

Just Capitalism: A Christian Ethic of Economic Globalization

Brent Waters. 2016. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. ISBN 978-0-664-23430-0. \$40.

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What should the Church think about affluence? This is the central issue that Brent Waters addresses in *Just Capitalism: A Christian Ethic of Economic Globalization*. Through exploring the issues presented to Christian moral theology by the context of economic globalization, Waters argues that affluence is not only a good thing, but is actually necessary for human flourishing. Further, since affluence is necessary for human flourishing, extending the opportunity to pursue affluence to the poor around the world is a moral imperative for Christians. Finally, Waters argues that, at present, the best option to make affluence possible for the global poor is the expansion of global markets. While recognizing economic globalization is not without its drawbacks, the message of *Just Capitalism* is that if Christians care about the poor, they need to support open economies.

Just Capitalism begins with a brief introduction to the history and context of economic globalization. This is followed by the first section of the book, which contains a historical overview of the traditional narrative concerning wealth found in Christian moral theology, a very basic introduction to the economic principles undergirding the benefits of open economies, the role of creative destruction, an argument that the nature of governance is changing as a result of globalization, the goodness of affluence, the causes of poverty, and the importance of globalized markets for alleviating global poverty. The second section builds on this foundation with a discussion of the purpose of an economy, the role of markets within that purpose, an explanation of how *Koinonia*/communicative associations provide us with a purpose for economic and political activity, the importance of freedom and justice in promoting *Koinonia*, and a brief discussion of environmental concerns raised by the earlier arguments.

It is important for Waters to address the skepticism with which traditional Christian moral theology views wealth. Waters does this early on and argues that the Bible does not condemn wealth itself but the unjust acquisition of wealth. Waters also emphasizes the importance of keeping context in mind. The treatment of wealth found in the Bible was written

in a time when the economy was primarily a zero-sum activity tightly connected to how much land you owned. In this context, a tendency to presume that increased wealth came at another's expense made sense. The crucial idea for Waters is that, in modern capitalist economies, we do not engage in zero-sum interactions. Exchange benefits both parties; therefore, the presumption should now be that wealth is generated by creating beneficial opportunities for others. If this is our context for moral reflection on wealth, the narrative changes dramatically.

Once Waters has dispensed with the baggage of injustice attached to the way one *becomes* affluent, he can turn to considering whether it is good or bad to *be* affluent. It is important to note that for Waters affluence indicates having a surplus beyond what is necessary to meet basic needs. This is not the same thing as wealth, which he uses to indicate "...an order of magnitude of surplus resources that few attain" (p. 81). Waters bases his argument for the goodness of affluence on the created purpose of human beings. Adam and Eve were intended to work together tending, and enjoy living in, a garden. The ultimate goal for human beings is to engage in a communal enjoyment of the good things God created: "...[the material world] God has created is 'good'...The proper response to this materiality is *delight*; taking pleasure in and enjoying the superfluity of creation..." (emphasis original, pp. 89-90). Without affluence, this enjoyment is not possible since, "if one's time and energy is used exclusively or predominantly in meeting basic material needs, there is little or no time for [enjoyment]" (p. 90). The ability to provide for more than our basic necessities (affluence) is required in order to have the time and resources available to enjoy God's creation together, which is how we flourish as human beings.

Waters builds on this idea of human flourishing to explain what he calls communicative associations, groups of people who together communicate goods of creation. He considers this concept of communication as being an expression of the biblical idea of *Koinonia*. Waters is using communication to mean more than the transmission of information between people. He is referring to an activity by which people communally contribute to, and participate in, an enjoyment of created goods. *Koinonia* is "neither a one-way conferral nor a mutual exchange. The object being communicated becomes 'ours' without the parties relinquishing their respective claims" (p. 145). While communicative associations require markets and state-enforced rules (coercion) to exist, *Koinonia* is

not an exchange and cannot be coerced. His prime example of this kind of association is the Church:

The church is the premier social sphere in which the goods of creation are communicated...centered almost exclusively on reciprocity...[it] participates, both directly and indirectly, in markets in order to maintain the organizational structures that fulfill its mission...but its internal life is not a marketplace...The church is not an association based on coercion...[though it] can be a beneficiary of governmental services...Charity plays...a central role in Christian thought and practice...but the church's internal life is not centered around unidirectional giving and receiving... The church, then, is an association that engenders reciprocity, a simultaneous giving *and* receiving that is neither exchanged nor coerced (emphasis original, pp. 149–150).

The central role of communicative association for human flourishing provides Waters with his framework for evaluating the broader economic and political context. Exchange and the state are both important. Without the goods, services, and affluence provided by markets as well as the stability, peace, and rule of law provided by the state, communicative associations could not exist; yet, neither the state nor exchange is the ultimate goal. They are both tools that need to be used to promote communicative associations.

If affluence is necessary for people to truly achieve their created purpose, then it becomes of great concern to the Church to consider how affluence can be spread far and wide. Waters engages in a basic discussion of poverty, its causes, and the limitations of charity, ultimately concluding that the most important issues are promoting access to capital and employment opportunities. Waters also reviews the central economic principles surrounding open economies, and argues that economic globalization is at present the only framework that gives us a reasonable hope that capital and employment can spread throughout the world and opens the door to affluence for the most impoverished. In this way, Waters argues that supporting the opportunity for the global poor to participate in global markets is a crucial expression of Christian love of neighbor.

A theme Waters develops throughout the book relates to the nature of governance in an increasingly globalized society. The framework employed by Waters posits that we are in the midst of a major transition

from nation-state governance to market-state governance. The idea behind market state governance is that the state will need to learn how to empower individuals within a country to take advantage of opportunities presented by global markets. This effort to enable people to take advantage of globalization will create tension with the long-standing political goal of protecting citizens from welfare shocks originating outside the country. Waters believes that states should eventually come to be focused on equipping individuals to participate in global markets rather than pursuing protectionist policies to insulate their population from the international economy.

Another point emphasized by Waters is that countries need to work to create more room for civil society. Since civil society is made up of communicative associations, politics and markets need to be reoriented to be placed at the service of civil society. The dominance of the state or markets in a society leads to an inevitable homogenization that is contrary to our identity as beings made in God's image. On the one hand, the dominance of the state leads to an atomized population subject to a one-size-fits-all tyranny. On the other hand, when exchange becomes the ultimate end, we find people turned into autonomous consumers of mass-produced goods and services. It is only in a vibrant civil society that human beings can collectively explore and express the good diversity God has given to people and His creation.

On a number of occasions, Waters contrasts the current economic system with those found in the past, stating that it was a characteristic of the old systems that hoarding wealth meant denying it to others. I don't think this is a question we have escaped. While I agree that, in modern economies, we do not have to assume that someone gained wealth by taking it from someone else, I would have liked more discussion of whether there is a way Christians could think through the optimal level of affluence in this framework. Is there a point at which we would say that, even if my acquisition of this amount of wealth is just, the proper use of it is to give generously to promote the access of the others to opportunities for *Koinonia*? Waters does suggest the need for redistribution, but he does not develop this in the context of the right use of affluence and voluntary action.

Just Capitalism certainly expresses interesting and useful ideas in an accessible manner, but it is not a book written with economists in mind. The majority of the first section and a good bit of the second are

written to provide a general reader with a very basic understanding of international economics. The focus on this audience leads to a degree of redundancy and simplicity which an economist would likely find unsatisfying. A weak point in Waters' discussion concerns the potential negative effects globalization could have on *Koinonia* due to the necessary reduction in potential for long-term relationships with groups and places. While acknowledging the concern, he does not provide any substantial argument to reassure us. Additionally, I was disappointed that his discussion of the Church extends only to being an example of a successful global communicative association, and does not address its potential to provide guidance on what constitutes *Koinonia*.

Overall, Waters makes a clearly structured, if highly generalized, case for the importance of globalization for human flourishing. His concise and clear explanation of the importance of context for Christian moral judgment of economic issues, and the associated case for the very different and significantly more positive nature of modern wealth creation, is particularly refreshing. I found the framework he developed for *Koinonia* as the desired end by which Christians could evaluate economic and political systems appealing. I am grateful for a structure that provides something to hold on to as we navigate the competing claims on our identity produced by our political system and consumer markets. It has also served as a reminder to me that, at times, I think we have often done a better job at representing the dangers of the all-encompassing state than the all-encompassing market.

In a time of expanding options for consumption and interactions mediated by technology, Waters' emphasis on how we need to enjoy God's creation together is timely. It is at this point that I was also left wishing there was more guidance for Christians here than just that of encouraging voting for open economies. While that is relevant, more discussion of what types of things promote *Koinonia* would be helpful. The ideas here could develop in ways that promote the Church, not just as an example of a successful global communicative association, but as a source of discipleship which shapes people to be agents that promote *Koinonia* in their communities and the world, not just through the ballot box but through the rich opportunities provided by markets and peace. ■