

LOVE ENDORSES (CREATES, PROVIDES, PROTECTS) PROPERTY

Eccl 3:22; Ex 31:1-6; I Cor 7:17

I. WORKING PRODUCTIVELY—VOCATION-in-RESPONSE to the LORD (I Cor 7:17)

- A. By nature, man designed to “enjoy his work”(Eccl 3:22), “by the sweat of his brow (Gn 3:19)
 - 1. Creative capacity—joining with Creator/LORD, tending/making good things
 - a. Understanding things as they are (including potential and limits), with Bible & reason guiding
 - b. Imagining how things might be—thus Mozart & Raphael & Shakespeare; so too James Watt & Eli Whitney & Thomas Edison & Bill Gates
 - 2. Desiring “good work”—e.g. young children (not adolescents!) anxious to “work with” parents
 - a. “Alienation” from product evident in slavery and much industrial work
 - b. Aspects of “good” work: (cf. Chuck Colson; E.F. Schumacher)
 - 1. Meaningful (*formal cause*)—thoughtfully designed, constructive, suitable
 - 2. Materials suited for endeavor (*material cause*)—e.g. soil & seeds for farmer; wood for carpenter; metal for engineer; grains & vegetables & meat for cook; students for teacher
 - 3. Trained for task (*efficient cause*)—via education, apprenticeship, personal diligence
 - 4. End result right (*final cause*)—contributing to human (or earthly and heavenly) flourishing
- B. By assignment: Make Good Goods (Gn 1-2, cooperating with Creator; Ex 31:1-6)
 - 1. “Six Days” properly dedicated to work! generally prosper thereby—Lapin’s *Thou Shall Prosper*
 - a. Jewish tradition re manual labor! NB Paul’s tent-making support of ministry
 - b. Protestant “work ethic” stemming from Luther stress on vocation—cf. Gene Veith’s “Arenas of Service” & Horton’s focus on masculine interest in “service”
 - 2. Good work includes:
 - a. Tending creation: agriculture; homemaking; medicine; education; ministry; productive firms
 - b. Beautifying products—good model: Bezalel (a “Spirit-Filled Craftsman”)
- C. In the process of Doing Good, Be Good (work’s sanctifying—attaining true end— dimension)
 - 1. Doing good work contributes to personal goodness
 - a. Children doing chores learn self-discipline, responsibility, caring for household
 - b. Adults gainfully employed restrained from assorted evils & frequently find happiness
 - 2. Instructive examples:
 - a. Benedict & Benedictines (*oro et labore*) help create Western (European) Civilization
 - b. Samuel Gompers & labor union objectives—AFL seeks to *share* nation’s economic success
 - c. Antonio Stradivari’s violins—prototype of craftsman committed to making good things

II. SECURING PROPERTY RIGHTS

- A. The “rule of law” secures property rights —thus Chief Justice James Wilson, declared, in 1795: “The right of acquiring and possessing property, and having it protected, is one of the natural, inherent, and unalienable rights of man. The preservation of property then is a primary object of the social compact.”
- B. In *The Mystery of Capital*, Hernando de Soto stresses prosperity gained by securing property rights
 - 1. Thus pioneers on American frontier
 - a. Personal courage, hard work, ingenuity (honing truly American traits—F.J. Turner thesis)
 - b. Legal assistance (Homestead Act, Preemption) & grants (notably to railroads)
 - c. N.B.: *New Trail of Tears* re poverty on Indian reservations due to absent property rights
 - 2. Cautionary contemporary news: *Range* magazine re dispossessed farmers/ranchers in West; recent Supreme Court decisions grant “eminent domain” abuses & “crony capitalism”
- C. In *Money, Greed, and God*, Jay Richards says
 - 1. Free enterprise (Capitalism) promotes human flourishing—maximal productivity
 - 2. Free enterprise (Capitalism), unlike “social justice” injunctions, realistic re human nature
 - 3. Socialism/Welfare State ignores human nature & promotes dependency, impoverishment
 - 4. Theological case

“Arenas of Service,” by Gene Edward Veith, in *World* (Aug 28,2010)

THE REFORMATION BROUGHT to the fore three key teachings that would characterize the Protestant movement in all of its variations: the authority of Scripture, justification by faith, and the doctrine of vocation. The word is simply the Latin term for “calling.” Perhaps the best summation of the concept is in I Corinthians 7:17: “Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him.” God “assigns” different kinds and places of service for each Christian and then “calls” each Christian to that assignment.

The great theologian of vocation was Martin Luther, who developed the teaching in his battles with monasticism—the view that the spiritual life requires withdrawal from secular life—and in defining “the priesthood of all believers.” For Luther, vocation, like justification, is ultimately God’s work. God gives us our daily bread through the vocations of the farmer, the miller, and the baker. God creates new human beings through the vocations of fathers and mothers. God protects us through lawful magistrates.

Vocation is, first of all, about how God works through human beings. In His providential care and governing of His creation. God chooses to distribute His gifts by means of ordinary people exercising their talents, which themselves are gifts of God. Thus, God heals by means of doctors, nurses, and other medical vocations. He makes our lives easier by means of inventors, scientists, and engineers. He creates beauty by means of artists, authors, and musicians. He gives us clothing, shelter, and other things we need by means of factory workers, construction contractors, and others who work with their hands. He cleans up after us by means of janitors and garbage collectors.

God thus looms behind everyone who provides us with the goods or services that we need. In one of Luther’s many memorable lines: “God milks the cows through the hands of the milkmaid.” This means that all work and all workers deserve honor. Whereas the world might look down on milkmaids and garbage collectors, they actually bear the sacred presence of God, who works in and through them. God created us to be dependent on others—meat processors, manufacturers, journalists, lawyers, bankers, teachers, parents—and, through them, we are ultimately dependent upon God Himself.

Every Christian has multiple vocations. Luther sorted them out into four “estates,” or spheres of life that God has established: the church, the household, the state, and what he called “the common order of Christian love.” Pastors speak rightly of being “called” into the ministry, whereupon God works through them to teach His Word, preside at His sacraments, and give spiritual care to His people. Laypeople too are called to do tasks in the local congregation, singing in the choir, serving on committees, serving meals, and in other ways blessing their fellow members.

Being in a family is also a calling. God established marriage, and being a husband or a wife is a vocation For Luther the estate of the “household” includes both the family and the activities by which it supports itself. He had in mind the concept expressed in the Greek word *oikonomia*, the laws of the household, from which we derive our word economy. For Luther, in his day of family based labor, economic life is connected with family life.

We also have vocations in the state..... Some Christians are called to positions of authority in the government. Americans have the unusual calling of being both subjects and rulers at the same time, since our democratic republic places the governing authorities themselves under the authority of the people who elect them. Christians thus have the vocation of citizenship, which means that politics, civic involvement, and cultural engagement are all realms of Christian service.

Every vocation has its particular neighbors. Members of a congregation are called to love and serve each other. In marriage, husbands are to love and serve their wives, and wives are to love and serve their husbands. Parents love and serve their children, who, in turn, love and serve their parents. Rulers love and serve their subjects. Workers love and serve their customers.

Luther said that changing a baby’s diaper is a holy work. A child doing his chores is outperforming the Carthusian monks in works of holiness. By extension, we can see the office desk, the factory machinery, the computer screen—likewise the voting booth, the marriage bed, the dining room table as altars upon which we exercise our royal priesthood. Vocation is where sanctification happens, as Christians grow spiritually in good works and in their relationships. Vocation is where evangelism happens, as Christians teach their children and interact with nonbelievers. Vocation is where cultural influence happens, as Christians take their places and live out their faith in every niche of society.

PROPERTY AND FREEDOM

Richard Pipes, a professor of history at Harvard University, wrote *Property and Freedom* because, he says: “From the time I interested myself seriously in Russia, I became aware that one of the fundamental differences between her history and that of the other European countries lay in the weak development of property” (p. xi). Indeed: “The idea occurred to me some forty years ago that property, in both the narrow and broad senses of the word, provides the key to the emergence of political and legal institutions that guarantee liberty” (p. xii). Personal freedom is, historically considered, inordinately rare and precious and is almost exclusively restricted to Western Civilization.

First Pipes discounts the utopian fantasies which project dreams about property-less societies, peaceful worlds lacking property distinctions, Arcadian communities devoid of ‘mine’ and ‘thine,’ distinctions. He argues, quite simply, “that acquisitiveness is universal among humans as well as animals,” and that we develop a healthy sense of personal “identity and competence” through getting and using property (p. 65). As the ever-insightful William James noted, “In its widest possible sense . . . a man's Self is the sum total of all that He CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children” (p. 72). To James, the “‘this is mine’ of a two-year-old implies ‘this is not yours,’ and so conveys that ‘I am I’ and ‘you are you’” (p. 73).

“Golden Age” myths simply lack any historical basis and are derived from literary sources such as Plato’s *Republic*, a powerful work which has deeply dyed subsequent utopias and spawned Rousseau-style revolutionary rhetoric. Revealingly, when James Boswell visited Rousseau, the Frenchman said: “Sir, I have no liking for the world. I live here in a world of fantasies, and I cannot tolerate the world as it is. . . . Mankind disgusts me” (p. 39). Accordingly, Robespierre (who allegedly read Rousseau’s *Social Contract* on a daily basis) refused to ‘tolerate the world as it is’” (p. 42). However, solid historical work, has vaporized the “Noble Savage” projections of Rousseau. “Images of a property-less world of ‘natural man’ are a mirage” (p. 65). Tribal peoples had a strong sense of territorial boundaries, and were clearly acquisitive in realms relevant to their interests.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle, with his common sense realism, was willing to take the world as it is and “regarded the institution of property as indestructible and ultimately a positive force” (p. 7). Aristotle “sees the cause of social discord not on the striving for property but in human nature—‘it is not possessions but the desires of mankind which require to be equalized’—from which it follows that dissension is best eliminated by enlightenment rather than the abolition of private ownership” (p. 8). Aristotle’s vision finds parallels in Jewish and Roman thought, which flowed into and gave form to Western Christian Culture, strongly supporting man’s right to private property. “The fact that all societies condemn and punish theft, at any rate within their own community, testifies to their respect for property” (p. 77).

Within the past 200 years, however, the position so solidly crafted by realists such as Aristotle and Aquinas was discarded by radical Jacobins and Romantics who envisioned the abolition of all injustices in a communist utopia. Successive waves of socialist euphoria, resonating to the calls of Marx and Engels, still wash across the globe—as is evident in influential treatises such as John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*, which conveniently “ignores psychological, political, and economic realities, as well as the record of history and the findings of anthropology” in its singular commitment to egalitarian “fairness” (p. 60). “Liberals” such as Rawls share with socialists and communists, as a “cardinal tenet,” the notion that man is “infinitely malleable” and thus capable of ultimate “perfectibility” through education and social change.

Consequently: “Of all ages in history, the twentieth century has been the least favorable to the institution of private property, and this for both economic and political reasons” (p. 209). Pipes finds distressing parallels between Soviet communism, German fascism, and British and the American welfare state. Franklin D. Roosevelt urged folks to expect both the abolition of poverty and “a comfortable living” from federally-orchestrated programs. Welfare programs, funded through taxes which deprive owners of their property, became deeply entrenched in America through the work of FDR’s philosophical disciple, Lyndon Baines Johnson. To Pipes, the great threat to liberty today comes not from tyrants like Hitler “but from equality—equality defined as identity of reward. Related to it is the quest for security” (p. 283).

To defend our freedom, we must recognize that: “Property is an indispensable ingredient of both prosperity and freedom” (p. 286). With Justice Brandeis we must “‘be most on our guard to protect liberty when the Government’s purposes are beneficent. Men born to freedom are naturally alert to repel invasion of their liberty by evil-minded rulers. The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachments by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding’” (p. 290). To gain understanding—an understanding largely lacking in many sectors of the body politic—Pipes’ historical work proves most valuable assistance!

Readings #92—Envy, Property

This consensus was effectively summed up by the Latin formula *suum cuique tribuere*, a phrase Cicero popularized and Thomas Aquinas picked up on in defining justice as “the perpetual and constant will to render to each one what is his.” Medieval cities encouraged personal freedom, and England's common law yoked it with property rights. In the 17th century, influential thinkers such as Grotius and Locke contended a person has “inalienable rights” to such things as personal liberty and property. Importantly, “The notion of ‘inalienable rights,’ which has played an increasing role in the political thought and practice of the West since the seventeenth century, grows out of the right to property, the most elementary of rights” (p. 118). Such rights budded and then flowered dramatically in England during the 17th and 18th centuries. Then, in America, the colonists fought for independence, convinced that the “protection of property was the main function of government,” for property was recognized as “the bastion of liberty.” Indeed, Pipes contends, “At every stage in the controversy to 1776 and beyond, Americans claimed to be defending property rights” (p. 240). From the Magna Carta to the Declaration of Independence, freedom and property have been welded together.

During WWII, Hitler averred that “National Socialism and Marxism are the same,” and Pipes contends, “A generation of Marxist and neo-Marxist mythology notwithstanding, probably never in peacetime has an ostensibly capitalist economy been directed as non- and even anti-capitalistically as the German economy between 1933 and 1939” (p. 224). Similarly, a comparison between Hitler’s Twenty-five-Point Program, set forth in 1920, differs only minimally from the welfare state—“full-scale socialist program” (p. 244)--such as articulated by the *Beveridge Report* and implemented by the British Labour Party in the 1940’s. Totalitarian regimes are obviously ruled by Stalinesque tyrants. Democratic regimes, less obviously, are equally “dominated by elites who devise ways of shaping and bending the law in their favor” (p. 211). Thus almost everywhere personal liberty has retreated, losing battle after battle to aggressive governments.

who, “Driven by the most pernicious of human aspirations, that of making his mark on history” (p. 245) declared a “national war on poverty” which has so manifestly failed, despite expending some five trillion dollars. Then, in 1965, he decreed: “Freedom is not enough. . . . We seek not just freedom but opportunity . . . not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and as a result” (p. 229). LBJ, committing the federal government to mandating results, probably failed to see “what a break with the Western tradition these words represented,” but Pipes fears for our future, for “Social equality can be attained, if at all, only by coercion, that is, at the expense of liberty” (p. 229).

MONEY, GREED, AND GOD

While attending a nominally Methodist university in the 1980s Jay W. Richards easily absorbed the anti-capitalistic bias of eminent academics such as John Kenneth Galbraith and “evangelicals” such as Jim Wallis. He rather enjoyed, he now realizes, the sophomoric “chance to rebel against authority and feel self-righteous doing it” (p. 10). In time, however, as he more carefully studied economics and observed the world, he changed his mind and wrote *Money, Greed, and God: Why Capitalism Is the Solution and Not the Problem*. He argues that “despite what you’ve been told, the essence of capitalism is not greed. It’s not even competition, private property, or the pursuit of rational self-interest. . . . What we now know is that market economics work because they allow wealth to be created, rather than remaining a fixed pie. Economics needs to be zero-sum games in which someone wins only if someone else loses. We have discovered an economic order that creates wealth in abundance—capitalism. And only the creation of wealth will reduce poverty in the long run” (pp. 7-8).

Social justice devotees such as Jim Wallis and Ron Sider often want us to ignore history and just imagine “what would Jesus do?” when crafting public policies—championing a “living wage” as well as a “minimum wage,” favoring “fair trade” coffee, etc. Clearly Jesus, in accord with the prophetic tradition of Judaism, calls His disciples to care for the poor. Given this truth, however, Richards insists we must use our minds as well as our hearts, exercising the virtue of prudence. And when dealing with economics we must heed Henry Hazlitt’s admonition: “The art of economics consists in looking not merely at the immediate but at the longer effects of any act or policy; it consists in tracing the consequences of that policy not merely for one group but for all groups” (p. 36).

Government-run welfare programs, Richards says, illustrate a century’s failure to weigh the consequences of what’s been done. FDR’s New Deal sought to end the Great Depression but acerbated it instead, and the Great Society of LBJ, with its “War on Poverty,” actually turned into a “War on the Poor” (p. 47). Lots of well-intended endeavors, costing trillions of dollars, have wrought pernicious (if unintended) consequences. For example, throughout most of America’s “history, the federal government cost every citizen about twenty dollars a year (in current dollars, not the more valuable dollars of the past). Now it costs every one of us, on average, about ten thousand dollars” (p. 53). We’re paying the bills for politicians who relish redistributing the nation’s wealth. But, Richards insists: “We don’t have the right to take the property of one person and give it to another. Therefore, we can’t rightfully delegate that function to the state. Delegated theft is still theft” (p. 53).

Entrepreneurs are driven not by greed but by the desire to offer their products to the public. Despite the stereotypes, personified by the likes of Ivan Boesky (the businessman who declared that “Greed is good”), the driving impetus of capitalism is the desire to develop and offer things of value—goods—to others. To Christians, as well as ancient ethicists such as Aristotle, greed is indeed contemptible. But “capitalism is not based on greed” (p. 112). It takes for granted our limited self-interest, as well as our sinful nature. But, as Adam Smith saw, “in a free market, each of us can pursue ends within our narrow sphere of competence and concern—our ‘self-interest’—and yet an order will emerge that vastly exceeds anyone’s deliberations” (p. 122).

Many great Christian theologians, contrary to popular myths, have endorsed capitalism. Certainly “usury” was condemned—but it must be understood in the light of ancient, agricultural economies. During the High Middle Ages, as trade and technology began transforming Europe, Scholastic theologians thoroughly analyzed money and banking, discerning the difference (distinguished by Jewish theologians centuries earlier) between loaning to a person who needs a winter coat and loaning to a person who wants to start a carpentry business. “Usury isn’t charging interest on a loan to offset the risk of the loan and the cost of forgoing other uses for the money; it’s unjustly charging someone for a loan by exploiting them when they’re in dire straits. That’s the work of loan sharks, not banks” (p. 144). Similarly, though Christian thinkers soundly condemned gluttony, attributing “conspicuous consumption” to capitalism is fundamentally wrong. Saving (not spending) sustains capitalism. Wealth must first be created and then saved and reinvested. “Delaying gratification is restraint; it’s the opposite of gluttony. So consumerism is hostile to capitalist habits and institutions” (p. 165).

This is an eminently readable, persuasive treatise, making the case for a Christian capitalism which seems to be “just what we might expect of a God who, even in a fallen world, can still work all things together for good. Seen in its proper light, the market order is as awe inspiring as a sunset or a perfect eclipse. . . . At the very least, it should settle the question we started with: Can a Christian be a capitalist? The answer is surely yes” (p. 215).