

## **Capitalist Christ or Socialist Son of God? *Towards an Economics of Jesus***

### **Introduction**

In the contemporary public square, Jesus is claimed to uphold and legitimize a variety of economic systems and structures. Lawrence Reed, former president of the libertarian think tank Foundation for Economic Education, wrote a short pamphlet painting the Galilean as a free-marketer *par excellence*, writing that “one can scour the Scriptures...and find nary a word from Jesus that endorses the forcible redistribution of wealth by political authorities...[rather] Jesus’s words and deeds repeatedly upheld...capitalist virtues [such] as contract, profit, and private property.”<sup>1</sup> In contrast, there is a large and long-lasting literature, both quasi-academic and popular, that depicts Christ as the prototypical socialist fighting on behalf of the common, working person. Political Scientist Peter Dreier wrote a short article for the online progressive publication *The Huffington Post*, bluntly claiming Jesus belonged to the socialist tradition. Dreier frames the Nazarene as “[urging] people to be kind to others in their everyday lives... [and] also talking about those in government who ruled over others...”<sup>2</sup> To Dreier, Jesus’ message of radical distributive generosity applies to both man and state. To him, it mirrors the contemporary politico-economic programme of democratic socialism as advanced by popular politicians Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn. Throughout political and economic public discourse, Jesus’ teachings and actions are proof texted as demonstrations of support for mutually exclusive economic ideologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence W. Reed, *Rendering unto Caesar: Was Jesus a Socialist?* (Atlanta, GA: Foundation for Economic Education, 2015), 3, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Dreier, “Jesus Was a Socialist,” *The Huffington Post*, December 25, 2016.

However, I find these “*quests for the economic Jesus*” extremely flawed. In this paper, I contend that characterizations of Jesus as an advocate of any contemporary economic ideology is wholly anachronistic. Jesus, regardless of any Christology which posits his eternal existence, was a contextual figure, born within the very particular social location of rural first-century CE Palestine, then under the imperial authority of Rome. His sayings and actions<sup>3</sup> reflect this context and no other.<sup>4</sup> What can be said about a potential modality of economics from Jesus’ teachings and ministry is twofold: First, he had an overriding emphasis on the care and support for the impoverished. Second, Jesus’ teachings reveal a paradigm of economic interaction that stresses mutual interdependence and general reciprocity (i.e. the giving without expected return) among society’s downtrodden. Through the care for the poor and generous giving of gifts between believers, Christ ushered communities which mimic the radical egalitarianism of the coming Kingdom.

### **The Economic Context of Christ’s Ministry**

A potential criticism that needs to be immediately addressed is concerning the very discipline and practice of economics itself. One may claim that if we cannot attach Jesus to an economic ideology, we also should not associate any notions concerning the economy with him for *economics*, as employed in popular and scholarly discourse today, did not exist as a distinct branch of thought before the 17th/18th-centuries CE. In his influential tome *The Ancient Economy*, Moses Finley wrote that the

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<sup>3</sup> In this discussion, I see no reason to perform an exact exegetical determination of which discourse or miracle was “authentic” to the “Historical Jesus.” The Gospels themselves, with the potential exception of Mark, arose from and reflect the same geographic, socioeconomic, and political milieu of Jesus’ ministry.

<sup>4</sup> This does not mean, however, that Jesus’ ethic *cannot* be applied in a contemporary context. In fact, a most contextually faithful presentation of his ethics will be, I believe, more beneficial to laypersons and ecclesial institutions in their goal towards economic justice as they will no longer be hampered by the potential political implications and baggage associated with “socialism” or “capitalism.”

ancients “lacked the concept of an ‘economy’, and...they lacked the conceptual elements which together constitute what we call ‘the economy.’”<sup>5</sup> While ancient Greeks and Romans engaged in trade and coinage and other materialist ventures, they did not “combine these particular activities conceptually into...‘a differentiated sub-system of society.’”<sup>6</sup> Yet, even though there was not a notion of economics among the ancients that we share, Jesus still frequently spoke about concepts that are completely related to the economy. This includes taxation, money, economic statuses (rich, poor, middling classes), parables filled with agricultural settings and illusions, and the proper place to exchange goods and services. Further, Peter S. Oakes states that the definition of economics as “the study of the allocation of scarce resources” is completely relevant to the first-century CE world— while there was no study for such allocation, it did in fact happen and the ancients did engage with such issues, however unsystematically.<sup>7</sup> Thus, even though Jesus’ ministry did not have an elaborate economic policy proposal, he interacted with and spoke about economic matters, particularly about the allocation of scarce resources, to such an extent that a discussion on the “economics of Jesus” is more than possible.

The economic context of Jesus is twofold: the broader political-economic conditions of Roman-occupied Palestine and the personal occupational setting of the Nazarene himself.

Palestine in the first-century CE shared virtually the same economic system as the entirety of the Greco-Roman world: *advanced agrarianism*. Originally proposed by anthropologist Gerhard Lenski, advanced agrarianism was similar to earlier

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<sup>5</sup> M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Peter S. Oakes, “Economic Approaches: Scarce Resources and Interpretive Opportunities,” in *Studying Paul’s Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods*, edited by Joseph Marechal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 77

agricultural societies insofar as agriculture was the prominent economic base of the economy, yet the former has three distinct characteristics. First, it possessed several new, energy-efficient technologies, such as the iron plough, which “made it possible to achieve greater economic output with less human energy.”<sup>8</sup> Second, advanced agrarian societies can support large standing armies that are professionally trained. These armies are the source of immense geopolitical power for these societies. Lastly, there is rampant and deeply structural socioeconomic inequality. Advanced agrarian societies “had small cities that were inhabited by an elite class who owned large amounts of land that they rented out to fund their comfortable living.”<sup>9</sup> While this modality of political economy was greatly more efficient than previous incarnations of horticultural societies, it was a deeply oppressive one. Significant quantities of food were supplied to massive armies employed to express domination across imperial boundaries and the highly privileged elites exploited the labor of vast swaths of rural workers.

The relationship between urban elites and impoverished rustics was a noticeable source of economic oppression and tension during Jesus’ life. Richard Rohrbaugh characterizes ancient Greco-Roman cities as a practically useless socioeconomic phenomenon, “[they] were neither commercial centers, nor loci of public agencies providing services to residents, nor marketplaces for the surrounding countryside.”<sup>10</sup> They were locations in which the powerful were able to consolidate their control over wealth, land, and people. Yet, this analysis is

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<sup>8</sup> Michael J. Sandford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 16. However, this is not to say that a consequence of advanced agrarianism is technological innovation. Rather, there happened to exist particular economically beneficial technologies in contradistinction to previous agricultural societies, such as the plough.

<sup>9</sup> Sandford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism*, 17.

<sup>10</sup> Richard L. Rohrbaugh, “The Pre-Industrial City in Luke-Acts: Urban Social Relations,” in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, edited by Jerome N. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 144.

equally applicable to Palestine: in the time of Herod Antipas, the region in and around Galilee saw “clear marks of...elite land ownership, and an extractive urban economy.”<sup>11</sup> In James Crossley’s analysis of the urban-rural relations during the time of the Jewish revolt, he notes that cities such as Sepphoris and Tiberias “would have required from the local peasantry both labor and goods, including food for the elite among the urban dwellers...”<sup>12</sup> Cities thus provided no economic benefits to the surrounding peasantry, rather they existed parasitically: they extracted limited physical resources and manpower to construct monuments or provide feasts for municipal patricians. This says nothing about the frequent and heavy taxation (via customs, tolls, tributes, etc.) placed on rural residents by the imperially-sanctioned political and religious elite, which scholars have estimated as being between one-third or over half of a year's total crop.<sup>13</sup> The elites who resided in such cities were entrenched with ideologies that valued wealth and hierarchy. As Finley remarks, “the ancient world was very unambiguous about wealth...[it] was a good thing, a necessary condition for the good life.”<sup>14</sup> Poverty, in contrast, was a shameful position to be in. One scholar notes that “mocking those of a lower economic standing was something of a sport among the upper classes, who would publicly humiliate the poor on account of their poverty.”<sup>15</sup> To the bucolic audience of Jesus, and even among his listeners in cities, urban centers

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<sup>11</sup> Sandford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> James G. Crossley *Why Christianity Happened: A Sociohistorical Account of Christian Origins* (26-50 CE) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, 45.

<sup>13</sup> Sandford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism*, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Sandford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism*, 48.

<sup>15</sup> Ramsey MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations: 50 BCE to AD 284* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 111

were “nothing more than a symbol of exploitation and social segregation,” filled with the unjustly rich and haughty.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, the practice of patronage was extensive among urban elites. Patronage is defined as “a structural principle which underlies asymmetric, personal transactions involving protection and loyalty...[between] two persons or groups of persons.”<sup>17</sup> Patronage-clientele relationships are found primarily in extremely stratified societies, characterized by “extensive and extractive economies.”<sup>18</sup> Patrons, who are almost exclusively wealthy members of the upper echelon in Greco-Roman society, “control access to key social resources and acquire a supporting network of clients.”<sup>19</sup> Clients, in return for utilization of such resources or the privilege of establishing connections with other elites, perform the bidding of their patron at beck-and-call. While patronage provided potentially poor clients the ability to accrue financial and status benefits, it was highly exclusionary and hierarchical. The system primarily consolidated power and wealth among politically connected elites in urban centers. Steven Friesen characterizes patronage as “an exploitative vertical flow of resources...where large occasional benefactions would come from a patron whose wealth was built on the daily exploitation of the masses.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, patronage only further perpetuated economic inequality in Greco-Roman society.

Jesus’ life and ministry began amid this urban-rural parasitic relationship. He was a semi-rural woodworking artisan,<sup>21</sup> who

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<sup>16</sup> Sandford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism*, 23.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Douglas E. Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 194

<sup>18</sup> Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 194

<sup>19</sup> Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 194

<sup>20</sup> Steven J. Friesen, “Injustice or God’s Will? Early Christian Explanations of Poverty” in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, edited by Susan R. Holman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 28

<sup>21</sup> While translations designate Jesus as a *carpenter* (tektōn, τέκτων), Jesus was probably not a specialized tradesman known in contemporary

“came from peasant stock and without question was socialized early to the routines of farming.”<sup>22</sup> His milieu was among the impoverished, rural peasantry—the class systematically exploited by urban elites across Galilee. Yet, it was his occupation in woodworking that allowed him to journey across the Palestinian countryside, and even into major urban centers, in hopes of work. Jesus’ vocational itinerancy resulted in establishing a wide variety of social connections, across economic, religious, political, and ethnic boundaries, not possible within the context of rural village existence. It was in these travels and occupational interactions that Jesus saw the exploitative nature of Palestinian cities and the Roman imperial economic system. He most assuredly viewed the immense poverty that struck many of the peasantry through hard taxation or unfruitful land, while also concurrently seeing the great wealth of the urban elite utilized on an endless number of ancient luxuries. Jesus’ economic theology arose from such experiences and must be read as an attempt to not only uplift the countless urban and rural downtrodden but upend the hierarchical mechanisms by which wealth was consolidated and distributed by imperial and city elites.

### **The Economic Theology of Jesus**

The economic theology of Jesus is a total inversion of the exploitative system of wealth perpetuated within first-century CE Palestine. Not only did Jesus commend the poor and promoted active monetary support for them— along with condemnations against wealth— he also taught a paradigm of economic support that prioritized mutual interdependence and general reciprocity among newly formed kinship organizations.

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culture: one who primarily shapes wood for the construction of buildings. He was, instead, a *factotum* who possessed a diverse set of skills related to woodworking of all types. Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 180.

<sup>22</sup> Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 179.

While it might appear obvious to many that the poor held an important place within the ministry of Jesus in the Synoptic tradition, some within the academy and church have submerged these passages to make room for a completely theological and spiritual Jesus. Evangelical New Testament theologian D.A. Carson puts bluntly that “If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic, he would have sent an economist...But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin...and he sent us a Savior.”<sup>23</sup> To conservative scholars like Carson, the passages where Jesus addresses the financial improprieties of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:23) or the blessedness of the poor (Luke 6:20) are not merely secondary, *they are irrelevant* insofar as they do not possess a spiritual dimension or speak to the salvific importance of the cross.

Yet, such readings are grave misunderstandings of Jesus’s ministry—the poor were at the forefront of his teachings and actions. In Mark, Jesus consistently rebukes the economic systems in place that keep the poor in perpetual poverty, all while keeping the rich with great financial security (see Mark 10:17-31, 11:15-17, 12:40-44). He paints the Temple sacrifices of the Pharisees, an imperially imbricated religious class,<sup>24</sup> as highly exploitative, “they devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers” (Mark 12:40).<sup>25</sup> This is more explicit in Mark 7:9-12, in which Jesus admonishes Pharisees’ practice of corban (offerings to God in the form of payment to the Temple) stating they “have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition! (7:9). As Michael Sanford notes, Jesus in Mark 7 “[condemns] the way in which such a practice deprived the family household of money in order to concentrate more wealth in the Temple

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<sup>23</sup> D.A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 80.

<sup>24</sup> “The Pharisees...like tax collectors and soldiers, appear to function as a buffer between the ruling classes and the peasantry...” Sanford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism*, 56.

<sup>25</sup> All Scriptural quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise noted.



treasury.”<sup>26</sup> Luke’s Jesus includes numerous passages directed at economic disparities, along with eschatological condemnations against the rich—the strongest language against wealth in the Synoptics. In Luke’s Sermon on the Plain, Jesus claims the poor will inherit the Kingdom of God (6:20) and that the present hungry will soon be satisfied (6:21).<sup>27</sup> Jesus says exactly the opposite for the wealthy: “woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation” (6:24). The misery that befalls the financially well-endowed is most evident in the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. The latter is tormented in Hades for flaunting his wealth and fashionable attire, all while the former, who was once “covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table,” is given eternal salvation in Abraham’s bosom (Luke 16:20 NIV). In order for the wealthy to avoid such calamity, they must relinquish their earthly goods. The Nazarene remarks to a rich prince that he must “sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven” (Luke 18:22). Matthew’s Jesus is the least concerned with material inequities. In fact, some scholars have claimed the Matthean portrait of Jesus implicitly embraces the existing socioeconomic structures of Roman Palestine when he quotes Deuteronomy 15:11 in Matthew 26:11: “For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.”<sup>28</sup> However, this interpretation only holds if one ignores many pertinent passages in Matthew’s Gospel, such as when Jesus proclaimed that “[one] cannot serve God and wealth” (Matt. 6:24). In fact, Matthew’s portrayal corresponds with Luke in that Jesus proclaims that the rich cannot even enter the Kingdom of God!

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<sup>26</sup> Sandford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism*, 74.

<sup>27</sup> This is noticeably more radical than Matthew’s spiritualized Sermon on the Mount, which includes the variation “the poor in spirit” and “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”

<sup>28</sup> Sandford writes, “the historical Jesus...subscribed to the hegemonic view of Deut. 15:11, for which fundamental social reform was impossible.” Sandford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism*, 76.

(Matt. 19:24). Further still, Jesus vitriolically chastises the Pharisees for their concern with gold and riches (Matt. 23:16-17) and their apathy towards justice, “For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matt. 23:23). When Jesus claims that the poor will always be among his disciples, surely this is a mere recognition that all societies, no matter how just, will still have an unequal distribution of wealth among the populace (until corrected via the coming Kingdom). Therefore, throughout the entire Synoptic Gospel tradition,<sup>29</sup> Jesus demands charity and justice towards the poor, while simultaneously pronouncing harsh judgement on both the ungenerous rich and the exploitive politico-religious structures which only continually pauperize already impoverished peasants and urbanites.

Beyond a prevailing ethic for the steadfast care of the poor, however, Jesus also taught a paradigm of economic fellowship amongst his followers as an alternative to the oppressive structures of Roman Palestine. In Mark 10:42-45, Jesus lays out a vision for a social organization based, not on unjustly acquired hierarchy, but radical egalitarianism of mutual interdependent support that shunned claims of power or the acquisition of extreme wealth: “whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all (10:43-44). This egalitarianism would be ushered under the notion of *extensive fictive kinship*. As one piece puts it, “the political economy [of Jesus]...[was] based upon Israelite traditions and proclaimed God’s rule, he invariably returned to ordering society around kinship.”<sup>30</sup> Within the “broadened kinship organization,” the exchange of goods and services is “based on general reciprocity”

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<sup>29</sup> I strictly focus on the Synoptic Gospels and not John because the latter lacks the same extended emphasis on the poor as the former.

<sup>30</sup> K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflict*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2008),117.

in contrast to the unequal distribution of resources in which the many give what little they have to the rich.<sup>31</sup>

Douglas Oakman contends that Jesus forged such kinship bonds via an inversion of the patronage system that defined the Roman imperial political economy. Jesus, to Oakman, functioned in his ministry as a “broker,” a figure within the patron-clientele system that worked to connect clients to prospective patrons. In segmented societies, such as the advanced agrarianism of ancient Rome, “mediators or brokers are required to provide links between these two segments of the society.”<sup>32</sup> Jesus, in this role as both an itinerant woodworker and then preacher-prophet, possessed a wide amount of social connections that was necessary for brokers to facilitate links between patrons and clients. Oakman remarks that Jesus demonstrated the characteristic of a broker in that he “mediated between wealthy patrons in socially stratified, first-century CE Palestine and an impoverished hungry clientele.”<sup>33</sup> This meditation is seen most evidently in Jesus’ table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners. In Jesus’ context, the sinners were “often destitute or economically marginal—prostitutes...beggars, those with various diseases,” while the tax collectors were the “well-to-do, but...socially ostracized”<sup>34</sup> These engagements were a means by which connections between disparate social elements, similarly ostracized in status but not wealth, were fostered. This was the process of forming new, fictive kinship organizations. As Oakman writes, “the mutual aid symbolized in eating together *carried over into other spheres of these peoples’ lives...*”<sup>35</sup> Jesus was establishing

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<sup>31</sup> Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflict*, 118.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 195.

<sup>33</sup> Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 196. Oakman also states that in Jesus’ role as a miracle worker, he “mediated as a healer and a holy man between a divine patron and sick or demon-possessed clients.”

<sup>34</sup> Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 197.

<sup>35</sup> Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 197. Emphasis mine.

social connections that lead toward mutually interdependent and reciprocal relationships among the socially despised and economically downtrodden. The table did not have exclusive desserts for high-paying benefactors— there was generous sharing among all. Jesus’ role as a broker is not a legitimization of the vertical, exploitative flow of goods seen in the typical Roman patronage relationship, but rather its egalitarian inversion.

In these new connections, the process of reciprocity and generous gift-giving was the economic mirror of the coming Kingdom of God. As seen in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus taught that there should be a “giving without expecting in return.”<sup>36</sup> Through this new economic exchange, human beings can achieve authentic solidarity that breaks through the violence, brutality, and malignant selfishness cultivated by the conditions of imperialism and economic inequality— generosity, peace, love, and cognizant support for one another is prioritized instead. To Oakman, this universalist message of peace and sharing is emphatically *not utopian*. Jesus’ ministry was an attempt towards a “truly interclass partnership” in which there would be a free-flowing entanglement of goods between all persons in order to meet immediate material needs.<sup>37</sup> This practice itself would lead to the very destruction of class distinctions among participants insofar as wealth is in a consistent flux of redistribution among peoples. This practice of general reciprocity among newly bonded kin reflects Jesus’ call for one being a servant to all. Through this paradigm of economic interaction, the Kingdom of God is, to an extent, actualized when money is given to the poor, hierarchy is inverted, and generosity defines all social relationships.

Oakman, however, states that Jesus’ message of general reciprocity depends on a prior mass redistribution of wealth away from a central source (i.e. the Temple, potentially even an

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<sup>36</sup> Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 215

<sup>37</sup> Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 216.

imperial/royal treasury, etc.) which is destroyed either by man or angelic forces in the eschaton. In fact, against Oakman's claim that Jesus' was essentially not utopian in his economic ethic, he remarks the Nazarene "hope[d] for the abolition of private property."<sup>38</sup> I find such a position lacking on two counts. First, the authors provide no biblical references to indicate that Jesus wanted such a large-scale plan of monetary redistribution and only posits that the crucifixion may have occurred because of such radical talk. Secondly, it appears unnecessary to the rest of Jesus' economic vision. Jesus was starting these kinship, horizontal patron relationships without any immediate general redistribution. They functioned, in his lifetime no less, just by the process of general reciprocity. Jesus' economics, it appears, do not have any prior conditions aside from the various peoples coming together and working towards the same goal of giving generously. In the face of a complex system of economic maldistribution and hierarchy, the economics of Jesus is straightforward in that they can begin to be implemented immediately.

### **Conclusion: *What is to be Done?***

Jesus' relationship to economics was completely informed by his social location in Roman-occupied Palestine. He lived in a socioeconomic landscape defined by immense poverty, inequality, and hierarchical ideologies of patronage and wealth. Yet, he taught a radical message of hope and care for the poor, judgment against the rich, and a paradigm of kinship organization in which newly formed Jesus communities would divest of their wealth and privilege and engage in a practice of consistent and purposeful generous giving of scarce goods and services. The economics of Jesus is thus radical and egalitarian. It is forcefully opposed to the economic structures, systems, and ideologies of Roman imperialism, while promoting a vision in which all, regardless of class or status, are welcome to the table of equitable sharing. The economics of Jesus is not simply

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<sup>38</sup> Oakman, *Jesus and the Economic Questions of His Day*, 213.

unfettered markets or regulatory statist socialism,<sup>39</sup> but a bottom-up, intentional economy of generosity.

While highly contextual and light on exact specifics, the economics of Jesus' can be a source of inspiration for churches, organizations, and people desperately attempting to forge a just livelihood in the midst of global capitalism. While there is no longer Rome, there still exists extreme wealth inequality in the world. There are nations with high GDPs and technological development, and those with perpetual poverty and near mass illiteracy. Even in supposedly developed Western nations, such as the United States, there exists large gaps between Wall Street billionaires and the unemployed of the Ohio rust belt. There still exists ideologies which emphasizes the continual accumulation of wealth for private corporations, regardless of the social and environmental havoc wrought. Private collegiate institutions foster inequalities in opportunity and skill by prioritizing the acceptance of alumni's children (i.e. legacy admission). While we exist in a world far away from Caesar, the specter of capital has fashioned a world not too dissimilar.

In light of this, Jesus' economics are just as applicable now as during His ministry. His economic message is profoundly radical insofar as it provides a means towards thwarting the continual exploitation of men and women at the hands of corrupt governments, profit-crazed corporations, and the ideologies of greed and selfishness which manifest seemingly everywhere in our neoliberal age. Not only can this ethic be fostered in churches and groups in the developed world, but displaced persons, refugees, the subaltern in the postcolony can establish alternative economies of gift-giving and mutual interdependence in hopes of slowly becoming unshackled from the institutions of economic oppression. This paradigm of caring for the poor and general reciprocity among a new kinship

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<sup>39</sup> I would contend, however, that certain variations of libertarian socialism that emphasize democratic worker councils and limited, if not non-existent, governmental apparatuses, are closer to Jesus' economics than any version of capitalism that has so far existed.

organization can allow communities destroyed or weakened by exploitative systems to connect in solidarity again, for alliances between hostile groups or classes to be formed, and for needed resources to be provided to the chronically disadvantaged. While this programme eventually stunted in the early church as the assemblies became accommodating to the wealthy of Greco-Roman societies, there is no reason why we should not try to implement this alternative economy once again. Just as we follow Jesus' teachings by loving our enemy, saying the Lord's prayer, turning the other cheek, why must we stop when *Mammon* becomes involved?

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