hope of new employment within the region; a spouse or child dies; life-threatening sickness sets in. It is only during the latter decades of the twentieth century that a few people in economically advantaged parts of the world have been able to avoid the bulk of these shocks and to soften the remaining ones. Debilitating poverty is a particularly devastating form, albeit only one form, of these adversities. During such times, the extended family has been the primary source of comfort and assistance throughout all of world history and in all social settings. As we shall argue below, this is how it should be; God established the extended family to serve these necessary roles.

When, however, the extended or nuclear family becomes broken or dysfunctional, or when it cannot provide the needed help because the condition is too severe, assistance from the wider community becomes necessary. This is the consistent message of the entire Bible. It is taught clearly in the Law of Moses in the provisions to be considered immediately below. It is repeated systematically in the wisdom literature and by the prophets in their instructions to the princes of Israel (Job 29:7-12, Ps. 72, Jer. 22:15f, Ezek. 34, Micah 3). It is there in the well-known judgement scene of Matt. 25:31ff, and in Paul's admonitions for wealthier churches to provide economic assistance to their poorer brothers and sisters (II Cor. 8). Indeed, the fundamental message of the New Testament is that each one of us, however self-sufficient we may think we are, is so unable to avoid all the adversities of life, and thereby to resolve our ultimate problems on our own, that we need outside assistance: at the least God's provisions for us in Christ and all that He accomplished, along with the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Let us now consider the system of assistance for the poor commended by the Law of Moses. To grasp this instruction properly we must understand something of the social and

economic life in early Israel.¹⁸ The vast majority of Israelites in that era lived in small villages as members of extended families of typically three generations: what in Hebrew is called the bet'ab (house of the father) and what Wright calls the household (because potentially slaves and residential employees were included). The patriarchal head of a bet'ab would serve as one of the governing elders of his Israelite village. Indeed, a number of villages would have been comprised almost solely of related bet'avoth, or what the Hebrew refers to as a mishap and Gottwald calls a "protective association of extended families".¹⁹ The presence of major trade routes running through the land suggests market-related economic activity and hence the potential for specialization in production. For the majority of the population however subsistence agriculture would have been the main source for economic well-being.²⁰

To the extent there was a civil governing authority in the modern sense, it was comprised practically of the elders of a village's extended families who interpreted and enforced the Law of Moses.²¹ A telling passage from the wisdom literature offers rich insight

18. A fuller presentation can be found in several previous publications which provide the basis for the summary comments made here. See J. Mason, "Biblical Teaching & Assisting the Poor" *Transformation* 4:1-14 (April/June 1987), and J. Mason, "Centralization & Decentralization in Social Arrangements: Explorations into Biblical Social Ethics" *Jrnl. of the Association of Christian Economists*[U.K.] No. 13 (1992), pp. 3-47. Christopher Wright treats this same material, drawing basically similar conclusions, albeit with several different emphases. See especially chapters 4 and 5 of *God's People in God's Land* (op.cit. (note 15 above)).

19. N. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979). See also C. H. J. DeGeus, *Tribes of Israel* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1979).

20. See L. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel" *BASOR* (Bull. of the Amer. Schools for Oriental Res.) 260:1-35 (Nov. 1985), and D. Hopkins, "Life on the Land: The Subsistence Struggles of Early Israel" *Biblical Archaeologist* 50:178-91 (Sept. 1987), for careful accounts of what life for the normal Israelite was like. For example, the eastern regions of the land in which the Israelites were concentrated (during at least the earlier years of settlement) receives limited and seasonally-concentrated rainfall, such that the construction of cisterns to catch and hold the available water was an important community-based task.

21. A number of studies have established that these elders, typically gathering at the main gate of the village ("elders at the gate" - e.g. Ruth 4 and Job 29), provided political oversight to the community and handled disputes between villagers. See R. Wilson, "Enforcing the Covenant: The Mechanisms of Judicial Authority in Early Israel," in H. Huffmon, et. al. (eds.), *The Quest for the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, Indiana: 1983) pp. 59-75; H. Boecker, *Law & the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament & Ancient East* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980); K. Whitlam, *The Just King: Monarchic Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (Jrnl. for the Study of the Old Testament, Supp. Series 12 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1979]); J. Salmon, "Judicial Authority in Early Israel: An Historical Investigation of Old

into what we believe was the normative nature of the Israelite governing authority in the pre-monarchic era.

When I went to the gate of the city and took my seat in the public square, the young men saw me and stepped aside and the old men rose to their feet; the chief men refrained from speaking and covered their mouths with their hands; the voices of the nobles were hushed, and their tongues stuck to the roof of their mouths. Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing. I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth. (Job 29:7-17)

Job joins the other elders before the people in the "public square". In such capacity righteousness and justice are the legal norms, which clearly meant a special concern for weaker members of the community. These "judges" hardly are passive officials. Job saw himself as eyes to the blind and feet to the lame and father to the needy. The picture is one in which this local governing authority not only issued decisions to contested claims, but actively intervened to make sure that righteousness and justice characterized the community. The normative standard for all this, the standard which decreed righteousness and justice, and which specified these norms in a vast number of cases, was the Law of Moses.

There is little evidence in Israel's earliest history of a permanent central government. Israel was to have neither king²² nor standing army,²³ making her unique among the nations. Equally unique at the time was the instruction that those responsible for Israel's cult (the sons of Levi) were to be granted no allotment of land and were to depend upon voluntary offerings (Nbs. 18:8ff), and this was accompanied by numerous admonitions to other Israelites not to

Testament Institutions" (Princeton Theological Seminary doctoral dissertation, 1968).

22. I see no other way to interpret I Sam. 8. An earthly kingship was not God's preference for Israel. In a review article of G. Gerbrandt's *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History*, David Howard argues that the Bible is pro-kingship. The king however must not be one "like the other nations have" (I Sam. 8:5), but a king who would be like Moses and Joshua and lead himself and his people into submission to the standards of the Pentateuch. See D. Howard, "The Case for Kingship in Deuteronomy & the Former Prophets" *Westminster Theol. Jnl.* 52:101-115 (Spring 1990). For a similar argument see P. Satterthwaite, "No King in Israel: Narrative Criticism & Judges 17-21" *Tyndale Bulletin* 44:75-88 (No. 1, May 1993).

23. That there were military encounters is obvious, given the already occupied nature of the region where the Israelite tribes settled. The books of Joshua and Judges recount a number of these. In the biblical accounts however, the leadership arose from common men (and women - Judges 4 and 5), who were not part of a continuing military hierarchy, and troops were raised popularly as needed.

forsake them (Dt. 12:19). Twin dangers lay in concentrating too much economic and political power into a central governing authority beyond the village (and even tribal) level: the use of such power to selfish ends and the detriment of common Israelites - especially the poor (II Sam. 11, I Kgs. 21, Amos 2:6-7, 5:12); the merging of centralized political-economic power with the temple and thereby appropriating the true King's name for unrighteous ends.²⁴

Despite the warning of God through Samuel (I Sam. 8) the temptation proved too great; like the surrounding nations, Israel embraced the monarchy. Though Samuel's warnings proved all too prescient, nonetheless Israel's king should (and would)²⁵ be different from kings in the surrounding nations. Exactly like the village elders Israel's king was to be a steward of the covenant conditions of the Law of Moses (Dt. 17:14ff), and seek to establish justice and righteousness (I Kgs. 10:9), with special concern for the weaker members of society (Ps. 72:1-4, 12-14). He was to so protect property rights that each family could sit under its own vine and fig tree (Micah 4:4).

The Law of Moses was delivered initially to the scattered network of Israelite villages, and this socio-economic setting serves as something of a paradigm within a paradigm: a simplified social reality that allows us to see God's ethical intentions more clearly than otherwise - whether in the marginally more complex era of the Israelite monarchies in an earlier era, or amidst the industrialization and urbanization of today's far more complex reality.²⁶ To these villages then God provides an extensive set of instructions on how to care

24. "As Solomon enthralled Yahweh as a patron of the dynasty, so David initiated the process by which Yahweh ceased to be god of Israel and became god of the king. The liberator god had become the symbol and the patron of an oppressive oligarchy." J. McKenzie, "The Sack of Israel" in H. Huffman, et. al. (eds.) *Quest for the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1983), p. 33.

25. Granting the various problems associated with the monarchs of Israel, we must wonder how powerful in fact they were. For example, they could not prevent Israel's sacred documents (many of which we believe were prepared during their watch) from saying so much that was negative about the idea and practice of the kingship. In "Israel's Judicial System in the Pre-exilic Period" *Jewish Quart. Rev.* LXXIV:229-48 (Oct. 1983), R. Wilson argues that King David's power may not have extended much beyond Jerusalem.

26. Norman Gottwald, the leading scholar to use a sociological model to explain the emergence of early Israel, describes that society as: ". . . an egalitarian, extended-family, segmentary tribal society with an agricultural-pastoral economic base. . . characterized by profound resistance and opposition to the forms of political domination and social stratification that had become normative in the chief cultural and political centers of the ancient Near East." *Op.cit.* (note 19

for the poor in their midst.

Poorer brothers falling into poverty should be granted zero interest loans, with cancellation of any remaining balance after six years (Ex. 22:25, Lev. 25:35ff, Dt. 15:1ff). Israelites committed to slavery for debt repayment were to be released after six years, assuming the debt had not been repaid earlier, accompanied by release from servitude (Ex. 21:2ff, Lev. 25:47ff, 39ff, Dt. 15:12ff). An Israelite forced to sell his land for debt-repayment should have the land returned in the Jubilee year (Lev. 25:8ff) - unless, we presume, the fair market value had been raised earlier and the land repurchased. Each of these provisions is associated in some way with indebtedness and loan repayment, and it seems likely they were intended primarily for otherwise able-bodied extended families who would have the capacity to accumulate a surplus sufficient to meet loan obligations. Implicit within each provision therefore is the reality that more work than normal would be expected, in order to repay the loan or purchase back one's freedom or one's land. Even so, each provision potentially presumes some act of community compassion: to make the zero-interest loan in the first place, to remit an outstanding loan balance or release one from enslavement after six years, to return a family's land in the forty-ninth year.

The remaining provisions are not attached to loan repayment and thereby assume a stronger element of community compassion or charity. It seems likely therefore that they were intended primarily for weaker families or individuals. Gleanings and corners of fields were to be left ungathered and unharvested for the poor, and especially the widows, orphans, and sojourners (Lev. 19:9f, 23:22, Dt. 24:19ff).²⁷ Each field was to be left fallow or unworked every seventh year, with the natural growth available to the poor (Ex. 23:10f, Lev. 25:1ff). The tithe in every third year should go to widows, orphans and sojourners, in addition to the Levites (Dt. 14:28f, 26:12). Work obviously was involved in gathering the gleanings and harvesting the fallow-year growth - albeit such effort was not as strenuous as in the provisions connected with loan repayment. It seems likely, therefore, that the third-year tithe was intended for the least able among the poor who were not expected to work in exchange for assistance.²⁸

above), p. 389. See also C. H. J. DeGeus, *Tribes of Israel* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1979).

27. Dt. 24:19ff explicitly mentions grain, olives, and the vineyard. The grain harvest was conducted from April through June, with barley preceding wheat. The grape harvest ran through the summer months to October, and the olive harvest took place in late October and November. In other words there was a continuous annual flow of gleanings from mid-spring through late fall for the poor who were able to go to the fields and gather them.

28. The particular Hebrew words describing 'poor' persons in early Israel (primarily *ebyon* and *ani*, but also *dal*) imply that the primary reason for different economic outcomes was not lack of ambition but adverse circumstances. There are other Hebrew words speaking of those

When faced with requests for or situations demanding assistance, what level or standard of assistance should be used? The instruction attending several of the specific provisions commends "sufficiency for need" (Lev. 25:35, Dt. 14:29, 15:8). In determining what need would mean in any specific situation the general urging of the entire Bible is for a generous rather than a niggardly interpretation (Ex. 16:18, 22:21, Lev. 25:38, Dt. 24:18,22, Ezek. 47:14, II Cor. 8:13), and hence "liberal" sufficiency for need. Anticipating the argument in section 3 to follow, assistance to the poor was intended to maintain each family unit as an economically viable and contributing member of the community, such that the family would be assured that if it worked the normal amount and otherwise remained a faithful member of the community, the community would not allow economic difficulties to so debilitate the family that it could not continue to be viable and contributing.²⁹

In addition to these specific provisions more well-to-do members of society were admonished generally to care for the poor and needy, such as in sharing feast days with widows, orphans and sojourners (Dt. 16:11-14). This is taught explicitly in passages like Ex. 22:21ff and Dt. 15:11, 24:10ff. It is affirmed throughout the Old Testament in passages referring to the "poor and needy" (e.g. Job 29:11ff, Ps. 72, Jer. 22:16). It is implicit in God's whole treatment of Israel, rescuing them from slavery in Egypt and providing them a land with wells they did not dig and vineyards they did not plant, even when because of their disobedience they were undeserving (Dt. 6:10ff, 8:7 to 9:6). Unsurprisingly it echoes through the New Testament as well (Lk. 16:19ff, Gal. 6:10, I Jn. 3:17).

We noted above several structural elements that characterized this system of assistance:

who were poor due to laziness, with most English translations using 'sluggards' or 'idlers' in these cases. These terms (*atsel* and *remiyyah*) are found primarily in the Proverbs and not in the narratives dealing with the first several centuries of the settled Israelite nation. See also II Thes. 3:6ff.

29. Gottwald argues that one of the salient functions of the *mishpāhâ* was "to protect the socio-economic integrity of *beth'avoth* threatened with diminution or extinction." The *mishpâ* "did not intersect with and impinge upon the family . . . but it heightened and brought to prominence the centrality of the family . . . Instead of qualifying the power and importance of the family, as a clan would necessarily do, the protective association of families maximized and guarded the integrity and viability of the member families." N. Gottwald, *op. cit.* (note 25 above), pp. 315-16.

an able-bodied/dependent distinction related to loan receipt, implicit work obligations, and a commended level of assistance. An important element remains undeveloped. Was this in fact a welfare system involving government-mediated income redistribution or a system of privately-orchestrated voluntary provision? A number of commentators argue that these provisions call for voluntary compliance only and that the moral/legal power of the village elders would not have been used to enforce them.³⁰ The use of "motive clauses" attached to a number of these laws, whereby an appeal is made to God if the instruction is not honored, suggests to some the legal unenforceability of such laws.³¹

It seems clear with these instructions as with so many of the pentateuchal laws that voluntary compliance was the ideal. Given their previous experience in Egypt, as well as the excessive and corrupt presence of the governing authority in virtually all surrounding nations of the time, the Israelite preference (and God's desire) was for a polity with the least oppressive role for a centralized governing authority as possible.³² The question however is whether a breach of the ideal of voluntary compliance would have been met by some attempt at moral/legal coercion by the village elders. In our reconstruction of how these provisions were lived out in practice, intervention by the elders appears very likely - and thus government-mediation was present in that setting.

Consider, for example, the case of a creditor who demands interest or payment in the seventh year, or of a gleaner who is denied access to a farmer's field. The offended party could complain to the "elders at the gate" who then would be compelled to render a ruling. Most likely the initial response would be a call for the offending party to respect the law - a judicial intrusion requiring no further action. Were this response to fail, however, the elders most likely

30. See in this regard: S. Loewenstamm, "Law" in B. Mazar (ed.) *The World History of the Jewish People*, v. III Judges (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1971) p. 246f; A. Phillips, "Prophecy & Law" in R. Coggins, et. al. (eds.), *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982) pp. 217-32, p. 222.

31. "In general, the motive clauses cited above are attached to unenforceable rather than policeable laws." R. Uitti, "Israel's Underprivileged & Gemser's Motive Clause" *Society of Biblical Literature, 1975 Seminar Papers*, v. 1 (Chicago: Palmer House, 1975) pp. 7-13. He also notes that the use of motive clauses regarding the underprivileged is but a small fraction of the total use of these clauses; he does not conclude that the presence of the motive clause therefore means such provisions are legally unenforceable, but only the suggestion that they may be difficult to enforce.

32. See various works of George Mendenhall, who argues there was very little (if any) state in pre-monarchic Israel: *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), e.g. p. 28; "The Suzerainty Treaty Structure: Thirty Years Later" in E. Firmage, et. al. (eds.), *Religion & Law: Biblical-Judaic & Islamic Perspectives* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

would become an administrative body and assure the poorer family of adequate assistance - in which case some type of mandatory income redistribution seems likely. Biasing this interpretation is the fact that a number of texts make reference to the "rights+ or "cause+ of the poor (Ex. 23:6, Dt. 24:17, 27:19, Job 36:6, Ps. 140:12, Prov. 29:7, 31:9, Is. 10:2, Jer. 5:28), and these words have unmistakable legal significance. Lacking biblical evidence to indicate that these rights possess a different legal meaning when it comes to assisting the poor, we must presume that those responsible for interpreting and overseeing enforcement of these laws would have held the community as accountable for them as for the other laws.³³

We have attempted, in summary fashion, to reconstruct the actual and normative responses to poverty in the villages of early Israel, because - our working hermeneutical assumption - therein lies the basis for discerning the ethical emphases that God prefers for any nation that seeks to order itself rightly.³⁴ We are impressed with the numerous provisions found throughout the Pentateuch, which then are informed by commentary from the entirety of the Bible, and conclude that the presence of debilitating poverty is serious enough in God's eyes to warrant a *systematized* response. Structural attributes of this system emerged as well: the use of an able-bodied/dependent distinction in the *type* of assistance, not (as has been true with many U.S. programs) as the basis for assistance; a work requirement, albeit marked by elements

33. Patrick argues that the provisions dealing with the underprivileged grew out of actual legal proceedings and court rulings, with the result that here "we have real law governing precisely defined legal relationships." D. Patrick, "The Rights of the Underprivileged" Society of Biblical Literature: 1975 Seminar Papers, v. 1 (Chicago: Palmer House, 1975), p. 2. Daube understands this social legislation similarly; see D. Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1947), p. 45.

34. The Bible promises a condition of this-worldly personal and social harmony (referred to as *shalom*) for the nation that orders itself consistently with the ethical urgings embedded in the Law of Moses. To see this, examine the structure of the Mosaic covenant generally (Ex. 23:25ff, Lev. 26:3-13, Dt. 28:1-14), as well as the promised state of harmony in the prophets (Is. 11:6-9, Ezek. 34:23-31, Hos. 2:14-23). Mendenhall characterizes it as ". . . a condition of peace in which every man could sit under his own fig tree and under his own grapevine (I Kgs. 4:24, Mic. 4:4), doing +what was right in his own eyes' (Jdgs. 17:6, 21:25, Dt. 12:8, Prov. 12:15)." *Op.cit.* (note 33 above), pp. 26-27. See also: D. Gillett, "Shalom: Content for a Slogan" *Themelios* 1:80-84 (Summer 1976); D. Wiseman, "Law & Order in Old Testament Times" *Vox Evangelica* VII:5-21 (1973), especially p. 14f. Kohler writes: "Community life depends entirely upon peace, that is a state of affairs in which the members of the community have their claims and needs fairly adjusted to one another. The one force which makes for this peace and preserves it is law." L. Kohler, *Hebrew Man* (London: SCM Press, 1956), pp. 150-51.

of compassion;³⁵ a level of provision deemed "liberal sufficiency for need".

The structural element given greater attention in our reconstruction is the question of government mediation involved in assistance to the poor. The ideal polity for early Israel was a limited governing authority, reflecting God's preference for deconcentrated political power (accompanied by deconcentrations in property ownership and the economic arena generally).³⁶ This preference granted, one of the normative roles for the deconcentrated governing authority of local village elders was to assure that the poor were assisted properly. Ideally and typically this would have been done through private initiative (Dt. 16, Job 31). The initial act of the elders when a case was appealed to them would be to encourage the private parties involved to honor the instructions of the Law. Ultimately, however, if efforts at private resolution were insufficient, the elders would have compelled a response - albeit in as deconcentrated a way as possible. What remains undeveloped in our reconstructive efforts to this point is an understanding of the overall objective of this system of assistance, which is the topic to be addressed in section 3 to follow.

35. To reiterate: for able-bodied Israelite families falling subject to difficult circumstances, a zero-interest loan with sabbatical year forgiveness of principle; for weaker families and/or individuals the use of gleanings, corners of the fields, and fallow-year growth (work requirements to be sure, but less onerous than many work situations). In the case of gleanings the element of compassion is reinforced when we consider the instructions of Boaz to his workers regarding Ruth: not to molest her, and to make her job somewhat easier by leaving extra grain as gleanings (Ruth 2). Though clearly this narrative is designed primarily to affirm the importance of extended family responsibility, we see in the instructions of Boaz something of the normative ideal for any case of gleaning. This interchange shows that "stigmatizing" poor recipients of community assistance would **not** be part of a welfare system that pleases God.

36. See my centralization/decentralization paper cited in note 18 above. In a sea of voluntarily structured institutions there were clear islands of compulsion to help bring about compliance to God's desires as revealed in the Law of Moses: Joshua *ordered* the men of the Eastern tribes to march before the others in taking possession of the promised land (Josh. 1); David *ordered* the soldiers who had captured the plunder to share it with those who stayed behind (I Sam. 30); Ezra, certainly a careful student of the Law, was allowed to use the state treasury (Ez. 7:20) to supplement the freewill offering (Ez. 7:16) in rebuilding the Temple, and along with the elders *ordered* all exiles to assemble subject to loss of property (Ez. 10:8); Nehemiah *ordered* those who had offended their Jewish brother to repay them (Neh. 8:11), and he later recorded a voluntary renewing of the covenant and then *ordered* certain measures to prevent sinful practice (Neh. 13:19). In other words, amidst God's general preference for limited and decentralized governmental authority there was indeed a normative compulsion exercised by those who held governmental power so that the community would conduct itself in ways consistent with the Law of Moses.

3. *The Objective(s) of Israel's Welfare System*

In searching for the basic objective(s) of Israel's welfare system we rely heavily upon Christopher Wright's *God's People in God's Land*,³⁷ a work in Old Testament property ethics. Wright's book follows a long hiatus in which little systematic work was done in this area of biblical ethics (due in good part we suspect to the impact of criticism which viewed the Old Testament generally as a composite of diverse literary strands pieced together and amended years after the events described, and which thereby seriously questioned the potential for discerning *an* Old Testament ethic). Wright interacts with and uses the critical material to argue that a consistent ethic does indeed emerge from the Bible.

Starting with a quest to discern the normative role of property, Wright was led to the Bible's more foundational concern for the social and economic well-being of the family. A theological assessment of land/property is "inseparable from Israel's consciousness of their unique covenant relationship with Yahweh", and this ultimately is "earthed" in the family (23). As noted above the primary family unit in mind in the normative appeal is the extended family, the *bet'ab* or "household". We argue the following: as the social and economic well-being of the family was the objective of the Bible's instructions regarding property and land in general, so was this true of Israel's welfare system - and so should this be true for the welfare system in any nation.

Why was/is the family fundamentally important within society? Although our brief attempt to capture this for the normative setting of early Israel relies carefully upon Wright's work, we place emphases and draw extensions where he does not - and thus we do not want to implicate him in conclusions he might not make.³⁸ We observe three crucial functions that only

37. Op.cit. (note 15 above). An earlier version of this book was presented as his doctoral dissertation at Cambridge University in 1977. Page references in the text of the paper hereinafter refer to Wright's book. See also in this regard M. Schluter and R. Clements, *Reactivating the Extended Family: From Biblical Norms to Public Policy in Britain* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre Publications Ltd., 1986).

38. We believe our application of his work is fully within the spirit of his overall arguments. That his argument does not proceed in the way we use it possibly reflects the fact that he came to emphasize the family somewhat indirectly, having begun his work with an investigation of property/land ethics - a fact which to our mind makes the veracity of the relative emphasis upon the family even greater.

the family can serve adequately; it is: (1) the surest setting to pass on the faith in Yahweh and to form personal character that takes on God-pleasing values; (2) the surest setting wherein the individual finds any lasting sense of personal significance and meaning; (3) the surest setting from which effective service is offered to the larger community.

God's chief concern is that we come to both acknowledge and worship Him and to live a life of obedience to Him. We should expect therefore to find in the Bible social arrangements geared to this end. Wright considers "the internal role of the family as a vehicle of continuity for the faith, history, and traditions of Israel", emphasizing both the didactic function of teaching the law (Dt. 6:7, 11:19) and the catechetical function of rehearsing cultic institutions and memorials of historical events (Ex. 12:26f, 13:14f, Dt. 6:20ff, Josh. 4:6f, 21ff). (81ff) "As a didactic force throughout succeeding generations, the family stood at the center of the twin relationships between Israel and Yahweh and between Israel and their land (as stressed in Dt. 32:47)." (82)

Moral philosophy has seen the reemergence in recent years of a concern for the conditions most conducive for the formation of virtuous character.³⁹ The Bible affirms that this is done best within socially and economically secure families, a claim that a growing body of contemporary evidence also affirms.⁴⁰ Reflecting on his several decades of work in biblical studies, George Mendenhall recently observed that the "transcendent ground of ethic in the Sinai covenant is perhaps one of the most important aspects of the biblical heritage to Western cultures". We have therein an ethic which "excludes behavior that works to the detriment of others", and which (tied by covenant) constrains otherwise harmful behavior "no matter where and in what context that individual acts".⁴¹ In other words, a healthy society requires individuals possessing morally upright character, and this is best achieved within socially and economically secure families.

Secondly, the healthy family provides the surest setting, short of our relationship with God, for individuals to experience a sense of personal significance and meaning in life. This is as true for the child who ideally is wrapped in love as he or she is nurtured through the maturation process, as it is for the mature adult - as previously notable individuals so frequently experience. Wright argues this particularly in terms of so-called dependent persons of the biblical era - wives, children, and slaves (plus resident aliens), each of which raise difficult

39. Alasdair MacIntyre is one of the leading figures in this movement, see *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

40. See J. Q. Wilson, *The Moral Sense* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

41. G. Mendenhall, "The Suzerainty Treaty Structure" *op.cit.* (note 32 above), pp. 97-98.

issues for us today because in some way they "belonged to" the father/head of the household. In each case, however, he argues that the claims of ownership are characterized more by the responsibility of the father/head rather than his rights.

The relationship between Israel and Yahweh was vested, initially at any rate, in the socio-economic fabric of household-plus-land units. On them lay a large measure of responsibility for the fulfillment of the obligations of the relationship and for the preservation of its historical traditions. Furthermore, it was by belonging within a household, with its portion of land as the proof of its share in the people of Yahweh, that the individual Israelite shared in the privileges and protection of this relationship. (88)

Our extension takes this claim beyond the tightly argued provisions characterizing early Israel, as Wright presents these, to the presumption that God revealed therein the proper social basis for all of us to find the acceptance and significance and meaning that He wants us to experience in our earthly lives.

Finally, it is within the family that individuals best are groomed for offering service to the larger community. Our use of Wright's work sees this expressed nicely by the role of the father/head as one of the governing elders of the local village.

Now it is probable, though the evidence is not very explicit, that the main qualification for eldership and the exercise of its judicial rights was the possession of landed property and family ... Anthony Phillips is correct in emphasizing the disastrous consequences arising for an Israelite from the dispossession of home and property. Apart from the obvious economic disabilities, it meant loss of standing and participation in a sphere of social life where the obligations of the relationship with God impinged most closely on the practical realities of society - the local administration of justice. (80f)

Referring to our earlier suggestion that at least for early Israel God desired a decentralized governing authority built on widely dispersed land ownership along family lines, the elder's participation in local administration helped achieve the preferred decentralization. Accordingly the family provided a man of sound character who had learned responsible stewardship in the home, which was in turn grounded in the Law of Moses and rehearsal of God's faithfulness to Israel and this family through good and lean years.

If the family had such important functions to perform within society, it is crucial that it be protected both socially and economically - and the Bible provides considerable evidence in

these regards. Wright's arguments are most complete in examining the normative economic supports for the family, reflecting his study's starting point. Working from the Jubilee claim that God is the true owner of all property (Lev. 25:23), he argues that "Yahweh's ownership of the land is affirmed to ensure the security of *individual families* by preventing permanent alienation of *their land*. It is not simply a grand statement of national belief about the national territory, but the theological sanction of an *internal* economic system of land tenure". (63, emphasis in original) Although he grants it is an argument from silence, he finds it "an impressive fact that the whole Old Testament provides not a single case of an Israelite voluntarily selling land outside his family group", and the "silence of the text is matched by the absence as yet of any inscriptional evidence from Palestine of Israelite sale and purchase of land, though there is abundant evidence of such transactions from Canaanite and surrounding societies". (56) Where there was forced sale of one's land to pay debts, the Jubilee institution of Lev. 25 was provided to restore the land to the family of original ownership. (123ff)

Reinforcing the importance of each family continuing to own its own land as a source of economic well-being, there are numerous provisions protecting private property rights. Boundary stones marking out property lines were not to be moved. (128ff) Wright gives special attention to the eighth and tenth commandments prohibiting theft and coveting - both dealing with property, he observes. (131ff) As traditionally understood violation of these two commandments does not carry a death penalty; indeed the tenth commandment is unique in proscribing behavior against which there are no legal sanctions. Contesting Phillips' claim that these two were criminal statutes, as with each of the commandments,⁴² Wright nonetheless appreciates the seriousness with which Phillips' solution treats these two commandments.

Theft, therefore, was not solely an attack on property, but indirectly on the fellow Israelite's person and on the stability and viability of his family. The prohibition of theft, therefore, did not imply the "sanctity of property" *per se*, but rather *the sanctity of the relationship between the Israelite household and Yahweh*. It was this relationship which could be impaired or destroyed in its material aspects by theft. In such a threat at the domestic level lay, as we have seen, a potential, intrinsic threat to the national relationship with God (136, emphases in original).

Enjoining covetous gives the Decalogue a radical thrust, making it more than mere legislation, and seeks to prevent at its source the desire that ultimately leads to measures (legal or illegal) which would deprive a family of its economic base.⁴³

42. A. Phillips, *Ancient Israel's Criminal Law: A New Approach to the Decalogue* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970).

43. "[T]he biblical law of property was concerned less with the efficient use and transfer of a commercial asset than with protecting the rights of the family to the source of their economic

The family must be protected socially as well as economically. The fifth commandment calling for honor of parents (the first commandment with a promise) contains within it the dual warning emphasized here: failure to maintain the social foundation of the family will ultimately give rise to loss of its economic foundation. In this regard, Wright examines two practices which could destroy the social stability of the family, rebellious behavior by children and adultery.

In this light, the various laws which proscribe the death penalty for any form of open disrespect for parental authority can be seen in a new and more positive perspective. They are not relics of a harsh *patria potestas* or an arbitrary, authoritarian patriarchy. They are in fact safeguards of the *national* well-being. For violation of parental authority - rejection of the domestic jurisdiction of the head of the household - was a crime against the stability of the nation inasmuch as it was an attack upon that on which the nation's relationship with God was grounded - the household. (78)

In the context of his argument that the Pentateuch affirms a generally more influential and less demeaned role for women than often thought, Wright considers the "loose woman" of Prov. 2:16ff.

The thread of thought, then, which runs through Prov. 2:12-22 and the related passages, is this: one who, by attention to wisdom, is saved from the "loose" woman and so maintains the integrity and strength of his own household stays within the community of the "righteous" (v. 20) and continues to enjoy its prime privilege - possession of a share in the land (v. 21). But one who gets entangled with such a woman, who has thrown off the obligations of her family and marital relationship and has thus stepped "outside" both her household and thereby also the spiritual relationship of the nation of Yahweh, is likely to end up ruining his own family and substance. In so doing he will cut himself off from the privilege of sharing in the land with the rest of God's people. Worst of all, he risks, through neglect of his family, the complete extinction of extirpation. In short, he "has no sense"; he "destroys himself" (6:32). (96)

Protecting the family socially and economically, both from within and from without, was then the intent of much of the legal and extra-legal material of the Pentateuch. God's desires as revealed in these provisions also help us to understand better the burning concerns of

survival, not only against outsiders but even against individual members of the family itself." R. Westbrook, *Property & the Family in Biblical Law* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1991), p. 11.

the prophets.

The abuses in the [socio-economic] sphere were not merely a "symptom" of Israel's degeneracy. They constituted in themselves, in fact, a major "virus" which threatened the stability of society and *thereby also* the relationship with Yahweh. The prophets denounced them so vehemently because they saw in them an *intrinsic* threat to that relationship through the effect they were having on the units of landowning households. This familial aspect becomes explicit in such texts as Mic. 2:1-3, 8-9; 7:5-6; and Is. 5:8-10. If, as we have sought to establish in the preceding chapters, the experience of the relationship with God was vested in the household units of Israel - just as possession of the land was vested in inalienable family inheritances - then the socio-economic forces and changes which were destroying these family land units would inevitably and "internally" destroy the nation's relationship with God as well.

Attesting to the consistency of the Bible, Wright extends this same concern into the New Testament, expositing particularly Eph. 2:11 - 3:6. (111ff) His general argument is that in Christ all peoples are allowed to enjoy the privileges and responsibilities of God's people. This granted, there is to be no less concern in Christ's body, the church, for the social and economic stability of families ("deeply practical mutual responsibility") than was true in the Old Testament. "The explicit purpose of the Exodus was the enjoyment of the rich blessing of God in his 'good land': the goal of redemption through Christ is 'for a sincere love of the brethren' (I Pet. 1:22), with all its practical implications". (113)

The arguments we have gathered to this point, though taking license with the general structure of Wright's work, nonetheless have sought to stay within the spirit of his analysis. In concluding this section we extend the arguments in a way that picks up several themes developed in section 2. There is an emphasis in the Pentateuch's ethical instruction as it relates to social institutions that also is reflected in one expression of North American populism.⁴⁴ Property ownership should be kept deconcentrated and tied to the family as much as possible, accompanied by as much local governmental responsibility and as little centralized government authority as feasible.

44. We speak not of the easy money, or ethnic and class prejudice, or protection from imported goods, attributes that sometimes mark populism. We have in mind, rather, the familiar quotation from Justice Learned Hand in his decision to limit Alcoa's monopoly control of the aluminum industry: "It is possible, because of its indirect social or moral effect, to prefer a system of small producers, each dependent for his success upon his own skill and character, to one in which the great mass of those engaged must accept the direction of a few." *U.S. v. Aluminum Co. of America*, 148 F.2d 416ff (1945). At least one recent scholar seems to be groping towards this recognition; see C. Lasch, *The True & Only Heaven* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991).

Without question the Law of Moses strongly affirms the importance of privately assigned property. What Wright seeks to make clear however, and what we affirm strongly, is that the Bible prefers private assignment of property not as an end in itself, nor necessarily because of its concern for individual rights (although the Bible is indeed very concerned for the individual's rights *and* responsibilities), but because privately assigned property rights assures economic protection of the family better than alternative regimes of property rights assignments. The greater affirmation here is the importance of the family.

When we speak of "property rights" in the Old Testament, it is clear from the foregoing that we are not concerned with an abstract, impersonal principle, nor with an *inherent* sacrosanctity of property *per se*. A person's right to the security and integrity of his ancestral land and other property was based (1) on his relationship to Yahweh, as a member of the community of his people, of which relationship and status his land was the symbol and guarantee and (2) on the fact that his land and property were essential to the economic viability of his household, with all its social and religious significance for the individuals within it and for the national well-being before God. On the basis of the Old Testament, therefore, we cannot speak of property itself being "sacred" or of the "sanctity of property". It is the *relationships*, Godward and humanward, of which property is a function and indicator, which are alone sacred. (140f, emphases in original)

The preference for decentralized property ownership implicitly affirms not just the economic well-being of the family, but also the political and economic *responsibility* of the family. It affirms, in the political sphere, the "network" of local families (the *mishpāhâ*), operating at times informally and voluntaristically, and at times formally and officially as the "elders at the gate". As noted there was a clear preference in the Pentateuch to resolve most of Israel's problems at the village level. As Mendenhall and Gottwald, among others, have made clear, this was a radical break with the practice of the surrounding nations, and therefore reveals the uniquely Yahwistic nature of Israel's formation. These preferences for early Israel offer us insight today in the way God ideally would work with any nation.

In addressing the problems of poverty in our nation, the preferred solution would combine some interplay between voluntary associations like the church (or better yet, networks of cooperating churches within regional areas) and regional governmental coalitions. Larger metropolitan regions today serve a similar political function as the early Israelite village. Passing in and out of the gate in order to go to and from work in the fields of Palestine has its counterpart today in commuting *throughout* a metropolitan region. Indeed, metropolitan

regions are coherent economic entities, and therefore should in some way be coherent political entities so that the problems within them (like poverty) can be resolved at the local/regional level, rather than being foisted up to the state and national levels. The brand of federalism (if that is what it is) held forth in the Bible would have a central governing authority serving primarily as a source of informal authority which holds the various parties (private and public) at the local level responsible for accomplishing the necessary political and economic tasks of society. As the central source of authority the central state would have to act when those otherwise responsible fail in their responsibility. Even in these cases the ideal form of centralized governmental action would be to devolve the actual resolution to as decentralized a level as feasible, compelling the previously responsible institutions to live-up to their responsibility rather than replacing them.

Whether these extensions of the earlier arguments, as suggestive as we find them, adequately capture the ethical urgings of the Pentateuch is less important in drawing this section to a close, as the unmistakable support in the Bible for the social and economic health and responsibility of the family, whatever governmental forms may be in place. The Bible clearly assumes and seems to prefer the extended family as the normative family. So it is that in I Tim. 5, Paul instructs grandchildren to be financially responsible for their grandmothers, such that the church will not assume this responsibility. Allowing for the several "structural elements" of early Israel's welfare system as these were noted in section 2 (such as work expectations and a liberal standard of assistance), which otherwise could be called objectives, clearly the overriding objective of Israel's system of assistance was to establish and maintain economically secure families.

4. Conclusion

Given the recent attention paid in the U.S. to the importance of the traditional family for raising children successfully, and amidst the growing evidence of dysfunctional traditional families in the U.S.,⁴⁵ to now turn to the Bible and find the "family theme" being emphasized

45. A growing number of recent reports chronicle this. See, e.g.: B. Whitehead, "Dan Quayle Was Right" *The Atlantic Monthly* No. 271:47-84 (April 1993); D. Hamburg, "The American Family Transformed" *Society* 30:60-69 (January-February 1993); J. Q. Wilson, "The Family-Values Debate" *Commentary* 95:24-31 (April 1993). To allay possible criticism by some, the "traditional" family norm to which I refer is not male-dominated in any harmful way. After instructing wives to submit to their husbands, St. Paul instructs husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Eph. 5:22ff). Christ sacrificed beyond human comprehension (Is. 52:13 - 53:12) for the church; He washed the feet of his disciples as

could appear as allowing current reality to inform the hermeneutical enterprise, rather than allowing the Bible to throw fresh light on the world around us. If so, there is nothing unusual in this regard. It is the truly exceptional person and exceptional era that correctly anticipates difficult ethical concerns before becoming overwhelmed by them. The general case finds us running to our sources of ethical insight as we struggle to comprehend what is happening to and around us. We must believe that our great God accounted for this human tendency from the beginning and provided for us in the Bible (aided by centuries of commentary) sufficient guidance if we but commit ourselves to careful study of this instruction for each new era.

This paper began not with troubles in the family but with citizen dissatisfaction over the administration of welfare in the U.S., the thrust of which is the complaint about growing dependency and too little work being done by those relying on public assistance. Out of a concern based on previous examples that concentrating aggressively on single pieces of the welfare system runs the risk of counter-productive outcomes, we proposed asking what role the system of welfare properly should play within society. Thus we "back into" the concern for the family - albeit not from considering the likely objectives of the U.S. welfare system itself. The present system only tangentially, if at all, embraces a concern for the health of the family. The various incentives that comprise our welfare system too often are likely to be detrimental to the family rather than supportive.

The importance of the family emerges from our examination of the Bible's commended system for addressing a debilitating poverty within early Israel - a condition which, unfortunately, describes too many of the poor in the U.S. today. In the midst of waning economic opportunity in the central cities of the land and, more generally, for lower-skilled workers,⁴⁶ and amidst a practical attack on the importance of the traditional family,⁴⁷ it is not

an example of how faithful Christians are to treat one another - sacrificial service (Jn. 13:1ff). The "wife of noble character" of Proverbs 31 hardly appears to be dominated or harmfully submissive, but rather a strong partner to her husband. My desire is to establish the norm of biblical instruction and not the sin-tainted and imperfect image of that norm.

46. Ongoing debate surrounds these two characterizations of economic opportunity within the economy. Having considered accounts of the lack of good employment opportunities for less skilled workers in the central cities, and whether this spatial dimension to job location makes any difference, we are attracted to W. J. Wilson's arguments that current conditions in the economy and the family have created a historically exceptional level of job-related difficulty for poor residents in central cities. See W. J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner city*,

surprising that particularly single parent families face great difficulty in coping economically or otherwise. It is our judgment that the social and economic conditions characterizing the second half of the twentieth century have created debilitating forms of poverty in a way that could not have occurred earlier in U.S. history when the traditional family was stronger and when unskilled workers could find remunerative jobs in the emerging industrial landscape. Even today, where traditional families remain strong - one thinks of many recent immigrants to the U.S. from all parts of the world - economic difficulty (even within adverse central city locations) is far less likely to become debilitating. What is distressing about poverty today is that the nation's historically most disadvantaged citizens - subject earlier to slavery, and subsequently to subtle and not-so-subtle forms of harmful race-based treatment by the dominant white citizenry - have borne a substantially greater incidence of the debilitating social and economic realities.

Bobbing somewhere in the midst of the difficult social and economic developments is the welfare system. When it was created in the mid-1930s, who could have foreseen the unfortunate future developments within the family, the economy, and the city? Allowing for an understandable lack of prescience, the system nonetheless maintained from its inception incentives that are contrary to establishing and maintaining strong traditional families - extended *or* nuclear.

Many have judged the basic Social Security program for the aged to have been a great success at lowering the incidence of poverty in a group who otherwise would have experienced relatively high levels of poverty. It did so, however, by lessening incentives for members of extended families to care for one another privately. An alternative approach would have used positive financial inducements (possibly tax-based) for family members to care for their own. In contrast, unemployment assistance, apart from problems in the administration which create incentives for prolonged idleness for unscrupulous participants, probably strengthens the family.

the Underclass, & Public Policy (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987). See also his recent unpublished paper ("The New Urban Poverty & the Problem of Race," delivered as the Obert C. Tanner Lecture at the University of Michigan in October of 1993) in which he responds to his critics and strengthens his argument that the poorest sections of the central city know today an exceptional degree of "social isolation" which makes grasping economic opportunity very difficult.

47. We have in mind here the message seen and heard in so much of the popular media and music; we think sadly of the misogynous lyrics of so many rap songs, the so-called comedy routines filled with appeals to racial and ethnic bigotry, and much of film and TV fare which displays values so contrary to nurturing strong traditional families.

As noted in section 1, "welfare" tends popularly to be associated with three programs: AFDC, Food Stamps, and Medicaid. The general assessment is that welfare has discouraged the formation and stability of traditional families. Most studies have addressed the nuclear family and asked whether the availability of welfare assistance has encouraged some families to separate (probably not an overwhelming number) and especially allowed unmarried couples not to marry when pregnancy results and the child is brought to term (a greater number).⁴⁸ The existence of incentives affecting extended family responsibility has not been studied adequately - which itself tells us something about the nature of the U.S. commitment to the extended family.⁴⁹

The welfare-related issues troubling the U.S. at present are dependency and a desire on the part of what appears to be a majority of citizens for reforms that require more work. These are legitimate issues in light of the ethical thrust of biblical teaching. The message of this paper is that in our efforts to address dependency and workfare, we should use as our ethical touchstone the impact upon the well-being of families, testing, as it were, whether a particular reform effort will help establish and maintain strong families, or whether it contains incentive that will weaken family formation and stability. And if we are to err in the risks we take with policy, let us err in the direction of over-loading incentives in the direction of securing strong families.

As we look about our society and economy it is interesting to note how often various policies court economic inefficiency. One thinks, for example, of agricultural price supports, which today spread greater benefits to wealthier families (and corporations!) than to small

48. The deductive case is stronger than the empirical evidence offered to discern it. See: R. Moffitt, "Incentive Effects of the U.S. Welfare System: A Review" *Jrnl. of Econ. Lit.* XXX:1-61 (March 1992); I. Garfinkel and S. McLanahan, "Single Mother Families, Economic Insecurity, & Government Policy" (IRP Conference Paper, May 28-30, 1992, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison). Regarding female headedness, most studies find that welfare, though a contributing factor, certainly is not the most important cause. Conditions on labor markets and the general cultural climate affecting the acceptability of single parenthood within society are far more important as causes.

49. Why the nation adopted the negative incentives is an important question, the answer to which will reveal attributes of the American character - an understanding of which will be necessary for effective reform. Given the present scope of this paper, we cannot address this important issue.

family farms, while holding prices higher for all consumers. In an earlier day various manifestations of so-called "blue laws" discouraged larger firms to the benefit of smaller, local ones, yielding higher prices than otherwise. Or consider the structure of import restrictions yesterday and today, in which all consumers are hurt by higher prices (and jobs lost wherever consumers accordingly decrease their spending), to the benefit of workers and property owners in protected sectors of the economy. In other words, we have been willing to incur considerable economic inefficiency in order to pursue various (perhaps family-based) social objectives. Why are we not willing to court economic inefficiency in the administration of welfare in order to encourage families to form and stay together?

REVIEW ARTICLE: The Moral Foundations of Market Institutions, J. Gray (with commentaries by C. Kukathas, P. Minford and R. Plant) Institute of Economics Affairs Health and Welfare Unit, Choice in Welfare, no. 10 (£7.95)

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The argument of John Gray, the distinguished Oxford political philosopher, in this extended paper could be summarised as follows. In Chapter 1 he argues that the two extreme positions in public policy and political economy, namely libertarianism and egalitarianism, are both impracticable and philosophically indefensible. Gray differs from classical liberalism in believing that "negative" freedom (i.e. absence of coercive constraint on individual freedom of action) is a means rather than an end itself. Moreover, unlike the classical liberals, he argues that the market economy needs to have moral justification over and above a purely pragmatic defence of its operation. (it is worth noting that Gray himself formerly occupied a classical liberal position before adopting his current views.) Of particular interest to economists is Chapter 2 which provides an elegant restatement of the relative social desirability of the market as a system of resource allocation given informational and incentives arguments. Gray follows the ideas of Hayek and Polanyi and stresses that the market is an epistemic device. While he is careful not to posit a one-for-one correspondence between market outcomes (income and wealth) and moral deserts he is confident that under the market system there is not that total disassociation between inputs and output rewards which seemed to be rife in the command economies.

In Chapter 3 Gray introduces his key concept of autonomy (i.e. the ability of individuals to be part authors of their own lives) which he argues must be a core value of a free and good society. He admits that autonomy may not be a universal good but argues that it is essential for any good life lived within the context of western societies. The preconditions necessary for autonomy are complex and sufficiently diverse as between individuals that they cannot readily be defined and prescribed through the definition of a single legal right (such as absence of coercion by the state - hence a point of contrast with the classical liberal's emphasis on negative freedom). Having pointed to the importance of autonomy Gray can then argue that the moral justification for the market is that it provides the arena within which individuals can exercise autonomy.

Some commentators might be willing to accept the end of autonomous individual development but would argue that this requires extensive redistribution of income and wealth (in order to furnish all members of society with the resources necessary for reasonable life chances). In Chapter 4 Gray therefore attempts to dissolve this "Egalitarian Mirage". In Gray's judgement the democratic socialist or social democrat errs in treating empowerment as a positional good and therefore in arriving at the conclusion that individuals should be given more or less equals amounts of it. In fact, in Gray's view it is not necessarily the case that measures designed to increase the autonomy of one group need reduce the autonomy of other individuals. The logic of egalitarianism is flawed because it demands too much, so Gray claims. Consistent egalitarians would be forced to penalise those who have been given "unfair" advantages because of genetic inheritance or a stable family background.

Having sought to demonstrate that the egalitarian state is unnecessarily intrusive and flawed in its concept, Gray proceeds to dispose of any claims on behalf of market socialism (Chapter 5). In Chapter 6 Gray outlines the enabling welfare state. This would seek to ensure that every member of society had sufficient resources to exercise his/her autonomy. The requirements for such resources define each individual's basic need and for Gray the critical feature of such needs is that they are in principle satiable. Thus, whilst the welfare state could be quite extensive (and expensive) in its range of operations there would not be the inherent tendency for the share of spending in GDP to rise which seems to be demonstrated by the existing arrangements. The last Chapter (7) takes a broader look at the sort of overall "social market economy" which Gray envisages. Once again, it is notable that Gray envisages a wide canvas for state action. For example, he extends the public good argument for state intervention and argues that government should ensure the rich cultural and physical environment which is most likely to promote autonomy (this perspective causes him to look with favour on continental European town planning and urban public transport policies). To Gray "fundamental" scientific research and "high" culture are intrinsic goods and the public purse should be prepared to pay for them. However, central banking should be taken away from the direct control of governments and politicians (i.e. there should be an independent Bank of England). He also infers that much of the post-1945 British Welfare State has been a "middle class racket".

Gray's paper is 98 pages long and is followed by 40 pages of commentaries. These are provided by Chandran Kukathas (a classical liberal political philosopher), Patrick Minford (a market liberal and monetarist) and Raymond Plant (a "reconstructed" democratic socialist thinker).

Turning to an evaluation of Gray's argument there is much which can be readily

endorsed. His critique of the various ideologies is very telling. Quite apart from a lack of compassion, libertarianism may be philosophically flawed (individual utilities cannot be added together when they are pursuing incommensurable values). Egalitarianism in practice has involved taking away from individual's capabilities as often as it has led to increasing them. Market socialism is not a real option. Contrary to the often rather abstracted analysis of Anglo-Saxon neoclassical economics the market economy is, as Gray argues, nested in a set of social, relational and legal frameworks (Gray points to the work of the German Freiburg School and its support for a social market economy). Gray's argument for the market on informational and incentive grounds would now be quite widely accepted within the profession. Gray is also right to argue that the conditions for autonomy are complex depending as they do on the individual. He is surely correct to claim that rights are in practice the consequence of a good society rather than its foundation (on this point Gray is reminiscent of Burke's critique of the propagation of abstract notions of rights during the French Revolution; the collapse of democracy in Weimar Germany or post-colonial Africa and the current difficulties in establishing a civil and liberal society in Russia suggest that they may be right).

However, what of Gray's central idea of autonomy (a certain quality of independent and responsible behaviour)? The Christian may well approach it with ambivalence. This is because, on the one hand, sin can be viewed as humanity's futile bid for autonomy relative to God. On the other hand, Christians might also look with some favour on the establishment of Gray's responsible, self-directed individuals. They would, however, have less confidence that such behaviour could be based on our internal stocks of goodness and virtue. Gray does recognise that autonomy does require good quality relationships with other people. His autonomous individual is not a wanton person without ethical standards, long term projects or deep attachments. Perhaps paradoxically, the Christian would claim that "autonomous" life (in the proper sense) requires submission to God and spiritual regeneration.

The Christian would probably also agree with Kukathas' point (in his commentary) that some of the desirable features of autonomy can appear even where external conditions are apparently unfavourable. Material deprivation or illness can lead to spiritual development. Kukathas asks who had more autonomy, Uncle Tom or his master, and in a similar way some Christians and others have observed that they felt more free within a labour camp than outside. None of this need imply an endorsement of poverty, disease, slavery or totalitarianism but it is

worth noting that some of the best features of "autonomy" (e.g. the ability to stand according to one's principles and conscience) could be stimulated by conditions which were unfriendly to autonomy in the normal sense of the term. An issue of time discounting could even arise; to what extent is it legitimate to reduce an individual's autonomy now if it leads to greater autonomy in the future? For example, at the time of writing the activities of the Child Support Agency are attracting much hostile comment. The "absent" fathers are claiming impoverishment which presumably reduces their autonomy and also that of any second family they have become involved with. However, my understanding of Gray's autonomy is that it involves the individual taking charge of his or her own life in the light of the knowledge that he or she will bear the responsibility for the consequences of his or her own actions. Thus the burdens imposed by the Child Support Agency paradoxically increases autonomy to the extent that fathers are taught to be "responsible" (and the same applies to future generations too to the extent that the new system influences their attitudes and behaviour).

As to Gray's policy proposals I would guess that many Christians would agree with most of them (this might be because they have a deceptive appearance of being middle of the road!). A Christian economist should probably not endorse either libertarian freedom or egalitarianism as the ultimate ends for society. Gray's emphasis on the satiability of basic needs also finds echoes in recent Christian economics. For example Goudzwaard⁵⁰ has argued that the axiom of insatiable consumer preferences is the flaw at the heart of neoclassical economics as well as the mistaken assumption which underlies the damaging obsession with economic growth which characterises modern economic policy. Gray's contention that the state should seek to meet the basic needs also parallels some of the provisional social principles which Hay derives from the Old and New Testament.⁵¹

And yet, while Gray's notion of satiable basic needs is rather attractive, it will prove very difficult to operationalise. Indeed, there is debate as to whether they are really satiable (see Minford's commentary). Gray is prepared to concede that in some cases health care needs may not be satiable (e.g. treatment for a chronic debilitating disease) though it is curious that he does not recognise that the infinitely expansive demand health care derives in part from its provision free at the point of use. (Gray might respond that the "want" for health care may be capable of indefinite growth but the "need" is hardly infinite. This may well be true, and Christians would be the first to acknowledge the contrast between wants and needs. Nevertheless, Gray's analysis does seem to imply a form of paternalism which is not entirely desirable; i.e. the doctor will decide when your basic health needs have been satisfied.)

50. B. Goudzwaard (1979), *Capitalism and Progress*, Wedge, Toronto.

51. D. Hay, *Economics Today: A Christian Critique*, Apollos, Leicester

There is also the distinction, Gray does not examine, between cases where the resource requirements to satisfy a basic need remain more or less constant over time and cases where, whilst the allocation of a certain amount of resources could still in principle satisfy that basic need, over time an ever increasing amount of resources would be required. Probably Gray believes that basic needs could be defined in such a way as to exclude the second possibility. In some cases this is true (e.g, the physiological requirement for a certain number of calories is not likely to change by much) but other types of basic need (e.g. an "adequate" degree of mobility, health care, education, cultural stimulation) are probably partly supply-determined. In other words the development of technology and the rise in the general level of prosperity have led to an expansion in basic needs (something is only a "need" if it can be conceivably realised; whilst I may claim that I have a basic need for inter-planetary travel and to live until I am 150 no one is likely to treat this very seriously, but in the year 2094 ?!). Thus whilst Gray is clearly concerned that the enabling welfare state and the social market economy should tackle poverty it is implicit that he is talking about *absolute* rather than *relative* poverty. I do not disagree with such an emphasis because by definition "relative poverty" is an enduring phenomenon ("the poor are always with us") unless governments aim at egalitarianism (and we have already seen Gray's critique of that policy) but rather the emphasis on absolute poverty should be made explicit rather than implicit.

It can therefore be argued that basic needs are likely to be ratcheted-up over time as the accompaniment of economic growth and technical change. This need not be fatal to Gray's scheme provided the rate of growth of those basic needs is contained to the more general expansion of the economy (unless this happens the state's share in GDP would follow a rising trend and Gray's social market economy would revert to the path taken by the 1945-1979 British welfare state/mixed economy which he views as undesirable). In some cases the growth of basic needs probably could be kept below the GDP growth rate (e.g. education, personal transport) though in other cases this is more debatable (health care provides a very good example of increased technological capability leading to an escalation in the cost of the socially acceptable minimum level of service). Social security needs probably can be restrained provided that the emphasis is indeed on absolute rather than relative poverty.

It is worth stressing that perceived basic needs may be rather endogenous to the

workings of the welfare system. For example, pre-1993 invalidity benefit compensated those judges too sick to do their previous occupation. Post-1993 the Government would like us to believe that compensation is only justifiable for those unable to do any kind of work (even if it was not their previous occupation). Gray recognises that the definition of the scope and content of basic needs and the associated welfare responses will be disputable. His response is to retain as much universality of entitlement in welfare benefits as possible. This proposal has certain attractions (e.g. reduction of disincentive effects and the costs and intrusiveness of the administration of the system) but may be fundamentally flawed on grounds of cost. It seems likely that both the Conservatives and Labour are now moving against Child Benefit, the state pension and other non-means tested benefits. In any case the logic of Gray's case (in the light of individual circumstances each individual should be guaranteed the resources necessary to attain autonomy) may point to more means testing and discretion on the part of the authorities rather than less. Classical liberals would object in principle to this but I doubt if Christians should. It would represent a kind of parsimonious socialism or tough but paternalistic Toryism (Minford likens it to the kind of welfare provision which would be produced by "Swiss Calvinism").

Finally, I would like to strongly recommend that anyone interested in economics, politics or public policy should read this paper (it is short but very weighty and the IEA may even be still offering alongside two related volumes at the inclusive bargain price of £8!!). Christians reviewing "secular" work often argue that the book outlines an area of thought which urgently needs an informed Christian input. In this case such a response would be fully justified. Christians would probably endorse certain aspects of "autonomy". We should also be sensitive to the moral void in which much public policy is currently being conducted. Whilst the 1989 revolutions have clearly revealed Marxism and the associated command economy as the "god which failed" there is increasing recognition that the market by itself is not a sufficient alternative. In his review of another of Gray's recent publications (*Beyond the New Right*, Routledge), the *Financial Times* columnist Joe Rogaly wrote: "Something has to replace Marx-based philosophies, and perhaps reinvent Christianity. Mr Gray ... suggests where to start" (June 15, 1993). Whilst I doubt the need to "reinvent" Christianity, Gray's work does indeed pose very pertinent questions as to the moral basis of economics and public policy.