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Towards Evolving a Christian Ethical Criteria to Evaluate Economic Development and Policy

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1.1 Introduction

Being a country with a very large number of poor and oppressed people, matters regarding economic development and policy have always been hotly debated in India, more so since the beginning of the shift to more market-oriented policies began in the 1980s.[1] Christians too have joined this debate, becoming fairly vocal especially after the liberalisation policies of post- July 1991 began. However, while joining the debate Indian Christian ethicists and economists have not explicitly spelt out the criteia that they have been using in order to critique the policies that they disagree with. Implicitly there are certainly criteria and criteria with which I agree, but for the sake of a focussed and clear evaluation of Indian economic policy from an Indian Christian perspective I feel that it is necessary certain explicit criteria are laid out. Thus in this paper I propose to set out three simple criteria that I feel are derivable from the Biblical writings and from the writings of the early Church Fathers, in order to judge the rightness of economic development that is taking place and economic policies that are being implemented. While the writings of the Church Fathers are a crucial support to the simple three criteria to evaluate economic policies and development that I am proposing in this paper, I shall beconfining myself to showing how I feel these criteria can be derived from the Bible. Not being a biblical scholar, my approach is to carefully use secondary material to develop my argument, an approach which I feel is valid in the area of Christian ethics. We are free to use the insights that biblical scholars have developed so that they can be applied to particular ethical problems.

1.2 Application of Biblical Ethical Principles to Secular life

It would be foolish to deny that for many people the deriving of criteria to evaluate a secular activity such as economic policy from a religious text acceptable to only one section of the population is inadmissible and even meaningless. One cannot, according to such people, draw conclusions from the Bible about how secular life should be ordered.

The problem with such an argument is, first, that it is based on the view that religious

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faith and secular life should live in totally separate compartments and that scripture and faith do not really have anything to say about how life is to be lived. Further, such an argument seems to suggest that the insights of one religious tradition are only useful for the adherents of that particular tradition and not for anyone else.

In my view, if one is to live a fulfilled life then it needs to be a life that is based on certain ethical principles. Those principles will, in my opinion, most often have a base in religious teaching of some sort. Thus one's faith influences the ethical principles one lives by. One cannot, therefore, separate faith and one's daily life into different compartments. It then follows that it is important for one attempting to live ethically to look closely at the source of one's faith. For a Christian the primary source for the development of that faith is the Bible.

Secondly, in my opinion, the ethical principles that one can glean from various Scriptures (including the Bible), have a validity of their own and need to be looked at by people of all faiths and those of none, just as all people need to be open to reason and the findings of science. Thus if we, for instance, derive ethical principles favouring greater economic equality from the Bible, they need to be taken seriously, not just because they are part of an important religious source, but because they are serious ethical principles that have the backing of wise and holy people to whom we would be advised to listen. While Christians, who believe that the Bible (carefully interpreted) reveals the Word of God must pay attention to its ethical principles, people who are not Christians, I would argue, could benefit by it too. This is because the principles are certainly reasonable, and they have the support of some secular moral philosophers, quite apart from having some sort of religious sanction.

1.3 General Economic Propositions Derivable from the Bible

Even a cursory look at the interaction between God and human beings as recorded in the Bible will show, that this relationship has a very crucial economic and social dimension to it. Indeed, as many commentators have pointed out with regard to the Hebrew Bible, the relationship to the Divine was unmistakably mediated through a person's relationship to his or her neighbour. That is, a right relationship with God could only be achieved through a right relationship with the neighbour in need. As the Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas puts it:

> The spirit of the Jewish Bible lies in the fact that the relationship to the divine takes place through the relationship to people and coincides with social justice. Moses and the prophets were not concerned with the immortality of the soul, but with the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. The relationship to the individual, in which contact with the divine is accomplished, is not a sort of 'spiritual friendship', but a friendship which expresses itself in, gives proof to, and is completed in a just economy and for which every person is responsible.[2]

Sharon H. Ringe in her book entitled, *Jesus, Liberation and the Biblical Jubilee,* puts the same concept thus:

> The political, economic, and social realities of life do not provide mere illustrations of the way in which God's reign is experienced. Rather they are identified as the precise arenas where the impact of God's reign is felt.[3]

The very same views can be found in the New Testament as well. For Jesus, a right relationship with God was impossible without a just and compassionate relationship with one's neighbour in need, as for example the Last Judgement passage in Matthew *25:* 31-46 shows. In the Letters, 1 John 4: 20-21, is an example of the inseparable link between loving people and loving God.

Though it is perhaps possible to find some support in the Bible for almost any form of economic organisation and policy, I do believe that there are some general directions which are repeatedly stressed. And because there is this continuous thread running through the Torah, the Prophets, the teachings of Jesus and the letters of Paul, I am led to believe that the following three general propositions that I am about to state do constitute an authentic Biblical viewpoint on the question of the goals of economic development and of what kind of economic and social arrangements there should be.

1. That all material goods ultimately belong to God and human beings are stewards and trustees of the bounty of God. It is God who is the provider, and all life (human, animal and plant) ultimately depends upon God. From this it can be deduced, that God wishes that the basic material needs of all people be met.
2. That the formation of healthy communities is central to the biblical vision of society. God wishes that people live in communities of love and sharing. Owing to the disruption that unequal distribution of wealth and income can cause to the ability of communities to function in an healthy way, the biblical writers are of the view that material inequalities should be small, if not insignificant. Thus a large measure of equality is needed in order to facilitate community. The ideal, perhaps, can be put as Karl Marx put it in his 'Critique of the Gotha programme', with people giving according to their ability and receiving according to their need.[4]
3. That the natural world is central to God's purposes and should be always treated as such.

As I mentioned earlier, I see that these propositions are prominent in both the Hebrew

Bible and in the New Testament and in the two sub-sections, 1.4 and 1.5, I propose to give evidence for this view.

1.4 The Hebrew Bible / The Old Testament

1.4.1 *Introduction*

Recent materialist readings of the Hebrew Bible have given us tremendous insight into the social and economic structure of ancient Israel. We are now able to build up a very plausible picture of the different stages through which Israel went. The stages were not an evolution of a tribal form of government into a monarchy, but rather a social experiment that came up against heavy odds and whose ideals were then compromised.

According to this sociological view of the time before the monarchy in Israel, i.e. 1250 to 1020 B.C.E., Israel 'was born from a heterogenous crowd of Hebrew slaves run away from Egypt and followed by a "mixed multitude' (Ex.12:3 8), rebellious Canaanite peasants and others who joined the tribal league.'[5] Israel was thus a counter-movement to the societies of Egypt and Canaan, where there was inequality and oppression and where 'some (peasants)

worked for the production of surplus value to be enjoyed and controlled by others who did not work.'[6] There was a break with the prevailing mode of social organization, resulting in an attempt to create a form of economic production where the needs of all were met and inequality was minimal. As Brueggemann writes, summarising the pioneering work of Norman Gottwald,

> Israel is 'a social experiment' in the world of the Ancient Near East to see if a community can be organized in egalitarian (covenantal) patterns, in resistance to the hierarchical, bureacratic modes of the world of the city-states. The alternative model of social organization seeks to distribute power so that all members are treated with dignity', so that all members have access to social goods and social power.[7]

In order to undergird this 'social experiment, covenant-making was very important, the covenant seeking to bind the various participating groups into a community, where leadership is shared and where there is no social discrimination and economic exploitation. It was the 'cultic action of acknowledging YHWH as sovereign Lord of the people implying readiness to do his will, and a sociopolitical action of the covenanting groups which accept a common constitution for their collective life.'[8] In order to protect and promote the life that had been set up through these agreements and covenants, at various times collections of laws were put forward, even though with the establishment of the monarchy in around 1020 B.C.E., Israel had to a great extent succumbed to the kind of social organization that the original pioneers (both Hebrew slaves and Canaanite peasants) had rebelled against.

There are three main collections of such laws. The oldest is the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20.22-23:33) which could primarily have been drafted by the supreme court (consisting of elders and priests) in Jerusalem instituted in the time of Jehosaphat, King of Judah (c.873-849 B.C.E.).[9] The first redaction of the Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomy 12-26) was probably drawn up at the time of King Josiah in whose reign there was a radical reform (II Kings 22:1-23:27). The code was a 'radical revision of the legal provisions found in the Book of the Covenant'.[10] The third code is the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) which was probably drawn up by priests at the time of the exile in Babylon and again was based on existing law codes. Apart from these codes, there is of course the teaching of the various prophets who consistently called for justice to be done in matters of economic organization.

In order to explore fully the various aspects of this we need to specifically look at five areas i.) The Sabbath, ii.) The Land, iii.) Debt, iv.) Slavery and v.) The Environment.

1.4.2 *The Sabbath*

God's overall design for economic affairs can be mapped out to a large extent by looking at the Biblical concept of Sabbath and God's call for His people to 'keep the Sabbath'.

Since the Sabbath rest involves a ceasing from the active provision of one's livelihood, it implies a dependence upon the providence of God. It implies an assertion that God is the ultimate provider of all that we need, and that God is faithful in meeting those needs, provided we follow His commandments. Further, the Sabbath rest goes against human attempts to control nature and maximise profits. It promotes a view that human beings should only take what is 'enough' for their needs, and not what their greed leads them to. As the American

theologian, Ched Myers, writes,

> The prescribed periodic rest for the land and for human labor means to disrupt human attempts to "control" nature and "maximise" the forces of production. Because the earth belongs to God and its fruits are a gift, the people should justly distribute those fruits, instead of seeking to own and hoard them.[11]

This principle is seen in the story of the manna in the Sinai desert [Exodus 16], where the Lord commands the people to collect as much as they need (v.16), and the fact that those who gathered much had nothing over, . . .those who gathered little had no shortage'. [v.18]. The lesson that the Hebrews were to learn from this experience was that God's provision for them was to be shared equally according to need, and that if this pattern of distribution was followed there would be enough for everyone. For the sake of the community there was to be equality.

On the question of relations between the employer and the employee, between master and the slave, the Sabbath was a liberating and revolutionary idea, since for one day in the week both slave and master were equal. The master was not allowed to dominate and the slave not forced to serve, both resting.

As Bastiaan Wielenga writes,

> The institution of the 7th day is revolutionary as it applies to all, high and low, master and servant. It hits at the heart of the slave-system as it prevailed in the ancient world. In that world there has been a clear division between labour and leisure. Labour is the task of slaves and women. Leisure is the privilege of free men. This commandment proclaims a new division between labour and leisure: All shall work, also free men and all shall rest, also the women and slaves.[12]

Similarly J. Eisenberg and A. Abecassis state,

> the liberation of all men from all hierarchy and all domination, even if only for one day a week, was one of the most revolutionary ideas in the Bible.[13]

Thus it is clear that apart from stressing the ultimate sovereignty of God, the biblical idea of Sabbath was a way of ensuring that the basic needs of all people were met, as well as emphasising the essential equality of humankind before God.

1.4.3 *The Land*

As is perhaps obvious, being an agricultural and herding community the primary economic fact for Israel was the Land. Land was thus the fundamental means of production, the key to almost every economic, political and social question. As Walter Brueggemann puts it, 'The Bible is the story of God's people with God's land.'[14] The distribution of land and the use of land were thus crucial for determining the prosperity of people, since using the land was *the* primary economic activity, whether for agriculture or for livestock.

Firstly, Israel was asked to be constantly aware that the Land was a gift from God. That the Land belonged to God, and that the people were only tenants on the Land. As Leviticus *25.* 23 puts it, 'The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are

but aliens and tenants.' Because the Land did not belong to them, the Israelites were to remember that they were dependent upon God for their needs, and not forget to give thanks to God through the tithes of first fruits of produce (Deuteronomy 14. 22-23). As S. Herbert Bess says,

> The proper concept of this divine ownership appears to be that every Israelite proprietor was to regard his holding as deriving from God himself, as though it had been apportioned to him from God.. .There existed the consciousness of an intrinsic equality among the Hebrews before God.

The second point with regard to the land was the fact that within the Torah and the teaching of the prophets, there was a great deal of emphasis on the need to maintain a degree of rough equality within Israel in the distribution of the land. This was because of the need to maintain the sense of community among the people, a sense that would be lost in case there were vast differences in the amount of land owned. This equality in distribution reflected the egalitarian nature of the ethos of Israel, where there was supposed to be no privileged elite or caste system. Instead, there was the view that each person was valuable in the sight of God. As Robert K. Gnuse puts it:

> The Israelite ethos was formed in the crucible of slavery in Egypt and of conflict in Canaan. Regardless of which model is used to describe the conquest, the constituent members of Israel were either escaped slaves from Egypt or lower-class Canaanites in revolt against Canaanite city states. They viewed Yahweh as the liberator of slaves who willed a society in which all members (adult males at first, then later all persons) were politically, socially and economically equal.[16]

The commitment of the writers of the Torah to this 'equality under God', is shown by the different kinds of mechanisms which were put forward as God's instruction in order to ensure that the natural human tendencies towards inequality, hoarding and one-upmanship were not allowed free reign. As the well-known American environmental economist, Herman E. Daly has put it, this commitment to the control of inequality in the Hebrew Bible could have been expressed in terms of an eleventh commandment which would read:

> *Thou shalt not allow unlimited inequality in the distribution of private property*[17]

As Walter Owensby concludes,

> There is running through much of the biblical literature an under-lying assumption of equality and of God's well-being of the whole people and of the whole world, not just of Israel.[18]

With regard to the Land, the principal means of production, the method of approaching equality that was proposed was the year of Jubilee, which was to be observed every forty nine years, as described in Leviticus 25. In this year of Jubilee, the inequalities in land ownership were to be removed, and each Israelite family was expected to either claim back its inheritance or give up what it had accumulated as the case may be. The intention behind this law was to cut at the root of poverty, i.e. the helplessness of those without any means of production. As Conrad Boerma states, 'In the Bible, the right to property is subordinated to

responsibility for the weak members of s2ociety and to their right to the means of production'.[19] With this right to the means of production assured, the Israelite family is guaranteed a basic income which is not only more than the handouts received from tithes and the almsgiving of richer families, but is also a way of safeguarding the self-respect and dignity of the family involved.

Finally, the law of the Jubilee promoted equality by making sure that mistakes made by one particular head of the family, were not perpetuated for all time to come. As Wright says, 'the specific mention of children in Lev. 25. 41, *54* points to the fact that more often than not the Jubilee would benefit the posterity of the impoverished Israelite rather than the person himself.'[20]

The third point that the Israelites were reminded of, was the need for the community to look after its own. Of course the individual was to be primarily looked after by his or her family, but when whole families were poor or destitute, then it was the duty of the kinfolk and the community at large to see that their needs were met. In order for this community care to be carried out, a series of rules or laws were put in place. So firstly, in the earliest code (the Covenant code) the land is to be left fallow every six years, 'so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat.[21] Secondly, the owners of the land are required to leave the gleanings for the poor (Lev. 19. 9-10, 23. 22 ; Deut. 24. 19-22). Thirdly, every third year a tithe out of the produce of the land is to be given to the poor (Deut. 14. 28-29, 26, 12).

When we turn from the Torah to look at the views of the prophets, we see that their primary criticism was that of the rich and their accumulation of wealth. This was mainly because they saw the injustice and exploitation that lay behind the accumulation of land, slaves and houses, for by the eighth century BCE, (the time of Amos, Micah and Isaiah) 'many of the small holdings had been absorbed into latifundia (large landed estates) of a new aristocracy'[22]. Recent proof of the growing inequality that was of such concern to the prophets, comes from archaeological excavations in Tirzah (Tell el- Farah), which 'indicate that in the tenth century B.C. all houses still had the same dimensions and furnishings. Excavations in the same city from the eighth century B.C. show that different districts had come into being: a well-to-do neighbourhood for the rich and slums for the poor.'[23]

Thus Isaiah *5.* 8 denounces those who, 'join house to house, who add field to field' while Micah calls judgement upon those who 'covet fields, and seize them; houses, and take them away' (Micah 2.2a). Hence, even in the prophets there was this strong condemnation of inequality, primarily because of the view that accumulation of wealth and the resulting inequality, was the result of injustice and the impoverishment of the weak. The prophetic vision was that of greater equality, as seen from the words of the Prophet Ezekiel writing in the time of the exile (Ezekiel 47.14), while Micah, of course writing much earlier, 'looks forward to a time when, with equal and secure access to the means of production, each person will again sit "under his own vine and under his own fig tree" (Micah 4. 4, cf. Zechariah 3. 10)'.[24] Similarly the vision in Isaiah 65. 17- 25 contains a strong economic element - as the first part of v. 22 reads, 'They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat.'

1.4.4 *Debt and Slavery*

The other two main areas where economic and social problems are seen within the Hebrew Bible, are the areas of Debt and Slavery. In a way they are inter-linked because the presence of large unpayable debts were very often a cause for people ending up as slaves.[25] As is still the case in the poorer parts of the world (where farmers often lead a precarious existence), it did not take much misfortune to tip the farmer into the waiting arms of the money-lender. High taxes exacerbated the situation in the many years when Palestine was under foreign occupation.

1.4.4.1. Debt

The prescriptions of the Torah with regard to Debt are three-fold. First, the instruction that debts be remitted every six years (Deut. 15. 1-11), secondly that no interest is to be charged from a fellow Israelite (Deut 23. 1 9-20; Lev. 25. 35-37) and thirdly that there must he limits to the kind of items taken as collateral (Deut. 24. 6, 10-13). No item that is crucial for earning a livelihood, such as a millstone, 11 may ever he taken as pledge for a loan.

It is my view that all these checks upon how debt was to be incurred and to be paid back, were because of a basic viewpoint that inequality within the Israelite community must not be allowed to get out of hand. The remission of debt every six years within the nation of Israel made sure that a temporary misfortune due to drought or sickness, for example, did not become a burden for ever as is still the case with 'bonded labourers' in India. There is a limit to the amount which a money-lender can extract from the misfortunes of a fellow Israelite. In fact, the prohibition on the charging of interest to a fellow Israelite was designed to prohibit any taking of advantage of a person's weakness. As Donald A. Hay says, the reason for this prohibition on interest is presumably that a fellow Israelite who is in need is to be treated as one who needs to be helped, rather than as an opportunity for financial gain.[26]

Hence the view is that financial gain must not be allowed to dominate human relations, which instead, must be based on the fact that each person is equally loved by God and is made in the image of God. Hence, Walter Brueggemann writes, '[the] Debt Sabbath is a dramatic affirmation that human society doesnot rest finally on buying and selling, owning or collecting.'[27]

1.4.4.2 Slavery

With regard to the attitude towards slavery, Israel was certainly unique in the Ancient Near East in that it did view the existence of slaves as unnatural and abhorrent.[28] The reason for this is not hard to find in that the Israelite nation consisted of liberated slaves rescued from the clutches of the Egyptians. As Deut. 15.15 states, 'Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you.' The importance given to the need to release slaves, is seen in the fact that commands for the manumission of slaves are found in all three law codes. i.e. the Book of Covenant (Exodus 20.22 - 23:33), the Deuteronomic Code (Chapters 12-26) and the Holiness code (Lev.17-26). Exodus 21.1-6 and Deut.15.12-18 command that Hebrew slaves be released every six years, while the commandment in Lev. 25.39-43 speaks of the release of, presumably Israelite slaves, in the year of the Jubilee, i.e. every forty nine years. Here there seems some sort of a contradiction because of the big

difference in time, as well as the fact that different terminology is used for the slaves. Wright is of the view that the word 'Hebrew' in Exodus and in Deuteronomy is not an ethnic term but a sociological one denoting a landless person who ' survived by selling his services to an Israelite household.'[29] However, in Leviticus the reference is to an,

> *Israelite householder...* who has been forced by poverty to mortgage [his land] and then sell his family and himself into the service of a fellow Israelite. The first is 'Hebrew' class slavery; the second is Israelite debt slavery.[30]

Here again, behind these prohibitions on keeping slaves indefinitely lies a view that all people are equal in the sight of God and it is unnatural for anyone to be a slave of another. As Paul D. Hanson has elaborately explained in his book, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible,* the Exodus experience was fundamental in the formation of social ideas among the Hebrew people. The common experience led them to embrace notions of community and equality unknown in time Ancient Near East. Thus Hanson writes,

> The early Yahwistic community was committed to the *equality* of its members, and indeed we can recognize a persistent egalitarian impulse influencing the laws and institutions of early Israel. Both in terms of the benefits enjoyed by the members of the community and the responsibilities they bore towards others, the emphasis placed on equality and inclusiveness stands out within the ancient world.[31]

From this overall look at various kinds of commands related to economic policy found in the Hebrew Bible, I think it is clear that within it there is a very strong preference for economic organisation to be community-based rather than individualistic in character, with a thrust towards equality in the economic sphere as a means of preserving the health of the community. As M. Douglas Meeks puts it:

> The laws that spring from the Torah are meant to preserve the political and economic equality that Yahweh means to create as deliverer of Israel.[32]

1.4.5 *The Environment and the Hebrew Bible*

Writing on the presence of ecological themes on the Hebrew Bible has, most often, concentrated upon the accounts in Genesis I, where God gives the human race 'dominion' over non-human life (Genesis 1.26) and Genesis 2 where Man is put in the Garden of Eden and told to 'till it and keep it' (Gen. 2.25). From these verses it is deduced that since the word 'dominion' means responsible lordship, and since the Man was told to tend the garden, there is certainly evidence that the Hebrew Bible is strongly in favour of 'responsible stewardship' of the natural resources of the earth.

Many modern authors have found this Biblical vision too anthropocentric, and have blamed it for the current environmental crisis.[33] According to them, the trend of treating nature as something separate from God was begun by the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, in response to this criticism, a rediscovering of ecological concerns in the Bible has taken place, quite apart from the development of ecological theologies which seek to explain the care of God for creation, either through the work of the Spirit of God or in ways of relating nature to God through relationships such as that of the human-body relationship or family relationships.[34]

In fact in the Hebrew Bible, commitment to the health of the natural world is not just a matter of giving human beings advice about responsible use of the natural world (which could be interpreted as an anthropocentric activity), but is rather, fundamental to the whole purpose of God in creation. Thus, there is seen, particularly in the Hebrew Bible, a fundamental link between injustice, greed and sin in society, and ecological destruction. This link for the writers took the form of a 'cosmic covenant' that connected 'all orders of creation and linked them with rituals, ethics and society of humans' and was recorded in Genesis 9. Hence, within the Hebrew Bible there are clear signs of the view that injustice in the social order, particularly in the conduct of kings, leads to disharmony in the ecological order. Thus, for instance, Jeremiah links ecological devastation and the abandonment of the worship of God, and the obeying of the commandments of God, when he says in chapter 18. 14-16a,

> Does the snow of Lebanon leave the crags of Sirion ? Do the mountain waters run dry, the cold flowing streams? But my people have forgotten me, they burn offerings to a delusion; they have stumbled in their ways, in the ancient roads, and have gone into bypaths, not the highway, making their land a horror, a thing to be hissed at for ever.

The call for all creation to praise God in Psalm 150 shows us that God depicted in the Hebrew Bible has not just provided for human beings, but has provided the things necessary to live for all creation, and therefore expects a response of gratitude from even the trees and the birds. This concern for the needs of the land and the animals is seen in the requirement that even they be given a Sabbath rest. Thus Exodus 23.10-12 speaks of the need for the land to be left fallow in the seventh year and for domesticated animals to be allowed to rest in the seventh day of the week. As Robert Murray puts it,

> When the Bible's teaching on God's creation and our place in it is duly digested, I believe that it cries out to us 'you are brothers and sisters of every other human, and fellow creatures of everything else in the cosmos; you have no *right* to exploit or destroy, but you have *duties* to all, under God to whom you are responsible.[36]

Thus the writers of the Hebrew Bible do not have an anthropocentric view, but rather a view that takes the needs of the land and the animals into account. However, since it is the human race that is responsible for the imbalances that appear, it is the responsibility of human beings to fulfil their duty to look after God's creation. It is therefore clear then, that only ecologically sustainable economic development has the support of the writers of the Hebrew Bible.

1.5 The New Testament

The propositions that I have pointed out in the introduction remain valid for the New Testament as well. Through Jesus' life and teaching, as well as in other parts of the New Testament, the desire of God to provide for the needs of all, the call to community and greater equality is reiterated. The natural world is very much part of the salvation that is inaugurated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1.5.1. Dependence upon God and God's provision for all

It is clear from Jesus' teachings and practice, that while he expected people not to lay too much store by material wealth, but rather to depend upon God for the fulfilling of their needs

(Matthew 6.25-34, Luke 12.16-21), it is God's will that the basic needs of all people be met. As Douglas Meeks writes when talking of the Jesus movement,

> Poverty is not from God. God intends daily bread sufficient for all of life's needs, even for the unrighteous and ungrateful (Luke 6:35). Jesus seeks to live in a new community in which the needs of one person are met by the gifts of others, where a supportive community suffers and rejoices together and where one can trust God without fear or anxiety over earthly needs.[37]

Thus, in the prayer that he taught his disciples, Jesus specifically tells them to pray that their daily, basic needs are met, symbolised by the prayer for daily bread (Matthew 6.11, Luke 11.3). Similarly, Jesus is concerned when the crowd that has heard him teach is hungry and far from home and places where food is easily available (Matt. 14.13-21, Mark 6.35-44, Luke 9.12-17). Rodney Wilson summarises this point when he writes that

> ... there is the assumption [in the New Testament] that the basic human needs of everyone should be satisfied, and it is the duty of all Christians, especially the rich, to ensure this happens.[38]

In the various letters a stress on the need to provide for the basic needs of the poor is also present. Thus, for example, Paul makes a collection for the needs of the church in Jerusalem (I Cor.16.1-4, II Cor. 9) while the author of the First letter of John berates the believer who does not share by writing,

> How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?[39]

1.5.2 *Equality in Wealth and Income in the New Testament*

If there is one commandment that runs through the entire New Testament it is the commandment to "love one's neighbour as oneself." The commandment is found in all three Synoptic gospels (Matt. 22.39, Mark 12.31 and Luke 10.27). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul says that the whole law is summed up in a single commandment "You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Galatians 5.14). In the letter of James this commandment is called the royal law (James 3.8).

Translated into economic terms, the commandment means that each obeyer of the commandment must seek to provide those in need (the Parable of the Good Samaritan establishes that the person in need whom I can help, is the neighbour) with the same economic opportunities and goods as he or she possesses. Just as one would wish to have one's basic needs met and various opportunities to grow provided, this commandment asks us to think about providing the same to those in need. This commandment is therefore ultimately calling for the provision of the basic needs of all people, as well as a great measure of equality, for giving to another in need what one would wish for oneself must eventually lead to a great measure of material equality.

It was the following of this commandment that led to the community being formed in Acts, where those who had more wealth sold their goods in order to provide for the needy. While this happened only among the followers of Jesus, the commandment that Jesus gave

is for all humankind, and the church by practising the commandment becomes the prototype of the new creation that has been inaugurated with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1.5.2.1 Jesus and Equality of Wealth and Income

It is my argument in this paper that Jesus was primarily trying to build a loving, sacrificial community of persons committed to one another and completely committed to and dependent upon God. Because of the nature of such a programme there was the need for much greater economic equality than prevailed in Jesus' time. Conrad Boerma perhaps captures Jesus' feelings well when he states,

> [In] the Bible ... poverty is not just a matter of politics; it is just as much an attack on the unity of the people of God. It is intolerable for the community that one person s status should be totally different from that of another.[40]

As Douglas E. Oakman too says, Jesus did not see the economic problems of his time and place as a function of 'too few pies', rather, future economic pies would have to be divided differently.[41] Hence much of his teaching stressed, a) the need for recklessly generous giving by the relatively wealthy with no expectation of return, which Halvor Moxnes following Marshall Sahlins (a writer on Tribal and Ancient economics) has called Generalized Reciprocity.[42] b) the theme of the general reversal, when the rich of this world would be overthrown and their riches not of any use to them. c) the blessedness of the poor (and in Luke the condemnation of the rich) and those utterly dependent upon God, and d) the need for all people to be treated equally.

The concept of Generalized Reciprocity of generous giving of gifts with no expectation of a return is repeatedly stressed by Luke's Gospel. In Luke 6.29b-35 the hearers are urged to give and lend without expecting any thing in return. As v.30 reads, 'Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.' In Luke 14.12-14, the hearers are asked to invite those to banquets who cannot return the invitation, i.e. the poor, the crippled, and the lame, and the blind. Such giving is not only an advance towards greater equality, but also builds up community at the same time as providing for the needs of the poor. Further, we see that in the eschatological banquets (Lk.14.16-24, 15.11-24, 16.25, 22.18) the faithful poor are lifted up and the inequality between people found on earth is broken down.[43]

However, for those who refuse to share in such a radical way and allow their incomes to be brought to a lower level, there is the warning of the great reversal of fortunes. As Brueggemann says, 'The radical inversion of landed-landless arrangements is evidenced in the teaching of Jesus'[44] and further that, 'Jesus' ministry is to restore the rejected to their rightful possession.'[45] Mary speaks in such language in the Magnificat (Luke *1.53,* 'he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty') while in Luke's gospel, especially, Jesus condemns differences in wealth.

Jose P. Miranda in his polemical but persuasive book, *Communism in the Bible,* has strongly argued that Jesus was never against material resources *per se* but that, 'it is *differentiating* wealth, or relative wealth that he condemns.'[46] Thus, in the story about Lazarus and the Rich Man found in Luke 16.19-31, the reason that the Rich man is condemned, is not

because he did not care about poor Lazarus sitting at his doorstep but because of the fact that the rich man 'lived in abundance and Lazarus in misery. What is punished in torment, is that some are rich and others are poor.'[47] While this may be a bit of an extreme kind of exegesis of the passage, it still does present strong evidence that points to the fact, that for Jesus extreme differences in wealth of the kind between Lazarus and the Rich man were intolerable in the new Kingdom of God that he inaugurated. The Woes pronounced on the rich in Luke 6.24-25 and in James 5.1.-6 are similarly against great differences in wealth and especially condemn the rich who do not share of their wealth. In the new community of time Kingdom of God, great inequality in wealth has no place.

It has been argued that when the writers of the various Synoptic Gospels were attributing words to Jesus, they were really reacting to the economic and social circumstances that they were faced with. Thus, according to this argument, the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31) comes from a time when there was tension between the poor members of the early Church and the Sadducees.[48] The basic view therefore is, that the criticism of the rich is not an original part of Jesus' teaching, but rather is a social construct of the early church.

Sociologically it does seem a neat argument to say that sects that are discriminated against by the rich develop a theology of reversal and hence we have Scriptural passages that talk about an eschatological reversal. However, from the biblical criticism point of view, proof is needed that Jesus definitely could not have used the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. While it is true to say that taken at face value the story seems to teach that 'wealth itself is punished and poverty is rewarded'[49] (a teaching that Jesus did not give), I believe that this is probably a wrong interpretation of the story. First, it is not possible to say that, according to Jesus, the Rich Man was blameless just because the text does not say that he harmed Lazarus in any way. The fact that he did not share with Lazarus the goods that God had given him was, in Jesus' sight, injustice enough for him to be punished. According to Jesus, the very same sin is present when we do not love our neighbours as ourselves, something we have to do if we are to attain eternal life according to the second of the two main commandments (Mark 12.29-31).

Secondly, it is not true to say that this kind of judgemental view is not found in Jesus' teaching and hence Jesus could not have used these words, for if we look at the pericope on the Judgement of the Nations found in Matthew 25. 31-46, we find that our salvation is dependent upon us actively relieving the suffering of the poor, the destitute and so on. Living comfortably with our wealth and ignoring the poor is not an option. Hence, if we believe that Matthew 25.31-46 does contain the genuine words of Jesus,[50] it is very likely that Luke 16:19-31 also contains the authentic words of Jesus, because the thrust of the two passages are very similar. In Luke the rich man is punished because he refused to share anything with Lazarus, the importance of which is stressed by the account of the last judgement in Matthew 25: 31-46.

Thirdly, in condemning the Rich Man, Jesus is not condemning wealth and glorifying poverty, but rather is condemning the Rich Man for not sharing his wealth, i.e., for not viewing the huge gap between him and Lazarus as abnormal.

As mentioned earlier, the theme of the blessedness of the poor was stressed in the

Beatitudes, in contradiction to the prevailing view of the Pharisees in Jesus' time who saw riches as a sign of divine blessing. Jesus not only called the poor blessed, but he also closely identified with them though his natural economic background seems to have been that of a middle-class craftsman.[51] Thus in Matt. 5.3 and in Luke 6.20 the poor are called Blessed.

The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matt 20.1-16), though usually interpreted as a parable about the calling of all people into the Kingdom can be interpreted as an example of the kind of equality that Jesus is encouraging, an equality where it could be said that each person must *give* according to his or her ability and each person must *receive* according to his or her need. Thus, in the parable the labourers have all offered their services; they have given according to their ability. However, some were not asked to work, something that was not in their hands At the end of the day the labourers were all paid equally, assuming that all had families and therefore the same needs. Jesus begins this parable with the words, 'For the kingdom of heaven is like this' thereby implying, that this was the kind of economic arrangement that God expects from us on earth.

Given this body of evidence, I think it would be fair to say that for Jesus, large inequalities in wealth and income were incompatible with the kind of community he was seeking to form.

1.5.2.2 Paul and the Equality of Wealth and Income

Paul too stresses the importance of equality for the maintenance of healthy relationships, at least within the Christian community. In his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter eight, Paul talks about the collection of relief for the famine hit Christians of Jerusalem. While urging the churches of Corinth to be generous, Paul says that this is necessary, in order that there be equality *(isotes)* He then goes on to quote Exodus 16.18, which refers to the time that the Israelites were in the wilderness and were given 'manna'. At that time the amount of 'manna' that each Israelite household was able to collect was equal, since 'those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.' By quoting this verse of the Hebrew Bible, Paul reveals his preference for a situation where there is much sharing of material goods. While here the sharing is to be done among believers in Christ, it seems logical that Paul would wish that this be so for all humanity. As the evangelical ethicist Ronald J. Sider writes about this passage,

> The key word is the Greek word *isotes* which clearly means equality. But equality in what sense? The Corinthian church apparently had a current abundance and the Jerusalem church lacked necessities. Paul was urging the kind of sharing that would result in an equality of income at least to the level where everyone enjoyed the basic necessities.[52]

Further confirmation of Paul's desire for there to be equality among the believers is found in his discussion of the Eucharist found in his first letter to the Corinthians. Here Paul condemns a Eucharist where there is social division between the rich Christians who arrive early and eat, not waiting for the poorer believers who arrive later. As he writes, 'When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's Supper' (I Cor. 11.20). The social divisions have meant that the body and blood of the Lord have been consumed in a manner unworthy of the

body of the Lord, the church. As Demetrius C. Passakos states,

> According to our analysis, the deeper meaning of the Eucharist, as it is expressed by Paul in 1 Cor. 11, 26, is the profound contest against social divisions in order that equality and justice may prevail in the community. We could paraphrase Paul in is *(sic)* facing of the problems in the Eucharistic gathering: "Do you want your gathering to be a truly eucharistic one? then you should have equality and justice in the community! Do you want justice and equality? These are some of the requirements for the Eucharist![53]

While both time examples that I have given of Paul's inclination towards material equality pertain to the believers, it is clear that Paul must have seen such a state of equality-within-community as being the ideal to which all humankind must aspire, through the work of God the Holy spirit.

1.5.3 *Community in the New Testament*

It is probably fair to say that Jesus' teaching about economic life centres around the foundation of a community of believers who share their life together, depending upon God and with a thrust towards equality, seeing that the needs of each person is met. As Oakman says, 'Jesus points to a community based upon loving service to the least (Mk.10.44) and the worship of God alone (Mk. 12.29-31).[54] This kind of a community began with Jesus himself, who with his disciples, shared a common purse as can be seen in John 12.6 and 13.29, where we are told that Judas held the common purse. It seems that the community consisted of the twelve and other disciples, including some women who seem to have provided most of the finance (Luke 8.1-3). Jesus' reaching out to those marginalised by mainstream Jewish society (such as the tax collectors, prostitutes and Samaritians) was motivated by a desire to 'rebuild community between socio-economically alienated groups'.[55]

This kind of community, begun by Jesus and his disciples, seems to have been carried on in the early church. Thus Acts 2.44-45 and Acts 4.32-35 contain the description of the communal arrangement that the early disciples had, when they held goods in common and they sold their possessions in order to provide for the needs of those in need. Whether these communal arrangements have paradigmatic value is a point of quite some controversy. While Jose P. Miranda says that 'no one has come up with a better definition of communism than Luke in Acts 2.44-45 and *4.32-35,*[56] some like Luke T. Johnson say that here Luke is just trying to appeal to the Hellenists who would understand these verses as depicting a higher form of friendship than that described in Greek literature.[57] Hengel, on the other hand, following the views of Ernest Bloch, says that the expectation of the *eschaton* had a very strong influence on the community, but does believe that such a community existed.[58] Because of this expectation, the community was able to hold all things in common and to sell their possessions in order to provide for those in need and '[abolish] complete penury among their own members and at the same time make a very, good impression on outsiders'[59] Other commentators have said that the communal arrangement died a fairly quick death because it was practically unsustainable. To this Miranda has replied, that the communal arrangement died out because it was impossible to 'have a communist island in an economic sea characterized by the exploitation of some by others'.[60] Justo L. Gonzalez, in a thorough refutation of some of the points of view expressed against the genuineness of the early church community, comes to the conclusion that, 'what Luke was describing here was the

understanding of the Christian *koinonia* that had been at the very heart of Paul's ministry',[61] where *koinonia* is defined not only as the feeling of fellowship, but also and essentially as the sharing of material goods.[62] Gonzalez then goes on to identify the presence of this notion of sharing or *koinonia* in the later books of the New Testament.[63] Thus, in spite of Johnson's view that Luke's report in Acts 2.44—45 and 4.32—37 is doctored, I do believe that the community described in Acts was genuine and paradigmatic. Even though it was influenced by time expectation of the *eschaton,* and may not have not been organised but rather was spontaneous, it still gives us an example of the spiritual maturity that is a Christian ideal. Such an arrangement is only possible when the spiritual maturity of the members of the community has reached a level when they are willing to share everything with one another. It is to this spiritual maturity and therefore to this kind of community that the teachings of Jesus and his disciples found in the New Testament are calling its readers and hearers.

1.5.4 *Creation in the New Testament*

According to the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the transforming event in human history, the vindication of all that Jesus stood for. It is also the event, when 'the original goodness and moral significance of the created order, and of humanity's significant place in that order, are reaffirmed and restored.[64] The death and resurrection of Christ bring nearer the transformation of the created order, for 'through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross' (Colossians 1.20). Until that process is complete, Paul views the whole of creation as groaning like a woman in labour, waiting for the new, restored creation to emerge (Romans 8.18-23).

Thus salvation in the New Testament is not only the restoration of the relationship between God and human beings, but includes the reconciliation of nature and human beings and the reconciliation of human beings to one another. Hence it is true that Christ atones for our debts to the creation, to one another and to God.[65]

It is therefore clear that the health of the environment is very much part of the concern of God the Holy Spirit, as He seeks to draw human history towards its 'final fulfillment in the eternal plan of God which is revealed in Jesus Christ.'[66] In order that this plan may be fulfilled, we are called upon to co-operate with God the Holy Spirit as He seeks to encourage humankind to use the natural resources of the world in a sensitive and sustainable manner.

1.6 Conclusion

From our discussion of the Bible, it is clear that there is present in it a great concern that the basic material needs of human beings be always provided for. Good economic policy must therefore, focus a lot of its attention on the meeting the basic material needs of all people. It is, however, envisaged that the meeting of these needs is primarily within the context of community, where there is substantial sharing between those who have and those who have not. This itself, leads to greater equality between members of the community. However, the Bible also sees considerable material equality as important for the healthy functioning of communities. Hence, in order to facilitate the functioning of healthy communities, good economic policy will focus on reducing the inequalities of wealth and income within communities to as great an extent as possible. Apart from this, there is considerable evidence

of concern for the natural world in the Bible. Good economic policy will ensure that the health of time environment is maintained, and the use of resources is sustainable in the long run.

1.7 Christian ethical criteria for judging economic development and policy

Having completed our survey of what can be learnt about what the goals of economic activity should be from the Bible, it is now time to formulate Christian ethical criteria for judging economic policy and development. While it is obvious that Scripture cannot provide a detailed critique of economic policy, I believe that it does provide us with sane practical guidelines, which if implemented, will bring a nation much more into line with God's vision and purpose for creation.

1.7.1 *The First Criterion to judge economic development*

By basic needs in this paper, I mean those material needs which any human being must obtain in order to have the capability of developing the potential which God has placed within him or her, given the circumstances in which a person is placed. While a human being has many non-material needs, such as the need for affection and a sense of identity, in this paper I will concentrate on the material needs. This is firstly, because I believe that they are absolutely fundamental even to the achievement of many of the non-material needs. Thus, there is no point, for instance, in the fulfillment of the non-material need of participation in decisions that affect one, when non-fulfillment of one's health needs makes it impossible to attend meetings where these decisions are taken. Similarly, without the fulfillment of the basic need of education and the ability to read and write well, the need of freedom from being unjustly treated by others is rather difficult to implement. This is because unless people have a minimum of education, it is fairly easy for them to be deceived by corrupt politicians and officials, devious commercial traders, money-lenders and the like. The second reason for concentrating on basic material needs in this paper~ is because it is expected that governments elected by the people go a long way towards providing them. The same sort of expectation pertains in India too, where politicians routinely make manifesto promises to fulfil the basic material needs of people at the time of seeking election.

Thus in this paper, I would define basic needs as the provision of adequate food, shelter, sanitation, health and education. The provision of all these needs would provide a base upon which other non-material basic needs of human beings, such as the need for affection, participation, identity and so on could then be obtained.

From the Bible it is quite clear that the basic needs of human beings are a high priority. When basic material needs and basic human rights are denied, voices from Scripture (and also the Church Fathers) arise that condemn that situation. Both the Bible and the Church Fathers make clear that God has provided enough for everyone's needs, and thus see the denial of basic material needs as a result of injustice and selfishness on the part of some. They are condemned for their attitude of selfishness.

Thus the first Christian ethical criterion that I am proposing that may be used to judge the 'goodness' or 'rightness' of the economic policy of a government is the criterion of meeting basic material needs. If a government does not succeed in arranging its economic

affairs in such a way that the basic material needs of all its population are met, then that policy has not met the first Christian ethical criterion and hence cannot be considered as good or satisfactory development by Christian ethical standards.

This criterion of the provision of basic material needs holds even if it is evaluated by means of reason. Secular theories of justice would also agree that the basic material needs of human beings must be met by a programme of economic development. For the philosopher, Bernard Williams, society should attempt, as far as its resources allow, to fulfil the basic needs of its members.[67] 'The need for basic goods in order to survive is taken for granted. In the same way, Peter Singer says that the second premise of an obligation to assist the poor is that 'Absolute poverty is bad'.[68] There is thus no doubt that even secular ethicists (who do not have a religious basis to their ethical premises) agree that the fulfillment of basic needs of people is fundamental to 'good' development.

1.7.2 *The Second Criterion to judge economic development*

A second point that is very obvious from a reading of the Bible is that the formation of community is at the heart of God's intention for humanity. It seems clear to me that God wills not only that human beings have a close relationship with God but equally that relationships among us humans be close and interdependent. While it may be argued, that the vision of community is confined to the people of Israel in the Hebrew Bible and to the believers in Jesus Christ in the New Testament, it still seems to me evident that God being the God of all creation, wishes that community spread outward from the people of Israel and the Church to all humanity. The people of Israel are called to be 'the light to the nations' (Isaiah. 42.6, Isaiah 49.6) while the Church is to become the 'first fruits of the new creation' (James 1.18). What happens in the Church is to be a prototype for the society at large.

This emphasis upon the importance of community leads the biblical authors (as well as the Church Fathers) to condemn inequality in the distribution of wealth and income. They can see that such inequality undermines the foundation of healthy community life and therefore call for a radical sharing of goods such that a great measure of equality in the distribution of material goods is the inevitable result. Thus the Jubilee ordinance, for example, is partly in order to reduce land inequality and thereby restore the Hebrew tribes and people to the unity that they had during the period of the Exodus. One could also validly argue that one of the reasons why in some of the Gospels Jesus asks the Rich Young Ruler to sell all he has is so that he may be free from the obstacle that prevents him affirming solidarity with the poorer followers of Jesus.

Apart from the argument that inequality in wealth is disruptive of healthy community life, there is also the strongly held view within the Bible that since all people are made in the image of God and loved equally by God and since all wealth ultimately belongs to God, it follows that a high degree of equality in the distribution of God-given wealth is just.

Thus it is my contention that the Bible teach us that the formation of healthy communities is very important, and that sustainable community life requires a certain measure of material equality, though it is clear that greater equality in material matters is not the sole determinant of how good community life is. The flourishing of community life depends upon many other factors as well, such as common language, beliefs, leadership and so on. These other factors

are sociological, cultural and spiritual factors and therefore cannot be created by economic policy. What is within the domain of the government is economic policy and the allocation of resources. Thus, if governments are to be faithful to the vision of community found within the Bible and the teachings of the Church Fathers, economic policy must promote an equitable distribution of wealth and income.

Thus the second Christian ethical criterion to judge a nation's economic policy that I am proposing is the criterion of material equality. Since greater material equality increases the chances of (but does not guarantee the existence of) healthy communities, a Christian ethical criterion to judge the rightness of economic policy is whether the policy reduces material inequalities as low as is possible, given the need to maintain material incentives for jobs that are difficult and highly skilled, as well as higher incomes for those who have greater needs. The more effort is put into reducing material inequality in a non-violent and humane way, the better is the economic policy according to this Christian ethical criterion.

Turning to secular philosophers who rely on reason in order to put forward their arguments, we find that the reduction of economic inequality is a goal in their writings as well.

The Harvard philosopher John Rawls in his book, *A Theory of Justice,* defines justice as fairness and sees inequality in wealth as only being justifiable if it is to the advantage of the least advantaged.[69] Rawls puts forward this principle, which he calls the 'difference principle', as logically following from a situation where people (who are originally all equal) decide about how income is to be distributed in the new dispensation. He assumes that there is a 'veil of ignorance' in front of each of these people as to what they can possibly gain in the new situation. They will, he concludes, decide that the best option for each of them would be for there to be equality in the distribution of wealth, since in this way, none of them will be worse off than the other. Rawls has been criticised in many ways, but it remains the case that it is logically possible to arrive at a distribution of wealth that is equal without assigning any moral value to equality as I have done. Peter Singer too, finds that his ethical principle of equal consideration of interests leads him to the conclusion that this principle would only fully be realised in a society where each person receives in accordance with his or her need and gives in accordance with his or her ability.[70] This would be a society where the only inequality that remains is that which necessarily must be there.

I turn now to dealing with the three basic arguments against material equality that are usually employed. The first, that the search for equality may lead us to welcome a situation where material incentives are reduced in such a way that the better off are made worse off without the worst off being made better off. The second, is that the search for equality means taking from people what is rightly theirs. The third objection to equality, is that it may in fact reward those who are lazy and punish those who work hard.

At the outset I must make clear that I am not arguing in favour of blind economic equality that takes no notice of the varying and unequal needs of people. Clearly, it would make little sense for the distribution of income to be such that a family with five children, including one that is handicapped, receives the same income as a family with only one child who is also healthy. Rather, I am arguing in favour of at least that much economic equality,

as would make differences in income and wealth no longer an obstacle to the formation of healthy communities which, as I have indicated earlier, I see as the will of God.

Considering the first objection, I notice that it ignores the value of relationships and concentrates on income. However, in my view, it is quite possible that people may be better off having better relationships because of more economic equality (which may result in lower income fur some) than being financially richer with not such good community relationships. A study in the United States, quoted by Peter Singer has shown, that the number of people who consider themselves 'very happy' has 'hovered around one third [of the population] since 1950',[71] even though material wealth has increased quite considerably since then for all people there. The conclusion that Singer comes to is that,

> Once we have satisfied our basic needs, there is no level of material comfort at which we are likely to find significantly greater long-term fulfillment than any other level.[72]

Since greater economic wealth does not always lead to greater happiness, while better community relationships (partly a product, I argue, of greater economic equality) invariably does, it stands to reason that this first objection has little basis.

Even if one accepts the argument that what people are always looking for is greater production, it is not entirely obvious that greater economic equality will result in lower production. This is for a variety of reasons.

First, greater economic equality puts in the hands of the poor resources that they lacked earlier which enables them to raise their productivity to a level higher than when they were working, as say, an agricultural labourer in the fields of a landlord. Secondly, as R H. Tawney pointed out in his classic work, *Equality,*

> Efficiency rests ultimately on psychological foundations. It depends, not merely on mechanical adjustments, but on the intelligent collaboration of human beings, whom hunger may make work, but mutual confidence alone can enable to cooperate.[73]

It was Tawney's view that mutual confidence required equality.

The second objection to greater economic equality that is given is that it involves the taking of something that rightly belongs to a person and giving it to someone else who had no right over it. This is the basic argument of the American philosopher Robert Nozick's, 'entitlement theory', in his book *Anarchy, State and Utopia.* Beginning with a distribution of wealth that is initially just, he then argues that provided some one builds up a fortune by legitimate means, governments have no right to re-distribute this wealth. The rich are therefore entitled to their wealth and the poor have to accept that.

The problem for other secular philosophers with this kind of an approach is that it does not show how such an initial fair distribution of entitlements takes place, and what the principle of just acquisition must be.[74]

From a Christian point of view this view is false because it assumes that we humans actually own what we possess when no one in society challenges that possession. As pointed out in this paper the Biblical view is that everything belongs to God. Thus in actual fact we humans are just tenants or stewards or trustees of what ultimately belongs to God. If that is

the case, there can then be no objection to re-distribution of wealth if God wills it, since wealth belongs to God in the first place. Hence the second objection to greater equality, in my view, stands on shaky ground.

The third objection to greater equality is that it means taking away from the hard working and rewarding the lazy. This objection would be right if the kind of economic equality that I am advocating would involve giving everyone in society exactly the same income, regardless of their needs and contribution. There would then inevitably be people who would sit back and wait for their pay-cheque without doing a spot of work. Such an attitude would only be possible in the kind of individualistic society that capitalism produces. However, in the kind of community life that the Biblical material points us towards, such behaviour would not be tolerated. As St. Paul says, 'Anyone unwilling to work should not eat'. (II Thessalonians 3.10). Pressure would always be brought to bear on the lazy to pull their weight. Thus in a way, community life facilitates equality, while greater equality encourages community life. They are to an extent interdependent. However, while the creation of greater economic equality is something that is in the hands of economic policy makers (whom I am concerned with in this paper) the other factors that favour the formation of community, such as common values, language, good leadership among others are not. Thus I would say, that logically, the presence of economic equality is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition for the establishment of community. Since it is a necessary condition, it is the duty of government economic policy to pursue greater economic equality, while it is the duty of spiritual and community leaders to encourage people to work together.

1.7.3 *The Third Criterion to judge economic development*

Concern for the health of the environment is something that I have pointed out as being strongly present within the Bible. Modern day environmental scientists have published a mass of literature which points to the danger of abusing the environment. Owing to this concern, it is clear that all economic development must be ecologically sustainable and environmentally sound. Thus my third Christian ethical criterion for judging economic development and policy as 'good' is whether the economic development is ecologically sustainable. Economic development that has the result of causing environmental destruction and is not ecologically sustainable in the long run cannot be called "good" economic development using this Christian ethical criterion.

Thus the three ethical criteria that I have derived from the Christian sources of the Bible are the following:

1. Economic development and economic policy that is ethical according to the Christian tradition is that which concentrates upon providing the basic material needs of all people; needs such as food, shelter, clean water, education, and sanitation and medical facilities.
2. Since an equitable distribution of wealth and income facilitates the formation of community (which is a central goal of the Christian tradition), economic development and economic policy that is ethical according to the Christian tradition will result in as much material equality among the citizens of a country as is possible, given the need to maintain some form of material incentives.
3. Since economic development that is destructive of the natural world and consumes

resources so rapidly that the quality of life of future generations is threatened is quite obviously unethical development by the standards of the Christian tradition, economic development and policy must be ecologically sustainable in order for it to be considered ethical. Only economic policy that results in ecologically sustainable economic development can be judged as ethical according to my Christian ethical criterion.

1.8 Conclusion

Through this paper I have attempted to delineate three simple ethical criteria that can he derived from biblical sources. The usefulness of these criteria is that they enable us to focus on the critical issues in economic policy and development enabling us to ignore the mountain of jargon and statistics that is often thrown at us by politicians, bureaucracts and economists, all perhaps interested in hiding their actual vested interests.

NOTES

1. In fact the first major step in the direction of greater encouragement to private participation in industry was taken in the first central government Budget during the Emergency (the Budget for 1976-77). See D.L.Surendra, 'Economic Diary', *The Guardian* (Madras), 54(1976), p.52.
2. Quoted in Roelf Haan, *The Economics of Honour: Biblical reflections on Money and Property*, (Geneva: W.C.C., 1988), p.42.
3. Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, *1985)*, p.92.
4. Quoted in Pulin Nayak, 'On Equality and Distributive Justice', *Economic and Political Weekly* (henceforth abbreviated as *EPW)*, 26(1991), 583-590, p.597.
5. Bas Wielenga, *It's a Long Road to Freedom: Perspectives of Biblical Theology* (Madurai, India: Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, 1981, Third Edition, 1998), p. 100.
6. Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel 's Communal Life*, ed. by Patrick D. Miller, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1994). p.58.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Bas Wielenga, *It 's a Long Road to Freedom*, p.104.
9. Bas Wielenga, 'Biblical Reasons for Resistance against the Sway of Capital *Vidyajyoti*, 60(1996)45-58, p.51. Here Wielenga is following the work of F.Cruesemann, *Die Tora: Theologie und Sozialgeschichte des alttestamnentlichen Gesetzes*, Munich: Kaiser, 1992.
10. *Ibid.*, p.52
11. Ched Myers, 'God Speed the Year of Jubilee: The biblical vision of Sabbath Economics', *Sojourners Online*, May-June 1998, (http://www.sojourners.com/soj9805/980520.htm), p.4 of 7.
12. Bas Wielenga, *It 's a Long Road to Freedom*, p. 131.
13. Quoted in Leon Epsztein, *Social Justice in the Ancient Near East and the People of the Bible*, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM, 1986), p.131. See also Timothy Gorringe. *Capital and the Kingdom: Theological Ethics and Economic Order* (London: SPCK ; Maryknoll: Orbis. 1994) p.62f.
14. Walter Brueggemann. *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, (London: S.P.C.K., 1978), p.12.
15. Quoted in Christopher J.H.Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Hebrew Bible*, (Exeter, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1990), p.63
16. Robert K. Gnuse, *You Shall not Steal: Community and Property in the Biblical Tradition*, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985), p.65.
17. Herman E. Daly, *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainiable Development*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p.206.
18. Walter L. Owensby, *Economics for Prophets*, (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), p.119.
19. Conrad Boerma, *Rich Man, Poor Man and the Bible* , (London: S.C.M., 1979), p.43.

20. Christopher J.H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land,* p.124.
21. Exodus 23.11. (NRSV). In the Sabbatical rules mentioned in Lev. 25. 1-7, however, there is no mention of the produce of the fields left fallow being for the poor and wild animals.
22. Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics amid Social Change,* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1982), p.66
23. Cited in C. Boerma, *Rich Man, Poor Man and the Bible,* p. 1 9. 'This view is challenged by Morris Silver in his book *Prophets and Markets The Political Economy of Ancient Israel* (Boston : Kluwer-Nijhoff Publishing, 1983) who claims that Roland de Vaux's conclusions were affected by biblical perceptions from the prophets. Silver's argument is the modern neo-classical one: that limits on acquisition of land and the payment of interest on loans had the potential to reduce the living standard in absolute terms' (p.242).
24. Stephen C. Mott, *Biblical Ethics amid Social Change* p.69
25. cf. Bernhard Lang. 'The Social Organization of Peasant Poverty in Biblical Israel', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (JSOT),* 24 (1982), *53-58.*
26. Donald A. Hay, *Economics Today: A Christian Critique,* (Leicester: Apollos, 1989), p.36.
27. Walter Brueggemann. *The Land* p.64.
28. Christopher J.H. Wright, *God's People in God's Lamid,* p.239.
29. *Ibid.,* p.250.
30. *Ibid* It is also possible that the longer time before slaves are released in Leviticus has something to do with the fact that Leviticus was primarily written in the Babylonian exile arid therefore this longer timeframe seemed sensible to them. Conversation with Bas Wielenga, Madurai, India, 28/01/2000.
31. Paul D. Hanson. *The People Called. The Growth of Community in the Bible,* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), p.469.
32. M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 84.
33. The most famous example is Lynn White's essay, 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis', *Science, 155* (1967), pp.1203-7.
34. Examples are Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An ecological doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM, *1985),* Grace Jantzen, *Gods Womid, God's Body* (London: DLT, 1984) and Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).
35. Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics,* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.168.
36. Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London:
37. M.Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) p.1 15.
38. Rodney Wilson, *Economics, Ethics and Religion: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Economic Thought* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) p.72. In opposition to the argument in my succeeding sections, Wilson does not think that the New Testament emphasises the value of material equality. It only stresses spiritual equality.
39. I John 3.17 (NRSV).
40. Conrad Boerma, *Rich Man, Poor Man and the Bible,* p.66.
41. Douglas E. Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day,* (Lewiston, U.S.A.! Queenston, Canada: The Edwin Mellor Press, 1986), p.213
42. Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke 's Gospel,* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp. 155 —*157.*
43. M.Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist,* p.115.
44. "Walter Brueggemann, *The Land,* p.172.
45. *Ibid.,* p. 174.
46. Jose P. Miranda, *Communism in the Bible,* (London: S.C.M., 1982), p.2 1.
47. *Ibid.,* p. 24.
48. David L. Mealand, *Poverty and Expectation in the Gospels,* (London: SPCK, 1980), p.48
49. *Ibid.*

50. This seems to be the view of Joachim Jeremias who writes that 'although [the pericope] may not be authentic in every detail, [it] contains, in fact, 'features of such startling originality that it is difficult to credit them to anyone but the Master himself. Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, trans. by S.H.Hooke, 3rd· rev. edn. (London: S.C.M., 1972), p.208.
51. Martin Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church*, p.27..
52. Ronald J. Sider, 'Towards a Biblical Perspective on Equality: Steps on the Way towards Political Engagement', *Interpretation:* 43 (1989) 156-169 (p.167).
53. Demetrius C. Passakos 'Eucharist in First Corinthians: A Sociological Study', *Revue Biblique* 104 (1997) 192-210 (p.205).
54. Douglas E. Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of his day*, p.218.
55. Ched Myers, 'Jesus' New Economy of Grace', *Sojourners Online* July-August 1998, (http:// w.sojourners.com9807/980723.htm), p.3 of 5.
56. Jose P. Miranda, *Communism in the Bible*, p. 1
57. Luke T. Johnson, *Sharing Possessions : Mandate and Symbol of Faith*, (London: S.C.M., 1981), p.1 28f.
58. Martin Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church*, pp.31-34.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 45
60. Jose P. Miranda, *Communism in the Bible*, p.9
61. Justo L. Gonzalez, *Faith & Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and the Use of Money*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), p.86.
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67. Bernard Williams, 'The Idea of Equality' in *Philosophy, Politics amid Society ~Second Series,,)*, ed. by Peter Laslett and W.G. Runciman. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), 110-131.
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69. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp.75-83.
70. Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, p.40.
71. Peter Singer, *How are we to live: Ethics in an age of Self-Interest*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.59.
72. *Ibid.* p.61
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