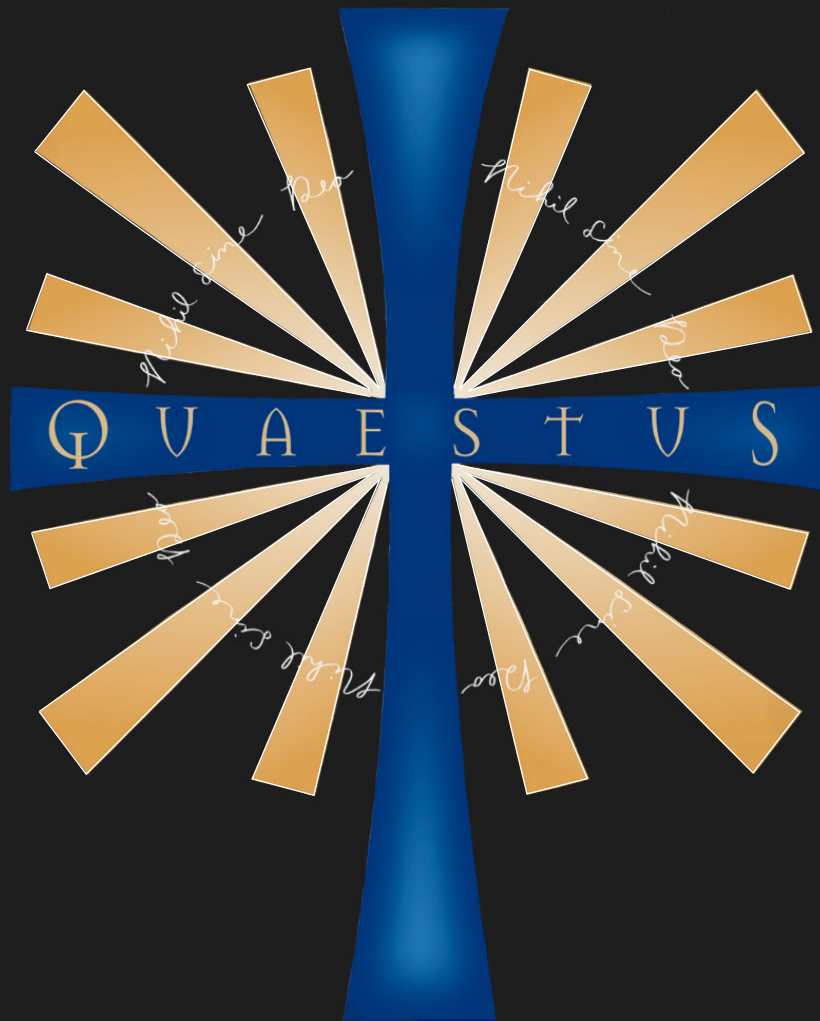


QUAESTUS

LIBERTY | FAITH | ECONOMICS



CHRISTIANITY & CAPITALISM:
VOLUME V NO. II

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Our Mission

Quaestus is a student-led journal presenting ideas about Liberty, Faith, and Economics from a Christian perspective in order to promote human flourishing.

Our Vision

We aim to inspire the next generation of Christian thought and leaders by addressing global issues with sound moral and economic principles.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

Mark 8:36

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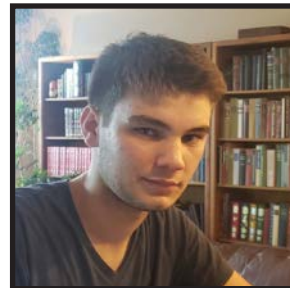
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So... What is Quaestus?

A Letter from the Editor

The following periodical includes transcriptions from the 2023 Liberty, Faith, and Economics (LFE) Summit at Concordia Wisconsin. This event is run by the Concordia Free Enterprise Center in association with the Acton Institute, an American think tank which focuses on religion and liberty. The summit is held annually and has drawn numerous high-profile speakers including this year's keynote, Scott Walker. The focus of this year's LFE summit was the compatibility of Christianity and capitalism. A second periodical will be published in the spring including student and faculty articles related to this topic.

Quaestus (*Kway-stus*) is a group for students who want to get people talking on important topics. Together, we form an editorial board of undergraduate and graduate students who are advised by Dr. Scott Niederjohn and Dr. Daniel Sem. We run two writing contests, one in the fall and one in the spring. Student editors are either chosen from the winners of these contests or invited by the current editorial board after demonstrating writing ability.

Quaestus Serves Two Main Functions

First: we publish two periodicals a year, one each semester. The fall periodical involves transcriptions from speakers at CUW's annual Liberty, Faith, and Economics summit. The spring periodical includes articles by students, faculty, and Quaestus editors. Any CUW student or faculty member can publish articles through Quaestus, although they must be accepted and peer-reviewed by the editorial board. The idea is that people can read the fall periodical for inspiration, then write articles for the spring periodical based on the themes of the one from the fall. Themes generally relate to free speech, economics, healthcare, and politics.

Second: we develop and lead forums to promote conversations on contentious topics. Our general model is to select one or more experts to speak on an issue. If we can, we will invite speakers with opposing perspectives. Our speakers will present publicly on the topic, demonstrating to the student audience that a healthy and productive conversation on this topic is possible. Students always get a chance to question our speakers at the end of the forum. In the past we have led forums on racial relations, *Roe v. Wade*, educational issues, climate change, transgender ideology, and the like.

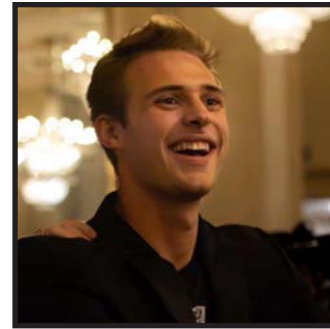
For the members of the editorial board, Quaestus serves as an excellent opportunity to practice writing, editing, and publication. There are also opportunities to interact with leading experts in various fields, as well as chances to attend and present at national and international conferences.

Ultimately our goal as an institution is to practice fruitful conversations and careful thought. Quaestus, which means profit in Latin, emphasizes ideas that are profitable for us to be thinking about and discussing. As you read the following articles, we hope you will be inspired by them into further questioning of our world, conversations about truth, and perhaps even to step into publication yourself.

Harrison Hulse,
Editor in Chief

The Christian Issue with Capitalism

Written by: Augustine Herrmann



Abstract

The Christian community is increasingly vocal about the politics and economics of the time. Some even suggest that the Christian thing to do is to abandon capitalism in favor of some supposedly more ethical system which would seemingly refrain from abuses of power or preying on the disadvantaged. There is, however, no need for the Christian to disdain capitalism. The Biblical imperatives proclaimed by Jesus that are used to support this argument are often taken out of context or misunderstood. Capitalism in and of itself does not corrupt society or lead to sin, but it is instead sinful humans that corrupt and abuse the system of capitalism. The concentration of greed and selfishness that seems to perforate the free enterprise system is a culture of consumerism. Therein lies the issue. Consumerism, as both an ideology and culture, is simultaneously the culprit and result of humanity's own degeneracy but is not created by capitalism. Capitalism may enable consumerism to some degree, but all tools used wrongly can enable people to do terrible things.

The Trouble with Capitalism, From a Christian Perspective

If one were to ask the general public of the United States today how they felt about capitalism, they'd be shocked at the wide variety of reactions. Demographically speaking, the consensus in large cities would be that capitalism is bad, or at the very least incredibly flawed as a system. Move out a little farther into the more rural areas of the country and the sentiment changes. Some hail it as the great backbone of America, others see it as a form of poison, slowly seeping the vigor of the common man away. This

split is reflected in the Christian community as well, with some citing Biblical evidence that seems to condemn capitalism (Rieger 2013), and others seeing further examples from the Bible as supporting the capitalist system. How can such varying perceptions exist? To understand this, we must look back for some brief context.

The economics of the Gilded Age may in some ways be described as capitalism unleashed. Industrialization allowed for a scale of production that was unprecedented, urbanization accelerated, leading to mass immigration, and titans of industry emerged. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller, just to name a few, accumulated untold amounts of wealth. Such strength and power of course came at the cost of the middle and lower classes in society. The most obvious effects were found in cities, where poor planning, a lack of safety standards, and greed combined to create cramped and filthy tenements. These conditions, although far more drastic than those experienced by average modern citizens, parallel today's world, with the disparity between rich and poor widening more and more. Hence there exists a similarity in attitudes towards capitalism as a system by both those during the Gilded Age, and today. From where do the division and apparent wealth gaps stem? And is such a disparity moral? In order to answer these questions, one must look closely at the aspect of consumerism which seems to appear wherever capitalism arises.

The main characterization of consumerism is that of a specialized greed, not necessarily for money, but for things, whether they be status symbols, collectables, or just fun gadgets. The

excessive desire to accumulate more while updating one's possessions drives consumerism within society. Something so closely tied to greed surely cannot be moral. Since capitalism seems to inevitably generate consumerist attitudes, it by extension must also be immoral. The answer, however, is not so simple. One must first start with the question of what constitutes morality; unfortunately, since several metric tons of essays, papers, dialogues, and debates have been written on this topic, it seems counterproductive to go into too much depth here. For practical purposes, grant the simple yet impactful assumption that Western society derives its moral code, by and large, from the Christian heritage. Thus, the main authority from which Western tradition draws is the Bible; so, in order to move forward with the analysis of consumerism, one must explore a Christian view of wealth. After examination, the problem becomes apparent. Consumerism is a by-product of greed which leads to unfulfillment, and a sort of hollowness, but it is not directly caused by the capitalist economic system. Instead, it is simply a perversion of the means and spirit of capitalism caused by the sinful nature of humankind. Therefore, despite the arguments that Christianity must oppose capitalism (Rieger 2013), the truth is that Christians should only be opposed to the perverted and twisted aspects of it. It is the human abuse of the capitalist system that must be opposed, not the system itself.

The Christian View of Wealth

Jesus' Teachings

The Christian relationship with wealth can appear complicated, because it isn't as cut and dried as seeing money as evil, or a force for good. There is a Biblical gray area which many people miss in their interpretations and analyses. The most popular view is that Jesus was generally against wealth. He spent time among the poor, the sick, and the needy, while simultaneously challenging the upper classes. In one instance a potential disciple falls away because Jesus commanded him to give all his possessions to the poor (English Standard Version, Matthew 19:16-24). Jesus may have commanded that His

followers forsake the pleasures and comforts of wealth, but he also demanded that they forsake all earthly things to follow Him. Scenes from the Gospels display Jesus speaking about leaving families and loved ones as well. One man came to Jesus, promising to follow Him after he had attended to his father's funeral. Jesus' reply " 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead' " (English Standard Version, Matthew 8:22) left no room for sentiments and devotion other than to Himself. Yet another example displayed in the Gospel of Luke sees Jesus turn aside His kinsmen (the reference cites them as his mother and brothers, although there is debate about their exact relation to Jesus), " 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it' " (English Standard Version, Luke 8:21). Jesus demanded complete devotion during His ministry, showing that He was the ultimate path to salvation and demonstrated that by comparison, nothing else was worthy of attention, not even family. Therefore, those things which people loved, family, honor, tradition, and yes money, were all things which He commanded to be forsaken. Jesus didn't hate wealth intrinsically but saw that hoarding it was an obstacle to surrendering oneself to Him (Ondari 2019). It follows that the Christian perspective on wealth should not be that it is evil, but rather that devotion to it is.

Later Theological Perspectives

The view that riches are not inherently sinful is one that has been discussed and debated by theologians over the course of centuries. Martin Luther for one acknowledged that the buying and selling of goods was vital to society, and that the merchant class played an important role in the community. He was, however, wary of the ease with which merchants could misuse their station and how economics could take advantage of people. Usury and price gouging for the purpose of getting rich was unconscionable especially since it harmed the community, therefore perpetrating a sin against God. This practice was something against which Luther was firmly set (Luther 2015). On the other hand, John Calvin, while the predecessor for Puritanism, believed that wealth could be a useful, a vital means through

which Christians did good. Ester Chung-Kim, a Doctor of Religious Studies and professor at Claremont McKenna College, expressed his view in her work, "Calvin on the Use of Wealth in the Christian's Life,"

Believers who are not slaves to wealth may make use of it in faith. To relinquish one's private possessions is therefore not a general rule, but is required when the need of Christians in want calls for it. In other words, one proper use of wealth is to relieve the needs of the poor. Calvin laments that such a proper use is far from being practiced by Christian communities that let themselves be contaminated by the profiteering mentality that prevails in society (Chung-Kim 2009).

Chung-Kim's exposition of Calvin displays that it is not the accumulation of wealth that is evil, but that the pursuit of it for its own sake leads down the path to condemnation. Furthermore, it is the duty of the Christian to use what resources they have available to aid other Christians and those in their communities. Also evident in Chung-Kim's work is Calvin's view on the corrupting effects of hoarding money. This leads back to the question of capitalism and its second cousin consumerism; whether or not Christians can be proponents of the capitalist system, one which seems to generate a culture of consumerism, still remains unclear at this juncture.

The Relationship Between Capitalism and Consumerism

Origins, Purpose, and Brief History of Capitalism

In order to understand the conflict between Christianity and capitalism, one must first understand the relationship between consumerism and capitalism. The legendary Adam Smith, the man credited with the theory and development of capitalism as an economic system, envisioned it as the steppingstone to a greater and more equitable society (Bassiry & Jones 1993). During his day mercantilism was the domineering view of economics, a battle for survival where the strong nations preyed on the weak, regulated all commerce for their own purposes, and competed for what appeared to be a set amount of wealth.

This of course saw that the ordinary citizen was overlooked in favor of government and national interests, therefore presenting a problem where the common man was ignored and quickly became impoverished. The solution, it seemed to Smith, was a system that emphasized production as a means of creating goods and wealth through the demand of the market and the needs of the people. Wealth and surplus lead to an expansion of employment opportunities which in turn should raise the employment rate and the standard of living (Smith 1981). Through production, the average citizen and worker gains more sovereignty as the surplus grows, allowing for an increase in economic freedom and sovereignty for the average working man (Bassiry & Jones 1993). In short, wealth and riches trickle down from the suppliers in society to uplift the general community, improving the standard of living and the level of compensation. The philosophy here is encapsulated in the idiom, "the rising tide raises all ships."

Smith's system, designed as a morally neutral tool to build wealth and provide resources for society in a mutually beneficial way, proved advantageous, especially on a communal scale, where there were fewer levels within the economy. Furthermore, the expansion of capitalism, saw its implementation on a grander scale with the rising aid of Industrialism. The system, now operating on a global scale, still worked to an extent, until the surpluses produced became obscene, and the avarice of man took control. As referenced before, the first instance of truly critical economic disparity was the Gilded Age, where the colloquial robber barons saw to the national and corporate interests over those of the average consumer. After riots, strikes (like the Pullman Strike of 1894), and scandals (such as the Teapot Dome Scandal), things began to change. The people openly called out for reform, so corporations had to evolve. Eventually companies adopted a new model for survival, instead of playing to national and corporate interests, they preyed on the greed of the common man. The cultivation of the consumerist attitude was easily woven from the innate rapacity inlaid in humanity's sinful character. The result

appears to be the modern-day resurgence of the wealth inequality found in the Gilded Age.

Impacts of Consumerism

Part of the issue facing society today is that the modern economy is not sustained by products and services that arose to answer a need, as Smith had intended, so much as it is by the accumulation of objects. The hoarding of wealth lies at the heart of the issue as well as its use to accumulate other objects for “hoarding.” This is consumerism, this is greed diversified. It has taken on the shape of consumerism, which props up its own ideologies and modes of living, all of which are fleeting and unsatisfying. This philosophy is portrayed acutely in David Foster Wallace’s *This is Water* (2005) speech, in which he expresses how the focus on consuming, possessing, or attaining, will eventually consume the soul or “eat you alive” (Wallace 2005). Furthermore, Adam Smith himself wrote on the abhorrence he felt for the practice of laying up treasures for the sake of gathering possessions or status. His *Theory of Moral Sentiments* concludes that, “The great mob of mankind are the admirers and worshipers, and what may seem more extraordinary, most frequently the disinterested admirers and worshipers, of wealth and greatness” (Smith 1969). With these arguments in mind, consumerism is laid bare as the result of avarice, the aftereffects of which are hollow. It is a sinful practice from a Christian perspective. Unfortunately, a flawed train of thought that stems from this reasoning conflates consumerism and capitalism while also claiming that the system which gave rise to such mass spread consumerism must by nature also be corrupt. This is not the case.

Severing the Link Between Consumerism and Capitalism

It can be agreed that consumerism is indeed a virulent mindset and indeed a poison to modern culture. Furthermore, the tenets of consumerism flow against the Christian beliefs established by scripture (Rieger 2013). Capitalism, however, is distinct from consumerism and not sinful by nature, rather it is an economic operating

tool. It is only the abuse of that tool that leads to sin and the consequences thereof. Professor Jesus Huerta de Soto marks this particular point in a piece for the *Journal of Markets and Morality*, even claiming that a perfectly efficient capitalist system equates to good, just as much as that which is inefficient leads to evil (De Soto 1999). Capitalism can just as easily be a force for good as it can be for creating cultures of evil and greed. It is a neutral force. The system is not to blame, but rather human abuse of the system. Therefore, economists must simultaneously recognize that while capitalism and consumerism are linked, one does not engender the other, nor does the sin in the latter contaminate the former. The emphasis must shift from debating whether or not to throw capitalism out and bring in a new system to instead focus on changing the culture of consumerism that has parasitically latched itself to the country and general public. Not only does this pertain to the economists, but also to Christians with unjustified scruples and a limited understanding of the Biblical view on wealth.

Conclusion

To conclude, the combination of economic theory and Christian moral sentiment must be presented. The Christian perspective on wealth and riches is not innately negative, and therefore not opposed to capitalism, since the system is designed solely as a process and tool for generating wealth. What should vex the Christian instead, is the culture of consumerism which surpasses need in favor of avarice. It is this culture which requires disdain, for it capitalizes on the innate sin of humankind and its selfish nature. Furthermore, capitalism and consumerism are not intrinsically dependent on one another, meaning that capitalism can exist without the lecherous consumerism. Therefore, the trouble with capitalism, from a Christian perspective, simply does not exist. That is not to say that the system has not been corrupted. It is instead the sinful impact of consumerism which perverts capitalism and takes advantage of the public, of the average consumer. Furthermore, the general population, although not ascribing to Christian values often recognizes that something is amiss. The gaps in

wealth which continue to grow not only engender resentment and hardship, but also division. In this way, those with a conventional sense of morality can see the detriments of consumerism and therefore should oppose it alongside Christians. The trouble of course then becomes the conflation of capitalism with consumerism, which, as previously stated, must be tackled in its own right. Thus, the work to be done is to attempt to unwind consumerism from its coiled position in the current culture and focus instead on building wealth to fill needs, as Adam Smith had intended. The path forward to complete this is not necessarily clear. It seems that Christian culture and values to the economic system of capitalism would help weed out consumerism. Unfortunately, secular society, which is the culture to which the majority of the world ascribes, tends to rebel against religious influence and authority, even if it is beneficial in the long run. The only hope therefore, for a major change in culture would be an appeal to secular influences and arguing for a return to Smith's understanding of capitalism and the role it was meant to play in the world.

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Consumption and Destruction: Seeking Clarity in Christian Stewardship

Written by: Temish Christiansen



“Fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’ ... The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Gen. 1-2). In the very first two chapters of the Bible, man is given the command to be fruitful and multiply, to have dominion over the earth, and to tend and keep to the garden. Mankind has certainly acted in response to this command since leaving the Garden, but the extent of both man’s success and failure is often uncertain. Mankind has certainly subdued the earth and filled it, but the dominion man ought to have seems to be more of a wasteful tyranny from time to time. Rather than cultivating and growing what God has given, mankind neglects and squanders what little they have garnered for themselves. Despite the potential for abuse of the gifts of nature, Christians can confidently live in the abundance provided by a capitalist society because it is God’s provision of daily bread to all through the work of man.

This potential abuse is not hard to picture. The modern marketplace allows for anybody to have just about anything they want at the click of a button. It produces countless products, sends them all over the world, and allows man’s many needs and wants to be fulfilled quickly. Man’s needs and wants, however, are ever-changing, and inevitably just as many things get carelessly wasted and destroyed as get conscientiously used and consumed. This degree of resource use is unprecedented in human history and gives Christians good reason to ask questions. A Christian in this environment can easily ask whether it is good to be using and consuming this much. Adam and Eve were called

to tend to the Garden and keep it, after all, and that includes preventing waste. While the Bible never makes explicit statements on how earthly societies ought to organize and run their economies, Christians are clearly called to be stewards of the world and the gifts which God has provided through it.

Stewardship, taken briefly, is taking care of what has been entrusted by another. A steward of a kingdom takes care of the crown until the king’s return. A steward of an estate runs the estate until his master returns. They are not the owners of what is entrusted to them, but merely caretakers in the stead and on behalf of the owners. Christians, then, know that it is one of mankind’s primary responsibilities to care for the world man has been given and will eventually return to its creator and owner, as is written in Genesis. This is not simply done by hoarding and maintaining what already exists, but to increase what has been entrusted. This is what it means to have dominion; rather than ruling as a tyrant or a curator of stagnation, man is commanded to develop and increase what has been given to him.

Dorothy Sayers, a renowned Christian writer and thinker, writes that man’s sub-creative nature comes from the Image of God that man has, which drives him to create in the way a child learns from their father. Man cannot create from nothing, but sub-creation with what has been given is a natural and good action. As Sayers writes,

“Looking at man, he sees in him something essentially divine, but when we turn back to see what he says about the original upon which the ‘image’ of God was modeled,

we find only the single assertion, ‘God created.’ The characteristic common to God and man is apparently that: the desire and ability to make things.” (1987, p. 22)

One can see this sub-creative authority in action when Adam names the animals in creation. Ancient readers would have been astounded to know that Adam, a created human, was permitted to name things. Names in the ancient world held great significance and were tied to the very essence of an object, so that if one knew the name of an object, they had power over it. Therefore, when he names the animals, Adam clearly displays his sub-creative authority over the rest of creation as the creature God crafted in his own image.

Furthermore, Christians are given many examples of people being proactive in their stewardship of gifts and exercise of dominion, such as the woman described in Proverbs 31, and the servants in the Parable of the Talents, as recorded in Luke 19:17. Those things which are given to man are not given simply to hold, but to use and increase so that when they are returned the owner can say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (English Standard Version Bible, 2001). These two passages are meant to teach more than a superficial, practical lesson on how to get by in the world – nothing in the Bible is meant as advice to help anyone “get rich quick.” That does not, however, mean there is no surface-level teaching available. Here, Scripture teaches that industrious and proactive servants are rewarded by their master, just as an industrious individual is a blessing to their family and community. Christians can easily see that if one has been given a gift – whether a small sum of money or the wealth of all creation – they ought to exercise their sub-creative dominion and produce benefit for their neighbor. The general teaching which the Bible offers about human industry and vocation does not outright promote capitalism. Nevertheless, the wide variety of gifts God has given to each person and the many tasks by which all Christians are called to serve their neighbor lend themselves quite well to a free market system.

The free market, often called capitalism is, simply put, a system where people work and reap the benefit of their labor, through an open and unrestricted marketplace (Hulse and Young, 2023). This can be as simple as a little girl selling lemonade and cookies to buy a new bicycle, to as grand as a large corporation buying out another to acquire its assets and increase production. Both of these are instances of a person or a group of people investing their time and energy to produce a benefit. As the Catholic priest Sirico writes,

“The free market rewards greatness and excellence instead of trying to eradicate them. It permits men and women space to express, pursue, and create higher things. And it leaves room for the most effective kind of charity to those in need.” (2012, p. 181)

In the best circumstances, this will be a benefit for both those working (in the form of payment) and for those who buy (in the form of a product or service), allowing all to generate wealth and help those in need. The basic definition of capitalism seems to be in keeping with Christian teaching and secular wisdom. This understanding of economics naturally excludes those who would misuse the freedom of a free market and exploit a capitalist system, harming others for their exclusive benefit. Service to one’s neighbor and the benefit of fulfilling one’s vocation are both included in a free market system and permissible by Christian ethics.

While on a conceptual level, capitalism matches neatly with Christian ethics, every human system is flawed and fallen on account of the sinful nature of humans and their broken creations. Capitalism is subject to the same fault, and yet abuse of something good does not preclude its proper use. Moreover, this is also not to say that capitalism is the best or only economic system permissible to a Christian. While that may be a valid argument to make, it is not being made here. For the purposes of this essay, it is sufficient to show how the capitalistic system is compatible with the Christian worldview and ethical system despite capacity for questionable outcomes. Stewards of God’s creation can comfortably and

ethically work to produce abundance in a free market, because it is both in human nature and a command from God to do so. The problems of the modern market that stewardship faces, then, are not ones of production or cultivation of abundance but rather the faults associated with wealth and waste. Therefore, the distinction relevant for Christians is the nature of human consumption as opposed to destruction.

Capitalistic societies produce much, and thus much is also wasted from neglect or lack of need. Sometimes this is because there is an over-abundance of products to select from. Nobody needs fifteen kinds of peanut butter or bread to choose from, but there is still an entire aisle dedicated to the peanut-butter and jelly sandwich in many stores. There is too much to choose from and too much to decide between, putting customers in a state of indecision about something as basic as lunch. Some would cite this as a failure of the capitalist system, but the blessings of abundance are many and often overlooked in America and the West. Of the troubles that a person could face, whether they would like crunchy or smooth peanut butter is far from the worst.

More often, the problem of consumerism is that much of what is produced ends in waste and destruction one way or another. There are things which are simply not needed – either it's produced and sold as vital without any real benefit, or produced but not distributed properly – in either scenario, waste or destruction are the results. One might consider cheap advertising merchandise for schools which wastes money, material, and space for no benefit, or a food service which produces sub-optimal food, charges people for it, and then throws the remainder away anyway, as examples of waste in the world today. Gold and silver, the basis of modern wealth, are mediums were agreed upon as valuable and seen to be imperishable, and thus used for trade and storage of wealth. Through this agreement of all parties, these objects are found to be valuable, if not necessarily useful. This is not the case when it comes to the cheap, low-quality goods produced en masse, as they are often presented as useful or needed, a lie which

most know as a lie and yet tacitly agree with (Locke, 1690). What was mentioned earlier about the innumerable varieties of peanut butter applies just as well to cheap branded pens and low-quality food service. While few apart from a seller genuinely want them to exist, it seems a law of the modern marketplace that such useless goods must exist, propagate, and ultimately be wasted.

No one would deny that resources must be consumed to meet basic human needs. “Man does not live by bread alone,” as Scripture says (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3), but he still needs the bread to feed himself and prays for it as the Lord teaches. Alternatively, to say that “water is life” is, aside from the trite virtue signaling, true. Not only is water how God saves the souls of his children through Baptism, but also the physical life of the human body, for it and all other life wither away without it. The needs of the body like warmth and nutrients require the use of resources like wood and food in order to stay alive. If a person is lost in the woods, he is justified in chopping down a tree to make a campfire and hunting game to feed himself. At the same time, burning down an entire forest just to stay warm would clearly be unacceptable, as would killing a deer and leaving the carcass behind. Destruction of resources is unacceptable, but is separate from the proper use of them. The difference between these two is often confused in discussions of stewardship and the marketplace, but is apparent upon closer inspection.

John Locke, the thinker who laid the philosophical foundation for the United States of America, shed light on the idea of proper consumption in his *Second Treatise on Government*:

“As much as anyone can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils, so much he may by his labour fix a property in: whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others. Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy.” (1690, sect. 31)

His argument a good one: God has provided the world for Man as his source of nourishment, and each person can rightfully consume from that

general supply by working to take it for themselves. At the same time, that which is taken and not used for the person or their neighbor's benefit is a waste, a destruction of the gift given to man in creation. From Locke, one sees that one's own property is protected by the fact that their own labor acquired it from nature, and no one else has a right to it beyond he who worked for it. Thus, theft is forbidden, as it is taking from another; waste is therefore also considered taking from everyone, as now no one can have those resources. One can and should take as much as they need, as God has given many and bounteous gifts to man, and should not encroach upon that which is another's, nor deprive others of the chance to acquire for themselves. That which a man takes and cultivates from creation is meant for the good of mankind and their neighbor; if so, then it is proper use, if not, or if the outcome is excessive loss, then it is destruction.

Locke's Second Treatise offers Christians in the modern marketplace plenty to consider concerning both consumption and destruction. In another section, he emphasizes the validity of trading, expanding, and keeping what one has because it does not take from the common supply, and thus does no harm. In that same section, he makes the point that hoarding more than he can make use of is wasteful, as others can surely use what he has, and keeping them from use is tantamount to outright waste (Locke, 1690). This conception of property is what the American market was built off of, and is entirely within the bounds of Christian principles. It is true that Christians are called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and generally care for the poor, so this must be done wisely. As the saying goes, "if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." St. Paul also writes "if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, 2 Thess. 3:10). This is not a command to despise the destitute, but an exhortation for all who are able to work for their own benefit to also work for the benefit of others. As Sirico writes,

"It is precisely those societies that have liberated the entrepreneur to create new

wealth that have generated the reserves of wealth, along with the means of creating and delivering a host of positive goods and services, that have done the most to roll back extreme poverty and place people on the path to economic well-being." (2012, p. 182)

Would the Good Samaritan have been able to help the man on the road if he did not have the money to spare? Or had in turn received the money from another because he chose not to work for himself? Certainly not, so Christians who wish to do their duty to serve their neighbor ought to work diligently, both for their own daily bread and to be of benefit to others. As Quaestus' own Dr. Niederjohn said,

"If we take seriously Jesus' commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves, an effective way to do that is to encourage an economic system based on individual liberty, mutually beneficial trade, and largely free markets—commonly referred to as capitalism." (2023, p. 30)

Despite mankind's abuse of God's gifts, Christians can confidently live in the abundance provided by a capitalist society because it is God's provision of daily bread to all through the work of man. With the clarity that Christians can and should create with the things they have been given to serve their neighbor, and that the misuse or disuse of those resources would be wasteful, how should a Christian navigate the modern world? The answer is clear: by nature and by the will of God, mankind ought to produce much by cultivation and sub-creation in order to supply the needs of oneself and one's neighbor. The destruction and waste of those gifts is a robbery from the rest of mankind, and therefore ought to be avoided. The waste present in the modern market is an unfortunate reality of the fallen world, but this is a misuse of the good gift of industry. Christians, then, should support the creation and cultivation of the fruits of the earth as their exercise of dominion and care for what has been given to man. As Locke succinctly writes: "God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience" (1690, sect. 26).

Just as God sheds blood to clothe Adam's sin and just as Jesus was nailed to a felled tree to save mankind from the captivity of sin, Christians can also feed and clothe their neighbor and use things present in creation to supply for needs of the body and serve their neighbor. Through this, Christians can be told that what they have done in aid to their neighbor they have done to God, and that in the end they may hear the words of their master: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Matthew 25:21).

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A Biblical Response to Wealth Inequality

Written by: Mikiah Pook



American society is very industrial. People are constantly urged to do everything possible to increase their wealth and assets, yet Christians are called to have a different mindset and approach regarding wealth. Often Christians are told not to pursue wealth, believing that being wealthy is evil. However, this mindset does not have a Biblical basis; rather, two questions can be asked to give clarity on how to approach the issue in a God-pleasing way. First, is wealth inequality a moral problem for Christians? Second, can someone be wealthy and still consider themselves a Christian? While the answers will be nuanced, the conclusion is yes, Christians should be concerned about wealth inequality, but that does not mean they have to purposely make themselves poor. Instead, Christians should use the blessings God has given them – whether that be financial or otherwise – to help their neighbors.

Christians are called to take care of the poor, the widows, the orphans, and anyone who cannot take care of themselves. This is seen in Acts 2:44-45: “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need” (English Standard Version). This might sound extreme, living so co-dependently and abolishing individual property, especially to American ears, but that is how the early disciples lived. Thus, one must examine what that means for modern society. This does not mean that all Christians need to sell all their belonging and live in this manner; nevertheless, they are called to care for and provide for one another.

It is easy to be apathetic and idle with what God has given us, especially in America where the culture constantly promotes putting oneself before all others. Regularly tithing 10% of one’s income might be standard practice for some but not a majority. In a study done by Health ResearchFunding.org, a group created by the National Health Council, only 17% of Americans tithed regularly. In 2020, the Pew Research Center estimated that about 64% of Americans were Christians. This means that a minority of Christians constantly give financially to their church. Yet Christians are called to do more than just give a small portion of their income:

“‘For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?’ ... And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me’” (Matthew 25:35-37,40).

Therefore, Christians must go beyond simply giving money to organizations that help those in need. Each person is called to help their neighbors when in need. That does not necessarily mean traveling across the world or spending every waking moment volunteering, but instead, taking care of those right next to us. Christians need to take time and look around them to see if there are people with needs, they can fulfill.

Although wealth inequality is an issue that needs to be addressed through generosity and service, Christians are not called to give everything they own away to the poor and needy. Matthew 10:16 states, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (English Standard Version). Christians are called to be wise in the way they live; including the way they use their money. The Bible explicitly states that people who are idle should not be provided for: “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness ... Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” (English Standard Version, 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). While Christians are called to help their brothers and sisters in Christ, that does not mean enabling them to become reliant on others.

God chooses a specific calling for each of His children – a vocation. That is more than just a job but an all-encompassing way to live one’s life. Martin Luther describes a vocation as being a “mask of God.” This is a calling for Christians to act as God’s hands and feet, helping and caring for one’s neighbor and showing God’s love. “On the surface, we see an ordinary human face ... but, beneath the appearances, God is ministering to us through them” (LCMS). Since Christians are called to act on God’s behalf, they must care for one another when struggling. If an individual is going through hard financial times, then perhaps a Church would feel the responsibility to offer financial assistance, or perhaps simple help like making meals for others would suffice. Christians have a responsibility to help one another but that does not mean there cannot be varying levels of wealth in a Church. Every Christian is called to one job or another, and some jobs pay more than others, but all Christians have the calling to serve and care for their neighbor.

There are multiple examples in the Bible of faithful believers who are wealthy. For instance, the book of Acts mentions Lydia, who sold purple goods. She was generous with her wealth

and offered Paul a place to stay in her home. She exemplified that wealthy people can show Christian love and hospitality without giving up their personal possessions and wealth (English Standard Version, Acts 16:11-15). Another example is Joseph of Arimathea. He was a rich man who believed in God, and after Christ’s death, he put Jesus’s body in one of his own tombs (English Standard Version, Mark 15:42-46). Joseph’s wealth was not condemned; rather, he had a wonderful opportunity to show faith and reverence through the use of his possession. From the examples seen in the Bible, it is apparent that you can have wealth and still be a Christian.

Furthermore, rich Christians who used their wealth for the benefit of the early Church greatly furthered the spreading of the gospel. Tabitha is one such example. She was a faithful disciple who was “full of good works and acts of charity,” meaning she financially supported the church (English Standard Version, Acts 9:37). Another example is Cornelius, who is described as a “devout man who feared God” and gave generously to those in need (English Standard Version, Acts 10:1-2). Both of these examples show how wonderful a blessing wealthy Christians can be to the Church if they focus on God and not the love of money.

Some people will disregard these examples and cite Bible passages out of context to claim that if a person has wealth, they cannot be a Christian. However, these passages often speak to more than the mere possession of wealth. For instance, in Mark Jesus tells a rich young man to sell all his possessions, give to the poor, and follow Him (English Standard Version, Mark 10:21-25). Jesus commands him to go and sell all his possessions, not because having wealth is evil, but because the man holds a false understanding of the law. He thinks that simply completing the required actions would make him righteous, not realizing that it is what is in the heart that matters for salvation and righteousness, namely faith. Money became an idol for the rich young man, so he placed his faith in it rather than in Christ.

Furthermore, some will reference other claims made by Jesus: “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple” (English Standard Version, Luke 14:33). This addresses the commitment that is required of a Christian. God tells his followers that their lives will not be easy and that they may be required to give up all they have in service of Him. The preceding verses talk about a Christian being called to hate his family in order to follow Christ. This statement does not mean that one must despise and avoid their family but rather that in all aspects of life, Jesus must come first. A Christian must be willing to do anything God calls him to do. In the same manner, when Jesus says that one must renounce all that they have, he does not mean selling everything one owns to give all the proceeds to the poor. Instead, he is saying that Christians must be willing and ready to use everything they own, including their wealth, for God’s purposes. The Bible even offers insight on how to be both a Christian and wealthy:

“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life” (English Standard Version, 1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Just like any other Christian, someone who is wealthy is called to use their blessings in a manner pleasing to God.

So, is wealth inequality a moral problem for Christians? Yes, Christians are called to take care of those struggling and less fortunate than themselves. Can someone be wealthy and still consider themselves a Christian? By all means! However, wealth can be a tempting idol, so wealthy Christians need to consider how they use their blessings and the motivations behind their actions regarding wealth. No matter how poor or rich a Christian may be, they are all called to do the same things, live out Christ’s love to everyone

they meet, and be generous to those around them in every way they are able.

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Faith in the Free Market

Written by: Gavin Stoub



As a Christian living in a modern world that continues to be overtaken by corporations that implement immoral practices, the challenges of supporting our beliefs prove to be difficult. Attempting to navigate this intricate intersection of faith and the market can cause significant strife and stress. It's important to investigate how our worldviews as a Christian should affect us when we see corporations using these immoral practices that don't align with our beliefs. When companies face us with a clear opposition to our worldviews, we should take action to refrain from their products. This thesis explores the challenges Christians face in aligning their consumer choices with their ethics.

Whether we know it or not, each decision we make throughout the course of a day is structured by an incomprehensible volume of information. As consumers, we are subconsciously filtering in knowledge we gain from advertisements, experiences, and appeal. This could result in beneficial purchases if we are purchasing a product that we heard good reviews on, but it could also lead to poor choices if we don't even realize that we are choosing a product simply because we recognize the name from somewhere. While this may seem unrealistic, we can look at a study summarized by Daniel Goldstein (2007) that proves this point:

"In a laboratory taste test, unwitting participants preferred a better-tasting peanut butter only 20% of the time when it wore an unfamiliar brand label but liked a worse-tasting product 73% of the time when they thought it was a recognized brand. Consumers' awareness runs deep: Images of highly familiar brands have been shown to activate specific areas of the brain."

Most consumers would much rather purchase worse products from a company that they recognize than better products from a company they are unfamiliar with.

In addition to that, we should consider our ethics and morals while determining our purchases. A conflict we often face is purchasing more affordable items that lead us to support causes that oppose our beliefs. When I see companies, such as Starbucks and Target, openly promoting concepts such as gender fluidity, how am I supposed to react? As a proclaiming Christian, can I no longer purchase items at companies like these? This action may seem illogical and even impossible. This is because the list of companies supporting the LGBTQ community stretches from clothing to automobiles to internet providers to beverage manufacturers and all the way to banking services. In the presence of all of this, how are we supposed to react? As a Christian, our responses should include reflection, responsible actions, and fortitude in our beliefs.

In the face of opposing worldviews, we may become frustrated and distressed, but we must remember to think before we act. Whenever I said or did something that I would later regret, my mom would ask, "Did you think about that before you did it?" God tells us to do this in James, who writes, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" (English Standard Version, James 1:19). We are called to listen to one another and, essentially, think before we speak. This passage is not forbidding us to speak, but rather, it reminds us that we cannot let our anger drive us towards wicked speech. It is important that

we are respectful and uphold our morals. If we were to disrespectfully vocalize our concerns, we would not be succeeding in anything. God tells us to be gracious in Colossians 4:6: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (English Standard Version). When people see Christ’s light shining through us, we further exemplify his glory and exhibit the grace that God intends for people to see. This is why we must, as my mom would say, think before we act. After doing so, we may realize there are alternative responses that will effectively resolve the situation. God provides us with guidance in His Word for when we get anxious that helps us reflect on the situation in Philippians 4:6: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (English Standard Version). Pray. Pray to God when you are confused. Pray to God when you are mad. Pray to God when you are anxious. People often underestimate the power of prayer and forget the significance that it carries. When we’re faced with these challenging decisions, it is important to remember that we can pray about it. Simply let your requests be made known to God, and He will help guide you through your decisions. Taking a moment to think before we act and reflect will help us best portray God’s grace.

While reflecting and praying are powerful, amidst a society influenced by corporations and their hidden agendas, it can still be challenging to determine what we can physically do. In the Bible, God tells us that everything we do should be for His glory in 1 Corinthians 10. The Apostle Paul writes, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (English Standard Version). With this in mind, we should ensure we refrain from supporting unjust causes specifically when companies explicitly do or say something that goes against what we, as Christians, believe. God is telling us in 1 Corinthians that no matter what we do, EVEN eating or drinking, we should do it for His glory. When we see a company advertising and selling products that we do not support, or even oppose, the Biblical worldview, we should strive

to avoid them. There are plenty of examples of this happening with multiple large companies. After Target began selling children’s “pride” clothes right in the entry of their stores, customers showcased their discontentment by voicing their concerns and no longer shopping at Target to the point that Target moved the displays to the back of the store. Joanna Walters (2023) explained this when she said, “Target confirmed that it had moved its Pride merchandise from the front of stores to the back in some southern US locations, after confrontations and backlash involving some shoppers in those areas.” Another example of this happening was with Ford and the release of their ad that featured a truck wrapped in pride colors. We can see that Americans roared with backlash as their favorite American-made truck company “went woke” in an article by Rose White (2023),

“Then last year Ford rolled out a one-of-a-kind rainbow and gold Pride Bronco at the Memphis Pride Festival and Motor City Pride.... But blowback to these rainbow trucks reverberated into 2023... [when] social media posts resurfaced the video last month with one saying, ‘Ford goes woke! Looks like they didn’t learn from Bud Light,’ and pushing for a boycott. Another said, ‘Thank goodness I don’t drive a Ford.’”

Finally, when Bud Light announced that they support pride efforts, Americans swiftly transitioned to other beer brands as highlighted by Michael Gauthier (2023),

“Unless you’ve been living under a rock for the past few months, you’re undoubtedly aware that Bud Light could use some ‘real men of genius’ as their association with transgender personality Dylan Mulvaney has sparked immense backlash. This has caused Bud Light sales to plummet by nearly 25% and some stores are effectively giving the beer away for free after rebate.”

These examples are not supposed to suggest that we go out and protest the companies, however, they are showing that we can take a stand and refrain from using those products or from shopping at that store. This doesn’t strictly refer

to buying goods; this responsibility extends to our rentals, subscriptions, investments, and more. Ultimately, we should be ethical in our decisions and ensure that our choices and everything we do reflect our Biblical worldviews.

Obviously, we have a variety of choices when it comes to how we can react to these companies' poor marketing decisions. There is even more we can do, however, to promote the Christian worldview. In addition to reflecting and maintaining responsible consumption, we can flip to the other side of the coin and volunteer or donate to organizations that still respect Christian worldviews. Imagine a football team. How do they win the game? They have to stop the other team from scoring a touchdown. Nevertheless, they can't win if they don't try to achieve a touchdown of their own. By boycotting these corporations, we are going on the defensive and not allowing them to spread their message through us and, along with others, sending them the message that we don't support their efforts. Instead of stopping for lunch at McDonalds, which has outwardly supported the pride community, we can opt for Chick-fil-A, which was founded by a Christian and still supports Christian worldviews by closing every Sunday and playing Christian music at every location. As Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians, everything we do should be to glorify God. There's no better way to do that than to support Christian worldviews. God tells us something similar in Matthew 5:16, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (English Standard Version). We are called to let Christ's light shine through us so that others can see God's glory. If we are supporting these companies, wearing shirts that remind people of God's love, taking our friends to places that play Christian music, and supporting missions to spread God's word, we are letting God's light shine through us. We are supporting what we believe in. We are being ambassadors for Christ.

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (English Standard Version, Colossians 3:23). This is a simple reminder that

can leave a significant impact. If we are putting the Lord before our own desires, we can leave a positive impact in our midst. There will be times we have to respond to the market when agents advertise, provide products, or support causes that oppose the Christian worldview. When we do this, we must remember to remain respectful, as God calls us to. In light of this, there are many ways in which we can respond to these agendas. We can always reflect on their choices and think before we act. Also, we can be wise with our consumption. We are responsible for making our own ethical decisions and avoiding purchases that support unjust causes. In addition to these, we can go on the offensive and support charities and companies that align with our Biblical worldviews. It's important to remember these things when we see opposing worldviews so that we don't sacrifice our Christian morals and always let Christ's light shine through us.

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How should we teach about capitalism and socialism in Christian schools?

Written by: Alyssa Giese



From Plato and the other ancient Greek philosophers to the medieval church fathers, the Renaissance and Reformation writers, the Enlightenment intellectuals, and the modern and postmodern theorists, it has always been assumed that education is important. Education is defined throughout the centuries as the means of shaping a child into a capable and wise adult who can interact with the world around them. Scripture gives a special emphasis to the education of the young, encouraging parents not to neglect the training of their children. “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it,” advises Proverbs 22:6 (English Standard Version). This Scriptural basis encourages Christians to take special care for their children’s education, not just in the secular realm, but also in the spiritual. Christians understand that we live in this world but not of it, and a good Christian education ought to reflect that perspective. The clash of the spiritual and secular realms has always existed and seems particularly amplified in today’s day and age, especially in schools.

As Christian schools struggle with how to navigate this clash, questions arise. Recently, one such issue is how Christians ought to respond to different economic systems. Is one system more Christian than another? How should Christians respond to immoral activities within the economic system they operate in? These issues take on a special meaning when we consider how to best approach them in a Christian school. To use the words of Proverbs, what is the way in which our Christian schools should train Christian students to go? How should a Christian school approach the intersection of capitalism, socialism, and

Christian values? In approaching these questions, Christian schools should make use of Scripture, teaching their students to view the world using its teachings, while also applying exegetical historical analysis to understand the nuanced realities of economic systems. From these foundations, students should also be equipped to thoughtfully respond in a God-pleasing manner to these systems through their vocations.

For any school that wishes to maintain the title of “Christian,” it is necessary to begin to tackle any issue with the truth of Scripture in mind. For the discussion of economic systems, it is important to discuss the nature of man as one of these truths. Scripture teaches us that humanity is inherently sinful, unable to change our evil condition (Book of Concord). From conception until death, a person is doomed to be irredeemably evil by nature, saved only through the grace of Christ. In practical terms, this means that humans are naturally predisposed to take actions that will harm those around them in order to achieve selfish purposes. A Christian school ought to teach this doctrine, along with the rest of the truth that we learn from Scripture, forming the foundation from which a child is taught.

In the case of learning about economic systems, the understanding of humanity’s utter depravity is important. A student who understands that humans are naturally selfish can recognize that no economic system will be perfect, simply because the humans participating are incapable of being perfect themselves. For instance, in America’s free market system, the market will reward greed, and allow for the promotion of immoral products if there is a demand for them.

In reading the Bible, Christians know these activities are contrary to the will of God. Thus, our sinful reality eliminates the utopian ideals of the most die-hard socialists and capitalists. With an understanding of the evil in human nature, students will be able better understand the shortcomings of economic systems.

In any education about economic systems, including a Christian one, history should be used to illustrate and explain economic systems. Scripture is the inerrant word of God, and provides absolute truths and clearly lays out what is virtuous and evil. On the other hand, history does not produce such concrete lessons of what to believe or how to best live. General conclusions can be drawn from past events, but not direct lessons. For instance, we know from history that it is unwise to invade Russia in the middle of winter. That being said, history does not tell us not to invade Russia in the winter. The distinction between a general conclusion and a moral lesson is important and often missed in the study of history. In his essay, "A Christian Perspective for the Teaching of History," George Marsden bemoaned the lack of this distinction in schools. "Some Christian teachers appear to feel that every history lesson should have a moral," he wrote. "One [issue] is that it involves the danger of substituting moralism for more significant historical analysis" (1975). In other words, Christian teachers should be aware of the difference between historical eisegesis and exegesis. These terms are most often associated with theological interpretation of the Bible, but they can apply to historical analysis as well. Eisegesis is when a scholar looks at a document or historical event in order to prove a pre-held bias. Exegesis is when a scholar interprets an event, drawing out conclusions from it, rather than using it to confirm a pre-held bias. In the case of a Christian teacher, historical examples serve to explain economic systems, rather than directly condemning them. The criticism comes after an understanding of the background, ideals, and execution of the economic systems in history and in the present day. Historical analysis will show that capitalism is most conducive with a Christian worldview, because it allows for people to live

out their vocations freely (The Wilson Quarterly, 2010). Students should be equipped to reach this conclusion after a careful examination of the facts, rather than just being taught the conclusion itself. Merely teaching that capitalism is good or evil, instead of teaching the history and reasoning behind the conclusion, would be a failure of the Christian education system to teach historical exegesis and equip students to draw conclusions from facts rather than bias.

Using a Scriptural foundation and historical understanding, a student in a Christian school is able to point out the flaws in economic systems, whether capitalist or socialist. They learn of human sinfulness as well as economic systems' origins, successes, and failures. However, a Christian education must also equip its students to meet these economies and their problems head on. Therefore, it is important to Christian schools to stress the idea of vocation. Vocation is the particular calling that each individual receives from God, in service to Him, the Church and their neighbors (The Lutheran Church Missouri-Synod). In this case, Christians should respond to the failings of their economic system in support of their neighbors through their vocations, and it is important that a Christian education equips them to do so. For instance, in America's free market system, there will be a disparity of wealth. The Church is called to care for the poor and needy, and students ought to recognize their vocation in this care for their neighbors. A vital part of learning about economic systems in a Christian school, especially in our free market system, is the application of values as the student interacts with the world around them.

Having both a historical context of the different theories of economic systems and a clear understanding of Christian doctrine will allow students in Christian schools to combat the issues that arise when discussing the clash of faith and economics. A successful education ought to prepare students to face a world in which they will be challenged, but to also use the truth which they were taught in their education to stand strong and evaluate issues thoroughly, making informed

and wise judgements. An education cannot simply provide all of the answers for a student. Instead, it must prepare students to face the questions themselves. We should teach the historical facts about each system, good and bad, in conjunction with Christian values and clear Biblical doctrine. Morals should be applied to teaching, not the other way around. History is not a fable with a neat and witty remark to be summarized, just as religion is not used to beat certain ideas into or out of our students. Students should ponder the conjunction of faith and economics, determining how our Christian faith requires us to act when faced with issues. A good Christian education must prepare students to evaluate economic systems, including our American free market, based on the truth of Scripture and equip them to combat the issues that they find within these systems.

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A Christian Perspective on Technology and Its Limits

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Society survives and evolves through technological advancements. These technological advancements have often benefited Christianity. For example, though the common people were illiterate, the Church Fathers wrote countless books to promulgate Christian doctrine in the early periods of the Church. Crusaders used evolving wartime technology to achieve the religious conquest of non-Christian nations. The invention of the printing press enabled Martin Luther to spread his writings to the masses.

Whereas in the past technology aided Christianity, in modernity it has become a hinderance. The internet and television have made it easier than ever for false teachers to spread incorrect and misleading theology. Internet forums and social media sites have become hotspots for misinformation or outright disdain for Christian doctrine. This dissemination of false teaching often goes unnoticed or unhindered. Technological devices have infiltrated the Church and may often take the focus away from the Scripture and place it on the glory of manmade technologies. Hence, humans often have placed faith in technology instead of Scripture.

The main theological objection to such rapid advances in technology is the disconnection between societal norms or structure and Scriptural truths. Some technological advances, such as artificial intelligence, social media, and instant access to the internet, pose a great threat to theology and Christian doctrine. They possess the potential to challenge the sanctity and distinctness of human life and disregard God's inerrant and authoritative Word. This paper will examine these three technological advancements and discern how they commonly distract humans from the Word

and toward the glory of man-made technology in light of capitalistic influences, and how the Church should address these issues.

Artificial intelligence

Technological involvement in theological situations may create a false conception of morality because the supposed contribution of technology is not grounded in a connection to the divine. Whereas human reason comes from the revealed truths of Scripture and the unique connection humans have with God in the Person of Christ and his Incarnation, some technologies are only able to regurgitate facts or knowledge with no conception of morality. Its moral compass depends entirely on its software input, which can be manipulated in such a way that disorientates it away from the Word of God.

This paper will follow the definition artificial intelligence offered by John McCarthy, former professor of computer science at Stanford University: "It is related to the similar task of using computers to understand human intelligence, but AI does not have to confine itself to methods that are biologically observable" (McCarthy, 2007, p. 2).

The main objection to artificial intelligence is the tension it creates with regard to the role that human agency has in discernment of morality. An article by Sterling Martin states, "Since the fall, theological tension has prompted Christians to reflect on the balance between human responsibility and the guidance of a higher power," (Martin, 2023). Artificial intelligence fundamentally challenges the place of human reason in the perspicacity of objective moral truths

Dr. Ximian Xu, a research fellow in technology at the University of Edinburgh, argues that “human beings are created in the image of God, while AI is created in the image of humanity” (Xu, 2023). Though one might object that this statement implies that all man-made creations oppose God’s design, it is important to note that being created in the image of man alone does not force that creation against God. Instead, any man-made creation that does not glorify God and His intended design is thereby in opposition to it. Therefore, when it used to promulgate unbiblical sentiments or promote an anti-Christian agenda, it becomes a threat to the Church.

In capitalist societies, technological advancements are often favored which optimize existing processes. For example, artificial intelligence has been used to reimagine interpersonal communication through chatbots and instant image creation. Similarly, ChatGPT may be used to write formal essays and papers based on provided prompts and make postulations using information it is fed. A capitalist society is far more likely to favor artificial intelligence for its efficiency in completing tasks, especially computing and data-related tasks. Not to mention, artificial intelligence outsource human labor, with some studies estimating that nearly 300 full-time jobs will be replaced by 2030 (Talmage-Rostron, 2024). Not only would this potential mass replacement of human labor effectively displace God’s command that humans work and have dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28), but it would also largely fracture man’s ability to carry out this duty.

Social media

Social media is defined by the American Psychological Association as “interactive technologies that facilitate the creation, sharing and aggregation of content, ideas, interests.” Common social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Snapchat, but many others exist. These platforms make use of photo-sharing, text messaging, and creating posts to interact with other users. As with

artificial intelligence, there is nothing inherently wrong with such platforms. The idea of user connection via the internet has helped family members and friends stay connected with one another.

Yet social media also poses an interesting risk to humans. The very premise of social media creates social disconnection by the ability to be “connected” from any location. Yet this connection is superficial because man was created to live interpersonally and socially. God proclaims in Genesis 2:18 that “it is not good for man to be alone.” Though this refers specifically to marriage, this same principle has been thoroughly applied to a broader sense of community throughout Scripture. For example, Acts 2 describes the constant meeting of Christians in the early Church and the importance of such a community. 1 Peter 4 also likens community to service, which is also commanded by Scripture.

This inherent desire for man to be social is reflective of God’s triune nature. God is three divine, consubstantial Persons in one Triune God. Therefore, His essence is communal. Because man was created in his image, man was created with a communal, social, and interpersonal nature. Ian Harber writes that social media “conforms our minds to the patterns of the content we consume,” much of which is anti-Christian and contrary to Scripture. He later writes:

Social media acts as a spiritual and cognitive distortion machine that warps our view of reality and bends our will away from God. It’s the systematic, corporately incentivized inversion of Romans 12:1–2. Instead of our minds being renewed by the Spirit of Christ, they’re shaped by algorithmically curated delivery of the particular patterns of the world that best play to our unsanctified desires. They beckon us into conformity with the world by drawing our hearts and minds away from God (Harber, 2023).

Examples of the algorithmic content people are fed on social media include short-form videos on TikTok, a video-sharing platform, that often include demonic and morally perverted principles. Social media formats like this also make it easier to publish and circulate propaganda, which is often hostile to Scriptural values.

An online article from Lifespan also argues that “the more time spent on social media can lead to cyberbullying, social anxiety, depression, and exposure to content that is not age appropriate” (Dalomba, 2022). Forbes notes that “The survey found social media usage peaks at the age of 17 for both genders with an average of 5.8 hours each day. Also, 62% of 17-year-olds spend 4+ hours on social media daily” (Adgate, 2024). This excessive use of social media often drives children away from their families and replaces communal life with superficial social media connections.

Therefore, social media promotes self-isolation for individuals and exposes them to perverse material. This is unbiblical and draws people away from God’s Word by encouraging them to seek fulfillment and self-gratification apart from Scripture. This issue has only been amplified in capitalist societies that utilize social media to sell goods and services or promote products.

Internet access

Internet access, which is now more instant and accessible than ever, poses numerous risks to consumers, notably the unrestricted consumption of pornography and the development of dependence on technology. With regard to pornography, one study claims that one in three American adults seeks out pornography monthly. Among 18–34-year-olds, that number is even higher at 57% (Smith and LaSueur, 2023). Creating and consuming pornography is a deliberate sin against the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Psychology Today reports that pornography is one of the biggest drivers of divorce and loneliness, as well as abandonment of faith and Scriptural morals (Frye, 2021). Even worse, pornography is largely

uncontrolled online, which has reportedly led to 73% of teenagers viewing pornography, including 54% by the age of 13 (Mann, 2023).

Dependence on technology also creates a personal idol out of technology, a direct contradiction of God’s first commandment that “You shall have no other gods.” According to the National Center for Biotechnology Information, excessive internet causes “little sleep, failure to eat for long periods, and limited physical activity, possibly leading to the user experiencing physical and mental health problems such as depression, OCD, low family relationships and anxiety.” This contradicts Paul’s reminder in 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and his exhortation in Romans 12:1 to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Immediate internet access of any kind also directly affects personal life and communal life. Though its direct effect on an individual depends on how frequently and for what purposes it is consumed, instant internet access has become extremely common in a rapidly commercializing culture like America. An article from Purdue University, for example, chronicles how classroom education has been transformed by the vast advancements in technology, which include access to wide swaths of educational material, but also the ability to be distracted from education by means like Facebook (Purdue Online). What is more, Forbes suggests that future success may largely depend on widespread use of technology (Trapp, 2021). This all suggests that it has and will continue to become much harder to escape the ever-expanding influences of technology and the dependence it has garnered in everyday life.

The Church’s response

Christianity cannot avoid the technological advancements of mankind. Yet according to Dale Sims, a professor of management information systems at Dallas Baptist University, “Because the Church has tried to meet the standards of

technology in order to remain relevant to society and culture, it has given technology the right to declare it irrelevant” (Sims, p.12). In many cases, the Church relies heavily on the use of technology, especially social media, which often detracts from the evangelical message of the Church. The desire to incorporate modern technological advances in church settings have often crippled with Church’s doctrine and evangelical mission. Thus, a balanced and well-reasoned response to technology is warranted.

When the Church makes use of technology in any sense, its usage must be kept under scrutiny. This is not to say that use of technology should be automatically despised, but rather that its effect on theology and sanctification is kept under close watch. In all circumstances, use of technology and its effects must be tested against Scripture. Whether it is artificial intelligence teaching something contrary to Scripture or social media dragging people away from the communal life for which humans are created, Scripture must govern how Christians view and use technology. Closely related is the idea that the Church is founded on Scripture. The revealed knowledge of God in His Word is supreme, and all things are subject to it.

Dr. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, claims, “The deep limitations of digital technologies become evident where the church is most needed,” (Mohler, 2012). The interpersonal connection that Christians have with one another and with the world cannot be replicated or replaced by technology. The connection that humans share with one another is irreplicable and foundational to the evangelical nature of Christianity.

Accordingly, the Church must emphasize interpersonal relationships and communal life apart from technology, especially excessive use of technological advancements like artificial intelligence and social media.

Technology can undoubtedly be used for good in the Church, especially when it is used to

complement its evangelical mission. Technology is not in itself an inherent evil, but advancements that challenge the authority of Scripture ought to be avoided and disavowed. Where the Church’s mission is overrun by the otherwise astounding technological advancements mankind has achieved, the truth of the Gospel may be suppressed.

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