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J. A. WALTER

SALVATION AND WORK:

A CHRISTIAN CRITIQUE OF THE MODERN IDEOLOGY OF WORK\*

A Christian ethic for work needs to begin with a sociological description of work in modern society. Dr. Walter describes the current ideology that work provides a man with worth, and then criticises this in the light of the Christian theme of grace. A guaranteed income system that would replace the present social security system is one example of how grace could be embodied in the economy. This was the 4th paper to be presented at the VI Symposium on Ideology and Idolatry in British Society on 19 May 1979.

*Introduction: On the Place of Sociology in Ethics*

In this paper I shall attempt a Christian critique of the ideology of work that is current in modern industrial society and in particular that found in modern Britain.

A possible starting point might be a brief outline of biblical teaching on work, to be followed by its application to the modern situation. Such an approach might fall into two traps. First, it would assume that what is meant by work today is to be identified with work in its biblical sense. This by no means follows. As members of contemporary society, our definition

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\* I am thankful for comments on an earlier draft presented to a seminar at Oxford in November 1978. The article is a development of chapter 2 of the author's book *A Long Way from Home* (Paternoster Press 1980).

of work is ideological and derived from that society, so that what *we* mean by work may be an entirely non-biblical concept. Our first task then is to identify the modern definition or ideology of work *before* we turn to the Bible.

The second trap is that the end result of searching the Bible may prove to be a bizarre collection of references apparently unconnected with the central themes of the gospel, to which they are merely tacked on in a wholly arbitrary way.<sup>1</sup> (Compare irrelevant Christian treatments of the state that focus on Romans 13, or views of work based on the injunction in 2 Thessalonians 3 to the effect that if a man does not work neither shall he eat.) This method leaves Christians from other cultures or with different political leanings free to tack on other and contradictory theologies of work, etc.

In this paper, therefore, we shall seek first to clarify what is commonly understood by work in modern society, we shall then be free to examine this idea of work (highly critically, as it turns out) in the light of some central Christian themes. Finally we shall suggest an alternative conception of work that may be appropriate to modern industrial societies.

What I am advocating is, then, that a sociological examination of things as they are should precede a biblical exegesis of how things ought to be or might be. Ethics must not be left to the theologians! This is not, however, to advocate the conventional positivist distinction between descriptive (sociological) facts and prescriptive (biblical) values, for the sort of descriptive sociology I am recommending is itself informed by biblical ideas. Two advantages of describing a situation from a sociological standpoint before theological ethicising may be observed:

(a) If we start by enquiring what the Bible teaches about e.g. work, there still remains the problem of cultural translation: how will teaching about work in ancient Israel provide specific guidelines for work in a modern context? One procedure that has been proposed is to translate specific biblical teaching about specific social matters into abstract general principles which may then be reapplied in the modern or any other situation<sup>2</sup>. The difficulty with this approach is that there are two stages of translation, both of which are subject to the translators' bias, and in any case it seems unwise to invoke abstract 'principles' which certainly were not in the typically concrete and specific thinking of the biblical writers. The procedure advocated here, rather, applies the central themes of the gospel as agreed upon by wide consensus within the church direct to the contemporary situation as identified by a careful use of modern social science. No abstruse heuristic devices like 'underlying principles' need be invoked.

(b) Whatever else may be said of Edward Norman's Reith Lectures, he may be thanked for pointing out the 'me-too-ism' of much contemporary Christian social thinking. Christians often imbibe ideologies from the surrounding 'secular' culture, and then baptise them as Christian. Many of the so-called 'biblical principles' about social matters referred to above are of just this nature: rationalisations for contemporary secular wisdom. The only way to guard against this danger is to clarify, *right at the beginning* of our ethicising, what are the contemporary secular ideologies about work, the family, or whatever we are studying. If our biblical exegesis then simply reiterates the contemporary ideology, we should immediately be suspicious and invite others to examine critically the process by which we have come to our conclusions.

#### *The Ideology of Work in Modern Society*

What is counted as work today? Not only what do individuals count as work, but also what counts as work in terms of employment, in law, in the social security system, and in other public structures? What is the modern view of work? I submit that in modern society *work is any bounded period of time spent by people, by virtue of which they deserve and receive payment*. Five elements in this may be noted, (although it is only the first two that we will be concerned with in the rest of the paper).

(1) *Payment* must ensue as a result of work. Thus, if a painter and decorator paints your house, or if the garage mends your car, this is counted as work because they get paid for it. But if you do your own home decorating or car maintenance, this is not work because you do not get paid for it; instead it is called 'leisure'. The amateur, whether painter, potter or golfer, sees himself engaged in play, a hobby or leisure; but when he goes professional and gets regularly paid for it, then he and others come to see it as work. Activity which cannot be called leisure but which nevertheless is not paid (such as manning the Samaritans telephone or hospital visiting) cannot be called work; instead it is 'voluntary work'. The same definition is found within the social security system in which every week in Britain over a million unemployed are confronted on the counter where they sign on by a prominent notice which says "Before claiming, please tell the clerk if you have done any work since last claiming benefit", by which is meant, Please tell the clerk if you have received any *income* from time spent in the last seven days.

(2) *Payment is deserved* and *necessarily* results from work. Time spent that results in payment is not necessarily work: a day at the races or a night at bingo that results in a fat haul is not work because financial reward accrues as a result of chance; there is no guarantee that payment will ensue as a result of this time

spent, and payment ensues because of luck rather than because it is deserved.

(3) Work must take place within a *bounded* period of time that has a definite beginning and a definite end; the time that is called work must be clearly distinguishable from the time that is called leisure. People do not see themselves as working every hour of the waking day.

One reason why housework, motherhood and childrearing are so often not seen as work (in a male dominated society) is that they do not fit these first three criteria in the definition of work: (i) Housekeeping and other allowances to the wife do not follow but precede housework. (ii) The wife's allowance is not granted her as a deserved reward for her work, but simply as a response to her status and rights as a wife. Thus when the children eventually leave home, the mother's personal allowance is not reduced by the husband on the grounds that now she has less work to be paid for. (In fact it is likely to be increased now that the departure of dependent children leaves more money over for the couple.) (iii) There is no bounded period of time during the day in which housework and motherhood take place; they are literally full time occupations.

(4) The time that results in the receipt of money, if it is to be counted as work, must be time spent by a *person*. The income from invested capital is not work, since this is time spent not by a person but by money.

(5) Work in modern society is not *activity* which results in payment, but *time spent* which results in payment. A considerable proportion of what is counted as work has nothing to do with productive activity: this may range from official and brief coffee breaks to several hours a day — as a student I once 'worked' doing nothing six hours a day for the GPO parcels service. Work cannot be defined as a list of productive activities: *any* activity or *any* passivity can be either work (= paid) or leisure (= unpaid). Usually making automobiles is work, but there are a few who make their own as a hobby. Usually activities such as watching television are leisure, but film critics do it as work. Even the ultimate passivity of sleeping can be work, as with the paid subjects of certain psychological experiments: this is time spent which results in payment, and is therefore work.<sup>3</sup>

In modern society, then, work is reckoned as any bounded period of time spent by people, by virtue of which they deserve and receive payment. This does not, of course, apply universally among mankind. For example, in a near subsistence rural economy (such as in the middle ages, tribal societies, or ancient Israel) work, if such it may be called, (1) did not

necessarily result in the payment of money; (ii) did not guarantee reward (the harvest could fail or the hunt be unsuccessful); (iii) did not take place within a bounded period of time (the daily round was determined by sun, season and weather: life consisted of this daily round, and was not broken up into discrete segments of 'work' and 'leisure'); and (iv) work necessarily involved activity. There is nothing God-ordained or timeless about work as we currently understand it.

This paper will focus on *the relation of work to money*. The idea that work is done for the sake of the money it earns is the main reason why people work. True, some people work partly for the satisfaction of doing a job well or for the sociability it entails with fellow workers, but mostly people work for the money. This is taken for granted at all levels. Conventional economics sees the prime purpose of industry as making a profit and the prime intention of the worker as selling his labour for the highest price, other motivations being seen as secondary, uneconomic or irrational. In Britain, the tax system is criticised by politicians, economists and laymen because "it doesn't make it worth working". This happens both at the top of the supertax bracket where it is not worth putting in extra work because it is mostly taxed away, and in the poverty trap at the bottom where an extra pound of earnings leads to the loss of possibly rather more than a pound of welfare benefits and allowance. All this assumes that the chief reason people work is that they want the money.

(This view of the relation of work to money is not entirely pervasive in modern society; the traditional notion of the professional calling in which the professional, scholar or artist lives for his work rather than works in order to live, rejects the notion that work is what one gets paid for. But the calling is not the dominant work ideology in modern society. Indeed, outside of their own community, the 'work' of professionals, scholars and artists is not counted as such by large sections of society. This attitude goes back to the 18th and 19th centuries when aristocrats and professionals did not need to work, and their daily activities of estate management, law, etc., were not called 'work' or 'labour'. These terms were reserved for those who deliberately spent time *in order* to gain money — the 'labouring' or 'working' classes.)

Although people work in order to earn money, money is not the ultimate end. We are supposed to live in a 'materialistic' age, but if you ask people what they live for or what their aim in life is, few will reply 'money'. Rather, the adult male worker may say "I live for my family"; the mother may say "I live for my children"; the teenager, the sink-bound wife yearning for liberation, or the member of an ethnic minority group, may say "My aim is to be free"; while the ambitious may reply "My aim is

to be someone that others can look up to". In fact, people work not for the money, but for the things that money can buy, in particular, security (especially security for their family), a place in society (expressed in terms such as respectability and status), and personal freedom (this is especially why teenagers and women want to work). Given that security, freedom and a sense of place are psychological necessities, work may arguably be described as sacred, as an idol. Without work, man is lost<sup>4</sup>.

In capitalist society, money — and therefore work — is the essential means toward achieving security, status, freedom and an honoured place in society. These things are not free: they have to be bought, and this means they have to be worked for. Work has become a sacred shrine at which men must worship if they are to remain whole. This is generally accepted as quite right and proper. Indeed, work is regarded as a laudable way of earning justifiable self-esteem, social respectability and security for one's family: it is more highly valued than inherited status.

#### *A Christian Response*

How does this modern ideology of the meaning and function of work appear when viewed through the prism of the central themes of the Christian gospel? The view is tinged with sadness and grief: for in capitalist society security, freedom and a place in the scheme of things are not free but have to be bought and striven for. (In socialist societies they are conditional not on work but on political conformity, which is no better.)

In Creation, freedom, security and a place in the scheme of things are offered mankind as free gifts from God. At the Fall, man forfeited these gifts when he rejected the God who gave them, and consequently had to strive unremittingly to regain them by his own efforts. The message of salvation is that in Christ they may once more be appropriated as free gifts from God.

By now it will be clear that work in modern society has little to do with the grace of God shown in Creation and Salvation, but much to do with fallen mankind's attempt to save himself and mitigate the effects of the Fall. If Paul's message to the Jews of his day was that they need strive no longer for salvation through the good works of the law, and if Luther's message to medieval man was that they too could not buy God's favour with their good deeds, then the Christian message today is that an enduring security, freedom and a place in the scheme of things are not to be found through work. These hoped-for fruits of work are as precarious as the salvation that was supposedly earned by legalistic religious folk in days gone by.

Unemployment, retirement, Sunday even, cause work to cease and threaten people's security and identity just as his latest little sin threatens the salvation of the religious legalist. What is involved here has been classically described by Max Weber in his study of the process by which the original Puritan notion of work as a response to salvation degenerated into the capitalist notion of work as the means to salvation<sup>5</sup>.

The meaning and function of work in modern society, then, epitomises the human condition from which Christ offers to liberate mankind. What then would an alternative concept of work look like, if it epitomised the kingdom of God instead? Work would cease to be a means to anything, for everything of ultimate worth has already been given freely by the grace of God. Like the traditional Christian virtues, work would cease to be a calculated means to get others to like and honour us, and would become a fruit emanating from the experience of God's grace. This concept of work is found right at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 1: 26-31 where work is introduced as man's natural response to the abundance of Creation, right through to the end where the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem portrays all human activity as response to and worship of God. Mankind is overjoyed at being a member of God's abundant Creation and a participant in his free Salvation, and works and acts and loves in joyful response.

How is this notion of work as joyful response to membership in Creation to be embodied in society and in economics? Basically, membership of society and of the economy is to be granted freely to everyone, and work is to become a response to rather than a means of achieving membership. Just as access to God's creation and heavenly community is not something that can be earned, so we must abandon the notion that full membership of society is something that must be striven for. I hesitate to use the modern liberal term 'rights', but it is suggestive of what is needed:- the right of every human to belong fully to his society simply because he is alive. The idea of 'human rights' is perhaps a useful way of persuading those who would not accept Christian theology of the need for an alternative conception of work. The rest of this paper will explore one particular way of basing work on membership of society as of right<sup>6</sup>.

#### *The Guaranteed Income*

Accepting everyone as a full member of society is not just a matter of words; it must be embodied in politics, in the law, and in economics. As far as politics is concerned, democracies have come a long way. If democracies are compared with either medieval society or many contemporary societies that do not enjoy civil and political liberties, it becomes apparent that



simply by being born into a modern democracy the individual is valued as a free and responsible person whose freedom is to be protected and whose responsibility and rationality are to be allowed expression in the ballot box. Although this freedom and responsibility may be formally taken away in certain exceptional circumstances such as a state of national emergency or committal to prison or psychiatric hospital, they cannot be removed simply because one is not as gifted and does not achieve so much in this world as one's neighbour.

But the vote alone does not make a person a full member of society. In some 'independent' countries in black Africa everyone may have the vote now, but if the basis for gross economic inequality remains intact and the average black person remains vastly disadvantaged economically then he is far from being a *full* member of society. Certainly this has been the experience of blacks in the USA for decades: they may have had the vote, but they were still second class citizens. Being a first class citizen was conditional on having a white skin. In Britain today, full membership is conditional (for healthy, adult males) among other things on being employed, or at least on wishing to be employed.

Political rights must be supplemented therefore by economic rights if full citizenship is to be a reality for all people. That is, every person should be guaranteed an adequate income simply by virtue of being a member of an advanced industrial society. Various ways have been suggested of implementing this:

(1) All modern governments have become committed to the goal of *full employment*, or at least their rhetoric is committed to it. (Their economists warn them that full employment is not without its costs, and in practice governments do not expect to achieve full employment.) But the goal of full employment is in any case not an embodiment of the notion of membership of society as of right; it still embodies the old ideology that work is a precondition for full citizenship.

(2) The concept of *social security* at first sight seems to embody the notion of economic rights. But unemployment and supplementary benefits are not granted simply because a man belongs to society; they are granted only so long as the recipient shows signs of the work ethic, so long as he continues to try to find what society counts as work and ritually repents for having failed. As the leaflet "Responsibilities of Claimants" that is handed to all those claiming unemployment and supplementary benefits in Britain says:

You must not sign the declaration on your claim form unless you are and were for any day covered by the claim prepared to accept at once any offer of employment suitable in your case....

The social security system merely makes a minor modification to the dominant ideology that a person is worth something only if he works, by adding that he may also be deemed worthy if he *wants* to work; which still maintains the ideology of work as the prerequisite for worth.

(3) A much more radical proposal and one that embodies a Christian view of work is the *guaranteed income*. This is a substance income accorded to every member of society. In addition, those who wish and are able to find paid employment may receive an additional income from their employer. Alternatively they may wish to become self-employed and so earn a supplementary income from their own businesses. On the basis of the security afforded by the guaranteed income, people are *free* to work; and they work *because* they feel they are worth something, instead of working *in order to* be worth something. Worth precedes work, rather than the other way around. Human worth does not depend on the precarious circumstance of having a job. The guaranteed income (g.i.) would be set at the present supplementary benefit level, that is, at a level just adequate for subsistence. (This would have the great merit of abolishing the social security system with its absurd complexities and degrading prying.)

The guaranteed income would introduce a much needed flexibility into work. People would be able without stigma (but with reduced income) to take 'sabbaticals' from work, or to work only part-time, in order to develop creative skills, go back to school, or look after their children. Productivity and creativity would be facilitated. Work would reflect the Christian notion of freedom, rather than the fallen notion of work as grim necessity. This argument for the guaranteed income can be presented in terms that make no reference to the Christian gospel (essential if it is to be taken as a serious political possibility):

Young people growing up in today's world are faced with what could be called economic tyranny. Well-paying jobs in large organisations are available, complete with all the elements generally referred to as the rat race. Other than something like the Peace Corps, however, there are few other alternatives except dropping out completely... At present, there is very little middle ground; for the most part, you are either in the system or out of it, and for many individuals neither alternative is very satisfying. The g.i. would offer a major new alternative.<sup>8</sup>

Associated with the g.i. would be *the abolition of the national insurance stamp*. The present flat rate stamp, payable by the employer for both part-time and full-time workers, is a

disincentive for employers to take on part-time workers and leads to the present situation in which adult males are either employed full-time or not at all.

Even without the g.i., abolishing the insurance stamp and paying instead for pensions, unemployment and sickness benefits out of taxes would be desirable. It would finally scotch the fiction that these pensions and benefits have been worked for and paid for by the individual contributor (and are therefore acceptable). Individuals believe that over a lifetime of work they have paid for their own social security: this is all part of the ideology that security must be worked for and paid for by the individual. In fact, this is a fiction. With rising living standards, it is not possible to pay an individual's pension (whether state or private) out of the sum of his lifetime of contributions; instead they are paid out of the higher level of contributions being paid by current contributors. In actuarial fact, pensions and benefits are not paid by the individual; they derive from the responsibility felt by the representatives of society to maintain the old, the sick and the infirm at a currently acceptable standard of living, simply by virtue of their being members of society. That is to say, actuarial fact reflects the Christian view of worth preceding work, and is to be welcomed; the ideology, bolstered by the idea of insurance, embodies the aspirations of fallen man to save himself, and is to be deplored.

#### *Fears and Reservations*

The g.i. is a somewhat unusual idea,<sup>9</sup> and people are likely to have fears and reservations about it. These fears derive from the challenge the g.i. presents to the present ideology of work: it demolishes the edifice by which people (especially men and liberated ladies) construct their sense of worth and replaces it with a completely different basis for worth and security. Since these fears are deeply rooted in emotions which are fundamentally religious in origin, it is unlikely that reason will do much to allay them. Nevertheless it seems worth while to examine three particular fears and reservations.

(a) *Theological reservations.* One argument against this paper would be that it is not possible to base economics or politics on *grace*. Mankind is fallen, and the kingdom of God can only come among the children of God, not in society at large. My answer to this is that if this is so (and it may well be) then the gospel (rather than odd bits and pieces of Old and New Testament teaching) has nothing to say about work, the economy, or politics. This may in fact be the case, but it does seem worth asking first whether basic christian teaching does in fact imply anything relevant rather than blithely assuming that it does.

Another answer to objections is that by the abolition of slavery economics has been firmly based on free membership of the human community. Abolition ended the idea that a man could only be free and worthy of respect if he could buy himself out of slavery; instead it became widely believed, and is so to this day, that everyone should be accredited freedom and respect as of right. A polity based on grace (inclusion as of right rather than through proof of worth) was also embodied in universal adult suffrage in which the previous notion that people had to buy the vote through wealth and income was abolished. The abolition of slavery and universal suffrage both ensured that all men were reckoned responsible citizens: to forfeit being counted as such they had to act in extremely unsocial ways.

Assuming that those who hold theological reservations about embodying grace in social structures *approve* of universal suffrage and the ending of slavery, the onus is on them to show why they *disapprove* of a guaranteed income. The principles involved are the same. Why should grace be appropriate for the polity, but not for the economy?

(b) *The fear of abuse.* A fear not restricted to theologians, though not unrelated to the theological fear just mentioned, is that people will abuse their g.i. and no one will work. This is similar to the argument of those who resisted the abolition of slavery and the extension of the vote (and also of those who currently oppose political rights for blacks in various countries): the masses cannot be trusted with responsibility, and therefore they are to be denied it. It is also the classic conservative argument against the government taking responsibility for full employment and opposing social security: people will no longer need to work and will therefore no longer want to work.

This argument flies in the face of all the evidence. Despite scare-mongering about social security 'scroungers', work is as popular today, if not more so, than at any other time in recorded history. Even at the height of the famous Puritan ethic of the 17th century, I suggest that most people, (and most people were not thoroughgoing Puritans) were no more inclined to work than today, probably less so.

In fact, the g.i. would actually increase the incentive to work of those few who are presently discouraged from work by the social security system. Those at present unemployed who are qualified only for low-paid manual jobs are little motivated to work since the more they work the less they receive. By contrast, the g.i. cannot be threatened by activity or earnings, and by working more those at the bottom of the economic ladder would benefit greatly.<sup>10</sup>

Also, evidence from those groups of workers who already work on the basis of a g.i. (not necessarily guaranteed by the state), far from suggesting that they abuse their freedom, indicates that some such groups are among the hardest working in our society and even deliberately invent work for themselves. Let us look at some of them:

(i) By far the biggest group working on the basis of a g.i. is the traditional, 'unliberated' housewife or mother. As mentioned earlier, she is granted her housekeeping and allowance by the breadwinner simply by virtue of her status of wife, but within a framework of commitments and obligations. Placed in this financial and moral situation, women work as hard as anyone in the community; indeed, they deliberately invent housework and child care, and have done so ever since the first wives were released from the family workplace of farm or workshop in the late middle ages. I mention this, not to eulogise the role of the stay-at-home wife, but merely to provide evidence that a guaranteed income does not induce idleness.

(ii) Another group working on a guaranteed income provided by either parents or the state are students, to whom we may add those academic researchers who have been awarded long-term grants by research councils and the like. As with housework, there is the combination of the prior granting of money simply by virtue of the status of the recipient (highly intelligent) within a framework of mutual obligations and commitments (although these commitments are not as far reaching as those in marriage). And again, there is no evidence that students and researchers spend their time at the races frittering away their grants; in general they work as hard as, if not harder than, other people.

(iii) A third less obvious group on a guaranteed income comprises aristocrats and those with private means. Although previous eras have known indolent and wastrel aristocrats, the typical aristocrat of today is rather hard working and takes his responsibilities seriously. The classic example is the royal family, and again we see here the importance of a framework of obligations and commitments which induce hard work. (I am no more a supporter of the monarchy than of the unliberated housewife, but royalty provides invaluable evidence of the sense of responsibility shown by those with a guaranteed income.)

(iv) The three groups mentioned above all consist of *individuals* who work on the basis of money first, work next. But there are an increasing number of *companies* and *groups* that work this way. In the traditional *laissez faire* capitalist economy, work had to come first and then profit followed. But in the modern mixed economy there are many instances of grant aids (from government and elsewhere) to organisations as big as giants such as British Leyland and as small and ephemeral as

local arts and community groups. If *organisations* can be funded this way (grant first, work next), then why may not *individuals* also?

In sum, there is plenty of evidence from the odd variety of individuals and organisations who presently work on the basis of a g.i. to suggest that such a system does not inhibit the motivation to work.

(c) *Can we afford it?* Surely the g.i. is impossibly expensive? Economically, it would cost no more than the present social security system (perhaps less because of reduced administration). It would involve a much higher rate of tax for those in work, but they would get this back in their basic personal g.i.

A valid question, though, is whether we can afford such a development *politically*. Would it not greatly exacerbate the power and tentacles of the state in every area of life? Would it not reduce people to utter dependence on the state? In fact it is far from certain that it would actually extend dependence:— we are already dependent for pensions, subsidies, basic services and so on, and politically the g.i. would be a matter of simply reorganising the financial channels through which this dependence operates. Administratively, the system would be immeasurably simpler than the present or any conceivable social security system: government would therefore be more open and more accountable. (There *is* a real problem here though:— the nature of politics is such that a g.i. could only be introduced piecemeal, which would temporarily increase the social security and civil service bureaucracy, which would then resist its own dismantling when the g.i. system proper came into operation.)

The question whether or not we can afford a g.i. may be turned profitably on its head. Can we afford *not* to have such a system? Forecasting the future is an uncertain business (and also an ideological business in that each scenario of the future tends to justify the interests and values of particular groups of people), but one scenario that has raised its head of late is that of mass unemployment due to automation. Should such a situation arise, great difficulties will be encountered if we continue the present ideology of work in which security, freedom and worth have to be bought through work. If we continue to maintain that a man's (and increasingly now, a woman's) worth is based on (or has to be confirmed by) work, yet as a society we fail to provide work for all but a minority, then there can be little doubt that the one occupation that *will* be fully manned in future is psychiatry. A g.i. system not only reflects a Christian conception of human worth, it is also tailor made for an automated future full of wealth and leisure, should such a future ever come to pass.

*Toward an economy of grace*

It may be that a g.i. system will emerge not because of prior change in the ideology of work but out of the necessities of coping with mass unemployment. One of the most interesting moves in this direction in Britain is the Youth Opportunities Programme which operates in accordance with the belief that young people who have never succeeded in finding a job have a right not only to social security but also to work. The Programme advertises itself to businesses as follows<sup>11</sup>:

The idea is extremely simple: If you can take in young people for up to six months, we will pay them £19.50 a week.

Now this particular advertisement is permeated with the usual ideology of work in that it assumes that without paid employment young people will come to see themselves as 'dustbin kids' of no worth, and on this ideological level it is damaging. But it does embody a fiscal principle that is promising in that work is provided on the basis of a g.i. from society, rather than income being earned on the basis of work. Since ideologies often change to accommodate us to changing circumstances, in the long term the economic principle of this Programme may become embodied in other programmes, and form a context for future ideological change in the direction suggested in this paper.

There are many ways in which individuals, small groups and churches can begin to embody the principle of the g.i. A small community can pool its resources and pledge itself to provide subsistence and the possibility of creative activity for all its members. At the church level, I have heard of churches in high unemployment areas arranging to share all the available money and work. At the group level, I have heard of a group of doctors, some staying at home to support the others on the mission field, in rotation. At the individual level, I know of at least one individual who has been on the dole voluntarily for long periods in order to do work that would not otherwise be funded.

Finally, the g.i. is not utopian. It is a concrete possibility for advanced industrial societies with already expensive social security systems. It is only one small step on the way to an economy of grace, for it is only the substratum of the basic g.i. that is premised on grace; above this base, individuals are still free to subject themselves to the capitalist ideology of working for ever more material gain. It is still very far short of the early church pattern of having all things in common, or of Marx's vision of "to each according to his need, from each according to his ability". But it is a

step in the right direction that is feasible *now*. Now is a very good time, for the government is currently reviewing the whole supplementary benefit system<sup>12</sup>; somebody ought to tell them about grace.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 This is not necessarily the case. Jacques Ellul's *The Meaning of the City*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970 coherently relates to the heart of the gospel a thorough examination of scriptural references to the city.
- 2 See, for example, Howard Marshall, "Interpreting Scripture Today", *Third Way*, 18th Aug. 1977.
- 3 The experience of work in terms of time spent rather than as activity does not appear to fit that of some of my professional friends, nor perhaps those on piecework. The issue is complex, but it is worth noting that with the growth of bureaucratically-organised people-processing professions such as teaching and social work there is an increasing tendency to see work in terms of time. Since the productivity of a teacher is very difficult to measure, the educational administrator is concerned merely that the teacher is there in the classroom from 9.30 to 3.30; he is barely concerned with what the teacher is *doing* during that period. A critique of the relation of work to time cannot be pursued here; a good starting point would be E.P. Thompson's "Time, work discipline and industrial capitalism", *Past and Present* 1967, 38, 56-97 in which is described the introduction in the eighteenth century of the element of time into work. My view of work as time is not in any case crucial to the rest of the paper.
- 4 I have explored the idolatry of work in *A Long Way From Home*, Exeter: Paternoster, 1980, ch.2.
- 5 Max Weber: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 1930.
- 6 I am indebted to Haddon Willmer's *Towards a Theology of Politics*, Nottingham: Shaftsbury Project, 1976 for the basic idea behind what follows.
- 7 DHSS leaflet UBL 18.
- 8 W.A. Johnson, "The Guaranteed Income as an Environmental Measure", ch.8 in H.E. Daly (ed), *Toward a Steady-State Economy*, San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1973, p.184.
- 9 Not entirely. It extends the commonly accepted principle of the *child benefit* into a 'human being benefit', and also resembles some *negative income tax* proposals. It has been suggested to the author that it also resembles the '*social credit*', first propounded in 1919 by Clifford Douglas and subsequently advocated by some Christians such as V.A. Demant and the then Duke of Bedford. The social credit involved government putting money gifts into the hands of



