

## BLASPHEMY AGAINST GOD'S ABUNDANT PROVISION

*Economics — A Christian View*

Kenneth Jupp

Available from Land and Liberty Press

THE PROBLEM with pamphlets is that they can be as light in content as in form. However, as one would expect from one of Sir Kenneth's record this is so rich in considerations legal, historical, social, religious and philosophical that it takes some digesting. Even so, like Oliver, we must ask for more!

Sir Kenneth gives a wide review of the consequences of failing to respect the God-given in economics. He recognises that exclusive occupation of land is not merely an opportunity for labour but the very condition of its existence; that conflict over it is a matter of life and death and war. He describes how slavery is made possible by landlessness; how its abolition merely freed the slave owner from welfare costs creating a more helpless dependency.

He outlines the long history of the collapse of kingly feudal power through the transfer of rental advantage to the barons; how the God-given land became a commodity; how the breakdown of upward feudal obligations forced Kings to hire standing armies; how in the confusions of plagues and civil war opportunists took their chance "to join house to house (and) lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth" (Isaiah 5:8), and the great sea of landless "rogues and vagabonds" was created. This destitution brought a massive increase in the use of imprisonment, the death penalty for more than 150 crimes, dependency, and the industrial growth that flourishes on wage slavery.

He suggests that today we live with the outcome in the great centralisation of government consequent on the collapse of devolved feudal obligations, and the high taxation of even quite poor people as a result of the wresting of rent revenue from the centre by landed and commercial barons. Taxation falling on the very poor prevents them acquiring capital for production, let alone land, or binds them

to extensive borrowing. So we have the impotence of the poor and long term unemployment.

"Successful" entrepreneurs and workers at all levels, Sir Kenneth argues, are now burdened by an expensive central administration with obligations to pay numerous taxes which inhibit deployments of labour and capital, and thus the creation of wealth out of which such taxes must be paid. A vicious self imposed circle which makes the euphemisms of "Welfare" and "Social Security" blasphemies in the face of God's abundant provision.

He has more to say, of course, particularly on money, banking, monopoly and so on and outlines six areas for Christian action and study.

Throughout, he relates these observations to scripture, demonstrating that our oldest cultural injunctions clearly demand that we recognise that "the Land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine." (Lev 25:23) He notes that Christ's first sermon (Luke 4:19) drew on Isaiah's text which refers to Leviticus which calls for their ancestral land to be returned to the landless in the 50th year, the Lord's year.

We have the Law and the Prophets and there is no excuse.

THE MORE I would like to ask for concerns the philosophy of economics with which he begins his pamphlet. He has little space to establish the validity of some interesting ideas (I suspect he would not call them merely "ideas"). This makes it hard to be sure of them or use them. (It would help to have more references for one's own reading.)

For instance, he deploys a concept of Natural Law without much explanation. Some understand Natural Laws to be the fundamental forms of the universe, describing the relations of all things. The law of gravity? That time is successive mostly in one direction? The laws of supply and demand? He argues that where

man made laws conflict with Natural Law disruption of the social fabric follows. But how can Natural Law be overridden? A law calling on us to override the law of gravity would cause no disruption because it would have no effect. Shooting a man in the head does not go against Natural Law. It uses Natural Law very skilfully to achieve its appalling consequence. A wine lake is made in accordance with Natural Law by increasing demand for wine through subsidy.

He argues, "It is essential to begin from the first cause. God is the creator of Wealth, as He is of all things." Indeed he asserts that the triune nature of God gives us the clue to the triune nature of all things and hence the three factors of production. (Interestingly, Kant's acceptance that a triune ontology is implied by experience brought a great advance in the philosophy of knowledge - that to experience means there must exist not only an experiencer and also that which is experienced, but that they are united within a third - the content of experience). But while it may be plausible to argue that some relations are triune it is another to argue that all relations are unless, as with physical law, one can frame a mathematics to govern all phenomena.

Sir Kenneth, himself, appears to break his triunity by very interestingly increasing the three factors of production to four. Capital, Labour, and two Given factors. He distinguishes benefits accruing from God through the natural environment (pure Land value) and those accruing from the community through the man made environment (Community value). God and Caesar. They must be different factors as they have different causes, elasticities of supply, and maintenance costs. The second can be destroyed without the former being (i.e. in war).

He suggests that a valuation of the former could provide a fund for the maintenance of the Church. But which church? Is this not a recipe for a sinecure? Might not religion be a great deal more real to us today if priests had to preach for their supper as the disciples did, trusting in provision? Does the Church, all too material in its fabric and history, deserve to be identified with the God-given now?

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