

## **Living Faith in the Economy: Biblical Principles for Living**

**--A framework developed by the International Moral and Social Issues Council, 2012--**

“The idea that if economic life is detached from all moral considerations and left to operate by its own laws all will be well is simply an abdication of human responsibility. It is the handing over of human life to the pagan goddess of fortune. If Christ’s sovereignty is not recognized in the world of economics, then demonic powers take control.”

Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Eerdmans, 1991), p.77

The Bible views all of life as an integrated whole. On this basis, the Christian view of a full life is a life where the person’s ability to realize their full potential in all aspects of life – meaningful work, physical prosperity, enriching individual and community relationships and a deepening relationship with God. God who created us is interested in every aspect of life and wishes us to derive the greatest possible enjoyment in all dimensions of our lives.

This view of life allows us to establish a frame of reference to guide our thinking about the economy, understood broadly as the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. It helps guide personal economic decisions, and also provides a framework to help us make the best decisions about economic policy at a community, national and international level.

Six key signposts emerge from the Biblical text on the economy as part of life.

### ***1. Economy is to be a vehicle of God’s blessing***

The Psalmist declares that the earth and all who live in it are the Lord’s. (Psalm 24:1). God’s plan has always been for all members of the human family to be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). It follows, then, that human institutions should work to bless all people. The economy is but one of many institutions to organize life – a life in which God is completely interested. The economy only functions in accordance with God’s plan when it works to bless a community.

### ***2. This is a fallen world***

A cardinal observation of the Biblical record is that humans are “sub-optimized.” We explain this as the consequence of sin. Sin touches the human race, every person, and every aspect of life, including the economy. Even the best aspects of humanity are compromised by the stain of sin (Romans 3:23). The economy and the market, institutions which can be used to the betterment of all, are compromised. In a sense every economy in this world is inevitably “depraved”- because they reflect the fallen nature of humankind. Even the holiest of people live in economies that are impacted by sin. This means that it is unwise, even delusional, to assume that these human institutions will always work to the benefit of all people, especially the powerless.

Because of the corruption of human nature, no economic system is without failings. The market, which is the prevailing economic mechanism in our times, can too easily lead to exploitation of the powerless. It can lead to over-consumption and indebtedness at a personal and at a national level. Although they will not perfect markets, supervision and countervailing controls can improve their operation for the good of the community and the least powerful.

### ***3. Human fulfilment is to be sought***

God's desire is that all people enjoy life to the fullest. The promise of Jesus was to bring life in all its fullness (John 10:10). This fullness is more than material prosperity alone –Jesus warned about the dangers of gaining the whole world but losing our souls (Matthew 4:4; Luke 9:23-24). In the Biblical view, all of life is sacred, and every dimension of life is of interest to God (Philippians 4:4-7). But material satisfaction is important itself and in the ways it connects with other aspects of human flourishing. Faith appropriately shapes our place and our participation in the workplace.

The bounty and goodness of God's total creation implies that there should be enough available for all to live a decent life. God's creation is generous and His plan is that there be no poverty, deprivation or exploitation.

### ***4. Equal dignity demands economic equity***

Every person has inherent value because they are created in the image of God. It is this divine image which is at the core of human uniqueness in God's creation. Our value is not vested in our economic worth, but in the fact that each of us bears the imprint of God. The Biblical record reveals a God who is interested in the disadvantaged every bit as much as he is interested in the rich. In fact, the Bible indissolubly links spiritual sensitivity, worship and justice (see Isaiah 58:1-8). God's plan of salvation is for all, irrespective of social class, race or gender (John 3:16, II Peter 3:8-9).

The principles of the Bible call for the economy to respect the dignity inherent in every individual and to act to promote justice and fulfilment for all. God's expectation, as revealed in the text of the Bible, is that we will seek to ensure that the benefits of creation are shared equitably (II Corinthians 8:8-12; James 2:5-9). In practical terms, this implies a commitment to end great disparities of wealth.

### ***5. Stewardship is a human responsibility***

From the outset, God intended that humanity should act as stewards over creation (Genesis 1:26-28; Genesis 2:15). Genesis also reveals that God continued to expect this of people even after they sinned (Genesis 3), though God tells us that it will be an onerous responsibility, imperfectly achieved as a consequence. This implies responsibility in how we use the world and how we use anything that is treated as a resource. The responsibility extends to transactions between societies and nations; it extends to ways one generation relates to other generations; it extends to human treatment of land and water and air and non-human animals. To destroy the beauty of the natural world (Genesis 1 and 2) or to fail to work toward the goal of a restored creation (Revelations 21) is a failure in our responsibility to work to speed the coming of God's Kingdom (II Peter 3:12).

Wise stewardship of resources—both natural and human-made—protects future generations and helps us to discipline and manage our lives to avoid the entrapment of debt.

### ***6. Jesus is to be our example***

The witness of The Salvation Army needs to be a witness to the vision of a full, satisfying life, rooted in relationship with God and based on Biblical principles of living life and managing society.

Economic justice is a characteristic of the gospel. The Bible describes the love and grace of God in the example of Jesus who though rich, became poor for our sake, so that by his poverty we might become

rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Life lived according to the values of the gospel will incarnate the reality of that love.