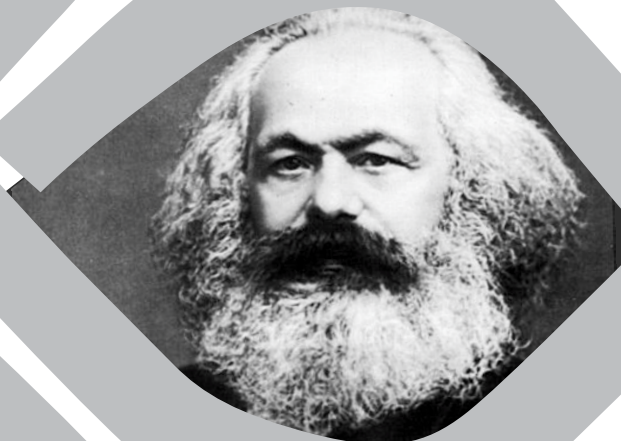
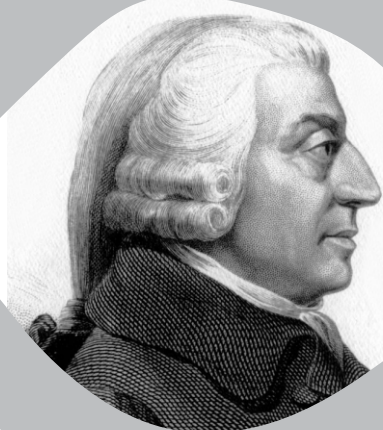


the WeighBridge

JUNE 2020

ISSUE 4: KINGDOMICS



THERE ARE ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

RED LETTER
EDITION

Tips for the Intrepid Reader

This issue of The WeighBridge still contains debate, as usual, but in a new format.

Christian Distinctiveness

Through this issue are five tables that identify Left, Centre and Right. These are consistently in the three columns to the right. That leaves a fourth column, which we have positioned it on the very left side of the table. Not at all because it is “leftist”, but because it is primordial. For in that first column, we have captured biblical laws, faith principles and ethical guidance that is relevant across that whole row. Guided by a theme for each row.

If we were thinking time-wise, we would have put Capitalist to the left, followed by Leftist, then by centrist. That is the **historical** order in which they emerged. However it would be disingenuous to put the “Leftist” column on the right side! And Centrist to the right of Left and Right. This explains why the tables are set up as they are.

I regard Karl Marx to be the prophet of Marxism, Henry George as the prophet of Centrism, and Adam Smith as the prophet of capitalism. But Smith lived and wrote first and George lived and wrote last. We preferred to place Centrism between Marxism and Capitalism, because that’s what it is. And we put the primordial column first, to the left side, because all of these prophets of economics were aware of those precepts.

A word about the rows. One example comes to mind – the right to bear arms. You will note that the decentralized response is always more inclined to individual rights. This aligns with liberal humanism. Whereas in a centralized or planned economy, there may be more gun control imposed by the State? Or even a ban on citizens possessing firearms?

We did not find any of these positions to be more or less “Christian” than the other two. Biblical quotes sprinkled throughout the tables both support and refute each position. It seems to us that the Bible is more concerned about Justice than about Policy or Platform.

Don’t Confuse “Centrist” with “Centralized”

Also, please note the huge difference between the two terms Centrist and Centralized.

*Centrists are just that –
not Left-wing or
Right-wing but
middle-of-the-bird.*

In economics there is a centre-Left (which we sometimes call market-socialist) and a centre-Right (which we sometimes call welfare-capitalist). Basically you’ve got Communism on the far-Left and Capitalism on the “Alt-Right”. We tend to regard both of these as extremist.

Centralizing can happen under Dictators like the Caesars who were far from communist. Most totalitarian regimes are highly centralized, but that does not necessarily mean they are leftist. However, “centralized” also applies to Marxist regimes, which seek to bring about the “dictatorship of the Proletariat” (that is, of the masses). The primordial column is our compass. It helps us to navigate through diverse alternatives in the here and now. ■

Thought-bursts

KINGDOM <i>What belongs to God</i>	LEFT
Jesus of Nazareth	Karl Marx 1867
Limitations ➡ An “asteroid belt” not a planet – a mixed economy, a pragmatic kingdom of coalitions	The growth of unwarranted State power (e.g. expropriation without compensation)
Highlights ➡ <i>“The kingdom of heaven is at hand”</i> New Covenant... in the church Decentralization enclaves	The “common good” – Augustine, Aquinas Private property is not a biblical concept: <i>“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”</i> (Luke 9: 58, Matt 8:20)
Pros and cons ➡ <i>“Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, “Who is the Lord?” or lest I be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God”. (Prov 30:8.9)</i>	The state has a duty to see that citizens have sufficient access to the things that enable their full participation in society
Behaviours ➡ <i>“They sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as they had need (Acts 2: 44,45)</i>	Not always atheistic – like Marxism Early peasants revolts (Wycliffe & Luther)
Traits ➡ The gospel is not a natural or necessary ally of capitalism NT vision of equality and grace	Generosity - <i>“Provided there is an eager desire to give, God accepts what a man has”. II Corinthians 8:12</i>
Roots ➡ God gave manna – Moses instructed the people not to gather any manna for the next day, since God would provide for each day Charging interest was prohibited	Communism – the “second world” The flaws of centralized management could be seen in comparing the Soviet management of its agricultural industry with that of the USA
Motives ➡ <i>“If you listen to these laws and are careful to observe them, the Lord your God will observe the sworn covenant he made with your forefathers and will keep faith with you. He will love you, bless you and cause you to increase.” (Deut 7:12, 13)</i>	God provides the State for our own good (Rom 13)... But the Bible for the most part takes a rather negative view of centralized government (e.g. I Sam 8, Rev 13)
Essence ➡ Jesus mentioned money and economics more than any other topic	When they say “society”, they mean the State

on History

CENTRE	RIGHT <i>What belongs to Caesar</i>
Henry George 1886	Adam Smith 1776
Empires have seldom lasted more than a century before pressures to decentralize take over	Ancient Egypt was a tyranny and massive bureaucracy, imposing a 20 percent tax
Church/State alliance (emergence of nation states) New Deal policies of FDR Sweden is most commonly recognized as the paragon of the welfare state	Centralized church/empire dominated local states Imperialism Medieval manorialism Feudalism
“Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to poverty will be cursed.” Proverbs 28:27 “Sodom was destroyed partly because it did not serve the poor.” (Ezek 16: 49.50)	The medieval church names seven sins as deadly: greed, avarice, envy, gluttony, luxury, pride and sloth. Capitalist economic philosophy has transferred six of the seven into virtues. Even sloth is permissible for the rich.
“No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” (Acts 4:32)	“A vampire than feeds on labour” – Karl Marx The rich exploit the poor (cif Amos)
“There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (Acts 4: 34, 35)	The rich fool who lavished everything on himself (Luke 12: 13-21) Oppression and injustice are among the major causes of poverty in the world
We have the power to eradicate hunger The welfare state was created as a support to people and to family life and responsibility “the acceptable year of our Lord” (Luke 4:19)	Leading lights – Italian port cities, to Iberian countries to north & western Europe Post-war Japan has been the paragon of industrial productivity. It has had low unemployment
Example of the generosity of Lazarus and his family in Bethany to Jesus and his band Initiative can be based in greed and selfishness, or it can be based on love	A humanist ideology (liberal reason) Supply-side economics Milton Friedman Ludwig von Mises
Self-evaluation: how have we enabled good? How have we resisted evil? How have we provided for those in human need?	Reaganomics “Get big government off the people’s back”

A Dialogue with Leonardo Boff

Part 1

Boff: It isn't preaching that saves but practices. This is the basic key to the ethic of Jesus. Which practices align people with the great dream of the realm of God, those that save? These practices do not sacralize, or extend, or improve existing ones. They start new ones. For new wine, new wineskins; for new music, new ears.

The WeighBridge: Interesting how radical this is from the start. Issue #4 of The WeighBridge is getting close to this - that Kingdonomics does not align easily with either Capitalism or Socialism, but wants space to role-model a mixture that will seem odd to anyone locked into an existing mindset.

Boff: The first thing Jesus does in terms of ethics and behaviour is free the human being. We all live behind the bars of laws, rules, prescriptions, traditions, rewards and punishments. That is how religions and societies work; with such instruments they make people fit in, keep them submissive, create the established order. Jesus stands up to this kind of apparatus, which impedes the exercise of freedom and stifles energy: "You have heard that it was said to the ancients, but I say to you" (Matthew 5:21,22). Since he is apocalyptic, he lives an ethic of urgency. Clock time is running against history. There is no halfway point: "Let your word be yes if it is yes and no if it is no" (Matthew 5:37). What is most important about the law is not observing the traditions and fulfilling religious precept, but "doing justice, mercy and good faith" (Matthew 23:23).

The WeighBridge: Yes but what we can do can be so totally overwhelmed by State action. If you think of the Hutterites or the Amish, they stand for a community-based faith. Perhaps in pioneer days they were a real option? But these days they have receded into knick-knacks. This is because both Left and Right have cleverly absorbed a lot of Christian influence into their secular models. The world is generally far kinder now than it was under Roman rule.

Boff: The essential and new thing introduced by Jesus is unconditional love. Love of neighbour and love of God are the same thing, and the meaning of all the biblical tradition is to

culminate in this unity (Matthew 22:37-40). The radical proposal resounds: "Love as I have loved you," which is love to the end (John 13:34). No one is excluded from love, not even enemies, for God loves all, even the "ungrateful and the wicked" (Luke 6:35).

The WeighBridge: Yet we don't see Jesus challenging the Rule of Law. Otherwise you get anarchy. This is our problem in dealing with corruption and patronage. You can't just forgive them. Or you basically validate them. Which pulls standards down into liquid evil, it does not raise them to a higher standard. Could this be why Jesus did not ultimately challenge the authority of Rome/Pilate?

Boff: The law of Christ - if indeed this word "law" can be used - or rather the logic of the reign, is encapsulated in love. This love is more than a feeling and a passion. It is a decision for freedom; it is a life purpose in the sense of always opening oneself to others, letting them be, listening to them, welcoming them, and if they fall, reaching out to them. The truth of this love is tested in whether we love the vulnerable, the despised and the invisible. It is especially of our relationship of acceptance of these wretched of the earth that Jesus is thinking when he asks us to love one another or the neighbour. Making this love the standard of moral behaviour entails demanding of the human being something highly difficult and uncomfortable. It is easier to live within laws and prescriptions that anticipate and determine everything. Our lives are boxed in but at ease. Jesus came to break down that inertia and to awaken human beings from this ethical slumber. He invites them, for the sake of love, to create conduct appropriate to each moment; he urges them to be alert and creative. The reign is set up whenever this loving and absolutely open and accepting stance exists. If power means anything, it is to be a potency of service. Power is only ethical if it enhances the power of the other and fosters relationships of love and cooperation among all; otherwise the domination of some over others continues, and we become entangled in the nets of the interests in contention.

The WeighBridge: We think that love for the wretched of the earth is terrific. Widows,

orphans, refugees, unemployed, homeless, etc. yes for sure. We think that the economic Inequality on earth is inhuman. Now we are soon going to have a trillionaire who has made a bundle off the Covid-19 pandemic. Others in the vaccine-Cabal are going to profit from their research while hundreds of thousands have died. But when it comes to Justice, we don't see forgiveness as the panacea. There has to be Rule of Law, police, courts, military, deterrent. Because Evil is a near and present danger. Love should not deny that it IS there. Politics is somewhere between Economics and Justice. It can soften by Christian ethics, but if it melts we are doomed. We still need Justice and the Rule of Law. What we are seeing is that the Christian influence may have to come out of pockets or enclaves, within society. Sort of like the kibbutzim in Israel kind of define it, although the whole country doesn't operate on their cooperative standards. They are part of the mix and they stand for something spiritual, something cultural. But they do not rule, or the country would melt into chaos.

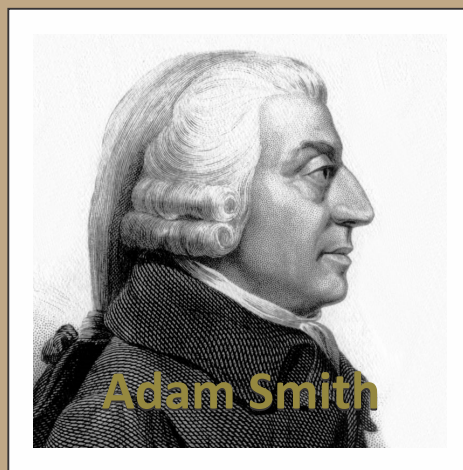
Boff: This love is expressed radically in the Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus makes a clear option for victims and those who don't count in the present order. He declares that the blessed, that is, bearers of the divine blessings, are the poor, and the first heirs of his reign are those who weep, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the compassionate, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for the sake of justice, those who bear insults and persecutions for the sake of the reign and put up with lies and every kind of evil (Matthew 5:3-12). Indeed, the ethic of Jesus reaches into people's innermost and hidden intentions: not only those who kill but even those who offend their brothers and sisters will be liable (Matthew 5:22); even desiring another's wife suffices for committing adultery in one's heart (Matthew 5:28). He says emphatically: "Do not resist the evil; if someone slaps your right cheek, offer him your left; if someone disputes with you to take your clothing, offer him your cloak as well" (Matthew 5:39,40). It was such ideals of Jesus that led Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi and Dom Helder Camara to propose the way of active non-violence for confronting the power of the negative.

The WeighBridge: Certainly the tradition of non-violence opposes the use of Force or Power to

dominate. It is a powerful potion indeed. But after living in communist countries intoxicated by power I can tell you that a lot of poor people are never mobilized or influenced by prophets like those you mention. They are just crushed, by Force. And when Triumphalism kicks in, they get even more vindictive. You have to have a legal system that ALSO requires law-abiding and if not, punishment. We are inspired when non-violent action stands up to power, like Hong Kong. But my guess is that for every time that works, ten other times the non-violent get crushed. Starting with Jesus, through to Tibet and now the Uygurs too. At this point we see a separation of church and State, the church cannot discipline like the Inquisition or fight like the Crusades. Better for maybe a few Christian individuals to run for office and to fight abortion, persecution, corruption and patronage?

A Kingdom of Coalitions

In the tolerant space of a constitutional democracy, there is always room for Christian influence. Unless of course, intolerance prevails, which can happen under totalitarianism, Marxism, and even Humanism. The role of Christians and the church may be to engage as a coalition member? ■



"Little else is requisite to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the lowest barbarism but peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice: all the rest being brought about by the natural course of things."

Thought-bursts

KINGDOM	LEFT
Non-negotiable	Equalizing
Regents	State-holder
<p>“Look forward to the day when the kingdom of this world will be the kingdom of our Lord” (Rev 11:15)</p>	<p>“The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.” (Psalm 103: 6)</p>
<p>“For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills” (Ps 50:10)</p> <p>“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Ps 24:1)</p> <p>“Every good and perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17)</p>	<p>Over-domination by government at the expense of individual freedom</p> <p>(The rights of the collective trump the rights of the individual.)</p> <p>God’s judgement on inequality based on exploitation (Amos 6: 4,7)</p>
<p>Inequality ➔</p> <p>“The distinction between social classes is overcome” (Gal 3: 28)</p>	<p>Planned economy (Fantastic centralization of power)</p>
<p>Distinctiveness ➔</p> <p>We should expect Christian values and lifestyle to be different from the world (Rom 12: 2)</p>	<p>Scientific socialism – “And thou shalt say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth” (Deut 8:17)</p>
<p>New World Order ➔</p> <p>“If anyone is in Christ, there is a whole new order” (II Cor 5:17) - Transformed economic relationships among God’s people</p> <p>We are to be stewards, not owners. For example, Wilberforce’s and Tolstoy’s ideals...</p>	<p>From the beginning, a deeply felt hostility toward the moral legitimacy of the auction process undergirds the socialist movement of our era</p> <p>Government’s role in providing needed human services and a more equitable distribution of wealth</p>
<p>Pitfalls ➔</p> <p>Money-lending with interest must go</p> <p>Nowhere does the Bible sanction the accumulation of economic power and possessions as ends in themselves</p>	<p>Humanism ➔ Communism</p> <p>➔ Authoritarian bureaucracy</p> <p>Who will control the centralized structure?</p>
<p>Downward mobility – The call of Jesus is understood by some as becoming poor, identifying with the oppressed, and casting their lot with the downtrodden. This is the logic of the Incarnation – giving up all you have. To others...</p> <p>It is to identify with the righteous, not with the poor per se: “Only to act justly, to love loyalty, to walk wisely before your God.” (Micah 6: 8)</p>	<p>With centralization comes bureaucracy, complexity and specialization. It becomes so complex a system that human control of it becomes increasingly difficult. This results in the increased social costs: alienation, personal maladjustment, communal disruption and environmental damage.</p>

on Identity

CENTRIST	RIGHT
Welfare	Alt-Right
Stakeholders	Shareholders
<p>“He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord.” (Prov 19: 17)</p>	<p>Wealth poses a great spiritual danger (Deut 8: 11-20)</p>
<p>Restrictions on the ownership of private property – e.g. gleaning</p> <p>Jubilee / Philanthropy – voluntary surrender of wealth and possessions</p> <p>OT Poor Laws – protecting widows, orphans, others in distress, sojourners in the nation</p>	<p>“Thou shalt not steal”</p> <p>Private property is sacrosanct; capitalism stands opposed to Koinonia</p> <p>A free market can only make sense when there is a reasonable equity of opportunity and built-in mechanism to maintain that equity</p>
<p>Guided-market - Keynesian economics became the consensus</p>	<p>Conservative ideology</p>
<p>Democratic socialism - the welfare state</p> <p>Increased government intervention</p>	<p>Laissez-faire Capitalism</p> <p>Free enterprise</p>
<p>Ethical, moral labour laws for slaves, servants and employees. To avoid exploitation, unfair labour practice and offer legal protection against the abuse of the poor by the rich</p> <p>Labour unions - “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn” (Deut 25:4)</p>	<p>“He who oppresses a poor man insults his maker, but he who is kind to the needy honours Him.” (Prov 14:31)</p> <p>Thrift and future-orientation</p>
<p>Charity is problematic without promoting Justice – the rights of the weak and the poor need protecting. But Gleaning meant that the poor should work hard – to avoid “entitlement” creeping in (e.g. food-for-work)</p>	<p>Weber thesis – links the links capitalism to the rise of Protestantism with its doctrines of hard work, thrift, honesty. The British non-conformists contributed a great deal</p>
<p>“What you do for one of these, the least of my brothers, you do for me” (Matt 25)</p> <p>A way of life that cannot be maintained by voluntary cooperation, that needs a powerful state to force people into its mold, is not worth preserving.</p>	<p>Manifest destiny – The Bible even goes so far as to promise prosperity to those who are righteous (see Deut 7 and 8).</p> <p>“All these blessings shall come on thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city , and blessed shalt thou be in the field”.(Deut 28:3)</p>

A Dialogue with Leonardo Boff

Part 2

Boff: How is this radicalism to be understood? What matters is knowing that Jesus did not come to bring a harsher law or an improved phariseism. We will completely lose the perspective of the historic Jesus if we interpret the Sermon on the Mount and his moral indications within the framework of the law. He renders its fulfilment impossible. Or else, human beings are left in despair, as seems to have happened with Luther. What is new with Jesus is that he brings good news: it isn't the law that saves, but love, which knows no limits. There are limits to law, because its function is to create order and guarantee some harmony among people in society and to curb those who violate it. Jesus didn't come simply to abolish the "the law and the prophets" (Matthew 5:17). He came to lay out a criterion: what comes from traditions and moral rules, if it passes through the sieve of love, will be accepted. If laws impede and hinder love, he relativizes them, as he did with the Sabbath, or ignores them, as he did with the precept of fasting. It is love that opens up the reign. Where power prevails, the doors and windows of love, communication, solidarity and mercy close. That applies to both society and the churches.

The WeighBridge: The reference to Luther is right on. Like Wycliffe 50 years before him, Luther's influence caused a Peasant Revolt. Yes, in both cases this was mainly economic protest, and Luther ended up scolding the peasants for their violent action. This is where "both society and the churches" part ways. I once heard a padre from the Philippines speak. He was arrested and imprisoned by Marcos, because he became a padre to the rebels. They were Catholics too. He did the padre thing for them, although he himself never took up arms. After Aquino took over, he was released. His explanation to us at University of Zimbabwe was that he had done wrong, by the law of the land, and deserved to go to prison. BUT HE SAID THAT TO NOT SUPPORT THE REBELS WOULD HAVE BEEN A GREATER WRONG, BECAUSE THEIR CAUSE WAS JUST AND MARCOS WAS A WICKED RULER. As he put it, he washed his hands in muddy water.

Boff: The supreme ideal of the ethic of Jesus is proclaimed in "Be perfect as the Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Jesus always emphasizes two characteristics of the Father's perfection: a love for all without barriers and an unlimited mercy. Love and mercy guide those who wish to enter the reign. It is not enough to be good and law abiding, like the

brother of the prodigal son who stayed home and was faithful in all things. That is not enough.

The WeighBridge: This gets very close to Kingdonomics. Certainly when the sheep are separated from the goats, and all citizens of that Kingdom support the ethics of their King, he will be able to rule in a much kinder, gentler way. Meanwhile, that kingdom has not come and even Christian rulers have to deal with the reality of Evil.

Boff: We have to be loving and merciful. Unless these attitudes are internalized, the reign does not advance, even though it is already set in motion by the practice of Jesus. When the reign is established, we will witness the great revolution in the sense of the spirit of the beatitudes: the poor will feel like citizens of the reign, those who weep will feel consoled, the non-violent will possess and administer the earth, those who hunger and thirst for justice will see their dreams fulfilled, those who have compassion for others will experience mercy, the pure of heart will experience God directly, the peacemakers will be recognized as sons and daughters of God, those persecuted for the sake of justice will feel that they are heirs of the reign and those who are insulted and persecuted for the sake of the dream of Jesus will be especially blessed (Matthew 5:3-11). Never have values been so radically reversed, as here courageously proposed by Jesus.

The WeighBridge: We agree with this. Our job therefore is to attract and convert people from the influence of Evil. We are only re-claiming them for their Creator, because the human race started as monotheists who lived in peace and harmony with him. But Evil subverted that. It still does. The reason there is a Judgment Day is that at some point, like the flood, you need to "cut the cheese". Those who don't want Kingdonomics can go somewhere else. The citizens of his kingdom can then enjoy economics, politics and justice that are driven by Love.

Boff: What is the ultimate meaning of the Sermon on the Mount, the contents of which we have just set forth and which sum up the fundamental ethic of the Jesus of history? It isn't a new law or a new ethical and moral ideal. It is something quite different. It is about establishing a criterion for measuring how far along we are on the path of the reign, near the reign or within the reign, or how far away we are, out of alignment and outside it. The Sermon on the Mount

is an invitation and a challenge to us to do our utmost at this last hour, to approach the ideals that make up the content of the reign. The reign is about to break in. The colliding meteor is about to enter the earth's atmosphere and set the earth on fire. The shortest and surest route to entering the reign of God is to participate in this way in the dream of Jesus and to live unconditional love and unlimited mercy now. That is the infallible passport for entering the reign and participating in the life of the Trinity. There is no reason to fear the devastation wrought by the

colliding meteor because it leads to the emergence of a new world and a transfigured humanity.

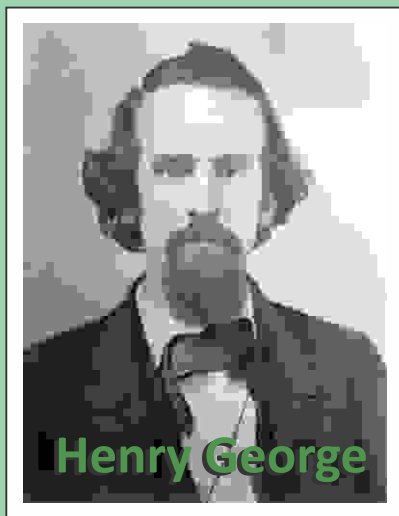
The WeighBridge: Boff's envisioning is exciting. That day may be brought to us by the triumphant return of Jesus as much as won by Christian values defeating Evil. But we cannot lay back fatalistically and wait. We have to "speak truth to power". Because we do have a roadmap, and the Sermon on the Mount is the single best expression of it. We need to preach and practice Kingdonomics, always believing that it will triumph in due course. ■

He argued that while people should own the value that they produce themselves, economic value derived from land (and he applied the same to natural resources) should belong equally to all members of society. "Georgists" argue that it would reduce economic inequality, increase economic efficiency, remove incentives to under-utilize urban land and reduce property speculation. The philosophical basis of George's thinking dates back to several early thinkers such as John Locke, Baruch Spinoza and Thomas Paine. However the concept of gaining public revenues mainly from land and natural resource privileges was widely popularized by Henry George in his book Progress and Poverty.

Henry George lived around the same time as Karl Marx. They were antagonists. Marx saw the Georgist platform as a step backwards from the transition to communism. On his part, Henry George predicted that if Marx's ideas were tried, the likely result would be a dictatorship.

Just listen to the list of those who sung the praises of Henry George!

- A 1906 survey of British parliamentarians revealed that the American author's writing was more popular than Walter Scott, John Stuart Mill and William Shakespeare
- By 1908, two years before his death, Tolstoy had become obsessed with George's LVT, regarding it as vital for the moral and economic regeneration not only of his homeland, but of the world
- Father Edward McGlynn, one of the most prominent and controversial Catholic priests of the time, was quoted as saying, "That book is the work of a sage, of a seer, of a philosopher, of a poet. It is not merely political philosophy. It is a poem; it is a prophecy; it is a prayer."



- In 1933, John Dewey estimated that Progress and Poverty "had a wider distribution than almost all other books on political economy put together."

- Alfred Russel Wallace hailed Progress and Poverty as "undoubtedly the most remarkable and important book of the present century," placing it even above Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species. Only one book out-sold it during the decade after its release – the Bible.

- Albert Einstein wrote this about his impression of Progress and Poverty: "Men like Henry George are rare unfortunately. One cannot imagine a more

beautiful combination of intellectual keenness, artistic form and fervent love of justice. Every line is written as if for our generation. The spreading of these works is a really deserving cause, for our generation especially has many and important things to learn from Henry George."

- Franklin D Roosevelt praised George as "one of the really great thinkers produced by our country" and bemoaned the fact that George's writings were not better known and understood

- Among many famous people who asserted that it was impossible to refute George on the land question were Winston Churchill and

Bertrand Russell

- The anti-war activist Rev John Haynes Holmes echoed that sentiment by commenting that George was "one of the half-dozen great Americans of the nineteenth century, and one of the outstanding social reformers of all time."

Commentators disagreed on whether Henry George's funeral was the largest ever in New York history, or just the largest since the death of Abraham Lincoln. *The New York Times* reported, "Not even Lincoln had a more glorious death."

Thought-bursts

Enclaves	Planned Economy
<p>Responsibility The Bible’s real issue is ethical or moral... it is against ethical neutrality but not a social or economic textbook. Responsibility is where Christians enter the picture</p>	<p>Control Totalitarianism From rebellion to <i>the dictatorship of the proletariat</i></p>
<p>A modest lifestyle ➔ Live simply, so that others can simply live Lifestyle of enough - Challenging the value system of a hedonistic society. A smaller house, less expensive transportation, reduced consumption... “Only to act justly, to love loyalty, to walk wisely before your God”. (Micah 6:8)</p>	<p>Neither personal effort nor Charity will ever do more than offer some marginal hope to the poor Individual acts of charity and the goodwill of capitalistic corporations can never be expected to solve the massive problems of the world</p>
<p>Role-modeling ➔ It is more important to decentralize and work on the local level. Maybe some centralized decision making, but first decentralization of power</p>	<p>“Is it not the rich who oppress you?” (James 2:6)</p>
<p>“Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6: 20)</p>	<p>“Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger.” (Luke 6:25)</p>
<p>Accountability ➔ “Teacher, whose sin caused him to be born blind? Was it his own or his parents sin? “He is blind so that God’s power might be seen at work in him. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me: night is coming when no one can work.” (John 9:2-4)</p>	<p>“Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you” (Matt 5:42) “Of him who takes your goods away, do not ask them again” (Luke 6: 30)</p>
<p>The family is the primary agency of welfare Pay taxes - to God and Caesar (Luke 20:19-25) Law and order (Romans 13) Koinonia can liberate people – collective, common, public action. Citizen participation. A satisfied mind. Come to Him to find acceptance and rest... (Matt 11:28) The will to possess and the desire for community are opposites</p>	<p>Western economies include a sizeable experience of poverty. That is what inspired Marx. “From him who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again.” (Luke 6:29,30)</p>
<p>Focus ➔ Surrender unconditionally to God: both rich and poor discover biblical values that bring them together fellowship in the pursuit of justice</p>	<p>Bear each other’s burdens” (Galatians 6: 2)</p>

on Functionality

Mixed Economy	Free Market
<p>Justice “Let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”. (Amos 5:24)</p>	<p>Freedom Neither the OT law nor the NT doctrine of grace is capitalistic “You cannot serve God and Mammon” (Luke 16)</p>
<p>“Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the midst of the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David invent for themselves instruments of music; who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils”. (Amos 6: 4-6)</p>	<p>Parable of Lazarus Parable of the rich man who built bigger barns “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire” – James</p>
<p>Closing the gap between prosperity and poverty – the “middle class” or bourgeoisie enjoyed a better quality of life</p>	<p>“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:25)</p>
<p>“You spend your money on what is not bread, and your labour for what does not satisfy.” (Is 55:2)</p>	<p>“Woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.” (Luke 6:25)</p>
<p>Great Society programmes of fair wealth redistribution (as death, illness and disaster can ruin families)</p>	<p>“You hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look fine on the outside but are full of bones and decaying corpses on the inside.” (Matthew 23:27)</p>
<p>Quality of life indicators – a rising life expectancy, reduced infant mortality</p> <p>To enable all citizens to live in freedom from fear of illness, homelessness, inequalities in education, old age and poverty</p> <p>Disaster relief</p> <p>Cradle-to-the-grave protection</p>	<p>“For the man who has will be given more, and the man who has not will forfeit even what he has”. (Mark 4:25)</p> <p>Mercantilism – a zero-sum economy</p> <p>Montaigne dogma – winnings exactly balance losses – still with us</p>
<p>There is no fixed quantity of economic benefits. The free-market economy is not a zero-sum game</p>	<p>An age of hedonism, crass materialism and conspicuous consumption</p>

Four Quartets

“From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” This has overtones of Luke’s words in the Book of Acts, chapter 2: “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.”

Speaking of St Luke, the first quartet is the Gospel writers – **Matthew, Mark, Luke and John**. The youngest of the four was fastest off the Mark (pun intended). Perhaps because he was so close to Jesus, John’s gospel has some peculiar insights? These four writers are quoted heavily in this edition of The WeighBridge. Luke, a doctor, is known to have had a particular sensitivity to the sick and the poor.

Honourable mention must go to St Paul, who is also quoted frequently.

The second quartet is composed of the four pillars of Old Testament writings, namely **Moses, David, Solomon and Isaiah**. All of these can be called prophets. Moses led a liberation movement, and after periods of military rule and rule by judges, along came a monarchy. David wrote psalms and his son Solomon recoded proverbs. Then after the monarchy collapsed, Isaiah addressed his writings to the diaspora. For Israel had been crushed by the armies of Babylon, and took some time to recover.

Honourable mention must go to Amos, although he is only one of the “minor prophets”.

Isaiah was the most recent member of this second quartet. He wrote at the time of the “Axial Age”, roughly concurrent with Socrates, the Buddha (a.k.a. Siddhattha Gotama) and Confucius. Polytheism was giving way to monotheism. About that same time, the Greek mathematician Pythagoras was educated in Babylon. He learned of Zoroaster’s system of religious ethics called Masdayasna (“worship of wisdom” in Persian) and thus coined a new word in Greek – “philosophy”. But this quartet is an aside, only Isaiah is one of our key sources.

It is important to remember that the Old

Testament was written over a period of almost two thousand years. God’s people were not always ruled by a “theocracy”, as some might mistakenly think. They started as nomadic ranchers, there was a period of institutionalized slavery, then a period of military rule, then a regime of judges, then a monarchy, and then conquest by regional powers of the Middle East. Colonialism.

The period of the Gospels falls under Roman rule, because Tiberius Caesar decided to annex that troublesome area of the Levant between the Roman provinces of Egypt and Syria. And so before the conversion of another Roman emperor to Christianity, God’s people lived under a regime of persecution. Then the church was un-banned and hooked up with the Roman Empire. This period ended in fragmentation at the time of the Protestant Reformation. There was a symbiosis between the emergence of nation-states and the decentralization of the church into many denominations.

The third quartet that must be recognized are four Christian writers who, in the late 20th century, teamed up to publish a book called Wealth & Poverty. By name, they are **William Diehl, Art Gish, John Gladwin and Gary North**. The book was released by Inter-Varsity Press. The “thought-bursts” throughout this magazine are sourced mainly from that book.

It was a debate format, the writers having very different theologies and thus diverse views on economics. Nor does the structure of their debate format align precisely with the structure that The WeighBridge has adopted in this *Kingdonomics* issue. But we owe them a huge vote of thanks for assuring that our magazine’s debate-format chassis is in place.

Honourable mention must go to Robert Clouse, who edited that book.

The fourth quartet comes from the saints of Christendom. This was long before Adam Smith’s analysis during the first industrial revolution in Britain. His writings started a Great Debate that rages until today! Marx wrote during the second industrial revolution,

which had taken hold of his native Germany. Henry George wrote as the third industrial revolution was getting going (Frederick Taylor, Henry Ford, etc – consumerism).

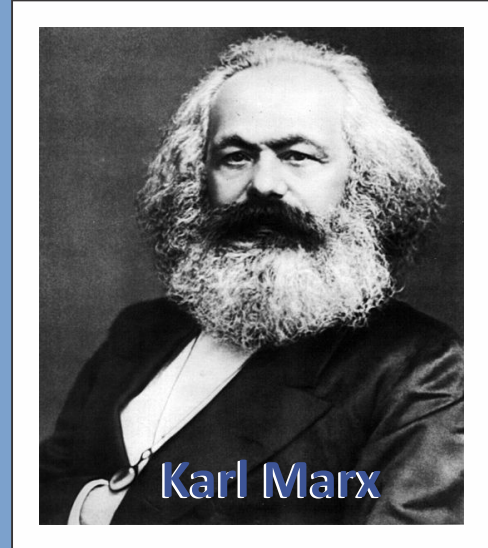
The influence of Jesus of Nazareth probed into all these periods, as it had up-ended the Roman empire and reverberated into the Middle Ages. Allow me to introduce a fourth quartet, namely **Tertullian, St Basil, St Ambrose and St Gregory:**

- *Tertullian*: “Let us abandon luxury, we will not regret it.”
- *St Basil the Great*: “The coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to the person who needs it”
- *St. Ambrose*: “You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.”
- *St. Gregory the Great*: “The Old Law did not punish the desire to hold on to wealth; it punished theft. But now the rich man is not condemned for taking the property of others; rather, he is condemned for not giving his property away.”

Since the time of Jesus, God’s people have traversed much terrain. Just as he included Matthew (a tax collector who collaborated with the Romans) and Simon (a Zealot, the nationalist who opposed Rome’s hegemony) among his inner circle, we have to find one another. We have to proactively work against polarization and to build coalitions.

Some Christians have withdrawn from “the world” to form alternative colonies. They offer something valuable to a mixed economy. For one thing, the carbon footprint of the Amish or Hutterites must be much lower than for Protestants or Catholics, on a per-capita basis! Sometimes what Jesus taught is supportive and sometimes it is critical – of each and every economic model in the Great Debate. We have to look for trade-offs to find a way forward. ■

“Communists believed that the law of nature was discovered by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin...”



“Like other religions, Communism too has its holy scriptures and prophetic books, such as Marx’s *Das Kapital*, which foretold that history would soon end with the inevitable victory of the proletariat. Communism had its holidays and festivals, such as the First of May and the anniversary of the October Revolution. It had theologians adept at Marxist dialectics, and every unit of the Soviet army had a chaplain, called a commissar, who monitored the piety of soldiers and officers. Communism had martyrs, holy wars and heresies, such as Trotskyism. Soviet Communism was a fanatical and missionary religion. A devout Communist could not be a Christian or a Buddhist, and was expected to spread the gospel of Marx and Lenin even at the price of his or her life.” - Yuval Noah Harari

Thought-bursts

We are to be stewards, not owners	Dictatorship of the proletariat
<p>Ownership ➔ Private property is never an absolute right... as an aid to personal freedom, it is a relative civil right that is always conditioned by the will of God and the needs of the community. The need to serve justifies the right to possess</p> <p><i>Koinonia</i> = sharing, partnership, fellowship, participation, community</p>	<p>State owns all land – confiscate the landed wealth of the aristocracy</p> <p><i>Expropriation Without Compensation (EWC)</i> – unless central government takes a leading role through structural change, the problem of UNFAIR distribution will remain</p>
<p>Wealth ➔ “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalm 24:1)</p>	<p>Money and land are not evil in themselves; it is only when we place them ahead of our love of God and our neighbour that the evil arises</p>
<p>Inheritance ➔ Land holding get smaller with fragmentation</p> <p>The Promised Land, held in trust: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 1:28)</p>	<p>State is the only heir</p> <p>People were never to buy the land. They were only supposed to buy a specific number of harvests before the land was again redistributed</p>
<p>Challenges ➔ The unfaithfulness of the institutional church is equalled only by her apostasy in blessing violence and war</p>	<p>The Christian gospel has always been a challenge to cultural conservatism</p>
<p>Innovation ➔ <i>Domino effect</i> – you cannot change only one thing. Attitudinal change is critical</p>	<p>Cooperation a principle closer to the meaning of the gospel than competition</p>
<p>Cooperation ➔ “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12: 32-34)</p> <p>It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Mark 10:25)</p>	<p>One root cause of hunger is the increasing concentration of control over food-producing resources in the hands of fewer and fewer people</p> <p>Inherited Deprivation – The vast majority of the poor do not end up where they are because of personal incompetence. THEY ARE BORN INTO IT.</p>

on Land Tenure

Jubilee	Accumulation
<p>Is EWC starting down a slippery slope? It could undermine what social cohesion is left</p> <p>Koinonia and Jubilee are the New testament economic programme</p> <p>The Giving Pledge – lines up with redistribution of land at regular intervals</p>	<p>Land tenure is privately owned. In South Africa, with a population of 55 million (82 percent black), 35 000 white farmers own around 70 percent of the arable land</p> <p><i>“I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Ps 37:25)</i></p>
<p><i>“It is in giving ourselves that we find ourselves”. (Matt 16:25) “Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” (Matthew 20:15)</i></p>	<p><i>“He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.” (Luke 1: 52,53)</i></p>
<p><i>“Your land must not be sold on a permanent basis, because you do not own it; it belongs to God, and you are like foreigners who are allowed to make use of it.” (Leviticus 25:23)</i></p> <p>Jubilee = <i>“the acceptable year of our Lord”</i></p>	<p>Primogeniture inheritance (a mentality of scarcity)</p> <p><i>Technology</i> - from “mills” to the steam engine; from the Industrial revolution to the Productivity revolution (Frederick Taylor)</p>
<p>Exploitation, unfair labour practice</p> <p><i>“The workman is worth his hire”. (Luke 10:7)</i></p>	<p>Use of renewable resources (solar, wind, organic waste) needs to be decentralized</p>
<p><i>“The labourer is worthy of his reward” (1 Timothy 5:18)</i></p>	<p>Capitalism leads to the exploitation of the poor and weak by the powerful and rich</p>
<p>The amount of giving will vary from individual to individual. Jesus asked some people, such as the rich young ruler, to surrender all of their possessions (Matt 19: 16-30, Mark 10: 17-31, Luke 18: 18-30) while others like Zacchaeus were not called on to abandon everything (Luke 19: 1-10). Zacchaeus returned the goods he had illegally taken and gave half of his money to the poor.</p> <p>Jubilee would seriously disrupt the present economic system</p>	<p><i>“If you truly execute justice with one another, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow... and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever (Jer 7: 5-7)</i></p> <p>The free market is not free. It is rigged by a corporate elite who control the bulk of the world’s economic and political power</p>

Our Flagging Leadership

The Reverend Jesse Jackson once stated wisely: “Leadership has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together.”

According to Davos 2020, the three biggest challenges in the world today are Inequality, Polarization and Climate Change. Without disagreeing, could it be that what is slowing us down in dealing effectively with Inequality and Climate Change is the ubiquitous Polarization? Should it not be listed first, instead of between the other two challenges? For it is our foremost challenge.

Ezra Klein has just written a book about it in the American context. It is called Why We’re Polarized. He writes: “We are a collection of functional parts whose efforts combine into a dysfunctional whole.” America is not the only place that has never been more polarized. But he argues that this is not because its democratic system is malfunctioning. Rather, it is because the system is functioning exactly as it was designed to – ever creating more checks and balances. It has got to the point that polarization is causing frustration, hatred and vitriol. Even, dare I say it? Gridlock.

All of the polarizations according to Klein’s analysis are related to issues of Identity; race, religion, geography, culture, politics. So we often speak of “identity politics”.

In the African context, this reminded me why Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk once shared a Nobel Peace Prize. And why Ethiopia’s President Abiy is the most recent winner of that coveted prize. He who, with stunning alacrity, made major strides in resolving a decades-long border conflict with Eritrea. After taking office, Abiy made concerted efforts to end hostilities with his country’s isolated neighbor. Leadership must bring both sides together.

The Nobel committee also praised him for implementing reforms at home. Though the country was formally governed by a four-party political coalition, power had long rested in the hands of the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front, which represented the interests of one ethnic group. In other words, it had become polarized. There goes the “identity politics” again. Abiy rose above it.

“Leadership has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together.”

If the Socialist International decides to play a game of soccer with the Alt Right, will their ideologies matter out on the soccer pitch? If they are playing football, and playing by soccer rules, their identity politics might fade a bit. Maybe the socialists will pass more? Maybe the capitalist superstars will have more ball possession than the rest of their team? But if they both play as a team - to score goals not to win votes - what you will see is soccer, not politics.

Leadership is like that. It focuses on winning the game, not on grandstanding. Uganda has introduced a Spoilers of Peace award, for leaders that are failing their citizens. One clue is this – are they just choosing sides, and digging in? Or are they trying to bring sides together?

I nominate Julius Malema for a Spoilers of Peace award, for his intimidation tactics. Shooting an automatic weapon off from the podium during a political rally. Petulantly disrupting the SONA address year after year in a tedious publicity stunt. Demanding that an EFF candidate be mayor if either of the major parties want the benefit of the EFF’s swing vote, tiny as it is. That is just taking sides, out of pure self-interest. That is not good leadership.

I could nominate the ANC as well for its EWC legislation (expropriation without compensation). From the perspective of Peace, this does not bode well. Certainly the Freedom Charter states: “All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose”. But it also states: “Peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding the equal rights, opportunities and status of all”. On this issue the ANC is not bringing sides together, it is taking sides.

The deeper problem is that the ANC does not want to let the elected government run the country between elections. The vanguard party wants to be more powerful than the elected government. Of course the fact that parliamentarians are appointed by their party through cadre deployment, not elected in their ridings, is the root of the problem. Even presidents can be recalled by their party. So for

a president to rise above partisanship is all but impossible. That means that leadership is constrained and that South Africa is more likely to win Spoilers of Peace awards than any more Nobel Peace Prizes. Basically a fight-back faction inside the ANC has got the president by the...

Ramaphosa is a good president constrained by a bad system. That system is not malfunctioning. It is functioning exactly as it was designed to – giving the former liberation movement a perpetual advantage at the polls. Keeping the party strong and subject to internal polarization, and keeping the government weak. Sadly, it is not a system from which good leadership can ever emerge.

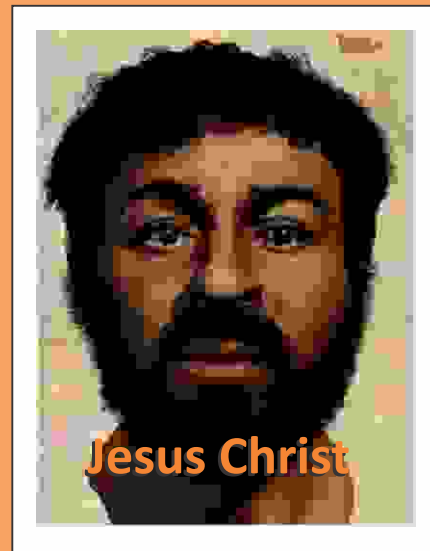
Nancy Pelosi also deserves a Spoilers of Peace award. For theatrically tearing up the president's State of the Union Address just after he concluded it. As House leader, she leads the House – in other words, both parties. Even John Bolton has since remarked that the impeachment proceedings were "grossly partisan". That is not leadership, it is mere electioneering.

The mantra of The WeighBridge is to hear out all sides to an issue, in mutual respect. In this "Kingdonomics" issue, we have tried to capture a wide range of opinion and ideology. We have literally tried to spread them out in front of you, in graphic tables. We have included compliments and critiques in a way that is non-partisan.

Remembering Jesse Jackson's remark: "Leadership has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together."

Particularly since the Protestant Reformation, there has been a proliferation of interpretations of the Bible. To some extent, the peculiar views of some denominations are championed in their own translation of scripture. For this reason, there is a wide variance of economic models. It was a British member of parliament - William Wilberforce – who led the anti-slavery movement. Another great Christian Leo Tolstoy was a change agent trying to find a new economic model post-serfdom.

Finding a centrist solution to land reform in South Africa has proved elusive to date, given the strident tug-of-war between Marxism and the opposite view that champions private property. ■



Jesus calls us to be the social alternative to the way the world works, reflective of a different kind of rule, a different kind of economics and a different kind of social relations than exist in the world. His politics are not coerced, they are - without being sappy or melodramatic - the politics of love, freely adopted by a group of people committed to becoming poor as he had become poor, and loving their enemies the way he loved his enemies.

This is the life of the cross, the life he calls us to... the life by which God's kingdom advances. This is the life that got him crucified.

- Contrarian John Deacon

The Case for Utopia

The world would be better off if people tried to become better.

And people would become better if they stopped trying to become better off.

For when everyone tries to become better off, nobody is better off.

But when everybody tries to become better, everybody is better off.

Everybody would be rich if nobody tried to become richer.

And nobody would be poor if everybody tried to be poorest.

Peter Maurin, Founder of the Catholic Worker Movement

Thought-bursts

The way of downward mobility	
Isolation / Sequester	Statism / Anarchism
Vested interests ➔ “You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin; but you have overlooked the weightier demands of the Law, justice, mercy and good faith.” (Matthew 23:23)	Communists are as brutal and repressive as capitalists Power vested in the working class
Contradictions ➔ Our living habits can mean that we are not walking the talk...	“The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Everyone had gathered just as much as they needed”. (2 Corinthians 8:15)
Simple lifestyle ➔ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth” (Matt 6:19)	Hopelessly idealistic? No true koinonia where some live on a higher economic level than others
Legalistic old covenant ➔ A free market? Or a market controlled by biblical principles? Baptized liberalism? Why bother to baptize socialism? Or disguise it in a theological cloak?	Police and military violence Guns and butter Military spending creates fewer jobs than the same investment in any other sector of the economy
Impact ➔ “The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have trespassed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.” (Isaiah 24: 4,5)	Every reform that has been instituted was fought tooth and nail by the capitalist system and its government. Consider women’s suffrage, equal rights for minorities or union bargaining rights
Work is a gift of God, not a curse. The curse of sin (alienation, boredom, unemployment) has been put on work, but we can work to remove that curse. If work is a blessing, it should be available to all.	Any economic system that denies biblical values of justice, stewardship, sharing, equality, community and freedom is in rebellion against God Investment in capital-intensive ventures only widens the gap between rich and poor.
Orientation ➔ Any centralized system of managing society which causes people to absolve themselves of a personal responsibility for others is not in keeping with our Judeo-Christian teachings.	The centralized government management of a nation’s economy simply does not work for two basic reasons. First, individual initiative is given little expression. Second, there is simply not enough human wisdom around to “manage” any economic system, especially a global one.

on Pitfalls

The way of upward mobility	
Periodic famines in subsistence agriculture	Periodic recessions even depressions
Basic impediment to a free-market system is greed (a sin). Power vested in the ruling class	Capitalism, that is, the system of private property and competition, is itself thievery; and it encourages theft by rewarding only winners and ignoring the needs of the losers
Said Judas to Mary: “Your ointment it could have been sold. And think of the blankets and think of the bread you could buy with that silver and gold.”	A totally unbridled free-enterprise system does permit the powerful to exploit the powerless
Not all means of production and services are privately owned	“Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9)
Charity can end up robbing humans of self-respect. Welfare of all citizens can lead to run-away entitlement, free-loading In a perverse way, programs designed to help the poor or disadvantaged end up creating Dependency	Time is not money but an opportunity to live, love and share. The goal is not profit but supplying people’s needs, supporting a fulfilling lifestyle, and teaching kingdom ways of relating to each other.
Pollution, environmental degradation, climate change	Capitalism is an expression of sin and should be rejected by Christians
Many voluntary and private agencies are out-of-date in their attitudes, unprofessional in their conduct and seriously mismanaged “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.” (Mark 10:43)	“How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (Luke 18:24,25) There are limits to growth. And ever-expanding pie is a delusion
Downward mobility in an affluent society is pleasing in God’s eyes. But it is not a “way of salvation” which would contradict the doctrine of unmerited grace	Capitalism is intrinsically futuristic. The ideas that underpin market economies – growth, accumulation, investment – express an unspoken assumption, that tomorrow will be different, and probably better, than today. How realistic is that?

Two Kind of Christians

Today I read a commentator describe the differing views between "clean-hands Christians" and "dirty-hands Christians". The first approach is to be "in the world but not of the world". One thinks of the Amish or Hutterite colonies as examples of this view. They withdraw and try to set an alternative example of what the coming kingdom will be like. But even many congregational churches are like this. Adherents tend to keep close to their denomination's culture and to practice its customs and teachings. They see the coming of the Kingdom of God as future, possibly immanent. This affects many of their decisions and relationships. So they try to remain as unsullied as possible by the ways of the world. Here is a quote that resonated with me, from a chapter by William E Diehl:

"For me the position of clean-hands Christians presents some real problems with respect to theology and strategy. At the same time, I must confess that we dirty-hands Christians must always struggle with trying to discern the will of God in any given situation and must constantly question our motives. Are we truly in but not of the world, or are we really owned by the world?"

"There is no such thing as Christian economics any more than there is Christian mathematics or Christian house-painting. Yes, we do have Christians who are economists and mathematicians and house painters, but they call themselves Christian not because of a biblical directive for carrying out their work, but rather because of a relationship they have with God..."

"Christian stewardship involves how I see myself in relationship to God. He is "the owner of the world and those who dwell therein." (Psalm 24:1)

"As I write these lines I am looking out the window into our yard filled with blossoming flowers. I live in a society which has given me legal title to that yard and the home in which I live. I own them, and yet I don't own them. Within the political and economic framework of my environment I have legal title to the material things. But at the same time I recognize that I am a steward of my material goods on behalf of God, who most certainly is the owner."

There is a huge debate in South Africa whether the State should own all the land (a k a Marxism) or whether the land should remain with its present private owners. Bear in mind that about 70 percent of arable land is owned by 30 000 white farmers in a country with a population of 55 million. However, if the land belongs to God, maybe both are mistaken?

Ultimately I believe that the two biblical strategies that we have are KOINONIA (sharing) and JUBILEE (redistribution). I tend to see the New Testament not as replacing the Old Testament but as a commentary on it. So I believe that there IS a supreme King or Lord, which is why I pray "Thy kingdom come". But it hasn't come yet. So my approach is not to withdraw and wait, but to engage as a change agent. Yes, I am a dirty-hands Christian in that respect. My vocation of activism is not exactly "holy" which used to mean "set apart".



the WeighBridge

Weighing pros and cons
Bridging partisanship
Bridging oceans
Seeking the Truth that emerges
From frank and open dialogue
In safe deliberation

Rules of Engagement

No demonizing allowed. You or I may be wrong, but we are equally human, equally loved, equally God's children, seeing some things more clearly than others and vice-versa, but in the main, we are in the dark, not seeing it all.

No one is ever dead wrong, except in issues where one's position means that someone other than he is denigrated to being something less than human, someone less to be loved and cared for than anyone else.

No name calling. It doesn't help. It derails the debate. It undermines the civility it takes to find the truth let alone live it.

If the debate is political, suspicions do creep in, if the party or politician one sides with can never be wrong. It is likely that person has lost their capacity for critical thinking, which true wisdom relies on.

We are all prone to coming under the spell of influential people, and when we do, the likelihood of being objective, let alone discerning, goes out the window. Our positions become parroted ones rather than those originating in us.

It helps to approach every person in leadership as though a member of their loyal opposition. Loyal when in your opinion the other is right and opposed when in your opinion the other is wrong. It helps keep populists and dictators in check and ensures the compasses we are relying on aren't skewed by bigger than life personalities.

Whatever our rank and status in life, we are no more nor any less than brothers and sisters. God has no grandchildren.

Sponsors

