

Blessings of Scarcity, Hope of Abundance

Biblical, Theological, and Ethical Perspectives on Scarcity

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Scarcity is a key concept in economic science. Theology, on the other hand, focuses on the abundance of the Gospel. Is scarcity therefore an evil to be abolished, a myth to be denied? Are Christians called upon to overcome a culture of scarcity or even to redeem economics? This paper argues that both disciplines can be fruitfully related to each other. Following the Christian story-line of the creation, fall, redemption and consummation that unfolds in the Bible, the foundation of scarcity in God's creation is expounded. The impact of sin and evil is explained, and human moral insufficiency and spiritual scarcity are distinguished from ontological neediness. Ultimately, the message of the Church about a perfected age to come is integrated into the whole picture: Christian generosity transcends scarcity, but believers are not called upon to establish a new economic order in the whole world based on the absence of scarcity.

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Introduction: “the science of scarcity”

Abundance vs. scarcity

Textbooks on economics mostly start with the assumption or the fact of scarcity. Harvard University professor Greg Mankiw in his widely used *Principles of Economics*: “Economics is the study of how society manages its scarce resources” (Mankiw 2010, p. 4). Yet when Christian thinkers of today write on economics, their theological perspective is often suffused with one major thought: there is plenty for everyone, so let's share generously. Scarcity, by contrast, is called a myth since God's creation is supposed to be a world of abundance.

Jim Wallis, founder of “Sojourners” community in Washington (D.C.) and influential Christian activist, demands, “The market's fear of scarcity must be replaced with the abundance of the loving God. And the first commandment of the Market: ‘There is never enough,’ must be replaced by the dictum of God's economy: namely, there is enough, if we share it” (Wallis 2010, p. 39–40).

A Roman Catholic scholar, William Cavanaugh, blames the free market economy for defining freedom purely negatively, as an absolute freedom from any external constraints. This concept of freedom, he says, is resting upon the dubious modern notion of a completely autonomous individual with no orientation toward a greater good. He then goes straight to the point in *Being Consumed*:

“Economics, we are told, is the science that studies the allocation of resources under conditions of scarcity. The very basis of the market, *trade* – giving up something to get something else – *assumes scarcity*. Resources are scarce wherever the desires of all persons for goods or services cannot be met. In other words, hunger is written into the conditions under which economics operates. There is never enough to go around [...]. Economics will always be the science of scarcity as long as individuals continue to want. And we are told the human desires are endless” (Cavanaugh 2008, p. 90).

This is why he faults the idea of scarcity of even establishing “the view that no one has enough”.

Obviously we are facing a serious tension between these two sciences, economics and theology.

The logic behind all these statements (with the exception of Mankiw’s) is easily summarized: God’s creation is characterized by abundance, not scarcity. Creation is abundant because the Creator’s goodness and love is reflected in it. God provides an abundance of resources and means for human beings to flourish. Therefore, scarcity is not at the heart of things – there is nothing to hoard, to grab, to fight for, to protect at all costs, because everybody can have enough. If we choose to live in a universe of scarcity, this leads eventually to violence and wars. On the other hand, trusting in God’s provision for our needs, deciding to live in his world of abundance, makes an attitude of sharing and acts of generosity possible.

Generosity vs. Greed

As we have seen, all these voices go back first of all to the creation account in the Old Testament (OT), Genesis 1 and 2. In the first long chapter (I. Creation) we need to go deeper into these texts. It is noteworthy that one of the most distinguished OT scholars in the world of theology today, Walter Brueggemann, professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary and prolific writer, gives a straightforward defence of these thoughts in essays like “The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity” (Brueggemann 1999, p. 342–347).

He stresses that the “the Bible starts out with a liturgy of abundance.” According to Brueggemann, Genesis 1 “is a song of praise for God’s generosity. It tells

how well the world is ordered.” The creation account “affirms generosity and denies scarcity.” The “orgy of fruitfulness” continues in the rest of the Bible. This “strange narrative” says “that the gifts of life are indeed given by a generous God. It’s a wonder, it’s a miracle, it’s an embarrassment, it’s irrational, but God’s abundance transcends the market economy.”

In another essay, “From Anxiety and Greed to Milk and Honey” (Brueggemann 2009), Brueggemann analyses the moral foundations of the last economic crises, blaming greed, autonomy and anxiety as its basic roots. The biblical faith, on the contrary, “is an invitation away from anxiety to the abundance of God. The God of the gospel is the God who keeps giving.” Again, he points to the creation account, but also to the giving of Manna to the Israelites in the desert (Ex 16:17–18) and even to Jesus miraculously feeding crowds, leaving 12 baskets of surplus bread (Mk 6:42–43). Divine abundance everywhere!

Christians, Brueggemann argues, have to ground their faith “in the generosity of God who wills and provides abundance.” They “respond to divine abundance with generous gratitude, willing to share with sisters and brothers. Those who share, moreover, find in ways they cannot explain that more gifts from God are given. The bread multiplies and loaves abound, a miracle never available to the autonomous.” Brueggemann calls us to “move to an alternative way in economics. In broad outline, this is a move from autonomy to covenantal existence, from anxiety to divine abundance, and from acquisitive greed to neighborly generosity.” He insists “that every available instrument of well-being... must be mobilized in order *to mediate the resources of the community* for the sake of the common good.”

We have quoted the influential and widely-read Brueggemann intensively to underline how inherently sceptically scarcity is seen in the eyes of leading (protestant) theologians. Scarcity is associated with greed and violence, hunger and hoarding. God himself, his goodness, benevolence, blessings – and his miracles confront it. Somehow, in non-explicable ways, there is always enough for the generous. But how is this? Does belief in the supernatural demand this kind of reasoning? And is scarcity really such a deplorable thing we have to dismiss? Where is the rightful place of abundance? Finally, has the breach between contemporary theologians and economists necessarily to be so deep?

In this essay we will come back to some of these quotes. In general, we can already say that a serious problem is the mixing up of categories like church and world, creation theology and the doctrine of salvation, of pre-fall conditions with the reality of a fallen world, stricken by sin and death. The result is, in spite of

categorical statements, a *confusing* teaching that, in the end, does not help people to live in God's world.

The Christian narrative or story-line can be summarized as creation, fall, redemption and consummation. This provides an outline for our reasoning about scarcity.

I. Creation

1.1. Being non-God

Creator and creature

"The widest horizon for theology – indeed for all of our knowledge – is the question of ontology: what is reality? Nothing is more central to our governing narratives than the God-world relation" (Horton 2010, p. 36), says theologian Michael Horton. The Bible answers this question with its first sentence: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Jürgen Moltmann remarks that,

"this opening sentence reflects a deliberate confrontation. The world, we are told here, is not the result of a struggle between the gods, as the [Babylonian] Enuma Elish epic says. Nor was it born from a cosmic egg, or from some primordial matter. To say that God 'created' the world indicates God's self-distinction from that world, and emphasizes that God desired it. This means that the world is not in itself divine; nor is it an emanation from God's eternal being. It is the specific outcome of his decision of will" (Moltmann 1985, p. 72).

God is Lord, and we are his creatures. The Reformed traditionally call this the Creator-creature distinction. John M. Frame: "In the biblical worldview there are fundamentally two kinds of being: the Creator and the creatures. God alone is the Creator; everyone and everything is creature. So, we must come to understand... that we are not God. We depend on him, not he on us. We are made to serve him [...]. He is a Lord, we are by nature his servants." (Frame 2006, p. 86) The formulation of this distinction goes back to Church fathers like Augustine. (Augustine's *The City of God* 2004, VII,30, or *Confessions*, X,6) But the revolutionary new idea itself was, of course, Hebrew monotheism.

According to German egyptologist Jan Assmann, the clear distinction of God and world was something radical new in the ancient world. (Assmann 2003) Foundational in pagan worldview was the conviction that the divine is intertwined with the world; thus he calls the pagan polytheism "cosmotheism": the universe is divine or permeated by the divine. In Biblical monotheism, on the contrary, the

Divine is emancipated from its integration into the universe, society, destiny; it faces the world as an independent entity. At the same time man becomes emancipated and a real counterpart of God; there is now a place for partnership and relationship with Him.

To summarize, the Biblical worldview, drawing on this fundamental distinction, denies the ultimacy of the created universe. Only God is ultimate or “self-contained”, as philosopher and theologian Cornelius Van Til (1895–1987) repeatedly asserted (Van Til 1955).

The Creator is the only Absolute Person who has absolutely comprehensive knowledge. Human beings are finite creatures, created good (Gen 1:31) and even made in God’s likeness (Gen 1:26), just a “little lower than the heavenly beings” (Ps 8:5), but they are not God or part of Him and will never become.

Called to be human

All this implies that our most fundamental scarcity, our not-having-something, is our being non-God, being non-divine. If scarcity may be described as a kind of insufficiency, of not possessing something we might get or desire, then we have to state: Yes, I am ‘lacking’ divinity, I am not God – but this is the way God created us, and it is good. Our calling always was and always will be the same, namely being human. And therefore this kind of scarcity is an essential part of God’s creation. Not being God is not a painful deficiency but our natural state of being. God blessed the first human beings after creating them (Gen 1:28), and therefore scarcity in this fundamental sense is a blessing.

Today this Jewish-Christian worldview is challenged by what is now for some centuries called “pantheism”: nothing but the old idea that the divine is everything, and everything is divine. In a pantheistic worldview God and the world are finally one (pantheism is one expression of monism). C.S. Lewis remarks: “Pantheists usually believe that God, so to speak, animates the universe as you animate your body: that the universe is almost God, so that if it did not exist He would not exist either, and anything you find in the universe is part of God. The Christian idea is quite different” (Lewis 1996, p. 44).

Implication of a monistic, pantheistic and mythical worldview is that all existing things are part of each other. There is no fundamental distinction between humanity, nature, and the divine. So we have too fundamental mindsets: one of continuity and identity (between the divine and the cosmos), and the Biblical mindset of boundaries and differences. Yet in a mindset of continuity, scarcity in our experience is, in the end, not real and just an illusion because in the all-encom-

passing deity there is no space for anything missing. There is just one divine reality and this, by definition, is characterized by divine abundance. On the other hand, a mindset of boundaries directly implies scarcity.

1.2. Being in a body

Created with flesh and bones

God, the Creator of the universe, does not have a physical body. The observable universe is not his body because he is the wholly Other. He is spirit (Jn 4:24). When the Bible speaks about his arms and ears, his hearing and seeing, his coming down and looking after, it is clear that such speech is metaphorical; for us as human beings there is no other way to speak about God or to understand God's self-revelation. On the other hand, we as creatures do have a physical body. God called the physical creation "good", and that includes us, human beings, having a body of flesh and bones. The first man and woman experienced fellowship with God in their bodies (Gen 2:7.22).

Nowhere in the Bible is the body itself despised. We are called to honour God with our body (1 Cor 6:20), "to offer our bodies as living sacrifices" (Rom 12:2); we will receive a new resurrection body (1 Cor 15:35f). 2 Cor 5:1–10 seems to imply that our soul longs for a deliverance from bodily existence, but Paul says that after death, in an intermediate state before the final resurrection and glorification, being without a body humans are "naked" (v. 3) – our soul naturally longs to be "clothed" with a body. In a fallen world of sin we long for a better body, which won't be destroyable as our "earthly tent" (v. 1).

Human beings are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27), but this image does not reside just in the 'higher' faculties of spirit and reasoning. Herman Bavinck underlines that "the human body belongs integrally to the image of God. [...] The body is not a prison, but a marvellous piece of art from the hand of God Almighty, and just as constitutive for the essence of humanity as the soul." Christianity teaches "that a human being does not bear or have the image of God but that he or she is the image of God" (Bavinck 2004, p. 554–560).

This is very important in respect to the second person of the Trinity. "God could not have been able to become man if he had not first made man in his own image", says Bavinck. And if the body would be an insignificant, non-integral aspect of being human and being made in the image of God, Jesus would and could not have become man with a real body. But the Incarnation was a coming into the flesh (Jn 1:14; 1 Jn 4:2); the Son of God really took "the very nature of a servant"

(Php 2:7); he “was made like his brothers [human beings] in every way” – apart from sin (Hbr 2:17); he suffered with a real body (1 Pt 4:1); he died in a body (1 Pt 2:24); he was risen with a body (Jn 20:24–29). He is now the first at home with his Father having a renewed body, and believers will join him (Rom 8:29). Human beings will remain bodily creatures in eternity.

Needy people

How does the Bible describe our bodily existence? The Hebrew *basar*, commonly translated “flesh”, occurs 273 times in the OT, with 104 references to animals. Often *basar* simply means the whole body; it is, says the Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, “probably the most comprehensive, most important, and most frequently used anthropological term for the external, fleshly aspect” of human nature (Schwarz 2013, p. 8).

The traditional translation of Hebrew *nefesh* is “soul”, but it has a range of meanings like throat, neck, breath, also individual life, the whole person, personality, individuality – what makes a person a living being – and in only some cases the translation “soul” is appropriate (e.g., Ex 23:9).

nefesh and *basar*, therefore, overlap in meaning, *nefesh* being the much broader and inclusive term. Hans Schwarz: “*nefesh* is not an indestructible core of personal existence that could stand in contrast to the body and exist independently of the body. Therefore the translation of *nefesh* with ‘soul’ is misleading” (Schwarz 2013, p. 6).

In his widely-read anthropology of the Old Testament, Hans Walter Wolff called the chapter on *nefesh* the “Needy Man” (Wolff 1974, p. 13). The word is, says Wolff, the main OT term for the human being in need, expressing our wishing, desiring, longing. Since the creation humans with their whole personality are needy people. “I” (the *nefesh* of me, the “soul”) am made to receive, to be complemented or fulfilled. God alone is life; we as created beings receive creaturely life.

Even more so *basar*, “Man in his Infirmary” (Wolff 1974, p. 13). The Hebrew word expresses our natural dependency on God’s breath of life and power. Every body was and is almost all the time in need of nourishment, water, and air. This was also true in a world without sin. Even with no fall into sin Adam and Eve and their descendants would have felt hunger, the desire to eat, and all other kinds of natural physical longings. In contrast to the all-powerful God humans were always weak. Defects, flaws, illness, suffering – physical weaknesses in the direct sense of infirmity and decay – are the result of the fall, of evil entering into this world. But in the beginning, the body, created good by God, was not frail.

Energy, for example, is quickly used up by our body, and so there is a almost constant scarcity of further supply of it, which then is provided by food. In pre-fall times this situation was in no way life threatening or desperate; thus there was no hard struggle or fighting for survival. Nevertheless, human beings, even in the Garden, were always limited and in constant demand of physical maintenance. Therefore our bodily existence directly underlines our fundamental deficiency: being in need.

Overcoming deficiency?

Humans beings are, as philosopher and anthropologist Arnold Gehlen (1904–1976) said, “deficient beings”¹ (Gehlen 1940). Most people and scholars would agree with this claim, because this is also what everybody experiences. But the crucial question is whether an original, created deficiency is good and God-given. Christianity says “Yes”. The natural, including the body, is good. Ancient Greeks and Romans claimed that human beings are only becoming human (and some never reach full humanity) when they develop their capacities of reason. The various groups of the New Religious Synthesis² also try to overcome the barriers of our bodily existence. And finally we have to mention Enlightenment thinkers who also aimed at the improvement of natural man by means of reason.

In his *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014) outlines the modern philosophical anthropology and shows that Gehlen’s famous term has its roots in Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (Treatise on the Origin of Language, 1772). Quoting the German philosopher and poet, “‘The distinctive trait of the human species’ is ‘gaps and wants’”. In comparison with the animals, the newborn human infant is ‘the most orphaned child of nature. Naked and bare, weak and in need, shy and unarmed’.” This is certainly true, but Herder’s point, according to Pannenberg, is that he “regards these ‘wants’ as simply the necessary counterpart of the highly developed human brain, or reason.” Therefore Herder can say, “We are not yet men, but are daily becoming so”. He is here, Pannenberg comments, “close to the Enlightenment idea of human self-perfectibility.” The point is that in Herder’s thought the goal of this self-improvement is God’s image in human beings. We just possess a “disposition”

¹ In German “Mängelwesen”.

² “New Religious Synthesis” is James A. Herrick’s term for the competitor of the “Revealed Word”, the Biblical worldview; this Synthesis includes various groups, cults and ideologies like New Age, New Thought, Kaballah, new Gnosticism, shamanism, the hermetic tradition etc. See Herrick 2003.

to humanity: “tradition and learning, reason and experience” is forming the image in us (Pannenberg 1985, p. 43–45).

In the Jewish-Christian worldview humans do possess the image of God (although, after the fall, it is marred and partly destroyed). They are already fully human, having been made good. Their natural deficiency is good, and we do not have to get past it, mainly through the faculty of reason, as the Enlightenment wanted to make us think. The fundamental human problem is not underdeveloped reason, but corrupted and wicked reason (Gen 6:5; 8:21).

1.3. Being in time

The creation of time

God exists eternally outside the confines of time. The Bible nowhere says that God had a beginning. Rather he lives eternally, he is God from eternity to eternity (Ps 90:2; 93:2), the everlasting God (Isa 40: 28; Rom 16:26). Christ is the “Alpha and Omega... who is, and who was, and who is to come” (Rev 1:8).

When God began to create the universe, time – as we experience it – was initiated and the succession of moments and events commenced. Everything created had a beginning, thus the cosmos and material things are not eternal. Therefore, a world apart from time is unconceivable. Augustine stated that the world was not made in time but along with time.³ Time, says Bavinck, “is the necessary form of the existence of the finite. It is not separate creation but something automatically given with the world, co-created with it like space” (Bavinck 2004, p. 429)⁴.

Time is a linear process with a preordained end. God knows this end, and he has revealed to us that there will be an end of this earthly time. But until then time will flow, and we as humans in rare cases exactly know what our future will bring.

Linear or cyclical time?

This linear concept of time is part of our Western heritage, but we must not take it for granted. The cyclical concept of time, common to all pagan and Eastern religions, is absolutely different. Methodist theologian John N. Oswalt comments on the ancient religions:

³ See Augustine’s *Confessions*, XI, 10–13, and *City of God*, VII,30; XI,4–6; XII,15–17.

⁴ See also Paul Mills’ good overview, “A brief theology of time”, *Cambridge Papers*, Vol. 7, No 1 (March 1998). Available from: <http://www.jubilee-centre.org/a-brief-theology-of-time-by-paul-mills/> [May 4, 2016]

“Since all things recur endlessly, there is no future different from the present, and there is no past from which the present differs. In such a circumstance, study of the past for the sake of improvement of the present and the future makes no sense. One can only hope to discover a pattern of recurrences in the past [...]” (Oswalt 2009, p. 122)

In this mythical worldview, says Oswalt, “the idea that the past might be transcended and that hitherto unknown events could occur is not within the myth-maker’s concept of reality. The shape of reality is determined by ‘now’, and ‘now’ is going nowhere.” (Oswalt 2009, p. 61–62) The idea that in the future things will not be as they are now does not make sense in the myths. Time has always rolled and it always will, but it is moving in a circle. There is no real progress, nothing fundamentally new. What is left is the “actualization of the timeless reality” (Oswalt 2009, p. 51).

In contrast to that, “the biblical characters are not depicted as semi-divine, representative beings. They are clearly presented to us as unique individuals, firmly rooted in time and space.” The whole Bible stresses “that it is human choices that shape the direction of events on earth” (Oswalt 2009, p. 125–126).

We must not underestimate this very important point. Thomas Cahill brilliantly elaborates on this basic contrast of worldviews in his *The Gift of the Jews*. Generally in the ancient world human life was regarded as a reflection of the life in the heavenly realm, controlled by the forces of destiny. The gods were supposed to decide everything. The examples, patterns, paradigms are in heaven, written in the stars. Task of human beings is to repeat these, to act in accord with them: “In the revolving drama of the heavens, primitive peoples saw an immortal, wheel-like pattern that was predictive of mortal life. At the centre of this Wheel of Life they found the Hub of Death... The spiral, ever turning, ever beginning again, is the image of the cyclical nature of reality [...]” (Cahill 1998, p. 53).

The biblical concept is not cyclical but linear. The stars are no gods, and human beings are really free (though not absolutely free). Their thinking, feeling and acting have meaning and potential for creating something new. In Genesis 12 we meet Abram/Abraham – an individual, stepping into an unknown future. He is not repeating a pattern, God is making history with him.

If time is no longer cyclical but one-way and irreversible, “personal history is now possible and an individual life can have value... And without the individual, neither time nor history is possible” (Cahill 1998, p. 94–95). Hence in the Bible we see, again and again, unique individuals – often bizarre, surprising; people who do not fit into any given pattern; real persons who impact history and change their

course of life. All this makes perfect sense since linear time implies that the new is worth looking for.⁵

Limitations of time

Abraham lived in time, and so did Adam. Of course, there is an important difference. Abraham knew that one day he would taste death; in the beginning, Adam and Eve did not have to die. Nevertheless, the first couple was called to live within a confined temporal position. They were created upright, but put to a test. This probation itself assumes being in time. Every moment is important, because it has ethical relevance. Thus Adam and Eve did not have to hurry as we might have to; their life was originally not restricted by a lifespan of 70–120 years. They did not suffer from a frightful shortage of time. But they had to deal with temporal limitations and could not fulfil every duty, laid upon them, once at a time.

We have to remember that they could find themselves put before several tasks: being fruitful, subduing or cultivating the earth (Gen 1:28), the last comprising many separate responsibilities. Yet already for them before the fall time was scarce, that is to say limited, and therefore they very often faced a kind of collision of duties: due to linear time they could not perform them all at the same moment.

God established several institutions, creation ordinances, for human beings to live in, and they all compete for our scarce time. German ethicist Thomas Schirrmacher:

“Every single day every individual has to weigh up which obligations he or she will fulfil and in which order this will be done... When I get up in the morning, I have to decide how I am going to fulfil my obligations as a husband and father, pastor, employer and citizen. Most of the time I cannot fulfil all the obligations simultaneously, and yet all of them are mandates received from God. I am therefore continually conducting a balancing of interests” (Schirrmacher 2013, p. 94).

Of course, Schirrmacher has in mind our daily experience today where this conflict of duties is often very difficult and painful. But even in a world without sin different and legitimate interests had to be reconciled with each other. Adam and Eve were facing the task of conscious deliberation, or simply put: What to do next?

Scarcity of time underlines the importance of choice. Samuel Gregg: “The need to choose implies the need to sacrifice. The very act of choice implies that, while

⁵ See also Stark 2006, p. 9: “With the exception of Judaism, the other great faiths have conceived of history as either an endlessly repeated cycle or inevitable decline – Muhammad is reported to have said, ‘The best generation is my generation.’ In contrast, Judaism and Christianity have sustained a directional conception of history [...]”

one thing is chosen, another is left behind.” This is due to the “self-evident” fact of scarcity, yet “many people fail to acknowledge this fundamental reality. But recognizing the inherent cost of every human decision should not carry a negative connotation.” We have to evaluate our priorities, and this “encourages us to be wise in our choices and this, indirectly, encourages us to actualize the first of the cardinal virtues: prudence” (Gregg 2001, p. 16). In this way, says Michael Novak, “time imposes disciplines and obligations”; it “imposes its own spirituality. Consider the daily regimen adopted by Benjamin Franklin”, who said, “Lose no time: Be always employ’d in something useful: cut off all unnecessary Action. (Novak 1991, p. 97, 101).

1.4. Called to work

God's co-workers

God himself is a worker or craftsman. “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing” (Gen 2:2). God is said to be resting after the six days of creation, but this is certainly not to be conceived as a cessation of all activities: “He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps 121:4); “How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all...” (Ps 104:24). Numerous verses in the Bible make it clear that the Lord is controlling the forces of nature and events of history; he is actively involved in the life of human beings, especially his chosen people. All this involves work. It is no coincidence that the incarnated Son of God was by profession not a philosopher, not a poet, not even a priest, but a carpenter (Mk 6:3) or construction worker as we could translate the Greek *tehton*.

Being made in God’s image human beings too are called to work. The command to subdue the earth and rule over it in Gen 1:28 clearly implies work, and in Gen 2:15 it is stated unequivocally, “The Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (See also Ex 20:9–10). The earth is given to human beings (Ps 115:16); they are taken or made from the ground, that is material stuff (Gen 3:19), and therefore they are also to work or cultivate the ground (Gen 2:5.15).

A concrete work is mentioned in Gen 2:19–20, the naming of the animals. In this way humans exercise dominion on earth (Gen 1:26) which, of course, is under the sovereign dominion of God. David VanDrunen says, “the first Adam was made in the divine image as the royal son of God, commissioned to exercise wise, righteous, and holy dominion over this world” (VanDrunen 2010, p. 40). We were created for creative production, being vice-regents of God in this world. Hence work

and culture are not a curse but a gift and invitation to continue God's own creative activity. Through work we participate in God's ongoing providence for the human race. Lee Hardy writes, "by working we affirm our uniquely human position as God's representatives on this earth, as cultivators and stewards of the good gifts of his creation" (Hardy 1990, p. 48).

The whole Bible speaks very highly of work⁶. If somebody is able to work, he or she has to work. It is interesting that in the future vision of the new heavens and a new earth Isaiah says that people "will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit", "they will not toil in vain" (Isa 65:21.23) – toil or work will then be fully satisfying, but work, nevertheless. And even if we admit that this is just figurative language, the ethos behind these expressions is clear. Similarly, when in the vision of edenic prosperity in Amos 9:13 wine will "flow from all the hills", this is no Cockaigne; the reaper and the plowman, the planter "and the one treading grapes" are mentioned – all workers. Wine will flow, but due to their work.

Thus the so-called Creation or Cultural Mandate (Gen 1:28; 9:1), comprising the whole range of activities in work and culture, is a divine and universal command, and it is in itself not less spiritual or less pleasing to God than the other Great Commission, the spreading of the Gospel (Mt 28:18–20). (Macaulay's essay 1998)

John Calvin even stressed that "we become most Godlike not when we turn away from action, but when we engage in it" (Hardy 1990, p. 57).

Working with dirt

It is necessary to keep in mind that the ancient Greeks and Romans had another conception of their gods and so of human work. "The gods, as we conceive them, enjoy supreme felicity and happiness," says Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, and this "activity of God, which is transcendent in blessedness, is the activity of contemplation" (1178b). The highest occupation of the gods is reasoning and meditating. Therefore we humans are also called to "prefer the activity of the part [of the soul] which is in its nature the higher" states the philosopher in *Politics* (VII. xiv.13). Roman orator and philosopher Cicero openly despised manual work in his ethics *On Duties*:

"Unbecoming to a gentleman, too, and vulgar are the means of livelihood of all hired workmen whom we pay for mere manual labour, not for artistic skill... And all mechan-

ics are engaged in vulgar trades; for no workshop can have anything liberal about it. Least respectable of all are those trades which cater for sensual pleasures: Fishmongers, butchers, cooks, and poulterers, And fishermen..." (I, 150)

Certainly not coincidentally Jesus first called fishermen to follow him and become his disciples (Mt 4:18; Mk 1:16). We must never forget that manual labour has its own high dignity. John Murray, referring to Gen 2:15, underlines that here we are informed "that it was highly worthy of man's dignity as created after the divine image to be employed in so a mundane a task. This is eloquent warning against the impiety of despising and judging unworthy of our dignity the tasks which we call menial." (Murray 1957, p. 35) The lowest kind of labour is of as much value as the intellectual. Jay W. Richards gets right to the point:

"We aren't ethereal angels or wispy spirits. We're made of dirt, and we're made to work with dirt – and yet we have in us the very breath of God. We're drawn from the ground but still transcend it. Dirt, as God created it, isn't dirty. And working with dirt, as God created it, doesn't make us dirty. Work itself is part of God's original blessing, not his curse after the fall. The way in which we work, then, should reflect the fact that we are a unity of matter and spirit, of heaven and earth, neither pack animals nor angels" (Richards 2009, p. 98).

No need to economize?

We now turn to the important question of what this work in Eden was like and what this means for our subject scarcity. "Since he came down from the trees, man has faced the problem of survival," Robert Heilbroner starts the second chapter of his bestselling *The Worldly Philosophers*. (Heilbroner 2000, p. 18) This picture just makes sense in the Grand Evolutionary Myth as philosopher Alvin Plantinga once coined this nowadays dominating paradigm. (Methodological Naturalism? 2016)

Yet the history of humanity did not start in misery or a fierce struggle for survival. The Garden of Eden was a place of joy, satisfaction, and harmony.

However, we must not stretch this picture too far. It is often assumed that life in pre-fall Eden, in Paradise⁷, was characterized by a blissful, easy-going laziness of a sort; work, perhaps, but not really. And here comes in abundance. Even acknowledged economist Thomas Sowell writes in *Basic Economics*: "The Garden of Eden was a system for the production and distribution of goods and services, but it was not an economy, because everything was available in unlimited abundance. Without scarcity, there is no need to economize – and therefore no economics" (Sowell 2011, p. 2).

⁷ Derived from the Greek *paradeisos* – garden.

There is truth in Sowell's sentences, no doubt. There was and is abundance, but was really everything available for Adam? Undoubtedly Adam was not hindered by any evil obstruction; he could freely implement his ideas and plans; in principle he had access to everything he desired. But let us go back to Sowell's term "production". Inherent to production is the initial situation of non-being. Productive labour is about transforming things into something more useful. In this way something really new comes to existence. Every work of this kind creates new things that have not been there before. This fact alone presupposes scarcity; and if abundance would mean the total and instant presence of everything, there would be no work at all. All we wish for would be right at hand. Therefore scarcity is directly connected to work. And since work is our calling and good, scarcity is good and God-pleasing too. Gregg makes this point better than Sowell: "Humans do not find that nature automatically provides us with the things that we desire or need. Work is required to harness this potential. Hence, everything that is produced by humans costs us some of our time and labor" (Gregg 2001, p. 15). This was true before the fall and is true today.

Work and enjoyment

How to imagine daily life in the Garden? Did Adam and Eve just keep going around, picking up fruits here and there? Pannenberg explains very well that inherent to work is the tension between work and enjoyment, and although he has in view post-fall conditions the main principle is also true in a sinless and fully harmonious world:

"The distinction of work and enjoyment is constitutive for the concept of work. Consequently, when human beings nourish themselves on the fruits of nature that are at hand..., they do not perform work. On the other hand, the gathering of these fruits for subsequent use, and especially in order to lay in a supply for the winter or other times of shortage, is to be considered work. Like the preparation of meals, which are only to be eaten after the preparation, the process of collection and storage postpones enjoyment and thus shows itself to be a behaviour that has been cultivated. Work provides food not only for the moment but for an anticipated future [...]. Through such postponement of enjoyment work creates property which to a large extent frees humans from the immediate pressure of their primary needs, since the products of their work are now at their disposition for future use" (Pannenberg 1985, p. 418–419).

In the Garden there was no life-threatening shortage. Nevertheless, Adam still had to think about ways to work and cultivate the ground. He faced the challenge to design and construct tools. It is hard to imagine that God would have given all

these necessary and helpful instruments of work to him. There was an abundance of copper, iron and tin in the ground, as there was an abundance of plants and fruits and water and soil. Nature does present to us a real abundance of resources, before and after the fall. No doubt God is the great giver. But we must not jump too easily to the conclusion that he generously gives us everything in pre-packaged form. He almost never does! There always had and has to be *productive effort* on the part of human beings. Therefore even in Paradise abundance, scarcity and production went together to form a peaceful balance. There is more than getting and sharing, there is also producing. Otherwise we are easily trapped, as so many theologians, in the dichotomy of either taking (evil) or giving (good). Production leads a way out of this, combining taking and giving. A great summary by economist Michael Kruse:

“It is true that God created and placed us in a world of abundant resources. But *very few resources exist in a state usable by human beings. Energy, technology, and intelligence must be applied to resources to transform them from less useful states into more useful states [...].* This is part and parcel of the biblical notion of stewardship as God placed Adam in the garden to work it so that it might produce abundance” (Kruse 2008).

1.5. Called to be creative

The Mind of the Maker

Being called to work, human beings are also encouraged to express their God-given creativity. This word of Latin origin is certainly not found in the Bible (our modern usage has its roots in the Enlightenment). In ancient times terms like the Greek *techne*, skilful knowledge and art, or *phronesis*, practical wisdom, had been used. God, too, is revealed as the most wise Creator, personified Wisdom is standing “at his side” (Prov 8:30). All of God’s works in creation and providence reveal his wisdom and creativity.

In the Bible wisdom is accentuated many times; it means knowing how to do things in changing circumstances. This clearly implies creativity because situations have to be evaluated differently; facing new challenges very often new and creative answers have to be found. This is true for the Bible itself. The various authors of the biblical books have spoken to so diverse audiences in different situations that the Holy Scriptures themselves reflect an astonishing literary creativity.

It is probably no coincidence that a creative writer, not a professional theologian, masterfully expressed these thoughts. Dorothy Sayers (1893–1957), famous author of crime stories, says in *The Mind of the Maker*, “The characteristic common

to God and man is apparently that: the desire and the ability to make things.” Of course, we cannot create in the same way God does, He alone made the world out of nothing; thus “we can only rearrange the unalterable and indestructible units of matter in the universe and build them up into new forms”. Nevertheless, especially creative artists do something analogous to the absolute creation of God. They use their creative mind and imagination, and in this way humans mirror God. Sayers quoting Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, “God created the world by imagination” (Sayers 1987, p. 17–23). This is why “creative mind is in fact the very grain of the spiritual universe”, and it is “exhibited in the structure of every man and woman”. Therefore we must not confine “the average man and woman to uncreative activities and to an uncreative outlook”, because “this would do violence to the very structure of our being” (Sayers 1987, p. 185).

Being made in God’s image involves “the capacity to understand, to grasp, to reflect, and to arrange” what God has revealed in creation. When we start to reflect on these thoughts of God, sciences arise, Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) says (Kuyper 2011, p. 35–42). Without sin, he continues, there would not have been a state (using force to punish criminals and to defend citizens from aggression) and the church (proclaiming an answer to sin), but there would have been science. And it started in the Garden. To be able to name the animals the first humans had to study their character and do research; they needed power to distinguish, imagination and creativity – a rudimentary kind of science emerged.

The genius of man

*But it was none other than Augustine who most beautifully expressed the greatness of the human creative mind in chapter “Of the Blessings with Which the Creator Has Filled This Life” of his The City of God.*⁸ “It is He, then, who has given to the human soul a mind,” says the *Church father, hence we have* “become capable of knowledge and of receiving instruction, fit to understand what is true and to love what is good.” Then he starts a series of questions and exclamations, becoming more and more enthusiastic about human achievements. “Who can competently utter or even conceive the grandeur of this work of the Almighty, and the unspeakable boon He has conferred upon our rational nature, by giving us even the capacity of such attainment?” He asks, “has not the genius of man invented and applied countless astonishing arts, partly the result of necessity, partly the result of exu-

berant invention, so that this vigour of mind... betokens an inexhaustible wealth in the nature which can invent, learn, or employ such arts?"

We have to remember that Augustine wrote these lines about 1600 years ago. What would he say today, after two centuries of numerous and even more fascinating inventions? Would he not marvel at all these achievements of modern science and technology? Should we not revel in the fruits of human creative spirit?

Theologians can take an example of Augustine. This is all the more true because theology as a discipline also requires a creative mind. We can define theology, following John M. Frame, as the application of God's Word to all areas of life.⁹ Believers are not called to blind and mindless repetition of eternal truths; God wants us to creatively implement His law and will for us in ever-changing situations.

Unfortunately, theologians rarely elaborate on this point in the context of economy. Christopher J.H. Wright mentions the "ingenuity and adaptability God gave to human beings" in his ethics of the OT; "humanity has always had a built-in potential to produce material goods beyond what is needed for immediate survival" (Wright 2004, p. 149–151). But that is all we get on 500 pages about the human genius of imagination, productive creation and creativity. Too quickly the industrialization and technological advance are only seen from the perspective of a fallen world. Says Wright in almost patronizing manner, "they [industry, technology] may not be in themselves sinful [...] but [...]". This "but" is very strong, and thus our human creative mind is immoderately minimized.

Being open to new ideas

Human creativity is closely related to our being limited and 'unfinished'. Hans Schwarz expresses this as follows: "openness to the world is a characteristic human feature". Humans "are always becoming and never definitely set in their ways. This allows for the peculiarly human freedom of action uninhibited by rigidly structured norms for actions and reaction... Humans can dialogically interact with their environment..." (Schwarz 2013, p. 73).

Human beings always retain 'immature' characteristics; they continuously develop, grow in knowledge, experience and skills. Seen from a purely biological perspective humans are relatively weak in physical terms; bodily they reach a certain completeness as adults. But our main asset, our most distinguishing feature as humans, is our ability to think, imagine and create. This is what keeps us open and in dialogue with our environment. Even if the theory of evolution were true, bio-

⁹ See Frame 1987, p. 76.

logical adaption takes long periods of time. Yet through our faculty of reasoning we interact with culture and do change all the time.

This fundamental openness and ever becoming is not a result of sin¹⁰; in principle change is not evil. Jesus' life confirms this truth too. In Lk 2:52 it is said that he "grew in wisdom". He was not incarnated as a perfect, immediately adult male. In a direct way he embodied our interaction with the world and our growing in knowledge and practical wisdom.

Having said all this, we now turn again to the subject of scarcity. Our understanding and wisdom can progressively increase, because we believe in a conscious and rational supernatural Creator – a person who can be understood; and because the created world itself reveals this rational God, it also can be explored with our mind. Yet, due to our being created human, knowledge will always be imperfect or not absolute.

Did Adam in the Garden possess perfect knowledge? All his acting and thinking was perfect only in a moral sense; before the fall it was not tainted by sin. But obviously God did not implant into his brain all-embracing knowledge. He still was facing many challenges of how to cultivate the Garden and to subdue the whole earth. In other words, he had to generate ideas, many ideas; and it simply is not plausible, as we noticed, that God would have directly revealed most of these to him.

Until today one main result of our mental activity are ideas, new ideas, creative ideas, better and better ideas. And there are never enough good ideas! Adam had some, we have more, and yet it's not enough. Who would dare to say "enough of these ideas"? We still do not have the totality of good ideas. The same is true in theology: We do have the infallible and inerrant Word of God, but our understanding of it will always remain open to improvement.

Economist Izrael M. Kirzner, following thoughts of Karl Popper and F.A. Hayek says: "Knowledge is open-ended in the sense that no matter how much we know, this is as nothing compared with what we know that we do not know... knowledge is open-ended in the sense of always being seen as incomplete. It is always only a fragment of that which is available to be known" (Kirzner 2003).

¹⁰ We have to add here that before the fall this openness also meant that Adam was able to sin or not to sin; he was in a state of integrity but on probation, put to a test; see also 1.3. Adam "stood at the beginning of his 'career' not at the end. His condition was provisional and temporary and could not remain as it was. It either had to pass on to higher glory or to sin and death" (Bavinck 2004, p. 564). Today, after the fall, we are not free anymore not to sin, as Augustine stressed, but we have to keep in mind that on a very fundamental creational level only human beings have been made good as well as on probation – open to God's checking.

For all these reasons good ideas are scarce and will always be so. There is no end of this kind of scarcity in sight. We still can do better, all the time! Ideas are our main resource, and the lack of good ideas will ever be with us.

Scarcity conspiring with creativity

This eminence of ideas relates theology to economics. Of course, theology itself is more conservative because it centres around faithfully passing on the undefiled Gospel. And yet it also needs new ideas to be able to communicate this old Gospel to ever new people in always different situations. In the end all theology serves this task. New ideas advance theology, the economy and whole societies. Theologians can concur wholeheartedly with Ludwig von Mises saying, “Everything that happens in the social world in our time is the result of ideas. Good things and bad things. What is needed is to fight bad ideas [...]. We must substitute better ideas for wrong ideas. [...] Ideas and only ideas can light the darkness. [...] What we need is nothing else than to substitute better ideas for bad ideas” (Mises 2006, p. 105).

We started with a serious tension between contemporary theologians and economic thinking. But the human creative mind and its products, ideas, constitute a fundamental point of contact. Therefore Christian economists Victor V. Claar and Robin J. Klay can express this agreement:

“Aspects of that image [of God in human beings] include the capacity, vision and passion to create new things, to uncover new possibilities, and to explore new dimensions. Because God continuously sustains and unfolds new potential in creation, the gift of human creativity is essential for society to thrive”, therefore human beings are called “to develop resources and apply their talents” (Claar & Klay 2007, p. 23).

Michael Novak is another bridge-builder, commenting on Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*, “The key to the wealth of nations lies in human creativity more than in any other source.” He explains concisely our human openness and orientation to the future: “Creation left to itself is incomplete, and humans are called to be co-creators with God, bringing forth the potentialities the Creator has hidden. Creation is full of secrets waiting to be discovered, riddles which human intelligence is expected by the Creator to unlock” (Novak 1991, p. 78, 39). In humble spirit he writes in the “Afterword for the 1991 Edition” of his acclaimed book: “Perhaps the most important point I slowly came to see is that the heart of the capitalist approach to economics is neither private property, nor markets, nor profits [...], but rather invention” (Novak 1991, p. 419).

Rodney Stark also notes that “it was invention that constituted the success of the West” (Stark 2006, p. 158)¹¹. More and more the conviction took root that in the long run economic growth is not possible through stealing and plundering and the exploitation of slaves. A mindset of robbing makes sense in a narrative of abundance: others have more than enough, so let’s take it away from them. Scarcity, on the other hand, conspires with creativity “to get us to the next level, to the next resource or the next technological breakthrough. Necessity is indeed the mother of invention, but a human creator is the father”, says Richards (Richards 2009, p. 190).

Our ultimate resource

Obviously, there is on earth an abundance of grasses with their fruits, the caryopses. Yet it took human creativity to cultivate wheat, corn, rice. We pray for our daily bread (Mt 6:11), but it usually does not fall from down heaven (with the exception of Manna to the Israelites in the desert, see Ex 16:31). The most natural thing like bread had to be invented! And this process is open to improvement (one of the most important was baking with yeast). Baking bread was made popular in Europe by the Romans. Bread-making needs flour, and this has to be ground. A big step forward in the production of food was the inventions of mills. The Romans came up with the rotary hand-mill, older are horse mills and watermills, later windmills were invented. The need to produce more and better food triggered off a whole range of ideas.

There is also an abundance of iron in the ground, the same is true for coal. But it took centuries to see that it is a far superior fuel than wood, that we can make coke out of coal, enhancing even the energetic properties of this mineral. The first blast furnaces were invented in the middle ages, but cast-iron was used for construction only from the late 18th century on; high-quality steel had to wait for Henry Bessemer’s converter in the 19th century.

New ideas brought about new needs which encouraged new inventions. More and more coal was needed, and this scarcity made James Watt think about an improved steam engine. His machine of 1769 changed history. In 1831 M. Faraday’s electrical generator followed and in 1884 the power machine which still lights our nights, C. Parsons’ steam turbine.

¹¹ See also chapter 4, „The Invention of Invention“, in Landes 1999. There he gives a good overview of early inventions; inventions are the root cause – or heart, as Novak says – of prosperity, but Europe succeeded, Landes says, not least because of institutionally embedded property rights and free markets, that is entrepreneurship.

For thousands of years crude oil lay in the ground unexploited. Again, there was enough, a sheer abundance, but until recently – in historical dimensions – we had no, or almost no, idea what to do with “naphtha” or petroleum. This radically changed only in the middle of the 19th century and gave us a whole range of new products like gasoline, kerosene, then derived from these petrochemicals and our whole world of synthetic plastics, starting with Bakelite and celluloid, later polystyrene, polyamide, polyester, and on it goes.

Step by step daily life was improved, the range of our freedom enlarged. These inventions got under way around 1900, starting with electricity and the petrol engine, then, in the great first decade of the 20th century, came the air conditioner (1902), the airplane (1903), the electric cardiograph (1903), the AM radio (1906), the electric cash register (1906), the vacuum cleaner (1908), to name but a few. It is hard to imagine life without them.¹²

Was there ever enough change? Should the development have been stopped at, let us say, 1800? Should humanity have been satisfied with steam power? But what about electricity? Should the “enough!” have echoed through the laboratories and factories of 1900? Who needs automobiles and airplanes? Shouldn’t we be satisfied with faster horses or faster locomotives? Shouldn’t we have called for stopping the circle of economic growth, in 1800? Or rather in 1900? Or today? Shall we really make wealth history¹³ or shall we walk on? Insightful thinkers like Popper and Hayek have understood that we have to choose the second.¹⁴

No doubt the gifts of life are given by a generous God. But his greatest gift to us, our ultimate resource, is our creative mind, and therefore we very rarely just take raw materials – we create products or commodities, and so He provides us with all we need through ever expanding new ideas and products.

Humanomics

Today it is probably economic historian Deirdre McCloskey who most forcefully stresses the decisive role of ideas and innovations. The “Great Enrichment”, starting around 1800, is not explicable by “putting brick on brick” or stealing from oth-

¹² See also the impressive list of 114 inventions between 1700 and 1850 in chapter 6 of Jay 2000.

¹³ See <http://makewealthhistory.org/>

¹⁴ See K. R. Popper’s final words in Vol. I of Popper 2011, p. 189: “There is no return to a harmonious state of nature. If we turn back, then we must go the whole way – we must turn to beasts. It is an issue which we must face squarely... We can return to the beasts. But if we wish to remain human, then there is only one way, the way into the open society. We must go on into the unknown, the uncertain and insecure, using what reason we may have to plan as well we can for both security and freedom.”

ers (exploitation and imperialism); it is not the physical capital, but human capital, which caused this unique phenomenon:

“Contrary to the usual declarations of the economists since Adam Smith or Karl Marx, the Biggest Economic Story was not caused by trade or investment or exploitation. It was caused by ideas. The idea of bourgeois dignity and liberty led to a rise of real income per head in 2010 prices from about \$3 a day in 1800 worldwide to over \$100 in places that have accepted the Bourgeois Deal and its creative destruction” (McCloskey 2010).

McCloskey is convinced that mainly discovery and innovations made us rich – ideas put into practice. She even prefers “innovation” to “capitalism” and “humanomics” to “economics”, underlining that economics first goes about in our heads. The Industrial Revolution was sparked by the way people thought and spoke, by a new liberty and dignity of the inventive people, for the bourgeois or the middle class.¹⁵ First in north-western Europe from the 17th century on the former hierarchical structure of society started to change and give way to more horizontal or egalitarian relationships. Ancient constraints were released, and all this resulted in political and societal freedom the world has never seen before. Freedom was the condition, and then ideas could start breeding.

McCloskey uses various illustrations like the ice hockey stick for the Great Enrichment. Another picture for the same phenomenon is a tide: the rise of income per head in history is like the rising of water on a shore. What economists are usually proud of (the “hard stuff” and how it works) analyses just what the water is doing in the sand of the shore. But the tide itself has to be explained, and in the end, it is ideas, ideas and ideas, the human spirit, ethics and our talking about ideas.

1.6. Called to life in community

The fully developed image of God

In the coronation hymn of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal from the 7th century BC it is said, “May harmony and peace be established in Assyria! [The god] Assur is King – truly Assur is King, and Ashurbanipal is the image of [the god] Assur” (eds. Joas & Wiegandt 2010, p. 83). The king alone is the image of god. In the biblical creation account this concept is fundamentally changed and democratized: *every* human being is made in the image of God. And we have to go further: the individ-

ual, gifted with dignity of being God's creation, is created for community, and only in community the image of God comes to fulfilment.

John Bolt, referring to the well-known verse "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen 2:18), says, "The point is *not* that Adam was *lonely*; rather, there is something humanly incomplete about him. If humanity is to image God as the Creator intended, 'man' needs the complement of 'woman'. Here we have, *in nuce*, the foundation of all social order." Therefore, apart from some rare exceptions, "work is always social; we work for others, with others, and to benefit others. We are able to work because social, political, and economic structures are in place to provide opportunities for us to work" (Bolt 2013, p. 42–44). Heart and foundation of the societal order are marriage and the family because it is there where we start caring and working for each other, learning the necessary skills and virtues. Out of family relations mostly organically and spontaneously arise all kinds of social order.

God created us as intelligent beings with a creative mind. This natural endowment, says Emil Brunner (1889–1966), "which makes it possible for him to work, also leads him to this life in community. Intelligent reflection shows him that he attains more in combination with others than each individual could gain by himself, it points him to the two natural possibilities of life in community: co-operation and exchange" (Brunner 2002, p. 385). Hardy also accentuates that

"We depend upon others, as they depend upon us. This indicates God's intent that human beings should live in a society bound together by common needs and mutual service. Our lack of self-sufficiency necessarily draws us together into an interdependent society of persons. Furthermore, although we were created with the same basic needs, we were not created with the same talents and abilities" (Hardy 1990, p. 60).

He quotes John Calvin, saying, "all the gifts we possess have been bestowed by God and entrusted to us on condition that they be distributed for our neighbours' benefit." God created us to live in communities of mutual love and service. He wants to give us all necessary for life through this mutual service to each other.

This service takes different shapes in the ordinances but there is always care for others and some mutual benefit in family, economy, church and civil government. The aspect of service is most obvious in the family because little children almost totally depend on their parents' service, providing food, shelter, etc. Only later children start to serve each other and their parents. In the Church ordained ministers serve the members of the congregations, and the believers serve each other. In many churches deacons serve in the area of relief and charity. The goal

of all leadership in the church is “to equip the saints [that is all members of the church] for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:11–12).

High-ranking government employees are ministers too, the Latin word for servants. The state in general serves *us*, the citizens, not the other way round (Rom 13:4). And in the economy everything is founded on service: providing products and services to other citizens; here the relationships are mostly horizontal, benefits clearly mutual. In the other ordinances vertical relationships are sometimes more prominent (parents stand above children); in the economy mutuality is king. Work is also our most general kind of service because (almost) every adult human being is working in some way or another (not necessarily paid work).

Never enough people

Single human beings are not self-sufficient, we are in need of other people. There will always be a lack of people, and this scarcity will stay with us. *Through it* God is blessing us. This means that labour for mutual benefit will always be scarce. Where there ever enough people to subdue, cultivate and keep the earth?

Yet the logic of Gen 1:28 is often not seen or turned around. “Growth in numbers [of human beings, following the command to multiply], however, requires growth in material production”, says Wright. Of course, there is truth in this statement. But the word “however” says a lot. Is not the growth in numbers first of all a blessing to the created world? If we see it mostly or first of all as a challenge, we will always come to the conclusion that feeding of more and more people is a burden.¹⁶ Yet from another perspective more people have more ideas, can better co-operate, are able to more intensively care for each other through their work etc. The existence of more people is basically good.

Wright almost gets to the point: “If human beings were ‘to fill the earth and subdue it’, this was bound to lead to surplus of some products in some places and scarcity of some in others... Thus it seems that exchange and trade of commodities are natural consequences of human growth in all its dimensions” (Wright 2004, p. 149). But why such a cautious expression like “it seems”? Here he touches the heart of our economic system, voluntary exchange for mutual benefit, and yet he remains so reluctant.

Economist Julian L. Simon (1932–1998) was more excited. The title of his *The Ultimate Resource* (first published in 1980) contains the message: his central premise was that people are the ultimate resource. “Human beings,” Simon writes,

¹⁶ The background of all this is, of course, T. R. Malthus’ theorizing.

“are not just more mouths to feed, but are productive and inventive minds that help find creative solutions to man’s problems, thus leaving us better off over the long run” (Simon 1996, p. 376). If we concentrate on the alleged finiteness of natural resources, we easily forget that our most important resource is our ability to create, an always renewable resource.

That means that to accuse the capitalistic economy of putting only the individual into the centre is fundamentally misguided. Of course, personal decisions of choice are essential for every market. But, as Novak explains, “The very structure of democratic capitalism... is aimed at community”. He points out that “economic activity is fundamentally corporate, exceeding the capacity of any one individual alone” (Novak 1991, p. 129, 131), therefore cooperation is a central feature of democratic capitalism (Leonard 2016).

Adam Smith masterfully captured the spirit of cooperation in the first chapter of *The Wealth of Nations*. “The woollen coat, for example, which covers the day-labourer, as coarse and rough as it may appear, is the produce of the joint labour of a great multitude of workmen.” Then he mentions “the shepherd, the sorter of the wool, the wool-comber or carder, the dyer, the scribbler, the spinner, the weaver, the fuller, the dresser, with many others, must all join their different arts in order to complete even this homely production.” But that is not all, “many merchants and carriers”, “ship-builders, sailors, sail-makers, rope-makers”, all must jointly work together to produce the coat. “What a variety of labour, too, is necessary in order to produce the tools of the meanest of those workmen!” Smith exclaims.

A page before this Smith expounds that the freedom of the individuals, pursuing their self-interest (see also below), finally leads to “universal opulence” and “general plenty” due to extensive cooperation; “all the different ranks of the society”, even the “lowest”, will profit (Smith 2012, p. 14–15).

Interlude

Now we can see that the statements, quoted in the introduction, contain much truth, but this truth is often twisted and distorted.

Yes, God’s abundant and superfluous giving to creation is a great gift. But we have to see that its main goal is to enable us to create and work. Without this human creation, without production, there is nothing to share.

Wallis, Brueggemann et al. demonstrate a fundamental ignorance of wealth *creation*, mostly a non-subject in all their essays and books. In contrast, they focus almost exclusively on distribution or sharing. But there has to be something to

share! Margaret Thatcher’s famous rebuttal: “No-one would remember the Good Samaritan if he’d only had good intentions; he had money as well” (TV Interview for London Weekend Television *Weekend World* 1980).

And this the Samaritan had earned before through productive work.

Yes, “God provides through creation’s natural systems”, there is “natural abundance” (McLaren 2008, p. 136, 138), but that is only a small fraction of the truth. We experience His daily providence through the creative work and service of others. There is almost nothing purely natural we receive; except the air we breathe virtually everything we get is manufactured. Voluntary exchanges, trade, the division of labour – this is our natural system, because God has made to thrive in that system.

Yes, trade assumes scarcity. We voluntarily exchange for mutual benefit; I am giving up something to get something else you have. Where is the evil in this? Why is thus hunger written into the conditions of our economics, as Cavanaugh claims? Isn’t it the other way round, following Smith, that trade is the only means to achieve universal prosperity to all the different ranks of the society?

Yes, there is not enough to go around. But what do we not have enough of? How to evaluate this lack? We have to say this, first of all, about our good ideas. And this scarcity is good and driving us forward.

II. Fall, Redemption and Consumation

2.1. East of Eden

Radical depraved

So far we have looked at the human condition as originally created by God. But all our experience in daily life testifies to the fact that something is fundamentally wrong with our world – and with us human beings. At one moment in history (or pre-history) sin entered into God’s good creation, and this was due to the first transgression of God’s law. Genesis 3 gives us the whole story.

Traditionally all churches stress the historicity of the fall. Michael Horton says, “Christian theology stands or falls with a historical Adam and a historical fall. On this point, Roman Catholic and Reformation theologies are at one” (Horton 2010, p. 424–425)¹⁷. This is important because only a period of time – real, linear time –

before a fall, time without sin, evil and misery makes it plausible that sin is not part of the definition of a human being.

The term “fall”, which is not found in the narrative itself, appropriately describes humanity’s new situation: human beings fell down from a level “little lower than the heavenly beings” (Ps 8:5); they were banished from God’s direct presence (Gen 3:23). The intimate and harmonious relationship with God, with each other, with the rest of the created world was broken. As a result, the image of God in human beings was not totally extinguished; human beings did not become animals, demons or stones. But the formerly perfect image is now corrupted and marred; distorted but not destroyed. Humans lost true holiness and righteousness. Sinfulness affected all parts of us, mind and body, will and emotions, reasoning and desiring.¹⁸

Sin is lawlessness (1 Jn 3:4). It impacts every aspect of our moral decisions. John Frame reminds that “a good work requires a right goal, standard, and motive.” But “if our goal is not to seek the glory of God, or if we are not acting according to the standards of God’s law, or if we are not motivated by godly faith and love, then even our best works are sinful” (Frame 2006, p. 111).

The dimensions of sin

Sin, as we have seen already, can be described from many perspectives. People often experience brokenness and estrangement. Twenty years ago, Canadian author Douglas Coupland captured the mood of our postmodern time in his *Life After God*, a collection of short stories. The narrator confesses, “I think I am a broken person” (Coupland 1994, p. 309), looking for personal identity: “I never expected to become this strange person I had become, but I was determined to know who this person was” (p. 328). He sees the breach of relationship between people but cannot find an escape or hope. Interestingly, he attributes the problems of contemporary culture to his parent’s generations’ who rebelled against God: “You are the first generation raised without religion” (p. 161). He is clearly dissatisfied with the state of things, observes how sin distorts society.

Apologist F. A. Schaeffer (1912–1984) about the feeling of contemporary culture: “The problem of our generation is a feeling of cosmic alienation, including the area of morals. Man has a feeling of moral motions; yet in the universe as it is, his feeling is completely out of line with what is there” (Schaeffer 1982, p. 295).

¹⁸ The pervasiveness of sin is often asserted in Bible, see, for example, Gen 6:5; 8:21; 1 Ki 8:46–47:49; Job 14:4; Ps 130:3; Ecc 7:20; Eph 2:3; 1 Jn 1:8,10, and especially the first chapters of Romans.

The Bible gives a clear and very realistic picture of sin – much clearer than the vague descriptions of brokenness and alienation of secular culture. The Holy Scriptures have no qualms about strict judgements: Sin is irrational (Rom 1:19f): everybody knows God, but this knowledge is suppressed, denied, and this leads to all kinds of irrationalities. Sin is idolatry: humans worship idols, created things, instead of the Creator (Rom 1:25). Sin is unbelief (Jn 16:9). Sin is selfishness, at least most often.

Selfishness as a definition has to be qualified, and even more so self-love. Not all self-love is evil (caring for one's own needs in the sense of self-interest, see below); morally reprehensible is a love which *only* centres on oneself. Augustine, later joined by Martin Luther, coined the Latin phrase *incurvatus in se (ipsum)* as a metaphorical description of human sinfulness: “curved in on oneself”, being totally occupied with the desires and wishes of me. In Augustine's *City of God* the earthly city is mainly characterized by this misdirected love (XIV,28).

A heavenly hole

The most serious result of the fall was the destruction of the intimate relationship between God and the only created beings made in his image, humans. Before the fall, God walked in the Garden with no distance between him and Adam and Eve; later they hid themselves from his face and voice (Gen 3:8). Because of sin God became unseen for them. He, the pure and holy light, is not approachable by sinful people (see Ex 33:20). Yet God did not abandon his creation and is still active in the world, upholding, governing, and protecting it. On the one hand, He is not far and away (see Ps 139 or Act 17:27); on the other hand, there is an abyss, a moral distance, between Him and us due to sin.

Using our subject's terminology we can say that now God is scarce for us, He is our most serious and fundamental scarcity, and this scarcity is not good. Created beings have always been in need of their Creator; humans, even in Paradise, needed God for a wholly satisfied life. Our ontological insufficiency being non-God (see 1.1) is good, but being not in accordance with his will, our moral insufficiency, is not natural and not good¹⁹. Now, after the fall, the need of God has become painful and desperate. God has set “eternity in their heart” (Ecc 3:11), and therefore we are longing for home. Unbelievers, in different ways, tend to ignore this; believers

¹⁹ We have to see the difference between these two insufficiencies; being non-God does not necessarily imply moral insufficiency, in other words, being non-God, we were not destined to become morally corrupt; if being human would by itself mean being morally imperfect, God would be to blame for his faulty creation.

like king David openly exclaim, “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps 63:1).

Theological genius Augustine famously captured this human incompleteness, our longing for eternity after the fall, in the first paragraph of his *Confessions* (I,1): “Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee”. This restlessness is an experiential reality. C.S. Lewis built on this his apologetic argument from desire in *Mere Christianity*: “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world” (Lewis 1996, p. 121). Another world is not an ethereal sphere, it is a world without sin, a world where “God himself will be with them” again (Rev 21:3) as God once walked among the first man and woman.

The Biblical narrative, therefore, is utterly realistic. It does not say that inside of us we can find divine potential or powers or energies; it does not tell us that we are semi-gods; it does not gloss over evil – it is real, not an illusion. Catholic apologist Peter Kreeft does not mince words saying, “What you will find in your heart is not heaven but a heavenly hole, a womblike emptiness crying out to be filled” (Hyatt 1997, p. 312).

This emptiness will not go away unless it is filled by the love of God. Unfortunately, human beings are not just seekers, they are also rebels who actively and more or less consciously suppress their knowledge of God and truth (Rom 1:18). They foolishly desire all kind of things which might fill that spiritual void. Human beings are driven to restlessly seek satisfaction where they cannot find it. Today such a message might sound too strict, but it is the only explanation why money, sex and power, having enormous potential to bring goodness into human life, are often misused and corrupted by greed, lust and pride.

2.2. Ultimate and penultimate

Infinite desires

Now we are prepared to turn to some very serious objections to the concept of scarcity from a theological perspective. In *Being Consumed* William Cavanaugh also refers to Augustine and our inner restlessness without God. Then he says,

“We desire because we live. The problem is that our desires continue to light on objects that fail to satisfy, objects on the lower end of the scale of being that, if cut off from the Source of their being, quickly dissolve into nothing. The solution to the restlessness of

desire is to cultivate a desire for God, the Eternal, in whom our hearts will find rest” (Cavanaugh 2008, p. 90).

This is mainly true, of course. Ultimate satisfaction can only be found in the Eternal because He is the Ultimate. Yet Cavanaugh does not stop there, and, for example, in his essay “Only Christianity can save economics” (Cavanaugh 2011).

discusses the premise that “in economics, scarcity results from the assumption that human desires for finite goods are unlimited.” His comment: “The problem with this assumption is not the idea that goods are finite, but that human desires for such goods are infinite. This is to write greed into the very nature of the human person, and to put all economic activity into a tragic mode where my desires must inevitably be in competition with yours.”

Walter Brueggemann argues on the same line in “The Liturgy of Abundance”²⁰. “Possessing land, property and wealth makes people covetous, the Bible warns.” The result is that “we never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us.” According to Brueggemann, “the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God’s abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity – a belief that makes us greedy, mean and unneighborly.” In contrast, “the story of abundance says that our lives will end in God, and that this well-being cannot be taken from us.”

An intellectually most demanding and profound version of this train of thought is given by theologian D. Stephen Long. In *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* he explains that the roots of belief in scarcity and infinite desires lie in modern anthropology, “modernity’s turn to the subject. After this turn, the human person becomes construed as grounded in a finite rationality but with an unlimited will.” This will “is grounded in a freedom that assumes the infinite.” In contrast, “my choice at any historical moment is always already connected with lack... I always live and act in a situation of scarcity where to decide for something at a particular moment is at the same time to decide against something else” (Long 2000, p. 144).

Long demands, similar to Cavanaugh and Brueggemann, that “theologians must deny this narrative of scarcity for it forces our language and actions into the inevitable embrace of death.” We have to “participate in God’s inexhaustible goodness”, because “God is not defined by lack: God is an original plenitude never able to be exhausted” (p. 146).

These are very strong statements with a final harsh judgement, and it is the most sophisticated version of the “infinite desire”-argument. What can we say in reply?

Omnipresent sin

This kind of reasoning is *almost* convincing because it is *almost* true. Yes, disordered desire *is* the main spiritual problem, and finite goods *cannot* ultimately satisfy. But we have to distinguish. In a way, all our desires are infinite in the sense of being open, as we saw above (1.5). If human creativity results in ever new inventions, these new products and services *create* new desires. And no one can say where this process could or should end.

People have the desire to move from one place to another. For many centuries they desired horses, faster horses, and then the locomotive came, creating new experiences, new expectations, even a whole new world of transportation. That changed again with the automobile, later the airplane. With these technical inventions our desires changed and grew: in the Middle Ages people desired to visit the nearby city; today we desire to travel to distant continents.

The same story can be told about communication. Cheap paper and a modern postal system created the desire to write private letters; smartphones created the desire to instantly tell friends about our feelings through social media. Cheap steel and reinforced concrete made it possible to construct taller and taller buildings – a desire no one even thought about before. Numerous similar stories could be told. For thousands of years people were forced to confine themselves to the most basic desires of survival. But we stepped out of this close circle, ever expanding and increasing our desires.

There is nothing inherently evil in all this. It is even true for other spheres than the economy. We have created new demands for family life, new desires of intimacy and partnership. We have created new requirements for civil government. All this is simply a fact, and we must not blame the economy for the success of our modern world.

Therefore, the demand to cultivate finite desires is at least equivocal. Our desires will keep growing. This does not necessarily lead to greed and hoarding, because, as we saw, goods are not that limited as often assumed. We create and produce more and more goods, and in a circle desires accordingly change. So there is no in-built greed in economy. Of course, greed is a problem. We can even say that it is the fundamental problem of human beings: people want more than justly belongs to them. This was a root of Adam’s and Eve’s sin: they coveted what properly belonged only to God.

But we have to remember, and this is utterly important, that sin penetrates every sphere of life in this world. Therefore, everything is infected by greed and disordered desire: there is sinful desire in the family, disordered desire in marriage, and the same can be said about civil government, science and education; and who dares to say that there is no disordered desire in the church? It is very dubious that greed is more inherent to the world of economy than to the family, or politics, or science. We can concede that in the sphere of work, consuming and profit greed is perhaps most obvious. Elsewhere it is better hidden and concealed but certainly not absent.

Modern capitalism is said to be based on greed and anxiety. But the crucial question is: Which human sphere or endeavor is not based on greed and anxiety? And even if we concede that greed is an all penetrating evil, isn't the list of vices much longer? Couldn't we blame the family of similar vices? Different vices, but vices, nevertheless? The state, for example, is based – we could argue – on the pursuit of power, the desire to control the life of people; politics is a world made for egomaniacs and narcissists. Science – made for proud intellectuals, cultivating their distance from the uneducated masses. The deeper we dig, the more ugliness and sin we will find. This is a direct implication of the Christian doctrine of original sin.

Every creation ordinance – work, family, civil government, church – is seriously affected by sin because the whole world exists in the shadow of the fall. Do all these need sin, as Long says?²¹ Do they function better with sin? Hardly. They all have to come to terms with sin, everywhere people struggle with sin. There is authority in every creation ordinance, though applied differently, and every authority is prone to sin. This is true for the family, for work, for the Church. Therefore authority has its limit (different in each ordinance), it has to be regulated, and everywhere human power has to be controlled.

Unfortunately, theologians have become accustomed to harshly blame only the economy. They should be first and best equipped to see that such blames are short sighted. But even they get into the same trap as others – because in part they are blinded by the delusions of sin too. C.J.H. Wright writes that “evil has woven its way into every aspect of humanity’s economic life” (Wright 2004, p. 153). It is very easy to attach the label “greed” or “idolatry” to economic growth and changing desires because this, as we noticed, is a problem: “the effect of the fall was that the desire for growth became obsessive and idolatrous, the scale of growth became excessive for some at expense of others, and the means of growth became filled with

²¹ “Modern economics does not merely assume sinfulness, it needs it. It could not work without the proliferation of disordered desire”. Long & Fox 2007, p. 42.

greed, exploitation and injustice” (p. 162). But again, obsessiveness and idolatrous desires are haunting us everywhere.

Work and the economy is probably the most visible of God’s ordinances; every second we see the fruits of invention and creative productions, but we also see the display of hoarded riches, status symbols etc. In many ways the Church is visible – real people gathering together, but many central aspects of her nature are unseen: faith, love, hope are first of all a matter of the heart, not directly visible. Her main duty is the preaching of the Gospel – words, promises and teachings which are less visible than the material stuff of the economy. The family in itself is more hidden from the public realm, its inner tensions, problems and tragedies are not that visible to outsiders, but it also exists under the shadow of sin.

We can conclude that it is not the world of economics, working, buying and consuming, that makes us greedy; politics does not spoil people, neither does the family. In all these spheres we express our personal sinfulness, we live or act out our inherited sin. Evil has taken roots in peoples’ hearts, therefore the economy is not in need of being saved, we have to be, the individual.

The abundance of the Gospel

Here comes in the desire for the only infinite good, God. This desire, given by God himself into our hearts, is the signpost which shows the only path to salvation. If we rest in God, ultimately satisfied by him, we are transformed into his likeness or image again and gradually change. A new inner status is the result of a radical operation in us. God himself establishes his kingdom on earth, working supernaturally in human souls. But this spiritual kingdom must not be mixed with the temporal kingdom, encompassing the mentioned creation ordinances. This is one of main mistakes of the theologians, quoted in this chapter. More on this soon.

Indeed, there is no scarcity in God, and his Gospel *cannot* be characterized by “not enough”. Christ’s sacrifice was and is absolutely sufficient for everybody. No scarcity at all. The “story of abundance” (Brueggemann) *is* true and we *do* “participate in God’s inexhaustible goodness” (Long). The abundance of the Gospel was brilliantly exposed by John Calvin in the preface to Pierre Robert Olivetan’s French translation of the New Testament (1534):

“But by the knowledge of the Gospel we are made children of God, brothers of Jesus Christ, fellow townsmen with the saints, citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, heirs of God with Jesus Christ, by whom the poor are made rich, the weak strong, the fools wise, the sinner justified, the desolate comforted, the doubting sure, and slaves free” (Taylor 2009).

Enumerating all the benefits of the Christian Gospel, Calvin marvels in God's incredible and gracious abundance. Believers can rest in God's abundant love and protection. He, the Ultimate, can guarantee spiritual security. This is most beautifully expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism's (1563) first question and answer²². Searching for abundance – here is its proper place.

Seeing things rightly

Christians who sincerely believe are perfectly justified and adopted by God. They are orientated towards the Ultimate. Given a new perspective, they do not look for ultimate satisfaction in the created world; now they see the things as they really are: the Ultimate as the only rest for sinners; but everything in this world does not disappear – it is not inherently evil, it is not rubbish, it is not an illusion. We look at it, but from a different perspective. It is appreciated and important but just the penultimate.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer devoted a chapter to the topic of the “Ultimate and the penultimate”²³ in his *Ethics* (Bonhoeffer 1995), a phrase the German theologian coined. He was very much concerned to correctly relate both. The two have to be distinguished, but we must not make the penultimate and the Ultimate mutually exclusive. Of course, Bonhoeffer speaks to Christian readers, but his theological insights have potential to shed light on our life in the secular world.

Believers have their eyes fixed on the Eternal; nevertheless, this created world remains the context of our Christian life where believers pursue virtues, fight temptations, grow in discipleship, practice love of God and neighbour. Therefore, the penultimate is neither destroyed nor simply sanctioned. It has its own right – until the end of this world and the final inauguration of the world-to-come. Thus Ultimate and penultimate, says Bonhoeffer, are closely related to each other, but they must not be mixed together.

Christians, though strangers and pilgrims in this world (1 Pt 2:11), continue to live their life in all the creation ordinances, and this is life in a world of scarcity and ever new ideas and products and desires. We do not follow the example of the Old Order Amish, a Mennonite sect, conserving a 19th century life-style: no cars,

²² “What is thy only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him.” Available from: <http://www.heidelberg-catechism.com/en/lords-days/1.html> [May 4, 2016].

²³ In German “Das Letzte und das Vorletzte”.

no electricity, no innovations etc. This is only consistent if we decide to definitely and once and for all limit our desires. Christians continue to invent and research; to produce and trade, to sell and buy, they consume without being consumed (to refer to Cavanaugh's book), they are devoted to a life of service on earth without being a servant of the penultimate. They use everything created as everyone does, but they see things differently, not attaching ultimate values to penultimate things. They live under the exclusive Lordship of the Ultimate in the realm of the penultimate.²⁴

We conclude that the aforementioned theologians, in the end, blame the penultimate for not being the Ultimate. They wrongly complain that the penultimate functions in a different way than everything concerning the Ultimate. It is like saying to the penultimate "you are not perfect, absolute, ultimate". Who said that it is supposed to be? Of course, there is no scarcity in God in the proper sense; he gives graciously and abundantly; we are totally justified and in union with Christ. But Christians still face the challenge of improving their life on earth, of generating new and better ideas; they remain in a world of limits and deficiencies.

On the one hand, we have to avoid the mistake of mixing the spiritual and the temporal, the Kingdom of Heaven and creation ordinances; on the other hand, Ultimate and penultimate stay related to each other: God is using the penultimate and everything in it to further his Kingdom.

A more commonly used term for blaming the penultimate not being the Ultimate is the "Nirvana myth" or fallacy: comparing actual things with unrealistic, idealized alternatives. Jay W. Richards: "The question isn't whether capitalism measures up to the kingdom of God [or Nirvana, in popular understanding a kind of Buddhist resting place for souls or heaven]. The question is whether there's a better alternative in this life" (Richards 2009, p. 32).

The distinction of Ultimate and penultimate also helps us to see the perhaps most fundamental problem of communism/socialism and national-socialism. In spite of all their anti-religious rhetoric they are secular religions, secularized forms of the Judeo-Christian religion (Gerlich 1920; Schirrmacher 1986). We may also put it a little different: Because these ideologies deny God and the whole realm of something Ultimate above them, adherents are almost forced to find a principle of ultimate value in the created world of the penultimate: either the race, one race, becomes the Ultimate, or matter (Marxism's eternal laws of matter). Atheism of all kinds of sort tends to divinize something penultimate.

²⁴ See also on this the *Epistle to Diognetus* from the late second century, chapter V.

Self-interest and self-sacrifice

Related to all this is the discussion about the evaluation and the proper place of self-interest and self-sacrifice. This is an important background to the scepticism about scarcity (sacrificial giving in the “narrative of abundance” vs. egoistical, self-interested hoarding in the “story of scarcity”).

Christ’s sacrifice for sinful human beings is the centre of the Gospel. Early in his ministry Jesus said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). He came “to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hbr 9:26). Believers were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pt 1:19). Christians, followers of Christ, are called to walk in his footsteps and live by his example. Paul encourages his readers in Rome “to offer your bodies as living sacrifices” (Rom 12:1)²⁵.

This self-denial is the basis for self-sacrifice, truly motivated by love. The true home of this virtue is the realm of the Ultimate, the Kingdom of Christ, which is manifested mainly in the Church. Members of local churches are to serve each other sacrificially (1 Pt 4:10; Gal 5:13). “Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others” (Php 2:4). Christians can never agree with staunch atheist Ayn Rand who categorically affirmed that all self-sacrifice is evil (Rand 1964). A central conviction of the Christian faith is that believers have to be ready to be persecuted, to suffer or even die for the sake of Christ and his Gospel (Mt 16:24–25).

Revolutionary stuff

It is interesting to see that Rand, probably unintentionally, revives moral notions of pagan antiquity. Greek and Roman thinkers regarded mercy and pity as vices, defects of character. This conviction had its roots in polytheistic theology. Rodney Stark observes that in the pagan mindset “the notion that the gods care how we treat one another would have been dismissed as patently absurd” (Stark 1997, p. 211). The Christians started to care because their God cared.

Two big epidemics of plague haunted the Roman Empire in the first centuries, one around 165, the other hundred years later. It is estimated that during the first a quarter to a third of the population of the Empire perished. At the height of the second, 5000 people a day were reported to have died in Rome alone. The pagan

²⁵ John Calvin elaborates on this in his *Institutes* (1559). The “summary of the Christian Life”, so the heading of chapter III,7, is constant self-denial.

religions had no answers at all why all these happened and what to do about them. The Christians were able to make sense of the plague, to find meaning in hardship, suffering, and consolation. And the Christian doctrine, with love and self-denial in the centre, provided a prescription for action.

Around 260 Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, wrote a lengthy tribute to the heroic nursing efforts of the Christians. They intensively care for their sick (see Jas 5,14), not so the pagans. Dionysius goes on: "The heathen behaved in the very opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt..." (p. 83).

Is this just Christian propaganda? No. This is confirmed by pagan documents too. The emperor Julian who tried to revive pagan religion launched a campaign to institute pagan charities to match the Christians. He complained in a letter from 362 that the pagans needed to equal the virtues of the Christians. He saw that the growth of Christian churches was also due to their moral character and effort. "I think that when the poor happened to be neglected and overlooked by the priests, the impious Galileans [the Christians] observed this and devoted themselves to benevolence". And he could not even deny the most embarrassing fact: "The impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well, everybody can see that our people lack aid from us" (p. 83–84). Stark: "Even more revolutionary was the principle that Christian love and charity must extend beyond the boundaries of family and tribe... and even the Christian community" (p. 212).

Self-denial, love of neighbour, mercy and pity, are not negating life, do not get in the way of human development and flourishing, it is the other way round. Stark's summary: "Central doctrines of Christianity prompted and sustained attractive, liberating, and effective social relations and organizations" (p. 211). Christianity brought a new moral vision "a new concept of humanity to a world saturated with capricious cruelty and the vicarious love of death" (p. 214).

Self-denial is 'at home' in the churches, but, as we have just seen, it is not restricted to the Christian communities, reflected in other areas as well. Family life is impossible without the readiness to deny oneself. In civil government some take the lower way, accepting wilfully unfounded insulting of political opponents; some rulers might even sacrifice their career or reputation because of truth and justice. And our capitalistic economy is founded on saving and investing, which means temporarily renouncing immediate consumption – a kind of self-denial.

Self-interest is different from self-denial, but they are not contradictory. Even an exemplary Christian, daily taking upon himself the cross, following the suffer-

ing Lord, is personally interested in progress and growth of discipleship; he or she looks forward to be finally rewarded by God. It is interesting to notice that the New Testament quite often connects exhortations and the practice of faith with reward and benefit believers can expect²⁶. There is proper spiritual self-interest.

Yet we can concede that self-interest is most at home in the broader world of economic life. To quote the famous words of Adam Smith,

“It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. Nobody but a beggar chooses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens” (Smith 2012, p. 20).

Unfortunately, self-love is often equated with egoism, but that is misleading. There is a difference between self-interest and sound self-love on one side, and selfishness and egoism or egocentrism on the other. Very often theologians read into these sentences a new paradigm of self-interest vs. common good, of greed vs. gracious giving. They forget or deny to see that Smith saw greed as sin; he definitely did *not* teach, says John E. Stapleford, “that unconstrained pursuit of self-interest in all areas of economic activity always promotes the general welfare” (Stapleford 2009, p. 39).

The moral indignation accompanying the term self-interest is not helpful at all because, as John Bolt observes, “self-interest is essential to our own survival. In fact, we humans cannot stay alive without self-regard.” (Bolt 2013, p. xxvii) This is the way God had created us: He wants us to care for our personal well-being. Human beings are called “to take care” of the whole created world (Gen 2:15). But this includes people themselves. God gave them the right to feed on all the fruits of creation, and this directly implies to care for their own benefit.

After all, Smith thought in categories of the Bible. He drew on the Golden Rule in Mt 7:12²⁷ which refers to our self-interest: my legitimate care of myself is the measure of my care for others; because I know quite well what I need, I am able to care for the benefit of others. Smith did not say: the more selfish I act, the better the market will work. He certainly did not agree with Bernard de Mandeville’s claim in his famous *The Fable of the Bees* (1705/14) that vice and vanity, greed and gluttony are the main springs of economic growth. What he wanted

²⁶ See, e.g., Mt 10: 42; Mk 10: 29–30; Lk 6:23; 2 Jn 8; Hbr 10: 35–36; Rev 22:12.

²⁷ “So in everything, do to others what you would have them to do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets [i.e., OT].”

to say was this: We can in the relatively narrow range of our desires and needs seek all these things, pursue our self-interest, and yet, somehow miraculously (the “invisible hand”), the outcome is broader benefit for the rest of society – common good.

The rationale behind this is that in order to achieve self-improvement, I have to struggle to bring benefit to other people; to serve myself I have to serve my neighbour. Therefore, quite contrary to the stereotype, pure greed does not flourish in market economies. If robbing, plundering and enslaving are not the usual means of getting rich, even the greedy has to satisfy the needs of others. And this is not easily done, because I might have many competitors who try to achieve the same. For this reason it is competition which curbs excesses of self-interest. Novak correctly observes that in this way “the [market] system itself places restraints upon greed and narrowly construed self-interest” (Novak 1991, p. 148).

We can conclude that it is not true that capitalism institutionalizes greed and selfishness. It is the other way around: the self-absorbed businessman, concerned only with his own benefit, is a bad businessman.

Deirdre McCloskey also warns us not to define modern capitalism as “vice incarnate” and “insist at the outset that ‘capitalism’ just means modern greed” which is already prejudging: “Such a definition makes pointless an inquiry into the good and bad of modern commercial society.” The historical facts simply do not support this: “There’s no evidence, actually, that greed or miserliness or self-interest was new in the sixteenth or the nineteenth or any other century.” She is convinced that capitalism can be virtuous, that it “nourishes lives of virtue”, that “the market supports the virtues”. “In a fallen world the bourgeois life is not perfect. But it’s better than any available alternative” (McCloskey 2006, p. 1–4).

2.3. Snapshots of the Age-to-come

A holy nation

In the background of discussions on scarcity stands the question of our vocation as human beings. What is our calling? And what is our calling as redeemed people? Paradigmatically this is shown in the OT by the people of Israel.

Israel was called to be “a kingdom of priests and holy nation” (Ex 19:6; see also Lev 19:2), to be different from the other nations. This line goes right through the whole OT: “You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you

must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices...”, says God (Lev 18:3–4); “Learn not the way of the nations” (Jer 10:2); to follow “the practices of the nations” (2 Ki 17:8) is the main reason for judgement and exile. In a positive sense, the chosen people was also to be a kind of model for the nations, expressing *in corpore* a redeemed life under God. The “light of the Lord” (Isa 2:5) is light for the other nations as well (the verses before).

The Israelites were different because of their monotheism, and deriving from that because of the covenantal conception of social structure. The Promised Land belonged in a special way to God: “the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants” (Lev 25:23). Wright comments that these terms (aliens, tenants) “in normal economic discourse, referred to a class of people within Israelite society who did not own any land, being either descendants of the old Canaanite population or else immigrant workers. Such landless people were wholly dependent” (Wright 2004, p. 94). This divine ownership of the land meant that it remained a divine gift; families as stewards of this land received small portions of land belonging to each household as possession.

The Mosaic Law demanded loving others with one’s possessions. A concrete regulation was gleaning: leaving some of the harvest remaining in the fields so the poor can pick up the rest (Lev 19:9–10). The Year of Jubilee (Lev 25) has to be mentioned too. It prescribed a kind of forced redistribution every 47th year: family ownership was to be restored.

We have to keep in mind that these regulations must not be *directly transferred* to our economy: this is not agrarian culture anymore, not based on a fixed piece of land, and land today is not owned by God as the Land in Canaan was. And most important, we as Christians are not under the Mosaic Covenant. We also must not forget that in a modern economy wealth is created (see above).

In a special way Israel exemplified the *total dependency on God*: the people depend on God, he cares for the Israelites, defends them, gives enough resource to live on (the flowing “milk and honey”, Ex 3:8). They could not boast in any kind of superiority or autonomy.

Strangers and exiles

The universal Church is the people of God in the New Covenant. Christians are also called to be holy (1 Pt 1:15). Like the Israelites, aliens in their land, Christians are strangers and exiles in the whole world (1 Pt 2:11; Hbr 11:13). Like Israel they have to be different: “Do not be like them”, the unbelieving pagans (Mt 6:8);

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world [...]” (Rom 12:2). The metaphor of being “light” appears again²⁸. Christians are challenged to develop a Godly counterculture.

Christians are strangers in this world, because they belong to the Kingdom of God, the redemptive rule of Christ over the people He saved. The Kingdom involves the Age-to-come (when God’s rule will be totally established), breaking into the present Age. The Bible gives us a snapshot of what life is going to be like when the Kingdom of God has fully and finally come. The final, consummated Kingdom will not only be a restored original creation, but a new creation. The Kingdom and glimpses of this new creation are manifested in this present age in the Church. Church and Kingdom are not identical, but the local congregation is the place where the reign of God is made visible.

Grace-based generosity

In the Age-to-come some aspects of scarcity will disappear; some limitations will remain (being non-God, having a body), but experience of time will change: we will fully step into eternity. There will be more abundance than today because believers will live in closest fellowship with the Abundant (Rev 21:3).

This view of the future makes already an impact in the present. The poor will always be with us (Mt 26:11), but the church should not tolerate material poverty in the sense of destitution in its own fellowship²⁹. Christians are exhorted to give generously, to care sacrificially for suffering brothers and sisters (Gal 6:10). The rich in the Church are called “to be generous and willing to share” (1 Tim 6:17–19) and to be content (1 Tim 6:6–10). In Acts we read about the church in Jerusalem that believers were “selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need” (Act 2:45); “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had” (Act 4:32).

This radical sharing is the calling of the Christians in the Church. It is a snapshot of the Age-to-come. The giving is motivated by love, free and voluntary³⁰. Christianity is not about a commercial deal; the Gospel is received for free.

²⁸ Mt 5:14; Rom 13:12; Eph 5:8; Php 2:15; 1 Jn 1:7.

²⁹ That means that *absolute* poverty has to be fought against in the Church; *relative* poverty will remain with us since there will always be income differences and some people may be beyond a certain average. But this statistical poverty has to be distinguished from the one the Bible speaks about.

³⁰ See Act 5:4; Rom 15: 27; 2 Cor 8:3–4.8.10.12; 9:7; Php 4:18; 1 Tim 6:18.

Having received the self-giving love of Christ, believers themselves are driven to give freely to others out of love, “under [no] compulsion” (2 Cor 9:7). Christians with more than enough ought to share with Christians who do not have enough, relieve the necessities of the brethren. It is grace-based generosity as the collection for the congregation in Jerusalem in 2 Cor 8–9 makes clear.

In the Church this strictly voluntary redistribution can work, but not outside of it. The New Testament did not introduce a new economic order for everybody on earth. Outside the realm of God’s redeeming grace, generosity cannot be that radical anymore. And plain reason says that without wealth creation and production you will not keep on sharing in such a radical way for a long time – one day there is nothing to sell anymore. This just confirms that the sphere of the Ultimate, including the Church, needs the penultimate and must not swallow it up.

It seems that the theologians quoted in the introduction try to impose principles that work in the Christian Church on the rest of the world. They intend, as we already noticed, to transform the penultimate into the Ultimate – already now. But the calling of the Church is not to transform the whole world into the Church; its calling is to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world and, as fellowship of believers, live in the spirit of Jesus. It is the calling of the Church, and the Church only, to be a signpost for the Age-to-come, to be an outpost of heaven. A utopian projection of a perfect world onto the whole fallen world has to be avoided.

Over-realized eschatology, which is trying to implement features of heaven in the whole world, won’t work. The Christian love to brothers and sisters which motivates believers in the Church would have to be exchanged for force and violence. Where love is scarce, sharing has to be enforced. Unfortunately, many Christians don’t live realistically in the light of the fall, underestimate the sinfulness of the world, and therefore give in easily to utopian dreams. But if heaven is intended to be perfectly implemented on earth, notwithstanding evil and sin, fallen people tend to use violence; communism is the worst example of expanding the giving “to anyone as he had need” by force. The only way to spread the Kingdom of Heaven here and now is the proclamation of the Gospel. God is using this to fill the inner void of human beings, and this enables them to live more humanly in God’s world, waiting for the final perfection.

2.4. Tocqueville's legacy

Heaven and earth

Both theology and economics have the potential to enrich the other discipline. To be able to achieve this theologians and economists are called to broaden their own perspective, taking into account the whole of reality. They all face challenges.

Theologians have to make their peace with scarcity. It is simply not enough to continue misleading talk about a “planet of plenty” which was supposedly turned into a planet of scarcity by evil and greedy conspirators. Christian thinkers have to teach people *to learn to live in this world*, in this created and yet sinful world. This means, first of all, seriously facing the Great Enrichment, the fruits brought about by the collaboration of creativity and scarcity, and also the pervasive influence of sin in all areas of life. The duty of theologians is to provide a broad and deep explanation for all this. Always pulling the rabbit of abundance out of the hat won't do it. And most important, theologians have to remember that by trying to establish heaven on earth in the broader society, humans will instead create a hell as Popper and Hayek repeatedly warned; the latter called this the “fatal conceit” (Hayek 1988).

But there is something to learn for economists as well. There is the scarcity of good ideas and of human beings, the ultimate resource – all the positive aspects of scarcity which drive us forward to improve our life. Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) gives a sketch of this liberal mindset in his famous *Democracy in America*:

“Give democratic peoples enlightenment and liberty and leave them alone. They will easily succeed in drawing from this world all the [material] goods that it can offer; they will perfect each one of the useful arts and daily make life more comfortable, easier, sweeter; their social state pushes them naturally in this direction. I am not afraid that they will stop.”

But that is not all Tocqueville has to say. The whole chapter is called “How from Time to Time Religious Beliefs Divert the Soul of the Americans toward Non-Material Enjoyments”³¹ (Tocqueville 2010). He identifies materialism as “a dangerous sickness of the human mind” which “must be particularly feared among a democratic people”. This is because democracy “favours the taste for material enjoyments. This taste, if it becomes excessive, soon disposes men to believe that everything is only matter”. The danger is that man, human beings,

³¹ Book II, part two, chapter 15.

“may lose the use of his most sublime faculties, and that by wanting to improve everything around him, he may in the end degrade himself.”

Materialism totally ignores the “heavenly hole” (see 2.1), the *spiritual* scarcity which is *not* good. Democratic nations, says Tocqueville, face the danger of being pushed into a “fatal circle” of being more and more carried away by material enjoyments. It is the duty of churches, preachers, theologians and every Christian to remind everybody of the “the immortality of the soul” – “the greatest advantage that a democratic people draws from belief”. And in not so liberal fashion the French diplomat and historian exhorts:

“So legislators in democracies and all honest and enlightened men who live in democracies must apply themselves without respite to *lifting up souls and keeping them pointed toward heaven*. It is necessary that all those who are interested in the future of democratic societies unite, and that all in concert make continual efforts to spread within these societies *the taste for the infinite*, the sentiment for the grand and the love for non-material pleasures. If among the opinions of a democratic people there exist a few of these harmful theories that tend to make you believe that everything perishes with the body, consider the men who profess them as the natural enemies of the people” (ibid., emphasis added).

Communism was one of these harmful theories, and its proponents proved to be real “enemies of the people” in the 20th century. The problem with all Marxism is that it is not only a faulty economic theory but based on crass materialism, being “itself a religion” as Hayek observed (Hayek 1988, p. 137). Other ideologies joined this most dangerous philosophy: logical positivism, existentialism, secular humanism, naturalism etc. Economists who are traditionally preoccupied with the ‘hard stuff’ of life have to be careful of not falling into the traps of these various kinds of materialism. We all have to protect our human orientation towards the Ultimate, since this is, as Tocqueville repeatedly stressed, “the most precious heritage of aristocratic centuries”³².

The two-edged character of Christianity

So there is a fatal *conceit* (Hayek) and fatal *circle* (Tocqueville) to be aware of. We are called to avoid disdain for the real earth and disdain for the real heaven. Christianity is prepared to integrate both perspectives because it is characterized by a “blessed two-edged character” as C. S. Lewis remarked in his short but brilliant essay with the modest title “Some Thoughts” (Lewis 1970, p. 155–158).

³² The French aristocrat himself struggled all his life with the claims of Christianity, never breaking through, as he confessed, to a really personal faith.

Christian activities are “directed towards this present world” and thus show that Christianity is “one of the world affirming religions”. But there is also “quite a different series of Christian phenomena”: the religion’s “central image” is the cross, a most horrendous instrument of torture; believers are encouraged to meditate “constantly on the mortality not only of ourselves but of the whole universe”, called to hope for another world. Christianity, seen from this perspective, is “one of the world denying religions”.

These two sides are not in contradiction. Lewis emphasises that “there is a place for everything and everything should be kept in its right place.” God created the natural world, “invented it out of His love and artistry”, and therefore “it demands our reverence”. The whole natural “is only a creature and not He, it is, from another point of view, of little account”. Nature is fallen, “it must be corrected”, but not denied, because “its essence is good”. This attitude depends logically “on the doctrines of the Creation and the Fall.”

This worldview, a doctrine of a real creation and a real fall, is unique to the Christian faith. And it enables people to come to terms with scarcity: having their heavenly hole being filled by the love of God and abundantly satisfied, longing for His world to come, believers do not look for the Ultimate in this world and can freely, creatively, graciously work with the limitations, deficiencies and scarcity in the realm of the penultimate.

Is it possible to live like that? Tocqueville, certainly not a naive optimist, answered in the affirmative: “The heart of man is more vast than you suppose; it can at the same time enclose the taste for the good things of the earth and the love of the good things of heaven” (ibid.).

Conclusion

The Christian doctrine of Creation provides a firm foundation for understanding scarcity. Human beings were created by God and are distinct from Him. This implies that we are neither God, nor divine. Ontologically we all lack divinity, yet this is the way He created us. Our “not being God” is not a painful deficiency but rather our natural state of being. This most fundamental scarcity is inherent in our humanity.

Our being created means that we human beings are bodily, physically and intellectually needy creatures; we live on this earth within the confines of linear time. This sets limits to our activities and is closely related to scarcity. Because we are made in the image of God, we possess the ability to think, imagine and create.

Therefore we are encouraged to express this God-given creativity, grow in knowledge and practical wisdom. We are also called to work, to transform things and to create something new and useful. All human interacting with the world of matter and ideas presupposes scarcity. Especially the scarcity of good ideas drives us continuously forward and will always be with us. Never having enough good ideas prompts us to develop new and better ones, and thus scarcity becomes a blessing.

Every individual human being is endowed with dignity; but we are also inherently social beings and depend upon each other. We work with other people and for their benefit. Our lack of self-sufficiency, an aspect of scarcity, necessarily draws us together into an interdependent society of persons. God wants us to live in societies bound together by common needs and mutual service.

The Christian doctrine of the Fall explains how evil and sin entered into this world. Scarcity itself is not a result of sin, because this limitation has always characterized the finite, material world. Human persons can fully flourish only in a relationship with the Infinite, the Absolute Person who created them. But after the Fall the intimate relationship between God and human beings was destroyed. Finite goods were never meant to satisfy us completely. Nevertheless, after the Fall human beings, due to a twisted orientation in their inner being, now look for ultimate meaning and satisfaction in the created world.

Thus next to our ontological insufficiency, our being non-God, limited and needy which is good, a moral insufficiency has also appeared. This is not good. After the Fall our natural need for God has become desperate. Similarly, our natural neediness in creation is tainted by evil, pain and suffering. Every creation ordinance – work, family, civil government – is now seriously affected by sin because the whole world now exists in the shadow of the fall. Sin penetrates every sphere of life in this world. Therefore everything is infected by greed and a disordered desire which is humanity’s main spiritual problem. Now scarcity collaborates not only with creativity, but also with covetousness and other vices.

The Christian doctrine of *Redemption* is in its essence a “story of abundance.” The Gospel of Jesus Christ abounds with riches. And yet the “narrative of scarcity” is not denied. Christians simultaneously live *both* in the Kingdom of God, in the light of the perfected world to come, in the realm of the Ultimate, *and* in this age of earthly desires and limitations, in the realm of the penultimate.

Ultimate and penultimate are related to each other. God is using the penultimate and everything in this world to further his Kingdom. But there must not be a mixing of the spiritual and the temporal, the Kingdom of Heaven and creation ordinances. Our finite and material world, our world of scarcity, has its

own right – until the end of this world and the final inauguration of the world-to-come.

Our life in the penultimate, looking forward to the Ultimate, is characterised by self-interest *and* self-sacrifice which do not necessarily contradict each other. They even overlap in many ways. Self-interest has to be distinguished from the vice of selfishness or self-centeredness. In different ways self-denial and self-interest are reflected in all areas of life. Both are related to scarcity: Self-interest obviously interacts with scarcity when people struggle with the coordination of needs and wishes with limited goods and opportunities. The genius of the market order is that self-denial or self-restriction is involved in this process as well: the better I serve the needs of others in their scarcity, the better I can fulfil my own needs. Self-denial also prompts us to help other people when they suffer under the burden of painful scarcity in a sinful world.

The Church is called to uniquely depict traits of *the Age-to-come in which some aspects of scarcity will disappear*. Christians are exhorted to give generously, to care sacrificially and to share abundantly, especially for suffering brothers and sisters. Christian generosity transcends material scarcity. In the Church a strictly voluntary redistribution can work, but not outside it. The New Testament did not introduce a new economic order for everybody on earth.

The calling of the Church is not to transform the whole world into the Church, or to transform already now the penultimate into the Ultimate. Her calling is to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world and, as fellowship of believers, live in the spirit of Jesus. The calling of the Church, and the Church only, is to be a beacon for the Age-to-come, to be an outpost of and a signpost to heaven.

The good news is that this otherworldly orientation has positive repercussions for life in this world. The Ultimate establishes the penultimate. Being rooted in eternity believers are equipped with principles and virtues which enable them to live faithfully and productively in God's created world. Or, following Alexis de Tocqueville, it is strongly advised to overcome spiritual scarcity in order to be able to adequately evaluate material scarcity.

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Stokos palaima, pilnatvės viltis

Stoka iš biblinės, teologinės ir etinės perspektyvos

Santrauka

Ekonomikos moksle labai svarbi sąvoka „stoka“, o teologija telkia dėmesį į Dievo malonės Evangelijoje gausą. Ar kaip mano kai kurie teologai, dėl to stoka yra blogis, kuris turi būti šalinamas, mitas, kurį būtina sulaužyti? Ar krikščionys yra pašaukti įveikti stokos kultūrą ir net išgelbėti ekonomiką? Šiame straipsnyje teigiama, kad abu mokslai – ekonomika ir teologija – gali praturtinti vienas kitą. Einant per krikščioniškuosius išganymo istorijos laikotarpius – sukūrimą, nuopuolį, išgelbėjimą ir atbaigimą, taip, kaip jie aprašyti Biblijoje – gerai matome, kaip stoka grindžiama Dievo pasaulio sukūrimo plane. Paaiškinamas nuodėmės ir blogio poveikis, žmogaus moralinis nepakankamumas, dvasinė stoka atskiriama nuo ontologinio stokojimo (skurdumo). Galiausiai Bažnyčios žinia apie būsimąjį tobulą Pasaulį nesunkiai integruojama į bendrą dabarties paveikslą: krikščioniškas dosnumas transcenduoja stoką, tačiau Bažnyčia nėra pašaukta sukurti naujos ekonominės tvarkos, pasiremdama nestoka.

Raktiniai žodžiai: krikščionybė, sukūrimas, kūryba, stoka, pilnatvė, teologija, antropologija, kapitalizmas, etika, Biblija, ekonomika.