Editor’s Introduction

The mind of the nation has been firmly fixed on the economy for the last several years. The Great Recession, as the recent financial collapse has often been called, has determined much of the political and religious dialogue during this period. From anger, to anxiety, to tepid optimism, the United States and the world have been left wondering what can be done to recover economically, and perhaps more importantly, how to prevent such economic catastrophes from recurring in the future. To this end, the current issue of *USQR* begins with three pieces in close conversation, based loosely on a dialogue that occurred in 2011 between Joerg Rieger of the Perkins School of Theology, Gary Dorrien of Union Theological Seminary, and Kathryn Tanner of Yale Divinity School. Together, these three pieces form a response in a trajectory that seeks a proper Christian critique of and challenge to rampant capitalism driven to the point of inflicting destruction and suffering.

Rieger specifically takes up the question of desires and how Christianity can offer alternate visions of what desire is, what should be desired, and what the proper limits of desire are. Using biblical passages and theological precedent, especially from Luther, he proposes that Christianity can offer an overhauled version of desire that is not unnaturally inflated by advertising and respects that one’s God is “that to which your heart clings and entrusts itself.” With revised visions of who God is and the purpose and function of desire, Christianity can offer a strong counterbalance to the greed-driven culture of finance and material driven economies that prioritize wealth and things over people, our relationship with the earth, and our standing with God.

Next, Dorrien offers a history of the Social Gospel movement and its justice legacy that Christianity needs to reclaim in order to offer a suitable response to the economic crisis and the injustices entailed within it. He offers a wide-ranging analysis of what caused the crisis, both in terms of technical factors and the cultures and attitudes that made it possible. He then makes proposals—religious, political, and cultural—that could help to defuse the current potential for market overreaches, especially with respect to the finance sector, and exploitation of what has come to be called, often, the “99 percent.” He concludes that there is hope in emerging creative forms of cooperatives and movements like Occupy Wall Street who reserve the right to challenge the very assumptions of our current economic norm.

Finally, Tanner ties the history and theory of the first two articles together by discussing Occupy Wall Street, mentioned in both of the previous articles, and why its vision is something Christians should very strongly consider supporting. She does this by examining the mission statements and goals of Occupy Wall Street and viewing them in the light of a Christian theology that concerns itself with just economic systems. While Occupy Wall Street resists alignment with any religious tradition, Christianity and its history of critique of unjust economic
systems and social inequality, she shows, have roles to play in supporting Occupy
and its mission.

The last two articles depart from the explicit Economics and Theology
theme. Steven Jungkeit, however, relates the critical theoretical idea of “Junkspace”
as a reality in modernity and challenges the contemporary church and its liturgical
practices to reconsider the role of space, especially given that, as he sees it, some
churches mimic the category of Junkspace he explores. He proposes a new relation-
ship with sacred spaces that allows for greater freedom and play in what constitutes
Christian worship.

To finish, Sergey Trostyanskiy offers a historical-philosophical look at the
Neo-Arian Controversy of the late fourth century C.E. He examines the styles
of argumentation and logic found in some of the major thinkers involved in that
controversy and offers a new reading of their philosophical and rhetorical sources.

The heart of this issue deals with the pressing matters of our present (and
any present) as those who confess or study a faith try to make sense of their beliefs
in the midst of the controversies and arguments going on around them. Theology,
economy, postmodernity, and where we stand with respect to faith are perennial
problems. This issue, especially concerning the difficulties of our contemporary
economic and financial systems, is bound up with the belief that Christianity
can evolve, be introspective, and in turn, offer critiques and strategies for the
larger world.
Contents

Editor’s Introduction ........................................................................................................1
Jason Wyman

Christianity, Capitalism, and Desire: Can Religion Still Make a Difference? ..................1
Joerg Rieger

Economic Crisis, Economic Justice, and the Divine Commonwealth .... 14
Gary Dorrien

Why Support the Occupy Movement? ........................................................................... 28
Kathryn Tanner

The Dreamlife of Junkspace: Utopia, Globalization, and the Religious Imagination ................................................................. 36
Steven Jungkeit

The Competing Philosophical Frameworks Apparent in the Neo-Arian Thoughts of the Late Fourth Century C.E.: A Case Study .................. 47
Sergey Trostyanskiy

Book Reviews

Chaos and Grace: Discovering the Liberating Work of the Holy Spirit ................................................................. 58

Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics After Liberalism ................................................................. 62

Readings from the Edges: The Bible and People on the Move ............ 67

The Universe Bends Toward Justice: Radical Reflections on the Church, the Bible, and the Body Politic .................. 69
As we investigate matters of Christianity and capitalism in the current context, the fundamental theological question is: What difference does religion make in a world of traumatic economic inequality? Before we can get to that question, however, I first need to address another question: What difference does capitalism make to religion? This is the question that most people forget to ask, supporters and critics of capitalism alike.

My point is that Christianity and capitalism are interconnected in many ways. Economic matters are never just about money. In fact, economic matters shape us more deeply than we think: they shape the way we live our lives, they shape our relationships, what we think and feel, all the way down. Religion and faith are also among the matters affected by economics. Christianity may serve as an example. The most blatant example of course is the so-called Gospel of Prosperity, which promises people unprecedented wealth and happiness if they support the precepts of the prosperity preacher. The Gospel of Prosperity resembles neoliberal capitalism in that it preaches limitless success endorsed by God, beginning with the elites and moving from the top down. While this approach works for the few, there is little evidence that it has worked for the many.

While mainline churches on the whole do not officially endorse the Gospel of Prosperity, there are nevertheless some parallels in the theological imageries. God is generally envisioned at the top, whether in heaven or at the pinnacles of power, and therefore in close proximity to those who are successful in the current economic system. Common images of God are shaped by wealth and top-down power, similar to the top-down powers that control neoliberal capitalism. As a result, God often turns out to look like a heavenly CEO, whose power is fairly unilateral and who does not need to get his hands dirty.

One of the problems with this kind of Christianity, which masquerades as traditional because its formation by contemporary power and wealth is rarely seen as part of its theology, is that it does not work for the masses. The masses are left behind just like the workers are left behind in neoliberal capitalism. Moreover, this kind of Christianity does not even work very well anymore for those of us who belong to the middle class, as even the middle class is benefiting less and less from

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1 This is one of the key questions of my book *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009).
the spoils of neoliberal capitalism. The other problem is that Christianity, which is thus shaped by capitalism, promotes images of God that have fairly little in common with what we know of the God of Israel and the God of Jesus Christ.

**What Difference Can Religion make?**

Religion and economics are often seen as at the opposite ends of a spectrum, and so it may appear as if they have nothing to say to each other. Economics is perceived as a matter of realism, planted firmly in the concerns of this world. Religion, by contrast, is perceived as a matter of lofty ideas, which have to do mainly with “higher things,” or another world. Yet these common definitions miss what is really going on. Religion and economics are much closer than meets the eye.

There are now even some economists who have noted that economics today often functions like a religion. The task of top economists, they note, is not nitpicky economic analysis and number crunching, but keeping the big ideas before the public. In other words, the role of top economists is to maintain the faith. The problem with this approach, whether in economics or in religion, is that it gives up close contact with economic reality, especially the economic reality at the bottom, in exchange for big ideas. To put it more strongly, this sort of an approach is built not on faith in general, which can be informed by reality, but on what we might call blind faith.

One example for such blind faith is the well-known statement: “A rising tide will lift all boats.” The principles expressed in this statement, which goes back to President John F. Kennedy, still guide much of contemporary economics, and serve as the basis for tax cuts to the wealthy and government bailouts of, and support for, large corporations and banks. Here, the difference between blind faith and valid observations becomes clear: While it can indeed be observed that the economic tide goes in cycles and therefore rises at certain times, that everybody benefits from rising economic tides amounts to an unconfirmed assumption and thus to blind faith.

As I have shown in greater detail in my book *No Rising Tide*, there are parallels between economics as blind faith and religion as blind faith. People who have been conditioned to accept religious principles on blind faith seem to be more likely to accept economic principles on blind faith as well. It is not surprising, therefore, that blind faith is one of our key problems today in the United States. Unfortunately, many people think that this is what religion necessarily is: blind faith or big metaphysical ideas that do not have to prove themselves in reality.

The good news, which I am seeking to develop in this article, is that neither economics nor religion has to be built on blind faith. Both economics and religion can be planted firmly in the concerns of this world and can contribute not only to a better life for all but also to a more adequate understanding of what is going on.

Nevertheless, leaving behind the blind faiths to which we have become accustomed is not going to be easy. In addition, even what is sometimes considered to be realism often still misses reality. In order to deal with these problems, I have suggested examining things in terms of the “logic of downturn.” Only if we look at the challenges of economics and religion from the perspective of those who have suffered the brunt of the recent economic downturns can we get a better sense for what is really going on. From this perspective, we can see for example that the blind faith of the Gospel of Prosperity is not helping: it cannot lift more than a few out of poverty, and even when it lifts some out of poverty, it happens at the expense of others who are left behind.

If we employ the logic of downturn and ask who benefits from the current economic and religious status quo, we realize that the majority of people are not benefiting and are not bound to benefit ever in this kind of world. Blind faith works for the few, but not for the many.

**Alternative Religion**

Unlike blind-faith economics and blind-faith religion, Jesus of Nazareth did not demand blind faith. When John the Baptist fell on hard times and began developing doubts about whether Jesus would be the promised Messiah, Jesus did not respond by encouraging him to believe blindly and without question. Rather, in his response to John, Jesus provided some evidence of why his kind of religion makes a difference when he told John’s followers: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them” (Matt 11:4-5).

The religion that Jesus proclaimed presents itself as an antidote to blind faith, which must have been a problem even in Jesus’ time. The Jesus movement is linked to concrete transformations, which are happening here and now, rather than to grandiose ideas, obscure doctrines, or other forms of blind faith. These concrete transformations have to do with human flourishing, expressed here in terms of health issues that affect not just individuals—as modern society perceives them—but the community as a whole. Unlike today, people in the first century were more likely to be aware that health is a communal good, because the lack of health placed burdens on society as a whole, and that “if one member suffers all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26).

The climax of Jesus’ proclamation in the above passage from Matthew is that “the poor have good news brought to them.” From the perspective of the poor, who are more familiar with the logic of downturn than anyone else, the good news may be many things, but it cannot be blind faith. The blind faith of pie-in-the-sky religion or some unsubstantiated economic hope that a rising tide will lift all boats...
not only does not help the poor; it is harmful to them because it makes their lives more miserable. This is the problem with the blind faith of the Gospel of Prosperity as well as the promises of neoliberal capitalism that have not materialized since they took center stage more than three decades ago.

Good news to the poor has to be the news of concrete transformation not just of individual lives, but of the lives of communities, and ultimately of the transformation of the structures that push people into poverty and keep them there. What would religion and economics that proclaim such good news to the poor look like?

The Common Good

It is often overlooked that neoliberal economics claims that it has in mind the common good: since a rising tide is assumed to lift all boats, increasing prosperity of the super-rich is seen as a good sign for the country, even if it happens to fall in times of economic trouble for everyone else. From this perspective the growing wealth of what is now called the one percent is not strictly speaking a matter of greed and selfishness, but rather a matter of pursuing the common good because it is believed that it will eventually benefit everyone. However, serious doubts are emerging about whether this is true. While we have had pie-in-the-sky theologies for centuries, it seems that we now also have pie-in-the-sky economics.

If we consult the logic of downturn, it appears as if the top-down visions of the common good have not worked. Rather than benefiting people, the production of wealth at the top has done harm. Instead of creating jobs, as predicted by neoliberal economic theory, the production of wealth at the top has led to the exclusion of more and more people from the benefits of the economy. Fifty percent of the jobs destroyed in the Great Recession are not coming back, especially the more decent ones. Many of these jobs were simply outsourced to places where labor is cheaper, while other jobs were cut and the workload distributed among the remaining workforce. Some who lost their jobs were rehired for similar work at lower pay and with significantly fewer benefits. The profits from all of these transactions were pocketed by corporations and their stockholders. As a result, the common good proclaimed by neoliberal economics has led to what has often been called a “jobless recovery,” a term which is in itself an oxymoron.

Christianity has a different response to the common-good question. The apostle Paul states one of the deepest insights of the struggling community: “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Cor 12:26). When Paul compares the church to the body of Christ in this context, he picks up an ancient image that was a commonplace in the Roman Empire. In the empire, there was a deeply held belief that all the members of the empire are organically related. Yet the theologians of the empire also believed that each part of the body was destined to stay in its predetermined place, and that there was a natural division between the higher and lower levels.

Paul turns this around: “Members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect” (1 Cor 12:22-23). In other words, the common good is not built from the top down but from the bottom up. This logic is deeply engrained in the Judeo-Christian traditions. In the Hebrew Bible, this is the place of the proverbial concern for widows, strangers, and orphans: “An injury to one is an injury to all.” In the New Testament, the famous passage of Matthew 25:40 points in a similar direction: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” The hungry, thirsty, strangers, lacking clothing, sick, imprisoned are not the objects of social service projects, the recipients of charity. Their interest is at the heart of God’s own interest, and therefore at the heart of the common interest.

Two things stand out here. First of all, the common good can only be achieved if the concerns of the weakest members of society are taken into account— not as an afterthought but as at the heart of the common life. This has deep implications for how we reconceive economics. Secondly, and here is where the challenge for religion lies, solidarity with the “least of these” is not a secondary issue but is solidarity with Godself, and solidarity with God is solidarity with the least of these. Religion in this context is not blind faith, but a new way of life that relocates the common good from the top to the bottom.

What are the implications of this relocation of the common good? The issue that comes to mind first of all is the question of distribution. Is there enough to go around? Are all receiving what they need? Those who defend neoliberal capitalism often point out that, despite astronomical differences in distribution, many people are better off than they used to be in the past. More people have color televisions than ever before in history, for instance, and in the United States most people own cars. What this response overlooks, of course, is that even in the United States many are not receiving what they need. In Dallas, for instance, a city that prides itself as being economically strong and growing, more than one in four children live below the poverty line and many children do not have enough to eat.

5 This distinguishes the so-called “Great Recession” from earlier recessions since the Great Depression. This problem was already pointed out during the recession itself, and the prediction has proved correct. See Will Deener, “Working?” The Dallas Morning News, July 13, 2009, 4D.

6 For the following interpretation of Paul, see Joerg Rieger, Christ and Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), chapter 1.

Yet distribution may not even be the primary issue in this debate. If we add the issue of production to the issue of distribution, things become clearer. Here, the question is whether all people have the opportunity to employ their creativity for the common good and whether they are compensated fairly for the contributions that they make to the common good. While in the United States and many other places around the globe more people have color television sets today than ever before, the opportunity for productive and creative labor that is compensated fairly has not increased.

The top-down logic of neoliberal capitalism rules when it comes to production. In the manufacturing industry, for instance, CEOs are compensated several hundred times higher than the workers. The default assumption in this context is that productivity has mostly to do with the accomplishment of the CEOs. Yet a CEO cannot produce a single thing without a qualified workforce that is needed to operate at all levels. In addition, the amazing and growing gaps that we are currently observing between CEOs and workers have not always existed in the United States. Sarah Anderson reports that even in the recession year of 2009 "CEO pay … more than doubled the CEO pay average for the decade of the 1990s, more than quadrupled the CEO pay average for the 1980s, and ran approximately eight times the CEO average for all the decades of the mid-20th century. American workers, by contrast, are taking home less in real weekly wages than they took home in the 1970s. Back in those years, precious few top executives made over 30 times what their workers made." 8

If we look at the common good from the perspective of production, we need to reconsider our default assumptions. How we value the production of workers is a matter that shows us the logic at the heart of neoliberal capitalism. Nevertheless, it is not just an economic matter. It also shows how we value the community as a whole with all its diverse members, and how we value alternative forms of creativity. The common good can only be maintained if all have significant opportunities to make positive contributions to it, and if the contributions of all are valued to some degree. At present, the opposite is the case, as the contributions of working people are increasingly devalued.

These reflections on the common good remind us that the top-down approach hurts not just the workers. While workers are treated as expendable, managers have no choice but to work in the interest of stockholders rather than workers, and even small business people are not benefiting because the larger corporations will not respect them, but go after their profit as a matter of principle. 9 While the compensation of CEOs is often debated, it is overlooked that while CEOs make 400 or 500 times what the workers make, top investors make 20,000

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9 This is what happens when large corporations like Wal-Mart come to town, whose strategy is to wipe out smaller competitors systematically in order to increase their own market share.

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common good. Jesus in this context needs to be understood as an organizer just as much as a preacher. In fact, what makes his preaching effective is his organizing, and it is here that God is seen at work most clearly and surprisingly.  

Religion presents itself here not as another blind faith. This is a way of being religious that is the exact opposite of dominant pie-in-the-sky religion. If religion is thus in touch with real life, rebuilding the world from the bottom up and working for the common good, we can begin to reimage what economics might look like if it, too, were in touch with real life.

**Reshaping Desire from the Bottom Up**

One example of how economic processes can be rebuilt from the bottom up has to do with the role desire plays in our lives. Desire points us to the core issues both in religion and economics.

The sixteenth century Reformer Martin Luther has captured the religious significance of desire in his definition of God as “that to which your heart clings and entrusts itself.” Desire points us to the heart of our faith, it shows us where things are ultimately rooted. Nevertheless, Luther’s definition leaves open the possibility that desire might be misguided and that our heart clings and entrusts itself to false desires.

In neoliberal capitalist economics, desire is often taken at face value by supporters and critics alike. Critics of neoliberal capitalism are quick to blame consumerism, greed, envy, and jealousy, all of which are related to desire, while supporters of neoliberal capitalism praise these attitudes as the engine of a healthy economy. Where these desires are rooted, however, is not addressed. Rather than taking consumerism and the popular shape of desire at face value, however, we need to take another look at where these things come from.

What consumers want, it is quickly assumed, is more “stuff,” i.e. the whole gamut of consumer products. For religious critics of consumerism, this is often taken to mean that the products that people acquire become their God. In this perspective, desire appears to translate directly into the acquisition of consumer products. Yet consumerism is not primarily about consumer products. Consumerism is about a deeper desire for intangible things like happiness, meaning, love, and freedom. The new car, for instance, is not simply about a desire for a new toy or a better and more reliable means of transportation, but about intangible things like feelings of security, power, and happiness. So how are consumerism, consumer products, and desires related? Many people, economists and theologians included, assume that desire for more things is a natural part of our humanity. Yet this may not be true. In fact, at a certain point, desire for more things has to be produced artificially. If it is often overlooked that desires and wants of things diminish at a certain point. People only want so many new cars, gadgets, houses, or chocolate bars. Who wants twenty cell phones? Economist John Kenneth Galbraith has called this phenomenon the “diminishing urgency of . . . wants” or a “diminishing urgency of consumption.” A capitalist economy, however, which is based on economic growth, needs to keep producing things. And so the desires of consumers have to be produced and maintained artificially, precisely because they are not natural.

The desires that we tend to take at face value are, therefore, not natural but produced and reproduced by an economy that depends on the steady growth of desire. This means that the idea of a “consumer-driven economy” is less than accurate. Capitalism depends on the top-down production of desire, which proceeds by endowing consumer products with intangible meaning in order to produce greater profit. Consumers are driven by the economy as much—or more—than they are driving it.

In our search for alternatives we need to understand that these produced desires go very deep. Advertising, one of the key mechanisms for the production of desire, is aimed at the formation of the deeper levels of our existence. Its goal is not primarily the providing of information about the products that are to be sold, like cars and cell phones; advertising is about linking products with deeper desires for happiness, meaning, love, and freedom. The ultimate goal is to imprint people for life, starting with our children when they are very young.

Unfortunately, those who seek to provide alternatives, including religious communities, commonly fail to deal with these deeper levels of desire. The many indictments of consumerism in particular often fail to address the mechanisms by which consumerism is produced and kept alive. Yet moralizing about desire does not help if desire is so deep-seated. The problem is, therefore, not just about ethics but about theology. Luther was right: That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is your God; our deepest desires point to who is God in our lives. The good news is that desires are not set in stone but can be reshaped. The question is how we do that and how alternative religion and economics can contribute to the reshaping of desire.

Let us return to the Prosperity Gospel one more time in order to clarify what is at stake. What is wrong with it? One common critique is that it focuses too much on the material and neglects the spiritual. This is one of the critiques that are also leveled against capitalism, expressed in the often-heard claim that capitalism would be too “materialistic.” Yet this critique rests on a fundamental misunderstanding.

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11 This is shown by Richard Horsley, Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).
12 For a more in-depth and detailed account of the argument of this part, see Rieger, No Rising Tide, chapter 4.
13 Martin Luther, “The Large Catechism,” in The Book of Concord, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 365. Luther reminds us, furthermore, that “money and possessions,” “knowledge, intelligence, power, popularity, friendship, and honor” can also take the place of God.
15 Economists talk about the “falling rate of profit”; over time, profit margins go down, and production needs to increase in order to keep making profit. See, for instance, Robert Brenner, The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945–2005 (New York: Verso, 2006).
Capitalism’s focus on the material is inextricably linked with the promise of spiritual happiness, as we have seen. The same is true for the Gospel of Prosperity.

The problem has to do with what kind of material reality is promised here. Both capitalism and the Gospel of Prosperity promise limitless wealth to individuals and the fulfillment of all of the desires that the advertising industry holds before us. In this way, people’s attention is trained on the material objects that the dominant economic system selects for us, like the latest cars and cell phones. These material objects are presented as the core of every person’s desire. As we have seen, however, such desires are not natural, and they tend to lead us to false gods that cannot, and are not supposed to, produce true happiness.

The problem, therefore, is not with the focus on the material, but that we are confronted with two fundamentally different approaches to the material world. These two approaches can be distinguished in terms of the difference between artificially produced desires and our real needs. What is unlimited in this context are not needs and desires in general, but artificially produced desires based on the false promise of limitless wealth.

When this is clear, we can begin to reshape desire by comparing desires and needs. This is one major way of rebuilding economic processes from the bottom up. If in capitalist economics the production of desire has overshadowed the focus on the real needs of people, it is not enough merely to reject desire and its symptom, consumerism. Rather, we need to reshape desire in light of the real needs of people. Desire as such is not a bad thing, and neither should we expect it to disappear.

In the Jewish-Christian traditions, God is often found at work in the context of the real needs of people; desire is shaped and reshaped in this context. In the following, I will give two examples, one from the Hebrew Bible and one from the New Testament.

In the Moses tradition, Moses gets separated from his parents and is raised as an Egyptian prince. We can only imagine how this upbringing must have shaped his outlook on life and his desires. Yet the narratives talk about how his desires are reshaped in his encounters with the needs of the common people: “One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating one of his kinsfolk” (Exodus 2:11). Moses begins to side with the Hebrews because he sees their needs and senses their desire. The experience must have been traumatic, because Moses overreacts and kills a slave master (Exodus 2:13). It is precisely in this context that God appears to him in surprising and life-changing ways.

Moses must have had a certain set of desires as an Egyptian prince. Getting in touch with the needs and desires of the people reshapes his desires and his images of God. This is the context of the epic Burning Bush story: God speaks only after Moses has connected with the needs of the people. This God is no longer the god of the Egyptian status quo worshiped in the palace; rather, this God is the liberator of the slaves, the one who radically transforms the status quo.

Without understanding this basic shift the Burning Bush story is just another status quo story, in which God announces some abstract sovereignty (“I am who I am” [Exodus 3:14]).

The Jesus traditions, like the Moses tradition, also make no sense without a deep sympathy with the needs of people. Just like Moses’ life was turned around when he left the palace and got in touch with the people, Jesus must have learned a few things from working in construction with Joseph and from spending much of his time with the common people. Desire is deeply shaped and can be reshaped in such settings. Not surprisingly, therefore, Jesus’ parables are full of examples from the everyday life of work and the needs and desires that matter there. Among the protagonists are shepherds (who don’t own their flock), working women, workers in vineyards and fields, fishermen, and service workers. The parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matt 18:23-32) is one example of how desires are shaped and reshaped as they encounter human need.

The parable, set in the context of the harsh life of service workers in the first century, begins with a dramatically reshaped image of God. God is portrayed as a master, who goes against all business logic by forgiving the entire debt of one of his workers. This is an odd move, because it is precisely this debt that makes workers compliant to their masters and pits worker against worker. By forgiving this debt, the master acknowledges the need of the workers.

Unfortunately, the worker whose debt has been forgiven remains a slave to his unreconstructed desires and forgets about the needs of his fellow workers. When a fellow worker asks him for the forgiveness of a minor debt, he is unwilling to forgive and has him thrown into prison. Reading this parable in the tension between desire and need, we are beginning to understand that the point is not to moralize: it is not to say “you must forgive, no matter what,” as this parable is so often interpreted. The point of the parable is that everything changes when the true needs of the people are recognized. If the forgiven worker had recognized that the needs of the people, including his own, have less to do with money than with solidarity, he would have acted differently.

From the perspective of the needs of the people, the case is fairly clear: the solidarity of working people is more valuable than money. After all, the flourishing and the survival of the community depends on this solidarity, rather than on the possessions of individual workers, which will never match the possessions of the master and which guarantee his power. Reshaped desire is located, therefore, in the solidarity of workers that meets the real needs of the people.

Of course, this perspective only makes sense from the bottom up, that is, if the needs of the people are taken into account. From the top down, things look different. The unforgiving servant follows the desire for individual power and wealth that characterizes the lives of the elite. From this perspective, the parable can only be understood as a moralizing exhortation, which is how it continues to be preached in most churches to this very day.

We are now at a place where real human needs can become part of economic considerations again, thus reshaping desire. The needs that form the bedrock of our lives appear to be fairly clear: we need food, shelter, and clothing. Moreover,
sanitation, education, and healthcare can also be considered as needs. The need which is often overlooked, however, is the need to be productive, to be engaged in work that matters and makes a difference. This brings us back to what we said earlier: alternative economics, and the alternative religion that is tied to it, needs to take a fresh look at production, not merely at redistribution.

We can now see more clearly the distinction between economic processes based on artificially produced unlimited desire and economic processes based on need. Economic processes based on unlimited desire are tied to a material reality, which is driven by the production of more and more consumer products. Yet what matters here are not the products. The goal is the maximization of profits for stockholders, and so the production of desire serves the interest of the elites.

Economic processes based on need, on the other hand, are tied to a material reality, which is driven not by the infinite maximization of profit but by the ability to work with dignity and be compensated fairly. What matters here is space for creative labor. The goal is the solidarity of all who work, and so desire is reshaped by human need, which includes the ability to make constructive contributions to the flourishing of life on the planet.

Conclusion

It is often noted that the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. This is true globally as well as within the United States. Yet the basic challenge in this connection is not what most people think it is. At the heart of this growing gap is not distribution; at the heart is production. The basic questions are: Who is given the opportunity to do work that counts as productive and is rewarded accordingly? Who is in a position to do the sort of work that makes a difference? In the current economic situation, determined by neoliberal capitalism, such opportunities are increasingly limited to members of the elites, and they are decreasing for everyone else.

Religion has been co-opted in this context. It frequently functions at the level of artificially produced desire and blind faith, without grounding in the real needs of people. No wonder that the God who is worshiped here resembles the god of the neoliberal status quo. Luther was right: our desires show us who our God is.

The good news is that many of the Jewish Christian traditions provide antidotes. Things change if God is understood as in touch with the real needs of people, at work from the bottom up rather than from the top down, in solidarity with a band of slaves in Egypt, service workers in the first century, and people’s movements throughout history. No one sums up this difference better than the Apostle Paul: “Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are” (1 Cor. 1:26-28). Desire is not demonized here, but it is reshaped in light of human need and put in the service of the community.

Finally, there is new energy emerging from places where we have failed to look for a long time. This energy comes not from heroic leaders or the elite, but from the community. The good news is that these dynamics have been going on throughout history; in the United States, abolitionism, the Women’s Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Labor Movement are examples. Most recently, the Occupy Movement has raised new hope that the true needs of the 99 percent can help us to reshape desire in such a way that an alternative economy becomes possible and that alternative religion is not finished yet.16

Economic Crisis, Economic Justice, and the Divine Commonwealth1

Gary Dorrien

It is a great privilege for me to address this remarkable gathering of ecumenical social justice advocates. I’ve been asked to speak about the economic crisis of our time and the involvement of Christian communities in struggles for social justice, and I’m going to begin by saying something about the tradition of ecumenical social ethics that we share.

The idea that our faith calls us to create a just society is as old as the biblical message of letting justice flow like a river and pouring yourself out for the poor and vulnerable, as in the magnificent text from Isaiah 58 that underlies this conference. This scriptural idea was renewed in the early 1880s by the Social Gospel Movement, which created the field that I teach, social ethics. Long before the Social Gospel arose, there were Christian movements in this country that opposed slavery, war, economic oppression, male supremacy, and alcohol. But the Social Gospel introduced something new—the idea that salvation has to be personal and social to be saving.

The Social Gospel Movement was the greatest surge of social justice activism ever waged by the mainline churches in this country. It was not a coincidence that the social gospel, social ethics, sociology, socialism, and the very ideas of social structure, social salvation, and social justice all arose at the same time; also corporate capitalism and the trade unions.

There were 17 things wrong with the Social Gospel Movement, beginning with the fact that most of it was moralistic, idealistic, and not very brave about racial justice. We have paid a steep price in the churches for the fact that the Social Gospel failed to interrogate white supremacy as a structure of power based on privilege that presumes to define what is normal. But for all the things the Social Gospel got wrong, it got some crucial things right. It recovered the centrality of the Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus. It taught that Christianity has a mission to transform the structures of society in the direction of social justice. It created the Ecumenical Movement in this country. It was the wellspring of the Civil Rights Movement through the ministries of Reverdy Ransom, Benjamin Mays, Ida Wells-Barnett, Mordecai Johnson, and Martin Luther King Jr. For decades it was a mostly Protestant enterprise in this country, but John Ryan planted the seeds of a Catholic Social Gospel that became a movement in the 1920s.

Above all, the Social Gospel expounded a vision of economic democracy that is as relevant and necessary today as it was a century ago.

In the Social Gospel, society became a subject of redemption. Social justice became intrinsic to salvation. Before the modern era, nobody knew there was such a thing as social structure. With the Social Gospel, the church began to say that if people suffer because of politics and economics, then the church has to deal with politics and economics, and it has to do so by changing unjust social structures. A great deal of ecumenical social ethics has backed away from its origin as a movement for economic democracy, but at its best it has kept faith with the Social Gospel founders—Washington Gladden, W.D.P. Bliss, Walter Rauschenbusch, Reverdy Ransom, Vida Scudder, Jane Addams.

The Social Gospel was a response to the story of its time—the rise of corporate capitalism and the trade union movement—and a call for economic democracy and the common good. The story of our time is that the common good has been getting hammered for 30 years and we need economic democracy more than ever.

Global capitalism commodifies everything it touches, including labor and nature, putting everything up for sale. Nothing is exempt from the pressure of competition. Social contracts have vanished under threats of obsolescence and ruin, while the global market exploits resources, displaces communities, and sets off wealth explosions in wild cycles of boom and bust. The debates that we are having today about busting public unions, cutting Medicaid, and privatizing Medicare are by-products of 30 years of economic globalization and of massive, structural, politically engineered inequality.

Wages have been flat for 35 years and inequality has worsened dramatically. The share of America’s income held by the top one percent has more than doubled since 1982. Today the top one percent of the U.S. population holds 39 percent of the nation’s wealth and takes in 25 percent of its annual income. The top ten percent hold 70 percent of the wealth. The bottom 50 percent hold two percent.

The crash of 2008 wiped out $8 trillion of home value. The banks that frothed it up are sitting on $2 trillion of cash. They salted away their bailouts and went back to gambling in the swaps market, which pays better than boring investments in the real economy. Wall Street has recovered nicely, but we have 8.5% official unemployment and upwards of 20% real unemployment, with higher figures in African American communities. Every trade deal that we have signed has resulted in jobs leaving the United States. A corporate executive is said to be a great success if he slashes his payroll, eliminates benefits, and makes bigger profits. But what kind of success is that?

For the past 20 years the bestselling books about globalization have told us to forget about changing the system. Tom Friedman, a celebrant of the second wave, calls it “turbo-capitalism.” In the academy we call it “neo-liberalism.” Economic globalization—the integration of national economies into the global economy through trade, direct foreign investment, short-term capital flows, and

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1 Adapted from a keynote delivered at Ecumenical Advocacy Days, Washington, DC; March 24, 2012.
flows of labor and technology—has “flattened” the world, Friedman says. In a flat world you either compete successfully or are run over.

According to neo-liberals, global capitalism reduces national politics to minor tweaks. There is no third way in political economy anymore; there isn’t even a second way. Any nation that wants a growing economy has to wear a one-size-fits-all “golden straightjacket” that unleashes the private sector, keeps inflation low, minimizes government, eliminates tariffs, deregulates capital markets, and allows direct foreign ownership and investment.

Neo-liberals exaggerate the futility of attempts to channel economic forces. Contrary to the story that they tell, the U.S. did not ensure its prosperity by donning the golden straightjacket and relinquishing its manufacturing base. From the late 1940s to 1975, productivity and wages soared together in the United States, creating a middle-class society; meanwhile there were no bank crises, as New Deal reforms kept commercial banks out of the investment business.

But wages flattened in the mid-1970s and productivity kept soaring. The rich got richer in the 1980s and 1990s while everyone else fell behind, taking on debt to keep from drowning. During this period nearly every manufacturing-oriented society outperformed the U.S. in income growth and did so with more equitable distributions of income. In the 1980s the U.S. cut the marginal tax rate from 70 percent to 28 percent and cut the capital gains rate from 45 percent to 20 percent. That was a revolution, a blowout for politically engineered inequality. Then the global integration of two radically different models of growth—debt-financed consumption and production-oriented export and saving—created a wildly unstable world economy featuring asset bubbles and huge trade imbalances.

First the U.S. hollowed out its industrial base that paid decent wages, providing incentives to firms that made things to make them elsewhere. Then it rang up enormous trade deficits that left the U.S. dependent on China and Japan to finance its debt. Then the economy crumbled after the debt resort reached its outer limit in the housing market and the mortgage bubble burst. For 20 years we were told that governments were passed in this area. But when the housing market crashed, these supposedly obsolete governments coughed up $12 trillion in two months to save the system from itself.

It started with people who were just trying to buy a house of their own; who had no concept of predatory lending; and who had no say in the securitization boondoggle that spliced up various components of risk to trade them separately. It seemed a blessing to get a low-rate mortgage. It was a mystery how the banks did it, but this was their business; you trusted they knew what they were doing. Your bank resold the mortgage to an aggregator who bunched it up with thousands of other sub-prime mortgages, chopped the package into pieces and sold them as corporate bonds.

Securitizations and derivatives are great at concocting extra yield and allowing the banks to hide their debt. Broadly speaking, a derivative is any contract that derives its value from another underlying asset. More narrowly, it’s an instrument that allows investors to speculate on the future price of something without having to buy it. Today speculators are driving up the price of oil because the Middle East could explode this spring or summer if Iran is attacked and there is a gusher of money to be made if one makes the right bet.

Credit-default swaps are private contracts that allow investors to bet on whether a borrower will default. Twelve years ago that market was $150 billion; today it’s $70 trillion, and it’s at the heart of the meltdown. AIG’s derivatives unit was a huge casino selling phantom insurance with hardly any backing that now we have to pay for.

Speculators gamed the system and regulators looked the other way. Mortgage brokers, bond bundlers, rating agencies, and corporate executives all made fortunes selling bad mortgages, packaging the loans into securities, handing out inflated bond ratings, and putting the bonds on balance sheets. Banks got leveraged up to 50-to-1 and kept piling on debt. The mania for extra yield fed on itself, blowing away business ethics and common sense.

This year, speculative corporate debt in the U.S. is going to explode, as the reckoning for high-risk loans, bonds, and leveraged buyouts transacted five to seven years ago will occur. In the bond business this is called a maturity wall. Last year over $40 billion came due for junk bonds that were sold before the credit crisis hit in 2007. This year that number will soar to $160 billion; the following year it will be at least $212 billion; and the next year it will be over $340 billion. This coming avalanche of over $700 billion of speculative debt was created just like the mortgage crisis, with CDO’s that sliced and diced corporate loans, and all of it is coming due as the U.S. government has to borrow $2 trillion to bridge its deficit. Another credit crunch is coming, and today the entire European Union is teetering on a systemic collapse.

In this country the big banks are still holding about $2 trillion of toxic debt. But their bailouts have made them feel better; their profits are up; they fought every reform in the Dodd-Frank bill; and they are spending $50 million per quarter to obliterate the reforms that passed.

When Obama took office there was a lot of talk about the “bad bank” model, which creates transitional banks to soak up the toxic debt. Here there is a risk of getting prices wrong. If the government overpays for toxic securities, taxpayers are cheated; if it doesn’t overpay and the banks take mark-to-market prices, some banks could go under. Some advocates of the bad bank strategy said the government should stall on the price issue, waiting until values rise, which is what Germany did. But to the FDIC that smacked of alchemy, floating assets into the ether.

So Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner settled on an Aggregator Bank that blends the original Henry Paulson plan—cash for trash—with some elements of the bad bank topped off with an auction scheme. Our government is spending $1 trillion subsidizing up to 95 percent of deals partnered with hedge funds and equity firms to buy up toxic debt.

Of all the possible strategies to deal with this problem, this one is the most cumbersome and non-transparent. It is obsequious to Wall Street. It is based on the dubious hope of finding private buyers for rotten goods. It offers a taxpayer guarantee to investors that they won’t lose money if they get in. It is a scheme to
bribe private investors to buy the bad assets for more than they’re worth, which the banks are resisting anyway, since they just want to go back to gambling without government interference.

Today seven banks control 66 percent of the nation’s assets. Fifteen years ago that figure was 18 percent. That’s the path we are on, a staggering concentration of power that has turned the big banks into giant hedge funds. Two years ago we had a chance to break up the megabanks, thanks to Ohio Democrat Sherrod Brown. The Brown-Kaufman amendment to the Dodd-Frank bill would have allowed no bank to risk more than three percent of the nation’s GDP or hold more than ten percent of the nation’s total insured deposits. These caps are large enough to allow effective economies of scale, and had Brown-Kaufman gone through, it would have broken up the seven megabanks.

In the Senate this amendment won 30 Democratic votes and three Republican votes, despite failing to win the support of the Obama Administration or the Senate Democratic leadership. Brown-Kaufman would have passed had Obama supported it. According to Obama, he opposed it because he believed that the Volcker Rule was a better way to restrain the speculative excesses of the banks. It didn’t help that the person who cut the bailout deals and arranged the recent bank mergers was ‘Timothy Geithner.’

But then we didn’t get the Volcker Rule either. In 1999 the Clinton Administration teamed with Phil Gramm to tear down the Glass-Steagall wall between commercial and investment banking, which opened the door to the megabank empires and mergers of the Bush years. It was a big deal when Obama announced that he supported Paul Volcker’s proposal to reinstate the wall between commercial and investment banking.

The federal government provides deposit insurance and other safeguards to ensure that America has a stable banking system. These privileges were not created to give unfair advantages to banks operating hedge funds or private equity funds. Banks should not be allowed to speculate with cheap money that the government is explicitly providing to the banks on favorable terms. The Volcker Rule was designed to undo this arrangement. This was not mere technocratic tinkering. This was using political power to change the system. But in the end, the Dodd-Frank bill could not pass without the vote of Scott Brown, who gutted the Volcker Rule, demanding exemptions for trading in Treasury bonds and bond issues by government-backed entities. As always, these exemptions led to others, and today the Volcker Rule is shot full of holes.

There are some good things in the Dodd-Frank bill. It requires most derivatives to be traded on a public exchange and cleared through a third party. It established a new consumer agency and authorized regulators to impose higher capital reserves. These were significant victories over an overwhelmingly better-funded opposition. But Dodd-Frank is riddled with poison pills and loopholes, especially exemptions for foreign exchange swaps and pension funds, and carve-outs for corporate users of derivatives. It relies heavily on the Federal Reserve, which is very friendly to the big banks. Dodd-Frank does not require higher capital reserves or abolish gambling with CDO’s. It takes a pass on the biggest problem, that the Too-Big-To-Fail banks are also too big to be regulated. And now Wall Street has gutted Dodd-Frank on the Volcker Rule, debit card fee caps, and oversight of complex derivatives.

Simon Johnson, until four years ago, was chief economist of the International Monetary Fund. He argues that the finance industry has effectively captured our government. During his early career at MIT Johnson tried to be skeptical about this, but then he went to the IMF and got a close look at the symbiotic relationships between the world’s economic elites and its governments. In the U.S., it goes far beyond mere access or even collusion, he says; here the two career tracks of government and high finance are melded together. And that is problematic when the oligarchy screws up and the economy implodes.

When the IMF enters the scene of a crash, the economic part is usually straightforward: nations in crisis are told to live within their means by increasing exports, cutting imports, and breaking up bankrupt enterprises and banks. Every nation that is not the USA would get this prescription. But the U.S. controls the IMF, it has a powerful and well-connected oligarchy, and it pays its foreign debts in its own currency. So our recovery began by paying off Wall Street.

There are significant differences between the South Korean and Indonesian crashes of 1997, the Malaysian crash of 1998, Japan’s lost decade, the recurrent crashes in Russia and Argentina, and the meltdown of 2008. But they all have in common the most important thing: a financial oligarchy that rigged the game in its favor, built an empire on debt, overreached in good times, and brought the house down on everybody. When the house collapses, elites do what they always do: They take care of their own. To get a different result, a nation has to take control of the problem and break the grip of the oligarchy. Otherwise you muddle along in a lost decade of your own, further entrenching the oligarchy.

The usual IMF playbook is clear: find a bottom, clear out the clutter, get the fiscal and monetary houses in order, and, if possible, shake up crony capitalism. There is always going to be an economic oligarchy, so the best we can do is shake it up from time to time. To this end Johnson recommends new antitrust laws, although he cannot say what they would look like, and he says it’s pointless to cap...

If we take the existing system for granted, that prescription is about the best we can do. It is certainly better than the course that President Obama took. But we need to talk about something bolder and more creative than the IMF playbook: Renewing this country with a massive investment in economic democracy.

For over two centuries, Americans have debated two fundamentally different visions of what kind of country the U.S. should want to be. The dominant vision is of a society that provides unrestricted liberty to acquire wealth. The second is the vision of a realized democracy in which rights over society’s major institutions are established. In the first view, the right to property is lifted above the right to self-government, and the just society minimizes the equalizing role of government. In the second view, self-government is considered superior to property, and the just society places democratic checks on social, political, and economic power. In the dominant vision, the goal is to attain enough success to stand apart from others, not have to worry about them, and perhaps look down on them. In the second vision, a just society reduces the punishments of failure and the rewards of success, subordinating private interest to the common good.

Both of these visions are ideal types, deeply rooted in U.S. American history. Both have limited and conditioned each other in the U.S. experience. But in every generation one of them gains predominance over the other, shaping the terms of debate and possibility, telling the decisive story of its time.

Today an extreme version of the dominant American vision is being asserted very aggressively. The story of our time, in this view, is that a great people is being throttled by a voracious federal government. Americans are over-taxed; government is always the problem; somehow the federal government caused the financial crash; we have a debt crisis because we have too much government; and cutting taxes is always the key to success, never mind if you’re in a recession and/or you’ve cut taxes quite a few times already. The Tea Party Movement won a huge political windfall by claiming that Obama’s mildly Keynesian stimulus of $787 billion was a windfall by claiming that Obama’s mildly Keynesian stimulus of $787 billion was anti-American and Socialist. We were losing 700,000 jobs per month when the Tea Party arose, free-falling straight into a depression, but somehow it was horribly wrong to save the nation from reliving 1933.

The Tea Party is overwhelmingly white, middle-class, and either middle-aged or elderly. It thrives on a deeply felt dichotomy between the deserving and the undeserving. At the grassroots level, much of this movement is not hostile to Social Security or Medicare, unlike the professional ideologues that are exploiting it. Conservative activists are quite certain that they deserve their own Social Security and Medicare. But they are outraged that undeserving people get benefits from the government. They deeply resent that they are losing their racial privileges. In their version of the American dream, there is no such thing as the common good. There is only the sum of individual goods, which many people do not deserve.

The Tea Party, a new phenomenon, rests on resentments and an ideology that are far from new in U.S. American life. But this ideology of predatory capitalism and democracy for the few has no standing whatsoever in the tradition of ecumenical social ethics. Here we begin with the recognition that we owe obligations to each other. There is such a thing as the common good. And when the sum of individual goods is organized only by a capitalist economy, it produces a common bad that destroys personal goods along with society. I have four points to make about that.

1. Americans are not overtaxed. This year the total tax burden reached its lowest point since 1958. In 1999 Americans spent 28 percent of their income on federal, state, and local taxes, which was the usual amount going back to the early 1970s. Today that figure is 23 percent. As a percentage of GDP, American taxation is at its lowest level since 1950, 14.8 percent.

2. This is how we got in debt. If we had stuck with the Clinton tax rates, our national debt today would be minimal or non-existent. Our nation’s debt exploded because during the Bush years we cut the marginal rate and capital gains taxes without paying for either, we established a drug benefit that we didn’t pay for, and we fought two wars that we didn’t pay for. These expenditures doubled the nation’s debt in seven years, and the record keeps mounting, accounting for three-fourths of the new debt that has accumulated during Obama’s presidency. Most of the remaining new debt is cleanup for the financial crash.

Today the wealthiest Americans pay income taxes at Mitt Romney’s rate, 14 percent. Investment managers earning billions per year are allowed to classify their income as carried interest, which is taxed at the same rate as capital gains, 15 percent. Constantly we are told that the investor class would lose its zeal for making money if it had to pay taxes on its actual income or if the capital gains rate were raised. But there is no evidence for this claim. No investor passes on a promising investment because of the tax rate on a potential gain.

A tax system that serves the common good would have additional brackets for the highest incomes, as the U.S. once did. It would have a bracket for $1 million earners and a bracket for $10 million dollar earners and a bracket for $100 million earners and so on. It would lift the cap on the regressive Social Security tax, taxing salaries above $110,000 per year. It is absurd that someone making $1 million per year pays no more into Social Security than someone making $109,000. Reforming Medicare is going to be difficult and complex, because Medicare is a four-sided contraption of political compromises resting on fee-for-service medicine. But Social Security is comparatively simple; we could make it solvent simply by returning to elementary fairness. If you make $500,000 per year, this country has done very well by you. You can afford to contribute more to the country’s social contract with the poor and elderly.

3. A federal budget is a moral document, a point made by the Call to Action issued this week by the Faithful Budget Campaign. Congratulations and thanks to Douglas Grace for directing this outstanding ecumenical campaign. If we scaled back America’s global military empire and reinstated a progressive tax system, we could eliminate the federal debt by 2021 without cutting Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, education, or research.

A morally decent tax and budget plan would tax capital gains as ordinary income. It would cap the benefit on itemized deductions at 28 percent. It would
tax U.S. foreign income as it is earned. It would eliminate the subsidies for oil, gas, and coal companies. It would place a tax on credit default swaps and futures and charge a leverage tax on the megabanks.

Nothing in this proposal is radical, nor all of it put together. We would still be well below European levels of taxation. All of it together merely mildly restores the principle that people should pay taxes on the basis of their ability to do so.

4. Tax rates are not the most important factor contributing to economic growth. Creating a healthy and productive workforce is far more important than the fluctuations in tax rates that we debate in election years. Educating the workforce for 21st century jobs and investing in research and technology are more important. Developing a strong infrastructure and saving for investment are at least as important as tax rates.

Today the economy is sluggish because of weak consumer demand caused by stagnant wages, job uncertainty, and the ongoing ravages of the mortgage disaster. If we opt for muddling through a lost decade, we can savage the public sector unions, as the Cameron government in Britain has done, and we can slash Medicaid and Medicare. The alternative is to renew the country by making massive investments in a clean energy economy. Labor costs, equipment costs, and the cost of capital will never be lower than they are today. The U.S. has under-invested in infrastructure, education, and technology for decades. A national infrastructure bank, once created, would get serious money plowed into infrastructure rebuilding on an ongoing basis.

If we can spend trillions of taxpayer dollars bailing out banks and eating the toxic debts of AIG and Citigroup, we ought to be able to create good public banks at the state and federal levels to do good things. Public banks could finance startups in green technology that are currently languishing and provide financing for cooperatives that traditional banks spurn. They can be financed by an economic stimulus package approved by Congress, or by claiming the good assets of banks seized by the government, or both.

Or they can be established at the state level. Today the only state in the U.S. that isn’t reeling from the credit crunch, North Dakota, is the only state that owns its own bank. North Dakota has its own credit machine, making it less dependent on Wall Street than the rest of the country. Recently, Washington voted to establish a state bank, and currently there are significant movements to establish state banks in Massachusetts, Illinois, Michigan, Virginia, Missouri, New Mexico, and Vermont. If these movements succeed, that will be a huge step in the direction of economic democracy.

Economic democracy is about extending the values and rights of democracy into the economic sphere. It features mixed forms of worker, community, and mutual fund or public bank enterprises. I do not believe that the factors of production trump everything. But I do believe that those who control the terms, amounts, and direction of credit play a huge role in determining the kind of society that everybody lives in.

People work harder and more efficiently when they have a stake in the company, when it’s their company. In Spain, the Mondragon network is spectacularly successful; in the U.S. we have 14,000 firms with worker-ownership plans, and approximately 1,000 are fully worker-controlled. These are building blocks for a movement.

On the way to a serious movement, economic democracy is about building up institutions that do not belong wholly to the capitalist market or the state. It begins by expanding the sector of producer and consumer cooperatives, community land trusts, and community finance corporations. Credit unions play a key role. Credit unions are growing; one of the best things that the Occupy Movement has done is to encourage people to join credit unions.

But merely expanding the cooperative sector is not enough. Cooperatives usually prohibit non-working shareholders, so they attract less outside financing than capitalist firms. They are committed to keeping low-return firms in operation, so they stay in business even when they can’t pay competitive wages. They are committed to particular communities, so they are less mobile than corporate capital and labor. They smack of anti-capitalist bias, so they have trouble getting financing and advice from banks. They maximize net income per worker rather than profits, so they tend to favor capital-intensive investments over job creation.

Most of these problems are virtues, and the problematic aspects can be mitigated with tax incentives. But we also need something bolder and more visionary. We need forms of social ownership that facilitate democratic capital formation, have a greater capacity for scaling up, and are more entrepreneurial. Specifically, we need public banks and mutual funded holding companies in which ownership of productive capital is vested. The companies lend capital to enterprises at market rates of interest and otherwise control the process of investment. Equity shareholders, the state, and/or other cooperatives own the holding companies or public banks.

Mutual fund models contain a built-in system of wage restraints and facilitate new forms of capital formation. They have nothing to do with nationalization, and investors still seek the highest rate of return. This approach does not rest on idealistic notions about human nature; and it does not need a blueprint. I have favorite models to push, but the key thing is to expand the social market in ways that make sense in particular communities.

Most of our traditions in social theory and Christian social ethics have operated with unitary ideas of capitalism and socialism, as though each were only one thing. Economic democracy must be built from the ground up, piece by piece, breaking from the universalizing logic of state socialism, taking seriously that there are different kinds of capitalism. The tests are pragmatic. The U.S. Pacific Northwest has a network of longstanding, highly successful plywood cooperatives. Some plywood workers choose to work in conventional firms instead of the cooperatives. No political economy worth building would force them into a different choice.

But having a real choice is the key to a better alternative. A politics that expanded the cooperative and social ownership sectors would give workers important new choices. The central conceit of neoclassical economics could be turned into a reality if meaningful choices were created. The textbook conceit is that capitalism doesn’t exploit anyone, because labor employs capital as much as capital employs
labor. But in the real world the owners of capital nearly always organize the factors of production. To expand the cooperative and other social market sectors would give choices to workers that neoclassical theory promises, but does not deliver. It would show that there is an alternative to a system that stokes and celebrates greed and consumption to the point of self-destruction.

The earth’s ecosystem cannot sustain a U.S. American-level lifestyle for more than one-sixth of the world’s population. The economy is physical. There are limits to economic growth. Global warming is melting the Arctic ice cap at a shocking pace, as well as large areas of permafrost in Alaska, Canada, and Siberia, and destroying wetlands and forests around the world.

For many years we have needed a social movement to break the Wall Street oligarchy. And now, suddenly, we have one. The organizers of Occupy Wall Street would not have succeeded had they operated like conventional trade unions and social justice groups. They are building a social movement that prizes radical democracy, radical hospitality, and a distinct blend of non-violence and outrage. They are committed to an egalitarian, autonomous, leaderless process. They operate by at least 80 percent consensus, moving as slowly as consensus requires. They have nurtured a powerful sense of community, building a global protest community that is transformative in the lives of those who are joining it.

For the occupiers, it is more important to sustain a spirit of rebellion than to agree on what the government should do about derivatives or tax justice. Occupy Wall Street is not a progressive organization; it is a social movement with a radical democratic ethos. It is raising hell about a system that has turned American society into a pyramid and made a mockery of American democracy. And it is not going away.

Coalitions are forming that were not possible six months ago. In one month this movement spread from Lower Manhattan to more than 900 cities and four continents. The Occupy Movement has clearly stated what it is against. It is against allowing corporate economic power to run the government. It is against predatory banking and foreclosures, bailouts for megabanks, and the perpetuation of inequality and discrimination based on race, sex, age, gender identity, or sexual orientation. It is against monopoly farming and the poisoning of the food supply, the abuse of animals, unsafe working conditions, the outsourcing of labor, the legal status of corporations as persons, lack of health coverage, the erosion of privacy, and the abuse of military and police power.

That should be enough. Meanwhile the movement is getting a very bitter taste of police power. Phase two has come sooner than we wanted, as a consequence of repression. In this phase, churches are already playing a larger role, as supportive communities and as meeting sites. Occupy Faith, the religious wing of Occupy, is organizing local Truth Commissions focusing on home foreclosures and a bus tour that will kick off the Truth Commissions.

There is an important role for religious communities in the Occupy movement—showing up and taking part. There is nothing stopping religious communities from doing so, and many have done so. In New York it is hard to imagine what the Occupy movement would be without Judson Memorial Church, Park Slope Methodist, Trinity Church Wall Street, and a few others. At Union Seminary, 45 students have worked in the movement as protest chaplains. Many religious leaders have been involved in the movement at the sites of occupation. And many occupiers have found themselves doing ministry with the homeless, a ministry that religious communities know a great deal about.

But the larger work of building this movement does not focus on a privileged site of occupation or protest. The occupiers do not identify this movement exclusively with themselves. They want people from various walks of life to occupy their own dwellings, institutions, and groups, asking what it means in these places and associations to struggle for a better system than the one we have.

We need a defiantly progressive movement that breaks the Wall Street oligarchy, scales back America’s global military empire, and rejects the U.S. American obsession with supremacy and dominance. The late Charles Kindleberger, in his major work, *World Economic Primacy, 1500-1990*, described the rise and fall of the great economic powers of the modern world. The chief internal causes of decline that he identified were increased consumption, decreased savings, resistance to taxation, corruption, mounting debt, finance becoming more dominant in the economy than industry, and above all, military overreach. When Kindleberger wrote in 1996, he was not sure whether the U.S. had entered the downward path. But his book reads like a forecast of the past decade.

Forty years ago, Senator William Fulbright warned that the U.S. was well on its way to becoming an empire that exercised power for its own sake, projected to the limit of its capacity and beyond, filling every vacuum and extending U.S. force to the farthest reaches of the earth. As the power grows, he warned, it becomes an end in itself, separated from its initial motives (all the while denying it), governed by its own mystique, projecting power merely because we have it.

That is what happened in our time, and for those of us who belong to a faith tradition, having a religious faith keeps us in the struggle against empire and for social justice. In Hebrew and Christian scripture, the test of ethical action is how it affects the struggles of oppressed and excluded people.

Christianity is not relevant in the sense of teaching a theory of politics or economics. Jesus did not talk about problems of proximate means and ends, calculated consequences, or defending structures of justice. But the teaching of Jesus impels us into struggles for social justice and holds us there, whether or not we succeed. *That* is its relevance. To love God above all things, and your neighbor as yourself, is the motive force of the struggle for the flourishing of life.

Love makes you care, makes you angry, throws you into the struggle, keeps you in it, and helps you face another day. It helps you hold in view the big picture, the Kingdom of God, which is not our production. The kin-dom, or com-mon-wealth, of God is comprehensive and multi-dimensional. It is the heavenly realm, and the divine spirit that enlivens every human soul, and the building of a common-wealth of God on earth, and the eschatological “not yet” that pulls us into the future and toward the end of history. The common-wealth of God is something in
which we have a tiny, partial, wonderful, mostly unheralded, sometimes painful, always grace-filled role to play.

We are not in control. It is not up to us to fulfill God’s will for the world. In drawing closer to God we are thrown into work that allows others to share in the harvest, and that is enough. No one can say if our efforts will make a difference, which is all right. But the biblical imperative to pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desires of the afflicted is utterly certain. After our struggles have ended, it is the ever-gracious God of glory and love who will make something of them. The words are from 2nd Peter: “God’s divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and goodness, that through these we may overcome the violence that is in the world, and become partakers of the divine nature.”

We need new forms of community that arise out of but transcend religious affiliation, culture, and nation. All our traditions have propensities for dogmatism and prejudice that must be uprooted. If those of us who are Caucasian or mostly Caucasian fail to interrogate white supremacism, we will resist any recognition of our own racism. If those of us who are male fail to interrogate our complicity in sexism, we will perpetuate it. If those of us who are Christian fail to repudiate anti-Semitism, Christian supercessionism, and Christian exclusivism, we will perpetuate the evils that come with them. If those of us who are heterosexual fail to stand up for the rights of LGBTQ individuals and communities, we will have an oppressive society. If we swear our highest loyalty to our nation, we will perpetuate U.S. American imperialism. And if we sit out the next election we are going to have a government that privatizes Social Security, replaces Medicare with a voucher, reduces Medicaid to block grants, busts public unions, and gives yet another whopping tax cut to corporations and the wealthy.

A century after the Federal Council of Churches issued the historic Social Creed of the Churches, the National Council of Churches has a new social creed. Chris Iosso and Michael Kinnamon were the driving forces behind it. It calls for “full civil, political and economic rights for women and men of all races.” It demands the “abolition of forced labor, human trafficking, and the exploitation of children.” It supports “employment for all, at a family-sustaining living wage, with equal pay for comparable work.” It stands up for the right of workers to organize, opposes the death penalty, calls for the abatement of hunger and poverty, and endorses universal healthcare, social security, and progressive tax policies. It commends immigration policies that protect family unity and foster international cooperation. It stresses the necessity of adopting simpler lifestyles; living within our means; protecting the earth’s environment; and investing in renewable energy. It supports equitable global trade that protects local economies, and advocates a foreign policy based on international law and multilateral diplomacy. It calls for nuclear disarmament, reductions in military spending, and the abolition of torture. And it calls for cooperation and dialogue among world religions.

It is no easy thing to get our religious communities to stand behind a statement as strong and prophetic as this one. Every line of the new social creed has a story behind it. To hang in there against a national myth that opposes the common good and a financial oligarchy that is the most powerful force in our nation’s life, one has to have a certain stubbornness and moral outrage. But if the stubborn types can build on what Occupy Wall Street has started, we might actually build a better social order.
Why Support the Occupy Movement?

Kathryn Tanner

I would like to provide a new angle on the Occupy Movement from a Christian point of view, specifically from the standpoint of my own work as a Christian theologian. Christians, I believe, should be supportive of the Occupy Movement and not simply for the obvious religious reasons. What are those obvious reasons? Christian concerns about social justice, Christian concerns especially for the poor, for all those disadvantaged and downtrodden, marginalized and harmed by forms of social exclusion and exploitation—such concerns clearly overlap with issues that the Occupy Movement has now brought to the forefront of our national consciousness: economic inequity and the economic plight of the 99 percent woefully underserved by our political and economic system since the financial crisis hit. Christianity and the Occupy Movement are closely aligned on these grounds of shared concern—concerns about injustice and about the economic disadvantage suffered by so many. But more than this, I believe that basic beliefs of Christianity contain an alternative vision of economic life that helps make sense of and pull together coherently the multiple strands of our economic and political predicament targeted for protest by the Occupy Movement—that’s what I want to argue now. I’ll try to show what this alternative Christian vision for our economic lives is, what the multiple concerns of the Occupy protest are, and how that Christian vision of economy brings those multiple strands of protest together.

First let me briefly outline the alternative vision of economy that Christianity provides. One major element of that vision, which I think lies at the very heart of Christian belief, is the idea of a society of mutual benefit, a society in which we all benefit at the same time from the same sources of wealth generation, a society in which we benefit together from wealth produced rather than alone. A society of mutual benefit is not simply a society, then, in which some have a lot and generously redistribute to others less fortunate than themselves some of what they have—in order to equal things out a bit—a society of philanthropic giving. More than this, a society of mutual benefit is one in which it makes no sense to benefit alone without others benefitting too; such a society therefore implies an economy where mechanisms of wealth generation are organized from the start in mutually beneficial ways.

I think a host of very basic Christian beliefs about God’s own life and about how God shares God’s life with the world contain within them this sort of vision of a society of mutual benefit. Let me give a few examples of Christian beliefs that hold up such an alternative vision of economic life.

Within the very life of God—God’s own triune life—as Christians describe it, one finds a mutually beneficial kind of production and circulation of the good. What each person of the trinity has the others have as well; the very same divine life is common to them all. No one member of the trinity can enjoy the good of divine life without the others also partaking in it. The good of divine life is produced within one member of the trinity only as that divine life is circulated to the others and found within them as well. And as the good of the divine life circulates among them that good never leaves any of them; they all continue to have what they provide to others.

In Christian accounts of the incarnation one finds this same sort of vision of community enjoined for the very purpose of ensuring mutual enjoyment of goods by the different parties (so to speak) making up Christ’s person—his divinity and humanity. Without losing what God has, God becomes incarnate in Christ to provide to the humanity of Christ what God continues to enjoy: eternal life, for example. By way of the closest community with one another in the person of Christ, both the humanity and divinity of Christ come to enjoy, to benefit from, the same divine goods, the same divine wealth, one could say, of eternal life. The God incarnate in Christ does not lose divine life by providing it to, producing it within, Christ’s own resurrected and glorified humanity; and the humanity of Christ cannot benefit from divine life alone, without the divinity of Christ, with which it is joined, continuing to enjoy it. To the contrary, this is a community designed from the very start just to produce mutual enjoyment.

And similarly with other human beings’ enjoyment of what God offers to them in Christ. What God gives to one person by way of Christ God can also give to others. This is no zero-sum game; the very life of God can be distributed to all without any one coming to benefit at the expense of another. Indeed, the more that I am saved simply by God’s free grace, the less I have reason to expect to be saved alone; mine becomes a destiny potentially shared with all others, irrespective of any difference in circumstance or in individual merits or demerits that might set us apart. What might lead me to question my own salvation is the limited character of God’s mercy; the more I seem to be saved alone the more reason I have to question the generosity of God upon which I depend for my own salvation.

Now what are the multiple concerns of the Occupy Movement and how does this Christian vision of an economy of mutual benefit help make sense of them, help integrate them, bring them into a coherent picture of the problems we face as a nation? Among those multiple concerns, first of all, is a worry about democracy. The Occupy Movement is tapping into the suspicion that our democracy is not really of the people any more. Our chosen representatives are not working for us; we have little ability to influence policy in our own best interests through them. Democracy needs to be redefined; and that’s what Occupy’s General Assemblies are—an experiment in a genuinely participatory democracy. The little hope that organizers have in the democratic polity we supposedly enjoy is one reason why this, unlike other movements for change, has no clear policy recommendations to make; it is not trying to influence the powers that be, but to empower people to take control of their own lives and come to their own decisions in the very process of constructing new forms of political life together.

A second major concern of the movement is wealth inequality, captured in the now famous slogan “we are the 99%,” the 99% who don’t seem to be benefiting economically from the present system, which favors the wealthiest 1% by way,
for example, of current tax policy. In 1963 the top federal tax rate was 91%; today it is 35%. The tax on long-term capital gains—from selling stock, say—used to be 20%; now it is 15%. Whatever economic growth there has been over the last few decades seems to have gone disproportionately to those at the very top.

And clearly the movement is drawing a connection between wealth inequality and the failure of democracy: we don’t live in a genuine democracy but in an oligarchy of the wealthy. Money buys influence given the current state of campaign finance law, especially after the recent Citizens United Supreme Court decisions, and given the extent of corporate lobbying in Washington.

A third major concern is the new economy of debt and risk management—finance—finance-dominated capitalism, concern about the financial crisis in 2008, about the government response to it and its aftermath, concern, for example, about the continued indebtedness of ordinary Americans, particularly of students forced to finance their educations through huge loans, backed by the government but at interest rates that don’t seem to fully reflect those guarantees and that are therefore higher than need be.

This concern about the financial system is one galvanizing focus for the movement that helps in great part to bring together its other two concerns. Consider the slogan commonly chanted: “banks got bailed out, we got sold out.” “Sold out” suggests we have been betrayed by the very people chosen to represent us. That banks got bailed out and we got sold out makes clear we don’t live in a genuine democracy of the people. And it is also a prime example of the inequalities of a grossly inequitable sort that the movement protests. The slogan is pointing out what easily appears to be an outrageous inequality of treatment on the economic front: some people, little people, most of the people, still have to pay their debts when things go sour (when the housing market collapses and their homes are worth less than their mortgages), while powerful banks, their debts, are immediately “forgiven,” despite the fact that it was their lax and sometimes even predatory lending practices that got us into this mess to begin with.

Now, how does coming at this whole complex of issues from a Christian point of view make a difference? I suggest that a Christian vision of an economy of mutual benefit helps put all these concerns together into a coherent picture, by leading one to ask whether there isn’t some system of wealth production in place here—some underlying form of profit generation—giving rise to the wealth disparities. In light of that Christian economic vision, one should look at wealth inequalities and consider their original causes, the economic system that underlies and produces them to begin with. From the Christian point of view I just laid out it doesn’t make sense to assume too quickly that the problem here is simply a failure to redistribute wealth—through more progressive taxation, say—that the problem here is that the wealthy don’t pay their fair share in taxes. One is prompted by the Christian vision of a society of mutual benefit to ask what is creating the prior wealth disparities to begin with, before taxes come into the picture. In other words, mightn’t there be some fundamental problem with the original system of distribution, some problem with the system of wealth creation (and not simply a problem with the processes for redistributing wealth from the already wealthy to the less well off)?

And here I think the finger can be pointed at finance-dominated capitalism, that third prong of the Occupy protest—for reasons I’ll get to in a moment. Moreover, it’s because the underlying system of profit generation is thereby so skewed, to benefit only a very small portion of the population, that it requires undemocratic trends in politics if it’s to be put in place and held in place. So you now begin to see how everything hangs together!

In order for all this to make sense, one must be clear about the sort of wealth inequalities at issue here. One isn’t primarily talking about income gaps across the whole spectrum, say between the poor and the middle class, or between the educated and not so well educated—but specifically about the gap between the very wealthiest 1%—or even between the richest one tenth of a percent, even the richest one-hundredth of a percent—and everyone else—between the very top and everyone else (including the poor and the middle class, the educated and the uneducated). That’s where the huge gap is—between the very top and everyone else. And it isn’t the income or wealth disparity per se that is the primary issue but income and wealth concentration at the top. The worry isn’t so much—or just—the fact that a CEO makes 400 times, say, what the employees of the company typically make, but that a disproportionate amount of the wealth to go around in that company is concentrated at the top, with everyone else making relatively little or no gains from profits generated. On the question of wealth concentration for the country as a whole, current figures are as high as the richest 1% holding 39-40% of the national wealth and 25% of the national income. Quite an increase from the figures from 2007, before the financial crisis, which showed the top 1% holding 18% of the share of national income in any one year and 25% if counting capital gains from investments and dividends; the richest one in a thousand percent (.1%) holding over 12% of the national income; and the richest one in ten thousand percent (.01%) holding 6% of national income. The cumulative result of all this wealth concentration over the years is that the 1% of the population at the top of the economic pyramid now holds as much wealth as the rest of the population put together (or at least they hold as much as 90% of the rest holds). Whatever the exact figures, the bottom line is that over the last 30 years the income and wealth of everyone else has been holding fairly steady, sometimes even declining, especially after the latest financial crisis, while the income and wealth of the top tier has been ballooning, multiplying several times over. The 99% are being left out, left behind.

A Christian vision of an alternative economy of mutual benefit makes one ask what sort of system for wealth generation this is in which 1% can make enormous wealth while everyone else stays standing in place. Clearly this is a system

1 See Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson, Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—and Turned Its Back on the Middle Class (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), chapter one, for more on the figures and analysis in this paragraph.

for wealth generation that brings with it no impetus to spread the wealth to begin with, through, say, full employment at good wages, across the board.

And what system are we talking about here? I’d say—with the Occupy Movement and its third prong of protest—that it has everything to do with a finance-dominated form of capitalism.

In a finance-dominated form of capitalism, finance is not simply an instrument of production, providing needed loans for investment in equipment or to cover store inventories, for example. This sort of capitalism in which finance does not dominate is dependent for profit generation on increasing demand for goods and services produced. If there is no one with the money to buy those goods and services the whole economy is in trouble—finance included because the money to pay back loans to businesses is generated in the same way—ultimately through the profits generated from selling the goods and services produced by those companies. Just because it is dependent in this way on demand, capitalism, in which finance does not dominate, has an interest in widespread employment at wage levels permitting increased consumption, for all its tendencies to exploit labor wherever possible.

Finance can, however, separate itself from the production process and become a preferred means of profit generation in its own right—what I mean by finance-dominated capitalism. This happens when, for example, speculation on the ups and downs of a currency becomes much more profitable than building and selling anything. Separated in such a fashion, finance’s mechanisms for profit generation are no longer dependent on demand in the same way as before, and the link with widespread, well-paid employment is severed. Especially in financial trading that simply involves bets on the rise or fall in value of some asset or bets on the spread between assets, or financial trading that takes the form of arbitrage—in which money is made off of the inconsistent valuations of the same asset or financial product across different markets (e.g., the difference between what it will cost one to buy dollars in Britain and in Hong Kong)—there is an enormous amount of money to be made in finance even when, overall, economies are in very bad shape, with massive unemployment and high levels of even dire poverty. It doesn’t matter what is going on in the “real” economy; there is as much money to be made in finance as ever.

Moreover, it is not simply that enormous amounts of money can be made by the few while everyone else is left behind and left out. It is quite possible to make money off their dire straits. In short, the exclusion of large numbers of people from economic wellbeing becomes a source of profit in finance-dominated capitalism. The subprime mortgage mess, for example, was aided and abetted by the fact of low-income folks that one could get higher than average mortgage interest rates from. The highest possible interest rate was important—even though it signaled that the risk of default on these loans was higher than average—because one intended to use financial derivatives to repackage the loans for sale to others. What attracted those buyers was the higher than average interest rate and by bundling and selling the mortgages one fobbed the higher risk of default onto them in any case.

A similar effect occurs when the values and practices of finance became dominant in corporate culture, as they have over the past thirty years: profit and the hardship of others become directly linked. All that starts to matter is the quarterly increase in the share price of the stock of one’s company and that number must be jacked up by every means possible—by cutting wages, firing employees, slashing benefits—even when none of that is particularly good for the long-term health of the enterprise. CEOs and other shareholders can cash out from rising stock values that are in this way often directly correlated with the worsening situation of the workforce. The financial finagling of private equity firms can produce similar results: companies are often targeted for hostile takeover when their assets individually are worth more than their stock valuation; money for investors can be made quickly in such a case simply by selling off those companies’ assets, with obviously dire consequences for the health of otherwise profitable businesses and their workforces. Takeovers like this are often financed by borrowing and these debts then appear on the balance sheets of the acquired companies, increasing the companies’ expenses and forcing even further wage, benefit, and workforce cuts, if these companies are to stay in business.

National priorities that favor finance are another case in point—where financial profit seems to be based on, even to require the worsening condition of the real economy. The economic circumstances that help maintain the value of loans—say, low inflation and high interest rates—are often the very things that depress economic growth. Similarly, economic measures that make it more likely that a country will be able to pay back its creditors are not conducive to economic growth. If countries in debt to foreign creditors are going to be able to pay back those loans, these countries need to amass foreign reserves—say, by buying up US treasuries that pay low interest even when that money might be better used on investment in their own countries. Or these countries must increase their ratio of exports to imports to raise foreign reserves even when that means depressing their domestic economies and decreasing thereby the spending power of their own populations in order to do so. The international financial community has often tried to keep countries from devaluing their currencies to make their exports more attractive even though export-driven growth might be the only way for these countries to stimulate their economies—because devaluing their currencies raises the chance of default on foreign loans. Even when countries aren’t in debt to foreign creditors, governments more worried about having the money to pay back their creditors than being able to spur growth will slash budgets and raise taxes; such austerity measures are simply a recipe for worsening recession. A scenario like this has been playing out in Europe for some time now.

Finally, financial derivatives are typically ways of making money off of volatility in asset prices—they are often just forms of betting on these ups and downs of the stock market. And volatility of all these sorts can be directly correlated with economic distress on the part of companies and working people. It’s very hard to do business, for example, when commodity prices and currency values across all
the markets one’s company does business in are swinging wildly from day to day—any of those swings can spell ruin. No one with a private retirement plan needs to be reminded about the hardships that stock market swings can portend. And the difficulties that fluctuations in oil and food prices represent for whole populations are equally obvious. But without volatility of these sorts there is simply no money to be made in financial derivatives—indeed, the bigger the swings the better—since derivatives often just involve betting on those swings.

One might argue, to the contrary, that derivatives are designed to help people cope with these swings. Derivatives provide companies, for example, with ways of hedging against the hardships that volatility can bring. If an airline is afraid that the price of jet fuel will go up, that airline can contract for the option of buying jet fuel at a certain price in future; if that target price proves wrong and the price of jet fuel when the time rolls around is lower, one can simply not exercise the option and one will have lost only what one paid for the contract. Or one might argue that derivatives help bring volatility down, for example by signaling to market participants what those investing in derivatives think an asset it likely to be worth in future. But there is plenty of evidence to suggest that derivatives, rather than deflating the costs of volatility or bringing volatility down, serve instead to foment the very volatility they promise to protect market participants from, and eventually in so doing, produce some of the wildest swings—from boom to complete bust. The derivatives that repackaged mortgages worked in that way, with that result. The market for those derivatives helped propel the mortgage market for risky loans; and that easy credit to even high-risk borrowers helped inflate housing prices—anybody could get a house, demand surged—which prompted more people to build houses and more people to refinance and take out bigger second mortgages and get further into debt. And then the whole thing collapsed when the rising price of housing became more than people could afford and the glut of new houses on the market eventually surpassed demand. Kaboom! More simply, betting on the decline (or upswing in value) of some asset—when a lot of people follow your lead and do the very same thing, as typically happens in financial markets—produces the very decline (or upswing) predicted and much more of one than would otherwise be justified by the underlying problem with the asset (or favorable news about it) that got anyone to bet that way to begin with.

Now if this is the sort of economy we have, one that works to the disadvantage of the majority of the people, one has got to be worried about democracy. Wealthy interests benefiting from such an economic system would have every reason to use their money to take control of the reins of democratic government; and, once they gain that control, to use the powers of government to squelch dissent and the potential social unrest that an economic system like this could very well help to instigate. In short, wealthy interests would have every reason, if given the chance, to push democracy in highly undemocratic directions.

One might indeed be led to ask an even more fundamental question: if an economic system dominated by finance is not good for so many people how could it have been set up and how could it continue to be sustained in a democracy? And the easy answer is that this is all happening because we don’t live in a very genuine or vibrant democracy. An economic system like this that disadvantages so many people could not be helped into place by government action and inaction—for example, by Congress’ repeal of Glass-Steagall (which separated commercial from investment banking) or by Congress’ passing of the Commodity Futures Modernization Act in 2000 which for all intents and purposes prohibited regulation of derivatives—and such a system couldn’t be kept in place, if our political system really were in the business of serving the will of the people. Calls of distress by the vast majority of the people are not being heeded in Washington, while the demands of those with money are being heard loud and clear—their money is obviously not just concentrating wealth but concentrating political power. The public and the media are distracted by elections and can’t seem to focus on policy debates once the elections are over; there is so much obfuscation out there about what’s at the root of our economic problems—too much regulation, not enough—and very little lively, and informed public discussion of the issues, which anyone pays any attention to, when policy is being made in Washington. And that’s the beauty of the Occupy Movement. It has helped open people’s eyes, gotten them to wake up. It has changed the national conversation in ways that might enliven our public discourse and help move our democracy in more genuinely and broadly participatory directions.

So there you have it: my perspective on the concerns of the Occupy Movement, and what they have to do with one another, from a Christian standpoint. This is how I make sense of the movement as a theologian; this is the sort of contribution I’d like to make to the discussion from a Christian theological vantage point. And I hope this has all made some sense to you!
The most famous elevator ride in the history of critical theory took place in downtown Los Angeles, when Fredric Jameson was dropped into the lobby of the Bonaventure Hotel. He writes of his inability to form a cognitive map of the journey he has made, the impossibility of gaining a sense of perspective in the hyperranean world unto itself, complete with a lake, restaurants, bars, and shops, all of them surrounded by four symmetrical vertical towers that contain the actual hotel rooms. The space exerts a vengeance upon the casual pedestrian, Jameson writes, them surrounded by four symmetrical vertical towers that contain the actual hotel rooms. The space exerts a vengeance upon the casual pedestrian, Jameson writes, for it is impossible to find one’s way around, to the point that old-fashioned arrows and signs needed to be installed to help potential customers locate the retail areas.1

The Bonaventure was built in 1977, and its visual and spatial strategies have become ubiquitous and almost unremarkable, such that Jameson’s sense of disorientation during his visit in the 1980’s now seems a little quaint. Every time a traveler enters an airport or a consumer strolls through a mega-mall, every time vacationers enter a casino or professionals hustle through the warrens of a convention center, similar effects take place. Dislocation becomes palpable, visceral, and it becomes nearly impossible to map where one’s body actually is with any accuracy. It’s true, one can learn to orient oneself within a specific hotel, mall, or airport, using whatever visual cues have been provided. But spend enough time in those spaces and a bit of vertigo sets in. Like Fredric Jameson, the shoppers, the gamblers, the convention-goers, and the business travelers all find themselves wondering from time to time where exactly on the surface of the globe they actually are.

The architect Rem Koolhaas offers an answer. The shoppers and travelers, convention goers and gamblers, have landed in Junkspace. If space junk is the debris strewn throughout the atmosphere, says Koolhaas, then Junkspace is the debris of our built environments, the debris of modernity itself scattered across the globe.2 It’s the sort of space that promotes disorientation by any means, whether through mirrors, echoes, ornaments, labyrinthine passageways, lighting effects or even, perhaps, in the complete absence of all sensation. Perspective disappears. Geography disappears. Walls become screens, helping to channel a ceaseless flow of human traffic. Most importantly, the borders and outermost limits of this interior space are impossible to discern—one room leads to another and then another, spilling into infinity, like the malevolent and very creepy house in Mark Danielewski’s novel House of Leaves. Similarly, the boundaries between inside and outside become blurred through the use of glass and landscape design, not unlike Frank Gehry’s Santa Monica house, where interior and exterior are seamlessly blended. For Koolhaas, Junkspace is literally a no-place, one that cannot be grasped, following no decipherable rules. He writes that it’s beyond measure, beyond any kind of coding, and thus, it cannot be remembered.3 It’s infinitely malleable, ceaselessly being reconstructed and reconfigured for new uses. “Pardon our appearance” signs become an almost decorative device in Junkspace. And so it takes on a nearly apophatic quality, defying theoretical categorization. Koolhaas’ text itself becomes a kind of Junkspace, a literary performance of the perceived effects of spatial disorientation, without a discernable beginning or end. To read Junkspace is to become a little lost, to sense Junkspace gazing back upon you, the reader.

Though Koolhaas refuses specificity, we can try to hone in on an understanding of Junkspace by asking what it is, and conversely, what it is not. For example, why is the Mall of America Junkspace, while something like Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello is not? Why are all the suburban McMansions with “For Sale” signs staked into the front lawns Junkspace, while Heidegger’s stable stone farmhouse in “Being, Dwelling, Thinking” escapes that logic? Borrowing from Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” we might say that Junkspaces are spaces of capital, in which place has been stripped of its aura. By aura, Benjamin means the unique and singular conditions that allow for the emergence of a specific piece of art, that which gives it its self-sufficient and self-referential character.4 With the advent of mechanical reproduction, that specific aura is lost, so that van Gogh’s “Café on a Starry Night,” say, can be detached from the conditions of its origin, copied, and thereafter distributed to every IKEA in the world. So it is with Junkspace—these are spaces that can be mass-produced

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3 Ibid., 409.
and manufactured ad infinitum, detached from any notion of place, locale, or region, extended across the surface of the globe in a repeating series of nearly identical spatial effects. To paraphrase Karsten Harries, a philosopher who has devoted his energy to theories of space, Junktspase represents the inability in this cultural moment to wrest place out of space. 5

The art historian John Berger argues that now more than ever, it is space that hides consequences from us, implying the need to read our geographies and built environments with a critical, prophetic eye. 6 So what might be hiding behind the neon glow of Junktspase? Is it possible to gain a little perspective within its disorienting confines? Where did it come from? What do these gargantuan interiors, which seem to possess no limits, no beginnings, and no endings, signify in our era of globalization? What might these corporate and political megastructures tell us about the very real political borders that determine the lives of immigrants and workers as they struggle to compete amidst the pressures of a global economy? What might these hyperspaces say about those of us who find ourselves perversely fascinated by Junktspase, alternately seduced and repelled by its garish invitations, especially those of us who spend our days thinking about religion? Could Junktspase be construed as a religious phenomenon?

My argument is that Junktspases comprise a spatial ideology of disorientation by any means, which carries with it specific political effects. It is an ideology that promotes the illusion of a borderless and porous existence, where bodies and goods move in unhindered flows, even as actual borders are constructed and policed, from Iraq's Green Zone to the string of fences along the US/Mexican border, from the wall dividing Israel and Palestine to the all but invisible lines dividing slums from high rent districts in North American urban zones. Junktspase is the visual and spatial effect of global capital run haywire. It's no accident, after all, that when Homi Bhabha reads Jameson's description of the Bonaventure in *The Location of Culture*, he interprets the elevator ride as a postmodern update to shooting the rapids of the Congo River in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where the elevator deposits its riders into the unmappable and unrepresentable terrain of financial flows. 7 Instead of producing a reaction of horror, however, Junktspase offers alternating senses of pleasure, comfort, and exhaustion—how else to explain the modular seating arrangements that line Junktspases, rows of couches and chairs for the weary, with nearby assemblies of caffeine and calories? 8 For those like Jameson and Bhabha, Junktspase becomes the architectural and spatial literalization of the body's inability to map the mystifying traffic and flow of global capital, its products, and the people needed to produce those products. As such, the sense of dislocation and ennui in Junktspases like malls and airports is inversely linked to the spatial controls exerted on populations in other parts of the globe or the city that remain largely invisible in Junktspase, those who are simultaneously hemmed in but dislocated, homeless within a tightly contained sphere of movement. Junktspases create the illusion of infinite space and freedom, even as the possibilities of movement within other spheres become tightly circumscribed and finite.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have noted this phenomenon in the rise of “fortress architecture” in cities like Los Angeles, Sao Paulo, and Singapore. Even as the gulf between the wealthy and the poor has increased under the regime of neoliberalism, the physical space separating the rich and the poor has contracted. On Hardt and Negri’s telling, private homes, commercial centers, and government buildings “create open and free environments internally by creating a closed and impenetrable exterior.” That leads them to pronounce the end of an outside altogether, which is to say, the end of a free and unregulated public space. 9 So the logic of fences and detention centers and the logic of Junktspases like hotels and airports are conceptual doubles—even as Junktspase provides this illusion of freedom, that movement is channeled in certain predetermined directions, such that visions of spaces in which humans are suffering the very real effects of uneven geographical development are unseen, unnoticed, or forgotten.

II

If Jameson’s elevator ride into the Junktspase of the Bonaventure updates the colonial experience articulated by Conrad, then Koolhaas’s essay “Junktspase” might be read as the postmodern appendix to another of Walter Benjamin’s works, this one *The Arcades Project*, the text that will structure the remainder of this essay. Benjamin’s book is a massive and fragmentary set of notes on the development of nineteenth century capitalism, viewed through the lens of the Parisian arcades, the long urban passageways roofed in glass and iron that serve as the prototype to the modern shopping mall, and thus as the prototype to the forms of Junktspase that Koolhaas describes. Here is a fragment that Benjamin includes from an 1856 travel guide published in Germany on the Parisian arcades:

> “These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass roofed, marble paneled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of these corridors, which get their light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the arcade is a city, a world in miniature” 10

Benjamin is interested in the detritus of material culture, what has been cast off as no longer valuable, and he seeks to read that detritus in a way that will

8 Koolhaas, 411.
reveal its forgotten promises, its earlier utopian energies. For him, the Parisian arcades become the central motif for what has been discarded, forgotten, and perhaps repressed by the twentieth century, and he discerns in them a secret history that proves illuminating for an understanding of the present.

Drawing from the toolbox of psychoanalysis, Benjamin reads material culture, and particularly the arcades, as a structure of the unconscious, noting the way their interior spaces served as the stimulus to intoxication and reverie. One fragment reads: “Arcades: houses, passages, having no outside. Like the dream.”11 For Benjamin, the threshold of an arcade, like that of bourgeois houses in the nineteenth century, constituted the border between waking life and a dream, between the conscious and the unconscious. Beyond that threshold one could stroll amidst the vast array of consumer goods and theatrical spectacles that continually unfold, participating in “the wish-images of the collective,” as he terms it.12 This collective dream state implies for Benjamin that those participating in it know no history. Events pass before those participants as always identical and always new, he says, like the circular motions of a roulette wheel, like the lever on a slot machine. Every moment of existence is tinged with both amnesia and the old eschatological expectation of all things made new.

With regard to the commodity images themselves, Benjamin borrows from Marx’s famous analysis of commodity fetishism. As with mechanically reproduced works of art, Benjamin describes the way that the consumer objects within the arcades detach themselves from their origins within human production, thereafter becoming irrational objects of worship. He writes that, “the property appertaining to the commodity as its fetish character attaches as well to the commodity producing society, not as it is in itself…but more as it represents itself and thinks to understand itself.”13 So the arcades are a dream work with latent religious energies, thus challenging the familiar dogmas about the rationalization and secularization of industrial society. If Christianity is replaced in the dream world of the arcades, it happens not through secularization but rather by being overwhelmed by new objects of worship, shiny and attractive household deities: commodity items for sale in this spectacular dreamscape.

Importantly, however, Benjamin also notes the utopian character of the arcades, including their womb-like enclosure, their offer of protection from the harsher realities lying beyond their walls, and their use of new technologies to produce an idealized social vision. If the streets of nineteenth century Paris exemplified all the messy complexities of urban existence, the arcades presented a picture of what might be, a seemingly idyllic arrangement of people and goods that, as the travel guide says, becomes “a world in miniature.”14 It’s no accident, then, that Benjamin includes a sheaf of materials on the social visionary Charles Fourier, who described his utopian community (which he termed a Phalanx) in terms strikingly reminiscent of the arcades:

“The street-galleries are a mode of internal communication which would alone be sufficient to inspire disdain for the great palaces and great cities of civilization…The Phalanx has no outside streets or open roadways exposed to the elements. Everything is linked by a series of passageways which are sheltered, elegant, and comfortable in winter thanks to the help of heaters and ventilators.”15

So Benjamin renders the arcades in dialectical terms, suggesting a vision of human beings trapped in an unending, disorienting dreamscape that ensnares them in the half-life of slumber and illusion, and yet also engaged in a collective yearning for a utopian restructuring of social relations, the “imaginative anticipation of a new world,” as Marx put it in a letter concerning Fourier.16

Most salient for this essay, however, is the way in which Benjamin traces the dialectic of this imaginative dreamspace to an earlier architectural vision, namely, the medieval cathedral. Benjamin describes the way the architectural design of the cathedral is transposed onto the space of the arcades, creating a quasi-sacred space where one can become lost in a vast, labyrinthine interior of reverie. The cathedral nave becomes the vaulted corridor of the arcade, in which the Parisian flâneur, the inverted figure of the medieval pilgrim, might aimlessly wander, admiring the array of goods displayed within the private chapels of the arcade, which have been transformed into shops. Like the flâneur, other medieval characters or types who once might have inhabited the cathedral spaces are now transposed within the newer space of the arcade, though, again, in an inverted fashion: the saint is replaced by the gambler, who seeks moments of transcendence, flashes of the eternal, in each role of the dice or shuffle of the deck. Similarly, the hospitality offered by those who had taken religious vows is replaced by the figure of the prostitute, who offers an altogether different form of hospitality, this one calibrated not to the Rule of St. Benedict but to the laws of commodity fetishism. Cathedral spaces call for a certain performance of character, which is born out in the arcades by means of inversion and doubling of earlier types and character forms.

But beyond these literal analogies, Benjamin hints that the arcades mimic the ways in which cathedral spaces actively work to produce a kind of disorientation in those who enter the cathedral portal. When one passes through those cathedral doors, after all, one slips into a different imaginative world, one that renders the lived existence at the edge of those doors unsteady and unstable. Moving inside the cathedral itself, it is a radically altered spatiality, existing at the border between the transcendent and the immanent. The soaring stained glass windows are a thin and translucent threshold between the ceiling and the sky, almost literally between architecture and the heavens. Images of the saints and of biblical

11 Ibid., 839.
12 Ibid., 905.
13 Ibid., 669.
14 Ibid., 31.
15 Ibid., 44-45.
16 Ibid., 637.
scenes are displayed on those windows, creating the impression that the membrane separating the temporal from the eternal is very thin indeed. Cathedral spaces thus work to eliminate certain boundaries, to cultivate a kind of disorientation in the faithful, thus producing a dazzling theological effect in which human beings can’t say where they are any longer, heaven or earth, here or there. When the twelfth century writer Abbot Suger describes the visual effects of what is widely regarded as the first Gothic cathedral, located in St. Denis, a Parisian suburb, he writes that his cathedral exists as a space of transport. Using the language of Neoplatonism, he writes:

“When out of my delight in the house of God, the loveliness of the many colored gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect…on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling in a strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be transported from the inferior to that higher world.”

So the cathedral exists as a space of imaginative disorientation, the staging ground for launching one's mind into a new kind of dwelling, a strange and unanticipated region of the universe, which is not quite heaven and not quite earth. As such, the cathedral can be read as a liminal space where the dreams and desires of those fixed by the tight confines of various earthly realities can engage in a kind of utopian flight.

Importantly, however, I would argue that this utopian flight is structured by the cruciform pattern in which the cathedral is laid out, so that to enter its space is literally to have oneself immersed in the world of the cross, arguably the detritus of an earlier cultural moment that has been ironically reframed by centuries of theological and piety. What had been disposed of as refuse is recast as a moment that masks the appearance of the eternal in temporal form. To state it provocatively, to enter the space of the cathedral is to enter a world of camp, where what had once been judged an aesthetic failure is taken up again and given new life by placing it within a different context. Indeed, the cruciform nature of the cathedral's outline suggests a spatial pedagogy in which human beings themselves are summoned into this camped up world, such as those who had once been cast off as refuse within one form of existence are placed within a new set of social relations, revalued, and thus given a new kind of life. To pick up an earlier refrain, the ironic and camped identities summoned forth by cathedral spaces lead to the performance of certain roles, which itself becomes a moment of profound dislocation.

Put impiously, what if cathedrals were a kind of Junkspace from an earlier era, working on one hand to unsettle and unmoor the rigid social and built spaces of religious adherents in a utopian way, even as it reinforced the social control of various political and ecclesial powers—recall that it is the sight of gems and other forms of wealth that transport the viewer in Abbot Suger’s cathedral? There are important differences here, to be sure, but Benjamin’s tapestry of fragments on the Parian arcades hints that a certain spatial logic flows from the medieval cathedral to the arcade. Versions of that same logic flow into Rem Koolhaas' Junkspaces, forms of which are on display throughout North America and Europe, to say nothing of the new global cities of Asia.

III

So what is to be done? Can Junkspace be resisted? Subverted? How totalizing is its power? Where might slippages in that power begin to expose themselves? Benjamin’s Arcades and Koolhaas’ essay provide subtle but important clues in this regard. Both of them remain silent about ethical prescriptions, solutions or strategies of resistance. Benjamin seems dubious that one could wake up from the dream world at all—how precisely would that work? What would waking life be? Wouldn’t that imply a still deeper repression of the unconscious, trying to fully eliminate its effects in favor of cold, rational analysis? So too, at the most literal level, Koolhaas remains aloof about how or if one can escape the effects of Junkspace. Still, both writers maintain an acute ethical edge, which shows itself precisely in the form of their writing. The Arcades Project and the essay “Junkspace” are concentrated literary attempts to attend to the effects of certain spaces on concrete human lives, noticing and observing in minute detail how those effects become explicit, thus exposing their absurdity and frightfulness. As such, both works are attempts to fracture one’s frame of vision within the arcades or within Junkspaces, such that the force and power of those spaces is refracted in different directions. So waking up from the dream world is exactly the wrong metaphor to draw upon. If anything, both thinkers want to shift the direction of the dream itself, to unleash some of the utopian energies at work in Junkspaces, precisely by bringing to the fore their nightmare qualities. For both of these writers, that move seems to be born of the realization that Junkspace and the practices it engenders won’t simply disappear, not anytime soon.

Fracturing the frame of spatial vision would open the possibility that Junkspaces could be wrested back from the powers of capital, put to different, more liberative uses. That’s quite literally what Guy Debord and the Situationists attempted to do in Paris in the 1960’s, fracturing the frame of vision in the marketplace Les Halles, say, by using that space to throw their bodies in directions and manners that the original commercial purposes of the building couldn’t anticipate or control.18 It’s that same energy that propels practitioners of Parkour through Junkspaces like abandoned warehouses and factories, resisting the carceral confines of those buildings by gymnastically propelling themselves in directions that could never be programmed or mapped. So too, skate boarding, urban spelunking, and

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all-night techno raves in abandoned warehouses, factories, and parking lots disrupt the flow of production and consumption, altering the ways commercial or urban spaces are inhabited.

I think these examples might function as parables for the kinds of responses to Junkspace that theologians, clergy, and other religious folk might consider. Liturgical practices and ritual performances contain a profound utopian power, capable of shifting and dislocating our spatial awareness, fracturing the frame of spaces of capital, as it were, such that it becomes possible to take note of real borders and real border crossings by immigrants, workers, refugees, and the like. To cite one example, the Eucharist table is a semi-bounded space that literally marks the edges of material substance and empty air. And yet at best, the table functions as a social space that contains no borders or boundaries, one that draws participants into a single shared space, an imagined utopia in which the all too real borders of nation, class, gender and race might easily melt away. Those social borders are eliminated as participants are joined with one another across space and time in a ritual of bodily nourishment. Within the symbolic space of the Eucharist table, those spatial and temporal boundaries are lifted in an act of transgressive consumption. In short, I do not want to underestimate the prophetic possibilities inherent in well-executed and imaginative liturgical moments, especially given the sheer number of people around the globe who undergo those practices on a regular basis. This use of liturgy and ritual would be put to use not to return nostalgically to an earlier worldview, where human beings were placed within a stable and fixed order of the world, but in order to throw into relief the sorts of spatial issues that dominate the present.

These insights also highlight the latent religious desires and dream energies at work in Junkspace itself. So many Junkspaces are intensely controlled realms of imagination and longing, realms in which wild flights of spatial fantasy are permitted and encouraged, even as that desire is channeled into predetermined directions. The question becomes how this regimented imagination can be set free, such that productive flights of genuine utopian and theological fancy can begin to occur. I would suggest that theologians and religious thinkers (and here I admit my limitations, for it is Jewish and Christian imagery that I know best) are well situated to stimulate that awareness and action, given the profound spatial imagery at work in the biblical texts: I think here of Eden, Babel, the consequent scattering of the nations, the Exodus, Sinai, Exile, Babylon, Temple, Jerusalem, a cattle shed, Golgotha, the Heavenly City, and on and on. These themes have been largely occluded and rendered invisible, not only because of the temporal dimension of prophetic utterances, but also because of the temporal obsessions of Western philosophy and theology as a whole. If John Berger is right, that in our time it is space that hides consequences from us, perhaps it is time for theologians, clergy, and other religious leaders to announce not “A time is to come” but “A space is to come.” The sheer power of degenerate utopias like the Bonaventure Hotel or any other form of Junkspace makes clear the overwhelming desire for alternatives to the fraught and over-policed global spaces we so often encounter in our built environments. In short, there are tremendous resources within the traditions and texts of theology to begin reimagining and reconfiguring the built environments of early 21st century life.

But we’ll need a new performative identity to accompany this task, a prophetic counterpart to the pilgrim, the flaneur, the saint, the gambler and the prostitute. The one I would suggest comes from David Harvey’s book *Spaces of Hope*: the insurgent architect. This is a role that has less to do with degrees from accredited schools of architecture than an ability to read and critique the spatial formations of a globalized economy. On Harvey’s telling, the insurgent architect is a realistic dreamer, always firmly embedded within the concrete conditions of existence, while at the same time having a foot planted in an imagined alternative. Moreover, this person recognizes him or herself as having an array of capacities that can be placed in relationship with other individuals and skill sets in different operational theaters, all of which can form a “long frontier” of political and cultural insurgency. So while the insurgent architect might very well be a builder or planner, along the lines of Walter Gropius or Bruno Taut, he or she might equally be found among novelists and journalists, in city halls, among labor organizers, in artists’ collectives, in university classrooms, and in the boardrooms of various corporations and organizations (though that stretches the imagination!). Most importantly, a privileged site for the work of insurgent architects would be religious institutions such as churches, synagogues and mosques, which play such a fundamental role in shaping the most basic dreams and desires within human life. There are few positions of public leadership that are better equipped than that of the pastor, priest, rabbi, or imam for both a radical and prophetic realism about prevailing social conditions on one hand, and the deployment of alternative and even utopian desires for a more equitable and just future on the other hand.

And what of that older character, the theologian, laboring among dusty volumes in university and seminary libraries? The theologian is the insurgent architect par excellence, for theology is by its very nature involved in the shaping of human desires and passions, for God, for the future, for the beloved community, for reconciliation, for justice, for hospitality. For all the rational calculations involved in the production of theological writing, texts like *City of God* and the *Summa Theologica*, the *Church Dogmatics* and the *Foundations of Christian Faith*, *A Black Theology of Liberation* and *Sisters in the Wilderness* can be understood as dream works, literary productions that both emerge from and alter the human unconscious. At their best, such works have the capacity to teach beneath the surface of conscious knowing and volition, operating at a level of the mind where so many of the dreams, desires, and fears of human life are lodged. The theologian at work is involved in the creation of a public imagination, one that is necessarily situated along the long frontier of political insurgency that Harvey describes. Theology exists as one of the many theaters of collective struggle in our globalized world. The theologian, then, is one among many insurgent architects, working in tandem with other like-minded architects to imagine alternative global spaces and an alternative

20  Ibid., 234.
global fate than that envisaged by neoliberal economic policies. To inhabit the role of such a character might harness the imaginative energies already at work in Junkspaces to produce genuine critical consciousness and action around the border issues that are so pressing in our anxious era.
In this article I would like to articulate the role of Stoic philosophy as a possible underlying philosophical framework that supported the so called ‘Neo-Arian’ theology represented by Aetius and Eunomius, the fourth century protagonists of the Arian movement. This movement can be thought of as a result of self-reassessment and regrouping of Arianism in the second half of the fourth century C.E. This time was marked by the Trinitarian debate reaching the state of philosophical subtlety as a number of great rhetoricians joined the controversy. As of today we know a lot about the historical course of events of the controversy and of its major protagonists. However, the very nature of their reasoning is still unclear due to the general lack of knowledge about the competing philosophical paradigms of the time. That is why it is no surprise that contemporary scholarship is quite uncertain about the philosophical roots of the controversy and about the nature of reasoning used during the clash between two competing views on the inner life of the trinity and the relationship between its hypostases. To overcome such uncertainty an appeal is made to the arguments made by the adversaries of Aetius and Eunomius and to the classifications that come out of their circles. Thus many scholars out of anxiety naturally retire to the safe resort of the ancients to make sense of a highly eclectic philosophical theology of Neo-Arians.

The popular textbook evaluation of the movement attributes the philosophical roots of Neo-Arianism to Aristotelian philosophy. Some highly respected monographs follow the same line of evaluation. Though this attribution is not completely invalid, it is quite clear as of today that it is outdated and needs scholarly re-assessment. Among the reasons for such a state of affairs are the following: a complete reliance on certain arguments made by the Cappadocian Fathers (namely, Basil the Great, Gregory Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa) and the church historians of the time (Socrates) who classified Neo-Arians as Aristotelians.

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1 This term coined in the twentieth century is in a sense artificial and introduced for the purposes of creating a new taxonomy capable of distinguishing various doctrinal differences that classify early and late Arianism.

2 For example, R.P.C. Hanson in his monumental *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* suggested that “…Aetius meets them [his adversaries] to this extent upon their own ground with acuteness, learning and a great display of basically Aristotelian logic.” It is thus no surprise that Hanson immediately retires to St. Basil who “as a deacon retreated before the formidable machine of Aetius’ logic”. 2005. p. 610. This comment immediately indicates the source of Hanson’s suggestion. More p.85
using a particular rhetorical trope to persuade the audience that the metaphysical and thus non-scriptural nature of arguments made by Aetius and Eunomius diverge from the mainstream Christianity of the fourth entury as being over-Hellenized and therefore loses its connection with Christian piety. By the fourth century Aristotelian philosophy was considered to be the most sophisticated and, in a sense, arcane system of thought, perfectly representing Hellenism which was perceived with a high level of suspicion by many Christians. Not many theologians were willing to subscribe to it at the time. This rhetorical trope thus should not be taken for granted.3

Another argument in defense of the attribution of Neo-Arians to Aristotelian philosophy is associated with the use of so called Aristotelian syllogistic reasoning in the Syntagmation of Aetius. This is just another example of the total reliance of contemporary scholars on judgments that came from the adversaries of Aetius to persuade the audience that the untenable premises of Aetius’ arguments necessarily lead to invalid conclusions as the nature of Christian faith cannot be deduced from a few simple premises. Thus, this attribution should not be taken for granted either, but rather should be carefully studied and historically substantiated. It is this lack of historical substantiation of the philosophical roots of the movement that make it quite incomprehensible for students of church history. How can it be otherwise if a student is not able to find any traces of the Aristotelian syllogistic reasoning in the Syntagmation? This was precisely my impression when I read it the first time.

Now, the key points articulated by Aetius in his Syntagmation were the following: The unbegotten or ingenerate ousia (for now I will defer translating the term ousia is essentially different from the begotten ousia and thus cannot be placed in line with it. Thus, the unbegotten God retains a higher rank in the schema of ta onta (beings). It produces or begets the only begotten God who, in turn, begets God the Spirit. Thus, there is a subordination between these three deities who represent three different types of ousiai and thus differ in essence from each other and from all other things that came into being through the creative activity of God the Son and God the Spirit.

It should be noted here that there was a significant terminological confusion over the notion of begotten or generated. There are three kinds of things that might be translated as begotten that should be taken into account in the context of the polemic: gegnesenta, genesenta, poiesenta (genoma, geugma, poiemaktisma). Thus, the thing that is begotten in a sense of natural transmission of qualities of the species of living beings is juxtaposed to things that come into being and seize to exist, and that are made out of the will of the maker (which normally refers to the products of imitative arts and crafts). The etymology of the first type is biological, so to say. The second type is physical, and the third type artistic. The Neo-Arians used the terms interchangeably and did not discriminate between meanings which gave a good reason to the Cappadocians to say that the unbegotten ousia of the Father can be legitimately compared to the ousia of the stone, as both are unbegotten (agegeneto) in the first sense of begotenness, and that the unbegotten ousia of the Son is the same as that of the Father due to its nature as, using the Aristotelian philosophical jargon, essential universal being (say, the form of divinity), and as the being of the Father (following the Aristotelian schema—non-accidental particular being) and of the Son (another non-accidental particular being) both indicate a natural relation to the same type of universal being under which they both fall, or which they both manifest. Based on the argument just reviewed one might immediately notice the use of Aristotelian philosophy by the Cappadocians. Thus I would like to suggest Basil’s Contra Eunomium is more indebted to Aristotle than both the Syntagmation of Aetius and the First Apology of Eunomius.

Now it seems to me that the nature of reasoning found in the Syntagmation and the conceptual content of the notion of ousia used in this collection of propositions are the key points that can open the door to discernibility of the subject at stake (namely, the philosophical roots of the Neo-Arian movement). Here I will explore those roots and will argue for their particular originative source which I will attribute to the popular Stoic philosophy of the time that could be found in logical manuals designed to provide a brief excuse to Zeno’ and Chrysippus’ philosophy. It is interesting to note that only a few scholars have indicated the connection between the Syntagmation and the Apologies of Eunomius and the Stoic philosophical heritage. For instance Richard Norris’ and David Robertson, among others, can be credited for uncovering this important link (though they were able to point out the link but did not provide an explanation for such a connection).

In the mid twentieth century Harry A. Wolfson in his essay “The Philosophical Implications of Arianism and Apollinarianism” pointed out:

Patristic opponents of Arianism as well as Patristic Church historians and heresiographers trace the Arian heresy to Aristotle. Thus Aristotle is mentioned as the source of the teaching of the various Arians by Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Socrates Scholasticus, and Epiphanius. But when we study the passages in which Aristotle is mentioned as the source of this heresy, we are surprised to discover that the reference is not to any particular theory with which the name of Aristotle is generally associated…but only to the Aristotelian method of reasoning. Thus they always speak in this connection of Aristotle’s syllogisms, or of Aristotle’s dialectics, or of Aristotle’s systematic treatment of the art of reasoning… 5

Interestingly enough the attribution of the "Aristotelian method of reasoning" to the Neo-Arians was quite uniocularly accepted by scholars so that

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3 A very interesting discussion about texne of the Arians and their reliance on the "naked persuasiveness without regard for truth" can be found in Vaggion (2000) pp. 93-5.

4 As Frederick Norris in his "Of Thorns and Roses: The Logic of Belief in Gregory Nazian-zen" noted, the major source of inspiration for the Neo-Arians comes from the Aristotelian and Stoic sources, as they “borrowed devices from Aristotle and Chrysippus.” p.459.

such attribution has never become a point of contention in the academy. It is my conjecture, however, that Aetius, who was meant to be the primary example of the use of the Aristotelian syllogistic reasoning in the fourth century, as a matter of fact, never used the Aristotelian syllogisms in his *Syntagmation*. On the first glance this judgment might seem to be unjustified or classified as a product of imagination of the amateur theologian, given the fact of the mutual agreement on this point by various scholars. However, I have a hope that the following analysis will substantiate my claim.

It should be noted in this context that the word "syllogism" is normally translated as deduction, conclusion, inference, etc. The etymology of the term is: to put thoughts together. There are various kinds of syllogisms offered by the late antique philosophers. The Aristotelian syllogisms are tied to a particular system of logic, namely, term or predicate logic. The syllogisms offered by, say, Chrysippus, are intrinsically connected with a different type of logic—propositional or sentential logic. These syllogisms therefore have different forms and follow different rules of inference.

Łukasiewicz and Mates identified the difference between Aristotle's and Stoic logical systems as twofold. Firstly, "Stoic logic was a logic of propositions, while Aristotelian logic was a logic of classes" meaning that "the values of the variables appearing in Stoic formulae are propositions (the substituends being sentences), while the values of Aristotelian variables are non-empty classes (the corresponding terms being the substituends)." Moreover, "Stoic logic was "a theory of inference-schemas, while Aristotelian logic was a theory of logically true matrices." 4

Despite the structural differences in Aristotelian and Stoic syllogisms, such words as syllogism, syllogistic reasoning, etc., are commonly associated with the works of Aristotle. This unfortunate conflation of different types of logical theories leads to much confusion for the scholars of church history.

Aristotle defined syllogism in the following way: "A syllogism is discourse in which, certain things being stated, something other than what is stated follows of necessity from their being so. I mean by the last phrase that they produce the consequence, and by this, that no further term is required from without in order to make the consequence necessary." [Prior Analytics. I.24.b.20] Two things are important in this regard. Firstly, that the conclusions ought to be different from what is supposed. This assumption necessarily eliminates arguments in which the conclusion and one of the premises are identical. Secondly, the reference to "certain things having been stated" rules out arguments with missing premises. However, the use of one premise was allowed by Aristotle for the incomplete syllogism, enthymeme. The first point is especially important in this context for the purposes of proper identification of syllogisms as it allows distinguishing Aristotelian syllogisms from those of the Stoics that allow for the conclusion to be identical with one of the premises.

It is obvious that Aetius uses sentential logic as the basic units of his 'syllogisms' in the *Syntagmation* as propositions. The basic syllogistic forms there, as I will argue, are also Stoic or reducible to the five indemonstrable forms of the Stoics. Moreover, the fact that the use of the conclusion identical to one of the premises (that can be found in the *Syntagmation* and which violates one of the basic principles of Aristotle's syllogistic) demonstrates the non-Aristotelian origin of Aetius' arguments. On the other hand, the absence of some (missing) premises in the arguments used in the *Syntagmation*, in my opinion, do not tell us much about the type of reasoning, but rather reveal Aetius' training in rhetoric.

Firstly, as one might note, it is not uncommon to see missing premises in the *Syntagmation*. Thus some propositions offer only one premise instead of two that constitute demonstrative syllogisms. In this light one might suggest that the arguments that can be found there represent Aristotle's enthymemes, incomplete syllogisms where the minor or major premise or conclusion is missing and must be supplied by the audience. However, the mere presence of two terms in an argument might not indicate that the nature of reasoning is non-syllogistic. Moreover, the arguments here are given in the form of conditionals (if-then). This again might be seen as quite acceptable for demonstrative syllogisms as Aristotle himself often used the conditional form in his syllogistic stretches of reasoning. What is really problematic in the *Syntagmation*, is that the propositions offered do not provide any traces of figures of syllogism and rules of inference that characterize Aristotelian predicate logic. It is quite evident that Aetius is familiar neither with Aristotle's proper syllogistic figures nor with the rules of inference. Thus, his reasoning found in the *Syntagmation* cannot be classified through the use of weak syllogisms.

I, however, think it is rather propositional logic of the Stoics that should be taken as the starting point of Aetius' reasoning. The reason for such classification is that Aetius' arguments (sentential and not predicate) do not run by the way of predicate or term logic. It is thus rather the Stoic propositional logic with its five indemonstrable forms that give way to the *Syntagmation* ([if p then q; p; therefore q] (modus ponens); if p then q; not q; therefore not-p (modus tollens); it is not the case that both p and q; p; therefore not-q; either p or q; q; therefore not-p or q; q, not p; therefore q)). This is precisely how the arguments run in the *Syntagmation*.

Now let us take a look at the arguments offered in the *Syntagmation*. The second proposition, taken as an example here, is stated by Aetius in the following way: "If the ingenerate Deity is superior to all cause, he must for that reason be superior to origination; if he is superior to all cause clearly that includes origination, for he neither received existence from another nature nor conferred it on himself."

[2] This proposition of the *Syntagmation* can be reconstructed in the following way: If the ingenerate Deity is superior to all cause, he must for that reason be superior to origination (if p then q); if he is superior to all cause clearly that includes origination (p therefore q). For he neither received existence from another nature nor conferred it on himself. The use of *modus ponens* is easily identifiable here.
The essence of the ingenerate Deity is different from the generate Deity; therefore, the essence of generate Deity is different from the essence of the ingenerate Deity.

This can be converted to EvB; E; as B and thus can be reduced to the following form: it is not the case that both p and q; p; therefore not-q. Thus, it is not the case that both p and q (it is not the case that the same essence to be both generate and ingenerate); p (the essence of the offspring is generate); therefore not-q (therefore, it is not generated by surrendering if essence and is thus not- ingenerate). This argument can also be reduced to the following form: either p or q; not p; therefore q. Thus, either p or q (either what was generated was generated by surrendering of essence or was posited by the power); not p (what was generated was not generated by surrendering of essence); therefore q (it was posited by the power). Reductio ad absurdum immediately follows.

These examples clearly demonstrate that the figures of syllogism and the rules of inference that can be found in the Syntagma of Aristotle’s logic. It is clear from these considerations that the use of Aristotelian syllogistic reasoning should not be attributed to the Neo-Arians. It can be found neither in the Syntagma of Aetius, nor in the Apologies of Eunomius. It is rather propositional logic (the use of indemonstrable syllogisms and their derivatives) of the Stoics that is offered in the Syntagma.

Another way of looking at the arguments provided in the Syntagma was suggested by R.P.C. Hanson who attempted to articulate the paradoxical character of Aetius’ arguments. Thus, he suggested that the Syntagma consists of the 37 propositions, all couched in the form of an aporia, i.e. a problem to which in his comment he tries to show there is no solution of the osias of the Son is like to or identical with that of the Father.” For example, “the first aporia begins in characteristic fashion: ‘is it possible for the ingenerate God to make something generate ingenerate?’ However, this is the only example of a genuine (logically indiscernible in its unqualified form) aporia offered in the Syntagma. There are a number of apparent aparai (for example: 23, 24) offered there and normally indicated by special markers: ‘can,’ ‘how can,’ ‘how will,’ etc. However, all those apparent paradoxes are immediately resolved by the proposed solution.

It is also true that most of the propositions can be classified by an excessive use of reductio ad absurdum making reference to the Law of Non-Contradiction and appealing to the impossibility for the subject to be characterized by the com-presence of opposites. However, the use of such reduction does not signify an existence of genuine paradoxes but rather attempts to demonstrate that the denial of certain premises (in particular, that the osia of the ingenerate God is different from that of the generate one) will inevitably lead (referring to the contra-arguments offered by his adversaries) to absurdities. Thus, the purpose in this context...
is to demonstrate that premises offered by his adversaries are untenable, capable of being reduced to absurdities (being self-contradictory) and thus fallacious.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the use of Chrysippus’ indemonstrable forms (and their derivatives) is combined with the use of *reductio ad absurdum*. It is interesting that the use of *reductio ad absurdum* on the first glance might indicate certain knowledge of Aristotle who, as a matter of fact, extensively used it in his *Prior Analytics*. Where can this type of combination be found? However, this type of combination was quite extensively used by Cleanthes. Thus, this combination seems to be common for the Stoics as well as for most of the late antique philosophers who used this proof by contradiction extensively.

Thus, it is my conjecture, that most of the arguments offered in the *Symagmaton* can be reduced to the five indemonstrable forms of the Stoics that go in conjunction with arguments couched in *reductio ad absurdum* form and never leave the subject matter in the state of *aporia*.

Secondly, Aetius’ notion of *ousia* might be said to be derived from Aristotle.11 However, neither the *Categories*, nor the *Metaphysics Z* provide enough evidence of such conceptual connection. Now the question is the following: what is the meaning of *ousia* as it can be found in the *Symagmaton*? The notion of *ousia*, as one might point out, represents one of the most complex concepts of antiquity. In the twentieth century monographs it might be translated as substance, essence, existence, being, and subsistence. Its lexical form is the feminine participial of *eine* (being) and its conceptual content varies from one manuscript to another.

The classical expositions of the notion in antiquity are associated mainly with Aristotle and Chrysippus. However, it is not to say that it does not play a significant role in other philosophers (a recent example of Silverman’s Plato’s *Dialectic of Essence* *(housia)* demonstrates the importance of the notion of *ousia* for the middle and late platonist dialogues).

In the *Symagmaton* we can find that the *ousia* of the ingenerate Deity is ingenerate or unbegotten [1-5]. It is simple, immutuble, completely transcendent as a cause, and is superior to its effects [2,3,17,32]. The notions of *homoousion* (same in *ousia*) and *homoionian* (like in *ousia*) are rejected as perverse doctrines for the following reasons: the *ousia* of the ingenerate Deity cannot be shared or transferred to another entity due to its simplicity and immutability [4]. It abides within the boundaries of its own nature which is ingenerate [4]. It did not receive existence from another nature nor conferred it on himself [2]. That which is generated or came-to-be (its offspring), in other words the only begotten Deity, was generated not by surrendering of *ousia* but was posited by the power or will of the ingenerate Deity [5]. It did not exist in the ingenerate deity as a germ (*spermatikos* here reminds us of the notion of *Logos Spermatikos* and *logoi spermatikoi* of the Stoics) as the *ousia* of the ingenerate Deity is simple and thus not capable of being shared [9]. Its only qualifier is ingenerateness or unbegottenness [2,12]. ‘The name ‘ingenerate’ does not represent the product of discursive capacities of human beings who conventionally ascribe names to entities during the process of conceptualization. It is rather a God given name. Thus, it has an essential connection with its referent [12,13,16,28].

Now it is time to compare this description of *ousia* with those that we can find in Aristotle and the Stoics. But before that one important question should be answered, namely, whether the notion of *ousia* in Aetius signifies particular/individual or universal type of being. It seems on the first glance that it is definitely particular as it cannot be shared by two or more entities (universal being, on the contrary, might have various manifestations and thus can be shared, or participated in, by many entities). Ingenerateness then might be thought of as an *idion*, a property of the Deity, or a certain quality of the Deity predicated to its *ousia* (which signifies a particular being). However, the statement that the *ousia* of the ingenerate Deity is ingenerate and is “superior to quality, quantity, and, in a word, all change” [22], and ingenerateness is its *ousia* (the terms reciprocat here) does not fit well into such understanding [28]. If the very nature or the *ousia* of the ingenerate Deity is its ingenerateness, the *ousia* of the ingenerate Deity rather represents a universal type of being. Is there a way out of this *aporia*? I think there is. But first let us look at the notion of *ousia* as given in the *Categories*.

Here two criteria are offered, namely, said-of and present-in. Based on these criteria four types of beings are offered: said-of and present-in; said-of and not-present-in; not-said-of and present-in; not-said-of and not-present-in. It is the last kind that is classified as *ousia* (first or primary *ousia*). Thus, it is a non-accidental (not-present-in) particular (not-said-of) being. It is not predicated (said-of) of anything but everything is predicated of it (except other *ousia*). It is not present in anything. Can this type of being be classified as representing Aetius’ *ousia*. It definitely cannot. On the first place it seems that since Aetius’ *ousia* cannot be shared it is an individual being and thus can be well reconciled with the Aristotelian notion of primary *ousia*. However, since Aetius’ *ousia* is ingenerate and ingenerateness is the *ousia* of the Deity, such *ousia* is definitely said-of (predicated) and thus seems to be rather a universal being. Therefore, it is clear that one cannot identify the notion of *ousia* as presented in the *Categories* with the one given in the *Symagmaton*.

Now let us look at the notion of *ousia* as defined in the *Metaphysics Z*, namely, the most specific species (a narrow version of the notion of secondary *ousia* of the *Categories*). Here *ousia* represents universal type of being. Thus, it can be shared (participated in) by many individual entities. This possibility excludes the most specific species from the list of possible conceptual sources of Aetius. Moreover, it seems impossible to frame the *ousia* of the ingenerate Deity into the schema of genus and differentiae. Aristotle could do it with his unmoved mover. The genus mover is qualified by the differentiae of unmoved. Thus, there are two types of movers, unmoved and moved, that qualify God and other movers. But in the *Symagmaton* it does not seem to be the case. One can suggest here that the ingenerate Deity has Godhead as its genus and unbegottenness as a qualifier (differentiae). It seems plausible. One can say that two types of Deities are qualified by unbegottenness and unbegottenness. Thus, we have unbegotten Deity and begotten Deity. The use of negative predicates is not a subject of concern here. The problematic aspect of

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12 Hanson again.
such approach, however, comes from Aetius who insisted that unbegotenness or ingenerateness does not represent a quality. Thus, it cannot function as a qualifier (differentiae) for the genus of Godhead.

I will suggest in this context that we should rather look at the Stoic notion of *ousia* as a starting point. The language of partition and sharing of *ousia* [5,6,7] in the *Syntagmation* is a great stumbling block that confuses the readers and simultaneously redirects their attention to the Stoic notion of *ousia*.

In Zeno and Chrysypus *ousia* is an individual existing material being which cannot be shared and which upon the event of being mixed with other beings either preserves its identity (which was the reason of its extensive use during the monophysite controversy a century later), or ceases to exist. All ‘existent’ entities in Stoicism are particular. Universals entities, on the contrary, were understood by the Stoics as ‘figments of the mind’, or products of invention of human discursive faculties (concepts of discursive intellect). Thus an apparent universal being, say, ingeneratness, is as a matter of fact a non-existent (but subsistent in the mind) sayable or *lepton* that qualify *ousia*.

*Ousia* of Aetius is a particular being that cannot be shared with precisely one qualifier—ingenerateness. If one assumes that the nature of the qualifier is not existent but subsistent, a *lepton*, or sayable, a mind dependent entity, the *aporia* of individual vs. universal is easily eliminated here and the notion of *ousia* in Aetius becomes more coherent. However, as soon as the sayable and an entity which it signifies are concerned, the nature of their connection can be said to be essential or intrinsic. Thus, the Arian appeal to essential connection between the name unbegotten and its referent can be easily preserved.

It is interesting to note that such qualifier as ingenerate was used by the Stoics to describe the nature of God as one of the first principles (*archai*) of the universe (along the line with utterly unqualified and inert matter). They identified God an eternal reason (*logos*) or intelligent designing fire which structures matter in accordance with its plan. It seems that Aetius internalized the notion of the ingenerate Deity, removed matter as one of the ungenerated principles, attributed the status of ingenerate to God the Father, and classified God the Logos as the generate Deity which is thus the subject of change and mutation, being a Divinity of the lower rank.

Another proof of conceptual connection between the Stoics and Aetius comes from the Stoic assumption that two individually qualified entities are incapable of coexisting within the same *ousia*. It provided a legitimate ground for Aetius to reject the notions of *homoousian* and *homoiousion*. Thus such individually qualified entities as the ingenerate Deity and the generated Deity cannot coexist within the same *ousia*; *ousia* here cannot be shared. The story of Theon and Dion perfectly exemplify this assumption.13

I will thus conclude by saying that by the fourth century C.E. it was Stoicism that perfectly manifested a “popular philosophy” which was easily accessible through the philosophical manuals of the time. It is precisely this philosophy that is so easily traceable in the fourth century controversy over the nature of the Triune God. It is thus my conjecture that the philosophical roots of Neo-Arianism can be found in the popular stoic philosophy of the time.

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13 For an excellent analysis of this subject see Rist (1969).
Chaos and Grace: Discovering the Liberating Work of the Holy Spirit

Mark Galli


Identifying the ways in which God’s Spirit maneuvers and works in the world has never been a task undertaken with ease by the committed faithful. Yet, this is exactly what author Mark Galli, current Senior Managing Editor at Christianity Today, attempts to do in his latest publication, Chaos and Grace: Discovering the Liberating Work of the Holy Spirit. With a foreword written by Will Willimon, former chapel dean at Duke Divinity School, this book completes the third and final volume in Galli’s series on the Trinity. The former two works in this Trinitarian trilogy address, first, Jesus Christ in Jesus Mean and Wild: The Unexpected Love of An Untamable God (Baker, 2008) and second, the nature of God, in A Great and Terrible Love: A Spiritual Journey Into the Attributes of God (Baker, 2009). While surely informed by these two previous publications, Chaos and Grace stands on its own as Galli seeks to demonstrate the potentially disruptive and untamed nature of the Holy Spirit—what he terms “holo chaos”—whose power can ultimately transform human lives dominated by a need for constant control and obsessive ordering over their circumstances in all domains of life, including religious life. This “holo chaos” of disorder spawned by movements of the Spirit, which Galli interprets as “gift,” serves as a means by which God chooses to both liberate persons from the duties of religion—worship, prayer, scripture reading—and also to relieve persons from their “addiction” to living such overly managed and restrictive lives (18). For Galli, abandoning this detrimental control and appreciating God as the “instigator” of dismantling chaos puts the Christian on the way to living “the life of freedom” which may become a “real possibility” (18-19).

To bring his theme alive, Galli divides the book into two parts. The first half (roughly ninety pages) is devoted to the testimonies included in the entire biblical narrative demonstrating how God either subdues chaos to order or creates confusion and/or disorientation to bring about God’s own liberating purposes for God’s people. Galli begins with the creation narrative in chapter two, and for the next nine chapters recounts the experiences of Adam, Eve, and the serpent, the story of Cain and Able, the Tower of Babel, the faith journey of Abraham and Sarah, the deliverance of the Hebrews by Moses from the Egyptians, the ministry of Jesus, the missionary work of Paul, the event of Pentecost, and the subsequent formation of the Church as reported by the book of Acts. The purpose in this “narrative” approach, by his own admission, is to “sketch in narrative fashion the formation of the Church as reported by the book of Acts. The purpose in this

about presenting his themes of control, chaos, and liberation in Scripture as “narrative,” because, in keeping in line with the Holy Spirit, it “cannot be so easily controlled” through the “strictures of careful argument” (20). As such, Galli couches familiar biblical narratives in language elaborating upon his themes: the Spirit of God that “tinkers” in the work of creation (37); human beings are created in God’s image as “mischief makers” (37); “curses” become “blessings” and “chaos characterized by suffering and death” (47); the story of Shinar (Tower of Babel) as one of “divine judgment against human addiction to order” and “the Spirit of God’s relentless drive to push his creation to the edge of chaos” (52); Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac “has forsaken all attempts to control the divine command and promise…” (61); the “Old Testament tells the same story—of a God who offers the freedom of obedience to a people addicted to control” (62); oppressors, such as the Pharaoh of Egypt, do not “like anything out of their control” and they “always try to bring the chaotic thing called life to a heel” (64); Moses who “bungsles things” (64); God calls the people (Hebrews) “into freedom in the most unlikely place” (65); the story of Jesus Christ as “nothing but the story of liberation” (73); God’s order that seems “on the verge of chaos” (74); sin as “order” where God “does not want order” (75); the sign of God’s coming as “disruption and confusion” (77); in fulfilling the law, Jesus “introduced chaos” (80); the “Acts of the Apostles” as “responding to the unsettling work of the Spirit” (82); the Spirit that descends at Pentecost in which “the same sort of chaos…results” (86); Peter and John filled with “happy confusion” (86). Through these scriptural examples, the reader comes to recognize, ever so slightly, the particulars of what Galli means by control, chaos, and the liberating actions of God and God’s Spirit. This first half of the book, with its deep enchancement in scripture, allows him to move forward with these ideas as he sees them operating within the present day life of the church.

Part two of Chaos and Grace (the next ninety-four pages) is devoted to what Galli calls his “analysis of current church culture” (20), and by “church” he means primarily the “evangelical” branch of Christianity in North America (107-108, 113-114, 158, 161, 167). Although he continues to rely quite heavily upon scripture in these latter chapters through his primary use of Acts of the Apostles, Galli finally offers his own deeper insights into the way liberation can happen, through chaos, to both individual and church community alike. “Chaos is the work of the Spirit,” he claims, “who disturbs the status quo, whether that status quo is political, social, religious, or spiritual. Chaos reveals the excessive order and forces us to make a decision—either to grasp ever harder to control or to let our lives be led by the Spirit” (91). Indeed, these sentences comprise the heart of Galli’s thesis, which he repeats throughout the rest of the book in various ways. In another subsequent section, Galli makes similar claims, but then includes the role of Jesus Christ who calls Christians to live in freedom after letting go of the “addiction to control,” adding that “we might slowly but surely grow up in Christ and learn to live in the freedom and love he calls us into” (104). To further his thesis, Galli addresses, most notably: the meaning of a life lived in freedom through liberation (chapter 11); the “captive” of the church to such foes as individualism, consumerism, and marketing, what he names as the “horizontal,” focusing on needs and
aspirations of people rather than God (chapter 12); an even greater preoccupation with marketing strategies and campaigns on the part of the church (chapter 15); and, finally, his distinction between the need to search for a “honeymoon” church, a “real” church, and the “actual church” which includes “hypocrites,” “signs of favoritism,” “outright prejudice,” and “division,” but one in which the Holy Spirit “abides” nonetheless (chapter 19). Galli concludes with an epilogue that envisions the Christian faithful as less caught up in religion and more free to live a dynamic life (183). He states here that the point of Chaos and Grace is “to help all of us to live more boldly and openly—with one another and in the Spirit” (184). The final twelve pages, A Companion Guide, offer thought provoking questions to help the reader and/or a study group navigate through each chapter in a more focused manner.

For the layperson who knows something about leading an overly structured life of details (which, in the end, may be many to most of us), including one of a stale and perfunctory spirituality, Galli’s work will have its merits. He reminds his audience that to be alive in one’s Christian faith is not only to be connected to a God of “peace and order” (19), but to One whose Spirit continues to penetrate through the ordinary and expected in human life, often wreaking havoc upon busy and automatic schedules, rigid ways of belief that one may have fallen into, or the comfortably quotidian that has come to settle in and occupy a life. Losing one’s controlling grip upon matters of life and faith is not always a negative sentiment for Galli, for he believes that at just this moment—when the overwhelming activity of chaos has declared victory—God’s liberating purposes of a life created for openness and freedom are revealed, shared, and known. That God continues to seek out and abide in and with human relationship despite the common pattern of God consistently having to break through the fervent human need for control (62) is what Galli identifies as God’s “gift” of “free grace” (181-182).

While the larger thesis of Chaos and Grace is admirable, one may question the method and smaller details of how Galli arrives there concerning his major themes. For instance, he makes pervasive use of the term “holy chaos” from the outset in the book without describing exactly what he means in depth by the term, or how it manifests itself in daily living, even though he cites many biblical narratives that seem to exemplify this concept. Although he can be heard on a radio interview (Inside Look with Greg Wheatley, January 21, 2012) making the distinction between the familiar “regular chaos” and his “holy chaos” (at the interviewer’s request), Galli makes no attempt to meaningfully clarify this in the book. Thus, it leaves the reader to wonder whether all chaos is holy and “instigated” by God (which leads to further difficulties regarding evil). Moreover, if there is a distinction between the two, what is the criteria for discerning this difference? Finally, is identifying chaos as “holy” supposed to be able to allow one to view and experience it differently (i.e. passively or in a more benevolent manner) in the midst of its occurrence than one would otherwise endure? Is it only in its aftermath that such a view of chaos can be formed? The reader is left to wonder.

Another issue that arises in Chaos and Grace is the seemingly totalizing views Galli offers that do not allow for nuance. “Two examples must suffice regarding his other two major ideas: liberation and control. Regarding liberation, Galli states in the introduction that “…liberation is no small theme, and one I believe needs to be revisited in our time, though without all the Marxist baggage of what is called liberation theology” (19). Why use “baggage?” While liberation theology has certainly drawn its critics, and even though Galli may be writing to a more conservative audience, there seems no need to lump all of liberation theology—some of which surely has been successful at refocusing the attention of mainstream theology and faith towards those who have been historically underrepresented—into a category of “Marxist baggage.” Second, Galli names the “desire for order and control” as “an unrighteous longing” towards the end of the book (178). Must the pining for order and control be classified as “an unrighteous longing?” Surely, one would hope, that he means here the “addiction” to seeking excessive control over all aspects of one’s life and not the “desire for order and control” as being in and of itself “unrighteous.” While he deeply criticizes this addictive behavior for most of the book, it would perhaps be more helpful for the reader if Galli qualified his thought concerning the advantageous qualities of order and control, and the reasons behind the human need for it, rather than ending the work by categorizing it as “unrighteous.”

Mark Galli’s Chaos and Grace will reach and challenge those seeking a more dynamic and living spiritual life. But even after 203 pages, one may be left wondering, still, if the Holy Spirit of God remains something that must be unearthed and “discovered.”

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Radical Political Theology: Religion and Politics After Liberalism

CLAYTON CROCKETT
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As the supposed victory of liberal global capitalism becomes more widely accepted, the religious (re)turn to modernity’s secular world deconstructs the haphazardly constructed walls that divide the religious from the secular. While postmodern theology exemplifies those attempts at operating within the postsecular logic, it is decidedly apolitical, bordering on conservatism. Clayton Crockett’s Radical Political Theology represents a sophisticated radical theology with the ambitious goal of decentering establishment theology while maintaining an explicitly political focus. Indeed, at its most fundamental level, Crockett’s theopolitical project exists as a union of opposites that exhibits rewarding uses of post-Marxism, postmodernism, postliberalism, and postsecularism.

With the rise of the Religious Right in America and what Naomi Klein calls “disaster capitalism” over the last three decades, many thinkers appear to be lost in the liberal-conservative binary while also strung relying on pre-modern values in order to counterpose today’s ruling regimes (3). Responding to this climate, Crockett proposes to “sketch out a constructive theology that is neither liberal in a classic sense nor conservative or orthodox in any way, whether politically or theologically” (2). This will demand a radical theology, which finds its roots in the American academy’s tradition of the death of God and postmodern theologies, as a counterweight to the Religious Right’s conservative Christianity, while also pursuing radical political commitments. Crockett explicates the focus of such theopolitical commitments by “suggesting that the political and the theological problem of our time is that of freedom... Radical theology’s task is to think freedom, which means to think the death of God, especially since the idea of God traditionally represents a sophisticated radical theology with the ambitious goal of decentering establishment theology while maintaining an explicitly political focus. Indeed, at its most fundamental level, Crockett’s theopolitical project exists as a union of opposites that exhibits rewarding uses of post-Marxism, postmodernism, postliberalism, and postsecularism.

Turning from the political abuse of theology, Crockett targets the theological blunder of conceiving a unified and transcendent God. For Crockett, this means conceiving of God apart from being as “event,” as becoming or “attractor,” as the deconstruction and dis-enclosure of Christianity, or as “impotentiality,” the power to refrain from acting and certainly beyond monotheism. Crockett frames the problem that the unified sovereign power of the nation-state appears to be god-like in the first place. Thus, with theopoetic and philosophical underpinnings, what is accomplished is a kind of transvaluation of our divine value conception— not Being but event, not one but many, not transcendent but immanent, etc. In chapter three, Crockett continues to emphasize immanence via Spinoza by delving into what Deluze calls “the virtual.” Crockett quotes Deluze on the significance of Spinoza as being “no longer the affirmation of a single substance, but rather laying out of a common plane of immanence on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated” (66). On the one hand, a transcendent sovereign power was expected to actualize a possibility (which does not have being until the sovereign brings it into being). On the other hand, the plane of immanence (the “image of thought” which provides consistency for the creation of philosophical concepts) is understood as containing the virtual, which does not lack being; rather it resides within a thing or concept and merely waits to be differentiated.

Crockett, in chapter four, goes on to analyze the problem of liberalism framed by Carl Schmitt, imagining a future beyond liberalism that “takes mat-
rional, worldly things seriously at the same time as it realizes the profound imbrication of religion and politics” (84). The outcome is certainly guilty of the Schmittian critique of liberalism insofar as it does not favor the overt “friend-enemy distinction” Schmitt argues for in Political Theology. However, Crockett wishes to challenge liberalism on its most basic level: the market.  

In support of the market, the secular emerges as an “emancipation from theology” that works toward maximal human freedom, which in turn is “ultimately the freedom of the market” Not only is this divide superficial, but Crockett argues that it fails to fully appreciate the implications of psychoanalytic theory, which put into question our conscious allegiances to theological and political systems. Crockett states, “so long as theism and atheism remain questions of belief, they remain superficial compared to a psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious and derivative of more primary human motivations and desires” (158). It can be, and often is, the case that what we say we believe is refuted both on a material and subconscious level. Hence, a “radical political theology” utilizes psychoanalysis to analyze the material conditions of our physical and psychic existence, and in stride brings religion back into the public sphere, not opposed to secularism, but wrapped up in it as a means of fighting the false ideal of secular human freedom which manifests in free market liberalism.  

In the latter half of the book, Crockett gives an argument for thinking of a post-secular theology in terms of Catherine Malabou’s theory of “plasticity,” (Ch. 5, 8), the Deleuzian event and our Biopolitical situation (Ch.6), and how Radical Theology can think through the “event” in terms of Deleuze alongside St. Paul (Ch.7). Among these, Malabou’s plasticity is especially pertinent as it allows Crockett to bind together the various philosophies that have been discussed. In chapter five, Crockett leads us through the “anomalous” aspect of Spinoza’s thought that is not part of the modern liberal democratic state’s notion of democracy, that which Antonio Negri calls potentia or the “power of the multitude” (98). The passage from any kind of radical democracy as outlined by Spinoza to a Schmittian “state of exception” politics is explained via Spinoza’s radical immanent critique of religion in contrast with Schmitt’s theological conception of an omnipotent, transcendent deity, a theology that is “ secularized” in the form of the sovereign.

To escape this, Crockett prescribes three concepts as articulated by fellow Continental thinkers: Malabou’s plasticity for “thinking of matter and form in the shadow of religious temporal Messianism,” “equality” i.e. “the power of anyone at all” rather than the “sovereign power of the majority” who dictate which issues are debated in the first place, and Foucault’s analysis of “governmentality” wherein the biopower of the state over human life is opposed. Plasticity becomes the “religious supplement” that is “not merely a supplement” because it is an inherent aspect of the “counter conduct opposing the predominant neoliberal and neoconservative forms of governmentality that capture or constrain life.” Thus, within the bounds of Crockett’s “secular theology,” which seeks to speak of the ultimate concern of the people and theology’s positive role within the parallax of religion, “plasticity and equality can be seen as contemporary theoretical forms of potentiality beyond liberalism” (107).  

Deleuze and “the event” in chapters 6 and 7 allow Crockett to explain and speak of a “pure law” that is beyond what Giorgio Agamben calls “force-of-law,” that is “law without law,” i.e. our current political situation is constituted by a perpetual state of exception in which what we call “law” is really a suspension of the law in which new laws are birthed (e.g. the Patriot Act, Gitmo, etc.). Crockett posits Deleuze a “successor of Paul” because he provides us the tools to think of the event, which signals “the end of global capitalism because capitalism has reached its earthly limits of resources that make indefinite growth impossible” (144). We, like Paul, are looking for an event to proclaim on our own road to Damascus that reorients reality in contrast to the current power alignments and leads us out of the sovereign state of exception. If we are to utilize Deleuze, then we can think of such an event as a “futural possibility in the present,” when our “openness to the future” (143) unlocks the possible realities contained in the virtual reality of our plane of immanence.

Crockett’s last chapter continues thinking through immanence by returning to Catherine Malabou’s reading of Hegelian plasticity and recent developments in neuroscience. Plasticity, which Malabou reads in Hegel’s Phenomenology of the Spirit, allows Malabou to understand the Hegelian dialectic not as a play of simple opposites but as the “stretching and folding of forms of temporality and subjectivity rather than the stereotypical supercessionism that is criticized by postmodern theorists wary of its totalizing operation.” In terms of brain science, “Plasticity refers to the incredible resilience of form of adult brain cells,” (154) their ability to give, receive, and destroy form- a “branching off that is creative and not simply responsive or passive.” Following Henri Bergson, Crockett concludes that theology would remain “A machine for making gods,” however “these gods would be plastic gods, and the theological machine would be a brain” (2). Plasticity allows for shifting religious philosophical discourse from the temporal to the spatial, for it has to do with interacting and creating on the spatial plane and realizing actualities, rather than operating on the temporal line of Christian Messianism or the Derridian “to come.” Lastly, Crockett admires the concept of plasticity for it allows us to move beyond reading thinkers in “either/or terms,” rather allowing normally mutually exclusive thoughts to give and receive from one another because, according to Crockett, “To truly interpret the world is to change it” (159). Plasticity allows for the construction of a truly radical political theology in its forming and receptivity to multiple streams of thought. This is indeed a timely claim that hopefully saves this project, no matter how brilliant, from a kind of formalism that is often an indictment of postmodern thought.

It is Crockett’s explicit refusal to engage with the work of liberation theology- particularly black, womanist, and feminist theology- that ultimately limits his project. While he does not wish to dismiss “other forms of theological thinking,” nor deny liberation theology’s engagement in “important and vital political theology,” his theological concern bases much of its raison d’être on a questionable observation made by Jeffrey W. Robbins that liberation theology “never went so
far as to put the established theology into question” (10-1) However, if the center
of the established theological order is properly identified as a white phallocentric
value system, then Robbins’ claim seems quite spurious, especially when consider-
ing some of liberation theology’s more explicit decentering gestures, e.g. black the-
ology’s assertion of the ontological blackness of God, feminist theology’s castration
of the “divine phallus,” and womanism’s radical subjectivity.

Furthermore, Crockett’s sympathy for Robbins’ position is troubling, not for
its theologically radical component that demands a freedom to think God without
God, but for its lack of consideration of influential liberation theologians and their
ideas. What is especially puzzling (in light of the absence of liberation theologians
in a work of radical political theology) is Crockett’s simultaneous criticism of
radical orthodoxy and process theology alongside his attending to their work and
concepts, namely the work of Catherine Keller and John Milbank. One can only
wonder how the liberation theologian’s eye to real bodies on the ground might
have complemented this thoroughly theoretical project.

Nevertheless, Clayton Crockett has constructed a brilliant work of politi-
cal theology. Its systematic and methodical arguments make abundantly clear
the complex resources that are used to build a radical political theology beyond
liberalism. Thinkers from various academic disciplines would greatly benefit from
Crockett’s insight and illuminations. However, given the space that Crockett has
opened up by uniting so many disparate concepts and thinkers, perhaps the most
significant addition he has contributed to the academy is freedom, freedom to (re)
imagine religion, politics, and theology without traditional limits and constraints.

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As its title suggests, this short book is located at the edges. More to the point, its thesis is at the intersection and overlapping of two distinct loyalties: a loyalty to the Bible as a guide for theological reflection, and a loyalty to migrant communities throughout the world (especially among the Latino/a communities in the United States). This is a theology of migration, one that revolves primarily around often-neglected biblical texts, and seeks to call biblical scholarship to consider the experience of migrant communities as a central component of its theological vision.

Ruiz divides the book into two main parts, with the final chapter radically shifting the book’s focus (more below). In the first part, Ruiz discusses what he calls “reading strategies”: the exegetical and hermeneutical process of interpreting the Bible, not as detached observers, but alongside the migrant communities of the world. In the second part, Ruiz discusses select passages from the Bible itself, offering interpretations of texts that are frequently neglected in considerations of faith and migration (particularly in the official documents of the Catholic Church).

In Chapter 1, Ruiz takes up the ubiquitous divide between Biblical Studies and Theology. He argues that the overt distinctions between these two camps, and their often competing ends, are in need of rethinking. Chapter 2 wrestles with liberation theology’s use of the Bible: namely, the relationship between liberation theology’s “preferential option for the poor” and its “hermeneutical privilege of the poor.” The tension between academic readings and those of the poor is the central problem of this chapter. Ruiz sees the consideration of daily, lived experience of human communities to be a safeguard against abstraction. Chapter 3 is the heart of Ruiz’s book, and it is his best chapter. It is his call for Latino/a scholars both to take up fresh readings of the Bible, and to allow those readings to engage the public square. Ruiz wants the Bible to inform the manner in which Christians (particularly Catholics) think about migration, immigration policy, and human rights.

Chapters 4-8 are exegetical essays on select biblical texts (Genesis 12:1-20; Ezekiel 12:1-16; Ezekiel 20; Nehemiah 13; Matthew 20:1-16, respectively) that Ruiz wrote according to the hermeneutical principles he established earlier. Each chapter sets the biblical text in conversation with a different migrant (but in Ruiz’s case, Latino/a) experience. Ruiz cites as relevant several realities: those who have crossed/are crossing the Mexican/United States border under perilous circumstances; enclaves of the Puerto-Rican and Cuban diasporas in the United States; the effects of colonialism, coupled with the necessity of post-colonial hermeneu-
tics; the trauma of exile; the complexities of assimilation (not the least of which are linguistic); and the trials of day-wage labor. This section is an ambitious and creative attempt to engage the Bible and these issues. Ruiz’s training as an Old Testament scholar comes through, as does a genuine desire to address the needs of migrant communities. But the theology in these chapters often fails to develop clearly: Ruiz’s writing is sporadic and tangential. Throughout this section, Ruiz needs to connect his thoughts more concretely, completing his arguments on how these realities enlighten biblical theology.

Chapter 9 shifts the course of the volume; here Ruiz reads Christopher Columbus’ *El libro de las profesías*, which Ruiz sees as a quintessential late-medieval redaction of biblical texts and commentary. Ruiz explains that Columbus’ exegesis is based largely on the Old Testament prophets (especially Isaiah, whose idea of new heavens and new earth Columbus found fulfilled in America) and that his subjective aim was one of propaganda for Spain’s imperialist cause.

In lieu of critique, I mention certain considerations Ruiz should expound upon more in future work. First, Ruiz’s reading of the OT is often challenging and insightful, but it leaves the reader wanting more from other parts of Scripture (what of Paul?). Second, although he did mention it, Ruiz needs to address more thoroughly the concept of legality alongside discussions of migration. Many readers here in the United States will consider that issue as too foundational for a short treatment. Third, although this book is part of Orbis’ Studies in Latino/a Catholicism Series, it would be beneficial to think more about Christianity as a whole. As an Evangelical Protestant (who has worked for many years in the Latino/a community both in the United States and Mexico, and as a Spanish teacher), I would insist that migration is reshaping more than Catholicism. Fourth, the reader needs to hear more of Ruiz’s own voice; he quotes incessantly, to the point that it is often difficult to discern the author of a text or paragraph. In sentences in which Ruiz’s distinct voice came through, it was one of clarity and nuance.

Ruiz wants to tease out a public theology of migration from the peripheries of the Bible. To that end, this book is, in many ways, a bibliographic essay—guiding readers toward scholars and texts that are helpful for taking seriously the Bible and its implications for public life. Throughout the volume, Ruiz goes to great lengths to insinuate that the task at hand for the Christian community is one of reading the Bible alongside the Other, and taking the concerns and realities of migrants seriously. This book’s strengths lie primarily in the call to engage these (seemingly) competing narratives. This insistence is essential for the global church of the 21st century. Ruiz argues that one of the central problems facing biblical scholarship is the isolation in which it frequently occurs, but this is one book in which the voice of the Other is heard loud and clear.

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Obery M. Hendricks’ *The Universe Bends Toward Justice* is a rigorous, highly nuanced, and skillful treatment of the paucity of prophetic Christian witness and critique in the church and in society. The author, who is an ordained elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, as well as an acclaimed scholar and intellectual and former seminary president, marshals significant evidence in setting forth the thesis that things have gone seriously awry in a nation that claims direct descent from the maker of all things. Not one to leave the reader languishing in some netherworld of political correctness or convoluted intellectualisms, Hendricks calls by name the besetting sin and deviltry that would rend the nation, with its lofty ideals of unanimity and love of truth, into a curious, contemptible mélange of atomistic, social hierarchies that bow at the great altar of Spencerian economic and social theory. “We are living in insane times,” says Hendricks, “Like purveyors of a bad Orwellian joke, the religious right and right-wing politicians have hijacked the meanings of justice and equity and cynically perverted them into their very opposites.” For the author, this tattered re-inversion of the Nietzschean “transvaluation of values” has led to “bizarre and unconscionable results” in both civic life and in the *ekklesia*—the assembly of those called out to bear witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Bound together by a common cord of intellectual inquiry, this series of essays seeks to “[Recover] the political radicality of the message of Jesus and the prophetic witness of the Hebrew Bible from the clutches of those who are devastating our society, our body politic, and our natural environment . . . .” At first blush, this is no mean task for a book that spans just over two-hundred pages and whose first chapter is entitled “I am the Holy Dope Dealer,” from an interview in *Vibe* magazine of Kirk Franklin, the prince of urban contemporary Gospel music. Yet, even in this opening essay, one cannot help but sense a subtle but unrelenting provisional hypothesis. Indeed, there is an over-arching metanarrative that on one hand informs and defines the commonalities (and especially the dissimilarities) between the prophetic consciousness of the Spirituals, and what for the author is the well-nigh nullifidian emphases of Gospel music; and on the other hand nourishes the fecund *anti-*minds of right-wing religionists, politicians, and prosperity preachers, whose “pernicious influence,” says Hendricks, “seems to increase daily.” For Hendricks, Gospel music bears in common with the Spirituals the proud influence of a deep embodiment of purposive, emotive sound. “We know what it
means,” says Hendricks, “to lift up holy hands in tearful supplication and joyful thanksgiving.” What has been lost along the way to the proximate freedom and circumscribed justice that persons of African descent partake of today, however, is a sense of collective, corporate purpose. “What this means,” says Hendricks, “is that at best, the social orientation of Gospel music today is unmindful of the ongoing social, political, and economic dilemmas that confront black people in America.” For the author Gospel music lacks a sense of social and political foresight; a vision of a world redeemed yet upwrought and still in need of redemption; a world beset before and beyond by the maladies and miseries of neglect for the idea of Evangelion as it spoke to our sainted forebears.

For Hendricks, (and not a few others who have been nurtured and sustained by the deep spirituality of the Black Church tradition), Gospel music has succumbed to an “apocalyptic apoliticality,” the primary concern of which is to get one’s “praise on” and pray that they “make it in,” with little or no regard, however, for the suffering and despair of God’s creation. Dr. Hendricks states the problem succinctly:

Gospel music has come to function as an opiate for the masses. As with a drug, sensations and emotions have come to be its focus. Like a drug, its primary goal is not to empower its users to change reality, but simply to change the way they feel. Like a drug, it temporarily lifts the people’s despair yet, in direct contradistinction to the prophetic mandate of the spirituals, leaves the causes of that despair virtually unaddressed, unscathed, even unmentioned.

According to Hendricks, “rather than collective acknowledgment of oppression, Gospel offers individualized expressions of hope and praise...the classic apocalyptic feeling of powerlessness to forestall the oppressive forces of this world, accompanied by a sense of resignation to continued social misery...” This need for personal praise and relationality, and the foregrounding of the idea of a private spirituality bereft of commonly held and expressed prophetic function, is the unutterable scourge of the Gospel music industry. “Gospel music,” says Hendricks, “must stop reducing the causes of human suffering to weak faith or poor morality on the part of the victim.” The dialectical tension created by this tendency to endow theological, economic, and social theories with emphases that privilege the felicitous few over against the disenfranchised masses is a recurring thematic endow theological, economic, and social theories with emphases that privilege the person’s experience over their suffering. This way of reading privileges a holistic understanding of the human story, and challenges the primary of place that the Western intellectual tradition has given to the few for whom the subtle realities of chance and the gross iniquity of an arbitrary fleeting biological unintentionality have given more than they may reasonably consume in “a time, and times, and half a time.” “We must... explicitly embrace ways of reading the Gospels,” says Hendricks, “that are methodologically sensitive to the plights and circumstances, concerns, interests, and worldviews of those below...”

A former Wall Street investment executive, Hendricks’ passion and intellectual dexterity are palpably evident in chapters three and four where issues of class and “anti-Christian” economic theory receive a thorough and meticulous treatment. From Jean-Baptiste Say, to Adam Smith, to John Maynard Keynes; from Say’s Law, to Smith’s “invisible hand,” to Keynes’ General Theory, the author dissects and analyzes these important theories with the mind of an academic and the heart of a prophet. Indeed, for Hendricks, “...conservative economic principles reflect no evidence of being influenced by biblical morality and ethical imperatives of responsibility for... the disadvantaged and the vulnerable.” Wittingly or not much of this lack of concern for the “least of these” points to what Hendricks calls “the American myth of heroic individualism”—the foundational myth upon which the theory of American exceptionalism has been built.

A very telling passage from the text deserves to be quoted in full:

This enduring social myth is a vestige of the social history of the pioneers who settled the American West by virtue of their own individual grit and mettle. This myth holds as its central value the belief that all people must make their own way in the world based on their own merits and inner resources... Thus the rich deserve to be rich; the poor deserve to be poor.

For Hendricks, not only does the uncritical acceptance of the American myth lead to a dire distortion of “economic life and social choices today,” it is, in fine, anti-biblical and anti-Christ. And if it is anti-Christ, it is enmity against God.

The Universe Bends Toward Justice is a book that must be read by those who love the church. But its scope is such that it reaches beyond the church or mere Christianity. It is a book for all those who love justice and are unwilling to accept the penchant for a divisive framing of economic and social issues by the conservative and reactionary fringe in politics and religion. A book that faithfully challenges the bloated, irreligious conflation of biblical morality and racist, classist, social theory—offering instead the Good News of deliverance of the captives, and the healing of the brokenhearted. But more than that, it is a love letter to a nation; a prophetic “on-time” word from a committed scholar, preacher, and public intellectual—for such a time as this.

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