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Capitalism and Biblical Ethics

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Introduction

Capitalism and market economies can be moral and provide Christians the freedom to participate in them in a way that is consistent with biblical teachings. To demonstrate how it is possible for capitalism to be compatible with Christianity, it must be defined in its traditional sense and differentiated from aberrant forms.¹ It is also important to understand the conditions that allow capitalism to flourish determines if such a system is compatible with Christian teaching. Also significant is the history of capitalism, which demonstrates that it was first practiced in monasteries, having grown out of changes in theological teaching.² Finally, it is important to evaluate areas of Christian ethics in which capitalism is charged by many to be incompatible. In so doing, the paper will demonstrate that capitalism is compatible with Christian ethics and began as a result of Christians practically living out various theological developments.³

Defining Capitalism: The Traditional Understanding of Capitalism

The definition of capitalism is complex, and, as Stark explains, the actual word capitalism was originally used as an insult against the economic concept in the nineteenth century.⁴ Often, capitalism today is used carelessly, and people often have different ideas as to what economic activity it encompasses. A second issue facing those who would defend capitalism is that later secular proponents sought to shift the societal understanding of capitalism.⁵ This will be discussed further in a subsequent section. Capitalism is a specific form of economic enterprise that normally and most successfully takes place within a market economy. Capitalism is one of the foundational aspects of a market economy. Its name is derived from the idea of the use of capital to create or gain wealth. This is done by investing.⁶ One has capital for the purpose of generating a greater return on capital than was previously possessed. This development also differentiated capitalism from other economic practices, which sought to take wealth from others rather than grow wealth. In a market economy, the entire economy benefits when wealth increases across the board; each person within the economy is interconnected while wealth increases and decreases at different rates for different people. It, by necessity, impacts others involved in the system. Capitalism is an essential aspect of this market economy.⁷ Stark provides this definition of capitalism,

¹ Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*. (New York, NY: Random House, 2005) 55-68.

² Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 55-68.

³Ibid.

⁴ Rodney Stark has dedicated much of his academic study to the various areas in which Christianity aided in the development of Western tradition and thought, including the development of capitalism. *The Victory of Reason* focuses on how trust in reason, developing out of Christian thought, resulted in many of the West's significant institutions.

Ibid., xi-xvi.

⁵ Jerry Bergman, *The Darwin Effect: Its Influence on Nazism, Eugenics, Racism, Communism, Capitalism, and Sexism*. (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2014) 251-263.

Donald DeMarco and Benjamin Wiker, *Architects of the Culture of Death*. (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004) 54-63.

⁶ Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 55-56.

⁷ Ibid., 56

“An economic system wherein, privately owned, relatively well organized, and stable firms pursue complex commercial activities, within a relatively free (unregulated) market, taking a systematic, long term approach to investing and reinvesting wealth (directly or indirectly) in productive activities involving a hired workforce, and guided by anticipated an actual returns.”⁸

This form of economic enterprise can be dated to monasteries in the Middle Ages and was the traditional way in which capitalism was practiced. From there it would eventually become a dominant economic practice in the West.⁹

Capitalism cannot take place and flourish in any environment. Certain factors must be in place; if they are not, economic potential is either stunted or destroyed entirely.¹⁰ The three fundamentals are “free markets”, “private property”, and “uncoerced labor”.¹¹ For this reason, it differs from the economies of antiquity because it is at odds with government intervention in the economy and slave labor and other forced labor. While neither of these problems of antiquity immediately vanished with the development of capitalism and market economies, capitalism’s impact expanded as they declined.¹²

Of the three requirements, “uncoerced” labor seems the least intuitive.¹³ However, “motivation” is central to capitalism, and forced labor is less motivating than voluntary labor, especially when the forced labor receives little to no reward.¹⁴ Interestingly, the greatest flourishing of the market societies of the West has taken place in the last couple centuries since the abolition of slavery.¹⁵ Specifically, capitalism has seen a rise in the overall quality of life across the class spectrum, as opposed to the empires of antiquity where wealth was concentrated with those in power. In fact, in the United States, the Northern States had a far stronger economy with greater technological advancement than the South, where wealth was concentrated among plantation owners.¹⁶ Brazil was another significant example; its economy was highly dependent on slave labor, and it was the last country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish the practice. It was also one of the least developed economies in the Western Hemisphere in 1888 when it finally abolished slavery.¹⁷ Von Mises, a notable proponent of capitalism, wrote,

“If one treats men like cattle, one cannot squeeze out of them more than cattle like performances. But it then becomes significant that man is physically weaker than oxen and horses, and that feeding and guarding a slave is, in proportion to the performance to be reaped, more expensive than feeding and guarding cattle... If one asks from unfree

⁸ Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 56.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 55-61.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹² *Ibid.*, 56-57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁴ Robert P. Murphy, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Capitalism*. (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2007.) 43-46.

¹⁵ The argument is not being made that, if forced labor was effective, it would be good or acceptable. It is only being argued that a unique aspect of capitalism and market economies is that their flourishing is enhanced when abolition takes place.

¹⁶ Murphy, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Capitalism*, 43-46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

laborer human performance, one must provide him with specifically human inducements.”¹⁸

In the twentieth century, this was demonstrated in the failure of the Soviet economy and the poverty and famine that resulted.¹⁹

Finally, a unique aspect to market and capitalist economies is the opportunities to move beyond class divides. Participation requires the investment of capital in order to produce greater capital. For this reason, even a small amount of capital, whether it is monetary or some other form of capital, can yield a reward.²⁰ Stark states about the early development of capitalism, “capitalists tend to invest in productive activities whereby new wealth is created. Moreover, capital (or wealth) is not merely money --- which is why some prefer to term ‘capital goods’ Factories, land, ships, mines, and warehouses all are obvious capital goods. But it is equally true that for a peasant a cleared plot of ground, tools, and an ox are capital goods...”²¹ It is also proportional; the more invested, the greater the risk, but this also increases the opportunity and magnitude of success. While the final outcome cannot be guaranteed, the ability to participate in a market economy is guaranteed, and as a result, there is greater opportunity to leave a situation of poverty than in other economic systems. The adoption of capitalism will not eradicate poverty but provide greater ability for economic mobility. As the wealth of a country increases, wealth increases across socioeconomic groups even though every individual will not rise to the same level of wealth.²²

The History of Capitalism and the Church

Stark demonstrates that capitalism had its origins within Catholic monasteries, who began to invest their capital in order to support their religious activity. This change took place during the Middle Ages, as different theologians began to consider the theological understanding of biblical passages regarding money, wealth, and most importantly interest. Notable examples of capitalistic practice in the Middle Ages include Cistercians at Fassoanaova, who began to specialize in horse breeding and trading and the Monastery of Saint Gall in Switzerland, which had begun to participate in trade. As theology around economic activity changed so too did the practices of monasteries. Monastics moved from producing goods for the purpose of survival and separation from society, to producing goods to participate in economic activity such as trade. Eventually, many monastic estates developed into towns, and their economic activity conformed to the traditional definition of capitalism, even though they functioned within the context of the feudal states.²³

Stark notes that, in the early history of the church, economic activity was regarded with great cynicism and as a likely source of temptation. The communal living described in the early chapters of Acts was held up as an ideal. However, during the fourth century, views among theologians began to change. While later teachings of Augustine influenced theologians to accept that all activity entails the possibility of temptation, it is up to the individual to make moral

¹⁸ Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action*. (Albany, AL: Ludwig van Mises Institute, 1998) 630-631.

¹⁹ Murphy, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Capitalism*, 5-7.

²⁰ Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 55-57.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

²² *Ibid.*, 55-61.

²³ *Ibid.*

responses.²⁴ Stark writes, “Augustine also ruled that price was not a function simply of the seller’s cost, but also of the buyer’s desire for the item sold. In this way, Augustine gave legitimacy not merely to merchants but to the eventual deep involvement of the church in the birth of capitalism...”²⁵ For this reason, it was possible to morally engage in commerce. This then opened up the possibility of engaging in robust economic activity for Christians. They were able to move from a system in which they produced just enough to survive to one in which they produced to generate profit.²⁶

However, it was not until Thomas Aquinas that capitalism truly became acceptable because he provided theological commentary on the issue of interest. Even today, Christians debate whether the collection of interest is morally permissible. Usury then was using interest to harm the poor or engaging in fraud, but it was distinguished from fair and aboveboard economic activity.²⁷ Barnette writes of Aquinas, “He condemned usury, theft, robbery, cheating in business activities, and emphasized the theory of ‘just price’.”²⁸ “Just price” is a compromise between the price that a seller and buyer wanted.²⁹ This price had to be the same for all people, meaning that discrimination was considered immoral. Aquinas also, because of his understanding of natural law, believed in private property while also holding that people needed to use their property for the good of others.³⁰ Later, during the Reformation, both Luther and Calvin upheld the right to private property. They also allowed for interest, so long as it did not hurt the poor, and so long as the rate charged was not exorbitant.³¹

As a result of the theological developments that took place with regard to Christianity’s understanding of Deuteronomy’s laws on interest, capitalism began to emerge in its entirety, not in the Enlightenment, and not even as a result of the Protestant Reformation, as some historians propose, but it can be seen in the ninth century monastic estates. Their economic activity met each of the criteria listed by Stark.³² Stark states, “If this is not Capitalism in all its glory, it was close enough.”³³ It was from there that capitalism as a system and foundational component of market economy spread to the rest of the world.³⁴

Aberrations From the Traditional View of Capitalism

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there were two significant attempts to redefine capitalism and market-based economies. Both relied on a secular philosophical approach, and both attempts are not the form of capitalism and market economy being defended in the paper. It is integral, however, to distinguish them from capitalism as developed in the Medieval Era. Specifically, it is important to distinguish them morally and ethically.³⁵

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 58.

²⁶ Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 57-67.

²⁷ Ibid., 59-66.

²⁸ Henlee H. Barnette, *Introducing Christian Ethics*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1961) 148.

²⁹ Barnette, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 148.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 57-63.

³³ Ibid., 61.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bergman, *The Darwin Effect*, 251-263.

Darwinian Capitalism

Jerry Bergman argues that capitalism, as it manifested in the twentieth century, was irrevocably altered by social Darwinism in two specific ways.³⁶ The first entailed poor conditions in which people were treated, who worked for unscrupulous businessmen, or “robber barons”.³⁷ He argues that Darwinism gave these businessmen scientific justification to treat their workers disposably. In other words, they were simply a disposable form of capital themselves, who could be replaced when they were injured or killed. Certainly, some businessmen were influenced by Darwinism; it would be impossible to defend the actions of every person within a capitalist system.³⁸ However, the fact that practices changed and evolved within about a century demonstrates three important developments. The first is that market economies are responsive to the values of society. In some cases, labor laws, such as child labor laws, changed the way business treated employees. In other cases, they adapted on their own, meaning that, as the views of Americans changed, so did the actions of companies, which wanted to draw in consumers and workers. Because capitalism thrives best with willing labor, companies did and do respond to their ability to attract employees. Employees then decide in what conditions they are comfortable working.³⁹

Second, despite how some employers may try to treat their employees, mistreatment of employees is not necessary for capitalism; it actually hinders it. From a strictly economic standpoint, mistreatment of employees is waste of resources. It slows productive capacity and decreases motivation. It also requires the use of capital to attract and train new employees to replace those who are lost and quit.⁴⁰ In fact, while making a profit is the goal of companies, this is not achieved at the expense of employees. Instead, it is achieved by finding a balance between expending resources to earn profits and resources that instill loyalty in employees. Finally, this illustrates that Darwinian theory applied to all areas of the social sciences was cruel and unlivable. However, it is not essential to capitalism, which existed centuries before Darwin.⁴¹

Bergman also argues that competition within markets is, as a result of Darwinian theory, a “survival of the fittest”.⁴² However, as long as immoral practices are not employed against competitors, there is nothing immoral about competition. Competition existed before Darwin. While competition is an aspect of market economies, this does not entail that it be a ruthless competition, which actively and intentionally harms people. In a market economy, it means that businesses will compete to see who can provide the most acceptable product, at the most acceptable price, to the most people, while still making a profit. As a result, the lifestyle of the consumer is enhanced, and companies compete to earn money. Quality is important in a product, contrary to popular criticism of capitalism. Poor quality might allow a short-lived product, but it does not garner long term customer loyalty, and it can lead to lawsuits.⁴³

³⁶ Ibid., 251-253.

³⁷ Bergman, *The Darwin Effect*, 254.

³⁸ Ibid., 252-260.

³⁹ Murphy, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Capitalism*, 61-77.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bergman, *The Darwin Effect*, 260.

⁴³ Murphy, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Capitalism*, 61-77.

Ayn Rand's Philosophy of Objectivism

The other aberration to traditional capitalism is the philosophy of Objectivism created by Ayn Rand. She had left the Soviet Union and held herself up as a champion of capitalism.⁴⁴ Recently, she has become a hero among libertarian factions; however, even during her lifetime, other proponents of a more traditional form of capitalism were highly critical of her work, notably Whittaker Chambers, who left Communism after his conversion to Christianity. Rand espoused that the highest values were selfishness and rationality and that the highest objective of humanity was achievement, especially monetary achievement. As Chambers argued in response to her *Atlas Shrugged*, she was not arguing for free markets in which all people could participate.⁴⁵ Instead, she argued for an "aristocracy of talents" of the those of the highest intellect and achievement.⁴⁶ She argued for an extreme and radicalized individualism in which all forms of charity are immoral and in which the individual should have no regard for society.⁴⁷

As Chambers explained, it is a theory that was influenced by the work of Nietzsche. Rand was also vehemently atheistic. However, this creates several issues.⁴⁸ First, as discussed, capitalism was originally developed by monastics, so traditional capitalism is not at odds with Christianity, whereas Rand's extremist ideal is, particularly its attitude toward those deemed not intellectually fit.⁴⁹ However, her idea that it is only the intellectual elite that are valuable in a capitalist society is incompatible with the traditional understanding that each person, who contributes to the society, is essential, although some assume less risk in the society. Her rejection of charity is not only immoral but incorrect, especially when it comes to private charity.⁵⁰ There is legitimate debate about the government's effectiveness at helping the poor, but charity itself is not at odds with capitalism. It still represents an investment of capital that provides a return. For instance, charities that invest in providing grants to develop cures for diseases, provide scholarships, or help pay bills, all meet the criteria of engaging in capitalism. They invest capital in an uncoerced manner and produce returns, which can be reinvested both monetarily and in other forms of capital goods.⁵¹ By contrast, Rand's philosophy views the world, and in particular human beings, as Chambers states, "wholly in the blackest blacks and the whitest whites. In this fiction, everything, is either all good or all bad, without any of those intermediate shades, which, in life, complicate reality and perplex the eye that seeks to probe it truly."⁵² As a result, she also misses the true nuances to the workings of a free market economy. She, as Chambers explains, does not escape the despotism from which she fled, it merely creates a new one, very similar to the one she left, which dehumanizes a large portion of the population and cannot actually sustain a market economy.⁵³

⁴⁴ DeMarco and Wiker, *Architects of the Culture of Death*, 54-63.

⁴⁵ Whittaker Chambers, *Ghosts on the Roof: Selected Journalism of Whittaker Chambers 1931-1959*. Ed. Terry Teachout. (Washington D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1989) 313.

⁴⁶ Chambers, *Ghosts on the Roof*, 317.

⁴⁷ DeMarco and Wiker, *Architects of the Culture of Death*, 54-63.

⁴⁸ Chambers, *Ghosts on the Roof*, 315-316.

⁴⁹ DeMarco and Wiker, *Architects of the Culture of Death*, 54-63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 56-57.

⁵² Chambers, *Ghosts on the Roof*, 313.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 313-318.

Capitalism and Biblical Ethics

The Biblical Purpose of Work

The early church debated how work should be viewed, whether all jobs could be considered service to God, or just those of specific religious vocations. As a result, there came to be a divide in the thinking of many theologians between the secular and the sacred in the area of work. In some areas, there was an impetus to move away from what were considered secular vocations. However, during the Reformation, this view was rejected by many of the reformers, notably Martin Luther.⁵⁴ He, along with Calvin, helped to enumerate the “doctrine of vocation”.⁵⁵ As a result, the Christian should consider their work first as a service to God and, secondly, as a service to others.⁵⁶ Barnette defines the Christian understanding of vocation as, “one which renders a genuine service to humanity; one which meets a real need of society; a job over which one can pray; a job in harmony with love, justice, and human dignity; one which requires of the worker integrity, creativity, imagination, and social usefulness; and finally, it is one characterized by a sense of purpose.”⁵⁷ As such, Christians can engage in a market economy and be faithful to this definition of work. It does prohibit certain jobs; a person could not produce pornography or perform abortions and meet this definition. However, a heart surgeon certainly would have the potential under the definition provided, as would a teacher, or police officer.

While a market economy might not prohibit work that does not fall under this definition, the freedom it provides to its participants makes possible their choice of occupation.⁵⁸ Capitalism necessitates “uncoerced labor”, and for this reason, each individual is responsible for how they choose to gain capital and which occupations they enter.⁵⁹ If they choose to enter into a line of work that is antithetical the definition provided, then they are morally culpable for this decision. Market economies, however, provide an environment with the freedom to live out moral conviction and, in so doing, be a witness to those engaged in commerce that there is a biblical means by which to participate in the economy. By choosing which industries to invest their capital, Christians can also make a statement regarding the immorality of certain industries and work they do not support, for instance, the refusal to use pornography or to go to movies that promote unbiblical behavior.⁶⁰

Also significant is the Christian recognition that work is important. God works and He created human beings, who bear His image, with a desire to do so as well.⁶¹ The substantive view of the doctrine of the image of God understands the image of God to be a reflection of an attribute of God. One way to view this then is that human beings have God’s communicable attributes, one of which is the ability to create, although not *ex nihilo*.⁶² Human beings also hold “dominion” over creation; they are tasked with its management and care.⁶³ Erickson writes,

⁵⁴ Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 155-157.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 55-57.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Genesis 1-2.

⁶² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013) 460.

⁶³ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 472.

“Learning and work are good. The exercise of dominion is a consequence of the image of God. Humanity is to gain an understanding and control of the creation, developing it to its ultimate potential for its own good and for God. This also means exercising dominion over our own personalities and abilities. Note that the exercise of dominion was part of God’s original intention for humanity; it preceded the fall. Work, then, is not a curse, but part of God’s good plan. The basis for the work ethic is to be found in the very nature of what God created us to be.”⁶⁴

For this reason, it is important for human beings to freely partake in economic activity in a way that is compatible with biblical ethics. Human beings are not merely economic beings; to treat them as such is dehumanizing, and a significant failure of both Communism and Objectivism is that they reduce human beings to being merely economic value, that their existence is solely for this purpose.

Modern examples can be seen in the way China and Cuba dehumanize their citizenry, treating them as a useful for the collective economy but letting the individual citizen languish in poverty. However, market economies recognize the opposite; the economy serves to provide human beings with the means to better engage in other human functions. In other words, in command economies, human beings exist to sustain the economy. But in market economies, it is the economy that serves human beings.⁶⁵ Walton also recognizes that the work described in Genesis 2 is both physical and spiritual. It cannot be limited to the physical work done by human beings, but the gift of work must be acknowledged as well. This is indicated by the language used in Genesis 2.⁶⁶ He writes, “we should surmise that people were gradually supposed to extend the garden as they went about subduing and ruling. Extending the garden would extend the food supply as well as extend sacred space”.⁶⁷ For this reason, it is good for human beings to engage in economic activity as long as their engagement is consistent with biblical ethics. It provides an opportunity to engage in society and provide a witness to the gospel.⁶⁸

Freedom to Live Out One’s Moral Convictions

Capitalism, while formed in part as an outgrowth of Christian monastic practice and theological debate, does not impose morality upon a society. It functions best in societies, which exhibit inherently biblical principles. Private property came to be defended based on Old Testament prohibitions against theft and covetousness. Barnette states that verses such as Amos 5:11-12 and Micah 2:1 as well as Jesus’s words in Mark 7:21 and Matthew 21:33-41 recognize that people can own property. Biblically, Christians are to recognize that their property ultimately is God’s, and He has given it to them for His service. Capitalism respects private property and thrives when it is protected. However, it does not determine how it is used; that is up to the heart of the individual.⁶⁹ As Augustine recognized, individuals are ultimately responsible for how they engage in commerce. Capitalism and market economies simply provide them with the opportunity to use their capital in a way that is pleasing to God. In a market economy, each person has the freedom and obligation to use their property in a way that is

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 457.

⁶⁶ John H. Walton, *Genesis*. (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2001) 149.

⁶⁷ Walton, *Genesis*, 149.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Barnette, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 152-153.

consistent with biblical ethics. If a market economy then demonstrated a high rate of immoral behavior, that is not the fault of the market economy; it is the fault of those who voluntarily use their property to engage in immoral ways. Market economies respect individual choice, but ultimately, people bear the moral responsibility for their actions.⁷⁰

Also important is the fact that capitalism and market economies work better when human beings engage freely and are valued.⁷¹ This is in keeping with the Bible's recognition of the inherent value of individuals.⁷² Each person plays a role in a market economy; each has the ability and potential to use their gifts and talents in order to succeed, and market economies are open to all people across class divides. Each person's decisions as to how they will or will not engage in commerce have a measurable impact on the economy as a whole. No economic system will work perfectly, but these factors allow for great good to come out of market economies in a way not possible in other economic systems. For this reason, while temptation is certainly a possibility in a market economy, it is matched with the capacity of individuals to make moral decisions. Economies, which regulate and attempt to impose morality on their citizens have no greater power to transform their hearts. They simply, in a temporal sense, remove the ability for personal moral decision making, which actually takes away from personal reflection. Finally, there is no guarantee that centralized economies will have a biblical worldview. They do, however, eliminate the marketplace of ideas and the possibility of moral correction on a grass roots level.⁷³

How Christians Should View the Rich: Matthew 19:24

In Matthew 19:24, Jesus states, "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."⁷⁴ This passage at times has been used to as an argument against capitalism and economic engagement. Rather, it seems to be a warning. As Augustine recognized, it is human beings who are ultimately responsible for their moral choices.⁷⁵ It is certainly a sin to make an idol of money, to hoard it, and place one's trust in it. For this reason, Christians must examine their hearts as they engage in economic activity. They must recognize that wealth can create a temptation and a distraction from one's faith; however, so too can relationships. Relationships can be a source of temptation, but they can also be entered into in a way consistent with scripture. For this reason, wealth, in and of itself, is not the sin, but the way someone relates to and uses wealth that can lead to temptation. Wealth by itself will not keep someone from God. Abraham acquired great wealth and yet was still righteous. So too, Joseph of Arimathea and Zacchaeus were wealthy. They used their wealth in agreement with biblical principles. It was Christ who was their Lord and not their wealth. Biblical adherence then determines a person's relationship with God, not their economic status.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 63-67.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Psalm 8: 4-6, Genesis 1:27.

⁷³ Stark, *The Victory of Reason*, 55-67.

⁷⁴ All biblical quotations in this thesis will come from the New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

⁷⁵ Ibid., 63-67.

⁷⁶ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004) ebook section: Matthew 19:1-30.

The Issue of Materialism

An important charge against capitalism is that it gives birth to materialism, which is at odds with biblical ethics. Materialism is at odds with biblical ethics. This was the reason for this paper's rejection of Objectivism. However, materialism is an outgrowth of secularism, and certainly the more market societies fall under a secular worldview, the greater the opportunity for materialism. Capitalism, however, does not cause secularization; it merely reflects it if that is what its participants value. For this reason, Christians must be clear about the purpose of property. It is for the service of God, and they must work to make the gospel known in their communities. The way people engage in economics is a reflection and demonstration of their worldview.⁷⁷ This recognizes Christ's teaching that, eventually, a person's outward actions will reflect the condition of their heart. Just as their words will demonstrate what they value, so too, in a profound way, does their engagement in the economy.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Because of human sinfulness, there will never be a perfect economic system, which is perfectly practiced. However, far from being incompatible with Christian teachings regarding economy, capitalism makes possible the economic freedom required to practice those teachings in a meaningful way. It first originated in monasteries as Christian theological attitudes toward economic practices changed, and the factors necessary for its flourishing are directly compatible with Christian ethics. It is a system in which human beings have the freedom to act or not act in the economy, and so live out their Christian teachings. It is also a system in which each participant is essential and valuable; in fact, their being valued is essential to its success. While there are temptations that arise with its practice, as in all areas, the individual is responsible for how they respond. For these reasons, capitalism is not immoral and is an economic system in which Christians can participate, so long as they are guided by the teachings of scripture.

⁷⁷ Barnette, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 152-153.

⁷⁸ Luke 6:45 (English Standard Version).

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