

Editorial

*Business and the Development
of Christian Social Thought*

Gratian, the great medieval codifier of canon law, included this aphorism: “It is always unlawful for men to fornicate, but it is sometimes lawful to do business.”¹ To say that the Christian tradition’s interaction with the world of business has been mercurial might be an overstatement, however. There has been a relatively clear development in the attitudes of Christian theologians, from the church fathers to the present day, moving from outright criticism and cautious skepticism (if not unambiguous rejection) to relative critical appreciation and cautious optimism (if not uncritical embrace). A recent book by Anthony Percy provides a helpful survey of these developments, particularly over the last two centuries of Roman Catholic social thought, culminating in John Paul II’s encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, in which Percy writes that “John Paul II brings to light the relational dimension of the entrepreneur in a way that no other pope before him has done.”²

The church’s understanding of the realm of production, consumption, exchange, and service may have achieved a fundamental insight with *Centesimus Annus*, but reflection on these areas has not remained stagnant in the last two decades. In 2004 the All-Russian Orthodox Council of the Russian Orthodox Church developed a document that includes “Ten Commandments for Businessmen,” with mandates such as the obligation to “remember the spiritual meaning of life while earning daily bread” and observations such as “the culture of business relations and adherence to promises help people become better and improve [the] economy.”³

Most recently Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* has applied the criterion of truth to human social life, particularly in light of global realities.

As Michael J. Naughton notes, this encyclical is part of a growing recognition “that we need to embed our understanding of business and organizational life in a larger transcendent reality that has the capacity and the resources to order our interests, profits, and contracts to a good that develops us in relationship to others. We and our organizations need integral human development.”⁴ To this end the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace released *The Vocation of the Christian Business Leader: A Reflection*, a note that recognizes the good that Christians are called to do in the world of business. In spite of challenges represented both by sin and evil (both personal and structural) as well as technological change and innovation, “Business leaders who are guided by ethical social principles, lived through virtues and illuminated for Christians by the Gospel, can, nonetheless, succeed and contribute to the common good.”⁵

Protestant social thought concerning the business world has likewise struggled to integrate the Christian faith with faithfulness in spheres traditionally understood to be secular. In our *Scholia* feature in this issue, the Elizabethan bishop John Jewel (1522–1571) applies Christian moral teaching to the problem of usury and loans. Like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, Jewel assumes a fundamentally static view of economic life. In his contribution to the symposium in this issue from the Evangelical Theological Society’s Theology of Work and Economics Consultation, Craig Blomberg identifies this theory of “limited good” as also characteristic of the person of the biblical world, in which “if a member of their society became noticeably richer, they would naturally assume that it was at someone else’s expense.”⁶ This perspective represents a strand of continuity between the biblical and the later Christian world up through the early modern era. As Jewel writes, “Here, you say, he who lends is a gainer, and he who borrows is a gainer. It does good for both. If both are gainers, who is the loser? For usury never passes without working loss. Take this as a rule: there is never usury without loss.”⁷ Again, this classical view is shared across confessional lines in the early modern period. No less sophisticated a thinker than Juan de Mariana (1536–1624) also contended that “one man’s loss is another man’s gain. There is no way around that fact.”⁸ Amid Jewel’s sharp critique of usurious lending, however, there is an implicit recognition of the good that can be done by joining together in partnerships for commercial enterprises where the prospects for both gain and loss are shared.

Recognition of the dangers as well as the positive possibilities for business life has thus characterized historical Christian reflection on the economic aspects of human society. Contemporary Protestant writers such as Jeff van Duzer and John C. Knapp have written cogently about the need for more thoroughgoing and dialogically critical interaction between church leaders and business-

people.⁹ Perhaps most notably, the Cape Town Commitment arising out of the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in October 2010, echoing Benedict's emphasis on truth from *Caritas in Veritate*, in a section on "Truth and the Workplace," confesses that "we have failed to regard work in itself as biblically and intrinsically significant, as we have failed to bring the whole of life under the Lordship of Christ."¹⁰ All spheres of life, including business, are accountable to God and are realms where Christians are called to faithfully follow Jesus Christ. To think and act otherwise is to split apart the human person in ways that denigrate rather than promote human dignity and flourishing.

Inspired by recognition of this pressing need to properly relate material and spiritual goods within a comprehensive vision of the human person and social life, the *Journal of Markets & Morality* has issued a call for publication for a theme issue to appear in the spring of 2013 on the topic of "Integral Human Development." More details about this issue are available in the CFP appearing in the back matter of this volume and on the journal's website. To reiterate Naughton's observation quoted above, "We and our organizations need integral human development."¹¹ Similarly, in the words of the Cape Town Commitment, which picks up the language of the Micah Declaration: "Integral mission is the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life."¹² In good faith all people of goodwill are invited to contribute to these ongoing efforts to glorify the Lord in all that we do (1 Cor. 10:31).

—Jordan J. Ballor, Dr. theol.

Notes

1. See *Decretum Gratiani*, vol. 1, *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (Rome: Populi Romani, 1582), dist. 88, c. 10, p. 561: "Fornicari omnibus semper non licet : negotiari vero aliquando licet; aliquando non licet." Quoted in Jonathan Penslar, *Shylock's Children: Economic and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 11. See also Raymond de Roover, "The Scholastic Attitude toward Trade and Entrepreneurship," in *Business, Banking, and Economic Thought in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Julius Kirshner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 336.
2. Anthony G. Percy, *Entrepreneurship in the Catholic Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2010), 165.

3. See “Church Offers Ten Commandments for Businessmen,” *Pravda.ru*, February 9, 2004, accessed May 1, 2012, <http://english.pravda.ru/history/09-02-2004/4795-church-0/>.
4. Michael J. Naughton, “The Business Enterprise,” in *The Moral Dynamics of Economic Life: An Extension and Critique of Caritas in Veritate*, ed. Daniel K. Finn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 89.
5. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection* (2012), 2.
6. Craig L. Blomberg, “Neither Capitalism Nor Socialism: A Biblical Theology of Economics,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 207–25.
7. John Jewel, “Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:6 and ‘A Paper on Usury,’” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 285–302.
8. Juan de Mariana, *A Treatise on the Alteration of Money*, trans. Patrick T. Brannan (Grand Rapids: CLP Academic, 2011), 85.
9. See Jeff van Duzer, *Why Business Matters to God (And What Still Needs to Be Fixed)* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010); and John C. Knapp, *How the Church Fails Businesspeople (And What Can Be Done About It)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). See also Kenman L. Wong and Scott B. Rae, *Business for the Common Good: A Christian Vision for the Marketplace* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011).
10. The Third Lausanne Congress, *The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2011), 35.
11. Naughton, “The Business Enterprise,” 89.
12. The Third Lausanne Congress, *The Cape Town Commitment*, 29.