

A CHRISTIAN QUEST FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE

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January 30, 2017

INTRODUCTION

Markets – arenas where people sell, buy, or exchange goods – have existed since the dawn of civilization. At their most basic level, markets enable human beings to meet common needs by exchanging available resources for their mutual benefit and individual survival. As civilizations grow larger and more complex, markets evolve in two different ways that distort their original purpose. One is economic: needs and desires multiply, new resources are discovered, new commodities produced. These innovations allow some traders to regard individual profit as more important than mutual benefit. The other is political: markets and civil governments develop complex interrelationships called political economies, creating power disparities within communities that are often tied to economic inequalities.

In practical terms, these political economies develop into one of three types: 1) economies dominated by the political order, as in communism; 2) economies that dominate the political order, as in underdeveloped but often economically exploited nations; and 3) mixed economies with rationalized interaction of civil and economic institutions directed toward achieving established goals. A people's collective sense of justice is the product of its political economy as well as its religious institutions.

The American economy is mixed, shaped by an 18th century constitutional democratic polity of political equality and a tacit historical acceptance of profit-oriented capitalism originating in the same period. We also incorporate a degree of early 20th-century socialism calling for more public ownership of production and a more equal distribution of necessary consumer goods. But our mixed economy is politically volatile, alternating between more market freedom or more market regulation depending on changing political circumstances. As Yale economist Charles Lindbloom observed, our market system's strength lies in creating wealth and innovation, but it fails at distributing social or economic justice.ⁱⁱ

Today's American Christians have experienced four generations of economic change. Their collective memories stretch back to the 1930s when many families struggled for survival. New federal policies, like the Public Works Administration and Social Security, were initiated to bolster employment and provide for secure retirements. During World War II, a combination of military service and federally-funded defense industries expanded employment, while the post-war decades brought expanding private businesses, new jobs and increased prosperity for millions of families. Structural racial and ethnic discrimination, however, continued to block economic progress for many citizens. As the nation's wealth increased and the white middle and upper-classes became socially dominant, programs were launched to reduce the effects of poverty in both urban and rural areas. But many of these safety-net programs were short-lived or modified until only remnants remain.

Today, however, many of us are more familiar with the effects of the 2007 economic crisis and the unsettled conditions of recent decades brought about by economic globalization, industrial automation, political and corporate attacks on unions and government regulations, and the unprecedented influence of money on policy making. We have watched as America's industrial base has been eroded and inequality exacerbated. Growing economic disparities increase the power of the super-rich while reducing the ranks of the middle-class.

American's attitudes about economic issues are shaped, in large part, by our experiences in these different eras as well as by moral and political beliefs. Christian churches and other religious institutions have been directly affected, both positively and negatively, by these economic changes. But in addition, religious bodies, including the United Church of Christ, have continually advocated for more fair, just and inclusive economy. How can the UCC continue its advocacy during the years immediately ahead?

Economic justice is defined according to the nature of the political economy. Where an economy dominates the political order, justice is defined by natural market outcomes: all market participants receive their “just deserts” based on their financial success. In state-controlled economies, justice is imposed. But in mixed, democratic political economy, justice can be defined by the degree to which the political and social distance between its richest and poorest members is narrowest: where the intrinsic value of human beings is more important than their political power or economic worth. Our question is, How do we determine the intrinsic value of human beings?

Many contemporary Americans adhere to the “just deserts” perspective. “God helps those who help themselves,” they say. This paper argues to the contrary that Biblical Christianity points all of us toward defining economic justice in terms of our inherent equality. We argue that human beings are by nature social and political creatures living within God's creation who can reach full development only as we fully participate in strong religious, social, political, and economic communities and institutions. From this point of view, economic justice depends on a high degree of social and political integrity informed by a broad spiritual sensibility.

TODAY'S ECONOMIC REALITIES

Today's global economy relies on mass production, low-wage manufacturing sites, automation, labor exploitation, environmental destruction, instant delivery systems, saturation advertising and systematic tax evasion. Over several generations conditions like these have changed basic assumptions about how modern economies *actually* work compared to how they *should* work. For example, prices are set less by consumer supply and demand equations as they are by producer profit margins. If human survival is a core purpose for economic systems, our current global economy is fundamentally unjust.

For example, the United Nations World Food Program reports that about one in nine people on the planet do not have enough food to lead a healthy active life. Poor nutrition causes **nearly half (45 percent) of deaths** in children under five - 3.1 million children - each year. WFP calculates that **\$3.2 billion in U.S. currency** is needed *per year* to reach all 66 million hungry school-age children.ⁱⁱⁱ

Here at home, **the official poverty measure** published by the United States Census Bureau shows that in 2015 there were 43.1 million people in poverty. The official poverty rate in 2015 was 13.5 percent, 1.0 percentage point higher than in 2007, the year before the most recent recession. The number of children in poverty was 14.5 million. Children, however, represent 23.1 percent of the total population and 33.6 percent of those in poverty.^{iv}

On the other hand, median household income for middle-class Americans in 2013 was about \$52,000, only slightly above where it was in 1995. But the richest Americans – those in the top five percent – have seen their incomes rise by 14 percent since 1995. Most shocking, according to Forbes Magazine in 2012, “The [top one percent of Americans] are worth about \$8.4 million, or 70 times the worth of the lower classes. Altogether, the top one percent control 43 percent of the wealth in the

nation; the next four percent control an additional 29 percent.”^v These disparities have only grown during the past five years.

So without burdening ourselves with additional facts and figures, we can readily see that an expanding global economy and a growing American market economy are effectively concentrating wealth in fewer hands to the detriment of millions of people both here and around the world.

A CHRISTIAN QUEST

Modern economic life in general bewilders most of us, and questions of economic justice defy easy solutions, leading many church members to simply ignore them. But Dr. Rebecca Blank, a leader in writing the 1989 UCC General Synod Pronouncement, “Christian Faith: Economic Life and Justice,” insists that “Linking Christian faith and economic life means...confronting the operation of the economy with the *vision of human purpose and human society* to which we are called as God's faithful people.”^{vi} (emphasis added.) In other words, economies are human systems that directly affect human well-being in this world. As such, economies fall under God's judgment and are open to divine redemption, making them primary subjects for Christian concern.

American Christians who do address questions of economic justice, however, face a series of contradictory ideas and traditions. For example, a Biblical theme running from the Exodus story of manna for starving refugees all the way to Jesus' prayer for just enough bread to sustain all of God's people day by day collides with modern free-market assumptions that all people must work for their own food and are naturally entitled to keep and enjoy all that they acquire. Again, from the Biblical point of view, poverty is an unfortunate condition for some that the whole community is expected to alleviate;^{vii} while from the free-market perspective, poverty results from individual failures for which the larger community bears little or no responsibility. Christian theology is similarly divided. A stream of modern Calvinism teaches that one's worldly wealth is a sign of divine favor and should not be challenged; but the Social Gospel tradition, both Catholic and Protestant, holds that excessive wealth should be taxed and reallocated to strengthen the general welfare.

Because of these and other contradictions, church bodies dealing with issues of economic justice often experience difficulty in finding consensus. This difficulty was borne out in the 1980s when the American Roman Catholic Bishops published an economic pastoral, “Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy.” Similar statements from major Protestant denominations soon followed, including the United Church of Christ's General Synod pronouncement, “Christian Faith: Economic Life and Justice.”^{viii} But the groups issuing these documents often found opposition within their constituencies.^{ix}

One source of constituent opposition comes from those who believe churches should limit their activities to conducting worship, preaching the gospel, and administering the sacraments. But a second source are those who identify capitalist theory with both political democracy and Christian morality. For example, in their book *Crossroads: The Great American Experiment*, economists Barry Asmus and Don Billings argue that “The free market system, in which only voluntary and mutually beneficial exchange is permitted, is consistent with freedom-of-choice, and, therefore, offers the greatest potentiality for a moral order in which the integrity of the individual conscience is respected.”^x This is the kind of economic idealism toward which Reinhold Niebuhr directed his theology of Christian Realism. And finally, a more pragmatic source of opposition is the fact that during the second half of the 20th century, most white, middle-class, church members experienced a rising standard of living. As a result, many Christians today express satisfaction with our system of market capitalism. The

assumption that a growing economy lifts all worthy, hardworking boats still prevails, despite mounting evidence to the contrary.

It wasn't until the economic recession of 2008, when millions of Americans lost jobs, homes, and family incomes, that many of us realized how major a shift of economic power from "Main Street" to "Wall Street," had occurred over the preceding 30 years. This power shift enriched the most wealthy segment of the population and it increased its political power. But it decreased overall public and private prosperity, and reduced broad citizen participation in our democratic legislative processes. This experience clearly demonstrated how in a capitalist system skewed to benefit just a tiny sliver of the population, powerful private interests hire lobbyists who contributions to political campaigns and legislative innovations designed to manipulate economic outcomes so as to increase their profits at the public expense. Today's post-recession rising tide seems to lift primarily the yachts of the wealthy.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

While the Bible does not provide today's world with a specific economic paradigm, God's covenant with ancient Israel informed Biblical prophets, who recalled Israel's exodus (Jeremiah 2: 20-21) and anticipated Israel's future (Isaiah' 2: 1-5), condemning economic exploitation (Amos 2: 6), luxury in the midst of poverty (Amos 6: 4-7) and religious self-righteousness devoid of social justice (Amos 5: 21-24). Isaiah sharply criticized the expropriation of farming families and the accumulation of land: "Ah! You who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land!" (Is 5:8) He called the greedy land-owners "thieves" (1:23) and the seizure of indebted farmers' land "taking the spoil of the poor" (3:14).

Centuries later, Jesus announced his own ministry, as recorded by Luke (4: 16-19, 6: 20-31), by blessing oppressed people and channeling Isaiah's promise to "bring good news to the poor,...proclaim release to the captives, recover sight for the blind,...let the oppressed go free,...and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (4:16-19)." The Bible as a whole makes it clear that in every age, despite cultural assumptions and powerful self-interests, God's congregations possess a mandate to intervene in this world's oppressions and lead all peoples toward a future defined by *mutual love* (Leviticus 19: 17-18, Mark 12:30-31), *covenantal justice* (Exodus 22: 25), and *ecumenical peace* (Micah 4: 1-4; II Cor. 1: 2.)

The pathway toward that future, as scripture and history well show, is studded with conflicts. However, since "a house divided against itself cannot stand (Mark 3: 25)," our goal is to build a sound theological foundation for including many perspectives in addressing economic justice. To that end, we begin with a trinitarian understanding of our world.

God, our world's creator and redeemer, is humanity's only absolute sovereign. No human power or authority is either superior to or separate from the divine domain. As Jesus told his disciples, "do not call me good; only God is good (Mark 10: 18)." But as Jürgen Moltmann has written, God creates by a process of self-limitation (or *tzitzum*, a focus on giving not destroying, on self-effacement not self-assertion, and on collaboration not conflict). God's limits on exercising divine *omnipresence* creates a habitation for the world; His limits on exercising *omniscience* provides the world with an open future. God's self-limitation allows God to be present within the world without destroying it, endowing humanity with co-creative power.^{xi} This means that nothing in this world is beyond human intervention. Our question, "toward what ends do God's people intervene in established economies.?"

Jesus Christ is God's human manifestation in this world, demonstrating the meaning of God's reign for humanity. In Karl Barth's words, "In [Jesus Christ] the fact is once for all established that God

does not exist without [humanity]...Since God in his deity is human, [the church] must occupy itself neither with God in Himself nor with [humanity in itself] but with [humanity]-encountering God and God encountering-[humanity].”^{xii} Just as God encounters his world through self-limitation, Christ's *tzitzum* is manifest in his suffering service for others. Christ's people live in this world for the sake of justice – the well-being of the world. In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, Christ's church exists for others. Our vexing question is “where do contemporary encounters between humanity and God reveal the nature and destiny of the human economy”?

The Holy Spirit is God's active urging to faithfully participate in all the world by seeking to diminish the power of oppressive absolutes and to illumine pathways out of human bondage. The essence of spiritual community, wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is the light of truth, while the essence of purely human community is dark desire. “In the community of the Spirit there burns the bright love of mutual service, *agape*; in human community there glows the dark...desire of pleasure.”^{xiii} Here he was describing how, in 1938, many German Christians nurtured the human, pleasurable aspects of their church communities while turning a blind eye to the persecution of minorities under the Third Reich. Our question is, “to what extent does the economy contribute to human communities and to what extent should it strengthen the community of the Spirit”?

INTERPLAY OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY

When American Christians challenge injustice today, we turn not only to our religious heritage but also to our political and economic heritage. Our Declaration of Independence, a form of political covenant, guarantees “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness^{xiv}” to all citizens. Our Constitution's Preamble includes as general principles: forming a more perfect Union, establishing Justice, insuring domestic Tranquility, providing for the common defense, promoting the general Welfare, and securing Liberty for ourselves and our Posterity. In other words, our founding documents have Reformation roots and describe this nation as a community, not simply a political haven for independent individuals. In practice, however, judicial decisions on economic issues often turn on legal technicalities or ideological preferences rather than implementing fundamental principles. These precedents and preferences, in turn, often reflect prevailing cultural biases rather than historic ideals. And cultural biases most often support advantages for some rather than the greatest good for the greatest number.

Adam Smith's rationale for capitalism, The Wealth of Nations, published in 1776, promoted the theory of an “invisible hand” guiding a self-regulating market. He wrote that by specializing in their production of goods, individuals would increase their incomes leading to a factory system, an ever-expanding division of labor, and therefore growing wealth. Changes in market supply and demand would naturally produce changes in production. At that time the prevailing view of international trade, called mercantilism, stipulated that a nation's economic strength required it to export more than it imports. British laws, therefore, enforced a trade system whereby Americans provided raw goods to Britain, from which British manufactured goods were sold in European markets and back to the colonies. This form of economic exploitation led not only to America's political Declaration of Independence, but also to its early adoption of market capitalism.

Often forgotten, however, is Adam Smith's earlier work, The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759). Here Smith wrote that even selfish people are endowed with the capacity to sympathize with one another. “[Although] we have no immediate experience of what others may feel,” wrote Smith...”by the imagination, we place ourselves in their situation.” As a result, he concluded, by each of us looking only after our own needs and happiness, we indirectly enhance the well-being of others. But Smith emphasized the stabilizing effects of human sympathy on interpersonal market relationships, not

anticipating the destabilizing power inherent in industrial capitalism. It was against later capitalism's cutthroat competition as well as the factory system's dehumanizing effects on its workers that Karl Marx and Fredrick Engles directed their own revolutionary theories.

Less revolutionary than Marx and Engels but no less critical, German historian, economist and sociologist Max Weber studied the evolution of capitalism. His most famous work, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, argued that certain types of Protestantism placed moral and spiritual significance on the rational pursuit of economic gain. The Protestant (or more specifically Calvinist) ethic was a vocation or calling for believers to work hard, be successful in business, and reinvest their profits in further development rather than frivolous pleasures as an indication of their divine salvation. But in a less academic vein he wrote, "The 'free' market, that is...not bound by ethical norms, with its exploitation of interests and monopoly positions, is an abomination to every system of fraternal [communal] ethics. [It] is fundamentally alien to any type of fraternal relationship".^{xv}

American capitalism took shape at the same time as American democracy. This coincidence presents us with what has been called the "paradox of democratic capitalism (or of capitalist democracy)." In the view of many scholars, modern capitalism and democracy are engaged in a symbiotic relationship that is both interdependent and contradictory. For example, Thomas Piketty's widely-acclaimed Capital in the Twenty-first Century makes the case that inequality is the inevitable consequence of economic growth in a capitalist economy and the resulting concentration of wealth can destabilize democratic societies and undermine the ideals of social justice upon which they are built.^{xvi} Moreover, liberal democracies tend to be individual rights-oriented and to draw their leaders from the economically secure rather than from the margins of society, often keeping populist critics from holding policy-making positions. As Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously concluded in 1941, We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both.^{xvii}

Christian advocates of democratic capitalism like W. Widdich Schroeder and Michael Novak appear to be far more concerned with combating authoritarian socialism than they are with seeking justice within a capitalist economy. But is that concern necessary? American culture implicitly rejects the imposition of arbitrary authority, while our Biblical and political heritages reject it explicitly. Justice does not depend on either authoritarian rule or *laissez faire* neglect; it is the product of a culture and an economy in which self-interest is effectively balanced with promoting the well-being of the whole community. In the timeless words of Hillel the Elder, "If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am only for myself, who am I? If not now, when?"^{xviii}

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Popular culture is another lens through which American Christians define justice and injustice. *American Ways: An Introduction to American Culture*,^{xix} explains why our value system attracts millions of people from diverse cultures to seek assimilation in the United States, creating a unique, enduring American identity. It identifies three pairs of values and three prices we pay for these benefits:

The first value is **Individual Freedom**, and the price for that is **Self-Reliance**. We cannot be truly free if we cannot take care of ourselves and be independent.

The second is **Equality of Opportunity**, and the price for that is **Competition**. If everyone has an equal *chance* for success, then we have to compete.

The third is **The American Dream**, the opportunity for a better life and higher standard of living. The price for the American Dream has traditionally been **Hard Work**.

But when we examine these values we readily see how they correspond more with principles of market capitalism than with fundamental religious or political ideals, both of which lay a heavy emphasis on justice. Moreover, this scheme of values omits a powerful aspect of American culture: our history and enduring toleration of racism. Neither the abolition of slavery in 1863 nor the civil rights “revolution” a century later has succeeded in securing equality for people of color, thereby making race a huge component of American economic injustice.

On the other hand, despite our reputation as a hyper-individualistic society, America has a deep and rich altruistic tradition.^{xx} Religious groups have long been committed to helping poor and marginalized people in their communities. Over the past 100 years, as our economy has become more impersonal and poverty more structural, the burden of responsibility for helping the needy has migrated from religious and volunteer organizations to governmental institutions. While President Johnson's 1960s “War on Poverty” attempted to combine volunteer and government agencies in a concerted effort to remove barriers preventing investments in impoverished communities that could secure their future prosperity, his initiative could not survive the intense political opposition it generated.

TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC COMMONWEALTH

So how do contemporary American Christians address questions of economic justice? One of the Reformation's lesser-known but most politically influential figures was Johnnas Althusius, whose seminal work, Politics, was published in 1603.^{xxi} Building on Aristotle's premise of human nature as essentially social, the covenantal nature of political Calvinism, and a Reformed piety borne of Germanic communitarianism, he argued that political sovereignty does not reside in a monarch, as Medieval theory taught, but with the whole people. His book begins with these words: “Politics is the art of associating men [and women] for the purpose of establishing, cultivating, and conserving social life among them. Whence it is called 'symbiotics' [lives lived together]....Symbiotes [people living together in society] pledge themselves each to the other, by explicit or tacit agreement [constitutions], to mutual communication [sharing] of whatever is useful and necessary [including material goods and productive services] for the harmonious exercise of social life.”^{xxii} He focused, however, on the political implications of his theories rather than on the economic.

Althusius was both a scholar and a politician. In 1604 he was elected mayor of Emden, in East Frisia, where he put his theories into practice. The polity that emerged from Althusius' work is called democratic federalism. It distributes political authority throughout the state according to needs in different areas and sectors of society, and it defines how those sectors relate to one another and to the whole. Eventually, through interpretations by philosophers such as Thomas Hobbs, John Locke, and David Hume, as well as John Witherspoon's federal (covenantal) theology, democratic federalism became the primary model for America's Constitution. Every citizen is endowed with a vote to use in electing political leaders. Writing in The Federalist, James Madison summarized the Althusian ethic: “Justice is the end of government. It ever has been and ever will be pursued until it is obtained, or until liberty be lost in its pursuit.”^{xxiii} Liberty *and* community, freedom *and* justice, must co-exist together.

But as Althusius was writing, a new economy was emerging from the Middle Ages through the acquisition and distribution of private capital by private banks. Even as Madison wrote, capitalists focused on private accumulation of newly-generated wealth were preparing to lead the West through an economically innovative but socially debilitating Industrial Revolution. Were it not for America's constitutionally-sanctioned federal distribution of political power, today's politics could be even more dominated by a capitalist mindset, exhibiting fierce competition among private fiefdoms and multiple political revolutions: in effect a return to the Dark Ages and its masses of poor peasants.

In this light, we endorse applying principles of democratic federalism to the American economy in ways that create more equitable distributions of capital for public purposes and provide more equitable incomes to all citizens.

GOALS FOR ADVANCING ECONOMIC JUSTICE THROUGH ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY

Even though the thirteen Colonial states voted in 1789 to ratify the United States Constitution as their legal foundation for political democracy, they allowed economic rules and relationships to be largely defined by capitalist free-market advocates in support of private sector profit-making. As a result, wrote Max Lerner some 60 years ago, American civilization has been characterized by a continual struggle between a “popular majority” and a “dominant minority,” giving a sociological description to the political phrase “Democratic Republic.” Lerner believed that these two poles of our heritage could never be disentangled, one always rising to modify the other.^{xxiv}

A major example with which we are all familiar is Franklin Roosevelt's “New Deal,” a comprehensive attempt to democratize our capitalist economy. Reforms enacted then and in subsequent administrations resulted in increasing economic stabilization for millions of families. However, in the face of sustained conflict between advocates for a free-market ideology and advocates for a fair, just, and inclusive economy, periods of stabilization have often been followed by periods of economic precariousness depending on political power shifts. Cued on indices of overall growth, like the Gross Domestic Product, assuming that a rising tide lifts all boats. Recent history has demonstrated the weakness of that assumption. Without sustained political attention to structuring the economy in ways that benefit the whole population, over time the rich get substantially richer and the poor relatively poorer. Moreover, democratic political processes become increasingly dominated by a wealthy elite, a condition that further diminishes democratic social integrity.

The time has come for a new paradigm to replace the “popular majority”- “dominant minority” polarity between America's political and economic systems. It is time for a democratically-conceived, experiential-based and justice-oriented *Economic Constitution*; a set of moral principles that legally define public and private-sector economic realms, the relationships between them and how each contributes to the integrity of a democratic society. America's political administrations should be paralleled by elected economic administrations, legislatures and courts dedicated to embodying and upholding our *Economic Constitution*.

What should be included as defining principles of our *Economic Constitution*? First, no one, and no segment of the American population, should expect, or be expected, to sacrifice their life, liberty or full pursuit of happiness to demands imposed by powerful economic institutions. An economy is not an autonomous system operating under its own inflexible laws. To paraphrase Jesus, an economy serves humanity, not humanity serving the economy. Therefore, no economic principles are beyond public criticism or correction; all must be evaluated by the extent to which they equitably serve all the people within their orbit.

Second, a democratic society has a special obligation to its poor and vulnerable. All citizens are called to strengthen the whole community by materially assisting those with greatest need. The technique of income redistribution, however, has been attacked by the wealthy for penalizing their economic success. Moreover, it has not only failed to meet the material needs of the poor; it has also failed to erase social divisions in American society based on income. As the mission of religious congregations is to work for the full integration of those on society's margins into communities of hope,

purpose, and security, so our *Economic Constitution* should focus on fair, just and inclusive economic distribution of the nation's overall wealth. As Jonas Salk demonstrated by refusing to patent his discovery of polio vaccine, capitalistic claims for winner-take-all profits from new inventions should not be allowed to limit the benefits of those inventions to those prepared to pay whatever can be charged. Instead of calculating the financial costs of eliminating poverty, we need to calculate the social and economic costs of allowing millions of people to live in poverty while the wealthy cut coupons. Poverty in the midst of plenty is social sin.

Third, an *Economic Constitution* invites all people to be full participants in the nation's economic life. Employment, as a fundamental form of both social and economic participation, must be available to all who need it through private or public institutions. As Henry Ford demonstrated, living wages are a moral imperative, necessary to secure both adequate incomes for families and robust economic activity for society at large. Moreover, instead of subjecting workers to the sometimes arbitrary authority of private business owners and managers, we should promote more employee ownership, employee profit sharing, stronger unions, and more inclusive stakeholder governance of privately held firms. In a democratic culture, collective bargaining between employees and employers must be legitimized by both public law and corporate policy. Collective bargaining is a peaceful and democratic process for reaching mutually-acceptable terms for employee wages, benefits, and working conditions. Like the Jubilee year, a time of contract renegotiation is an event when changed financial conditions for employers and employees are mutually recognized and adjusted for.

Fourth, an *Economic Constitution* should delineate between private and public economic sectors. Capitalist free market advocates have long-resisted taxing private or corporate income for public expenditures. The result has been a public sector starved of resources, including the economic and social deterioration of neighborhoods and even whole cities. Meanwhile, private investors wait for signs economic restoration before calculating potential profits. Constitutinally-defined public-private partnerships, however, can combine principles of adequate profits with sustainable community life to enhance possibilities for a vigorous community life. Moreover, instead of vacillating between increasing and reducing government regulation of huge private institutions like banks and corporations, we should focus on enforcing anti-trust regulations to increase real-life competition between smaller entities, strengthening public control and regulation of firms where a near monopoly is inevitable and eliminating the power of private-sector wealth to effectively “buy” legislators and draft laws for increased profits. And instead of continuing to privatize public service facilities, we need to return public responsibilities, like providing for prisons, tax collections, and water supply to public agencies.

In summary, under an *Economic Constitution* the nation's economic institutions would be legally sanctioned by democratically-determined procedures and their decisions drawn from principles designed protect and contribute to the common good. The *Economic Constitution* would recognize the primary role of the economy as developing and distributing resources that allow all people to thrive on the planet God created for them. Conflicts, of course, will never be eliminated; but the power of the “popular majority” will be given a more equal opportunity to challenge the power of an economically “dominate majority.” As in all democratic societies, conflicts will be necessarily negotiated and adjudicated. In other words, There is no guarantee that future will become any more predictale. Our only hope is that it will become more fair, just and inclusive.

ⁱThe writer contributed to the 1989 UCC General Synod Pronouncement, “Christian Faith, Economic Life and Justice,” as well as to the UCC Pension Boards resolution on the economy submitted that Synod. He deeply appreciates the critical attention Edith Rasell, UCC Minister for Economic Justice, has given to producing this paper.

ⁱⁱLindblom, Charles E., The Market System: What It Is, How It Works, and What to Make of It. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.)

ⁱⁱⁱOnline: www.wfp.org/

^{iv}Online: www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty.html

^vAlan Dunn, “Average America vs. the One Percent.” *Forbes*, March 21, 2012.

^{vi}Rebecca Blank is quoted by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, “In Hard Economic Times, Church Must Proclaim Justice, Good Stewardship.” United Church of Christ, Economic Justice. online.

^{vii}The Year of Jubilee described in Leviticus 25: 8-12, is a means for regularly restoring justice to those who have suffered losses over time in the give and take of economic activity. It's purpose is to allow each family to regain possession of the land it needs to provide for it's survival.

^{viii}“Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U. S. Economy,” United States Catholic Bishops, 1986; revised edition, 1997. Online: http://www.usccb.org/upload/economic_justice_for_all_pdf. The United Church of Christ General Synod Pronouncement, “Christian Faith: Economic Life and Justice,” was issued in 1989. This and many other UCC General Synod resolutions and pronouncements on the economy are available on the United Church of Christ economic justice website.

^{ix}For example, the Catholic Bishop's Pastoral was criticized in “Toward the Future - Catholic Social Thoughts and the US Economy,” American Lay Commission. It's thesis is that the Free Market Economy corresponds

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- exactly to Matthew 25: 14-30, i.e. that profiteering with the talents leads to the feeding of the poor. The United Church of Christ's pronouncement was similarly criticized from the perspective of democratic capitalism by W. Widdick Schroeder, Flawed Process and Sectarian Substance. (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1990). "The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism" is developed by Michael Novak in Christian Social Ethics: A Reader, ed. By John Atherton. (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1994.) pp. 372-395.
- ^xAsmus, Barry and Don Billings, Crossroads: The Great American Experiment. (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984.)
- ^{xi}Moltmann, Jurgen, "Reflections on Chaos and God's Interaction with the World from a Trinitarian Perspective" in Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action, ed. by Robert John Russell et. al. (Berkeley, California, The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, 1995). Available online; <http://www.counterbalance.org/ctns-vo/moltm-body.html>.
- ^{xii}Barth, Karl, The Humanity of God, trans. By John Newton Thomas (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960). pp. 50, 55.
- ^{xiii}Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, trans. by John W. Doberstein. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954). p. 31.
- ^{xiv}Francis Hutcheson, an Irish clergyman and philosopher, defined the framers' political definition of *happiness* in 1725, as "that Action...which accomplishes the *greatest Happiness* [well-being] for the *greatest Numbers*." Online: <http://blog.dictionary.com/happiness/>. Today, however, we interpret *happiness* more narrowly and more literally in individualistic terms.
- ^{xv}Weber, Max, Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology. Trans. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) p. 637.
- ^{xvi}Piketty, Thomas, Capital and Democracy in the Twenty-first Century. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014.)
- ^{xvii}"**The Paradox of Democratic Capitalism: An Historical View**," by Rebecca Fisher in Corporate Watch, a not-for-profit co-operative providing critical information on the social and environmental impacts of corporations and capitalism. Online <https://corporatewatch.org/pages/about-corporate-watch>.
- ^{xviii}Hillel, *Pirke Avot* I.14, CUP Archive. translated Charles Taylor, 1939, p. 20.
- ^{xix}Vintage American Ways describes its mission as 1) to find common ground for expressing diverse opinions; and 2) to provide unique resources about American culture. online: <http://vintageamericanways.com/>.
- ^{xx}See "Altruism in Contemporary America: A Report from the National Altruism Study." Tom W. Smith, National Opinion Research Center/ University of Chicago. Report prepared for the Fetzer Institute June, 2003. Online
- ^{xxi}See Hueglin, Thomas O., *Early Modern Concepts for a Late Modern World: Althusius on Community and Federalism*. (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999.)
- ^{xxii}"The Politics of Johannes Althusius." An abridged translation of Politica Methodice Digesta, ed. by Frederick S. Carney. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). Online: www.constitution.org/alth/alth.htm
- ^{xxiii}Federalist No. 51, Hamilton, Alexander, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*. With an introduction and commentary by Garry Wills. (New York: Bantam Books, 1982.)
- ^{xxiv}Lerner, Max, America as a Civilization. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957.)