

- cal Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research.* Leiden: Brill.
- Grant, Robert M.** 1990. "Early Christianity and Capital" in Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Capitalist Spirit: Toward a Religious Ethic of Wealth Creation.* San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies.
- Gordon, Barry.** 1989. *The Economic Problem in Biblical and Patristic Thought.* Leiden: Brill.
- Hanson, K. C. and Oakman, Douglas E.** 1998. *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Hengel, Martin.** 1974. *Property and Riches in the Early Church: Aspects of a Social History of Early Christianity.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Horsley, Richard A. and J. S. Hanson.** 1985. *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the Time of Jesus.* Minneapolis: Winston Press.
- Johnson, Luke T.** 1977. *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts.* Missoula: Scholars Press.
- Kantzer, Kenneth S.** 1990. "The Christian Ideal" in David Neff, ed. *The Midas Trap.* Wheaton: Victor Books.
- Malina, Bruce.** 2001. *The New Testament World: Insights From Cultural Anthropology.* 3rd ed. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Marx, William G.** "Money Matters in Matthew." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, pp. 148–157.
- Noell, Edd S.** 2002. "Wealth and Market Exchange in the Gospels: Re-Examining the Evidence." Presented to the Second National Lilly Fellows Conference "Christianity and Economics: Integrating Faith and Learning in Economic Scholarship." Baylor University.
- North, Douglass C.** 1996. "Markets and Other Allocation Systems in History: The Challenge of Karl Polanyi" in Richard Swedberg, ed., *Economic Sociology.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Oakman, Douglas E.** 1996. "The Ancient Economy" in Richard L. Rohrbaugh, ed., *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation.* Peabody: Hendrickson.
- Perkins, PHEME.** 1994. "Does the New Testament Have an Economic Message?" in Paul G. Schervish, ed., *Wealth in Western Thought: The Case For and Against Riches.* Westport: Praeger.
- Pilgrim, Walter.** 1981. *Good News to the Poor: Wealth and Poverty in Luke-Acts.* Minneapolis: Augsburg.
- Polanyi, Karl, Conrad M. Arensburg, and Harry W. Pearson, eds.** 1957. *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory.* New York: Free Press.
- Powell, Mark A.** 1998. *Jesus as a Figure in History: How Modern Historians View the Man From Galilee.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Safrai, Zared.** 1994. *The Economy of Roman Palestine.* London: Routledge.
- Schmidt, Thomas E.** 1987. *Hostility to Wealth in the Synoptic Gospels.* Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Schneider, John R.** 1994. *Godly Materialism: Rethinking Money & Possessions.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity.
- _____. 2002. *The Good of Affluence: Seeking God in a Culture of Wealth.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Shillington, V. George.** 1997. "Engaging With the Parables" in V. George Shillington, ed., *Jesus and His Parables: Engaging the Parables of Jesus Today.* Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Stambaugh, John and D. Balch.** 1986. *The New Testament in Its Social Environment.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Temin, Peter.** 2001. "A Market Economy in the Early Roman Empire." *The Journal of Roman Studies.* Vol. 91, pp. 169–181.
- Wheeler, Sondra Clark.** 1995. *Wealth as Peril and Obligation: The New Testament On Possessions.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.



In Defense of Delight

John Schneider, Calvin College (MI)

I wish to thank the editors of *Faith & Economics* for devoting much of this issue to a symposium on my book, *The Good of Affluence*. It is gratifying to know that they think it is worth this kind of attention. Let me also thank the contributors to this symposium—for both their affirmations and thoughtful suggestions and criticisms. I divide my reply to their comments into two main parts—the economic and the theological.

The professional economists (Robin Klay, Ken Elzinga and Edd Noell) on the whole approve my handling of economic matters. But a few objections do come up in the others' essays, and they warrant brief replies.

First, Biblical scholar Craig Blomberg expresses incredulity at my reference to there being twenty-five nations worldwide that have "successfully deployed capitalism." Since the truth of this figure has no bearing on my argument (and since it seems uncontroversial in the literature), I simply defer to my source, which is Hernando de Soto's pathbreaking work, *The Mystery of Capital*.¹ Blomberg thinks it a failing that (in my book) "nothing is said about all the post-Soviet republics where capitalism to date has largely failed." (It has failed, he explains, since no Christian morality exists "to temper" the widespread "human greed" in these places.) Now I make no claim that capitalism is successful there. It obviously is not—it fails there and elsewhere—hence the subject of de Soto's book. But as for the explanation of why capitalism works in the West and almost nowhere else (not the mere absence of Christian morality), I strongly recommend the recently published conference volume of *Markets & Morality* for a discussion and debate among leading theorists.²

But Blomberg has more severe and serious criticisms of my economic uses of the prophetic writings. He writes that my treatment is generally “even-handed and fair.” But “What is missing is *sophisticated hermeneutical reflection*” (my italics). He cites two major such defects: (1) that I ignore the widely known fact that the prophets addressed *non-Israelite nations*, and thus that their judgments apply *across* cultures, and (2) “Nor does it appear that Schneider has thought through the full implications even of the principles he does espouse.” Now, as to (1), I must protest. Perhaps Blomberg (mystifyingly) overlooked my sub-section called “The Morality of Nations” (pp. 106–108). I do not know. Nevertheless, the main point of this section just *is* to note this fact, to stress it and to build foundations for just such moral hermeneutics. I must, alas, resort to citing what I wrote: “they [the prophets] were not only interested in the morality of Israel, but also in that of the *surrounding nations*” (new italics, p. 106). I then elaborate the implications for the morality of nations.

But as for objection (2), his example of my hermeneutical lack of sophistication certainly falls short of supporting the criticism and creates an odd sort of irony. In the first place, why does he suppose I would not gladly anticipate his question? Indeed, why not, in principle, use Amos to condemn Nike, “when it pays Michael Jordan as much in one year as its entire 18, 000-person, largely impoverished Indonesian workforce?” I believe my sub-section (also ignored) on “The Hermeneutics of Moral Evil in the Prophets” makes it transparently clear that I would raise just that sort of question (pp. 96–98). But of course, the example that is nested within the question, as Blomberg states it, does not provide a very good case paradigm for the judgment he apparently supposes we will all make. For in his case, Nike performs several distinct but interrelated economic actions, the rationality of which is contingent on the dynamics of at least three distinct micro-economies. And in order to judge the moral plausibility of those actions, we must first be very clear on their economic rationality (not least in reference to input from the Indonesians themselves). There is no space here to elaborate this (fairly elementary) point of economic-moral hermeneutics. I am grateful to Edd Noell for noting and affirming the general validity of my “sophistication” in hermeneutics at those points where our applications require carefully nuanced economic analysis.

Before finishing this section, I believe I should respond briefly to two economic criticisms made by Andy Hartropp. In describing my addendum on globalism and Christian moral obligations, he notes my use of de Soto (2000). But he hardly captures my strategy and purported accomplishment in this addendum. My purpose was not to offer an economic *view* (replete with a critique of said work and supporting arguments) but to *explore* the much discussed and vexing topic of Christian global-moral obligations

(hypothetically) in the *context* of a widely regarded but generally unexplored (in that way) major work of global economics.

Second, Hartropp also lodges mild objections to my failure to give a satisfactory definition of capitalism, and likewise to comment on the sometimes-positive role that government can play in free societies. He is right. I should have given more explicit definitions. However, I supposed my understanding was implicitly clear from my liberal use of Michael Novak’s work, with its stress on governmental order, and also from my use of de Soto’s work, with its stress on integrated systems of the right *sorts* of law. Quite naturally, this approach presupposes a key role for (democratic) government to ensure liberty and promote justice by means of stable legal institutions. Debate over particular *policy* (which Hartropp seems to have in mind), however, is quite beyond the scope of my book.

The core of the dispute with Blomberg is not just exegetical. It is . . . a difference in theology at a fundamental hermeneutical level . . . over how the doctrine of creation, especially as takes shape in Old Testament narratives, now functions in the context of the New Testament and its Christ-centered teachings on redemption.

Turning to the theological context, I want to begin with what I think is the most seriously unfair criticism in all the essays. Blomberg reports that my account of the meeting between Jesus and Zacchaeus offers a “*flagrant misrepresentation* of the contents of Scripture” (my italics). The flagrancy, he explains, is that I seriously downplay the radical character of Zacchaeus’s response. It was greatly more radical, he explains, than (quoting me) “to give back half (not all) of what he has gained by questionable means.” The exegetical facts are, he explains, that Zacchaeus pays back four times the amount defrauded. Now, I am forced for the second time to cite my own text in self-defense. Here is what I wrote of Zacchaeus: “he offers that he will repay *four times* whatever he has taken from the people by fraud. And he adds that he will give *half* of his possessions to the poor” (p. 164). I then explain the background in Old Testament moral law for understanding how very radical his action was in that context. It seems that Blomberg has misrepresented my text about as flagrantly as could be.

At any rate, the core of the dispute with Blomberg is not just exegetical. It is—at bottom, I think—a difference in theology at a fundamental hermeneutical level. It is over how the doctrine of creation, especially as takes shape in Old Testament narratives, now functions in the context of the New Testament and its Christ-centered teachings on redemption. (In a different way, this also describes what I sense is a difference between my approach and that of Andy

Hartropp, as I will note at the very end.)

My view is that the narratives of creation and exodus, together with the narratives and literature of the exile (including the Psalms and the Wisdom Literature) are “paradigmatic” in what they envision for human material existence. In other words, these narratives enshrine something like God’s vision for humanity. It is a vision of what I call “delight,” and it includes material flourishing in abundance (though not only that, to be sure.) And in my view it is just this vision—and no other—that provides the theological-hermeneutical framework we need for our distinctly Christian theory and practice of modern economic life. This vision is to be our source of light, by which to see just why human poverty is evil, and more lucidly than otherwise what the aim of liberation is in the first place. And of course my thesis is that in this vision affluent Christians find the resources they need for an integrated Christian identity. It shows them how it is that the condition (and enjoyment) of affluence can be a very great spiritual and moral good. And likewise, by contrast (and I do think I stress this quite enough), it reveals precisely how it is that this condition can be (and often is) such a very great evil.

My view also is that this very selfsame vision—while subordinated to other themes, especially the suffering and self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his followers—nevertheless endures. And in those instances (now becoming widespread) that Christians find themselves enjoying affluence, this Old Testament vision—in the context of the New Testament—is what such Christians desperately need. For it (and it alone) connects them as affluent people with the reality and will of God for them. There is no other teaching in Scripture on how to be both godly and rich at the same time. And the fact that moral theologians have almost completely ignored this teaching has the terrible consequence that the affluent Christians of our time are dangerously deprived of the nuanced guidance they seek. What they mainly get is advice on how to become non-affluent under values of non-capitalism in some form.

Now Blomberg (here and elsewhere) strongly resists my efforts to recover these (mainly Deuteronomic) traditions in the worldview that gives shape to some parts of the New Testament. From his comments on my crucial subsection, “The Christ of Delight,” which he judges “the weakest of Schneider’s exegetical chapters” (the one Hartropp describes as “one of Schneider’s best”), readers could never guess that my argument rests, not thinly on but “four texts,” as he claims, but on a narrative judgment about what Luke is doing with the identity of Jesus. One could never guess that I build my “rolling” argument on the literary studies of works by narrative Luke-scholar Luke Johnson (1981), as well as upon the remarkable book by David P. Moessner (1989). They show convincingly (in different ways) that Luke has identified Jesus primarily to affluent Christians in

Deuteronomic terms, i.e., as the embodiment, in new form, of the Mosaic vision of God for wealthy persons among the people of God. If true, as I am sure that it is, then no further defense of my claim that continuity between the two Testaments exists on that level.

But Blomberg is convinced the New Testament lets this vision just drop—as if it can do this without distortion of the entire worldview underlying Biblical religion. (Here shadows of Gnosticism appear.) Now, this is not the place to offer a critique of his view, but of course, logically speaking, if his view is correct then mine is mistaken. So I briefly comment on some key reasons he offers in support of his “discontinuity-thesis” in his essay for this symposium.

One of his reasons is (to me) quite curious. It is that if my thesis were true—that material delight were needful for healthy human well being everywhere—“millions of God’s people throughout history could rightly call ‘foul.’” I presume that by “crying ‘foul’” he means something like objecting to the injustice of the matter. If so, the argument (an attempted *reductio*) is indeed curious, since (even as I made quite clear in brief comments on the books of Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Psalms and Proverbs) the inference he makes is so obviously mistaken. As rudimentary rebuttals of simple logical arguments from evil (against belief in the existence of God) demonstrate, it does not follow for the proposition that p, “God disapproves state of affairs x,” that q, “state of affairs x cannot obtain at any time.” Simply: God’s antecedent will for his creation is that it be free from evil of any kind, but his consequent will (in redeeming a fallen world) is to *permit* the existence of evils for some time. So the non-existence of this particular evil—the non-flourishing of God’s people—clearly does not follow from my assertion.

But Blomberg’s main reason for rejecting my claim is his conviction that the “paradigmatic” passages in Scripture are not narratives of affluence (ever?), but rather narratives and teachings on (for lack of a better term) sufficiency, or moderation, or something of the sort (ambiguities abound). His banner text—and source of the title for his book on the subject—is the famous passage from Proverbs 30: 8–9, which he thinks carries over, in the context of the “manna-narratives” of Exodus, in a normative way for all Christians in the New Testament (especially in Paul, see 2 Cor. 8). But this conviction seems to me quite unfounded. As the prayer of Proverbs 30: 8-9 shows, the petitioner asks God to give him “neither riches nor poverty,” and simply to provide what is “needful.” Now Blomberg seems to have stretched this sentiment substantially, so that it means “neither riches in the *extreme*, nor poverty,” which really makes definitional matters greatly more complicated. (His additional qualification, that the standards differ from time to time, culture to culture, makes them hopelessly so.) My own (stated) view is that this proverbial prayer is a beautiful,

virtuous and elegant example of a godly disposition (comparable to part of the Lord's Prayer), but that this in no way implies that it describes the vision that God has for his people (no more than Solomon's prayer—not to procure wealth—described God's will for him—to give him wealth in the extreme, as Job.) But let's suppose that this text is our paradigm. What then?

Imagine a Christian professor named Smith, who reads that the Bible does not condemn affluence as such, but rather affluence in the extreme. Now, Smith knows that as an American college teacher he is in some sense affluent (has considerably more than is "needful" for his mere sustenance.) But what he does not know is whether or not he has crossed that fateful boundary into conditions of being affluent in the extreme. But according to the Bible's teaching he has read, he *has* to know this in order also to know whether or not (horror of horrors) God approves of him.

My purpose was to explore something almost completely neglected—traditions in Scripture that help us to discern the sense in which the enjoyments of affluence can be good—spiritually and morally.

But, he reasons, to know this requires a standard of quantitative measurement, a kind of "net-worth moral tape measure" with a mark on it that says "affluent," up to a point, and then (in red, I like to think) has the words "affluent in the extreme." Smith looks around for this measuring device, but he soon realizes that God has supplied no such thing. What he rather finds is that there is no agreement at all on which of the various devices available is the right one to use. (He does find other college professors who use devices that assure them that even a comfortable middle class American existence isn't to enjoy "affluence in the extreme," but in view of conditions worldwide he has no clue why anyone would trust that device.) In the end, Smith concludes that one of two things is true. Either God has given his people a crucial prohibition that is essential to both their individual and corporate lives and destinies, but has made it impossible for them to discern with any collective clarity what the object of that prohibition is, or this interpretation of what God is supposed to have done (deliberately left the wealthy members of his people in a state of desperate, irredeemable confusion) is itself false. Thankfully, for Smith, this is no dilemma.

Nearing the end I would like to take up some of Andy Hartropp's concerns. The first is his apparent perplexity over my handling of the Parable of the Pounds. He writes that my approach to this parable (quite important to my narrative argument, by the way) seems to be "misguided from the start." I fail, he explains, to take note that "Luke makes it perfectly plain that the context and reason for the

parable is the people's misconception 'that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.'" Indeed, Luke makes that plain. And so we wonder, what question would wealthy Christians (Luke's presumed readers) have in that eschatological context? Obviously, their question would be what to do with their economic lives in the presumed meantime, the "time between the times." Luke: "As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell them a parable" (Luke 19:11). With these connective words Luke makes clear that the Parable of the Pounds explains this shocking anomaly, which is that Zaccaheus (even he) does not leave everything but goes back into the world, now investing himself completely in a new ethical way of life. "These things" make no sense on the people's assumption that the world was about to end. But on the contrary view (Luke's), this model of worldly involvement makes perfect sense (and so the economic sense of Luke's use of the parable does, too.) But of course (as Hartropp observes) the parable doesn't reduce to an economic teaching—we must invest everything we have, which is Matthew's broader message in his different use of the parable.

Hartropp also states in several contexts that in my treatment of affluence I do not stress the "negatives" enough and, also, that I do not give enough attention to the obligations of individuals, particularly the historic Biblical mandate of charity. There is truth in these complaints. But let me explain. First, as Edd Noell's piece makes clear, there is a great surplus of literature on the "negatives" of affluence. My purpose was to explore something almost completely neglected—traditions in Scripture that help us to discern the sense in which the enjoyments of affluence can be good—spiritually and morally. In that light my aim was to provide a better theological frame of reference for understanding just what the "negatives" are and what is rightly to be done about them. That is not to concede that I downplay the wealth-negative themes. I don't. I just subordinate them to the antecedent themes of creation and put them into that context for spiritual and moral theologies of redemption. I cannot help that this has become an uncommon thing for Christian theologians to do.

Furthermore, I chose to write a book of theology and not ethics. (I am a theologian and not an ethicist.) However, I believe that systematic ethics—for societies, institutions, organizations and individuals—can and should be built upon these foundations, or something like them. My view is that the theological foundations for most Christian ethics on this subject (including the theory and practice of charity) are antiquated and/or badly distorted by defective (often quasi-Marxian and Weberian) assumptions that prevail in our academic culture. Hence, merely to construct the relevant theology in a fresh way was (for me) challenge enough for the day.

Finally, I wish to respond briefly to Andy Hartropp's defense of ambivalence as a proper Christian attitude toward affluence. I think this is quite mistaken. Two stories—true stories—about moral ambivalence and guilt suggest what I believe goes wrong, theologically, with this judgment.

Story 1: In old age Tertullian wrote a letter to his wife to let her know that he had prayed to God and apologized for them both about their having enjoyed sexual relations during their marriage (that pleasurable but “foul deed between us.”)

Story 2: A former colleague of mine was an expert in Shakespeare. I always wondered why his obvious love of Shakespeare did not lead to productive scholarship in his field. In an honest moment he confided: “I have always—always—feared that maybe God wanted me to be a missionary.”

In both instances the object of ambivalence is a good. In the one instance, the good is the enjoyment of sex within the context of a marriage. In the other, it is the enjoyment of studies in the context of a (supposed) calling by God. In both instances the ambivalence is not a virtue (although the persons involved thought it was), and the pious feelings of failure and guilt were misplaced. They also unleashed absolutely crippling effects upon the healthy spiritual and moral development of these persons in engaging life as it is

in the world. In my view, the forms of ambivalence in these stories closely resemble the widespread state of affairs that prevails among the intellectual leadership of modern Christendom. And while many forms of ambivalence are marks of wisdom—ambivalence toward capitalism, say—ambivalence toward the enjoyment of affluence in its proper context is as tragic as it is mistaken.

Endnotes

- 1 de Soto (2000), pp. 208–209.
- 2 *Markets & Morality*, Vol. 5, No. 1, especially the dispute between Michael Novak and Nicholas Wolterstorff over the explanation offered by the Austrian School, and also over proper Christian perspectives on that understanding of capitalism.

References

- de Soto, Hernando.** 2000. *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*. New York: Basic Books.
- Johnson, Luke-Timothy.** 1981. *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts*. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press.
- Moessner, David B.** 1989. *The Lord of the Banquet: The Literary and Theological Significance of the Lukan Travel Narrative*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. ■