Ministers-at-Work

The Journal for Christians in secular ministry

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Editorial

The world around us keeps changing, challenging any notion that it might for one moment settle down into the stability we think we fondly recall from the past. In reality it was never quite like that – but just as we thought we might be turning the corner with COVID (though I've heard that before), we are faced with a new war in Europe, highlighting for many of us the inhumanity and chaos of our attitude to all those seeking

refuge on our shores. There are warnings that our activities are damaging and degrading the Earth and its biodiversity in an unsustainable manner. And then in UK there is the squeeze on everyone's incomes – exacerbated by many things, including rising costs for fuel. It feels much more like Lent and Passiontide than Easter!

This edition of the journal contains some significant pieces of thinking to chew on as we try to work out what ministry in the middle of this changing world is and should be, and how we might see and celebrate what God is doing around us.

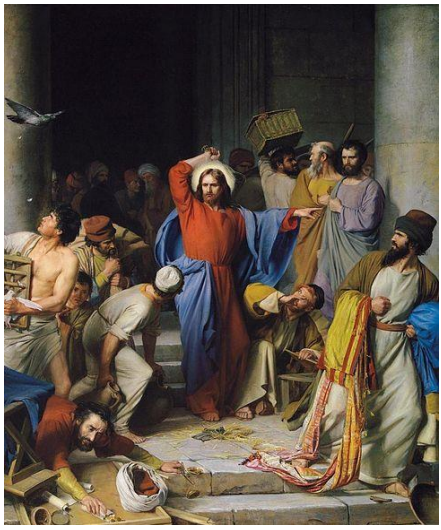
Julian Blakemore and the Theology Discussion Group have begun to examine how we might view the market economy, raising questions about gain, growth and generosity. Dorrie Johnson contributes a thoughtful analysis of just what working at home might mean for many of us, particularly where face to face contact is minimal. Both end their pieces with some thought provoking questions - do let me know if any of these inspire you to put pen to paper... We have a book review by Rob Fox for Jim Francis' latest book, which is highly recommended. And Phil contributes an obituary for Christian Herwartz, a European worker priest for whom political commitment and faith were inextricably linked. We also have details of forthcoming events – both the Theology Discussion Group and (with a flyer) our planned Annual Conference. All being well, I look forward to seeing you there!

Pauline Pearson

A Christian Perspective on the Market Economy: *Julian Blakemore*

The following article is based on a discussion within the CHRISM Theology Discussion Group in March. The hope that is by sharing this with the wider membership, it will start a dialogue and enable us to bring our collective thoughts, wisdom and prayers to the important issues that are raised here and their implications for our ministry in and to the world of work.

Background



Jesus cleansing the Temple, 1874 by Carl Heinrich Bloch (1834-90).

Ever since Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem by driving out all who bought and sold, overturning the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons (Mk.

11.15-19; Matt. 21.12-17), Christians have been conflicted in their attitudes towards markets.

Although Jesus' action was situation-specific (i.e. he is not recorded to have disrupted markets outside the temple), the kind of behaviours he objected to in that place are equally objectionable outside the temple precincts. Consequently, there are those who will always see markets as dens of robbers in which traders pursue personal gain at someone else's expense. Some recognise the temptations of the marketplace, which are to be resisted, but also see its usefulness. This translates into a begrudging acceptance of markets as a necessary evil. Others conclude that the upsides outweigh the downsides, affirming markets as a positive force for good that support trade and commerce, and create opportunities for work and wealth generation. What is not in doubt is:

- the function markets serve as an exchange, bringing together sellers of commodities, goods and services with potential buyers;
- the importance of markets as a way of facilitating economic development.

Markets begin as voluntary, local and small-scale fora in which people simply truck, barter and exchange one thing for another. They develop their own traditions, customs and practices based on the values and beliefs of the communities to which they belong. These 'traditional economies' tend to exist in hunter-gatherer and nomadic societies of the kind that can still be found in emerging markets and developing countries in Africa, Asia, and South America. They do not

generate large surpluses. When these societies settle down and start farming, their economies start to evolve.

It is from such humble beginnings that today's highly complex, technologically sophisticated and fast-paced markets emerged. These global enterprises enable huge volumes of commodities, goods, currencies and financial instruments to be traded on a daily basis. When markets grow and become more important economically to a region or country, choices have to be made about how they will operate. The fundamental choice is between freedom and control.

Market economy

Led by Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, classical economics in the 18th and 19th centuries embraced the idea of there being a natural economic order in support of their faith in unregulated individual activity. This assumption was exalted into the principle of laissez-faire ("allow to do"), which held that the pursuit of individual self-interests would benefit society as a whole without the need for government interference.

Market economies are based on the private ownership of property to enable the free exchange of goods and services between different parties (no one can rightfully trade property they do not own), with distribution based on market forces of supply and demand. In theory, this promotes efficiency by giving the owner of resources an incentive to maximise their value.

Market economies tend to be part of capitalist societies in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state. Adam Smith

described self-interest and competition in a market economy as the "invisible hand" that guides the economy.

In saying this, he assumed that the principles he laid out to maximise the “wealth of nations” would preclude the concentration of wealth, even before government intervention. As such, he regarded inequality as a market distortion. Smith’s principles have never been fully implemented and inequality has become accepted as a market norm.

The main drawback of free markets, therefore, is that they do not provide a level playing field on which all can compete fairly. Markets that are left to their own devices in the hope that unfettered competition will generate wealth, drive growth, increase choice and improve efficiency, are also completely at the mercy of market forces. These forces can expose markets, and the people whose livelihoods depend on them, to volatility

in demand and price. This, is turn, can lead to speculation, which only serves to exacerbate these fluctuations.

No holds barred competition means that markets are open to abuse, exploitation and manipulation by the unscrupulous and wealthy (in terms of money, education and influence), who are able to use their stronger economic position to gain at the expense of those with less bargaining power. A consequence of this is that rather than benefiting society as a whole and alleviating poverty, free markets can actually make things worse for smaller or weaker participants who are unable to compete effectively due to these inherent inequalities.

The most economically free countries in the World are Hong Kong (a special administrative region of China) and Singapore. They have extremely low tax rates, minimal regulations on businesses, highly capitalist system of economics and strong property rights. Other countries with relatively free economies are New Zealand, Switzerland and Australia.[1]

Critics of the free market argue that although some aspects of the market may be self-regulating, other issues, such as the climate emergency, environmental concerns, workers' rights, ensuring equality and diversity, and preventing corruption, require government intervention.

Command economy

At the other end of the spectrum from a free-market system is the command or planned economy. In a command economy, all major aspects of the economy and economic

[1] Source: Statista's 2019 Index of Economic Freedom

production are controlled centrally, i.e. it is the government that decides what to produce, how to produce goods, how to distribute goods and services within the economy, and at what price. The theory behind command economies was defined by Karl Marx who argued for 'common ownership of the means of production' in The Communist Manifesto (1848). Command economies are a component of Communist and Socialist political systems.

Communists and Socialists believe that capitalism is flawed and leads to class divides. They each contend that their approaches offer a more equitable distribution of goods and services. The difference between the Communist and Socialist models is that under Communism, there is no private property. All property

is communally owned, with resources distributed according to need. A strong central government - the state - controls all aspects of economic production, and provides citizens with basic necessities, including food, housing, medical care and education. This approach was practiced in the former Soviet

Union and China (until 1978) but still exists today in countries such as Cuba and North Korea.

Socialism also believes in a fair distribution of income but that does not necessarily mean equal. Individuals can still own property and capitalism is allowed in some parts of the economy. However, all industrial production (i.e. the main way of generating wealth) is owned communally and managed by a democratically elected government or collective.

The case for a command economy is that it gives a government the ability to focus production on goods that benefit society and ensure that everyone has access to basic necessities. The emphasis is on economic equality and social welfare rather than maximising profit. Resources can be mobilised quickly on a large scale to meet social goals, deliver projects and provide work - they are not slowed down by private lawsuits or environmental impact statements. Command economies protect against market failure and prevent abuse of monopoly power.

The main argument against command economies is that without the impetus of free-market competition, supply and demand can be difficult to predict, leading to wasteful surpluses and harmful shortfalls. They are also highly bureaucratic, with decisions help up by planning processes and committees. Furthermore, without the profit motive, there is no incentive to improve efficiency or drive innovation. Individual freedoms and choices tend to be limited and are subjugated to the needs of society as a whole.

Mixed economy

Most modern economies, such as the US, UK, Germany, France and Japan, combine elements of both free market and planned economic systems. Such mixed economies protect private property and allow a level of economic freedom in the use of capital, whilst also allowing for governments to intervene in economic activities in order to achieve social aims, e.g. by implementing subsidies, tariffs or protections for essential industries, regulating where there is risk of market failure, nationalising certain industries deemed to provide a public good (e.g. transport, education and healthcare), preventing monopolistic behaviour, or using taxation to redistribute wealth.

Mixed economies aim to get the best of a market economy system whilst avoiding the worst excesses through government regulation and support. Private enterprise co-exists with public ownership to drive efficiency, innovation and profits, whilst ensuring that important but less profitable sectors are not neglected. However, there are drawbacks with this approach. Getting the balance right in terms of the amount of government intervention is crucial but difficult in practice. Too little means disadvantaged groups will not get the support they need. Too much will act as a disincentive to private enterprise.

There is also the risk of a powerful private sector exerting undue influence on the government. Big business may seek to lobby governments to influence policies and shape legislation to its advantage. Government intervention may also lead to moral hazard, whereby businesses that are large or important to the economy might be tempted to take excessive risks because they know they are too big to be allowed to fail.

Keynesian vs. Monetarist economic theories

Responsible governments try to manage their national economies to maintain relative stability (e.g. inflation, price levels, employment, markets and trade) and moderate the effects of boom and bust in the business cycle. To do this, they have various levers at their disposal which they can use to stimulate or slow down economic activity.

The study of how the overall economy (i.e. markets, structures and other large-scale systems) works and can be controlled is the branch of economics known as macroeconomics. This involves looking at big picture measures such as inflation, unemployment, and Gross Domestic Product (GDP)[2] and building models that explain how they relate to

[2] GDP is defined as the value of the goods and services generated within a country.

each other. Such models are used to generate forecasts that inform government policy-making, business planning, and investment management strategies. There are various schools of thought relating to macroeconomics but the two main approaches are Keynesian economics, formulated by John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), and Monetarist economics founded by Milton Friedman (1912-2006).

Keynesians, whilst content to allow the private sector to guide the economy for the most part, advocate judicious government intervention to address economic problems in the short-term because waiting for the market to correct itself can take too long. They believe that an economy's output of goods and services is driven by demand, which comprises consumption, investment, government spending, and net exports (the surplus of exports over imports). Thus, for them, manipulating the demand for goods and services is the best way to control economic activity, maintain employment and stabilise prices. This involves implementing countercyclical fiscal policies to counteract the effects of the business cycle on the economy, such as infrastructure investment to create jobs and maintain wages during a downturn, or by raising taxes when the economy is booming to prevent demand outstripping supply and giving rise to inflation.

Monetarists believe that money supply is the main driver of macroeconomic performance and business cycles because it is directly linked to inflation. Increasing the money supply leads to inflation and cutting money supply reduces inflationary pressures. Money supply, in its broadest sense, includes notes and coin in circulation, bank deposits and the availability of credit and loans. The flow of money into the economy can be

managed through reducing or increasing the cost of borrowing (interest rates), tightening or loosening the amount of reserves commercial banks have to hold with the central bank in order to lend, or through the central bank buying or selling bonds (open market operations). Using these methods, inflation can be kept under control and the rest of the market can be left to sort itself out. Keynesians accept the role of money supply in the economy and its effect on GDP but see its main drawback as a control mechanism being how long it can take for the economy to adjust to changes made to monetary policy.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. Following the 2007-8 financial crisis we saw both government intervention in the form of bank bail-outs and Quantitative Easing (QE) became a key part of monetary policy, with central banks purchasing longer-term securities from the open market in order to increase the money supply and encourage lending and investment.

When governments make policy decisions in respect of the economy, their choices may be driven by political ideology as much as pure economic theory.

Examples include: the process of nationalisation whereby a government takes control of certain companies, industries or assets out of private sector ownership because of their social or strategic importance to a country.

A decision to raise tax revenues can be implemented in a way that is progressive (higher income groups pay a larger percentage than those on lower incomes), proportional (everyone pays the same percentage), or regressive (lower

income groups pay a higher percentage than those on higher incomes).

A decision to impose excise duties on certain commodities or activities that are perceived to be unhealthy or have a negative effect on society, such as cigarettes, gambling, and alcohol. These so-called 'sin taxes' are intended to deter individuals

from purchasing these products.

By the economic choices they make, governments can increase equality and fairness or undermine these values, they can protect individual citizens from market extremes or leave them exposed, they can promote social and environmental wellbeing or hold back. Christians need to be aware of the economic options available to governments and their

implications in order to be able to engage with the issues and hold politicians to account.

The market fixation on continuous growth

Governments and economic policymakers are wedded to maximising the rate of economic growth at all costs. Typically, that growth is measured by GDP. There are three ways of calculating GDP, based on:

- total value of goods and services produced (i.e. output);
- total income of everyone;
- total household expenditure, business investment, government spending and net exports (i.e. total spending).

The latter is probably the most familiar measure and assigns a monetary value to a country's economic activity based on total spending over a given period of time. It is used as an indicator of a country's economic size and health and as a basis of comparison between countries. The problem with GDP is that it excludes value-added activity for which no money changes hands, including caring, cooking, cleaning, other tasks around the house and voluntary work in the community that are all done for free. It also includes activity that will cause GDP to rise but does not make the country better off or improve wellbeing, such as timber sales resulting from deforestation which carries an environmental cost, or the costs of war.

In a world of finite resources and fragile ecosystems, the idea of unrelenting growth in which we continue to plunder the earth's assets and pollute the atmosphere is not a realistic or

sustainable proposition. The climate crisis, in particular, has focused attention on alternative methods of measuring economic performance that take into account sustainability and wellbeing but these have yet to challenge the dominance of GDP. However, the prospect of stopping growth or even shrinking economies gives rise to other challenges, most importantly in how to manage the transition without exacerbating global poverty. Transformative thinking is required to provide a greener, cleaner, less resource-intensive economic model, that is based on technological innovation, sustainable infrastructure investment, increased efficiency and different patterns of working, and where success is measured much more in terms of wellbeing, sustainability and inclusivity.

Container Ship 'Ever Given' stuck in the Suez Canal, Egypt - March 24th, 2021.

Reflections on the market economy

Market economies are efficient at moving capital, goods and commodities around the World from where there is a surplus to where there is demand for them. We rely on markets – the labour market to find jobs, property market to buy/sell homes, auto market to buy/sell cars, supermarkets to supply our food and other supplies. However, left to their own devices, markets can have devastating effects on peoples' lives. In the UK and elsewhere, we currently find ourselves at the mercy of wholesale oil and gas markets which are driving up the cost of fuel and heating and contributing to a cost of living crisis. Most of the markets we use have complex global supply chains. The problem with long and intricate supply chains is that they are at risk of disruption from a whole variety of different causes, from conflicts and natural disasters to sanctions and other barriers to trade. Even a cargo vessel blocking the Suez Canal for six days wreaked untold havoc, holding up an estimated £7bn of goods per day.[3]

There are also questions about how ethically some of the goods we enjoy have been sourced. We like the convenience, choice and cheap prices that markets can offer but consumers also have a responsibility to make sure that what they are buying is sourced sustainably and that workers throughout the supply chain are being treated and paid fairly. The World Bank reports that while global wealth is increasing, wealth

[3] BBC News, 26 March 2021, Suez blockage is holding up $9.6bn of goods a day.

inequalities are being exacerbated.[4] Also, in response to the climate emergency, we need to think about the carbon footprint of the things we buy, not only in terms of how they are produced but how far they have travelled to get here. Buying local where possible is the more environmentally friendly option. It is time to challenge the way that the market economy is working. With the means of production in private hands and with the priority to maximise profit, there is a temptation for those who own them to use their power to accumulate a disproportionate share of wealth, by abusing workers' rights, squeezing suppliers, exploiting customers, plundering the planet's natural resources, ignoring climate change, and influencing government policies to their advantage. Doing the right thing has an economic cost which makes it hard for individuals and businesses with a conscience to compete with those who do not. Rather than benefiting society as a whole, market economies have tended to create winners and losers. It seems that they are rigged to normalise inequality and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a relative few. For too long these difficult issues have been ignored because we fear the answers might be uncomfortable and might reduce our choice or raise prices. The crucial question is, have we become slaves to markets?

The overriding concern is that the market economy has gone too far. There is a high price to pay for its promise of uninterrupted growth and increasing wealth. It has become too powerful, governing every part of our lives when it should only govern a limited part of our existence. In a critique of the

[4] https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/10/27/global-wealth-has-grown-but-at-the-expense-of-future-prosperity-world-bank

market economy, the late Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sachs sees it as having overreached itself and is threatening the values that it depends upon for its existence: "when everything that matters can be bought and sold, when commitments can be broken because they are no longer to our advantage, when shopping becomes salvation and advertising slogans become our litany, when our worth is measured by how much we earn and spend, when the market is destroying the very virtues on which in the long run it depends."[5] There is the possibility that the hold the market economy exerts over people could undermine the values of faith but, equally, the potential also exists for the values of faith to redeem the market economy.

The market emphasis on self-interest has bred an individualism that undermines people's sense of community and economic interdependence. In his 1981 encyclical, Laborem exercens

[5] Rabbi Professor Jonathan Sachs, Morals and Markets, IEA, London (1999), p.24

("Through Work"), Pope John Paul II called on the Church to develop a spirituality of work which acknowledged the importance of work as an economic activity but, more significantly emphasised the priority of people over things. This 'personalistic' approach defines people through their interpersonal relationships, with others and with God. This is how people establish their worth and share in God's creative purposes.[6] For people to feel that they belong to a society means recognising that they hold things in common with other members of the society (e.g. culture, values, vision) and accepting that they have a shared responsibility with one another for creating and maintaining that society. Upholding law and order is important but one thing we can be certain of is that it is not possible to regulate against every possible market abuse, legislate to remove every uncertainty, or rely of codes of conduct to prevent every rogue trader from pushing the envelope or exploiting loopholes in the rules. Something more fundamental is required to encourage and enable people to stand up to market forces and, rather than simply acting in their own best interests, to take into account the needs of others and the wider interests of society when making decisions about what to do.

Applying Kingdom values to the market economy

Jesus was brought up in the home of a tradesperson, for Joseph was a carpenter. Jesus was also a Jew living in first century Palestine under Roman occupation. This might seem far removed from a twenty-first century market economy and

[6] Pope John Paul II, encyclical, Laborem exercens (On Human Work), The Holy See, Rome (1981)

cause us to question whether Jesus' teaching on wealth and market exchange are relevant to modern economic life. There is, however, archaeological evidence that the traditional agrarian economy of Palestine was undergoing increasing commercialisation during that period, no doubt encouraged by the Romans.

The Roman empire had a strong economy that was built on trade and commerce. Huge volumes of commodities were transported between its provinces by sea routes and Galilee was well placed as a trade centre. The ancient belief in 'limited good'[7] still seems to have characterised economic thinking at the time, which could explain the perceived hostility and tensions towards those who were able to exploit the situation to increase their wealth at the expense of the traditional peasant farmers. Whilst the need for reciprocal sharing between families and friends, and concern for the poor remained strong, the Gospels reference the widespread use of coinage in everyday transactions, marketplaces, traders, wages, taxes and tax collectors and laws to do with buying and selling. Jesus' parables reflect the growing role of market-based exchange (Mark 8.37; Matt. 13.44-46) and the legitimate pursuit of economic gain through risk-taking (Matt. 25.14-30). On this basis, Christ's message about the coming of God's kingdom is perhaps more relevant than we might have first thought.

[7] Limited good is the idea that all goods in life, such as land, wealth, status, respect, honour, friendship, love, power and influence, were finite and always in short supply. Therefore, someone could only accumulate more of a good at someone else's expense.

Jesus' teaching was not directed at overarching economic systems but the behaviour of individuals and groups within them – he challenges the vested interests of his day, calling out the hypocrisy of those with position, wealth and authority; he recognises quiet, sacrificial giving over showy offerings by those who can afford it; he has plenty to say about people being honest and fair in their dealings; but he does not advocate the overthrow of institutions as such. His basic economic philosophy is "do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth… but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven… for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6.19-21). He is far more concerned with trusting God for the necessities of life than the pursuit of worldly goods: "look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them" (Matt. 6.26).

The rich young ruler cannot follow because he valued his possessions more than God (Matt. 19.16-30). Jesus' view of free-market capitalism is always tempered by compassion and

generosity, as in Luke 6 where he says "If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6.32-36). Likewise, in the parable of the householder, by choosing to pay his workers the full daily rate, regardless of how long they had worked, all are provided with enough to feed their families (Matt. 20.1-16).

For Jesus, the priority is to seek first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6.33). This is predicated on following the two great commandments: to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves (Mark 12.28-34). God's kingdom will be fulfilled on earth when he comes again. In the meantime, the coming of the kingdom is a quiet revolution to be achieved by his followers being 'salt' and 'light' in the World (Matt.5.13-16) – faithfully doing what they can, within their sphere of influence, to transform lives and situations by reflecting God's light and love into them. The dispersed Kingdom community touches lots of areas of modern life. As individual agents of change, every disciple can make a difference where they are. As they combine their efforts with others and create partnerships, their influence and impact can increase. Markets do not operate in a moral vacuum. They are influenced by sentiment and can be moved by ethical concerns (e.g. in response to the climate emergency, human rights abuses, lack of diversity, governance failings, single-use plastics,

etc.). Lots of small changes added together can potentially lead to a complete transformation.

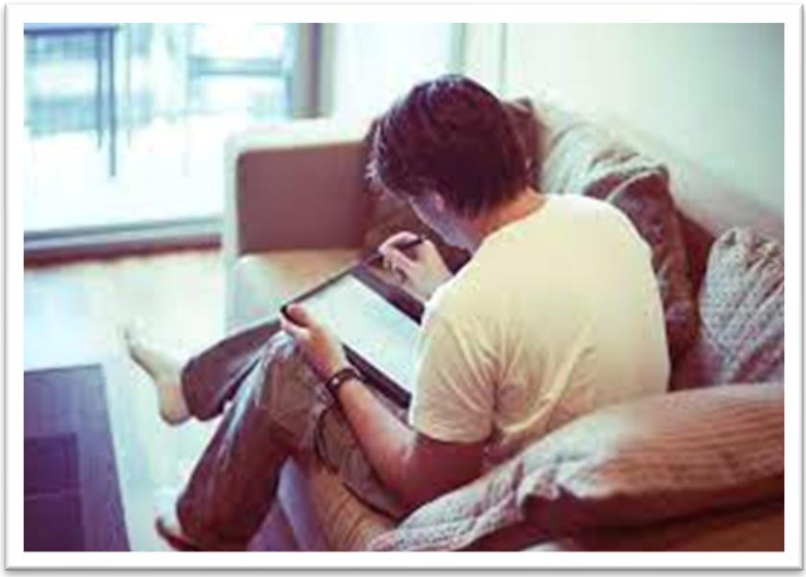
Christianity is a religion that emphasises individual freedom and promises to set us free from the ties that bind us. But that freedom is founded on love, for God and other people. Our faith finds its expression in community. Being in thrall to markets is one way that we can lose our God-given freedom. Jesus prays for his followers to remain in the world but to be protected them from evil in the world (John 17.14-16). This is often interpreted as Christians being called to be 'in the world but not of the world' as a way of describing a participation and involvement in the World that enables us to be present without forgetting that our ultimate loyalty is to God. It is about keeping things in perspective and not losing sight of what really matters. If Jesus' temptations teach us anything it is that ends do not justify means. Our motives and the way we go about things matters (Matt. 4.1-11).

There are many issues with the market economy as a system. Like all human institutions, it is flawed but that does not mean that it is irredeemable. If the creative energy and wealth generated by the market economy could be channelled differently and shared more equally, it could become a much more powerful force for social good. Certainly, this would mean changing attitudes and overcoming vested interests but with God, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, all things are possible (Matt. 19.26; cf. Phil. 4.13).

Questions for consideration:

- **To what extent are the imperfections of market systems due to the systems themselves or the people who participate in them?**
- **How do we uphold or challenge the current order of things through our work and the economic choices we make?**
- **What is our prophetic voice on economic matters and how do we rediscover it?**
- **How sustainable is the demand for continuous growth?**
- **In what ways can we build a better economic system based on Kingdom values?**

If this article prompts any thoughts or comments that you would be willing to share as part of creating a wider dialogue within CHRISM, please email the author at rev.julian.e.blakemore@gmail.com – or indeed submit a reflection or response to the editor of this journal.



The MSE and working at home: *Dorrie Johnson*

As long ago as 1987, the *ACCM Occasional Paper no 23* identified the importance of work based ministry. It differentiated between parochial or sector ministry such as chaplaincy and that which primarily sees ministry in the context of employment.

'… in the context of employment'. The advent of Covid19 jolted our understanding of what that context might be.

The situation is not entirely new. Many workers were - or are - temporarily based at home, some have experienced, or will experience, a permanence to this arrangement. Other employees will be physically separated within a workplace. Others experience shifts which create division. A model is developing of flexible working where an employee splits their

time between the workplace or work situation and remote working. Indeed, some practising MSEs are in one of these situations and their views could provide valuable feedback. Doubtless other forms of separation may be identified. Does each situation demand separate deliberation or are there principles which might apply to all home working contexts?

Has theological thinking about MSE in retirement anything to offer? I suggested[8] that in retirement potentially-false self images are lost - manager, worker, secretary and so on. In the context of retirement there is a complete separation between work place labels and the new experience. Are any of those theological principles applicable also to the MSE-worker-at-home experience?

It was assumed at that time of writing that the MSE would be one of and with people who 'went to work'. It remains focused on those who see their work/work place as the material of their ministry. Several new issues may arise, however, in home-working which demand a rethink of how MSE ministry might be exercised, particularly when there is a physical separation of employee and employer. What, if anything, maintains a feeling of connection? Is there still an understanding of the purpose of the organisation? Other questions abound and there remains the MSE responsibility to 'tell the Church* about it'.

[8] Dorrie Johnson. Applied Theology for the Retired Minister in Secular Employment (MSE) *Modern Believing Church and Society Volume 49:3* July 2008

An earlier article[9] would need to be rewritten in recognition of vast changes in the context of work. Ministry at work and home must be rethought, revalued, starting, perhaps with those MSEs currently engaged in exploring such ministry. The ministerial role, which I have previously suggested underlies the work-based role, must be reassessed, it has to change. One task at least, I believe, may endure - to discuss what faith is and what it means to be a disciple in a secular world. Michael Ranken (an MSE theologian if ever there was one) asked what the appropriate theology would be for someone telling the story for those outside the church. That is still a valid question.

[9] Dorrie Johnson Ordained Ministers in Secular Employment *Theology January/February1998 Vol CI No 799*

* Church - all denominations not just the Church of England

The place of work, as are established churches, is still a vehicle for God's activity. Ministry in a Secular Environment has always been a pioneering ministry, a *prophetic* one. Now it must pick up that role, work through the consequences of the new practice. This is not only to reflect on the current situation but to look forward, to anticipate what might come of it. Increasingly this is also associated with our use of resources, of how work, however practised, influences the environment.

The obligation to reflect and feed into the church is still significant. The church needs, I suggest, all MSEs but

particularly those already experiencing home working, to identify, operate and support a new way of preaching and sharing its theology. It needs prayer to work this through and

to reflect God's purpose in this new, possibly fractured, work situation. Theological reflection on God's purpose, the relationship of working in this new economic environment, demands a new vision. How can the MSE discern the signs of God's grace? Where, how, are regret, forgiveness, love or absolution expressed? ? What are the sacraments in this new experience?

At the risk of repeating myself, theological principles need to be applied to all forms of work, to the organisation or system and the society in which the organisations function. When theology starts with our own experience, then that affects all of our lives. It should demonstrate a relationship with a participatory and sustaining society. Of course there are all the practical problems that arise. The responsibilities of employers and employees do not change although their method of implementation has changed. Anxieties may arise on either side. Relationships at home may be disturbing or damaging to other household members. What separation, in intent if not a physical one, is there between home and workplace? Does there need to be? What links are maintained between the worker and the workplace? Can the MSE stand alongside or claim to share the same questions, the same anxieties or pleasures. If so, how? If not, then what is the ministry to be?

I believe that it is good and right that questions about MSE do keep repeating as new ministries are sought, recognized and need to be nurtured and given expression - and each will be different. Each minister has to find that personal path but then to share it. Can the insights gained by longer serving MSEs be useful or does home working require a fresh direction?

Many years ago troubled conversations took place around house-work or voluntary work when trying to define what was understood by the MSE as 'work'? Do different questions arise when the worker is happier identifying their own working patterns? What are the factors which best enable a sense of fulfilment? How is God glorified in home working? How is the kingdom reflected when the community is broken?

The MSE works towards doctrine from human experience and human needs. How might these be identified in this working-at-home environment? The MSE may continue to be a watcher, a steward, to express a ministry through the work itself. MSEs could/should look for and encourage ways of expressing ministry in and outside of the work context. How is concern for workers-at-home recognised and then expressed within formal church settings?

Ministerial roles, if faith is a lived experience, continue to evolve. Different elements may be expressed dependent on

the environment. I quote Bourke:[10] 'the Christian task is to experience and understand the job and the complex social and economic forces which interact with it'. It has taken the church time to recognise (and still that message needs to be heard) that people may see their place of work as worthy of recognition as is a place of holiness. MSEs are in the forefront of this growing area of work where there is separation and need. In words of John Spong but I must paraphrase - 'we are not alone, God is in this, too, was before us, will be after us'.

I come back to the ACCM definition of MSE: *ministry in the context of employment.* MSEs, now, as never before perhaps, need each other to stimulate, theologise, minister and uphold through this new (ish) situation. I have been retired for too long to know exactly what happens in any working environment, particularly when they are home based. Seek out those with experience. It is a complex situation and I apologise for any repetition.

Let us not forget that any workplace is also where the kingdom is to be expressed. We wish to affirm it not as a place to run from (and into the formal church) but a place to rejoice in - as God's world in action; as a place of growth and fulfilment; as a reflection of the kingdom. As Michael Ranken asked: How [does] God Look if You Don't Start in Church?[11]

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[10] Michael Bourke The Theology of the Non-Stipendiary Ministry *Theology* (May 1981)

[11] Michael Ranken How God Looks if You Don't Start in Church. Cairns publications 2001

Clear replies might be forthcoming from those who do know. As I don't, I would like to ask:

- How does an MSE minister when working at home?
- How does an MSE minister to others who are working at home?
- Can the MSE identify these secular concerns and theological insights for the church to consider, pray about, influence?

From across the Pond

After an unexplained hiatus, I've started again, on behalf of CHRISM, to receive Initiatives, the newsletter of the National Center for the Laity (NCL), a Roman Catholic organisation based in Chicago. The NCL's declared purposes is 'In Support of Christians in the World', so chiming well with CHRISM and MSE (see www.catholiclabor.org).

In the latest edition there is an interesting piece on Fr. Virgil Michel, OSB, who was prominent in the pre-WW2 movement to reform the liturgy so that it engaged more with the daily lives of worshippers. At a time when the Mass was in Latin and the Priest celebrated with his back to the congregation, Michel advocated using the vernacular and facing the people, proposing evening Mass so that workers could attend. He believed that liturgy is the primary school 'for the development of the Christian' in the world, that a unity of liturgy and life is a strong antidote to our culture's ragged

individualism, with its dehumanising elements. A community transformed by worship can transform the world.

Michel understood liturgy to be the active participation of all; as a biography published in 1988 put it, 'The Church should not hide from the contemporary industrial world … but meet it and transform it through the people's work, the liturgy.'

The article reminds us that this is what 'liturgy' means – the work of the people. Thus, if liturgy does not reflect our daily lives and work, and empower us to bear witness to God's Kingdom in that daily life, is it fulfilling its meaning? Food for thought.

Phil Aspinall

Correction:

Dear Pauline

Thank you for the recent issue of Ministers-at-work.

In the review of the ICF book Love@Work I was surprised to read the following: 'There was further growth in networking...and in particular with the Ridley Hall Foundation through which it now publishes jointly the Faith in Business Quarterly.'

The Ridley Hall Foundation changed its name to Faith in Business as long ago as 2008. And since 2018, when I retired from Ridley, it has been a CIO independent of Ridley Hall. Faith in Business publishes the quarterly journal jointly with ICF.

Please include this correction in your next issue.

Best wishes

Richard Higginson

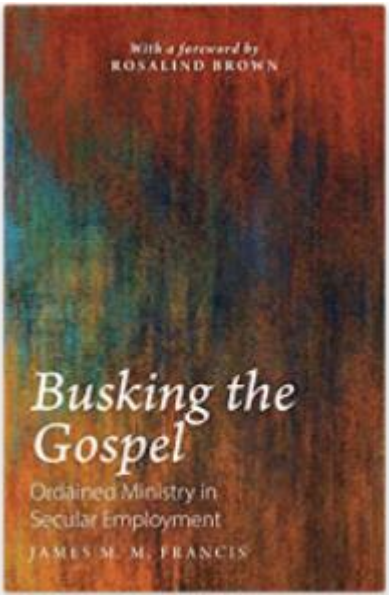
Chair, Faith in Business

Book Review

Busking the Gospel – Ordained Ministry in Secular Employment

James M. M. Francis. Sacristy Press, 2021. 161 pages. £14.99. ISBN 978-1-78959-155-2. Available from the publisher at Book Shop - Sacristy Press, and through Amazon.

Occasionally the adage 'never judge a book by its cover' really is apt, and I'll explain why shortly. But don't assume that the relative slimness of this book lessens its major significance in



the canon of works about MSE; as such it deserves wide reading.

The author, Jim Francis, is steeped in both the theory and practice of MSE. He and Leslie Francis edited an extensive selection of MSE writings as *Tentmaking* (Gracewing, 1998), still an important resource for MSE, and Jim has extensive experience as a practising MSE in various roles (including Lecturer at Sunderland University, and principal of the Durham OLM training course). This depth of knowledge and personal experience shines through *Busking the Gospel.* Jim tested out an early draft of the book as the theme for CHRISM's Reflective weekend in 2019 (which I reviewed in the April, 2019, edition of this journal), which proved the strengths of the model and helped him refine the final draft.

The structure itself is straightforward and invites the reader to use it and the content as a basis for further reading and reflection on their own experience of MSE; a quarter of the book comprises bibliography and notes. Jim rightly points out that there is no single way (nor even a menu) of being an MSE (and 'being' is a key ingredient), as the contexts MSEs work and minister in vary so widely. However, he identifies common characteristics and principles that underly what MSE is, organised as 6 chapters, a Conclusion, and an excursus on how and why Paul is a model for MSE.

Jim's style can at times be dense – I found myself re-reading sections several times, to ensure I understood what he is getting at – yet at the same time can be penetratingly direct. A good example of the latter is his discussion of how public ministry is perceived – by the public, the Church as institution, and theologically – in pages 18-19. This mix is, I think, a strength as it encourages the reader to engage fully with the content. Overall it is certainly a book that challenges assumptions and rewards re-reading.

The first chapter sets the scene, setting out the scope and purpose of MSE, and the context within ministry and mission, citing Austin's definition: 'The purpose of MSE is to deepen the vocation of the whole Church to serve Christ in the world, and to be a representative sign of the presence in the world of the mystery of God.' The chapter invites the reader to think through carefully what it means for them to be an MSE and poses a number of searching questions. It also reminds us that MSE is outward-looking, both for the equipping of others within the church context and ministry to the organisations, communities and people among whom we work.

The next 5 chapters explore in depth particular aspects of MSE praxis: The Characteristics of a busking style, Busking the Gospel: Dimensions, Busking the Gospel: Improvising, MSE and Mission, MSE and Spirituality. In my review of the 2019 Reflective weekend I raised a concern that using the term 'busking' might be misconstrued by some, and I confess to still holding that reservation. As I wrote 3 years ago, a key to understanding the busking analogy is to appreciate just what busking is. In the popular imagination it is often equated with 'making it up as you go along', but while there is a strand in MSE of improvising, being responsive to the immediate (as there is in any missional context – Paul in the Areopagus for example), neither MSE nor busking is 'on the hoof' but a serious undertaking, carefully considered and planned. As I pointed out, prime busking spots are often pre-booked and paid for, with the content of the performance pre-planned, while being flexible to what works in context. MSEs and buskers do extemporise, but also plan ahead and build relationships. Where they diverge is in the long-term influence MSEs have.

In his Conclusion Jim carefully considers how the characteristics of MSE he has described fit together and ventures which elements he considers most significant. I particularly identify with his view that 'the bringing of oneself to the venture' is a key element (p.103), and with the final sentence of this chapter: 'it is … in daily life and work, along with fellow Christians in their discipleship, that MSEs find their vocation and exercise their ministry, and celebrate the Presence of God in Christ.'

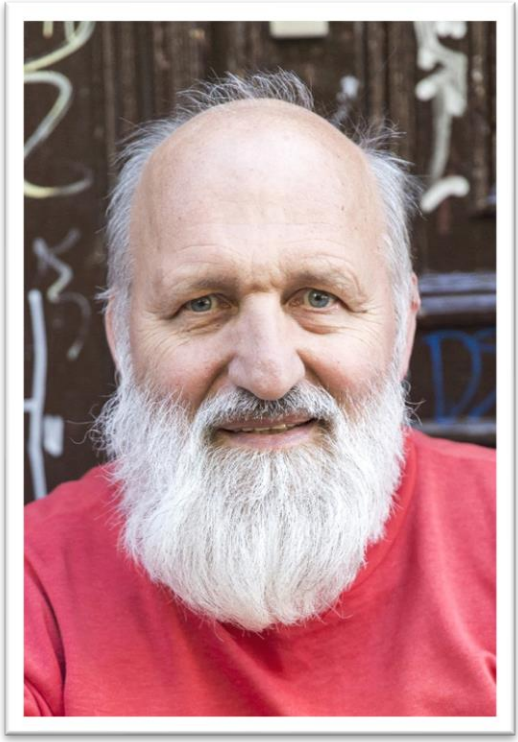
If you haven't already, I recommend getting (and reading) a copy!

Rob Fox

Christian Herwartz – Worker Priest

We learnt the sad news that Christian Herwartz died on Sunday 20th February 20th in Berlin from the consequences of a colon operation. Several of us knew him very well from European Worker Priest conferences and events.

Christian was born on 16th April, 1943 in Stralsund. The family often changed their place of residence due to the father's



professional activity - he was a captain in the German Navy. Christian began his professional life with a mechanical engineering apprenticeship at a shipyard in Kiel. There he switched to the army and trained as a reserve officer. In 1969 he received his high school diploma and joined the Society of Jesus.

After the novitiate, Christian studied philosophy in Pullach and Munich, then theology in Frankfurt up to 1975. During this time he also had himself recognised as a conscientious objector. This was followed by training in metalworking in France, based in Toulouse, Strasbourg and Paris. There he became acquainted with the ideas of the worker-priest movement.

He was particularly impressed by the way worker priests had gone into captivity with prisoners of war. In 1976 he was ordained a priest. In 1978 he started working as a lathe operator and warehouse worker in Berlin and joined the German group of “worker brothers and sisters” (arbeitergeschwister.wordpress.com). At first he lived with a colleague in a workers' hostel and accommodation for foreigners, and then from May 1979 in his own apartment on Naunynstraße in Kreuzberg, which Franz Keller SJ soon joined permanently. People in a wide variety of emergencies were welcome in the shared flat. Christian slept in a room with eight or more beds. In the morning he and his roommates often didn't know who would be in the room by the evening.

His solidarity with marginalized people became more and more important to him. He visited prisoners, showed solidarity with colleagues who were discriminated against racially, took in people who were fleeing and had no papers, and did not shy away from crossing the legal boundaries. "The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mk 2:27) His willingness and ability to address and provoke conflicts - in the sense of prophetic "calling out" - made him well-known and also, in middle class circles, occasionally feared. For Christian, political commitment and faith were inextricably linked. In the guest who knocked on his apartment door, he saw not only the person in need of help, seeking protection, but also the potential host who, like the wanderer on the way to Emmaus, broke bread for his hosts Cleopas and Maria (cf. Lk 24:30).

In 2000, Christian was given early retirement as a result of action taken by his company. At the same time, people contacted him who wanted to live in the Naunynstraße shared flat, so that he could accompany them on retreats. Christian threw himself into it. He began to accompany them in their desire to discover the street as a place of contemplation, in order to be hear the call that is being made there – in the same way as Moses once, on "the backside of the desert" (Ex 3:1), suddenly came across a burning bush and let himself be called there. The “retreats on the street” developed from these first experiences of accompanying others. Over the years, they became more and more of a nationwide and ultimately a worldwide movement, which opened up the gospel to many people in a new and true-to-life way, beyond the limits of denominational, but also social and educational differences.

In April 2016, Christian said goodbye to Kreuzberg, as progressing Parkinson's disease had brought him to his physical

limits. He moved to the Canisius College but kept in touch with the residential community and the street retreats. From March 2020, he moved to the Jesuits' own retirement home in Berlin-Kladow in order to be better protected during the corona pandemic. He stayed in touch with many friends until the last day. His sudden death has shocked many people. His legacy will continue to be discovered and valued along with his many publications.

Most of these are only available in German, but include titles which demonstrate the themes of his life, such as:

- Hospitality Keller/Herwartz 2004
- Looking for the traces of God in daily life of the streets Neuchirchner 2016
- With Bare Feet Echter Verlag 2006
- Experience Brothers and Sisters C Herwartz 2010

By Phil Aspinall, based on an obituary from the SJ, Berlin

Forthcoming Events

CHRISM Theology Discussion Group - Future Meetings

This Discussion Group, which is open to all CHRISM members, provides an online forum where we can reflect on and discuss the theological aspects of our work. We meet monthly by Zoom for an hour and a half. Recent topics have included: The Importance of our Work to God and Us, The

Idea of Rest, What is Work?, Justice at Work, The Kingdom at Work Project, Eternal Life, Christian Perspectives on Conflict in the Workplace, Organisational values - Help or hindrance to ministry in the workplace?, Is it OK to be ambitious?, Who is Jesus?, and Neighbourliness at Work.

Our next meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday, 25 May 2022 from 19.30-21.00 (UK time)** when I will be leading a discussion on "*What is God's economy and how do we measure it?*" This continues to explore our recent theme of how we engage with the economic realities of the world and bring Kingdom values to bear.

If you are interested in joining the Theology Discussion Group, please email me at rev.julian.e.blakemore@gmail.com and I will add you to the invitation list so that you receive Zoom links for this and future meetings.

We look forward to welcoming you.

Revd Julian Blakemore

Chrism Annual Conference: 'Telling our stories of MSE' at The Kairos Centre, Roehampton, London SW15 4JA

The Kairos Centre is an urban oasis in south-west London situated within acres of landscaped gardens and overlooking

the historic Richmond Park. The tranquil setting of peaceful, secluded gardens provides place to pray, space to think and time to meet. The centre is located close to the end of the M3

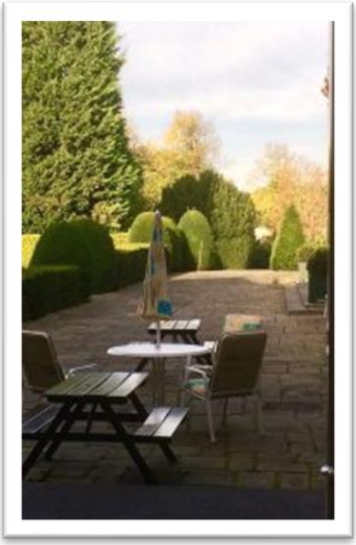
motorway and to Underground stations at East Putney and Southfields and suburban railways at Barnes. Lifts can be arranged. Further details of the centre are available at www.thekairoscentre.co.uk

The Chrism Annual Conference will take place from 15th – 17th July 2022. It will be a chance to tell our stories of our work as our ministry and a time to reflect on our changing workplaces and practices. Arising out of our own stories we hope to explore:

- Reflection on our own work situations
- How the changing work landscape has changed the nature of doing MSE

- The lessons that can be learnt for MSEs for the future

And we hope to enjoy the opportunity to meet each other face-to face after over 2 years. More information is enclosed.



And Finally…..

48 hours

Alone by choice,
This time,
Immersing into love
And justice.

The unfamiliar shapes
Suddenly transformed
Seen from a different place
Make sense.

Strangers who share
Food, chatter,
Form a background,
Their interests and concerns
Washing past,
And left behind
Today.

Birds cry, wind blows,
Time passes bit by bit.
Soon re-entry comes
Demanding,
Connecting:
Work.

CHRISM is on Facebook, 'Ministers at Work':
https://www.facebook.com/groups/129656640430436/

and LinkedIn, at:
https://www.linkedin.com/groups?home=&gid=3756477

CHRISM is the National Association of CHRistians In Secular Ministry

for **all** Christians who see their secular employment as their primary Christian ministry, and for those who support that vision. To further this aim, CHRISM publishes a quarterly Journal, releases occasional papers and organises an annual retreat. Conferences are held regularly and worldwide links pursued.

CHRISM welcomes members, both lay and ordained, from all Christian denominations, encourages them to be active within their own faith communities and to champion ministry in and through secular employment.

If you would like confidential support as an MSE, please contact any member of the Committee (see inside rear cover)
Further information may be obtained from the Secretary or the Journal Editor.
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www.chrism.org.uk

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