

FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE PLACES OF COMMUNITY:
ECONOMIC VALUING AND VIRTUOUS FLOURISHING

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Over the last century, Mennonite participation in the economic life of the United States has changed drastically. These changes have occurred not in isolation but coupled with at least two other cultural and theological changes. The first has been a change in the self-identify of Mennonites who reside the United States, which Philipp Gollner has dubbed the change from ethnic Mennonites to white Mennonites.¹ This shift entails seeing themselves not as their own ethnic grouping separate from the larger culture, but as a nonresistant Christian subset of the dominant white culture of the United States. Gollner writes, “Mennonite activists had learned to conform to what sociologist Steven Goldschmidt has called ‘the first commandment of American multiculturalism’ - namely, ‘thou shalt define thyself in terms we understand’ by resolving the paradox of being racially white while also being ‘nobodies’ without the power to shape culture, transcend tribalisms, and serve and improve the world that other white Protestants enjoyed.”² Part of the meaning of this whiteness is a change in social strategy for the ills of the world. Gollner continues, “it is precisely the zeal to prove oneself as capable of *fixing the problem*, as redeemingly superior to those guilty of passivism, that the histories of white Christian progressivism and white supremacy are indeed historically intertwined.”³ This is a foreign social strategy to the historical Anabaptist theological options.⁴

¹ Gollner, Philipp. “How Mennonites Became White: Religious Activism, Cultural Power, and the City.” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. 90, no. 2 (April 2016): 165. See also, Goossen, Benjamin W. “From Aryanism to Anabaptism: Nazi Race Science and the Language of Mennonite Ethnicity.” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. 90, no. 2 (April 2016): 135.

² Gollner, Philipp. “How Mennonites Became White,” 191.

³ *ibid.*, 192–3.

⁴ See, for instance, Yoder, John Howard. *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism*. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1972. Yoder argues that a faithful Christian social strategy modeled on discipleship to the way Jesus interacted with the authorities of his day as “the creation of a distinct community with its own deviant set of values and its coherent way of incarnating them’. Today it might be called an underground movement, or a political party, or an infiltration team, or a cell movement. The sociologists would call it an intentional community.” p. 28.

More or less simultaneously Mennonite communities experienced a theological movement from a stance of nonresistance to a focus on nonviolent affirmations of peace and justice. Ervin Stutzman has spent time trying to explain this change over the last century, although he has stayed away from the racial categorizations and connections employed by Gollner.

Just as the word *nonresistance* was losing its ideological appeal, *nonviolence* stepped up to take its place. This highly visible change in Mennonite vocabulary symbolized a paradigm shift in peace ideology.... Whereas the doctrine of nonresistance had always forbidden violence for the church, the new term implied the same might be true for the state. This was a concept completely foreign to two-kingdom theology. Nonviolence worked well as a ‘middle axiom,’ a strategy that the state as well as the church could embrace. Whereas nonresistance depended on biblical explanation and defense, nonviolence as a strategy could be defended on psychological and social as well as religious grounds.⁵

These sorts of drastic cultural and theological changes always and necessarily have effects on the theological vision of economic participation. This change in the theological frame cannot be further pursued here except to say that it has historically evaded, and even in its current moves towards justice still evades, the economic aspects of peace and justice. The Anabaptist Vision as historically recovered by Harold Bender has not focused enough on the issues of the economic lives of believers and how those are deeply coterminous with lives of faith.⁶ Jesus as described by the writers of the Gospels spoke more about economics and economic justice than prayer but the focus of Anabaptists and other Christian theological traditions have often switched those emphases. Although any implications of causal connection of the previously mentioned cultural

⁵ Stutzman, Ervin R. *From Nonresistance to Justice: The Transformation of Mennonite Church Peace Rhetoric 1908-2008*. Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 2011, 166.

⁶ For brevity, I will locate Anabaptist conviction with the Anabaptist Vision Harold Bender published first in 1944: “three major points of emphasis; first, a new conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship; second, a new conception of the church as brotherhood; and third, a new ethic of love and nonresistance.” Bender, Harold S. “The Anabaptist Vision.” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. 18 (1944): 73.

and theological changes in Anabaptist communities must be withheld, there is a clear economic change that has occurred over the last century that can be summarized loosely as the move from primarily agrarian, community-oriented self-sufficiency to the near full breadth of economic and career oriented options and participations of vocation in the United States. I will outline the theological problems of these moves through an analysis of human flourishing and the connected notion of value, and then offer a reflection on the importance of ‘place’ as a understood in a multiplicity of forms as the seedbed for the sorts of virtue formation that Christian communities need to more faithfully participate in economic life.

The change of economic life in Anabaptistic communities has three major components. First, the change from being productive members of society through primarily agricultural participation as producers and caretakers of the land for the good of the larger community to the panoply found in the modern techno-beaurocratic complexity of contemporary vocational choices. Historically this involved providing for the local community primarily and rarely exporting goods farther than the nearest cities. The movement from trade in the local town, to the state, and then nationally and internationally through radical changes in transportation underscore these changes.⁷ For the present consideration, the changes of vocation have adjusted the communal practices which bound people together as well as the very sorts of relationships to

⁷ Pirog, Rich. *Food, Fuel, and Freeways: An Iowa Perspective on How Far Food Travels, Fuel Usage, and Greenhouse Gas Emissions*. Ames, Iowa: Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, 2001. This research paper has generated a disproportionate amount of scrutiny, such as Born, Branden, and Mark Purcell. "Avoiding the Local Trap". *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. 26, no. 2 (2006): 195-207. Macias, Thomas. "Working Toward a Just, Equitable, and Local Food System: The Social Impact of Community-Based Agriculture". *Social Science Quarterly*. 89, no. 5 (2008): 1086-1101. Campbell, Marcia. "Building a Common Table". *Journal of Planning Education and Research*. 23, no. 4 (2004): 341-355. However, at least two things are clear. For Chicago, distance food traveled increased by 20 percent during the 1980s and 1990s. In addition, these sorts of studies have not been done at large scale for multiple locales, so it is not possible yet to know to what extent food miles are increasing. However, it is clear that they are globally because the exports of food around the world, and imports as well, are increasing. This will be taken up again when discussing place.

land and place which necessarily occurs when work can or cannot be done independent of place. That freedom from, or perhaps more accurately loss of, such contingent limitations disassociates the community from any *necessary* connections to the locations it finds itself. Those connections become merely formal and shape people into a very different sort of economic actor. Place becomes something to overcome rather than a gift to be received and that makes all the difference in the world for the sorts of communities who are called to recognize our lives as gifts from God.

Second, the vision of the local community as self-sufficient has been transformed into the modern affirmation of contemporary global capitalism: reducing limits to trade and encouraging a mono-crop mentality not only in farming but for efficiency in any and every productive endeavor. This historical self-sufficiency is not that of liberal and economic individualism, but akin to the folk mentality that “it takes a village.” Ideally, each and any community would be able to raise the resources to care for its members, but also remain capable, often through some amount of technological simplicity, to produce for itself those goods whereby interdependence is realized.⁸ This resists the current mode of economic interdependence that prioritizes global trade and attempts to reduce limits to global consumption, thus decentralizing producer, laborer, and consumer and emphasizing the homogeneity of culture and locality through another reification of the dissociation from the importance of place. Current economic theory argues that the best result is for a locale to produce that which it can most efficiently and trade to acquire whatever other

⁸ Hauerwas, Stanley, and Jean Vanier. *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness*. Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2008, 27—28.

goods are needed.⁹ Thus, New Zealand, which can produce sheep and their by products more efficiently than anywhere else in the world, should produce as much as possible for itself and for export since it will reduce the global marginal utility to produce anything else. This fails to understand the important fabric of the local community that needs to foster flourishing for any and all serious eventualities, especially the care of its members. In addition, this allows for outsourcing to ruin communities when an adjustment of efficiency occurs. These adjustments can be the disruptions of new technologies, changes of the international political climate, or instability like the Great Recession. The environmental costs of transportation which cannot yet be realistically measured are likely not fully accounted.¹⁰ Just as biodiversity is necessary for a healthy environment, and has led to significant and presently emergent problems in farming, economic and productive diversity is necessary in a local community even if it reduces total global productivity.¹¹

The last change in the Anabaptist landscape has been a slow affirmation of the movement from communal identity to individualistic participation in economic exchange. This is a problem that is realized for most Christians in the United States even if they do not have the same depths of communal history as the Anabaptists. This can be most easily seen in conversations about

⁹ For instance, Glaeser, Edward L. *Agglomeration Economics*. Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago Press, 2010. Weber, Christopher L, and H Scott Matthews. "Food-Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States". *Environmental Science & Technology*. 42, no. 10 (2008): 3508. Shadlen, Ken. 2008. "Globalisation, Power and Integration: The Political Economy of Regional and Bilateral Trade Agreements in the Americas". *The Journal of Development Studies*. 44, no. 1: 1-20.

¹⁰ Wakeland, Wayne, Susan Cholette, and Kumar Venkat. "Food Transportation Issues and Reducing Carbon Footprint". Pages 211—236 in *Green Technologies in Food Production and Processing*. Edited by Boye, Joyce I, and Yves Arcand. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC, 2012. See also, Pollan, Michael. "Why Bother?" April 20, 2008 [Cited 10 May, 2016]. Online: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/magazine/20wwln-lede-t.html?sq=pollan%20bother&st=cse&scp=1&pagewanted=all&_r=0

¹¹ Timothy E. Crews, and Lee R. DeHaan. "The Strong Perennial Vision: A Response". *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*. 39, no. 5 (2015): 500-515.

retirement, a concept that should be foreign to a Christian view of work. Certain Anabaptist sects are allowed to be excluded from social security.¹² This is because they were recognized by the state as communities that both had a religious objection to the receiving of such state assistance from their deep grounding in a full separation of church and state and also exhibited an unqualified ability to care for their own. Currently the majority of Anabaptists participate in the individualistic forms of saving for retirement through the normal and expected channels, i.e., 401k accounts, IRAs, and social security. In fact, the largest Anabaptist credit union is barely distinguishable from other actors in the financial sector. They are actively marketing themselves as a socially conscious credit union changing their name from Mennonite Mutual Aid to the a-theological and thus more socially acceptable appellation: Everence.¹³

In order to make sense of these changes in Anabaptist communities, I will draw heavily from D. Stephen Long's analysis of the relations between theology and economics in *The Divine Economy*.¹⁴ This will yield conclusions about human flourishing and value adjudication in economic life. Flourishing is rarely part of economic language. Indeed, it is not common in non-Catholic theological language either as it comes from Ancient Greek philosophy, particularly Aristotle, and the Thomistic appropriations later on.¹⁵ In particular, that concept of flourishing from Aristotle entails the striving for excellence based on one's unique constitution, talents, and

¹² United States. *Social Security Handbook*. Baltimore, Md.: U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Social Security Administration, 1969, §1128.

¹³ Miller, Larry D. "MMA Adopts a New Name." March 25, 2010. [cited 7 May, 2016]. Online: http://www.everence.com/uploadedFiles/About_Everence/Our_community/News_and_promotions/Everence/miller_remarks_032510.pdf

¹⁴ Long, D. Stephen. *Divine Economy: Theology and the Market*. London: Routledge, 2000.

¹⁵ MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*. Chicago: Open Court, 1999, 65. The Greek word eudaimonia has come to be translated most often as "human flourishing."

potential.¹⁶ As MacIntyre has pointed out, any concept of flourishing must be related to an idea of the good.¹⁷ Here is where the theological convictions of a community must supplement the economic structures they are surrounded by. In what Long describes as the dominant tradition of understanding the relationship between theology and economics, the good is something that is privatized in the individual.¹⁸ This is a direct result of the usage of Weber's fact-value distinction as part of the undergirding sociology of capitalism. The coincidence of titles between Weber and Michael Novak's texts, one of the dominant traditions theological voices, underscore the point.¹⁹

Weber's fact-value distinction is necessary in capitalist formulations of economics because it separates the analysis of the mechanics of the market from the subjective and privatized values of the participants in the market. This is not only a problem in economics, but in all the social sciences. However, for economics it is perhaps a larger problem because of its claims to be the most objective of the social sciences, attempting to rival in claim any of the hard sciences.²⁰ The fact-value distinction in capitalist thinking is connected to the nature of that tradition, which tries to deny that it is a tradition or any importance of tradition as such.²¹ It seeks to create a morally neutral frame for the role of economics in society so that the pluralism of valuing in society can be affirmed. The historical tradition of capitalism began with this

¹⁶ MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Dependent Rational Animals*, 67.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 71-79.

¹⁸ Long, *Divine Economy*, 24

¹⁹ Compare, for instance, Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Scribner, 1958. with Novak, Michael. *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. New York, N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1982. and Novak, Michael. *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Free Press, 1993.

²⁰Roberts, Russell D. *How Adam Smith Can Change Your Life: An Unexpected Guide to Human Nature and Happiness*. New York: Portfolio, 2014, 40ff.

²¹ Long, *Divine Economy*, 70, 74.

separation of the market from the Catholic church (and its system of valuing). It has continued as an affirmation of separation from all forms of valuing from irrational authorities.²² Weber considers all authorities irrational because their authority is not based on “facts” but tradition. Interestingly, Weber’s work has come to hold that same place of authority. Such fact-value distinctions have been all but disproved as a fantasy of objectivity which can never be obtained, even in the hard sciences. Whether economists are able to see this conundrum in the philosophical underpinnings of their work, the theologians should be well aware of the problems therein and thus call into questions the fundamental assumptions of such capitalist systems. However, instead they participate in accepting the ‘facts’ of economics and the ‘value’ of theology in the universalizing sustenance it can give the economic project. The fundamental difficulty for the theologian in the fact-value distinction is not philosophical. It is that such a distinction puts the location of value in “a human assertion of will.”²³ Yet the fundamental theological claims about the world are in the notion that the facts of creation, namely the goodness, truth, and beauty of the world, are rooted in God’s stance toward the world not any individual’s choices concerning it. So for those theologians that affirm the dominant tradition, the theology of creation, sin, and anthropology are necessarily the major themes because of their potential for universal affirmation when stripped of their embarrassing Christian particularity.

This move from the particular to the universal must leave behind those theologies that become incoherent from such a move, such as Christology and ecclesiology. However anthropology is not as difficult. The dominant tradition comes to affirm an human anthropology

²² *ibid.*, 68. Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. New York: P. F. Collier & Sons, 1909, 755—7.

²³ Long, *Divine Economy*, 178.

rooted in an *analogia libertatis* connecting a theology of creation and a theological anthropology with the doctrine of God. Humans are like God, and created in her image, in their freedom. This view of human nature, idealized in individual liberty and reified in certain theological engagements with the economic discipline, holds as normative an unencumbered economic person not mired in moral formation and attendant commitments (encumbrances). In addition, though not precisely equivalent, similar critiques hold for philosophical liberalism, which Alasdair MacIntyre has shown to maintain this same ideal of human nature.²⁴ The differences between the ‘economic [hu]man’ and the ‘liberal [hu]man’ are up for vigorous debate but for the purposes here that debate yields only minor differentiation over against the major similarities. The economic concept of opportunity costs and marginal utility underscore this point. Opportunity costs, namely the economic concept of human limitation, argues that people choose between different options in their decision making by weighing their relative benefits against each other. When a person has five dollars at the store they choose those goods that will yield the most benefit while forsaking the other opportunities. Marginal utility names the purported diminishing returns from each quantized increase of a product. Thus, eating the next oreo from the bag will bring less pleasure than the one before it. Long points out that these choices entail moral decisions, not merely ‘rational’ choices. Thus, a cost-benefit analysis of having an extra-marital affair, although a coherent practice for this sort of economic thinking, misses the very forms of life necessary for something like Christian discipleship.²⁵ The interrelationship then between this anthropology and the fact-value distinction appears to be necessary:

²⁴ MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3rd Edition. Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 24-123.

²⁵ Long, D. Stephen, Nancy Ruth Fox, and Tripp York. *Calculated Futures: Theology, Ethics, and Economics*. Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2007, 62.

Human volition becomes the basis for reasonable political and economic exchanges. Although not identical with it, this anthropology fits well the marginalist rationality that provides the basis for capitalism as ‘scientific’ social organizations. Marginalist rationality assumes that goods are not intrinsic to forms of life, and therefore it does not question whether certain goods might be incommensurable. For marginalist rationality all goods are subject to the overarching law of value. All goods are potential objects of human choice, and thus through a person’s choices, she or he gives value to that which is. These choices can then be indexed and regularities observed. These regularities are subject to change, but through statistical methods we can chart and negotiate the changes. We may not approve of these choices, but they reflect the ‘facts’ of economic life, the empirical realities. Morality cannot alter this facticity. Instead, it gives values that the moralists hope will bring people to make different choices. If the task of theology is to be relevant to modern economics, then it must adopt this posture.²⁶

Long is not arguing that these sorts of modes of economic thinking are incorrect in the economic sphere. Rather he is making the more subtle point that these modes of economic thinking need to be limited to the analysis of the economic good within a larger framework of the purpose of human lives. There are times when the sort of rationality employed by marginal utility and opportunity costs, as also representative of much more complex economic tools, are precisely right for the situation at hand. But they are limited by the particularity of economic ways of knowing, and for Christians by the theological truths of their claims. For Anabaptist convictions, as alluded to earlier, this involves a recognition that God is the bearer of justice. It is not the state, the market, or even the church that is responsible for resolving evil in the world. The doctrine of nonresistance, and even a rightly ordered extension to nonviolence, seeks to create a politics of witness in the believing community that stands in tension with the principalities and powers.

²⁶ Long, *Divine Economy*, 73—4.

Of course, in the contemporary binary view of options for economic organization, it may seem that a turn to socialist forms may be the necessary resolution. However these typically Marxist critiques of capitalism through liberation and postmodern theologies make many of the same mistakes as the dominant tradition. The very naming of some of these traditions as liberating underscores their participation in the same *analogia libertatis*, albeit one that more explicitly names that freedom in the liberating story of Scripture. As the emergent tradition maintains the same anthropological convictions and fact-value dichotomy of the dominant tradition, it falls into the same unacceptable marginalization of theology.²⁷ So, even as they move the form of economics closer to different parts of the Biblical story that are often unaddressed in the dominant tradition, they do not resolve the fundamental problems they claim to solve. Daniel Finn points out that both of these traditions still maintain an affirmation of market mechanics, just differing boundaries for what is restricted to and from the market.²⁸ It is far more productive to talk about where those fences ought to be placed than the moral assessment of these two economic traditions. And here, that question of what it is to value, much less to speak of value-creation, is still very problematic.

As noted before, in order to have a way to place economic thinking into a rightly ordered Christian theological frame will require an understanding of the *telos* of human life and that requires some idea of what human flourishing means. It is only when those are reasonably explained that value and value-creation can have meaning. For the danger of an understanding of value in ahistorical terms is that it then comes to inhabit a purely formal space that veils the

²⁷ *ibid.*, 172.

²⁸ Finn, Daniel K. *The Moral Ecology of Markets: Assessing Claims about Markets and Justice*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 122.

particular truth-claims necessary to uphold it. Christian theology demands that value is not derivative of human will and desire, but finds meaning in a rightly ordered relation to God and her church. And here we can then see that ‘value’ is perhaps not even the right way to discern that action of setting worth. For rightly valuing can only become possible when the requisite virtues have been achieved. Without certain Christian virtues teaching disciples how to value, value comes to stand for itself in a way that maintains all the difficulties already addressed in the fact-value distinction.

The Anabaptist theological vision of human flourishing is of the sort that sees clearly the *telic* purposes in a theology of kenosis. Nancey Murphy and George Ellis argue that the form of the universe and the Christian convictions that flow with it is an affirmation of kenotic self-renunciation that fits within a complex and coherent tradition. The center of their ethical theory, “self-renunciation for the sake of the other is humankind’s highest good,” does not try to ignore the particularity of theology while at the same time making ultimate claims about metaphysics and ontology.²⁹ Although rarely articulated in the language of kenosis, Anabaptist thinking has long been connected to the self-renunciation ethic through the framework of nonresistance and *gelassenheit*. In short, Anabaptist theology is premised on a radical discipleship of Christ that expects a coherence of speech-act. And the contours of Christ’s activity in the world, which they hold as the highest human good, is laying down one’s life for one’s friends.³⁰ This telos then centers at least in part the virtues which teach Anabaptists how to value. The virtues of compassion, humility, and self-renunciation contour seeing value in the neighbor and the

²⁹ Murphy, Nancey, and George F. R. Ellis. *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology, and Ethics*. Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 1996, 118ff., 175ff.

³⁰ John 15:13

stranger. Likewise these virtues devalue the economic tools of marginal utility excepting as they are used for the care of others.

It is necessary to note that often the biblical proof-text for human flourishing as economic success through hard work and participation in the economic structures of the day is centered upon the parable of the talents.³¹ Often presented in a monolithic form as clearly underwriting capitalism, an alternative reading from Ched Myers and Eric DeBode may provide at least a withholding of certainty about the Scriptural underwriting of the economic order. Myers and DeBode set the scene vividly for most current modes of interpretation:

“This has been for many an unsettling story. It seems to promote ruthless business practices (v. 20), usury (v. 27), and the cynical view that the rich will only get richer while the poor become destitute (v. 29). Moreover, if we assume, as does the traditional reading, that the master is a figure for God, it is a severe portrait indeed: an absentee lord (v. 15) who cares only about profit maximization (v. 21), this character is hard-hearted (v. 24) and ruthless (v. 30).”³²

Of course they suggest a reinterpretation of the parable that is both more contextually sensitive and less theologically problematic. Before diving into their interpretation, a few cultural clarifications are necessary. First, a talent, despite current meaning, was a sum of money worth approximately \$2.5 million in 1999 dollars, so these slaves are more akin to business managers and are being entrusted with vast sums of money. Second, in a manner virtually unimaginable today, the act of doubling one’s money in an agrarian society was an act of greed that ran against the culture where “the ideal was stability, not self-advancement.”³³ In order to partake in such increase of wealth when surrounded by primarily subsistence farmers implies the sorts of

³¹ Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:12-28

³² Myers, Ched and Eric DeBode. “Towering Trees and ‘Talented’ Slaves.” *Other Side*, 35, no. 3 (1999): 14

³³ *Ibid.*

dealings that would include taboo activity which is verified in the parable by the master's recommendation of *at least* ignoring the prohibitions of usury to gain a profit. However, what may be lost on the modern reader is the understanding of the land as the only place of true wealth. Myers and DeBode suggest, "[t]hat [the third slave] buried the money in the ground seems strange at first glance. But considering that many in Jesus' audience were farmers, there may be some wry peasant humor here... this silver talent, when 'sown,' produced no fruit!"³⁴ In contrast, as all farmers know, wealth is tied to and grows from the ground, and that which cannot grow in the ground is not the sort of wealth worth pursuing. When these adjustments are taken into account, the protagonist of the parable becomes the third slave who speaks truth to corruption and power and gets his unjust reward. That this was one of the final teachings in Matthew's narrative before Jesus comes to be judged in a similar manner should not be taken lightly. To draw out the parable even more, the sort of two-kingdom theology that the Anabaptists hold can be surmised between these two narratives of economics. The master represents economics in "the world," amongst those who do not follow Christian commitments. The alternative, and the choice to speak truth to power despite the consequences, reveals the possibilities that the church is called to enact at the very least towards each other but preferably towards all others.

Although written aphoristically it is necessary here to consider to what extent the vision of the Economic Wisdom Project relates to the dominant tradition.³⁵ The project identifies working together and creating value for each other through economic exchange in a manner that

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵ The Economic Wisdom Project. Cited 20 April 2016. Online: <http://oikonomianetwork.org/economic-wisdom-project/>

can be unfortunately prone to participation in the Weberian fact-value distinction. The virtues of cooperation and interdependence, which encourage and form values already unable to be sustained without a particular anthropology that is not individualistic (or at least, to some extent delivers the individual into community) in reference to the sort of freedom often posited in the economic realm, are the sorts of affirmations of values that cannot be sustained by Weber's philosophy. However, virtues and practices that form participants into lives of cooperation and interdependence, *especially over against the dominant tradition's individualism*, are necessary for the sort of value creation that Christians can affirm. Often in capitalist systems value is seen as a creation of exchange where even labor and raw goods fall under such purview.³⁶ As Long summarizes, "[i]n modern contractual economies, my labor is an investment that goes out from me and is then alienated: it represents a sacrifice made by my will. It becomes a commodity that receives a return only in the form of abstract equivalence such as wages. Yet labor within Christian theology must be understood primary as an 'aesthetic and liturgical work offered to God.'" ³⁷ A Christian understanding of an economics that is in service to telos reconfigures exchange from an act of will to a reception of a gift.³⁸ John Milbank points to this reconfiguration of exchange within the social practices of the Eucharist.³⁹ This breaks down the fact-value distinction between the *facts* of the necessity of daily economic exchange and the *values* of the relationship liturgically mediated between God and human.

³⁶ Halteman, James. Personal Correspondence, 14 November, 2015.

³⁷ Long, *Divine Economy*, 259.

³⁸ Hauerwas and Vanier, *Living Gently*, 75.

³⁹ Milbank, John. 'Can a Gift Be Given?', *Modern Theology*, 11, no. 1 (1995): 136.

In direct contrast to the theology of the dominant tradition that prioritizes creation, sin, and anthropology, Long suggests that value must be theologically framed within Christology and ecclesiology in part because of the impossibility to reduce these theological claims from their particular convictions to a general truth claim. In many ways Long's vision is analogous with an Anabaptistic, kenotic Christology.⁴⁰ Value-creation then roots itself as well in the practical forms of economic activity that affirm the virtues of kenotic theology. There arises an obvious critique which condemns production for the sake of production, even if that production is a means of livelihood, for how it affects others and the environment. Likewise, these virtues need to be a part of the loci of production. As Wendell Berry notes:

To speak of the need for affection and loyalty and social stability is not at all to slight the need for life-supporting work. Of course people need to work. Everybody does. And in a money-using economy, people need to earn money by their work. Even so, to speak of “a job” as if it were the only economic need a person has, as if it doesn’t matter what the job is or where a person must go in order to have it, is brutally reductive. To speak so is to leave out virtually everything that is humanly important: family and community ties, connection to a home place, the questions of vocation and good work. If you have “a job,” presumably, you won’t mind being a stranger among strangers in a strange place, doing work that is demeaning or unethical or work for which you are unsuited by talent or calling.⁴¹

Other practicalities would include paying more for goods to ensure they are fairly and well made, the laborers can flourish, and environmental impact is not damaging. In current economic configurations this is beyond the ken of the consumers, and more so in a global capitalism where the producers are removed from the consumers by multiple levels. Thus, the knowledge necessary for virtuous participation in economic life often is tragically, at least at present,

⁴⁰ Long, *Divine Economy*, 269ff.

⁴¹ Berry, Wendell. *What Matters?: Economics for a Renewed Commonwealth*. Berkeley, Calif.: Counterpoint, 2010, 22.

impossible to ascertain for large numbers of products excepting the relationships of trust developed with the locales of purchase. However, it is never clear that such locales have any proximate similarity of concern.

How then to move into a positive affirmation of economic exchange? A possible Anabaptist response is a return to a commitment to place broadly construed. One possible conception of such a commitment might be to the local economy and community over the trans-national in consumption. This is no easy commitment. Not only are the ideological, theological, and economic winds blowing strongly against such a movement, but the social structures, practices, and virtues have been slowly changed to affirm globalism despite contemporary political lip service to the contrary. It is now easy to move anywhere in the US—those things that people have been taught to consume are there! The grocery store carries the same food; the national food, clothing, and home goods chains are present. The aforementioned Anabaptist conviction of commitment to place, both local and global, and the connected implication of commitment to neighbor are necessary for virtue formation of a kenotic theology. So, for an Anabaptist set of virtues—virtues that at the least maintain Bender’s three part form of the Anabaptist vision: the essence of Christianity as discipleship; a new conception of the church as brother- and sisterhood; a new ethic of love and nonresistance—one rather direct outcome will be a very different relationship to place than the larger culture encourages. Whereas success is often purportedly dependent on a college education for the purpose of a formation into a professional usefulness related to the purported need-want matrix of the demands of economy, it is linguistically and culturally disassociated from the actual individuals who compose it and their consumptive habits that forms such demand and which will likely included the literal geographic

relocation of these young adults from family, church, and community. This is itself an encouragement of young adults to learn independence which is just a reconfigured form of the *analogia libertatis*. But this extends beyond place as a geographical reality. It includes the social ecology and the environment. In a word, there is a connection that occurs in a place where the realities of stability co-inheres with the continued nurturing of disciples and community. The practices of sister- and brotherhood require that stability. It is no coincidence that the parables name building one's house of stone which implies a commitment to location⁴². Elsewhere abiding in Christ is described as becoming a part of a vine, the very image implying roots in the soil.⁴³ In some ways that stability of place is an acceptance of what we own, of not needing anything new, for the new is often merely a shiny bauble of emptiness, or a luxury that would take our time from those things which are actually important. Anabaptists have long prized and named this virtue of simple living. But simple living and forming deep community is not a selfish activity. It is for the evangelical purpose of Christian mission. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, reflecting also on the writings of Augustinian-Anabaptist theologian Gerald Schlaback, writes:

“To grow in the practice of stability is to learn how to discern when we are called to stay and when God wants us to go. Theologian and Benedictine oblate Gerald Schlabach notes wisely that ‘we should expect authentic stability to nurture the virtues that allow Christians to become mobile in the best of ways—ready to hear the Abrahamic call, to live among the poor by both giving and receiving hospitality, and thus to nurture the newly deepened commitments by which God’s people make Christ present in new communities and cultures.’ Indeed, we might even go so far as to say that true Christian mission is not possible until we have established roots of love through the practice of stability. We need not look long at the history of Christian mission to see how easily it has been co-opted by greed,

⁴² Matt 7:24—27; Luke 6:46—49

⁴³ John 15:1—8

colonial interests, paternalism, and violence. Maybe none of us are safe to respond to God's call until we've stayed put long enough to face our demons."⁴⁴

This call to place, especially in a country as fabulously affluent as the United States, runs the risk of normalizing experiences of luxury and opulence. The blessing and flourishing the Scriptures name for Abraham, Lot, and Job would be considered impoverished by Southern California standards: no electricity, no healthcare, no education, illiteracy, etc. And yet that was a provision of flourishing and blessing from God. Is there a need for a renormalization of what flourishing means? A kenotic Anabaptist vision of economic flourishing may actually mean learning how to be poor for that may be the only way to face the demons.

⁴⁴ Wilson-Hartgrove, Jonathan. *The Wisdom of Stability: Rooting Faith in a Mobile Culture*. Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2010, 140