

The Redemption of Capitalism Through Christian Principles

by


Randell A. Cain, Jr.

Date: 27 March 2023

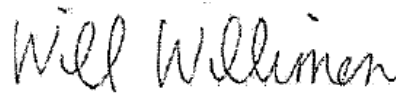
Approved:



First Reader: Dr. Kevin Rowe



Second Reader: Dr. Gregory Jones



D.Min. Director: Dr. Will Willimon

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2023

ABSTRACT

The Redemption of Capitalism Through Christian Principles

by

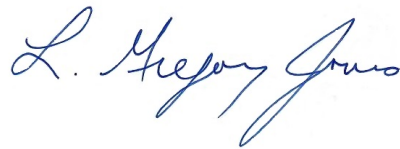
Randell A. Cain, Jr.

Date: 27 March 2023


Approved:



First Reader: Dr. Kavin Rowe



Second Reader: Dr. Gregory Jones



D.Min. Director: Dr. Will Willimon

An abstract of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2023

Copyright by
Randell A. Cain, Jr.
2023

ABSTRACT

Capitalism and Christianity have been at odds in the application of this system of economics that has been deemed exploitative, manipulative and destructive of people who are not beneficiaries. In essence, the divide between the haves and the have nots in American society makes capitalism the scapegoat for the ills that society finds problematic without immediate remedy. Adam Smith, the father of modern capitalism, is often quoted in support of the capitalism that is currently deployed without an understanding that Smith's capitalism is not the same as the contemporary capitalism with the negative effects. In fact, Smith wrote of God and deity which bring Christianity and the Church overtly into the conversation. Discussions surrounding capitalism typically present one of two options – accept things as they are with the understanding that things will likely get worse rather than better or change the system of economics to something more palatable. Into this discussion, I introduce a more thoughtful and nuanced alternative, redeem capitalism. Redemption is based on the belief that if individuals can be redeemed then the systems that they participate in, as redeemed individuals can be redeemed as well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must acknowledge in the writing of this thesis a few people who were impactful on my vision, undertaking and completion. First, I must acknowledge my Savior and Lord, Jesus the Christ, who gave me life and life eternal with the understanding that my greatest thank you is to live well in-between. Second, I must acknowledge my wife, Cynthia D. Rorie-Cain, and my children – Hamilton, Grant, Olivia, Victoria, and Preston – for being patient with me in undertaking the academic rigor along with the time commitment to pursue my Doctor of Ministry degree at Duke Divinity School. Third, I must acknowledge my first and second readers, Dr. Kavin Rowe and Dr. L. Gregory Jones, for being willing to support my journey through what is clearly a controversial topic in many circles. Fourth, I must acknowledge my Uncle Johnny Bailey. Uncle Johnny made a prophetic utterance to me on Christmas Day, December 25, 2016. I was in the midst of the pastoral search process at my current church, Zion Memorial Missionary Baptist Church. Uncle Johnny asked me if I was looking at going back to school to get my doctorate. I told him that I would only be interested if I was pastoring so that I would have a place of application. Uncle Johnny told me that I was going to be the pastor of Zion Memorial and he told me that I was going to get my doctorate. In January 2017, I was voted in as the sixth pastor of Zion Memorial and I gained entrance into Duke Divinity School in the Fall of 2019 with the expectation that I will complete this journey in May 2023. Fifth, I want to thank Hood Theological Seminary for preparing me for transformative ministry. Sixth, I want to thank Zion Memorial for allowing me to respectfully challenge their past while helping to lead them into an unchartered future. Seventh, I want to thank my dear friend, Dr. Karen Owens, my former classmate at Hood

Theological Seminary and editor of my thesis, for her willingness to work with me and her professionalism in helping me to prepare the most scholarly work of my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 – Capitalism As Initially Proposed.....	7
CHAPTER 2 – The Capitalism That Americans Have.....	23
CHAPTER 3 – The Church And Capitalism.....	36
CHAPTER 4 – Can The Church And America Do Better?.....	52
CHAPTER 5 – The Church Provides Leadership To Capitalism.....	77
CHAPTER 6 – It Can Be Done.....	98
CHAPTER 7 – Conclusions.....	108
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	113
BIOGRAPHY AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE.....	115

INTRODUCTION

Capitalism has been deemed exploitative due to the commoditization of human capital and natural resources. This has resulted in imbalances reflective of issues surrounding systemic racism, oppression and marginalization as well as environmental issues such as climate change and pollution. Problems have been created that, seemingly, objective financial decisions to generate profits has also created an underclass of individuals and a challenged environmental climate without hint of a sustainable, thriving community based on some sense of equitable sharing.

This thesis describes my desire to re-envision the application of capitalism based on the influence of Christianity to thwart some of the ills that capitalism, untethered from its Christian roots, has caused. A focusing question for my thesis will be, “*What does the authentic Christian witness look like in the face of capitalism?*” This authentic Christian witness is one that is overtly intentional in presence to combat the overtly intentional way in which capitalism has veered from the initial conception of this form of economics. Additionally, the authentic Christian witness is one that is unapologetically different from allowing Christianity to be placed into a box of complicity, only allowed to be revealed in certain places and certain times.

Beginning with the genesis of capitalism based on Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, the immediate departure point between purpose and perspective provided a catalyst for capitalism to become corrupted due to the seeming lack of consistency with Smith’s previous text, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which dealt with the characteristics of conscience, moral judgement, and virtue that would have tempered the unfettered notion that free markets and their ideological legacy, capitalism, should exist

in a way that have resulted in a mindset of domination, going far beyond God-ordained dominion.

Having lost its way like a child trying to grow up without the proper parental oversight, guidance and direction, capitalism has departed from the fundamental underpinnings that clearly mark Smith's expectations in *The Wealth of Nations*. While being proclaimed as based on the invisible hand of the free market, capitalism's deviations from the true Smith paternalistic ideological roots have revealed levels of intentional actions leading to corruption rather than redemption of the ills of humanity as revealed in Kenneth Barnes' *Redeeming Capitalism*.

As Smith was overt in speaking to the presence and expected impact of God and deity, the exercise and implementation of free will, as related to capitalism, has been widely revealed in a way that has caused the Church to be permissive in what should have potentially been an issue for protest. Benjamin Freeman dealt with this overt complicity in *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* as capitalism has become a religion in and unto itself with idols and idol worshippers which Eugene McCarragher wrote of in *The Enchantments of Mammon – How Capitalism Became The Religion of Modernity*.

Several proponents of seeing capitalism as being irredeemable, such as Walter Brueggemann, have presented a problem without seeming solutions while others have more hopefully focused on the redemption of capitalism. *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist* and *Better Capitalism*, written by Richard Neuhaus as well as Paul Knowlton and Aaron Hedges, respectively, present the alternative views of capitalism which the Church can support in making decisions for the betterment of society and presenting a Christian witness in the capitalistic society.

Issues regarding power, the misuse, abuse and manipulation of power in a warped sense of domination versus God-ordained dominion has corrupted individuals, society, capitalism, and the Church in varying degrees of overt participation or covert agreement. Power, exercised correctly, can be used in a way that reveals the redemptive power of God. The Church is the embodiment of such power and is entrusted with being the provider of a Christian witness.

By the Church being overt in presenting a Christian witness, it can be revealed as a solution to the ills of this capitalistic society based on continued emphasis of formation as disciples of Jesus Christ as shown in C. Kavin Rowe's *Christianity's Surprise – A Sure and Certain Hope* as well as finding creative and imaginative solutions such as the processes presented in Gregory Jones' and Andrew Hogue's *Navigating the Future – Traditioned Innovation for Wilder Seas* which seeks to change the future by recognizing the challenges of the past in the present and finding ways to create a better future.

There is currently a deficit in society in terms of ethics and morality related to the creation, capturing and distribution of wealth that the Church can more overtly confront by offering alternative ways of implementing capitalism that is more consistent with Christianity. Therefore, rather than settling for what is a forgone conclusion in terms of the corruption of capitalism as applied in society, a more inclusive thriving community can be imagined that will only be fully revealed by the Church leading an effort of redemption, repentance, and reclamation.

For the Church to do so to provide leadership in the effort of redeeming, causing to repent and reclaiming capitalism for the glory of God, it must, as the Apostle Paul challenged Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12, “set the believers an example (or witness) in

speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity”. It is incumbent upon the Church to set an example in practices, programs and possibilities that embody Christian character, integrity and values in this capitalistic society. Being the example is not a radical or liberal perspective. It is what Scripture calls for the Church to do.

In many respects, this topic lies at the heart of what it means to be a Christian in American society. The challenge arises from the very real issue of perspective on service to God and humankind, which are intimately intertwined. As Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” The opportunity found within these theological constraints and the opportunity for the Church is the potential and possibility to serve God with the wealth that God has entrusted to the Church, individuals and the body collective. In doing so, the Church can lead the path forward in presenting an authentic Christian witness in a capitalistic society.

To approach such a topic with only a utopian vantage point would be similar, seeing hope as something to be found in Heaven but not here on Earth. Instead, in seeking to find application of Jesus’ expectations found in John 14:12, “Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.” I believe it is incumbent upon the Church to cease simply commenting on the wrongs that have been enacted due to the corruption of capitalism. The Church should lead the way for finding ways to demonstrate an alternative perspective with a realized, actionable, and pragmatic approach to dealing with the ills of capitalism. For every sense of abuse, manipulation, and misappropriation of capital – human, financial, or material – that exists, the Church

should be able to offer means of a repenting mindset with redemption as the aim.

Returning to the true origins of capitalism, an authentic Christian witness, led by the Church, can help to recalibrate the capitalistic society with a vision of what is possible with an intentional focus on Christian ethics and values. The approach should have an impact on the individual and then the corporal from the perspective of the world seeing something different in how the Church lives into a capitalist society. The difference should help society to recognize that the alternative approach is not the same as an abolition of capitalism. As a result, capitalism can be redeemed as individuals who have been redeemed live out their redemption.

The methodology to be employed will involve reviewing current literature from three perspectives – the origin of capitalism based on the work of Adam Smith and the role of the Church, how capitalism lost its way and the complicity of the Church, and the opportunity for the Church to lead in a way that is authentically Christian in the capitalistic society supported by existing examples and potential solutions. The origin of capitalism lays out a foundation in cooperation with the Church rather than seeing the two ideologies being separated and distinct. The combination of the two at origin helps to identify the deviation that has occurred over time. With the Church deploying leadership, the hope is that capitalism does not have to be replaced but can be redeemed by a return to some form of the initial Christian roots.

Systems of economics have existed since the beginning of time. What began as means of bartering for specific needs has evolved into the opportunity to build and distribute wealth. In capitalism, that means is localized around participants who either create wealth for themselves or others, capture the wealth created, and then keep or

distribute the wealth captured. How the keeping and distribution is handled will be analyzed from the perspective of society and the role of the Church in defining this keeping and distribution.

With evidence that capitalism has created economic, societal, and class inequities, I will proceed to demonstrate how the Church has been complicit or silent in this process in a fashion that has been tantamount to winking and nodding in complicity as society has led the Church instead of the Church leading society. Economic challenges provide real opportunities for the Church to step into the gaps between those who have and those who have not. Lowering barriers of inclusion based on historical societal structures aligns with the messages of the Gospel. Traditional class issues that appear to relegate those in positions of power and authority as dominant in a perpetual sense can be confronted by the Church in an effort to show a better path forward.

Finally, believing that the individual proponents of capitalism are like those who need redemption from sin, which is the mission of the Church, I will offer examples of how abundant living has been redefined by existing individuals and institutions while also presenting ideas to show that what is occurring on the micro level can be more widely applied in a broader sense. Consequently, the institution that must lead the charge in this effort is the Church.

CHAPTER 1 – Capitalism As Initially Proposed

When I began my interest in pursuing the Doctor of Ministry degree at Duke Divinity School, I was prompted by the book, *Where Do We Go From Here – Chaos or Community*, the last book written by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the foreword, Vincent Harding wrote of the provocative challenge that King faced as he put forth a tome that was written in precarious times for our nation, during the Vietnam War.

Harding wrote:

He knew that there were many black and white allies and supporters of his organization and of the larger freedom and justice movement who considered it unwise, unpatriotic and unnecessarily provocative to combine the call for legal and economic rights at home with a profound questioning of the foreign policy of a federal government whose assistance was considered essential in the achievement of civil rights.¹

Yet, King, one who never shied away from what was right and righteous, pushed the proverbial envelope anyway as he wanted to make sure the world knew he operated from a foundation akin to the words of Micah 6:8, “He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” As a result, King had to confront the government, which commanded the direction of millions and billions of dollars that could be used to fight wars while simultaneously appearing to offer a blind eye and a deaf ear to what was happening in the United States of America.

Had King gotten it wrong or was America misguided in applying the tools of capitalism that had amassed great wealth and power for a few, controlled by a few, funded by the masses but not always mobilized for their welfare and on their behalf? Or,

¹ King, Jr., Martin Luther, *Where Do We Go From Here – Chaos or Community?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), xvii.

had America gotten it wrong in extolling the virtues of capitalism that appeared to prize individual achievement over collective progress in a way that would address the clear challenges that many faced on a daily basis?

Looking deeper into the issue that plagued King and inspired the writing of the book that inspired me to see if there was a possibility of merging my sacred call with my lifelong secular ambition, investing, I turned to the one who is considered the father of modern capitalism, Adam Smith. Adam Smith wrote the compelling book, *The Wealth of Nations*, in 1776, the same year the United States of America declared its independence from Great Britain after a year of fighting the Revolutionary War. At the time of the writing, white men were considered to be the dominant protagonists in the war for social, political, and economic independence.

The premises that formed this nation as well as the economic structure posited by Adam Smith served as the foundation for what Americans know to be capitalism. Capitalism has been broadly deployed in a continued corruptive fashion in a dynamic world such that it has now been questioned as the right economic system to be maintained due to the negative consequences. The challenge exists, not so much with capitalism as a system of economics, which has gone astray but a system of economics that has not been deployed in the fashion that it was originally intended. As a result, the simple focus on producing wealth has been marred and overshadowed Smith's intent on helping society in aggregate through the means of wealth production and the division of the fruits associated with it.

For example, on the title page of the edition of *The Wealth of Nations* that I have used is a preemptive warning that reads, "This book is a product of its time and does not

reflect the same values as it would if it were written today. Parents might wish to discuss with their children how views on race have changed before allowing them to read this classic work.”² The necessity of a preemptive warning suggests that the evolution of thinking has changed, but when the foundation remains the same, problems can still exist beneath the surface and serve as the basis for continuing to do things that are harmful to others similar to the challenges associated with a contemporary blind spot highlighted in Critical Race Theory, an examination of how the cross-currents of politics, economics, and society are shaped by historical foundations associated with racial biases and prejudices.

Part of the thinking behind Critical Race Theory is the necessity of dealing with the past on the basis of how then-contemporary ideologies corrupted in the past as well as the corruptive elements that continue to exist in the present, which need to be eradicated if the future will repudiate the past instead of repeating the past with advantaged participants turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to their ancestors who created the environment for some to benefit and many to continue to suffer. In his book, *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith wrote of how all people are connected in some fashion:

In civilized society he stands at all times in need of the co-operation and assistance of great multitudes, while his whole life is scarce sufficient to gain the friendship of a few persons. In almost every other race of animals, each individual, when it is grown up to maturity, is entirely independent, and in its natural state has occasion for the assistance of no other living creature. But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them.³

² Smith, Adam, *The Wealth of Nations* (Mineola: Ixia Press, 2019), title page.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

The engagement of the people within his time regarding economy revolved around what Smith identified as three classes of people who participated in the generation of revenue – “to those who live by rent, to those who live by wages, and to those who live by profit.”⁴ According to Smith, these were separate people with separate interests with the latter group having a greater interest in controlling and possibly monopolizing the economic aspects of society for its own good. As described by Smith:

The interest of the dealers, however, in any particular branch of trade or manufacturers, is always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the public. To widen the market, and to narrow the competition, is always the interest of the dealers. To widen the market may frequently be agreeable enough to the interest of the public; but to narrow the competition must always be against it, and can only serve to enable the dealers, by raising their profits above what they naturally would be, to levy, for their own benefit, an absurd tax upon the rest of their fellow-citizens.⁵

The aspect of monopolization, one controlling the means of production and distribution of a good or service, or an oligopoly, the same experience with the control being in the hands of a few, creates the opportunity for oppression of those who do not have access to redress but do have needs to be addressed. Smith believed that such a structure was negative for the masses while creating powerful forces of exploitation by the few who controlled the means of production and delivery of goods and services with the source of such desire for control being one thing, pride.

Smith wrote, “The pride of man makes him love to domineer, and nothing mortifies him so much as to be obliged to condescend to persuade his inferiors. Wherever the laws allows it, and the nature of the work can afford it, therefore, he will generally

⁴ Ibid., 184.

⁵ Ibid., 186.

prefer the services of slaves to that of freemen.”⁶ And, of this pride, it is written in 1 John 2:15-17, “Do not love the world or the things of the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world, for all that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches – comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God abide forever.” “The pride in riches” leads to a fallenness in humankind that fulfills the prophetic words of 1 Timothy 6:9-10, “But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.” Focusing on money, in and unto itself, while often demonized as the primary issue in capitalism, causes a misplacement of the issue. The issue is not the money. It is the pursuance and application of money that is the issue.

While this thesis focuses on capitalism, capitalism was not identified as the issue according to Paul in his letters to Timothy. Capitalism did not exist, but pride and greed coupled with the negative residual impacts on society regardless of the timeframe were specifically identified by Paul. One of the negative residual impacts has been slavery, that has “plunge(d) people into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9) for centuries.

While the word *slave* can bring with it negative connotations of days gone by, the historical time of Smith was during slavery, and the means by which access to certain goods and services can be procured in these times is not enslavement, but rather, the ability to manipulate and control who gets access and at what prices could be considered

⁶ Ibid., 277.

to be similar. Unfettered capitalism can therefore be seen as contributing to the enslavement of portions of society if not checked by government intervention, which laws out rules and regulations to prevent the perversion and exploitation of the uninformed or ignorant.

This concept of slavery basically devolved humankind down to the level of commoditization where labor was prized over humanity. As Smith wrote:

In every country where the unfortunate law of slavery is established, the magistrate, when he protects the slave, intermeddles in some measure in the management of the private property of the master; and, in a free country, where the master is, perhaps, either a member of the colony assembly, or an elector of such a member, he dares not do this but with the greatest caution and circumspection. The respect which he is obliged to pay to the master, renders it more difficult for him to protect the slave.⁷

In an economic system such as capitalism, where production of goods and services is privately owned and protected, the laws can often give more value to the producer than those involved in the means of production.

The misalignment of interests between master and slave or master and servant or, in modern day contractual arrangements such as boss and worker, can be reflective of Smith's observation, "From the nature of their situation, too, the servants must be more disposed to support with rigorous severity their own interest, against that of the country which they govern, than their masters can be to support theirs. The country belongs to their masters, who cannot avoid having some regard for the interest of what belongs to them; but it does not belong to the servants."⁸ Smith could see the dichotomy that existed in an economic system that overtly separated the haves from the have-nots in a way that

⁷ Ibid., 417.

⁸ Ibid., 457.

can sometimes be blurred in the supposed free society that Americans experience today.

Moreover, this dichotomy was and, to some degree, still is based on differences often beyond the control of the participants. Smith contended:

The causes or circumstances which naturally introduce subordination, or which naturally and antecedent to any civil institution, give some men some superiority over the greater part of their brethren, seem to be four in number – (first) “superiority of personal qualifications, of strength, beauty, and agility of body; of wisdom and virtue; of prudence, justice, fortitude, and moderation of mind...(second) superiority of age...(third) superiority of fortune...(fourth) superiority of birth.”⁹

In terms of the latter factor, “superiority of birth” Smith wrote:

Superiority of birth supposes an ancient superiority of fortune in the family of the person who claims it. All families are equally ancient; and the ancestors of the prince, though they may be better known, cannot well be more numerous than those of the beggars. Antiquity of family means everywhere the antiquity either of wealth, or of that greatness which is commonly either founded upon wealth, or accompanied with it. Upstart greatness is everywhere less respected than ancient greatness.¹⁰

As a result, as leadership is often discussed as a function of nature versus nurture, an additional factor has to be considered in terms of the advantages that come from being born into the *right* family with *right* often being defined by factors well beyond an individual’s actual control. The dichotomy that it creates is an intentional cultural system of haves and have-nots that is not breached and can cause for the persistence of structural barriers in economic progress by consistently advancing some while simultaneously doing the opposite to others as a means of maintaining power and control.

A place one could look to for redress of these issues that has also sometimes shown a measure of complicity, is the Church. Smith observed, “And in this manner

⁹ Ibid., 510-511.

¹⁰ Ibid., 511.

ecclesiastical establishments, though commonly they arose at first from religious views, prove in the end advantageous to the political interests of society.”¹¹ Politics is essential in the formation of how groups of people get along and the process always revolves around power.

As a case study, Smith offered a critique of the Church of England, and he stated:

The church of England, in particular, has always valued herself, with great reason, upon the unexceptionable loyalty of her principles. Under such a government, the clergy naturally endeavour to recommend themselves to the sovereign, to the court, and to the nobility and gentry of the country, by whose influence they chiefly expect to obtain preferment. They pay court to those patrons, sometimes, no doubt, the vilest flattery and assentation; but frequently, too, by cultivating all those arts which best deserve, and which are therefore most likely to gain them, the esteem of people of rank and fortune; by their knowledge in all the different branches of useful and ornamental learning, by the decent liberality of their manners, by the social good humour of their conversation, and by their avowed contempt of those absurd and hypocritical austerities which fanatics inculcate and pretend to practise, in order to draw upon themselves the veneration, and upon the greater part of men of rank and fortune, who avow that they do not practise them, the abhorrence of the common people. Such a clergy, however, while they pay their court in this manner to the higher ranks of life, are very apt to neglect altogether the means of maintaining their influence and authority with the lower. They are listened to, esteemed, and respected by their superiors; but before their inferiors, they are frequently incapable of defending, effectually, and to the conviction of such hearers, their own sober and moderate doctrines, against the most ignorant enthusiast who chooses to attack them.¹²

The challenge that the clergy faced during Adam Smith’s time is not dissimilar to that of today’s clergy. Societal impact can be relational to who is being catered to but in catering to the wealthy and powerful hegemony the masses can be lost in ministry. Losing the masses lessens the impact over the many in favor of the few.

The observation of Smith was similar to Jesus’ indictment of the Pharisees in Matthew 23:2-7:

¹¹ Ibid., 567.

¹² Ibid., 580.

The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it, but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others, but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. They do all their deeds to be seen by others, for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have people call them rabbi.

This criticism by Jesus of the clergy clearly transverses the ages as what Jesus said and Smith recounted in his contemporary times could also be said of some among the clergy today.

The entry of clergy and the Church into the conversation raises the issue of how the Church has potentially been complicit with capitalism in terms of the good, the bad, and the ugly of capitalism. As such, the desire to believe that capitalism can be redeemed is built upon a premise that Christianity is a religion of redemption. This idea of redemption was not anathema to Smith's book, *The Wealth of Nations*, as he wrote a previous text, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a book that was written seventeen years earlier than *The Wealth of Nations*, in 1759. The latter book was supposed to be written with the former as a foundation such that focusing strictly on *The Wealth of Nations* as a treatise on unfettered capitalism was and still is quite erroneous. Smith believed that morality should inform economics in a way that capitalism, as applied, seems to have gotten away from.

One of the key underpinnings of Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is that of love. With perhaps an understanding linked to 1 John 4:8, which describes humankind's relationship to God and love as "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." Smith wrote:

Of all the passions, however, which are so extravagantly disproportioned to the value of their objects, love is the only one that appears, even to the weakest minds, to have any thing in it that is either graceful or agreeable. In itself, first of all, though it may seem ridiculous, it is not naturally odious; and though its consequences are often fatal and dreadful, its intentions are seldom mischievous. And then, though there is little propriety in the passion itself, there is a good deal in some of those which always accompany it. There is in love a strong mixture of humanity, generosity, kindness, friendship, esteem; passions with which, of all others...we have the greatest propensity to sympathize, even notwithstanding we are sensible that they are, in some measure, excessive.¹³

Love changes the dynamic in human relationships by adding an intangible that is hard to quantify but is absolutely a key ingredient in desiring to make sometime sacrificial change for the betterment of others. It is the love of God and the love expressed from God that is a key definitive factor in what it means to be the Church. In addition, the Church cannot be the Church without love.

The introduction of the notion of love by Smith appears to interject an additional consideration for the more sterile view of capitalism, not as a practice devoid of consideration of humankind as an object commoditized in the pursuance of wealth, but one that was always supposed to have been a part of the application of capitalism. Love may have been taken for granted in *The Wealth of Nations* by Smith because of his clear understanding from *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Without similar understanding by later readers and interpreters, those with much baser desires may have robbed the latter text of the richness of community impact than what the former text would have implied. The dichotomy that results is one where class and societal status, in the absence of love, creates a two-tier way of living – one of the rich and one of the poor. Of these two classes, Smith wrote:

The rich man glories in his riches, because he feels that they naturally draw upon him the attention of the world, and that mankind are disposed to go along with him

¹³ Smith, Adam, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Urbana: Gutenberg Publishers, 2011), 42.

in all those agreeable emotions with which the advantages of his situation so readily inspire him. At the thought of this, his heart seems to swell and dilate itself within him, and he is fonder of his wealth, upon this account, than for all the other advantages it procures him. The poor man, on the contrary, is ashamed of his poverty. He feels that it either places him out of the sight of mankind, or, that if they take any notice of him, they have, however, scarce any fellow-feeling with the misery and distress which he suffers.¹⁴

The rich man has one vantage point on life while the poor man has another.

Unfortunately for both, the economic and social standing that they have attained or failed to attain proves to reinforce the perspective on the value that they ascribe to themselves. Their perspective appears to be quite limiting in terms of a greater perspective on the value of individuals.

While contemporary Scripture readers would prefer the New Revised Standard Version of Romans 2:11 which reads, “For God shows no partiality,” I think that the King James Version makes a better point, “For there is no respect of persons with God.” These Scriptures do not imply a level of indifference with God as much as a lack of preference that God has for one person versus another. Rich or poor, black or white, male or female, all are the same in the eyes of God. This vantage point from the heavenly realms is supposed to be applied in the earthly realm by those who are believers in God as a witness of what it means to be a Christian. Therefore, the intentional magnification of differences that subjugates one class of people to another is not God-like and does not reveal the love of God in the world.

An emphasis on the potential individualistic aspects of capitalism outside of the focus on love can create a pursuit of that, which can lead to lesser and lower forms of humanity rather higher and more noble forms of humanity. Although those pursuing and

¹⁴ Ibid., 63.

achieving can still gain the adulation of humankind, the result can serve to sometimes feed the dark, misguided motivation called ambition. Of ambition, Smith wrote:

‘Love,’ says my Lord Rochefoucault, ‘is commonly succeeded by ambition; but ambition is hardly ever succeeded by love.’ That passion, when once it has got entire possession of the breast, will admit neither a rival nor a successor. To those who have been accustomed to the possession, or even to the hope of public admiration, all other pleasures sicken and decay. Of all the discarded statesmen who for their own ease have studied to get the better of ambition, and to despise those honours which they could no longer arrive at, how few have been able to succeed?¹⁵

Because of the success of the few, many have pursued success in capitalistic activities where the spotlight is shone on the victors which serves to inspire others to do likewise. Without an eye towards the impact on humankind, unintended consequences can occur with the greatest impact being that which darkens the soul, heart and mind as revealed in what is said and what is done. Society has created a world where individual success is admired as much as it is sometimes jealously coveted which can diminish a vision of a world where individuals are valued for whatever giftedness they have, not only the giftedness that can be monetized. Smith shared, “This disposition to admire, and almost to worship, the rich and the powerful, and to despise, or, at least, to neglect persons of poor and mean condition, though necessary to establish and to maintain the distinction of ranks and the order of society, is, at the same time, the great and most universal cause of the corruption of our moral sentiments.”¹⁶

The emphasis on finding some form of ethereal, temporal idols in society by valuing the outcome of the outpouring of God’s gifts upon certain individuals rather than seeing the

¹⁵ Ibid., 70.

¹⁶ Ibid., 73.

gifts as being universally applied has created division within society based on one objective measure, wealth. Wealth, in the hands of a sacred few, has created a near sacrilegious focus and emphasis on wealth accumulation that has served to degrade rather than uplift society. As a premise, Smith might posit that it is not capitalism that has been corrupted and in need of redemption. Capitalism is a system of economics, one that, like others, is abstract in description and only concrete when applied. The application allows for one to see whether the adherents, similar to Christians, are following the discipline or whether there are variants that are being ascribed to which can cause different forms of Christianity, or capitalism in terms of the intent of this thesis, that may look nothing like the original intent.

I subscribe to the idea that capitalism is not good or bad in isolation. The symptoms of corruption in capitalism are the result of the application. As a result, it is the practitioners who have lost their way because of a greater corruption of society that rewards the rich and penalizes the poor. The rich try to protect their riches and the poor pursue the riches of the rich until a fatalistic perspective overrides this desire as they, those who cannot rise above and achieve, resign themselves to their lower-class station of life. This station of life that society devalues the poor in comparison to the rich. The process of elevation and segregation that can lead to riches was described by Smith as:

To attain to this envied situation, the candidates for fortune too frequently abandon the paths of virtue; for unhappily, the road which leads to one, and that which leads to the other, lie sometimes in very opposite directions. But the ambitious man flatters himself that, in the splendid situation to which he advances, he will have so many means of commanding the respect and admiration of mankind, and will be enabled to act with such superior propriety and grace, that the lustre of his future conduct will entirely cover, or efface, the foulness of the steps by which he arrived at that elevation.¹⁷

¹⁷ Ibid., 77.

The desire to be rich can justify, in the eyes of some, a *by any means necessary* approach with the collateral damage caused at the individual, relational, community, national, and global level being worth the adulation once it is achieved. The justification brings a heavy weight upon the perpetrator whether openly acknowledged or privately hidden. The method of bearing this weight contrasts

with the offer of Jesus Christ found in Matthew 11:30: “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Smith articulated the alternative as:

He invokes in vain the dark and dismal powers of forgetfulness and oblivion. He remembers himself what he has done, and that remembrance tells him that other people must likewise remember it. Amidst all the gaudy pomp of the most ostentatious greatness; amidst the venal and vile adulation of the great and of the learned; amidst the more innocent, though more foolish, acclamations of the common people; amidst all the pride of conquest and the triumph of successful war, he is still secretly pursued by the avenging furies of shame and remorse; and, while glory seems to surround him on all sides, he himself, in his own imagination, sees black and foul infamy fast pursuing him, and every moment ready to overtake him from behind.¹⁸

The result is that the weight of riches does not serve to lighten the load of those with great wealth. It serves to increase the burden when wealth achieved is done through means not celebratory or deeming merit. Thus, riches are not necessarily a blessing but a burden.

Instead of being resigned to such a dismal state, humankind has another choice that can be made. The other choice is found by choosing the way of God which prizes community, solidarity and unity over individualism, isolationism, and division. The

¹⁸ Ibid., 78.

unfettered pursuit of riches corrupts. The unfettered pursuit of love frees. Because Scripture explains in 1 John 4:8, “God is love,” and when love is pursued, an overt intentional act is under way to pursue truth of which Jesus said in John 8:32, “And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Truth and freedom in any system of society, economics, and politics will intentionally be inclusive of or devoid of God. If exclusion is chosen, then corruption will exist with a remedy dependent upon conviction, redemption, and restoration is required. If inclusion is chosen, then humankind becomes an ambassador for Christ as Smith shared:

It was by actions of charity and love only that we could imitate, as became us, the conduct of God, that we could express our humble and devout admiration of his infinite perfections, that by fostering in our minds the same divine principle, we could bring our own affections to a greater resemblance with his holy attributes, and thereby become more proper objects of his love and esteem; till at last we arrived at that immediate converse and communication with the Deity to which it was the great object of this philosophy to raise us.¹⁹

It must be stated that if *The Wealth of Nations* is taken in isolation, then the foundation is faulty because it is robbed of virtue and reference that is overwhelmingly inclusive of the impact of one’s actions on humankind, not in a void or in a vacuum. As Jesus told Peter in Matthew 16:18, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” Peter was not the rock to be built upon. The rock was Jesus Christ and the Gospel. In similar fashion, capitalism, as revealed in *The Wealth of Nations*, is similar to Peter. The foundation was revealed to Peter and the foundation of *The Wealth of Nations* is revealed in the predecessor text of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Peter could not succeed without Christ. He would have

¹⁹ Ibid., 354.

been incomplete. *The Wealth of Nations* cannot succeed without *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Both Peter and *The Wealth of Nations*, left alone, demonstrated that corruption was not only a choice but an outcome. The conversion from the corruption could and only would be possible through Jesus Christ, which presents a choice for humankind as well as for capitalism as a system of economics. Smith wrote:

It must either be said that we ought to obey the will of the Deity because he is a Being of infinite power, who will reward us eternally if we do so, and punish us eternally if we do otherwise; or it must be said, that independent of any regard to our own happiness, or to rewards and punishments of any kind, there is a congruity and fitness that a creature should obey its creator, that a limited and imperfect being should submit to one of infinite and incomprehensible perfections.²⁰

As such, capitalism will be corrupted as the practitioners continue to turn away from God and take a God-like position in how they steward the resources that God provides on this earth. The question that arises is whether the system is too far gone to turn back, too far beyond salvation, or too far beyond redemption. To this question, hope is truly the focal point, a focal point where Paul offers a possible path forward in 1 Timothy 1:15, “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I am worst of them!” If the worst of sinners can be saved, then possibly there is hope of turning back, saving and redeeming capitalism with the understanding that change as evidenced by repentance is a part of the process.

²⁰ Ibid., 359.

CHAPTER 2 – The Capitalism That Americans Have

The foreword from the book, *Redeeming Capitalism* by Kenneth Barnes, puts forth an audacious task, “to reimagine and reform capitalism as a moral enterprise so it can become a morally steered servant rather than a cruel, amoral master.”²¹ With this set forth as the task, Barnes helped to bring clarity to the issues surrounding capitalism with the statement, “Capitalism is nothing more than the result of countless individual and corporate decisions, and for good or ill, the capitalism we have is the capitalism we have chosen; its *redemption* rests on the choices we are yet to make.”²²

The task that Barnes pursued has a goal “to imagine *virtuous capitalism*: an economic system with all of the wealth-generating possibilities of the capitalism we have, plus the social benefits of the capitalism we desire – a system that consciously embraces and enthusiastically employs *common grace* for the *common good*.”²³ Having to imagine such a capitalism is the task that Barnes pursues due to the absence of it currently existing in terms of widespread application. Imagination without the possibility of application would lead to just frustration. Barnes offers an image of hope to replace that of frustration.

Referring to the higher expectations of Adam Smith embodied in *The Wealth of Nations* and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the capitalism that is currently employed appears to have veered far from Smith’s view of what would have been deployed

²¹ Barnes, Kenneth J., *Redeeming Capitalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), xi.

²² *Ibid.*, 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

according to his principles. As a result, the current capitalism that Americans have appears to be like a bastard child that has no interest in knowing it's father, to which Barnes commented, "The notion that business is amoral and that companies have no social responsibility other than the maximization of profits has been the generally accepted mantra of business schools and boardrooms for a generation."²⁴

Smith would have expected there to be an overt connection between the actions of enterprises and individuals in the undertaking of the capitalistic exercise with the additional understanding that the free hand of the market was not unbridled profit-seeking or maximization but yielding to a higher power, authority, deity, God. Instead of applauding being linked with the current stratified efforts, "Observers such as Adam Smith and Max Weber (addressed shortly)...would be shocked to see capitalism no longer undergirded by faith in a higher power or to observe commerce failing to assume commonly held beliefs about right and wrong, morality and immorality."²⁵

For Weber, writing in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* of his understanding of the capitalism of his day, like Smith, believed in the alignment of godly principles with the work being done. "He believed that modern capitalism...sprang from a particular ethos that sought to align religious belief with economic activity, resulting in a kind of devotional zeal that powered the engine of wealth-creation in America."²⁶

Weber's early 1900s Germany gave him a perspective that caused him to believe "that business leaders and owners of capital, as well as the higher grades of skilled labour, and

²⁴ Ibid., 9.

²⁵ Ibid., 18.

²⁶ Ibid., 60.

even more the higher technically and commercially trained personnel of modern enterprises, are overwhelmingly Protestant.”²⁷ This religious affiliation laid a common ground for expectations within society that rivals the heterogenous landscape that Americans deal with today. To a certain degree, Weber had the opportunity to envision capitalism applied in a more perfect fashion by removing some of the impediments of differentiation among people of a variety of races and ethnicity. A religious moral standard applied across society without separating the Church and state was closer to the implementation that would have meshed with the ideologies of Adam Smith.

For those veering from these ideologies, Weber observed that Americans had a form of capitalism that amounted to hypocrisy because of the way that they seemed to intentionally seek to separate God from their daily activities. Money ceased to be a tool and became the object of creation. Weber described it as, “Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs.”²⁸ The result of the emphasis on making money causes money to compete with God for the attention of humankind.

The lack of ability to serve two gods – God and mammon – results in the clear appearance of a variant spirit that Weber calls the “spirit of capitalism” and which he wrote of “The people filled with the spirit of capitalism today tend to be indifferent, if not hostile to the Church.”²⁹ The hostility reaches a fever pitch as this intentional separation

²⁷ Weber, Max, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

to relieve the myopic capitalist of any desire to bow down to God described by Weber as “it no longer needs the support of any religious forces, and feels the attempt of religion to influence economic life, in so far as they can still be felt at all, to be as much an unjustified interference as its regulation by the State.”³⁰ This overt intention of separating creates an environment where the two, Church and state, do not coexist. One stands in opposition to the other in a fashion that makes reconciliation and cooperation quite difficult.

One of the tenets of the democratic government of America has been the separation of Church and state. Weber saw Church and state as being on equal footing in being problematic for the capitalism that is completely devoid of God, a position that is anathema to that of Adam Smith, the father of modern capitalism. A more noble approach offered by Weber was “the fulfilment of worldly duties is under all circumstances the only way to live acceptably to God. It and it alone is the will of God, and hence every legitimate calling has exactly the same worth in the sight of God.”³¹ Unfortunately, the scales of worthiness in the capitalist world do not yield to those offered by Weber.

Following Weber in a critique of the free market and the application thereof, Kathryn Blanchard wrote *The Protestant Ethic Or The Spirit Of Capitalism*, after the economic collapse of 2008. This collapse provided a world-wide vantage point of the ugly underbelly of capitalism that had clearly veered far from the initial principles of

³⁰ Ibid., 34.

³¹ Ibid., 41.

capitalism and bore no resemblance of what was envisioned by Adam Smith or Max Weber. Blanchard leaned heavily upon John Calvin and Calvinism³² in her critique of Weber. Blanchard wrote, “Nowhere does Calvin declare that the material world is unworthy of human attention or inimical to the life of the soul. On the contrary, the material world is the primary means of God’s ongoing reaching out to humankind.”³³ As a painter paints to express their vision on a blank palate, humankind’s actions in the world become the spiritual paint on the terrestrial palate in the hands of a masterpiece-creating God. Agreement with God should be expected to fulfill the desires of God.

And, in God’s ongoing reaching out to humankind, it is supposed to use all that God has given to it to glorify God as Revelation 4:11 reveals, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and created.” However, the challenge that humankind has is resisting the desire to create idols of what God has created, including the means and mechanisms of capitalism. Blanchard wrote, “Human beings are so full of pride that they can manage to turn their sins into virtues in their own eyes.”³⁴ This turning has been manifested in how the pursuit of capitalism in the perverted form rather than what was envisioned by Adam Smith has become the dominant perspective of capitalism on a global stage.

A balance was offered by Calvin as explained by Blanchard, “He argues that

³² John Calvin was a Reformation-era theologian who, through Calvinism, emphasized the sovereignty of God and the authority of the Holy Bible. As a result, nothing in the world was outside of theological application and explanation according to Calvin which would have run contrary to a world separating church and state.

³³ Blanchard, Kathryn D., *The Protestant Ethic Or The Spirit of Capitalism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010), 11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

devotion to God is the only antidote to the double anxiety of greedily striving after wealth and worldly honors, while dreading poverty almost more than death.”³⁵ Living in the extremes between the pursuance of wealth and the avoidance of poverty without submitting both endeavors to the pleasing of God, causes a tension amounting to the double-mindedness described in James 1:8, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (King James Version).

The desire to separate Church and state, Church and social affairs, Church and economic affairs would appear to absolve Christians and others from seeking to yield all aspects of their lives to God. Regarding this, Blanchard wrote, “Economic life, no less than any other aspect of Christian life, must be guided not by self-interest but by love of God and neighbor.”³⁶ Perversion of this love, love as expected to be concurrent with the two great commandments detailed in Matthew 22:34-40³⁷ and Mark 12:28-31³⁸, is how corruption seeps into the world of the Church, homes, communities, schools, jobs, cities, states, and nations in various aspects of society, politics, and economics.

If this type of love is perfected rather than perverted, then capitalism can reflect a

³⁵ Ibid., 26.

³⁶ Ibid., 29.

³⁷ Matthew 22:34-40: “When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, an expert in the law, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets.””

³⁸ Mark 12:28-31: “One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.””

duality of parallel service unto God that allows for Christianity to not only be present but to be expected in how capitalism is undertaken. Blanchard highlighted, “For Calvin, human economic life is not subject to unique laws but is an aspect of human life generally; we can therefore infer that *the goal of economics is the same as the goal of all theological ethics.*”³⁹ As a result, the separation of our economic reality from our theological and ecclesial overtures is not only in error but also an apostasy for what it means to be a Christian. Written another way, one cannot check their religion at the door depending on the room that they enter. Either a person is a person of faith or they are not. Consistency in faith, whether in economics or other affairs within a person’s life, was mandatory according to Calvin, as Blanchard described:

He was also not speaking of a merely spiritual or inward freedom that bears no outward signs in a person’s life. He was speaking of a concrete, bodily, and earthly freedom, entirely and peculiarly shaped by the fundamental acknowledgement that all good things come from God. Any human freedom that did not bear this particular shape would not be freedom at all; it would be slavery of a most deceptive kind, particularly seductive to corrupted human reason.⁴⁰

Calvin and Smith agreed on matters of integrating faith and freedom into all aspect of life, including economics, as Blanchard observed, “This is not a coincidence because, like Calvin, Smith had an interest in liberating human beings from oppressive forces so that they (or at least more of them) could lead fully human lives. He did indeed see self-interest as a constructive force in human society, particularly regarding the organization of economic life, but *only* in so far as there is a just moral and institutional framework that prevents abuses.”⁴¹ And, the underpinnings of the framework were based on yielding

³⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁴¹ Ibid., 54.

to the proverbial invisible hand of the market with Smith believing that the invisible hand was not the market operating without interference but the market operating under the ultimate guidance of God and deity. As Blanchard summarized:

This is where Smith's (in) famous 'invisible hand' comes into play. He saw the overall success of this apparent human free-for-all (capitalism) as being achieved not necessarily through the merits of anyone in the system; rather it is God (or Nature, or the Deity) who mysteriously directs individuals' works (even the selfishly motivated ones) toward the greater end of human happiness.⁴²

While some have chosen to assume that the invisible hand is the absence of over influence, Smith's intent was that the invisible hand should be assumed to be very intentional because it was actually the hand of God. Capitalism without the invisible hand, as applied by Smith to be the hand of God, could not actually be capitalism at all.

Additionally, the idea of an economic system with little to no government influence was anathema to Smith's understanding and expectations. To the contrary and according to Blanchard:

Smith does not promote an utterly anarchistic, *laissez-faire* system (or non-system, as the case may be) as the best policy. Even in the best-case scenario of perfect liberty, the invisible hand does not work to the exclusion of cultural and governmental constructs but alongside them. Smith was indeed suspicious of civil government, on the idea that it was constructed by the rich to protect themselves and their stuff from the poor and was therefore biased toward injustice. But he still saw legislation as a necessary corrective to the force of individual self-interest run amok.⁴³

The capitalism that America currently has is one that sneers at the idea and notion of big government meddling in business affairs and ascribes this idea to Adam Smith. Clearly,

⁴² Ibid., 75.

⁴³ Ibid., 78.

the conclusion and application is in error. And, while companies and capitalists alike may sometimes speak of a double bottom line where they seek to do well in community as well as for shareholders, few do so in the guise of serving God and Deity as the true invisible hand described by Adam Smith. As a result, the capitalism that America has is not truly capitalism at all. It is the lost child of a father, Adam Smith, who is akin to the father of the prodigal son of Luke 15:32⁴⁴ whose son was celebrated upon returning back to the father. Our big mess is the capitalism that America has. As the prodigal son found eventual redemption in the eyes, arms, heart, mind and spirit of his father, capitalism has a chance of being redeemed through the return of individuals back to the true roots of capitalism which is coincidental in capitalists returning capitalism to God.

Referring back to Kenneth Barnes, he “defined postmodern capitalism as ‘capitalism that is devoid of a moral compass and resistant, if not impervious to ethical constraint.’”⁴⁵ Timothy Keller, in the book *Counterfeit Gods*, compared the lack of a moral compass to the lack of intentionality with God as he referred to Friedrich Nietzsche, “He wrote that, with the absence of God growing in Western culture, we would replace God with money.”⁴⁶ In seeking to serve money as a god, there is a blindness that comes into play because when it seems that everyone is doing the same thing, then it can be hard to see that the thing being done is wrong because the wrong becomes the norm. Keller observed, “Greed hides itself from the victim. The money

⁴⁴ Luke 15:32: “But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.”

⁴⁵ Barnes, 67.

⁴⁶ Keller, Timothy, *Counterfeit Gods* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 50-51.

god's modus operandi includes blindness to your own heart."⁴⁷ And, when the masses yield to the money god, it is tantamount to the fulfillment of Matthew 15:14, "And if one blind person guides another, both will fall into a pit." Generational focus on wealth as the ultimate objective perpetuates the blindness that creates a culture of corruption that becomes entrenched. The proverbial pit can only be escaped through a return to the origin and genesis of capitalism, the principles of Adam Smith.

The blindness of money, the key pursuit of capitalism without regard for truly adhering to Adam Smith's principles, creates idolatrous behavior that is manifested in adherents chasing money idols. Keller described:

According to the Bible, idolaters do three things with their idols. They love them, trust them, and obey them. 'Lovers of money' are those who find themselves daydreaming and fantasizing about new ways to make money, new possessions to buy, and looking with jealousy on those who have more than they do. 'Trusters of money' feel they have control of their lives and are safe and secure because of their wealth. Idolatry also makes us 'servants of money.' Just as we serve earthly kings and magistrates, so we 'sell our souls' to our idols.⁴⁸

The continued emphasis on money as lovers, trusters and servants binds individuals to money in a fashion that is harmful to individuals and the society. The depth of corruption associated with it is manifested most of all in our treatment of humankind.

Capitalism has become the idol of our economic system rather than the tool. As a result, instead of loving God by using money as a tool to give God praise, honor, and glory, it is used to heap praise, honor and glory upon ourselves. While our money has the inscription, "In God We Trust," the inscription itself was a source of controversy when it

⁴⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 56-57.

first appeared on coins during a time of religious fervor in the Civil War, challenged as to the continuation of it on the basis of controversy regarding God and mammon by President Teddy Roosevelt, and the Congressional order to extend it to all currency including paper currency in 1955, with numerous legal challenges to it since that time.⁴⁹

The antidote is clearly an inoculation that many are as resistant to as some have resisted taking vaccines for Covid-19 throughout the global pandemic. Keller clearly pointed out, “If, however, God becomes the center of your life, that dethrones and demotes money. If your identity and security is in God, it can’t control you through worry and desire.”⁵⁰ In capitalism devoid of God, a choice has to be made in terms of whether America will serve God or whether America will serve itself. The individualistic emphasis then creates a culture where individuals are commoditized into helping other individuals gain wealth despite the helpers often being worse off in the exchange.

Money derived through inherently selfish capitalistic pursuits typically revolves around three areas of idolatry – “Some people want lots of money as a way to control their world and life...Others want money for access to social circles and to make themselves beautiful and attractive...Other people want money because it gives them so much power over others. In every case, money functions as an idol...”⁵¹ The replacement of God with money creates a dichotomy for humankind. Value for the individual becomes relevant only to the degree that money is acquired and accumulated in ever escalating ways that serve to raise some to levels higher than others.

⁴⁹ Begley, Sarah. (2016, January 13). How ‘In God We Trust’ Got on the Currency in the First Place. Time.com. <https://time.com/4179685/in-god-we-trust-currency-history>

⁵⁰ Keller, 57.

⁵¹ Ibid., 65.

The idolization of money has reached a fever pitch that has reached all the way to the West Point of capitalism, Harvard Business School. Interestingly, Harvard College, the first college in the United States of America, was founded in 1636 to train new clergy in the new commonwealth. Thus, the institution that many associate with being the training ground of the rich and powerful was initially founded to train individuals to lead people to God. Harvard Business School was founded in 1908 as the world's first Master of Business Administration program with an emphasis on training students to excel at general management in a variety of business enterprises while also developing expertise in some functional areas of business. The bedrock of American capitalism can be found at Harvard Business School, for better or worse.

As Keller pointed out “Milton Friedman’s claim that business managers have one and only one goal – to maximize shareholder value. That, goes the traditional argument, is the only way that a business promotes the common good, by creating jobs and generating new products. The market itself rewards integrity and punishes dishonesty; if you lie or cheat, it will catch up with you and you will lose money. The only goal of business, then is to maximize profits.”⁵² The abstract nature of business becomes prevalent as business success becomes separated from the actual impacts on society rather than looking at needed societal impacts to determine the purposes of business. Winning and losing is calculated by bottom-line profitability but society bears the brunt of those wins and losses.

Milton Friedman made that claim in a 1970 New York Times magazine article

⁵² Ibid, 127.

referenced in the article, “Milton Friedman and the social responsibility of business.”⁵³ Thirty-nine years after the Times article and almost one hundred years after the founding of Harvard Business School, “nearly half of the 2009 class of Harvard Business School promised to ‘act with the utmost integrity,’ resist ‘decisions and behavior that advance my own narrow ambitions,’ and work in a manner that ‘enhances the value my enterprise can create for society over the long term.’”⁵⁴ From what many consider to be the top business school in the world, despite annual rankings, a mantra has begun to resonate that doing well and doing good should be coincidental and not simply a coincidence. Without necessarily mentioning God or deity, the founding principles of Adam Smith appear to be gaining traction of a renaissance variety.

The capitalism that America has is at a crossroads, and under the cross of Jesus Christ the way forward may be found if those who are supposed to offer a way to the cross are willing to make sure that no area of life, economic life included, is left out of the leading. The question is, How has the Church been leading in the area of economics?

⁵³ Makower, Joel. (2006, November 24). Milton Friedman and the social responsibility of business. GreenBiz, <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/milton-friedman-and-social-responsibility-business>

⁵⁴ Keller, 127.

CHAPTER 3 - The Church and Capitalism

American capitalism has become a form of worship that seems to have intentionally forced Americans to make a choice between God and mammon, the intentional pursuit and/or acquisition of wealth associated with property, plant and equipment. Matthew 6:24 reminds Christians, “No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” Because humankind was created by God to serve God, and because God will have no other gods before God, a conflict has arisen between Christians’ known theology and what might be surmised as our “realogy,” a conflict between what we know about God and what we know about how our world appears to work.

A great divorce exists that has created a void that is actually the continuity of our need for God. In *The Enchantments Of Mammon*, Eugene McCarragher put it this way, “Capitalism, I contend, has been a regime of enchantment, a repression, displacement, and renaming of our intrinsic and inveterate longing for divinity.”⁵⁵ Instead of capitalism becoming a positive representation of the best of Christianity and God, it has become a means for often showing how far America has moved away from God. As a result, “capitalism represents what the theologian William Cavanaugh has called a ‘migration of the holy,’ a forced march of sanctity and devotion toward new, putatively secular objects of reverence.”⁵⁶ The issues surrounding the engagement with the Church are that the prevalent and pervasive economic form that we have appears to have supplanted

⁵⁵ McCarragher, Eugene, *The Enchantments Of Mammon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

Christian theology to the extent that instead of worshipping God, worshipping wealth has become the *realogy* replacing traditional theology. McCarragher explained:

Capitalism is a form of enchantment – perhaps better, a *mis*enchantment, a parody or perversion of our longing for a sacramental way of being in the world. Its animating spirit is money. Its theology, philosophy, and cosmology have been otherwise known as ‘economics.’ Its sacramentals consist of fetishized commodities and technologies – the material culture of production and consumption. Its moral and liturgical codes are contained in management theory and business journalism. Its clerisy is a corporate intelligentsia of economists, executives, managers, and business writers, a stratum akin to Aztec priests, medieval scholastics, and Chinese mandarins. Its iconography consists of advertising, public relations, marketing, and product design. Its beatific vision of eschatological destiny is the global imperium of capital, a heavenly city of business with incessantly expanding production, trade and consumption. And its gospel has been that of ‘Mammonism’, the attribution of ontological power to money and of the existential sublimity to its possessors.⁵⁷

Capitalism has uncovered and revealed a variant form of theology by replacing God with money as the means for us receiving what is needed in this world. The study of making money has replaced the study of God. Run to excess, capitalism attempts to remove God from the world that God created for humankind.

The challenge that this mindset presents is that God, and therefore, the Church have been under siege to take what Christians would assume is rightfully God’s, for Psalm 24:1 tells Christians, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.” This passage is predicated on a shared and commonly held belief in the Holy Bible that is not pervasive because the whole world is not of the Judeo-Christian persuasion. God, from the Christian perspective, is an overt choice while others outside of the Christian realm may view God as one of many choices. Capitalism as a choice creates another god to which McCarragher explains, “Under capitalism, money occupies

⁵⁷ Ibid., 5.

the ontological throne from which God has been evicted.”⁵⁸ While not overtly admitting this truth, much of the activity undertaken in America comes down to the making or spending of money. Defending capitalism as the system of economy that America has without addressing the shortcomings perpetuates the problems within our society. Holding the leaders of capitalism to a higher standard is necessary to begin to redress some of the wrongs that have been committed.

The challenge has existed through the modernization of society over the ages. By way of example, Henry Ford appropriated theological language to help shift fervor typically reserved for the religious to be incorporated into the ethos of American business. “Machinery is ‘the new Messiah,’ he wrote in 1928, ‘accomplishing in the world what man has failed to do by preaching, propaganda, or the written word.’”⁵⁹ Not alone in such proclamations, the appropriation by businessmen of religious language that would resonate with the masses relegated the Church to a place to go and a thing to do; but true success and advancement in life while still harkening for the world to come was found in capitalism.

Thurman Arnold put forth an ideology of two types of governments, which help to illustrate the ongoing challenge between capitalism and the Church. According to Arnold’s general theory of enchantment:

All societies have two governments: a ‘spiritual government’ presiding over symbols, ideals, ‘mythology,’ and ‘magic,’ and a ‘temporal government’ supervising the daily business of production and politics. No society survives without spiritual governors: indeed, Arnold asserted, ‘there is no evidence that the human race is going to...get along without a priesthood, whether it be religious, civil, or economic.’ In times of stability, the spiritual and temporal governments

⁵⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 362.

align in tranquility: the ‘magic words’ crafted in the spiritual order appear to describe the material and organizational realities mastered in the temporal realm. Crises occur when a conflict arises between the verbal and visual enchantment of the priesthood and the realities of the temporal world. At first, when the conflict between ‘magic words and reality’ becomes so clear that the formulas begin to lose their effect, institutions rally to revitalize their charm.⁶⁰

The Church plays a vital role in America society that capitalism can sometimes seem to obscure. The fact remains that capitalism is the dominant economic system of our society, a society that had fundamental underpinnings that have been rooted in the Church. The Church has the opportunity to continue to significantly impact the type of capitalism that we currently have and will have in the future.

Essentially, the coexistence of capitalism and the Church serve a dual purpose. Capitalism is what American Christians do in everyday life. The Church moves Christians to pursue a belief in a better world to come and, in normal times, helps to move people towards a moral and ethical way of engaging. When conflict in the real world occurs, the world to come becomes less appealing and capitalism, through institutions and individuals, offers a redress in the world that is that may not seem as forthcoming from the world that is aspired to. As the world of capitalism offers more and more solutions than seem to come from the world to come, the world to come becomes more of a fantasy for a diminishing few and the world that is becomes more concrete for those seeking a “right now” solution to their challenges. Hugh Ferriss wrote *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929) about urban modernity:

In a strange epilogue, Ferriss recounts how he discovered a mutilated manuscript – possibly of ‘quite ancient origin’ – that recalled a less gargantuan and avarice polis, founded in reverence for the human person. The fading document features a diagram of the ideal city, divided into precincts for business, science, and the arts, each corresponding to the senses, thoughts, and feelings of a healthy personality.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 381.

‘THE CITY,’ the text declares, ‘could be made in the image of MAN,’ ‘WHO IS MADE IN THE IMAGE OF’ – and here the manuscript is torn. It’s unclear what Ferris intended to say with that absence. Is ‘GOD’ the concluding word? Is ‘MAN’ made in the image of nothing? Though Ferris simply asked, ‘Did it contain a clue?’ his spooky conclusion hinted at the prospect of retrieving the ancient conviction of the image of God.⁶¹

The overt absence of God in modernity does not obviate the fact that, from a Christian perspective, God exists. And, with this fact, while capitalism may, in the eyes of some, be a replacement for a belief in God, the two actually coexist. Going back to the time of Adam Smith and the impact of religion, Benjamin Friedman wrote:

Religion was a central element of their worldview too: not because the most important thinkers at that time and in that place were religious men – to repeat, they were not – but because religion then played a more central, more pervasive, and more integrated role in society than anything comparable in the Western world today. Indeed, the very distinction between the religious and the secular is a modern concept, unknown throughout most of human history.⁶²

While some critics will seek to continue to create a sense of divorce between the sacred and the secular, Church and state, capitalism and Christianity, that is a radical perspective from a historical standpoint. The more conservative approach is the cooperation and influence of Christianity on capitalism.

Institutions of higher learning did not hold religion out as a subject to be studied so much as a way of thinking and living that was an afterthought with it being the very foundation for well-regarded private institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Duke. Friedman explained:

Moreover, religious thinking was integrated into the curriculum in ways that went well beyond merely having on the faculty professors of subjects like divinity and

⁶¹ Ibid., 440-441.

⁶² Friedman, Benjamin, *Religion And The Rise Of Capitalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021),

church history. Not surprisingly, the standard undergraduate sequence included both physics and moral philosophy. But both were taught as aspects of natural theology: the attempt to learn about aspects of the divine by studying the world God had created.⁶³

Again, the notion of economics, politics, societal, and religious influences existing in incongruent states of being is a modern concept that has not resulted in America creating the best outcomes for society as a whole. The fundamental roots associated with the capitalism espoused by Adam Smith and others during his time were focused on bringing forth a dimension for society that would seek parallel success for business and society. This dimension included a focus on Church and God, not solely on making money.

These institutions and the approach of teaching included those who were the leaders of the area of study we know to be economics. “In Adam Smith’s era, and for well after a century after, the scholars whom we today regard as economists were commonly exposed to ideas from a different range of disciplines, importantly including religious thinking. And in many cases, certainly including Smith’s, they were exposed to these religious ideas not out of any deliberate exploration on their part but merely through the ordinary intellectual intercourse that formed the core of their everyday lives. These ideas were simply part of their ‘cultural soil,’ the ‘spirit’ of their time.”⁶⁴

The impact of such teaching was an intentional intermingling of economic affairs with an impartation of religion. A contemporary of Adam Smith, Francis Bowen, observed, “We are all servants of one another without wishing it, and even without knowing it...we are all cooperating with each other as busily and effectively as the bees

⁶³ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 28.

in a hive.”⁶⁵ This expectation of continued cooperation was underpinned by a religious orientation found in the religious teaching of the day. “This interpretation of private economic activity based on divine intent carried over to matters of economic policy as well. By the 1850s, the phrase ‘laissez-faire’ was becoming familiar in English-language discussions of political economy. Bowen defined the concept for his readers in a way consistent with his own religiously oriented view of the discipline: ‘*Laissez-faire*; “these things regulate themselves”, in common phrase; which means, of course, that God regulates them by his general laws, which always, in the long run, work to good.’”⁶⁶ This thinking contrasts with the prevailing contemporary view that *laissez-faire* is the lack or low level of intervention by anyone or anything, including God.

Currently, the impact of the Church can seem to be waning in contrast to the growing influence and impact of capitalism; yet Friedman provided survey results of the following outcomes:

69 percent of Americans say they consider themselves to be religious...35 percent attend a church or synagogue or mosque at least once a week...53 percent say religion is very important in their lives...Fifty-five percent of Americans pray at least once a day...(as a result) in America, therefore, religious influence on what *the general public* thinks about matters of economics and economic policy has the capacity to be powerful.⁶⁷

These results indicate that the Church has had, has, and will continue to have a significant impact on the thoughts regarding American religion and the economic system, capitalism, that is currently undertaken. Capitalism, due to negative outcomes associated with the

⁶⁵ Ibid., 285.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 285.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 390-391.

participants who have clearly veered from the foundation, has become the antagonist to the protagonist position of the Church. As Michael Novak articulated:

Throughout the world, capitalism evokes hatred. The word is associated with selfishness, exploitation, inequality, imperialism, war. Even at home, within the United States, a shrewd observer cannot fail to note a relatively low morale among business executives, workers, and publicists. Democratic capitalism seems to have lost its spirit. To invoke loyalty to it because it brings prosperity seems to some merely materialistic. The Achilles' heel of democratic capitalism is that for two centuries now it has appealed so little to the human spirit.⁶⁸

The capitalism that Novak writes of as democratic capitalism appears to have lost its soul as the relationship between economics and religion has been breached. Novak went on to list some of the ills, as follows:

(1) *The corruptions of affluence.* Moral discipline yields successes. But success corrupts moral discipline. Thus, the system's ironical momentum heads toward hedonism, decadence, and that form of 'self-fulfillment' which is like gazing into the pool of Narcissus. Instead of seeking discipline, citizens seek 'liberation.' Instead of saving, individuals spend and borrow. Instead of committing themselves to hard work, citizens live for 'weekends.'...(2) *Advertising and moral weakness.* The leaders of the economic system permit advertising to appeal to the worst in citizens...(3) *Structural irresponsibility.* The leaders of the political order take advantage of a structural weakness in all democratic societies. Unable to depend on strong political parties, political leaders face the people alone and vulnerable, clothing themselves in symbolism and wishes. Their promises of benefits have become a special form of bribery endemic to democracy...(4) *An ambitious adversarial class.* The number of persons grows who see in expanded government empires to conquer, personal security and wealth to accumulate, and personal power to acquire. Moreover, these growing numbers are increasingly led by an intelligent, able, persistent, and ambitious elite strong enough to rival the business elite in brains and purpose and power...(5) *The declining status of aristocracy.* The leaders of the moral-cultural sector have long suffered under the market system of democratic capitalism from a profound loss of status...(6) *Envy.* In democratic capitalism, the resentments of the intellectuals are bound to fester. Monetary rewards for high intellectual and artistic talents, while in the vagaries of the market sometimes lavish, are more frequently less than rewards for top performers in corporate management, athletics, and entertainment...(7) *Taste.* The culture of

⁶⁸ Novak, Michael, *The Spirit Of Democratic Capitalism* (Lanham: Madison Books, 1991), 31.

democratic capitalism is loathed – with perhaps the deepest loathing – for its ‘bourgeois’ and ‘philistine’ tastes.⁶⁹

Each of these ills have contrasting virtues that are propagated within the Church – (1)

Romans 2:11⁷⁰ reveals that God is not a respecter of persons; (2) Exodus 20:17⁷¹ tells us

not to covet; (3) Mark 9:35⁷² illustrates that leaders are supposed to be servants and not

seek to be served; (4) Philippians 4:11-13⁷³ encourages us to be content with whatever we

have; (5) Mark 10:31⁷⁴ shows how current positions of status are always in flux; (6)

Proverbs 24:1⁷⁵ encourages us not to be envious of those in positions of power and

authority; and (7) 1 Timothy 2:9⁷⁶ encourages modesty of women which can be

extrapolated to society in general. The Church clearly has the tools to provide the

counterargument and counterpoint to a society that appears to have lost its way.

In the Church seeking to help move society into a closer relationship with God on the basis of economic principles, it must be made clear that Americans live in a pluralistic society in terms of religion. Everyone is not a Christian. As stated by Novak:

⁶⁹ Ibid., 32-34.

⁷⁰ For God shows no partiality.

⁷¹ You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, male, or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

⁷² He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.

⁷³ Philippians 4:11-13: “Not that I am referring to being in need, for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

⁷⁴ Mark 10:31: “But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

⁷⁵ Proverbs 24:1: “Do not envy the wicked, nor desire to be with them”

⁷⁶ 1 Timothy 2:9: “Also that the women dress themselves in moderate clothing with reverence and self-control, not with their hair braided or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes”

A pluralistic spirit decisively distinguishes democratic capitalism from either traditionalist or socialist societies. Every other form of society the world has ever known imposes a collective sense of what is good and true. In all other systems, every decisive economic, political, and moral-cultural power is exercised by one set of authorities. Democratic capitalism is unique among all forms of political economy by reason of its pluralism.”⁷⁷

The structure of pluralism and the fact that Christianity is based on a free will yielded to a sovereign God makes an overt application of Christianity as the dominant form of religion preferable to other Christian adherents, but problematic for society as a whole.

As stated by Novak:

Christianity has helped to shape the *ethos* of democratic capitalism, but this ethos forbids Christians (or any others) from attempting to *command* the system. It is particularly difficult for religious bodies to adjust to a role which removes them from command and places them outside the center. Their natural inclination is to suffuse every part of life with their own holistic vision of human nature and destiny. Since human beings are social animals, creatures of flesh and blood, religious bodies properly resist being shunted aside into the private spaces of the individual heart. The desire a public social role. Under democratic capitalism, they have such a role. But it is neither in command nor at the center.⁷⁸

Because of the free will of God offered to God’s creation, Christianity has influence but it cannot dictate outcomes. As Novak observed, “The judgment of individual cases may be left to God. It is, so to speak, the chief virtue of democratic capitalism that, in giving rein to liberty, it allows tares to grow among the wheat.”⁷⁹ It is in this sense that the “invisible hand” discussed by Adam Smith becomes more relevant along with the *laissez-faire* approach to economic affairs can co-exist with an intentional dedication to Christian

⁷⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 85.

principles without attempting to Christianize everyone and everything. It is based on freedom and liberty. Of this liberty, Novak wrote:

Democratic capitalism means a system of natural liberty, requiring both political liberty and economic liberty – but also more. Prior those two is the acute need for a particular moral and cultural system, constituted by both new institutions and new personal habits. True liberty must be derived from self-control, and such liberty is best ordered by laws. Hence the need for a third science, the science of *moral ecology*, to discern all the institutions and personal moral habits essential for the flourishing of self-governing peoples. Under this view, liberty does not mean freedom from all restraints; rather, liberty means ordering one’s own life – that is, self-government – for the sake of full human flourishing, through reflection and deliberation. Democratic capitalism, therefore, is a system of three liberties: political liberty, economic liberty, and liberty in religion and conscience.⁸⁰

These various forms of liberty have underpinnings that have originated and a genesis in the Church. Novak shared:

Many of the inspirations of the threefold system of political economy derive from evangelical inspirations such as personal creativity, personal responsibility, freedom, the love for community through association and mutual cooperation, the aim of bettering the condition of every person on earth, the cultivation of the rule of law, respect for the natural rights of others, the preference of persuasion by reason rather than by coercion, a powerful sense of the sinful drag on human souls and the need for checks against these. All these imperatives spring from the Bible...That is why capitalism – and societies free not only in their economic system but also in their polity and their culture – have arisen with more energy and less friction in areas where Jewish and Christian traditions are strong.⁸¹

These traditions became incredibly important as Kathryn Tanner stated:

“Religious beliefs, whether of obviously practical import or not, are meant not just to be believed but to be lived, to orient behavior, attitudes, and actions toward oneself and others. Those beliefs motivate action by establishing the value of certain states of affairs (salvation) and by telling people either how to get there, their means of access to them, or at least how to prove or test one’s being in them (often in both cases, for example, by the doing of good deeds). Religious beliefs

⁸⁰ Novak, Michael, *The Spirit Of Democratic Capitalism – Thirty Years Later* (McLean: Institute for Faith, Work & Economics, 2015), 12.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

also effectively steer action by making only certain courses of action seem reasonable.”⁸²

Into this arena overtly steps the Church to formally orient one towards right actions individually and collectively. While some limitations, as Novak implies, are expected, Christians are supposed to be Christians and should seek to formally represent Christ in a pluralistic society, especially one where individual actions can be so impactful, such as in capitalism. As Tanner implied:

Where religious interests and their pursuit are not cordoned off from everyday life but attribute considerable importance to what happens there – where, for example, religious vocations are not confined to specifically religious institutions (such as monasteries) – Christian beliefs, by all the mechanisms noted, might form life conduct generally, permeate life in all respects so as to establish a whole way of living, with significant economic impacts.⁸³

Christianity, in seeking to emulate and model Christ before the world, has the ingredients for changing life as we know it from one emphasizing self-interest to one focused on the greater good for all. For Christianity to be most effective, it cannot be a part of life to be visited occasionally. It should be the underpinning of all aspects of life without hesitation.

Capitalism, as currently applied, appears to have veered significantly from the Genesis-like point of origin as understood and propagated by Adam Smith. As a result, instead of being underpinned by religion in terms of application, as Tanner pointed out, capitalism has become a religion in and unto itself in need of redemption through true religion to counteract the negative effects, “Without the need any longer of religious backing, capitalism may now have the power itself to shape people in its own image; its

⁸² Tanner, Kathryn, *Christianity And The New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 6.

conduct-forming spirit may now be its own production, in other words. But as one of the few alternative outlooks on life with a capacity to shape life conduct to a comparable degree, religion might remain a critical force against it.”⁸⁴

A key aspect of Christianity is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!” Therefore, through salvation, anyone can be redeemed by taking a turn from the past in the present to garner a new future. Tanner described this as follows:

The past of course is sometimes considered by Christians to be something of great value, indeed taken to represent an ideal to which present and future conduct are to conform. One is to identify oneself with a human past that was originally perfect in Paradise, an Eden in which human life perfectly matched divine intentions for it. Or, one existed oneself (along with all other individuals) in an ideal state in the mind of God prior to being created in the world as we know it, a world of change and bodies. The past becomes a norm exerting pressure on future conduct just to the extent as it has been lost. Where one has been but is no longer determines where one is going. Being saved means returning to lost origins, recovering the ideal form of oneself as God originally knew it, or the state of Adam’s conformity with God before the fall. Who one was, whether in God or proleptically in Adam, is who one is to become again with God’s help. One is to exert oneself to the utmost now, by way of God’s grace, to bring one’s life in its entirety back into line with that.⁸⁵

For Christianity to have the most impactful opportunity and outcome, it must have a focus on who God is calling one into being. The fallen nature of humankind is not a fixed condition but is one that can be redeemed and reconciled back to God. Only through the Church is such a transformation possible.

The Church, as the Body of Christ, is perfectly positioned to bring this aspect of religion back into the conversation with capitalism in an act of seeking to redeem the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 51.

present by returning to the past, a past with a point of origin that appears inconsistent with much of the present actions taking place. Capitalism, more so as a function of practitioners rather than as an economic ideology, needs to, via the practitioners undergo a salvific moment because as Tanner explained, “Salvation then means the complete repudiation of what one has become through sin.”⁸⁶ Rather than seeing redemption as correlation to admitting past wrongs, paying some sort of fine, and then continuing to repeat the patterns of negative behavior, a conversion needs to occur that is always in the present tense “whereby one constantly turns away from what remains a force in one’s life.”⁸⁷ This newness in Christ and Christianity is crucial in changing of the individual and the spheres of influence where the individual operates.

The Church, in seeking to lead redemption of capitalism, must lead with an overt witness of a total conversion of life of which capitalism is a part of humanity’s whole. Instead of going to Church, whereby Church is thought of as a logistical destination; and instead of doing Church, whereby one’s actions can amount to a latter-day form of works righteousness; one, individually and collectively, must seek to simply be Church. Rather than seeing Church and Christianity as a part of one’s life, Church and Christianity must be foundational to all aspects of life. Tanner declared:

Christian commitment to God is not exhibited in only those spheres of life specifically dedicated to it but should make itself felt throughout the whole of one’s life. No mere matter for intermittent consideration, depending on the character of the setting or circumstances, such commitment should become the constant focal point of one’s life direction; never neglected, such a commitment is to be activated, actively engaged, at every moment without fail. One must be constantly asking whether, and if so how, all of one’s other pursuits fit into one’s primary Christian commitment. By in some way appearing in everything else one goes on to do,

⁸⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 60.

Christian commitment would become incorporative of every other more mundane desire, bending all such aims under its own purposes.⁸⁸

In essence, being a Christian is not a choice of arbitrary, incongruent, discrete moments of life. It is supposed to be a part of a life movement that continuously moves the individual closer to who and what God is calling the individual to. As a result, every aspect of the individual life becomes more Christian.

Capitalism is a perfect template or proving ground for Christianity and the Church because of the current focus on individual achievement to benefit or detriment of others from more of a side-effect rather than the objective being necessarily pursued. As Tanner points out, “At the root of this evident inability of people to profit together in finance-dominated capitalism lies the fact of heightened competition. One cannot depend on others to help one profit because finance-dominated capitalism forces one to compete with everyone else in all avenues it offers for achieving profit.”⁸⁹ Where competition appears to be endemic in the corrupt capitalism that America has, cooperation, through Christianity, is the opportunity for an evolution, or, perhaps better stated, a return to what capitalism was always supposed to be.

A zero-sum game approach is characteristic of capitalism, which is anathema to Christianity where servant-leadership, putting others first, seeking to do well for as many as possible for the cause of Christ, leads one to have a broader vision of seeing winning and losing in the context of the world that is versus the world to come, sin versus salvation, sinner versus saint, Hell versus Heaven. Capitalism does not speak in these terms, but the actions undertaken reveal the disposition of participants on these issues.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 87.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 183.

While such a perspective might seem to devalue capitalism versus the value found in Christianity and the Church, Tanner offered the perspective:

His devaluation of economic activity per se is mitigated when that activity itself becomes a way of serving God...one can serve God directly in economic pursuits because those are thought to be themselves divine vocations, part of God's specific plans for one's life. Working very hard would amount, then, to an appropriately heightened form of service to God, a way of proving dedication to the God who assigns people to just those tasks.⁹⁰

In the totality of the Christian experience, the work that one does from a vocational perspective is not separated from what God is calling the individual to be and do. Economic activity is a part of who individuals engaging collectively undertake that can and should be used to express an overt relationship with God.

With Christ as the head of the Church, all works can and should be done in an effort to be Christian, Christ-like, Christ-following. By doing so, as Tanner offers, "The body of Christ is such a cooperative body but its head plays a very peculiar role. All the work of the body is attributed to the head. And once the body as a whole is alive through its head, the failure of members does not prevent that head from retaining the very same enlivening influence on remaining members."⁹¹ This leads to a question of whether capitalism by incorporating Christianity can be better than what it is.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 200.

⁹¹ Ibid., 214.

CHAPTER 4 – Can The Church And America Do Better?

In this capitalistic society that is marked by a pluralistic religious context, “Some Christians may be tempted to assume that economics is a discipline autonomous from theology.”⁹² Such an assumption is autonomous from theology and creates a divide that many believe are better left separated in terms of the impact that theology, Christianity, and the Church can have on the economy. The application of a mindset rife with notions of being *in* the world but not *of* the world relegates Christianity to a position of criticism to speak on what is wrong in the world.

Conversely, William Cavanaugh offered another assertion, “Many Christians, however, intuit that what we do with our money and our stuff should be directly informed by how we relate to God.”⁹³ This aspect of Christianity, the notion that Christianity is a religion of conforming to the image of God and not simply criticism of a broken world, leads Christians to have to make definitive statements and stands regarding the works of the economy. The definitive stand is measured by the standard of whether Christian actions initiate and instigate a more flourishing life in accordance with Jesus Christ’s offer in John 10:10.⁹⁴

In seeking to live into the abundant life, be it life in Church or economy, Christians must continue to deal with the confrontation from the adversary who Jesus spoke of, also found in John 10:10.⁹⁵ In America where capitalism is the system of economics,

⁹² Cavanaugh, William T., *Being Consumed – Economics And Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), vii.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁹⁴ John 10:10: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

⁹⁵ John 10:10: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”

“Consumers feel besieged by marketing and surveillance, and they feel powerless in the face of enormous transnational corporations that are disconnected from the communities where they live.”⁹⁶ The fight for the monetary resources that God has entrusted to all is a battle between real needs, perceived needs, and wants that can appear to be readily available at a price that might be costly to individuals and communities. This may potentially frustrate the purposes of God for those resources. This fight is as much theological as it is practical because it is a fight surrounding freedom of choice and freedom to pursue the highest ideals according to God. Cavanaugh wrote of this aspect of freedom, using Augustine as a model. He contended:

Augustine’s view of freedom is more complex: freedom is not simply a negative freedom *from*, but a freedom *for*, a capacity to achieve certain worthwhile goals. All of those goals taken up into the one overriding *telos* of human life, the return to God. Freedom is thus fully a function of God’s grace working within us. Freedom is being wrapped up in the will of God, who is the condition of human freedom. Being is not autonomous; all being participates in God, the source of being.⁹⁷

As Christians and the Church, the desire is to serve God but the competing market forces can make serving God difficult based on the overwhelming influence that market forces exert in ways that can seem benign. The truth is that marketing, and therefore, aspects of capitalism, are designed to intentionally influence consumers by directing their purchases of goods and services as Cavanaugh explained:

On the one hand, marketing is communicated to the broader public as the provision of information about products so that consumers may make choices that are both informed and voluntary. Here consumers are depicted as autonomous and rational, perfectly sovereign over their choices of products and ends. On the other hand, marketing is an in-house presentation to its practitioners and clients that it is a machine fully capable of creating desire and delivering to its intended goal. These

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

two aspects of marketing are two sides of the same coin; marketing can manipulate desire successfully in part because of its success in convincing the broader public of consumers that it is not manipulating their desires...In fact, most contemporary marketing is based not on providing information but on associating products with evocative images and themes not directly related to the product itself.⁹⁸

Shifting consumer desires works at the individual level as well as at the corporal level that shapes the culture in which all individuals operate. The pursuit of a profit imperative by intentionally influencing purchasing desires robs individuals of true freedom as expressed by Augustine that today's society is a manufactured society seeking to serve the idols or gods who have created it.

The situation is an example of the disparity that exists between those who exercise power on their behalf within the capitalistic society and those who are impacted by the power exercised upon them. Corporations fool consumers into believing that they are exercising power when in reality, consumers are giving their power away. As a result, "In industry after industry, a few huge corporations dictate patterns of production and consumption."⁹⁹ The impact of this situation is that consumers are subject to being controlled by corporations rather than consumers exercising control over the corporations that are supposed to serve them with goods and services.

The disparity of power is one where the few, the hegemony of capitalism, reap significant financial rewards to the detriment of society, collectively. Cavanaugh illustrated this disparity as,

More severe than the asymmetrical power relations between corporation and consumer are the disparities of power in the exchange between employer and employee. In 1980, the average CEO made 42 times what the average production

⁹⁸ Ibid., 16-17.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 20.

worker made; by 1999 that ratio had risen to 475 to 1, and it continues to rise. Why do executives pay themselves so much? In part, because they can.¹⁰⁰

The situation that exists continues to create a divide that reveals the abuses of power that can occur in a society that is operating under a false aura of capitalism that deviates from that inspired and envisioned by Adam Smith. In such a situation, freedom is compromised and corrupts the possibility of human flourishing.

The compromise in the capitalist structure is one where corporations, the employer of individuals within communities, wields the power, that is often not wielded on the behalf of employees or communities. Further, corporations work on the behalf of investors, shareholders, rather than for employees, individuals, and communities who represent another class of interested parties, stakeholders. Cavanaugh shared:

As Peter Drucker, Michael Naughton, and others have observed, over the last twenty years the tremendous concentration of stock in institutional investment plans – mutual funds, pension plans, insurance companies, and so forth – has shifted the power dynamics of publicly traded corporations. Institutional investors have put tremendous pressure on executives to maximize returns for their clients. At the same time, offering stock options to executives and those of the stockholders coincide. As a result of this shift of power, executives have strong incentives to favor the concerns of stockholders over those of other stakeholders, such as employees and their families and their communities. Who owns corporations – the question of property, concerning which Friedman and others are generally agnostic – plays a crucial role in the dynamics of power.¹⁰¹

This focus on power that can corrupt, as it has corrupted capitalism from the true origins, delineates those who have the opportunity to impact versus those who are impacted. The emphasis on increasing profits at the possible expense of people having the opportunity to flourish in the abundant life promised by Christ creates a great divide.

The divide occurs at the institutional level as well as at the societal level as

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 22-23.

capitalism poses a challenge to individuals who deem gaining more and more is the measure of success. The emphasis on gaining more while others may be in positions of need, clouds the perspective of those who cannot see others' needs or decreases their desire to meet others' needs. Cavanaugh calls it a distraction, which is described as:

For a number of reasons, desire in consumer society keeps us distracted from the desires of the truly hungry, those who experience hunger as life-threatening deprivation. It is not simply that the market encourages an erotic attraction toward things, not persons. It is that the market story establishes a fundamentally individualistic view of the human person. The idea of scarcity assumes that the normal condition for the communication of goods is through trade: to get something, one must relinquish something else. The idea of scarcity implies that goods are not held in common, that the consumption of goods is essentially a private experience. This does not mean that charitable giving is forbidden, but it is relegated to the private realm of preference, not justice. One can always send a check to help feed the hungry, but one's charitable preferences will always be in competition with one's own endless desires. The idea of scarcity establishes the view that *no one* has enough. My desires to feed the hungry are always being distracted by the competition between their desires and my own.¹⁰²

As a result, the flourishing that would occur in Adam Smith's version of capitalism is absent from America society. This absence creates the void where charitable giving is devoid of the biblical love typically associated with it from the Christian perspective. As a result, the desire to help others becomes a preference not a true desire to meet the expectations of God. When viewed from the perspective of Adam Smith:

Adam Smith does not simply leave the care of the hungry to individual preference, however, for in the larger scheme of *The Wealth of Nations*, the needs of the hungry are addressed by the providential care of the market. According to Smith, the "invisible hand" of the market guides economic activity so that the pursuit of self-interest by uncoordinated individuals miraculously works out to the benefit of all."¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid., 91-92.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 93.

Emphasizing the necessity of there being a corporal response to societal needs because of the inherent communal sense of corporations and individuals cooperating to better society at large, Smith would find the current market environment and the ideas surrounding charity and philanthropy wanting in terms of what capitalism is supposed to achieve. Capitalism is an economic system that should promote individual achievement while simultaneously lifting society and individuals in a symbiotic relationship.

In the midst of what should be a symbiotic relationship, there exists a dichotomy that revolves around the use and misuse of power. The polar opposites are those who are powerful and those who are powerless. Andy Crouch wrote of power in *Playing God – Redeeming The Gift Of Power*. Of power, Crouch shared:

Like the electric current that runs, with the rarest of interruptions, through my home, power is a fundamental feature of life. And as with electricity, those who have the most unfettered access to power are the ones who are likely to think about it the least – unless and until it suddenly disappears or violently appears. But that does not make it less important or dangerous or valuable. For power is all those things. It courses through our lives. When it is rightly used, it makes possible most of what makes us truly human. When it is misused, it puts all of us at tremendous risk...power is the ability to make something of the world.¹⁰⁴

Capitalism, because of the engagement between those who have power and those who do not, presents an opportunity for power to be revealed in a very overt, transparent, and clear fashion. Those who have it can presume an entitlement to it that makes it difficult for it to be shared in an equal or equitable manner. Those who do not have it feel the pressure of being held in a subjugated relationship to others around them. These are those who are deemed powerless. Of the powerless, Crouch wrote:

¹⁰⁴ Crouch, Andy, *Playing God – Redeeming The Gift Of Power* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 16-17.

And what is powerlessness? It is being cut off... The powerlessness of death means that the world may act upon us, but we will never again act on it. Such powerlessness, just as much as power, is a fundamental feature of human existence... The deeper and more debilitating form of powerlessness is to be cut off from making *meaning*. There are able-bodied people all over the world whose physical capacity to make something is diminished (much less diminished, in fact, than my own body's after decades working at a screen), but who are denied any opportunity to make their own sense of the world. Perhaps they were denied this by being cut off from education, the process by which human beings gain the cultural fluency to participate in culture's ultimate task of meaning making. Perhaps they are denied by deeply ingrained assumptions about who matters in the world – excluded from the circle of meaning making by virtue of their skin color, gender or dialect... when powerlessness results from the exercise of power – when one person or group of people acts to deprive another of power, and especially when the pattern of exclusions persists from generation to generation – then something has gone fiercely wrong, and not just for the ones who directly suffer their disempowerment. Because the ability to make something of the world is in a real sense the source of human well-being, because true power multiplies capacity and wealth, when any human beings live in entrenched powerlessness, all of us are impoverished.¹⁰⁵

When capitalism, as America's form of economic activity, creates oppressive forms of engagement for the sake of the pursuit of profit, then America is worse off as a country.

When the Church, the physical representation of God, fails to directly address the oppression that can result from capitalism, then the Church makes a stand of complicity with the systems of oppression and the oppression that results from the systems. The Church bears a significant responsibility to respond to the systems of oppression by making the world aware of the consequences of the decisions that are made.

As the Church overtly enters into the conversation regarding power, it must do so from the perspective of praxis not solely from an abstract theological perspective. The study of God and the application of what is known about God, and what God expects, must become paramount in understanding where capitalism and the Church must

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 18-19.

intersect. The theological study of Micah 6:8¹⁰⁶ results in an understanding of what God desired of the Israelites. The perspective of praxis demands a response that makes the word of God come alive, especially for the powerless and the oppressed. Responding to the practical application of the word of God, Crouch offered:

Power at its best is resurrection to full life, to full humanity. Whenever human beings become what they were meant to be, when even death cannot finally hold its prisoners, then we can truly speak of power. Yet it is the way of our world that the very thing that makes us fully human at our best is what most truly corrupts us at our worst. Power at its worst is the unmaker of humanity – breeding inhumanity in the hearts of those who wield power, denying and denouncing the humanity of the ones who suffer under power...This power ultimately will put everything around it to death rather than share abundant life with another. It is also the power of feigned or forced ignorance, the power of complacency and self-satisfaction with our small fiefdoms of comfort. Power, the truest servant of love, can also be its most implacable enemy.¹⁰⁷

The interplay between capitalism and the Church, when approached as being discrete patterns of life that do not have to engage increases the probability of the misuse and abuse of power. Capitalism, as often applied in America, can cause practitioners to bow down to the altar of profits. The Church, as rightly applied in Christianity, is supposed to cause practitioners to bow down to the altar of God as directed by the prophets.

The bowing down is one of choice as explicitly revealed in Luke 16:13, “No slave can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” The serving of God is the way of Christianity. Serving any other god is the way of idolatry with the Christian understanding that the idol is simply a false substitute for the one true God.

The world builds up idols to fill the vacuum for someone or something to worship

¹⁰⁶ Micah 6:8: “He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 25.

that is greater than humanity. Because the idols are false, the idols are ultimately destructive. Crouch shared his perspective:

At the end, idols completely fail. They not only fail to deliver the godlikeness and immortality they promised at first, they rob their worshippers of even the most minimal human dignity and agency. Of all the charges the biblical prophets file against idols, the most damning is this: “Those who make them become like them.” The very human creativity that was able to fashion a god substitute is undermined and eventually eradicated by idolatry. The idol maker, originally an image bearer, becomes as inanimate and mute as a statue, no longer able to move, feel, care or love. The idol, originally invested with all the human hopes for power, ends up robbing human beings of their power. And in the end idolatry does not only rob image bearers, the culmination of creation, of their dignity; it robs the whole creation of its goodness...Power is all about image bearing – reflecting and refracting the creative power of the world’s Maker into the very good creation. And image bearing is for flourishing. But as idolatry fills the world with false images, and as those false images proliferate, the image bearers lose their capacity to bear the true image. The more the image bearers lose this capacity, the more creation itself is diminished, reduced to utilitarian means to bitter ends. Idolatry is the true failure of power.¹⁰⁸

As individuals choosing between capitalism in the extreme, in the corrupted application that has veered far from the principles of Adam Smith, the choice is much more than a system of economics. It is actually a choice of a system of belief based on how power is viewed. The false images described by Crouch serve to negatively impact all of humanity. The result is the devaluation of all that God has called good. Symptoms of this thievery can be found in broken human relationships, inequitable allotment of monetary goods, environmental challenges without concern, and a lack of vision for a future beyond the current generation. In addition, the thievery can be found in the substitution of the one true God for other gods – gods followed, gods created, or the actual assumption of the god role by individuals or groups of individuals.

Because individuals gather in groups and organize corporally into institutions,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 67.

institutions are where cultural decisions are made that impact individuals. Of institutions, Crouch wrote,

Institutions at their best make room for image bearing at its best, in all the abundance which God originally intended. But nothing in this world east of Eden has escaped the corruption of the divine image, certainly not institutions. For the patterns that institutions sustain with their artifacts, arenas, rules, and roles are not just the patterns of image bearing but the patterns of god playing and god making played out over space and time until they become woven into the very fabric of culture. These institutions consistently fail to provide for the comprehensive flourishing that is the test of shalom – instead, within their matrix some enjoy absurd levels of godlike autonomy and affluence, while others are robbed of even the most basic dignity image bearers should enjoy.¹⁰⁹

While individuals, in American society, are often hailed or assailed because of the wealth that they can amass as evidence of the inequities of the capitalistic economic system, the truth of the matter is that the outcomes are directly related to the institutions that have been created, promoted and are protected. Justification via laws for what can clearly be deemed questionable if not outright destructive behavior. This is based on outcomes and is symptomatic of the potential need for the institutions created by capitalism to be either destroyed and replaced or redeemed and rehabilitated. The institutions that America has are the institutions that American culture has allowed to continue to exist. As Crouch offered, “The basic law of cultural change – the only way to change culture is to make more of it – applies to institutions as well. Until new institutions are created, the power of the old institutions can persist for generations.”¹¹⁰

The creation of new institutions does not necessarily mean the abolishment of the institutions that currently exist. Rather, by the Church becoming intentionally involved

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 200.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 201.

with the establishment of new rules and regulations that reflect God’s desire for human flourishing as evidenced throughout the totality of humankind, capitalism can be redeemed through the process of making all things new as revealed in Revelation 21:5.¹¹¹ The newness is not to be substitutionary for the eschatological new Heaven and new Earth. Instead, the desire is for the appeal to God to work through the Church to offer an alternative way of living and being human in the world that offers a contrast to what is revealed in capitalism as currently deployed.

For the Church and Christians to offer a consistent and authentic witness to the world, Christians have to be Christians all the time not when it is convenient, not when it serves some ulterior motive, not when there is no downside risk for doing so. Regarding this, Richard Neuhaus stated:

Christians are not – or should not be – schizophrenic. That is to say, we do not put on our “Christian hat” when in church or in time set aside for prayer, and then resume our “secular hat” when going about the business of everyday life. The most elementary Christian confession of faith is “Jesus Christ is Lord.” He is lord of all, or he is lord not at all. He is lord also of the marketplace. That does not mean that everything done in the economic marketplace is done according to his will. Economic behavior, like all human behavior, is deeply distorted by sinfulness. Economic behavior, like all human behavior, frequently refuses to acknowledge the lordship that, Christians are convinced, will one day be evident to all.¹¹²

The underlying emphasis of being a Christian is that alternative, otherworldly nature that makes Christians stand out is supposed to make the Christian approach to economics outstanding. The outstanding nature is that it contributes to human flourishing rather than parroting the sometimes parasitic ways that American capitalism has given evidence of

¹¹¹ Rev. 21:5: “And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”

¹¹² Neuhaus, Richard J., *Doing Well and Doing Good* (New York: Penguin Random House, 1992), 18.

being.

Additionally, while the application of a Christian type of economics is what the Church should lead people in following, it is necessary for the lexicon and paradigm to shift from one of ownership, which can rob God of being primary in the lives of the Church, to one of stewardship, where each life in the Church understands the necessity of being available, responsible, and accountable to God in all things. Of stewardship, Neuhaus offered:

The steward is someone who takes care of things, who keeps the household in good order. “Stewardship” says very nicely what we mean by economic responsibility. Jesus had a great deal to say about stewards, both good and bad stewards. Whether we are talking about a huge corporation, a corner boutique, or the family budget, the subject is stewardship or economic responsibility. The global household of humanity is composed of innumerable households. While all of us are to be concerned for the global household, each of us has a little household for which we are responsible...The Christian who is engaged in economic activity understands that he is responsible to the Ultimate Economist, who is none less than God.¹¹³

This different perspective is one that is not necessarily best reserved for theologians in isolation or economists in isolation. The neglect of worldly matters by the Church only serves to reinforce the mechanisms and means for abuse, which will have the greatest and gravest impact on those most poorly equipped to deal with the consequences. Instead of neglect, the Church should actively take a stand of engagement to ensure that the world has an understanding of how God expects for the resources God has provided to be properly stewarded. This responsibility is of such great importance of which Neuhaus wrote:

As war is too important to be left to the generals, it is at least equally true that economics is too important to be left to the economists. Put differently, in a limited sense we are all economists. There is hardly a person among us who is not deeply

¹¹³ Ibid., 19-20.

involved, one way or another, in economics. Our activity as economic man, *homo economicus*, is not the main thing in most of our lives. And for that we can be grateful. But it is an important dimension of our lives, and, in Christian teaching, this dimension of life, too, should be brought under the lordship of Christ. That requires Christians to become more reflective about what they might otherwise take for granted or simply ignore altogether. Even when our economic work is conceived as a game, we play to a celestial gallery.¹¹⁴

This sense of a communal, corporal experience, because economics is a primary stage of engagement among seemingly disparate parties, is one where the impact of decisions are not simply temporal or terrestrial. As Neuhaus emphasized, the economic decisions that are made here on Earth resonate in Heaven. As a result, the consequences of economic decisions within capitalism reverberate beyond seemingly isolated transactions as the cumulative effects have ripples that change the global economic landscape for either the better or the worse.

In capitalism, the world in general, and America specifically, has taken the lead from the Church determining what is appropriate, legal, and ethical behavior. In taking the lead, the Church, in being quietly complicit by not challenging small financial transgressions before larger financial transgressions occur, has followed the examples of capitalism rather than presenting a pathway to what would be considered acceptable according to God. The result is confusion as Neuhaus articulated:

What do love and prayer have to do with sales reports, corporate takeovers, management studies, and reducing inventories? It would seem that Christians should have an answer to that question. One might suggest that the Church has a serious pastoral responsibility to help people answer that question, for occupations that are pursued “without respect of God’s injunction and glory, are loaded with curses.” Let it be readily admitted: the churches have generally done a deplorable job of enabling people in business to work adverbially to the glory of God and love of neighbor. What is needed, it seems is a spirituality of economic enterprise...It is spiritually eviscerating that what millions of men and women do fifty or seventy hours of most every week is bracketed off from their understanding of their faith.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 24-25.

What do people mean when they say they offer their lives to God if the most important activity of those lives – next to the family or, all too often, even more than the family – is not included in the offering? Of course, they might say that the fruit of that activity is offered in the form of money. As spiritually important as the money offering is, it might be pointed out, the Sunday “collection” is no substitute for a life lived with “respect of God’s injunction and glory.” And economic enterprise that is not grounded in a sense of moral legitimacy and urgency will always be easy prey for the ideological attacks of the cultured despisers of business.¹¹⁵

Capitalism in America is like a ship on rocky seas without a rudder to keep it from crashing too close to shore. The shore is the place where capitalism negatively impacts the human condition by restricting the opportunity for human flourishing. While the Church does not control the seas, it can and should provide a metaphorical rudder and sense of the closeness to the shore. The Church should not seek to replace capitalism in this regard. Instead, the Church should seek to improve the capitalism that America has. This work of the Church is a work that involves grace, unmerited favor from God, that leaves individuals and institutions in a much better place than where they would have been without the impartation of grace. Neuhaus wrote of this grace work as:

We are told that while the power of grace “penetrates” the temporal order, it does not displace that order. “In the is way the requirements of a society worthy of man are better perceived, deviations are corrected, the courage to work for what is good is reinforced. In union with all people of goodwill, Christians, especially the laity, are called to this task of imbuing human realities with the Gospel”. The Church does not, we are told, seek to control how Christian lay people perform their work but to alert them to the dignity and responsibility of the work that is authentically theirs. Individual persons and persons in community must freely and conscientiously discern what is to be done and how it is to be done. Even when they are not sure precisely what is to be done, they know it is to be done faithfully.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 60-61.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 111-112.

The Church bears a significant responsibility in making sure that the world is clear that the pluralistic nature of the world is not necessarily supposed to be replaced by a homogeneous alternative that is solely based on the Church, but the Church does bear an equally significant responsibility in making sure that the world has a clear perspective and vision of what the Church believes resonates consistently with God’s vision for the world. In doing so, the Church cannot limit the areas of impact to what occurs in an ecclesial context. The Church must bear a witness through the members of the Church, the Body of Christ, in the world in all areas of potential impact. Capitalism is not to be removed, destroyed, or eradicated. Capitalism must be redeemed through the work of the Church to bring forth a better capitalism that is more consistent with the principles of God. As such, “The teaching of the Church is not to provide detailed directives but ‘inspiration for [Christian] involvement in the world.’”¹¹⁷ Being an example of an alternative way of living in the world requires the Christian to be wholly in the world that he/she is no longer supposed to be of.

The challenge that persists is who has ultimate authority in the world, which involves the consideration of responsibility and accountability. The abstract nature of economics makes it difficult to ascribe responsibility and accountability to the system itself. The practitioners should be held responsible and accountable based on the outcomes of the systems as applied by the practitioners. When properly used, the outcomes, according to Adam Smith’s expectations of capitalism, should contribute to human flourishing. When improperly used or abused, the outcomes, based on the same expectations of capitalism, rob humanity of the opportunity for flourishing. The system

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 112.

itself is objective but the practitioners are not. As a result, the outcomes that reflect abuses of the system cannot be viewed through the myopic lens of the system. Rephrased, capitalism is not a system of economics devoid of human impacts and possible abuse when incorrectly deployed.

Because human beings are not completely objective, it should not be surprising that without proper intervention and oversight, the objective economic system undertaken reveals manipulations and abuses consistent with flawed human nature and behavior. The depth of abuse is more than mental. It is also moral and spiritual. In seeking a better way forward, “The answer to abuses of the free market is not always to be found in the economic system, he says, but is finally moral and spiritual.”¹¹⁸ As the pursuance of the answer is moral and spiritual, then it moves more so into the realm of the Church where moral and spiritual matters have an objective mechanism for response that can be helpful to the economic system, capitalism.

A euphemism for the current corrupt version of capitalism that is currently being deployed is offered by Paul Knowlton and Aaron Hedges with the term *plantation economics* defined as “one person or group destructively exploiting or wielding control over another and/or resources.”¹¹⁹ Additional clarity of the challenge associated with plantation economics is revealed in the plantation system which “is any human construct that creates and/or permits inequities in support of plantation economics.”¹²⁰ While plantation often invokes imagery associated with long ended and abolished slavery, the

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 190.

¹¹⁹ Knowlton, Paul E. & Aaron E. Hedges. *Better Capitalism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021), 1.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 1.

vestiges that remain in an economic system that legally continues to exploit others and thereby frustrate the opportunity to encourage human flourishing for all.

Depending on one's understanding of economic matters, various perspectives can be delineated, which can have a profound impact on the individual and collective decisions regarding economic choices. Knowlton and Hedges articulated three key perspectives:

Three major factors shaping our real-life economic decisions and behaviors are ignorance, uncertainty, and confusion...Ignorance simply means we are unaware of economic matters...Uncertainty means that, when we do have some awareness of economic facts, we are uncertain about what those facts mean, uncertain of how to interpret and make sense of the facts...Confusion means that when we have some awareness of economic facts and also some understanding of their meaning, we are confused about how to put the understanding into practice – we aren't sure what to do."¹²¹

Ignorance in dealing with economic matters can also be a reason for sub-optimal decisions. Where ignorance is pervasive, it is incumbent upon others to not take advantage of the ignorance but to help to resolve the ignorance. Where uncertainty exists in economic matters, sub-optimal decisions can also occur with those who are more experienced bearing a responsibility in leading others to make better decisions. Where confusion is at hand in economic matters, sub-optimal decisions are likely to happen with an appeal to those who are able to provide sound counsel are held culpable in making sure that abuse and exploitation does not occur.

These aforementioned expectations are reasonable in a system where human flourishing is expected to be the basic standard of community responsibility. In capitalism, as deployed in America, caveat emptor, buyer beware, is a more normal

¹²¹ Ibid., 18.

pattern of transactional behavior where seller and buyer can often seem to be in an adversarial position. The adversarial position can cause participants in capitalism to retreat into traditional patterns of behavior as explained:

Because we as human creatures are ignorant, uncertain, and confused both about economic facts and what to do with them, we rely on convention and make sub-optimal economic choices. We tend to do what is considered normal and/or conventional, going with the flow of pre-made defaults (even when the default “norms” are destructive) rather than making intentional, helpful economic choices. We tend to underestimate costs and risks and overestimate benefits and potential, a dangerous combination.¹²²

Ignorance, uncertainty, and confusion can be viewed as opportunities for exploitation or opportunities for obstacles to be overcome. The focus on individual outcomes, and therefore, making decisions that accentuate the benefits of certain individuals with little consideration of the impact on the broader community of participants, is a challenge for capitalism as America’s system of economics. The opportunity exists for an evolution from the present situation to a more effective one, but it requires a response from society as a whole. As Knowlton and Hedges offered: “The first step to better economics is overcoming ignorance, re-viewing “norms” and getting facts in perspective. This is a move from ignorance to awareness: awareness that current economics, particularly corporate economics, are deeply flawed for all involved, and awareness that economics matter to God.”¹²³ Economics via capitalism and theology via Christianity are not two polarized ideologies that should be kept in an arm’s length. In America, capitalism and Christianity are the dominant economic and theological constructs that impact daily life. Co-existence in the same way as ecumenical religious engagements are undertaken by

¹²² Ibid., 19.

¹²³ Ibid., 20.

respecting the differences of others can only lead to the continuation of sub-optimal decisions and outcomes that can only serve to exacerbate the economic challenges which bleed into social and political challenges that are so pervasive in America.

The result is the plantation economics, which is also consistent with what Knowlton and Hedges termed a market society, a lesser and poorer form of economic behavior and outcomes with the rationale being “One reason we’ve collectively arrived at a market society is that after decades of insisting people leave their ethics and values at the door when they enter the workplace, we’ve created a moral vacuum in the marketplace.”¹²⁴ The moral vacuum cannot be filled with an economic response. It requires a theological response which means that God must be involved in resolving these issues.

The pursuance of a resolution requires a revisiting of Milton Friedman’s expectation that a corporation’s sole responsibility is to produce profits with no obligation towards the social consequence of how the profits are produced. Corporations bear a responsibility to the social consequence of corporate actions, and it should be considered in the context of truly seeking to instigate activities that will contribute to and not frustrate human flourishing.

Friedman took issue with the engagement of profits and people not directly related to the production of the profits. Knowlton and Hedges disagreed:

Friedman, in the article he pens, goes on to argue that acting in the social interest is at odds with the owners’ interest. This view is narrow and short-sighted: are not shareholders part of society? Friedman makes the worthy point that actions of corporate social responsibility are often used to generate positive publicity for the purpose of offsetting the perceived negativity of profit-seeking. He is right that

¹²⁴ Ibid., 23.

profit should not be criticized in and of itself and seen as competing with social action. He is wrong, though, in saying profit should be praised in and of itself and that it can be pursued apart from any social interest.¹²⁵

The interrelated nature of society is one where actions create consequences – potentially positive or negative – intended and otherwise. Knowing that negative consequences are a possible outcome should not be neglected. The challenge that exists is how to deal with it in a way that does not necessarily have to compromise profits, but that does not cause profits to supersede the negative consequences on society. A societal standard that is expected to be followed should parallel the pursuit of profits. As the Hippocratic Oath is supposed to bind physicians to working in patients’ best interests, the leaders in a capitalistic society should bind themselves to working in society’s best interests. As stated by Knowlton and Hedges, “Suffice it to say that corporations can be a valuable part of society, but they must partner as truly part of society rather than bend society to serve the corporations’ narrower interests. Corporations are created by society – society should not be created by corporations. Corporations can and should benefit society – not the other way around.”¹²⁶ As corporations have proliferated and become the creators of employment opportunities, the sense of the plantation economics has magnified in importance and impact. The larger corporations wield more and more power. Those who bow down to the corporations are employers and customers at a minimum. The reverberating impact on the decisions that are influenced by corporate behavior can most significantly impact those who have less means to address the consequences that result. The associated distress creates a void of the invisible and the voiceless.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 28.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 30.

Different leaders have ventured into the pathway to fill the void. Knowlton and Hedges raised up the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as an example of one who sought to fill the void through overt social, economic and political action. He did so through the Poor People's Campaign with origin and impact summarized as:

The Poor People's Campaign (PPC) grew out of Dr. King's awareness of the need to address economic exploitation everywhere. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, he felt the economic question was the next most crucial question that Black people, and poor people generally, were confronting. For example, Dr. King observed, from the typical corporate perspective, mass unemployment in the White community was a crisis that required everyone's immediate attention to correct, while the same crisis in the Black community was merely a social problem brought on my the community and to be solved by that community. Dr. King understood market discrimination and economic inequality to be even more widespread and ingrained than racial inequality. The solution, Dr. King thought, should begin by cutting across racial lines and reaching the poor in every community across the nation...Recognizing that equipping the poor to become regular consumers benefited both the poor and the rich, Dr. King cast the vision of the Poor People's Campaign as a correction to market discrimination and set as the primary goal guaranteed jobs and income for all people.¹²⁷

Dr. King, a theologian and a community activist, was not an economist, but he saw the need for economic solutions to address societal problems that reflected theological inconsistencies in a society that claimed a relationship with God. King did not believe that economics, politics, and societal concerns were disparate issues. He recognized the interrelated nature of these spheres and sought solutions that would bring to bear the best that all had to offer. In addition, in doing so, he was able to see and articulate a vision of flourishing that could be had for all not a segregated few.

King was not operating in new territory or contradictory principles when it came to his higher order expectations of capitalism. He believed in the potential of capitalism in a way that many would have viewed as being threatening and radical. In truth, he appealed,

¹²⁷ Ibid., 54.

in very conservative fashion, to the principles of capitalism as postulated by Adam Smith for:

Smith does advocate for self-interest and his view of self-interest inherently and inextricably includes concern for others and the common good. His own words declare that both individuals and governments can and should seek mutual benefit. Smith's work centers upon and repeatedly emphasizes the mutuality of self-interest with other-interest and social good.¹²⁸

As such, both King and Smith were essentially in agreement with what could be achieved in the capitalistic society. The challenge that has existed for both is the settling on a form of capitalism that Smith never envisioned and that King could not endorse. The form of capitalism that exists in America is not actually a conservative version that adheres to Smith's principles. Rather, it is a radical form that bears little resemblance to what Smith postulated or would have expected.

Knowlton and Hedges, in their Partnership Economic Ethic, presented four key principles to address the inconsistencies between Adam Smith's view and expectations of capitalism in contrast to the American version of capitalism that is currently deployed.

The four key principles were:

- God provides and we partner.
- To partner is to seek mutual benefit.
- Mutual benefit is created by engaging in exchanges that are profitable for the self and the other – pursuing our economic neighbor's interest and our self-interest.
- Corporately our purpose is to sustain profitability for all stakeholders.¹²⁹

On the first point, the Partnership Economic Ethics, shared: "The work that is ours to do, indeed our highest and best work, is to be the very best partners possible with God and

¹²⁸ Ibid., 76-77.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 100.

with what God has provided.”¹³⁰ Pursuance of work and profits is supposed to cooperatively begin by recognizing our relationship with God, not in the absence of God. Revelation 4:11¹³¹ provides a theological perspective. The second point of Partnership Economic Ethics explained: “To partner is to recognize the reality of relationships, understand that what affects one person in a relationship necessarily affects the other(s) too, and act in ways that mutually benefit all involved in the relationship.”¹³² Theologically, the Golden Rule found in Matthew 7:12¹³³ illustrates this symbiotic relationship of reciprocity. The third point of Partnership Economic Ethics pointed out: “Partnership is about keeping both the self and the other in view and acting profitably for both together.”¹³⁴ Proverbs 18:24¹³⁵ reveals a relational perspective. The fourth and final point of Partnership Economic Ethics highlighted: “each stakeholder has a responsibility to other stakeholders.”¹³⁶ John 13:35¹³⁷ provides insight.

As Knowlton and Hedges expressed, “In sum, the Partnership Economic Ethic is to love your economic neighbor as yourself.”¹³⁸ Basically, theology and economy do not

¹³⁰ Ibid., 101.

¹³¹ Rev. 4:11: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

¹³² Ibid., 101-102.

¹³³ Matt. 7:12: “In everything you do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”

¹³⁴ Ibid., 103.

¹³⁵ Prov. 18:24: “Some friends play at friendship, but a true friend sticks closer than one’s sibling.”

¹³⁶ Ibid., 104.

¹³⁷ John 13:35: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

¹³⁸ Ibid., 100.

have to be in conflict, and, in application, are not in conflict if theology and economy are seen as complementary aspects of Christianity and capitalism, both rooted in an intentional relationship in pleasing God.

In seeking a relationship with God, the John 3:16¹³⁹ God, it is necessary for the Church to take an intentional leadership role in helping to lead corporations away from a mentality that seems to encourage more so than discourage exploitation of many – people and resources – for the sake of profits. In the language of Knowlton and Hedges, the plantation mentality must be eradicated and replaced in a very intentional fashion if capitalism is to be redeemed. From their perspective:

The ideal is a better partnership capitalism including corporations designed to benefit as many as possible, that replaces the inequitable plantation capitalism designed to benefit as few as possible. This ideal is the starting point for corporate strategic planning and engagement and is the platform on which to develop concrete transforming initiatives that build that better capitalism.¹⁴⁰

In essence, the defenders of Christianity against capitalism have it wrong. Capitalism is the economic system of America, and while it may evolve, it is unlikely to be replaced by a different form of economy among the known various forms. Concurrently, the defenders of capitalism as it is currently constructed also have it wrong. The current system is not sustainable due to the absence of intentionality in terms of seeking human flourishing for all. Seeking to keep the societal progressive imperative on the back burner is tantamount to thinking that a fire that no longer flames but still has embers is on its way to becoming extinguished. Eventually some type of accelerant will arrive to reignite the flames with greater intensity because the fire never went out.

¹³⁹ John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 109.

The way forward must be one where creative, innovative thinking comes to the forefront. The thinking may very well be a historically conservative move back to the true principles of Adam Smith, which current capitalistic participants may see as quite radical in contrast to the principles of myopic profit pursuance offered by Milton Friedman. As such, taking the best of tradition while incorporating the current life-affirming and -giving principles found in being adherents to the Holy Bible as led by the Church offers a path forward to redeeming capitalism.

CHAPTER 5 – The Church Provides Leadership To Capitalism

The Church, as the Body of Christ, the image-bearer of God, must provide leadership in economic, political, and social realms to redeem capitalism. To do so, the Church must reach beyond the confines of what has become the current reality of America and American capitalism. Reaching beyond what currently exists requires an imagination for what can be that is greater than what currently exists. While such an approach will at first seem quite radical, it is quite conservative in terms of appealing to the traditions of believing in God and adhering to the principles related to obeying God.

For the Church to approach America and capitalism in this way, an admission of facts is required. Walter Brueggemann offered:

The contemporary American church is so largely enculturated to the American ethos of consumerism that it has little power to believe or to act. This enculturation is in some way true across the spectrum of church life, both liberal and conservative. It may not be a new situation, but it is one that seems especially urgent and pressing at the present time. That enculturation is true not only of the institution of the church but also of us as persons. Our consciousness has been claimed by false fields of perception and idolatrous systems of language and rhetoric.¹⁴¹

The unfortunate circumstances surrounding the Church are such that the Church has failed to provide a true, authentic Christian witness in the world because it has become too much like the world. As a result, the Church has failed in witnessing to the world in an indictment of and validation of the ways of the world because an alternative vision has not been properly offered by the Church.

Brueggemann further shared:

Our consumer culture is organized against history. There is a depreciation of memory and a ridicule of hope, which means everything must be held in the now,

¹⁴¹ Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 1.

either an urgent now or an eternal now. Either way, a community rooted in energizing memories and summoned by radical hopes is a curiosity and a threat in such a culture. When we suffer from amnesia, every form of serious authority for faith is in question, and we live unauthorized lives of faith and practice unauthorized ministries. The church will not have power to act or believe until it recovers its tradition of faith and permits that tradition to be the primal way out of enculturation.¹⁴²

The Church has been co-opted into a corrupt form of capitalism that is false to the origin and genesis offered by Adam Smith. The Church has abdicated the responsibility to make the authentic Christian witness to the world. The admission of this guilt is the first step in moving forward in a way that will provide the leadership necessary to redeem rather than eradicate capitalism in America.

A multi-layered approach is needed to re-appropriate the power that the Church has to make necessary changes within the Church before the Church can authoritatively approach American society. For Brueggemann, prophetic ministry is the primary means to enact the type of change that is necessary. He offered:

The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us. Thus I suggest that prophetic ministry has to do not primarily with addressing specific public crises but with addressing, in season and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated. It may be, of course, that this enduring crisis manifests itself in any given time around concrete issues, but it concerns the enduring crisis that runs from concrete issue to concrete issue. That point is particularly important to ad hoc liberals who run from issue to issue without discerning the enduring domestication of vision in all of them.

The alternative consciousness to be nurtured, on the one hand, serves to *criticize* in dismantling the dominant consciousness. To that extent, it attempts to do what the liberal tendency has done: engage in a rejection and delegitimizing of the present ordering of things. On the other hand, that alternative consciousness to be nurtured serves to *energize* persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which the community of faith may move. To that extent, it attempts

¹⁴² Ibid., 1-2.

to do what the conservative tendency has done, to live in fervent anticipation of the newness that God has promised and will surely give.¹⁴³ The time has come for the Church in America to appropriate the spirit of prophetic ministry that will seek to first live into the power offered as being the incarnate Body of Christ. This must occur prior to seeking to speak truth to the powers in the world, specifically America, that do great harm, injustice and unrighteousness to marginalized people through the application of capitalism. The means to do so is rooted in the belief that the world that exists is not all that exists. The belief in something different from what currently exists is what is foundational for Christianity. Intentionally returning to that foundation is critical for the Church to provide an alternative path forward.

In seeking to find a path forward, a dichotomy of ideology exists when envisioning the challenges created by capitalism that is clearly misaligned with human flourishing. In the extreme, one group focuses on the broader issues of society without a focus on God as the issue takes the dominant role and perspective. Conversely, another group spends time on matters of theology without actually bridging the theoretical with the practical to reveal the power of God over all situations. Brueggemann wrote:

The liberal tendency has been to care about the politics of justice and compassion but to be largely uninterested in the freedom of God. Indeed, it has been hard for liberals to imagine that theology mattered, for all of that seemed irrelevant. And it was thought that the question of God could be safely left to others who still worried about such matters. As a result, social radicalism has been like a cut flower without nourishment, without any sanctions deeper than human courage and good intentions. Conversely, it has been the tendency in other quarters to care intensely about God, but uncritically, so that the God of well-being and good order is not understood to be precisely the source of social oppression. Indeed, a case can be made that unprophetic conservatives did not take God seriously enough to see that our discernment of God has remarkable sociological implications. And between liberals who imagine God to be irrelevant to sociology and conservatives who

¹⁴³ Ibid., 3.

unwittingly use a notion of God for social reasons because they do not see how the two belong together, there is little to choose.¹⁴⁴

The challenge that exists between the two disparate camps is whether one group will recognize the impotence in trying to work things out without God, while the other group recognizes that the presence of God does not absolve them of the responsibility to work things out through God. While the Church should be the bridge between the two, holding on too tightly to theological reflection without intentional application can serve to broaden rather than lessen the divide that currently exists. As a result, both groups may rightly criticize the negative outcomes of capitalism without either offering means to adequately evolve the path forward beyond criticism.

Into the midst of the criticism, the Church has had many examples of those who stood between the secular realities and the seeming lack of alternatives offered by the sacred authorities, the prophets. As Brueggemann described:

It is the task of the prophet to bring to expression the new realities against the more visible ones of the old order. Energizing is closely linked to hope. We are energized not by that which we already possess but by that which is promised and about to be given. It is the tendency of liberals to rail and polemicize, but in the lack of faith or bad faith of so many it is not believed that something is about to be given.¹⁴⁵

The Church and the prophetic ministry of the Church is needed in America to offer an alternative witness. This witness must reveal a different reality. The different reality must be embodied with hope to counter the expectation that America and capitalism are on an unalterable path with no means for redress for the wrongs and collateral damage that has become synonymous with both in terms of how marginalized people and communities have experienced life in this country. The prophet is the one who speaks of the

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 14.

possibilities of what can be, not contrived by the prophet, but offered by God. The Church has a prophetic voice that needs to be heard to offer new directional leadership to capitalism.

The prophetic voice of the Church is not one that will be met with acquiescence and approval in America because of the rift that it will cause on the basis of power. The current power structure of America is well enculturated and will not be unseated without a struggle. Regarding such, Frederick Douglass, American abolitionist and orator wrote and spoke in 1857:

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.¹⁴⁶

The American racial struggle in which Frederick Douglass wrote parallels the American economic struggle that persists to this day that has become more pervasive than being contained in the bounds of racial terms. In both cases, the struggle has to do with power that is exerted by the hegemony over the majority in a way that ultimately demeans humanity and robs it of the opportunity for human flourishing. One of the great challenges within it is the complicity of America based on the continuity of power held by the few over the many. Brueggemann describes this as a royal consciousness, which created the following challenge:

We are children of the royal consciousness. All of us, in one way or another, have deep commitments to it. So the first question is: How can we have enough freedom to imagine and articulate a real historical newness in our situation? That is not to ask, as Israel's prophets ever asked, if this freedom is realistic or politically

¹⁴⁶ Douglass, Frederick. (January 25, 2007). "If There Is No Struggle, There Is No Progress," **February 14, 2023.** (1857) Frederick Douglass, "If There Is No Struggle, There Is No Progress" • (blackpast.org)

practical or economically viable. To begin with such questions is to concede everything to the royal consciousness even before we begin. We need to ask not whether it is realistic or practical or viable but whether it is *imaginable*. We need to ask if our consciousness and imagination have been so assaulted and co-opted by the royal consciousness that we have been robbed of the courage or power to think an alternative thought.¹⁴⁷

To confront the challenge of capitalism in America, almost like David defeating Goliath, the Church must first believe that with God the Church can. To assume that capitalism has the final say over the path and direction of America would be an admission that the Church is powerless against America and capitalism. Jesus offered a polemic against anything coming against God in this world by addressing the entrance into heaven in Matthew 19:26, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.” As the entrance into heaven is possible with God, changing the current path and direction of America and capitalism are possible with God.

The task of the prophet, as revealed in prophetic ministry, is found in bringing forth the vision of what is possible with God. The redemption of capitalism through Christian principles is only approachable by believing in what may seem to be impossible. The path forward from Brueggemann excited the possibility of the impossible as:

The prophet engages in futuring fantasy. The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The *imagination* must come before the *implementation*. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing. The same royal consciousness that makes it possible to implement anything and everything is the one that shrinks imagination because imagination is a danger. Thus, every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the king ants to urge as the only

¹⁴⁷ Brueggemann, 39.

thinkable one. Indeed, poetic imagination is the last way left in which to challenge and conflict the dominant reality.¹⁴⁸

In the vein of the munus triplex, the Church, as the Body of Christ, is embodied by those who are supposed to be counter-cultural by simultaneously representing prophet, priest and royalty. The prophetic aspect of the Church must continue to confront the dominant reality in helping to bring forth new realities in apocalyptic fashion that will challenge the current authority of capitalism with a God-ordained demand for a newer and better reality that is only possible because of God, inaugurated with God, and lived out through God, as represented by the Church.

Part of that reality is based on seeing America through a Christian lens.

Appropriating this vantage point requires remembering what it means to be a Christian. Contemporary experience may be flawed in offering the most accurate view. As a result, an appeal must be made to looking through the lens of the early Christians. C. Kavin Rowe offered this perspective by sharing:

Before the Christians no one had thought that every human – whether high, low, or anything in-between – was exactly the same as every other, and no one had thought that all of them were to be treated as if they were the very Lord of the world. In a very real sense, the Christians took the human as such, and therefore each and every instance thereof, to be the “incarnation” of Jesus Christ. It is patently obvious that this vision took some time to develop, and it is patently obvious that Christians both then and now have betrayed their own vision.¹⁴⁹

The betrayal of the vision by Christians is synonymous with a betrayal of the vision by the Church. The opportunity exists for the betrayal to be reversed through the continued reminder of Christians that they are redeemed people as a means to help the Church to

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 40.

¹⁴⁹ Rowe, C. Kavin. *Christianity's Surprise – A Sure And Certain Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), 4.

stand as an authentic witness of Christianity. Capitalism is a by-product of this reminder with the opportunity to be redeemed as Christians are supposed to be redeemed people.

This aspect of redemption that is uniquely found within the Church is based on what Rowe terms the story of everything, which is the story of Christianity. For capitalism to be included in this story, an orientation towards what is to come is much more helpful than focusing on strictly and reactively complaining about what is. The challenge that exists is to have a future orientation in a world that appears to be deterministic in approach that can call into question a more hopeful outlook. To thwart this challenge requires a different perspective, described as:

With the resurrection of Jesus, the future has arrived in the present. All things that exist are created; all things that exist have been and continue to be marred by the fall; all things that are marred by the fall are being and continue to be healed by the presence of New Creation in our midst; all things are therefore getting a foretaste of what's finally to come. The consummation reaches from the future into the still-plagued present. The story of everything thus looks not only forward but also backward. It is a retelling of all creation from the vantage point of the end. And it claims that we can have a taste of God's good fortune even now in the midst of time.¹⁵⁰

Part of the Church's key mission is the necessity of envisioning a future that is hard to believe and that requires hope to have the audacity to pursue. Basically, if America is in need of a miraculous change, it is not likely to be within the grasp of America to bring this change to pass. The necessity of God's intervention in providing the vision and bringing the vision to pass is paramount in a quest such as redeeming capitalism. It is no less audacious a task than salvation offered to sinners to transform them into saints or sinners redeemed. The redemption of capitalism as a system practiced by those who are outside of the Church or those who have laid down their responsibilities to be Church

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 21.

wherever they exist, requires a new vision that can only be fully engaged and acted upon by those who have a belief in Christ or a belief in Christian principles.

The Church needs to provide leadership by providing an authentic Christian witness that is based on consistently living as Christians. The power of the Church is diminished when the counter-cultural opportunity is left aside while trying to pursue a relationship with the world that subverts the Church into being complicit with worldly activities that weaken the Christian witness. Historically, the Church only stood out as the Church because of the willingness to look and live different from the prevailing contemporary culture. When it failed to do so, the Church failed to be impactful. Rowe characterized this activity as:

Put negatively, the early Christians were acutely aware of the power of hypocrisy to destroy their witness. No one likes to see Christians who talk about being Christian and live like something else. This was as true in the ancient world as it is today. Conversely, living in the transformative power of the resurrection and thereby witnessing to Jesus Christ was immensely attractive. Human lives that actually change and move toward and in patterns of healing and joy were as attractive then as they are now.¹⁵¹

For the Church to show the leadership that is necessary for the redemption of capitalism, it must continue to present that Church as an institution made up of individuals who are willing to be unique and distinct in the world. The effort cannot simply be undertaken in the liturgy and worship practices on Sabbath days. It must extend into the realms where the Church, as individuals instead of the institution, engage with a world that needs to see the authentic witness to offer a measure of hope in what may often seem to be a hopeless world.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 23-24.

The challenge that exists is the holding up of the Church and Christianity in the pluralistic society of America, which is tantamount to what the early Christians faced in the polytheistic society that it invaded. The invasion was only as powerful as the belief in Christianity and the Church. Similar to the previously mentioned Frederick Douglass quote, this was and is a battle of power. Rowe described this as:

What had not occurred until the Christian story collided with the assumptions of polytheism was the possibility that the whole system was false. The story of everything called into question the entire way of being that was polytheism and narrated it in all its variations as the worship of creation rather than the Creator. Polytheism was not a story or set of stories that took account of everything but a multifaceted interpretation and exaltation of all that was not-God. The true God had yet to come fully into the picture in the polytheistic world. Bringing God into view as the only one to be worshipped created the conditions for a clash between rival narratives and the practices that go with them (worship/sacrifice/festivals/calendar/etc.). This clash amounted to a gradual undoing and remaking of the entire religious cloth of antiquity.¹⁵²

This clash has been ongoing as even the adherents to Christianity and many who consider themselves to be a part of the Church have subverted their Christian principles to accommodate a view that other religions are to be tolerated rather than challenged. As a result, in America, a country without a national religion, social, political, and economic principles can sometimes appear to be a mixing of various backgrounds and traditions without overtly sticking to or promoting one from a religious standpoint. The confusion that results has often left leadership seeking secular solutions rather than religious solutions that might be considered polarizing.

The power of individuals is subverted to the power of institutions, that may be profit-seeking but may not seek human flourishing as an overarching goal to be similarly

¹⁵² Ibid., 30-31.

pursued. The institutions may be contemporary Goliaths that need to be confronted by contemporary Davids. Of institutions, Rowe shared:

Today we almost automatically think of institutions as bureaucratic extinguishers of vibrant faith and all that goes into them – dynamic relationships, powerful worship, works of justice, and imaginative thinking. If you want to slow, or stop, the beating heart of new faith, institutionalize it. If you want to oppress human beings, build institutions that smother their natural creativity. If you want to ensure that innovation never gets the upper hand, do things in an institution. If you want drudgery day after day, work in an institution. And so on.¹⁵³

As capitalism represents a potentially troubling institution, the Church can represent an equally troubling institution when it chooses to emulate the practices of secular institutions. To do so would mean that the Church has intentionally subverted the vision of the Church and the purpose of the Church. This was never supposed to be the case at the individual or institutional level. The Church is an institution that should be unlike any other institution that exists. Rather than being a vehicle that is complicit with any forms of oppression, Rowe provides perspective that suggest an alternative:

The early Christians did not share our view. Instead, they insisted that the revelation of the human required the development of institutions to sustain the practices that kept the new vision of the human visible and alive in the world. The story of everything positioned them, that is, as institutionally creative people. For them, the question was not whether to build or get rid of institutions, but what kind of institutions Christianity requires to spread the surprising good news and to live it out through time.¹⁵⁴

Adopting a similar perspective as the early Christians offers hope in redeeming capitalism rather than the abolition of capitalism. What needs to be intentionally interjected is the Christian perspective on how capitalism can live out the principles from the genesis when initially propagated by Adam Smith that was intentionally inclusive of a

¹⁵³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 55.

perspective of adhering to God and deity. The Church, in leading this transformation, must be clear on what capitalism can be and then, in leading Christian adherents, present means and methods for achieving this alternative vision.

The alternative vision is one that the early Church was not afraid of embracing. To lose sight of the vision would have threatened the legitimacy, relevancy and potential continuity of the Church. Recognizing that Jesus Christ is the foundation of Christianity and the Church, Jesus shared with Peter, in Matthew 16:18, “and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” These true words have embedded in them the hidden fact that the Church and Christianity will be under attack. Rather than retrenching, the Church must be on the offensive in defending the faith. Rowe wrote of insights that the early Church employed to keep the Church moving forward:

In order to keep the Christian vision of the human alive and reveal it to the world, the early church created institutions that carried the view of the human in their practices and made it socially and politically visible. Understanding the Christian provision for the poor, the nursing during the plagues, the development of the hospital, and the invention of the orphanage is the same thing, that is, as seeing the concrete social and political explanation of the human revealed by God in Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁵

While Rowe accentuated the social and political, the economic is also incredibly important when a system of economics such as capitalism is at hand. Capitalism is rife with the opportunity for exploitation of the marginalized, the poor, and the disenfranchised. As capitalism is rife with the opportunity for exploitation, the Church, simultaneously, is rife with the opportunity to present an alternative way of life that highlights the value of the marginalized, provides the chance to offer relief to the poor,

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 68.

and finds ways to offer dignity to the disenfranchised. To do so requires imagination and vision that will seek to take what has been the best of America's past or tradition with an eye towards a possibly different a better future which concurrently requires innovation.

L. Gregory Jones and Andrew P. Hogue wrote of the opportunity for the coexistence of tradition and innovation with the introduction of the term traditioned innovation with the following definition:

Traditioned innovation is a way of thinking and living that holds the past and future together in creative tension. That is to say, our feet are firmly on the ground with our hands open to the future. It requires an ongoing learning in which we are encouraged to live into the future by immersing ourselves in the best of our past, formed with practical wisdom – what Aristotle called *phronesis* – that enables us to discern what we ought to carry forward and what we ought to leave behind. Traditioned innovation is at once obvious, counterintuitive, transformational, and urgent as a mindset for leadership and institutions nurtured by a Christian imagination.¹⁵⁶

This approach is incredibly important in determining how to proceed in a relationship between the Church and capitalism that does not continue to create a polarized outcome of having to choose between one or the other. The Church has traditionally, even from the writings of Adam Smith, had an influence on capitalism. This is a part of capitalism's tradition. The application of capitalism in contemporary America has revealed the deviation from these traditional roots. Going back to the past is not the answer. Employing methods of moving forward in the most helpful ways is necessary to create solutions that will propel human flourishing for all as the goal.

The efforts to undertake this kind of activity requires a different viewpoint of how things have been done, how things are currently being done, and the possibilities

¹⁵⁶ Jones, L. Gregory and Andrew P. Hogue. *Navigating the Future – Traditioned Innovation for Wilder Seas*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2021), xviii.

regarding the future. It is a significant challenge to look at current institutions and deem them ineffective in a way that will be received by the powers at be such that the institutions will cooperatively work to change or innovate for the betterment of all. The task requires vision, as Jones and Hogue pointed out:

We sense that we need a broader vision of the future and of the past that enlivens the present and points to transcendence and purpose for the future. We need an understanding of what it means to flourish that can help us to overcome our despair and discover life that really is life. We need to be able to cultivate institutions that encourage networks of relationships to serve thriving communities.¹⁵⁷

The focus on thriving communities, which is also a key component of any system of economics, should also be reflected in the efficacy of capitalism or the lack thereof. Rather than operating from the perspective of various definitions of thriving communities, the Church can provide leadership in understanding thriving from a biblical perspective that could serve as a basis and foundation for how decisions should be made – social, political, as well as economic. Left to the current hegemony of leadership in America that has benefited from a corrupt application of capitalism is likely to result in a suboptimal solution for individuals and communities that only serves to continue the degradation of community as well as the degradation of hope that is endemic in thriving communities.

Rather than conceding to the current institutional powers that have hindered flourishing and thriving communities, the Church should overtly and intentionally step into the forefront of providing this needed leadership. The Church has a unique perspective on God that is unlike any other power that can be presumed to offer

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 1.

consistent, positive impactful change. While others may not embrace God the same as the Church, the embracing of God will have an impact on the totality of the community.

Americans live in a dynamic world that is always changing. The consistency that is found in God can help to remedy some of the challenges found in America, in general, and capitalism, specifically. The basis for such an assertion comes from scripture such as James 1:17, “Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” The consistency found in God and the Church, which is supposed to be the ambassador for Christ, allows for innovation to occur amid the traditions that continue to impact the present as America moves forward towards a seemingly uncertain future.

Human flourishing should be the focal point but Jones and Hogue pointed out:

We have mounting evidence that human flourishing does not happen inevitably or automatically in a world that is changing quickly and being environmentally degraded, where, for too many people, the ways of the past are unfit for the challenges of the future. In fact, human flourishing is a state, and never a static one, that is always under threat by deep forces in our world that bewilder us, by technological changes that are quickly altering our work and our lives, by eroding our trust in society, by inequality of opportunity or injustice in its pursuit, by deep suffering around the globe and across the street, and perhaps even by the simple ways we see and treat one another in our daily interactions.¹⁵⁸

The negatively chaotic state of America in many realms is related to the lack of goal congruence as a country surrounding standards of engagement as human beings. The Church can and should provide this clarity by appealing to the Holy Bible and extracting what is relevant in the current contemporary society that recognizes America as a country of laws, laws that, depending on situation and circumstance, may be just or unjust. The measurement of the justice or lack thereof should be the impact on people, communities,

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 9.

human flourishing collectively. It should not be on bottom-line profitability of institutions that can herd people in the production and acquisition of goods and services in ways that can reflect the plantation mentality that Knowlton and Hedges introduced.

The ability to measure against an objective constant is needed to avoid instigating a mindset and disposition that makes hope something that seems so abstract that it ceases to be seen as worth pursuing. The void of hope introduces a sense of complacency that invites criticism over critique of how things can possibly be better. As Jones and Hogue shared:

When we encounter bureaucracies that seem to exist for their own sake, discover abuses of power by leaders and organizations that are more focused on narcissistic self-preservation than a commitment to others and to a broad sense of purpose, we become cynical. And yet we continue to yearn for something more.¹⁵⁹

The cynicism causes individuals to retreat into their own corners of defining success and failure in individualistic terms. America's more corrupted form of capitalism, seeking the profit imperative without regard for others, appears to have planted seeds of this nature that have deep roots. Deeper than these roots are the yearning Jones and Hogue mentioned, a yearning that can only be satisfied by someone or something greater than the institutions, God.

The yearning is coincidental with a shared existence of life, whereby those who are in positions of power should be focused on helping those who lack power. The Church has a focus on helping those in positions of need. The Church can provide leadership in this effort for society as well as revealed in Acts 20:35.¹⁶⁰ Jones and Hogue

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶⁰ Acts 20:35: "In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

described a secular application in the “paradox of generosity,”¹⁶¹ showing an intentional willingness to give and pour into the lives of others. Similar to a spirit of reciprocity, the compilation of blessings at the individual level increases those at the institutional level.

Jones and Hogue wrote of the outcomes:

And when it works, when givers succeed, Grant has found that giving and flourishing become contagious, spreading and cascading. Philosopher Christian Miller has written that we can see something that is “so powerful in its goodness” that it has the capacity to “make us care.” People start to root for givers and support them, and their success actually *creates* value, Grant notes, rather than claims it, developing virtuous cycles and collective benefits.

The upshot is this: we all stand to benefit when we start with why, when our purpose is to promote the flourishing for which we all yearn – in our own lives, in our relationships and institutions, in our communities, and in the world at large. Starting with the End, flourishing, and holding to that purpose, deepens and sustains our commitments and enables us to be open to a more hopeful future. And this is crucial for institutions as well as in our own personal lives.¹⁶²

The Church has the opportunity to provide leadership in showing how the application of biblical principles that correlate with human flourishing can actually enhance the expected outcomes of capitalism in America as opposed to being seen as intruding in a way that will hinder economic progress. Rather than instigating more competitive behavior that is destructive, the opportunity exists to show that cooperative behavior is coincidental with institutional success, such that the abolition of institutions and capitalism is not the outcome upon which to be focused. When starting with outcomes that focus on human flourishing, the redemption of capitalism then becomes the aim.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 45.

¹⁶² Ibid., 45.

Similar to the process of the redemption of individuals within Christianity, the traditioned innovation approach is one of continuity without ever achieving the ultimate level because continuous improvement is always available. Jones and Hogue offered:

Traditioned innovation is a mindset, habit, and way of seeing that holds past and future together in creative tension, animated by both wisdom and improvisation, aimed toward the cultivation of human and institutional flourishing. Requiring both a deep fidelity to certain patterns of the past that have borne us to the present and a radical openness to the changes that will carry us forward toward the future, traditional innovation can help guide a vision for institutions and leaders as they advance flourishing and look for an array of creative possibilities to achieve it in the future.

Traditioned innovation is neither a quick fix nor something we do just once. It requires sustained attention to what to preserve and what to cast off, as well as what and how to innovate. That means we ought to equip ourselves with dynamic ways of approaching the future and bringing forward the past – a running broad jump, not a standing one. It requires us to look toward the future with hope, curiosity, awe, and humility, even as we carry forward the past with gratitude and discernment.¹⁶³

The approach of traditioned innovation is akin to a full gospel approach to Christianity, whereby the entire Bible is utilized versus a focus on the Old Testament versus the New Testament. As Matthew 5:17-18¹⁶⁴ demonstrates the congruency of Jesus' mission on earth to bridge the gap between prophecy revealed and prophecy fulfilled, the Church has an opportunity to creatively demonstrate how capitalism can be revealed as something closer to what Adam Smith envisioned versus the corrupt capitalism that America appears to have embraced and desires to preserve. This approach of incremental change is one that can be part of a pattern of continuous improvement versus the notion of creative

¹⁶³ Ibid., 79-80.

¹⁶⁴ Matthew 5:17-18: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."

destruction where something has to be completely abolished for progress to be considered to have been made.

Rather than abolishing capitalism as some would prefer, the Church can and should lead in this effort of redeeming capitalism to demonstrate the good that can still come out of it in an effort to focus on human flourishing. Jones and Hogue contended:

Jeff Dyer, Hal Gregersen, and Clayton M. Christensen discovered in their studies on particularly effective innovators, in fact, that industry disruptors rarely, if ever, invent something entirely new out of nothing. Instead, they associate, question, observe, and experiment in ways that simply “recombine the ideas they had [already] collected in new ways,” leading to new insights for new purposes or new contexts. Think of, say, a savvy engineer and businessman who grapples with a call to ministry, and begins to imagine how his knowledge and skills in the business of engineering might function as ministry creatively redesigned.¹⁶⁵

The notion that secular skills can be applied for sacred purposes is not immediately a polarized outcome. Bringing into the conversation the idea of stewardship rather than ownership is a Christian principle that could help to free capitalism from an individualistic idea of seeking to maximize individual or institutional profits with no consideration of the impact on human flourishing. Rather, stewardship, with an eye towards accountability to the owner of all of creation, consider Psalm 24:1,¹⁶⁶ which Christians would define as God, helps to demonstrate how capitalism does not have to be abolished. It simply needs to be redeemed in a fashion that an opportunity for stewardship that will have a positive impact on as many as possible is the focal point.

It is necessary to have a reframed mindset which will bring possibilities out of seeming impossibilities. If human flourishing is under siege based on the ill-effects of

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 92.

¹⁶⁶ Psalm 24:1: “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it”

capitalism, then the Church, based on the expectations that Jesus Christ articulated as the counterbalance to the efforts of the thief in John 10:10,¹⁶⁷ has a primary responsibility to seek out all means to improve the odds that human flourishing is the outcome. Capitalism is akin to the thief in this passage and Christ, through the Church, thwarts the efforts of the thief and the efforts of capitalism that are ill-conceived and malformed.

Conceptually, Jones and Hogue indicated a way forward to improve the odds of the Church in being a proponent and protagonist against the challenges of the negative ravages of capitalism:

Together, curiosity, humility, and hope are important keys to how we imagine and pursue human flourishing. Our bent is often to choose from among them, but wisdom comes through pursuing all three together. If curiosity grows our capacity for imagining, enabling us to live into our design as *homo prospectus*, and humility guides that imagining, calibrating our sense of what's prudent and possible, then hope enables us to sustain an evergreen sense of possibility without ever losing sight of all the challenges that surely will await as we navigate the future in light of the wisdom of the past.¹⁶⁸

Redeeming capitalism is an audacious initiative to propose. Such an effort requires a belief that the current leaders of capitalism will buy into the idea that capitalism, first, is problematic for American society if it continues on the current unaltered path. Second, a solution that will improve outcomes for all is not only attainable but also preferable. The brokenness of American society in terms of stratification based on economic issues that bleed over into social and political concerns presents the case that America absolutely has a problem and capitalism is not an objective and innocent participant. All taking responsibility for their part in developing implementable solutions that will not eradicate

¹⁶⁷ John 10:10: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 115-116.

but evolve capitalism is not only noble. It is necessary for progress to be initiated that can continue to be revisited such that past successes are viewed as being evidentiary and definitive that promotes their maintenance in lieu of the pursuance of future innovation that is expected to make sure that human flourishing is constantly pursued.

The Church, embodied with principles of the apocalyptic,¹⁶⁹ needs to take on and maintain a leadership role in this effort by highlighting examples of situations where the Church has been able to provide sacred remedies to secular challenges. Similar to the birthing of something new into the world that may not have previously existed, making capitalism and the Church partners in solutions for human flourishing rather than combatants requires something or someone who is greater than both. God is greater than both. And, as Luke 1:37 reveals, “For nothing will be impossible with God.”

¹⁶⁹ Apocalyptic is used in this sense as not being representative of an Armageddon-like outcome but a revealing and uncovering of something new that has not previously existed.

Chapter 6 – It Can Be Done

The Church, as led by those who lead it, has been able to make great achievements to change the world. Capitalism can appear to be a formidable foe. The formidability is based on the lack of consistency in challenging it in ways that co-opt it into working towards congruent human flourishing. This is in contrast to relegating it into the position of being the antagonist with defenders and apologists who argue for the relegating of the Church solely to ecclesial matters. The Church bears a responsibility to God and creation to be involved in all matters. Abdication makes it a co-conspirator in the issues that plague America.

When Church leaders, clergy or lay have intentionally gotten involved in seeking to make a concerted effort to bridge the gap between our current reality and an alternative reality, change has come that enlivens the imagination to new possibilities. The following are examples of Church, para-Church, and non-Church initiatives that have proven how capitalism can be redeemed in a fashion that increases the curiosity, humility and hope. Combined with wisdom that Jones and Hogue believe are foundational to making necessary change, the redemption of capitalism can be seen as more practical and not simply theoretical. Starting with the vision of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., widescale initiatives to instigate change can be proposed and pursued.

King highlighted a reality of the world that he lived in that was sometimes cast in different shades depending on who envisioned it. In the midst of great challenges, King highlighted the civility of people of color despite circumstances that would have qualified most, if not all, to take matters into their own hands in seeking redress for their living

conditions at the social, political and economic level. King was able to show something quite different:

The amazing thing about the ghetto is that so few Negroes have rioted. Ninety-nine percent of American Negroes have never thrown a Molotov cocktail or lit a match to comply with the admonition, “Burn, baby, burn.” Even more amazing is the fact that so many ghetto inhabitants have maintained hope in the midst of hopeless conditions. Contrary to the myth held by many white Americans, the ghetto is not a monolithic unit of dope addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes and unwed mothers. There are churches in the ghetto as well as bars. There are stable families in the ghetto as well as illegitimates. Ninety percent of the young people of the ghetto never come in conflict with the law. We are constantly made aware of desertions and illegitimacies that take place in the ghetto, but often forget the vast majority of families that have stayed together throughout the years. Despite the overwhelming odds, the majority of Negroes in the ghetto go on living, go on striving, go on hoping. This is the miracle. To be a Negro in America is often to hope against hope. It means fighting a daily double battle – a battle against pathology within and a battle against oppression without.¹⁷⁰

The vestiges of capitalism have reigned for years with many of the commoditized lives playing subservient roles in a system of perpetual oppression. The hope for opportunity has not resided in a patriarchal top-down hierarchy. Hope has resided with the people who should be the most devoid of hope – the marginalized, the oppressed, the disenfranchised. Yet, it is these same people in America who have much to gain who continue to hold America accountable to people who are often ignored, hidden and invisible.

King had a vision that was not simply myopically focused on Negroes or African Americans or Blacks. King’s vision was inclusive of all as he stated, “we must not overlook the fact that millions of Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, Indians and Appalachian whites are also poverty-stricken. Any serious war against poverty must of

¹⁷⁰ King, 120-121.

necessity include them.”¹⁷¹ This inclusion means that a wholeness of solution regarding the corruption of capitalism is one that should, similar to Adam Smith’s initial intent, lift all people not just a few.

The challenge of America’s pluralistic society means that solutions must not simply treat anecdotal elements of the problems that plague America. The Church, in assuming leadership, needs to recognize that the objective is not only to address the ills of the Christian but to address the ills of all. As King stated:

This is the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great ‘world house’ in which we have to live together – black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu – a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.¹⁷²

This opportunity presented to America in seeking to redeem capitalism will make a positive difference for all pockets of society.

To make the positive difference requires a difference in paradigm that challenges prevailing thoughts while also instigating new ones. Capitalism can promote individual achievement, but capitalism does not operate in a vacuum with no consequences beyond the immediate participants. King added the following perspective:

We must honestly admit that capitalism has often left a gulf between superfluous wealth and abject poverty, has created conditions permitting necessities to be taken from the many to give luxuries to the few, and has encouraged smallhearted men to become cold and conscienceless so that, like Dives before Lazarus, they are unmoved by suffering, poverty-stricken humanity. The profit motive, when it is the sole basis of an economic system, encourages a cutthroat competition and selfish ambition that inspire men to be more I-centered than thou-centered.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 141.

¹⁷² Ibid., 177.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 197.

The issue at hand is not the mobilization of scarce resources, rather it is the mobilization of plenteous resources that are frequently found in the hands of the few who seek to maximize profitability. The overt objective may not necessarily be to make people poor and to keep them poor. The outcome often appears to initiate and instigate this outcome as the well-being of others is treated as secondary to the advancement of self.

America is presented with a problem and an opportunity. Capitalism, as an economic institution, can be protected in the corrupt form that appears to do more harm than good. Or, capitalism can be redeemed through Christian principles that will allow the Church to provide much needed leadership. King put forth the challenge as follows:

America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing to prevent us from paying adequate wages to schoolteachers, social workers and other servants of the public to insure that we have the best available personnel in these positions which are charged with the responsibility of guiding our future generations. There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American citizen whether he be a hospital worker, laundry worker, maid or day laborer. There is nothing except shortsightedness to prevent us from guaranteeing an annual minimum – and *livable* – income for every American family. There is nothing, except a tragic death wish, to prevent us from reordering our priorities, so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war. There is nothing to keep us from remolding a recalcitrant status quo with bruised hands until we have fashioned it into a brotherhood.¹⁷⁴

King wrote as a social economist of issues of his day that resonate with the current state of America as a clear example of the lack of progress that has been made on many of these issues. His theological foundation helped him to envision an America that did not need to destroy capitalism. He envisioned an America that could help capitalism to be redeemed in a way that would bring greater relative prosperity to all in an effort to bring forth greater human flourishing.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 199.

The ideas for greater human flourishing often begin at the bottom and go upward because those at the top are already flourishing in a way that can create a zero-sum game where they see more for others as always meaning less for them. It is the cries of those impacted by the negative outcomes of capitalism that can open the eyes of those who can make the greatest change for the better for the most people. Knowlton and Hedges offered the following:

The co-founder and CEO of Gravity Payments, Dan (Price) launched a media frenzy and exploded onto the national stage in 2015, when he announced a \$70,000 minimum annual wage for all the employees of his Seattle-based company. Moreover, in order to fund the wage increase without layoffs of employees or price increases to customers, Dan slashed his own annual salary of \$1.1M to \$70,000. As of this writing, almost five years after implementing that announcement, Gravity just opened a second location and is successful by every typical business metric (i.e., year-over-year revenue growth and profits, customer satisfaction and retention, employee satisfaction and retention). You can refresh your memory and learn more on the company's website. Gravity is also successful as measured by non-traditional but significantly meaningful employee-centric metrics (i.e., happiness, engagement, increased home ownership, decreased commute time, increased 401(k) contributions, increased family formation and stability, and the fact that the employees bought Dan a new Tesla car as a thank you gift.¹⁷⁵

Gravity was changed because Dan was confronted with the reality that his employees felt as commoditized parts of the plan to enrich Dan without feeling partnership in enriching themselves as well. Dan spoke with an employee who told him the truth about how he and others saw the one-sided relationship. It was a process of truth-telling and truth-receiving in a way that brought forth a greater opportunity for shared human flourishing.

The process for Dan was as follows:

First, Dan is confronted with a truth that ticks him off. Notice that the CEO says he “felt horrible” and “like a victim.” But because he’s willing to face and wrestle with his emotions over the encounter, Dan’s transformed to a place of understanding about the underlying truth. In this case he realizes and acknowledges he’s in fact fostering a plantation system, even if he’s without that specific intention.

¹⁷⁵ Knowlton and Hedges, 145-146.

Courageously revisiting and exploring his childhood Christian training and ethics (described elsewhere in Keegan’s article and in a more recent article in *Forbes*) Dan concludes a form of Partnership Economics is a better path and begins to make the tangible changes toward that new model, even at an initial personal cost. The new model benefits Gravity’s stakeholders, not just its shareholder(s), and is proving sustainable. In this way Dan fulfills the wisdom of Buckminster Fuller, who urged “build a new model that makes the existing obsolete.”¹⁷⁶

It should not be lost on the reader that the foundation for Dan in making this change was based on Dan’s Christian training. Seeds of Christian leadership were planted in Dan as a child that, in another season, became manifest in him making decisions that would benefit all, not just a few. Dan did not cease to be a capitalist. He found a way to redeem his capitalistic activity in conjunction with Christian principles.

Learned Christian principles can serve as a basis for the redemption of capitalism in secular activities. The Church can also become overtly involved in economic activities. William Cavanaugh offered a more explicit example of the Church’s influence and involvement with his description of Church Supported Agriculture (CSA):

One example of how Christians are meeting this call is Church Supported Agriculture (CSA), which creates a direct link between family farmers and local congregations. Rather than limit their economic activism to demanding that the state intervene in the market, local churches are creating alternative kinds of economic spaces in which they resist the abstraction of globalization by face-to-face encounters between producers and consumers. In the CSA model, family farmers – most of whom farm organically and practice environmentally sustainable methods – sell their produce directly through local congregations. Parishioners either buy individual products or buy a share of a farmer’s produce at the beginning of the season, thus helping share in the risks of farming. The church serves as a drop-off point for produce and a place for farmers and parishioners to meet. In this space they avoid the middleman and they personalize the food. Food no longer comes from some anonymous distant place; rather, it comes from another particular human being, and the consumer enters into a relationship with that producer. In this encounter, the person is seen as another self and another Christ, the universal in the particular. As a result, economic exchanges are not based simply on supply and

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 147.

demand, on what the market will bear. This model sets prices to ensure a sustainable living for farmers, who are otherwise subject to the vagaries of the market.¹⁷⁷

By being in direct relationship with other market participants, a model of economics, which is still capitalism, shows the engagement between these sometimes seemingly polarized ideologies, Christianity and capitalism. Instead of being in conflict, Christian principles serve as a foundation for the redemption of capitalism that instigates human flourishing for participants.

Capitalism is the economic system of America. The Church should find ways to infiltrate and impact capitalism that can develop redemptive practices. These redemptive practices can be of institutions as well as individuals. Jones and Hogue offered the following example:

Out of jail, Sergio was in his mid-twenties when he met Father G, a Jesuit priest who helped him get a job at Homeboy Industries, a conglomeration of businesses – a bakery; a silkscreen and embroidery business; an online market; a line of chips, salsa, and guacamole; a clothing company; an electronics recycling business; a diner; a farmer’s market; a café – that Father G founded and leads. The successful businesses are just one part of the constellation at Homeboy; the main work is providing hope, training, and support to formerly gang-involved and previously incarcerated men and women hoping to reroute their lives and contribute meaningfully to the world. Job skills, an employment record, and a reliable reference come hand in hand with opportunities for parenting classes and anger management. It was the perfect stop for Sergio: Homeboy helped him develop skills, recover from addiction, find redemption, and launch toward something altogether different from his previous life.¹⁷⁸

Father G used capitalism as a means of ministry instead of allowing it to continue the cycle of degradation of those likely impacted by the negative aspects of capitalism. While the focus was on the redemption of individuals, the secondary effect was also the

¹⁷⁷ Cavanaugh, 87.

¹⁷⁸ Jones and Hogue, 3.

redemption of capitalism by finding ways to use it to intentionally create more human flourishing.

A focus on stewardship of environmental resources reveals that corporations and institutions can enact principles that reflect Christian principles without being overtly related to the Church. Solvay, a Belgian specialty chemicals and advanced materials group, was led by Ilham Kadri. Kadri had a unique disposition on economics and commerce because of her upbringing which she shared:

I have always been committed to sustainability issues. It is a very personal matter to me. While growing up in Morocco, I witnessed how water was a scarce resource at home. These circumstances motivated me to work with water conservation and water desalination in my early career. In essence, the sustainability agenda has always been a clear part of my strategic vision.¹⁷⁹

The implication of Kadri's early life, similar to Dan Price, impacted her future decisions as a business leader when given the opportunity for impactful leadership. As sensitivity to environmental issues caused her to make sure that these consequences were taken into account with her business decisions, her general business goals were: "The first segment 'Materials' was tasked with accelerating growth, the second segment 'Chemicals' to deliver resilient cash, and the third segment 'Solutions' to unlock value and optimize returns. Kadri also wanted to improve ROCE (Return on Capital Employed) from 8% in 2019 to at least 11% by 2024."¹⁸⁰ These general business goals were tempered by an understanding that the business that she was in had environmental consequences that could directly impact the quality of life for many people. To that end, she also added:

¹⁷⁹ Serafei, George; Dessain, Vincent; and Mette Fuglsang Hjortshoej. (2022). *Sustainable Product Management at Solvay*. HBS No. 9-120-081. Harvard Business School Publishing, 3.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

On July 29, 2019, the planet experienced its overshoot day when the human demand for resources exceeded the regenerative capability of the earth's ecosystem. We have witnessed a growing consensus for urgent international action to tackle these issues such as the Paris climate agreements aiming to limit the global temperature increase below 2 degrees Celsius and the European Commission targeting carbon neutrality by 2050. We need to make sure that we can enjoy the earth's full resources long-term.¹⁸¹

The duality of these mandates reflects the tension of stewardship to shareholders seeking profits and stakeholders seeking human flourishing as over-arching and potentially competing goals. Kadri did not see competition in these goals as she sought to come up with solutions that would satisfy both constraints.

Kadri dealt directly with the challenge by shifting the conversation away from top-line revenue and bottom-line profitability to incorporate aims surrounding sustainability that had the potential to hurt short-term profitability while simultaneously increasing the odds for greater human flourishing in recognizing environmental impacts. As a result, in addition to the corporate goals that she had she also included a One Planet strategy described as:

We are going to launch a new holistic approach to sustainability called One Planet which is based on three pillars. The first one is 'Climate,' traditionally refers to CO2 emissions, which we already decoupled from our top line growth, but we want to extend this notion and think of which pertinent sustainability metrics that the industry should use beyond CO2. The second pillar, 'Resources', aims for Solvay to take a lead on circular economy in order to minimize resource consumption, use renewable resources and promote solutions to help our customers to become more circular, and eventually reach zero waste. Last, the final pillar, 'Better Life', adds a new dimension to inclusion and diversity, focusing on society at large.¹⁸²

Kadri sought to bridge the gap between corporate profitability and a heightened sense of broader stakeholder impact by aligning the two aims rather than holding them as polar

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 1.

¹⁸² Ibid., 5.

opposites. Instead of sacrificing one level of results for the other, Kadri was able to demonstrate that the two could not only co-exist but also be complementary. The results from Kadri's and Solvay's efforts were:

Solvay's innovative sustainable solutions products showed promising potential. Solef PVDF had 10 million euro in sales, making batteries for EVs more durable, and enabling higher voltage and temperature thereby faster charging, SW premium range had 300 million euro in sales, making tires less rolling resistant thereby reducing fuel consumption by about 7%. Cycom had 600 million euro in sales, making aircrafts lighter and increasing fuel efficiency. MAX HT had 30 million euro in sales, helping alumina refineries reduce energy and water consumption.¹⁸³

While the overt results appear to be business-oriented, the true impact goes far beyond the simple business results. Each one of these initiatives showed results that also had positive environmental impacts. Kadri showed a measure of leadership where she "hoped that society would better balance emotions with facts and science-based data through education."¹⁸⁴ The education aspect can appear to be secular while the more wholistic approach suggests that the incorporation of other values such as Christian principles will be additive as well.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 13.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions

Capitalism has clearly veered far from the roots that were planted by Adam Smith. The cause can merely be a simple explanation of original sin when Adam and Eve were told what to do and what not to do in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, by their own choice, they decided to disobey God. Moreover, the cause can be as simple as a taking for granted the principles postulated by Adam Smith that were deemed outdated in a fashion akin to the teenager who knows who their parents are but chose to ignore the home training that brought them to their current station in life. Finding the root cause would be another interesting scholarly undertaking; however, a different matter is at hand.

Rather than focusing on the why or how, is there any hope that capitalism can be redeemed? The redemption of individuals is the starting point for beginning to address the more involved undertaking of the redemption of institutions. Hence, if individuals can be redeemed who populate and lead American institutions, then the institutions can be redeemed similar to a vaccine being injected in one part of the body to offer healing to the whole body.

One key focal point is the vaccination needed to redeem capitalism. Adam Smith offered Christian principles based on his first book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which were echoed in his later more well-known offering, *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith was not afraid of directly interjecting the respect for and expectation that God and deity were at work in commerce as in all other realms of life. Initial practitioners would have known this during a time of more theological influence on daily life. Current practitioners, rarely if ever, give direct credence to a higher power while still extoling the virtues of the proverbial invisible hand that thwarts any influence or impediment to the pursuance of profits.

Smith did not have an issue with the pursuance of profits. He was more concerned about the ancillary and collateral effects of how profits were pursued, how financial rewards were amassed, and how these rewards were distributed for the collective good of community to make sure that human flourishing was not sacrificed in the process. This concern revolved around a sense of accountability to God and deity, clearly the territory of the Church.

In America, capitalism has run to the extreme polarity of neglecting and omitting the Church in economic affairs. As a result, in the extreme, American capitalism does not resemble true capitalism at all. As God made humankind in God's image, humankind only bears the image of God when it looks and acts in a Godly fashion, not in seeking domination but in seeking dominion by reflecting that God is love. Economics, politics, and societal engagement without love is the most barbaric form of existence that can be.

The Church has an opportunity to demonstrate, with a consistent Christian witness, an alternative form of engaging each other in economic affairs that should correlate to expectations of engagement in political and societal affairs. All form overlapping circles like a Venn diagram that represent the degree to the interrelatedness express human flourishing or the lack thereof. The Church, through the intentional teaching and preaching of Christian principles, helps to lay a foundation for consideration of better and more helpful ways of living in community.

America's pluralistic society presents hindrances because America is not a religiously homogeneous society. Respect for others' values, morals, and ethics is understood in an ecumenical fashion, but Christianity should not shrink from nor shirk the responsibility to show how Christian principles can positively impact society without

discrimination, division, or encroachment upon others' ways of life. Human flourishing should be an uncompromisable pursuit that crosses all barriers of separation.

The hope that Christianity offers in this pursuance of a better life for all requires cooperation that must begin in the Church. Pulpit leadership to inspire lay leadership is critical in the redemption of capitalism. Confrontation with the eye towards conviction followed by repentance is what will ultimately lead to the redemption of capitalism. Understanding the truth of what Adam Smith offered and expected can refute misrepresentations, mischaracterizations, and outright lies about what capitalism is supposed to be.

The work of the pulpit should be an inspiration to the hearers in the pews with convicting words that lead to redemptive work. Helping Christian lay people to courageously seek to apply Christian principles in their homes, communities, and workplaces is the only way that the word of God is continuously made flesh in contemporary times. Getting uncomfortable in seeking less conformity to the world to intentionally instigate a transformation of self and others is required for the redemption of capitalism to happen.

Ways of doing this very necessary work includes weighing all decisions on the basis of whether human flourishing is the potential outcome or if a hindrance of human flourishing will occur. Additionally, reflecting on how the work that is done in the name of capitalism is beneficial to self at the individual as well as institutional level versus the benefits of society, especially for those who are struggling economically, politically, and socially. This additional litmus test can be applied for whether certain courses of action should be pursued. Finally, daring to only pursue activities that will have positive

outcomes beyond oneself allows capitalism to be more greatly aligned with Adam Smith's vision versus the individualistic pursuits often associated with American capitalism.

And, as Christians operating in a capitalistic economic society, laypersons can always apply simple methods of questioning intended actions by remembering that they are supposed to be ambassadors for Christ. As a result, they should only seek to do, in their economic pursuits, what Jesus would do because they represent Jesus. The change in perspective will more greatly align them with their eternal goals over their temporal goals with the understanding that in eternity, all will be judged for what they have done during their temporal times.

Capitalism was never intended to be an economic system of exploitation of individuals or the environment. Smith believed that capitalism could and would help individuals to work towards their highest levels of utilitarian usefulness in society. Stratification based on economic class was expected but not in an effort to marginalize, exploit or demean the lower class. Simply put, each individual was expected to contribute what they could so that all of society could flourish.

While a seemingly utopian ideal given the current state of America, capitalism can still fulfill those aims; however, capitalism needs help. Capitalism must be redeemed. A vision of a better America begins with a dissatisfaction with the America that we have. This dissatisfaction must give way to hopeful, creative, and imaginative solutions that are constantly challenged in an effort to see if the solutions currently meet human flourishing standards. And, when the standards are met, the standards must be challenged again to be raised to another level.

An apocalyptic opportunity is upon America. Capitalism can be left in the hands of the few who practice it to their benefit while leaving others with the philanthropic crumbs when the feeling moves them. Moreover, capitalism can make sure that all of society has the opportunity to contribute as well as to receive the best that capitalism has to offer. Staying in the current position is not an option.

With the few examples offered, the possibility is clear at the grass roots level up to the institutional level. The opportunity is to make it more of a collective effort so that the burden for change is more equitably distributed. The Church can help in this effort by providing leadership by demonstrating that Christian principles do not compete with capitalism. Christian principles complete capitalism. Therefore, capitalism can and must be redeemed through Christian principles.

Bibliography

- Bandow, Doug. "Capitalism and Christianity: The Uneasy Partnership?" *International Journal on World Peace* 19, no. 3 (September 2002): 39-55.
- Barnes, Kenneth J. *Redeeming Capitalism*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2018.
- Blanchard, Kathryn D. *The Protestant Ethic or the Spirit of Capitalism: Christians, Freedom, and Free Markets*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010.
- Begley, Sarah. How 'In God We Trust' Got on the Currency in the First Place. Time.com. <https://time.com/4179685/in-god-we-trust-currency-history> (January 13, 2016).
- Berry, Matthew. "Two Economies" *World Wisdom online library*, (2005): 186-201. http://www.worldwisdom.com/public/viewpdf/default.aspx?article_title=Two_Economies_by_Wendell_Berry.pdf
- Bretherton, Luke. "Soteriology, Debt, and Faithful Witness: Four Theses for a Political Theology of Economic Democracy." *Anglican Theological Review* 98, no. 1 (2016): 71-89.
- Brueggeman, Walter. *Money and Possessions Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church: Interpretation*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.
- Byron, William. "Christianity and Capitalism: Three Concepts from the Tradition, Three Challenges to the System." *Review of Social Economy* 40, no. 3 (December 1982): 311-22.
- Cavanaugh, William T. *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.
- Friedman, Benjamin M. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021.
- "Imagining a Shared Economy – An Interview with Willie Jennings". https://issuu.com/yale66/docs/reflections_spring_2020_single_page_aa1afebd7289b2/s/10493753
- Jones, L. Gregory and Andrew P. Hogue. *Navigating the Future – Traditioned Innovation for Wilder Seas*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2021.
- Makower, Joel. "Milton Friedman and the social responsibility of business". GreenBiz. [https://www.greenbiz.com/article/milton-friedman-and-social-responsibility-business-\(November-24-2006\)](https://www.greenbiz.com/article/milton-friedman-and-social-responsibility-business-(November-24-2006)).
- McCarragher, Eugene. *The Enchantments of Mammon – How Capitalism Became The Religion of Modernity*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019.
- Keller, Timothy. *Counterfeit Gods*. New York: Penguin Books, 2016.

- King, Jr. Martin Luther. *Where Do We Go from Here Chaos or Community?* Boston: Beacon Press, 2010.
- Knowlton, Paul E. & Aaron E. Hedges. *Better Capitalism*. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2021.
- Neuhaus, Richard J. *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2012.
- Novak, Michael. *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. Lanham: Madison Books, 1982.
- Novak, Michael. *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism – Thirty Years Later*. McLean: The Institute for Faith, Work & Economics, 2015.
- Rowe, C. Kavin. *Christianity's Surprise – A Sure and Certain Hope*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020.
- Serafei, George; Dessain, Vincent; and Mette Fuglsang Hjortshoej. (2022). *Sustainable Product Management at Solvay*. HBS No. 9-120-081. Harvard Business School Publishing.
- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Urbana: Gutenberg Publishers, 2011.
- Smith, Adam. *The Wealth of Nations*. Mineola: Ixia Press, 2019.
- Tanner, Kathryn. *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Routledge Press, 2001.

BIOGRAPHY AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In lieu of writing a standard biography, I looked back at my statement of purpose that I submitted when I began the process of applying to Duke Divinity School and thought it would be good to include it as I complete my journey.

After much prayer and counsel, I have made the decision to apply to Duke Divinity School to pursue the Doctor of Ministry degree with a current focus on Christian capitalism.

Born and raised in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, I graduated from West Forsyth High School in 1985. After graduation, I attended Morehouse College and the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) through the Atlanta University Center Dual-Degree Engineering Program graduating with an Interdisciplinary Bachelor of Science degree from Morehouse College and a Bachelor of Industrial Engineering degree from Georgia Tech in 1991. I earned my MBA from Harvard Business School in 1994 and my Master of Divinity degree from Hood Theological Seminary in 2015.

After graduating from Harvard, I worked in investment management for Nationsbank Investment Management, TradeStreet Investment Associates, JP Morgan, and NCM Capital. I transitioned from NCM Capital to join a start-up Atlanta-based investment firm, Herndon Capital Management, from 2002-2017, which became one of the fastest growing and largest African-American owned and operated investment firms in the country. Currently, I am a portfolio manager with Sustainable Insight Capital Management.

In 1990, at the age of 23, I gave my life to Christ at North East Baptist Church in Durham, NC which was pastored by Duke Divinity School alumnus, Bishop J. Jasper Wilkins II, who also officiated my marriage to my wife, Cynthia, in 1992.

In 1997, after finishing my education and a variety of life and work experience, I reconnected with North East under the leadership of Pastor Wesley Elam, Sr. I served as Chairman of the Budget and Finance Committee as well as singing with the Men's Choir.

In 2002, I moved to Atlanta and joined Mount Zion Baptist Church in Fairburn, Georgia under Pastor Robert Stanley. During this time, the Lord first placed a desire in my heart to teach His word. I moved from teaching our intermediate boys to leading the teen boys' Sunday School Class in addition to assisting with the teaching of Bible Study. Also, I was appointed Assistant Superintendent of Sunday School while also serving on the Trustee Board. As such, I was exposed to the workings and administration of the Church from a spiritual and practical perspective.

The Lord began calling me into the ministry a few months after the birth of our fifth child, Preston Emmanuel, in March 2006. Our son's name proved to be prophetic as it means "From the priest's house" and "God is with us", respectively. The Lord began revealing to me that He had more work and service for me to do beyond teaching. He was calling me to preach His word to His people. I accepted the call in August of 2006.

I was licensed on October 15, 2006 and ordained on April 29, 2007 at Mount Zion.

Upon returning to Winston-Salem, NC in July of 2007, I became an Associate Minister at Zion Memorial Missionary Baptist Church under Pastor Dr. Joseph Jones. I served as an Adult Sunday School teacher, Wednesday evening Bible Study teacher,

Chairperson for Vacation Bible School, Chairperson for the Annual Friends and Family Weekend, and President of the Layman's League while also assisting with the budgeting process.

Upon the pastor's announcement of his retirement, the Chairman of the Deacon's Board approached me about being a candidate to become the next pastor of the Zion Memorial. I agreed and, after a rigorous and lengthy process, I was voted in as the sixth pastor of the church in January of 2017 and installed on April 8, 2017.

Upon becoming pastor, I felt led by God to make a decision for the direction of the Church. Zion Memorial could either continue to be a Church in the community with little association with the activities of the community except on Sunday for worship service and Wednesday for Bible Study (or HOPE – Hour Of Power and Encouragement – Wednesday, as it is now called); or, we could be a community Church by being a placeholder with a neighborhood address as well as being a stakeholder believing that our future is intertwined with that of the community where we worship. We have chosen to be the latter.

The Church has experienced solid growth in several areas of ministry such as a youth ministry, a senior ministry and women's ministry, outreach via a food pantry and clothing closet, implementation of new technology allowing for the livestream of sermons as well as the cataloging of messages online, and an overall increase in membership via baby dedications, baptisms, weddings, and general growth of more disciples in Christ. The Church has assisted with the development of a neighborhood association which now allows the neighborhood to more easily access city resources for neighborhood improvement and development as well as being a resource to para-Church ministries.

Grasping the opportunity to bring together my investment education, experience and exposure with my sacred calling to create impactful transformative experiences between Church and community, the Church has reallocated passive, low-return financial assets to an investment fund focused on long-term opportunities as well as to an inhouse real estate fund that is focused on purchasing nearby properties to create more of a stakeholder role within the community.

My life journey has brought me to the point where I believe it is time for me to pursue additional education with a practical emphasis and orientation; hence, I am applying to Duke Divinity School for the Doctor of Ministry degree with a current focus on Christian Capitalism.

In his final book, *“Where Do We Go From Here – Chaos Or Community?”*, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote, “The economic highway to power has few entry lanes for Negroes. Nothing so vividly reveals the crushing impact of discrimination and the heritage of exclusion as the limited dimensions of Negro business in the most powerful economy in the world.”¹⁸⁵ His desire to seek economic progress to address social inequities drove him to write a book that could still be viewed as a contemporary tome although it was originally published in 1968, over 51 years ago. His appeal was less to the Christian and more to society as a whole.

Luke Bretherton, Professor of Theological Ethics and Senior Fellow at the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University, wrote, in *“Soteriology, Debt, and Faithful Witness: Four Theses for a Political Theology of Economic Democracy”*, “churches need to be

¹⁸⁵ King, 147.

involved in wider forms of democratic politics so as to move beyond merely sticking Band-Aids on structural problems. Moreover, involvement in forms of highly participatory democratic politics forces churches to recognize their need of others and to own in practice that their welfare is intricately bound up with the welfare of the *demos*.¹⁸⁶

Society, politics, and the economy are where people experience real life. Theology informs, reimagines and redirects real life from God's perspective.

My current focus on Christian Capitalism is to identify solutions on how to approach life better in community from a Christian perspective because I am a Christian and a Capitalist perspective because we live in a Capitalistic economy that is protected by our politics to perpetuate our society to the betterment of some and the detriment of others.

I believe the Church has a primary role in the betterment of others where detriment is uncovered. Scripture says the poor will always exist; but, they do not have to always exist the same way. The Church should work to eradicate the manifold poverty that exists rather than simply accepting it as a given condition of a fallen world.

In my vision, I believe it is better to find ways to cease the food pantries because the poor have their own food in their own pantries, to cease soup kitchens because the poor have their own soup in their own kitchens, to cease clothing closets because the poor have their own clothes in their own closets, and to shutter homeless shelters because the homeless are no more. The Church should be at the table to help offer solutions that will

¹⁸⁶ Bretherton, Luke. "Soteriology, Debt, and Faithful Witness: Four Theses for a Political Theology of Economic Democracy." *Anglican Theological Review* 98, no. 1 (2016): 71-89, 89.

likely involve para-Church and non-Church entities with greater access to capital, human and financial, to address inequities.

Idealistic, audacious goals can lead to incredible, extraordinary achievements.

As a part of a large research institution, I believe my time at Duke Divinity School will help me to find theological answers to practical issues in a cohort community of like-minded peers and professors as we seek to be voices of transformational change in this generation.

Thus, I desire to matriculate at Duke Divinity School to pursue the Doctor of Divinity degree with a current focus on Christian Capitalism.

UPDATE

Clearly, I was awarded entry into Duke Divinity School and matriculated through the pandemic known as Covid-19. I thrived with an incredible group of individuals in my cohort who became a second family during our academic time together and have remained so during the thesis writing period. Prayerfully, our connection will last much longer.

I have started my own investment firm, Kerusso Capital Management, while approaching six years of pastoral ministry. I continue to find ways to be impactful in my community via board work and other initiatives. And, I look forward to seeing if my thesis work can have an impact on the Church and America. I am thankful for my time at Duke and look forward to thanking Duke for the time in how I live my life in the future.