

# People's Reporter

A FORUM OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human



### The Theme



**'The Ascent of Money and the Descent of the Human'**  
is the theme we have chosen for this issue

Niall Ferguson, one of Britain's most renowned historians and Professor of History at Harvard University, has written in his book, 'The Ascent of Money', **"If the last four millennia had witnessed the ascent of man the thinker, we are, now, living through the ascent of man the banker."**

Money has always been playing a commanding role in the life and attitude of the people. But, by the end of the twentieth century, money has become amazingly mighty and critical, radically transforming not only the life and behaviour of the people; but also the socio-economic and political structures and processes, and most importantly the ethics and the religion.

Along with this, on the one hand, the essential value of the human is terribly belittled. And on the other, the human himself/herself has descended to resort to any speculative, abominable act. And values like love, caring, sacrificial sharing, compassion, laying down lives for others, are shockingly de-valued. What is the relevant and just response that we must have, to such a situation? That is what we are exploring.



Collage by James S. Murthy  
Please See page: 12

### Build up a new trans-modern civilization of just relations

Ulrich Duchrow

All religions and philosophies of the Axial Age and later also the Jesus movement and Islam, can and must be understood as a response to the emergence of that kind of civilization – including its political economy, psychology and spirituality – which now, at its climax, is leading humanity and earth not only into increasing dehumanization but into death. This means that it is of crucial importance to unleash the original power of these faiths and spiritualities in order to inspire and lead us towards a new all-embracing culture that allows life to flourish on this wonderful planet. This includes the critique of religion that has deviated from its original source, in order to assimilate to the dominating civilization. Liberation theologies in all faith communities are already doing this but they can be strengthened and united by realizing their common origin in the Axial Age.

Please See Pages: 3 & 14

### Establish Tax Justice

David Haslam

If we are talking about the ascent of money, one of the places this has happened is in the payment of taxes, where large corporations and wealthy individuals have been busy for the last twenty years in working out how to dodge paying their taxes. This is true for almost every country in the world. It is bad for the rich countries which lose vast sums in income, but even worse for poorer countries.

In Jesus's time the poor were weighed down by taxes, for the occupying Romans, King Herod and his court, and worst of all, the Temple authorities. The High Priests and scribes kept themselves in comfort through using the money-changers and sellers of doves and pigeons at the temple entrance. When Jesus went there he was so incensed at the way the wealthy were exploiting the poor he turned over their tables, and whipped them out of the place. We should be doing the same to the tax dodgers of today, in whichever country they operate.

Please See Pages: 4 & 18

## The Pilgrimage of the United and Uniting Churches



Participants in the Consultation of the United and Uniting Churches held at Chennai from 25 Nov. to 2 Dec.  
Please see pages: 2 and 13





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**Money Turns Into A Monster !**

The invention of money is a major mile-stone in the progress of human civilization. Money, as a medium of exchange, a store of value and an instrument for accumulation, has been contributing much to the development of economy and social life. For a long time, money has been an invaluable servant of the humans. But, at a later stage, money got transformed to be the Master, an unkind Master.

The big problem, the humanity faces today, is the impact of further transformation of money into a Monster from the end of the 20th century. Although the tyranny of money and finance is the source of the many ills of today, we tragically fail to realize this. The steep rise in the proportion of money used as an instrument for accumulation is the root cause of the many problems that individuals and societies face today. While accumulation is inevitable for capital formation, the process to achieve this creates many ills – indebtedness, exploitation, deprivation, poverty, erosion of values of life etc. During the 8th century B.C, at the beginning of this process, the prophets of Israel strongly condemned this process of accumulation.

From the 16th century onwards, with the emergence of capitalism, the adverse impacts of accumulation became more serious and widespread. First, the merchant capitalists, and later, the industrial capitalists, on the strength of their money power, controlled not only the daily life and activities of the people, but also the economy, society, polity, culture, religion, philosophy and values and outlook of the people, to satisfy their passion for unlimited accumulation. In this way, money subdued the world. This situation further worsened with the financialisation of the economy from the 1980s onwards. Since then the proportion of money used for speculative trade in currency, stocks and shares, real estates, metals, minerals and even consumer goods, has been growing at an alarming rate. In 1997, while the money used for financial transactions was only 15 times of that used for trade in goods and services annually; in 2008, this became 70 times! This means that the proportion of money being diverted from productive to speculative activities increases at a deeply disturbing rate. Big financiers, in order to enhance their rate of profit, play disastrous games of speculation in the economy without any concern for its impacts on the life of the people. Between 1980 and 2000, profit of the big financiers rose from \$32.4 billion to \$195.8 billion! This is facilitated by the new technologies that enable transactions of money/financial wealth across the borders by tapping the keys of a computer.

Basically, financialisation of the economy is a strategy to facilitate high rate of accumulation. In a financialised economy, money is used as a Monster to suck the blood of the people and to destroy the economies. Money thus used, leads to intensification of poverty, inequality, joblessness and land alienation. Apart from this, the money in a financialised world, is totally unconcerned with the values, philosophies and political outlooks that used to uphold ethics, and freedom and dignity of the humans. Even religious structures and teachings are being changed in favour of money and finance, success and prosperity! Human values and ethical principles are being thrown to the tyranny of finance.

What is deeply disturbing is that, in this age of information, people are not aware of, and concerned with, the gravity and ramifications of this development.

**Thought for the Fortnight**

“No one can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will be devoted to the one, and despise the other.  
Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

– **Matthew: 6:24**

**9th Consultation of the United and Uniting Churches**

**The Pilgrimage of the United and Uniting Churches**

**‘Living in Tents’**

The 9th Consultation of the United and Uniting Churches (UUC) was held at the CSI Centre, Chennai, India from 25 Nov. to 2 Dec. 2015. It was jointly hosted by Church of North India, Church of South India and Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar. These three Churches have become Communion of Churches in India, accepting each other's Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. The earlier UUC consultations were held at Bossey (1967), Limuru (1970), Toronto (1975), Colombo (1981), Postdam (1987), Jamaica (1995), Driebergen (2002), and Johannesburg (2008). There are, now, 41 churches listed under this ecumenical umbrella of the WCC member churches.

**The Consultation commenced with a worship and a Eucharistic service which was jointly celebrated using CSI liturgy, at St. George Cathedral which is celebrating its 200th anniversary.**

In his key-note address at the reception accorded by St. George Cathedral the Most Rev. Dr. G. Dyvasirvadam, Moderator of the CSI said, “The word *Koinonia* encourages us to recapture the sacramental connotation which rejects self-sufficiency but always keeps us dependent on the power of the Spirit of God. *Koinonia* keeps us aware that no community is perfect but only it is in the making. *Koinonia* is not a goal or a finished product but

an ongoing faith-journey, incorporating the given human communities around, to live together sharing the Eucharistic values”.

**Themes**

The main theme was ‘**Living in Tents (Heb 11.5): Pilgrimage of the United and Uniting Churches**’. This theme was divided into five sub-themes: Pilgrimage, Unity, Justice, Peace and Witness. Each day dealt with one of the sub-themes.

**Journey of Faith**

**Rev Dr. Olav Fyske Tveit**, General Secretary, WCC, in his address, asked why they were using the image of pilgrimage for Justice and Peace. He said,

“Such images are good but the reality has to be much more important than ideas. Pilgrimage is journey of faith. We have to note that we are called to witness Christ. We have to connect unity with Peace and Justice. We have a moral obligation to be together. We have to be motivating and complementary to each other. Mutual critique and mutual accountability are also necessary.”

Dr. Tveit showed great concern about the increasing violence in the name of religion and also the violation of child rights all over the world. He called upon all the churches, and all the people, to develop an attitude of one humanity.

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**For All Editorial and Business Correspondence:**

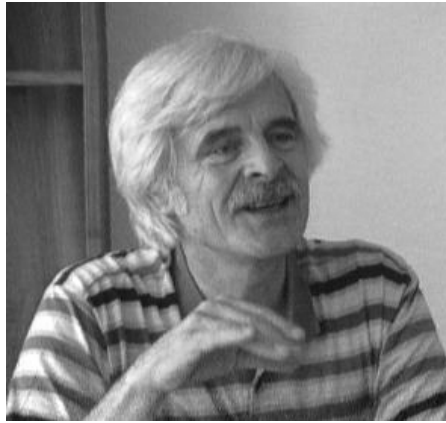
**Prof. Mammen Varkey**  
Editor in Chief  
People's Reporter, Post Box No.12,  
Mavelikara - 690 101, Kerala, India  
Phone : 09446916374, 0479 - 2300096, 2304355  
E-mail : mammenvarkey@gmail.com, prprtr@gmail.com

## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# Money or God and the Human – Between Faith, Social Movements and Capitalism



Ulrich Duchrow



**[Dr. Ulrich Duchrow, renowned theologian and economist, is Professor at Heidelberg University, Germany. He is one of the founders of Kairos Europa]**

Together we are facing a global kairos of humanity because these years are decisive - will our global civilization, driven by western financial capitalism, irreversibly continue to produce death or will we find a way out towards a life-enhancing new culture.

### I. Dehumanization caused by structural economic injustice in the Axial Age and in the capitalist civilization of modernity

Everybody knows the sufferings caused by economic injustice. The suffering cry to high heaven every day. Jean Ziegler, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, speaks of more than 60 million people dying of hunger and its consequences, especially for children, although there is more than enough to feed them. That is an annual World War II against the poor. He continues to say: "A child that dies of hunger is murdered." He calls this a daily crime against humanity.<sup>1</sup> Others call it structural genocide.<sup>2</sup> Also the blue planet earth's suffering is growing dramatically. We all know this, but so far we have not been able to make the necessary changes in global economics and politics – also in our personal behavior.

What is often forgotten are the psychological and spiritual sufferings and diseases of a growing number of people. In India about 54 farmers, driven into debt beyond their means, commit suicide, on a daily average, out of despair.<sup>3</sup> Workers suffer increasing stress and anxiety; middle class people fall into depression,

What we are experiencing now, started nearly 3000 years ago, within what is called the Axial Age, beginning in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, in the whole of Eurasia from Greece to China. At that time a new economy, built on money and private property, started to appear in daily life. It had tremendous social as well as psychological and spiritual effects. An analysis of what happened then would help to understand what is happening today. Looking at the responses to this development by the different faiths and philosophies in Israel/Judah, India, China and Greece and later in Arabia may also help us to better understand the tasks and the possibilities of engaged liberation theology in our age.

presumably the second largest illness in 2020, according to the WHO. What are the roots of all of this?

My thesis is that what we are experiencing now, started nearly 3000 years ago, within what is called the Axial Age, beginning in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, in the whole of Eurasia from Greece to China. At that time a new economy started to appear in daily life, built on money and private property. It had tremendous social as well as psychological and spiritual effects. An analysis of what happened then would help to understand what is happening today. Looking at the responses to this development by the different faiths and philosophies in Israel/Judah, India, China and Greece and later in Arabia may also help us to better understand the tasks and the possibilities of engaged liberation theology in our age.

It was the philosopher **Karl Jaspers** who coined the term Axial Age.<sup>4</sup> According to him, the experience of the violent crises between 800 and 200 BCE might have prompted the parallel efforts of the prophets, the Buddha, Confucius, Daoism and Greek philosophy to find new foundations for living together. He characterized the new approach as intellectual and spiritual (*geistig*), looking only marginally at the economic and political context. As far as the socio-historic context of the Axial Age is concerned my thesis comes nearest to Richard Seaford's findings<sup>5</sup> and to what David Graeber has worked out in his book *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*,<sup>6</sup> although he is not much interested in the religious responses. Combining their insights with my own research<sup>7</sup>, let me summarize how the new economy affected the ancient societies.

Money as a unit of account was used in the palaces and temples of Mesopotamia as early as around 3000 BCE, but the ordinary economy of people in daily life functioned via a system of

mutual credit. This changed when soldiers and mercenaries became professionals and war-making was raised to previously unknown levels. They had to be paid. The most important wage were the spoils. As precious metal could easily be transported, it started circulating in little pieces as a kind of money. Around 600 BCE authorities in Lydia, India and China started at nearly the same time to coin the metal in order to pay the mercenaries and soldiers, later craftsmen and artists. With these practical currencies also local markets developed for daily transactions of the normal people. **This means that cash and unfilled markets are the children of war.**

At the same time slaves, usually prisoners of war, increasingly debt slaves, were turned into a negotiable commodity. This is why Graeber calls this new system the "military-coinage-slavery-complex". There was a kind of circle: new professional armies looted precious metals from temple or palace - treasuries, jewelry of women etc., and slaves. The slaves had to work in the mines to produce more metal for the coinage. The coins were paid to the soldiers and it stimulated the local markets. **The whole system functioned only as long as it expanded through further conquests. So it is no surprise that this system was easily wedded to imperialism. Increasingly, the empires also requested tribute payment in the form of money. This development finds its first climax in the Hellenistic-Roman empires.**

On this basis, the **logic of calculated exchange in markets** emerged. Goods for daily needs were exchanged with money as unit of account. Money became the "one" in the variety of commodities – however, not as a "thing", detached from the social process, in which people recognized its value.<sup>8</sup> This means that the daily use of money also changed the soul and the thinking of people. Besides communicating by speech, i.e. using words (*logos*), they communicated by calculating in money (*ratio*). In so doing, the individual ego gains precedence over relations in community. Solidarity declines.

**This is furthered by the fact that, in the process of exchange in the market, the money owner has more power than the producer of goods.** Money as such offers access to the market while the product has first to be in demand. Coping with this risk is only possible by having as much money as possible. One of the "Sages of Antiquity", Pittakos of Mytilene, underlined this, saying: "Profit is

insatiable". He does not say: "The one who makes profit is insatiably greedy". An economy in which money is made a commodity is inherently greedy. This is why in our new book Franz Hinkelammert and I speak of "greedy money".<sup>9</sup> There is an 'objective' base for greed to

accumulate money without limits.

The other implication of this is that money gives the right to private property beyond personal use. Money gives access to the market, cushions the risks, measures the exchange value and gives access to property rights. Combined with the development of hierarchies and classes in larger societies, money and private property started to determine the economic, social and political power of people within societies.

**In any case, the new economy led to greed and the desire to accumulate limitless money. The institutionalization of this greed was interest.** A debtor had to pay back more than he had borrowed, for example to purchase seed. He also had to put up his own land as security. If he could not pay back his debt plus interest, he lost his land and his family had to work as debt slaves for the creditor. Thus private property and money came into existence at the same time and led to debt slavery and loss of land. On the other hand, the creditors could collect more and more land, money, and debt slaves. This is what scholars have called the emergence of a class society in antiquity.<sup>10</sup> Private property and money also reinforced the male domination of

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**Does MONEY  
Originate from  
'MOAN YE'?**

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# The Importance of Tax Justice

David Haslam



[Revd David Haslam is the Convenor of Methodist Tax Justice Network UK, and Trustee of Dalit Solidarity Network.]

If we are talking about the ascent of money, one of the places this has happened is the payment of taxes, where large corporations and wealthy individuals have been busy for the last twenty years in working out how to dodge paying their taxes. This is true for almost every country in the world. It is bad for the rich countries which lose vast sums in income, but even worse for poorer countries. It is contributing to the growing inequality in our world.

The UK charity Christian Aid calculates that developing countries lose up to \$160 billions every year as companies cheat using pricing mechanisms, and the rich shift their money into tax havens. Compare this to the \$100 billion in total annual foreign aid. These tax havens are called by researcher and writer Nick Shaxson 'Treasure Islands', that's the name of his very informative book.

Shaxson begins his story by saying that the world of 'offshore' is all around us,

Nicholas Shaxson argues for a fresh approach to corporate responsibility, directed inside companies rather than outside, a re-evaluation of corruption and what it means in the context of fair taxation, and most of all a change in the culture of banks and corporations. This would involve a shift from the mentality of how can we pay the least, to how can we pay the just. He concludes, 'Whoever you are, wherever you live and whatever you do, this affects you. 'Offshore' is undermining your elected government, hollowing out its tax base and corrupting its politicians. It is creating a new, unaccountable aristocracy of corporate and financial power. A tiny few will have their boots washed in champagne which the rest of us struggle for our lives in conditions of steepening inequality. We can avert this future.'

Ireland play a substantial role as indeed does the City of London. Shaxson says that in 2007 the Crown Dependencies hosted some \$1 trillion of possibly tax-evading assets, the income from which might be \$30 billions a year. **Another example is that Mauritius, owing to its low foreign source tax rates of 3 percent, is the largest source of foreign investment into India!**

Wealthy US corporations use the web extensively. In late 2008, Citigroup had 427 subsidiaries in tax havens, including ninety in the Caymans. Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation had 152, including sixty two in the BVI. Shaxson says people are not surprised when it is said the two most important tax havens in the world are on islands, though they are, when they are told that they are Manhattan, and the City of London on the island of Britain.

The body which currently could do most about tax dodging is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the massive Paris-based think-tank of the wealthy Western nations. Both Western Governments and the OECD are constantly claiming to be cracking down on tax dodging. Shaxson quotes the Tax Justice Network calculation that in 2005, wealthy individuals held some \$11.5 trillion worth of wealth offshore....about a quarter of all global wealth and equivalent to the entire gross national product of the United States. An estimated \$250 billion in taxes was lost on the income that this money earns, it

which countries. This is especially true of banks. Then there should be automatic exchange of information, whereby countries tell each other what their respective taxpayers own and earn. Such an arrangement operates in the European Union, and there is no real reason why it should not be extended, especially to developing countries.

There is a raft of shadow institutions which need to be deconstructed. "Shell banks", which hide behind unnamed nominees are one such. Banks as a whole need to become more transparent, especially in countries like Switzerland, where international thieves, exploiters, and kleptocrats have stored their wealth for far too long, and Luxembourg, whose

Luxembourg they found it to be a very small office indeed. This was in the context of the Chief Executive Andrew Whitty having vigorously attacked companies who moved their head offices abroad for tax purposes, saying it was wrong for companies to situate themselves as "mid-

Atlantic floating entities." It was subsequently shown that GSK had three operational subsidiaries in Luxembourg, and another ninety in secrecy jurisdictions around the world. Two are in Mauritius and one of these subsidiaries purchased shares in GSK India and then sold them on to another subsidiary in Singapore. Because of India's tax treaty with Mauritius no taxes were paid on this transaction, either in India or Mauritius. This of course points to the need for Governments to engage much more actively, and collectively, with this issue.

Nicholas Shaxson argues for a fresh approach to corporate responsibility, directed inside companies rather than outside, a re-evaluation of corruption and



There is a raft of shadow institutions which need to be deconstructed. "Shell banks", which hide behind unnamed nominees are one such. Banks as a whole need to become more transparent, especially in countries like Switzerland, where international thieves, exploiters, and kleptocrats have stored their wealth for far too long, and Luxembourg, whose accountants have made a virtue of hiding corporate money. The lid has been lifted from these two by whistle-blowers Herve Falciani and Antoine Deltours who, whatever their mixed motivations may have been, deserve our heartfelt thanks. Falciani let us know what was going on in HSBC Switzerland, whose prime purpose appears to have been to aid tax dodging. Deltours revealed what an unholy alliance of PwC (formerly Price Waterhouse Coopers) and the Luxembourg Government had been up to, no wonder so many large companies had branches in Luxembourg, often with very few employees but handling very large amounts of money.

and that a large proportion of banking assets, foreign investment activity, and issuing of bonds is situated "offshore". Small island financial centres such as the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands (BVI) and Bermuda hold enormous balance sheets. Other participants are the British Crown Dependencies of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. As knowledge about the way transnational corporations do business has emerged, it is clear that countries like Switzerland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and

**will be much more now.** However Shaxson does point towards things that may be done, while also commenting that the whole financial system has grown more dangerous, even than it was before the 2007/8 crash.

Firstly more transparency is needed, so that we know what money is invested where, for corporations this means, for example, that country-by-country reporting is required to know what profit has been made and what taxes have been paid in

accountants have made a virtue of hiding corporate money. The lid has been lifted from these two by whistle-blowers Herve Falciani and Antoine Deltours who, whatever their mixed motivations may have been, deserve our heartfelt thanks. Falciani let us know what was going on in HSBC Switzerland, whose prime purpose appears to have been to aid tax dodging. Deltours revealed what an unholy alliance of PwC (formerly Price Waterhouse Coopers) and the Luxembourg Government had been up to, no wonder so many large companies had branches in Luxembourg, often with very few employees but handling very large amounts of money.

One example of the latter was revealed in 2012 when a BBC Panorama film showed that the pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) had used a Luxembourg subsidiary to provide a £6.34 billion loan to their UK operations. The interest of this loan was then paid back to Luxembourg, thus removing artificially £124 million of taxable income from the UK. When the Panorama programme tried to visit the GSK headquarters in

what it means in the context of fair taxation, and most of all a change in the culture of banks and corporations. This would involve a shift from the mentality of how can we pay the least, to how can we pay the just. He concludes, 'Whoever you are, wherever you live and whatever you do, this affects you. Offshore.... is undermining your elected government, hollowing out its tax base and corrupting its politicians. It is... creating a new, unaccountable aristocracy of corporate and financial power... A tiny few will have their boots washed in champagne which the rest of us struggle for our lives in conditions of steepening inequality. We can avert this future.' (*Ibid*, 289)

Another writer on this topic who has influenced me was former tax inspector Richard Brooks, who in 2013 published *The Great Tax Robbery*. Brooks starts by pointing out how important the tax system is to all of us, how paying our taxes provides us and our families, with healthcare, education, social services, transport, pensions, defence and much more. What's not to like, or even to love?

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

### UN Millennium Development Goals and India

# Numbers and figures not necessarily reflect the quality of life of a person



George Mathew



**[Dr. George Mathew is the Chairman of the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi]**

The year 2015 marks the end of the UN adopted Millennium Development Goals period which had emerged from the blueprints of the Millennium Declaration in 2000. These goals were: the eradication of poverty and hunger, universal primary education, gender equality and empowerment of women, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, environmental sustainability and global partnership for development.

There has been a reduction in the levels of poverty in terms of numbers but the progress is uneven.

However, the slow pace with regard to women's empowerment through wage employment and political participation is something that needs to be looked into.

In the country's capital Delhi for example, the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector was 17.1% in 2011-12 as against the target of 50% as per the Millennium Development Goals.

A crucial role that the MDGs played was to draw the attention of policy-makers and civil society towards various inequalities prevailing in each country. Member nations of the UN in adopting the MDG framework had in effect taken up a cause that otherwise might have been sidelined owing to the different challenges in governance.

Concurrently during this period, global challenges such as climate change, environmental preservation and addressing poverty led to an important debate on the sustainability of approaches adopted for the same. Hence, it is in this context that member countries of the UN after significant deliberations among policy-makers, members of the civil society and activists reached a consensus on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals as part of the

international post-2015 agenda.

Talking about perspectives from the UN, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has stated that global mobilization behind the Millennium Development Goals has produced the most successful anti-poverty movement in history. Based on the UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, almost half of the population of the developing world that lived on less than \$1.25 a day have come down to as much as 14 % in 2015.

India adopted the framework of eight MDG's that had a total of 18 targets with a list of 53 indicators (48 basic and 5 alternative) to assess the progress achieved for each goal. According to a United Nations Report titled *India and the MDGs* prepared by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), 'India has made notable progress towards reaching the MDG's but achievement across the goals varies'.

According to the India Country Report 2015 released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, the poverty head count ratio has been halved along with gender inequality being eliminated in the primary and secondary education sectors but fighting hunger remains one of the most significant challenges in India alongside ensuring adequate sanitation facilities. There has been a reduction in the levels of poverty in terms of numbers but the progress is uneven. However, the slow pace with regard to women's empowerment through wage employment and political participation is something that needs to be looked into. In the country's capital Delhi, for example, the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector was 17.1% in 2011-12 as against the target of 50% as per the Millennium Development Goals, Delhi State Report, 2014. The understanding that the work on eradication of poverty is linked to a host of other development challenges such as health and education, is again very important. Another key issue for discussion is the fact that numbers and figures may not necessarily reflect the quality of life for a person. Hence, the monitoring of indicators should not be

limited to being a mere evaluation of rise or reduction in numbers but should assess the core concerns of people's problems that range from hunger, poverty, societal exclusion, lack of education and healthcare etc.

The Millennium Development Goals, in principle, have led to a new vision both in India and in the world where relevant agencies have paid attention to the various problems people face through poverty. An important fact to be noted is that the root causes of matters such as poverty have not been addressed so far through MDGs and it is expected that the list of indicators for Sustainable Development Goals to be adopted in March 2016 will take this aspect into consideration seriously.



**ASCENT,  
LIKE ANY SCENT,  
MAY NOT  
LAST LONG.**

With best compliments from:

# NCCI

Since 1914 National Council of Churches in India

## Christian Service Agency CSA

**Unity:** Be a common platform for wider Christian communities

**Practice:** Actualising a just and inclusive church for all

**Witness:** Facilitate expressions of wider ecumenism

**Service:** Promote just and inclusive communities with good governance

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# The diabolic medium The belief in God and the power of money

Gerhard Wegner



**[Prof. Dr. Gerhard Wegner is the Director of the Institute for Social Sciences of the Protestant Churches in Germany.]**

Money rules the world: that's just common sense. Everyone thinks that they know that to be true, and that this sentence accurately expresses many people's experience. And that is, indeed, how it seems to be, because it is money that allocates 'opportunities' and in this way reaches out to the farthest corners of people's lives. And it certainly doesn't have to be 'big money'; it is precisely the little sums of money - if we don't have them - that can drive us to distraction. If you don't have any money, then you are unequivocally and literally in a poor situation - you have no opportunities, in extreme cases, not even the opportunity to survive.

The 'big money', money as capital, is the medium of business, and via business it shapes society. Today, we are able to see how drastic is the course of this process by the radical economisation of the aspects of life which - in Germany at least - were for centuries governed by other principles, ones which were not (or at least, not at first sight) monetary, such as education and culture - and religion, too. Money as capital is visible, above all, in the institution of the banks. Banks exist only because money exists, and the greater the importance of money, the greater becomes the power of the banks.

It has been a long time since the success of a country's business sector is judged by whether it developed and sold products needed and desired by as many people as possible; rather, it is judged by numbers which correlate to the monetary value of the banks and thus ensure their control of the economy. The criterion is not, strictly speaking, whether people are happy with the products and services on offer, but whether they have spent and will spend money on them. The two can be

Money is a human creation - a means, an instrument - nothing more. What follows from this is the plain and simple observation that 'money is there to be spent'. The value of money lies not in the thing itself; it exists rather in order to bring forth other things, and it fulfils its real purpose through being spent. At the precise moment when it vanishes from our sight, and only then, it fulfils its *raison d'être*, when it transforms itself into a perceptible object, or a service, or something else that can be obtained with money. The sentence 'money is there to be spent' expresses everything that needs to be said about money. This sentence might sound cynical to people who have no money. It is certainly not intended in that way, because it emphasises the dignity of human beings and their common identity as God's creatures - not dependent on money. From this perspective, it follows that money cannot come between God and humanity..

identical, but don't necessarily have to be; and especially not for those people who don't have any.

Because the banks hold such an important position in society, they are subject to an unusual level of public scrutiny. Their behaviour is an indicator of the state of the economy in general. In recent years, they have suffered a significant loss of trust. The high point was the news, just before Christmas 2004, that Deutsche Bank, having achieved a return on capital invested of 18%, was announcing redundancies for many thousands of employees because it required a return of 25% in order to remain internationally competitive. There was intense public debate over this in the newspapers and elsewhere. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* observed that this event could almost have been designed to discredit the market economy in its entirety. And it is indeed a remarkable event: a number (25%) - perhaps the highest conceivable level of abstraction - has become a measure that determines people's fate.

What is decisive is not the useful things that might be done with this money; it is the money itself, which must grow. It seems that by means of this abstract, numerical guiding power, money does indeed determine people's lives. And in a very simple way: money is more important than people and everything that moves them. At least, so it appears at first sight.

But does money really determine everything? The economists would tell us that it is 'only' a medium through which control or guidance is exercised. An ingenious one, to be sure. But this only highlights the problem. How can something which stands for something else - that is, a medium - determine everything? A medium in itself is empty, and must be empty, otherwise it could not fulfil its function. But how can emptiness determine everything?

In all the great religious traditions of the world it is not money that determines what happens in the world and that constructs reality. Other powers set the ultimate goals and purposes and secure the greatest possible interconnectedness of all that is real. In the monotheistic religions, it is God. He is what holds the

world together at its very core - the 'secret of the world' (Eberhard Jüngel). In religious thought, God is at the centre of all significant forces and powers that impinge on us. The central human yearnings such as love and trust are directed towards God, because he is understood to be the creative force from whom all things stem. God is the all-encompassing reality - a 'symbol' of the whole to which we ourselves belong and in which we share as his creatures.

But money is a human creation - a means, an instrument - nothing more. What follows from this is the plain and simple observation that 'money is there to be spent'. That is really, all that is to say about money in this context. The value of money lies not in the thing itself; it exists rather in order to bring forth other things, and it fulfils its real purpose through being spent. At the precise moment when it vanishes from our sight, and only then, it fulfils its *raison d'être*, when it transforms itself into a perceptible object, or a service, or something else that can be obtained with money! The sentence 'money is there to be spent' expresses everything that needs to be said about money. To be sure - and this idea leads us on to further considerations - this sentence might sound cynical to people who have no money. But in a religious context it is certainly not intended in that way, because it emphasises precisely the dignity of human beings and their common identity as God's creatures - not dependent on money. From this perspective, it follows

that money cannot come between God and humanity.

So far, so good. Theoretically, things - at least for those who take religion seriously - are clear. If the others don't want to become slaves to money, they have to think of something else. If money is there to be spent,

then things could surely be sorted out at the ethical level alone - by reaching agreement on spending priorities. But the ethical perspective is not enough: money is more than that. It affects us on an existential level by changing our lives. It is not possible for us simply to use money - money uses us! That is the truly interesting - and diabolic - aspect to this medium.

It has long been observed that money has become a substitute for God. Niklas Luhmann describes this process very well: in earlier times, God represented as it were the 'homogeneous substance' that makes up all the motives necessary for living - but now money is more than able to perform this same role<sup>1</sup>. Whoever has money requires no other justification to fulfil any particular wish - the ability to pay is sufficient. From time to time, when this mechanism provokes too much scandal, society is duly appalled - but basically everyone is quite happy to accept the situation.

In this way, money pushes piety, the belief in God, to the margins of human experience - not dramatically and quickly, but quietly and slowly, and for that reason all the more effectively. The duties of gratitude, neighbourliness, friendliness - everything can be substituted by money<sup>2</sup>. Such duties and interpersonal qualities have an inherent value in themselves in the old, religiously-based society, because they are the result of social obligations related to a world ordered by God - and in that way they can also be

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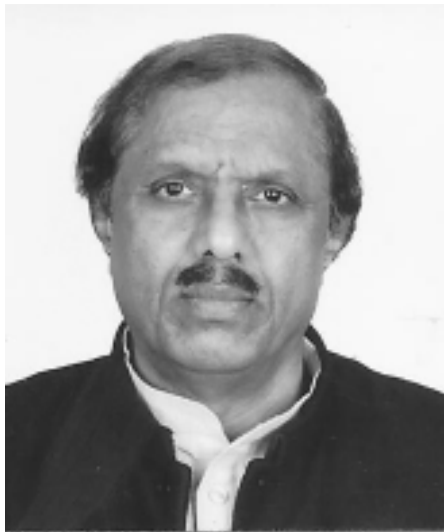
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The Ascent of Money,  
The Descent of the Human

# The Ascent of Money and the Models for Moral Regeneration

Jetti A. Oliver



[Dr. Jetti A. Oliver is the Chancellor of SHIATS University, Allahabad.]

All said and done, the man-created money continues to play havoc in the life of God-created man in every sphere of life, to a great extent, with religious groups as no exception. True to the title, Niall Ferguson's master piece "the Ascent of Money", makes it seen and heard in its depth as to how money subdues the bearers of values and morals. Several factors contributed to this state of affairs of money the mighty, in this world of injustice, discrimination, exclusion and inequalities. Markets truly are mirrors of mankind, revealing the way we value ourselves and our resources. The market was created for prudent management of the resources. In fact, it became the platform of situational exploitations with unfair trade practices, profits-first attitudes, commodification of services leading to the worst kind of enslaving, exploitation and value bankruptcy.

Ferguson traces the financial history and reveals the fact that there was no trade without war and no war without trade. The commodity markets, the bond markets, the stock markets, the insurance markets, the real estate markets, the retail



**Descent  
Is, indeed,  
Decent,  
If it stands for  
Sacrifice.**

Money is needed but money is not everything, as such, money needs to be put in its place and it is the morals that need to be cultivated and multiplied for an assured common future strengthening the common wealth with the simple principle of "for needs, 'yes' to money but, for greed, 'no' to money".

markets, the credit markets and such other became game fields for the clever and the intelligent against the ignorant and the un-informed. With globalization, markets have become harsher to the common people with either tougher regulations or no regulations, all to the detriment of the weak and the marginalized. Certain rulers still hold the notion that markets could address the problems of the people but, this leaves the vulnerable to their fate.

As Rockefellers always contended, it was easier to earn money than to spend it. It may be true of wealth creators but not of those who struggle to make both ends meet day after day. Around 70 percent people of our country are not able to secure even the prescribed minimum wages. The scenario on the other hand, contrastingly is that there are the lucky ones who draw fat salaries; or high dividends; or sky-high profits. For the speculators, the prudent investors, the venture capitalists and such others, wealth-creation is a child's play, all at the cost of breaking the backs of the poor or by the mismanagement of the State-exchequer.

The power of money is such that it is able to penetrate into the domain of the cleanest possible administrators, the statesmen-turned politicians, the self denying religious groups and such other. "The Ascent of Money" is the outcome of extensive research by Prof. Niall Ferguson, a well known British historian. As rightly observed, financial history is the back story of all history. The original definition of economics as the behavioral science of mankind is explicitly reflected in the markets and the ascent of money.

**In all circumstances, money has been playing the key role. For the ascent of man, money is required; for the basic life, money is required. To prosper in any sphere of life, money is certainly required and it looks like money begets power, authority, influence, networks, profits, empires and so on. The greed for money is such that, the means do not justify the ends but, the ends justify the means. As Ferguson analyzes, there were times when wars were waged for trade and trade for wars. Money did decide the activism either in trade or war. The territorial ambitions certain rulers entertained, developed trade links and fought wars and plundered the wealth of the countries in the south.**

Even in the modern era, in some of the countries, the so called democracies are also sustained through money, employing a variety of malpractices. This has spread into religious organizations and civil society groups. So money rules the roost. In Telugu, there is a saying that if you have money, the monkey on the mountain can come down. In this world of ever-increasing consumer values, one wonders if there is anything that the rich cannot buy with their money. It is one side

of the coin; a vast majority of people live a life of scarcity of everything is the other side of the coin. Apparently, money embraces any language, culture, ethnicity, nationality etc. and it speaks clear and loud. Money makes many things. But, the fact of the matter is, money goes a long way but not all the way. The ascent of money is man-made and so reversible.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the young man had his share of wealth with which he could readily gain friends, summon pleasures, luxurious life and all that he wanted except peace and contentment; never realizing the fact, that contentment is a continual feast. The ascent of money in his life was short-lived and so soon he became aware of the vanity on the one hand and disgrace on the other that money brought. Money does seem to have a magic to attract the best of the people and once bitten, man is the loser and money is the winner. With it comes the legion of friends, power, authority, pleasures, rulership and so on. People blame the chairs certain leaders occupy for the ills and the changed attitudes of such leaders. The gravitational pull of money is great as history tells us. All the same, we are not short of models – life transforming legends, powerful with potential to regenerate morals.

We are fore-warned by Christ the Lord that laying of treasurers on earth is not safe as moth and rust will destroy, thieves steal and so, he called upon, to lay up treasures in Heaven where neither the moth nor rust will destroy and thieves do not break and steal. To have the true power is to follow Jesus and one who desires to follow Him, has the prerequisite of denying oneself, taking up the cross and following Him, to be assured of life eternal.

The recent memory that we have is of Mahatma Gandhi, who opted to be half naked as a measure of self-denial. An English saying goes thus that "dress opens all doors" but to this grand-old man Gandhiji, though half-naked, the 10 Downing Street gates were wide-opened. Here is the Mahatma, a model even in the time of the ascent of money. The breed of people looking upto Mahatmas is certainly increasing than those looking

unto the multi nationals. If we look around, there are exemplary men and women of conviction to foster regeneration of morals in the

face of the ascent of money. Look at Mr. Bill Gates; with the fortunes he generated through his company, he is going round the world in search of leaders and the volunteers to reach out to the poor and the neglected with a compelling conscience to serve the human kind in contradiction to the outlook of the ascent of money. Mr. Mark Zuckerberg, the "Face Book" founder, on the occasion of the birth of his daughter, looks for a safer world for children and pledges most of his shares disregarding the value of the ascent of money. We can go on counting people and the foundations that value human progress aiming at the ascent of man the moral force, than the so called power, the authority, the domination and the deceit that go with the ascent of money.

**It is therefore necessary and urgent to realize that money is needed but money is not everything, as such, money needs to be put in its place and it is the morals that need to be cultivated and multiplied for an assured common future strengthening the common wealth with the simple principle of "for needs, 'yes' to money but, for greed, 'no' to money".**

As part of market strategies, several funds were floated like the loan funds, the hedge funds, the insurance funds, the pension funds, the collateral funds, the ninja (no income no job / assets) funds, the dividend funds and all these funds that were floated helped enrich the smart and the clever and impoverish the poor. Ferguson aptly contends that access to efficient credit network is essential, which alone facilitates the savers to deposit and thus, money can flow from the idle to the industrious. This would alleviate poverty. Once, poverty and hunger are removed, inequality begins to disappear. Such opportunities keep away the loan sharks and people could be freed from their shackles of bondage and they can thus be out-target for these financial weapons of mass destruction.

**As we journey towards a new heaven and a new earth, the ascent of money is a passing phase; morals will be massively regenerated, ethics honestly adhered to, and we will not be far from the Kingdom of God.**

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# Gender Dimensions of the Ascent of Money: Who is the gainer and who is the loser?

Vibhuti Patel



[Dr. Vibhuti Patel is Professor and Head of the Post Graduate Department of Economics, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai.]

### Historical Context

Expansion of World Capitalism is marked by commercialization of every core of human existence, monetization of every part of governance and increasing control of financial capital in the world economy. Money is oxygen of capitalism and market economy rules the world. Macroeconomic Policy of liberalisation, marketisation and globalization, a marked feature of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world economy has created a condition where money reigns supreme. Unlike in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, you do not need comprador to surrender sovereignty of the people of the nation, now the state itself plays the role of facilitator for giant multinational corporations (MNCs) and transnational corporations (TNCs) promoting cash nexus in every sector of the economy in the interest of super profit.

In this situation, the already skewed gender relations perpetuated over the last 5000 years of human civilization get further distorted and women and girls get more and more resource-poor, marginalized and commodified as they are largely in the care economy not cash economy. As per the United Nations, Women constitute 1/2 of the world's population, 2/3 of the world's work force but they get only the 1/10th of the world's income and 1% of the world's wealth. In a nutshell, the economic growth has by-passed the large majority of women and girls as their work is care work – cooking, cleaning, child and elderly care, lives-stock raising, collection of fuel wood, fodder for animals and water for domestic consumption – which is not monetised. None of these gets them any money. Women, not only are deprived of the rewards of their hard-work in the domestic arena, but also, women's work is not even recognized as work, it is treated as unproductive. The same ideology gets extended when they join the employment market. As women's work is not treated as productive in 'domestic arena', their work in the professional life is also considered less worthy than that of their male counterparts.

As the ascent of money does not challenge institutional hierarchy based on class, caste, gender, race, ethnicity, it accentuates inequality between 'asset owners' who are largely men, rich, upper caste, white, and 'asset-less' who are poor, lower caste, non-white and women. Economic independence is a minimum necessary condition for women's dignity, autonomy, decision making power in the family, community, economy and society at large.

In every stratum of the economy-skilled, semi skilled, unskilled, white collar-blue collar, intellectual-managerial-physical-manual - women get less pay than their male colleagues. Hence, women remain at the bottom of the pyramid even in the period of economic prosperity. In the market economy, governed by 'laissez faire', women rank among the poorest of the poor in the world economy. As the ascent of money does not challenge institutional hierarchy based on class, caste, gender, race, ethnicity, it accentuates inequality between 'asset owners' who are largely men, rich, upper caste, white, and 'asset-less' who are poor, lower caste, non-white and women. Definitely, there are inter-sectionalities in this process of increasing gap between those who control money and those who are forced to do servitude for money for their bare survival needs.

**Economic independence is a minimum necessary condition for women's dignity, autonomy, decision making power in the family, community, economy and society at large.**

### Devaluation of Women: From Womb to Tomb

It is in this context, commercial minded techno-docs and laboratory owners have been using new reproductive technologies that violate women's bodily integrity and dignity. Among the educated families, adoption of small family norm means minimum one or two sons in the family, they can do without a daughter. The propertied class obsessed about capital accumulation does not desire daughter/daughters because after marriage of the daughter, the son-in-law may demand share in the property. The middle and lower classes resort to sex selective abortions of female foetuses (i.e. future daughters) to avoid dowry harassment. But they don't mind accepting dowry for their sons. The birth of a son is perceived as an opportunity for gaining more money while the birth of a daughter is believed to result in losing money. In upwardly mobile communities, boys are treated as 'blank cheques' that can be used to encash from his future in-laws. This mindset, in the context of the ascent of money, has converted doctors into mercenaries using patriarch bias of son preference and daughter aversion in South Asia, and has made science in the service of commerce.

### Commodification of man-woman relationship

Ascent of money has ensured unlimited power to men to control sexuality, fertility and labour of women. World capitalism uses the cocktail of monetization/ commodification of man-woman relationship and male supremacist value system perpetuated by

patriarchal / class society for concentration and centralization of economic-political-cultural-social-educational and political power in the hands of the moneyed who in turn use this power to get more money.

Women have historically managed the unpaid care economy and fulfilled the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, family care, collection of fuel, fodder, water, kitchen gardening, poultry and animal husbandry and provided food and nutritional security. As women's contribution to the economy and society at large remains unrecognized, largely underpaid and mostly unpaid, women and girls are main losers in this era of ascent of money. Macro economy is controlled and managed by men, while the powers that be, see to it that women get entrenched only in micro finance thro' self help groups. Money market will never help women!

### Gender Pay Gap

The ascent of money has intensified the process of violation of women's human rights issues. While women's human rights highlight the importance of women being able to claim their rights to adequate housing and land, in order to lessen the threat of discrimination, different forms of violence, denial of political participation, and other violations of their economic rights.

### Women and Shelter

The UN has invited attention to the problem of persistence of homelessness, substandard and inadequate housing and living conditions,

an age-ing housing stock in the public and private sectors, grossly inadequate housing and civic services, including potable water. The ascent of money violates the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights characterized the state of homelessness and inadequate housing as a "national emergency." Homelessness due to desertion of aging women (who are considered to be 'garbaged') by their family members has been a major reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Subsidized social sector services replaced by "User fees"

For healthy and efficient economy, the country must have healthy and educated/skilled workforce. Introduction of User Fee in all social sector services has been a special and over-enthusiastically promoted characteristic of phenomenon of ascent of money. This has served a major blow to social sector services of welfare state in the area of public health and education.

### Neglect of Health care

Due to massive reduction in public health budgetary allocation by the state,

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# Providing Alternatives to the Poor and the Excluded

Bennet Benjamin



illegal practices like bonded labour. What we refer to as microfinance today does not include such exploitative practices, but rather lending to the poor at reasonable but sustainable rates.



[Dr. Bennet Benjamin is the Founder-Director of the Centre for Rural Health and Social Education at Yelagiri Hills, Tamilnadu.]

In this essay, I am inclined to deal with the subject of the descent of the human more from the sociological category than from the biological. Charles Darwin might treat this subject from the theory of 'Origin of Species'. In the mid-nineteenth century, an Italian scientist Francesco Barrago concluded that "man, made in the image of God, was also made in the image of ape". Whatever the case may be, while looking at the aspect of the descent of the human, it should be noted that we are essentially talking about values and behaviors with an ethical outlook for the future of the human.

In the last two centuries or so, the slow progress that was made in the monetization process gave rise to the Ascent of Money. The ascent of money picked up such momentums in the last 50 years, that it has reached mammoth proportions that monetization interferes with all processes of life. This can further be converted into a source of income, to purchase goods and convert from a system of barter to one based on the exchange of money. So, the man, from being human, became the banker.

Home to the largest number of poor people in the world, India has been a natural candidate for experimenting with microfinance as a tool for poverty alleviation. With a nationalized formal banking sector that has emphasized rural and developmental banking for several decades now, India's involvement with small credits targeted primarily at the rural poor is hardly new. However, the recent years have generated unprecedented interest in microcredit and microfinance in the form of group-lending without collateral.

But the question is, what is the plight of the poor and the marginalized, the women who remain without much money to invest and who get paid lowly for their labour, both in industry, agriculture and even in houses for their enormous services.

At the beginning of the third millennium, new and innovative alternatives could be seen as experiments and these bring people into the process of monetization for their survival and benefit. I, now, would like to recapture the essential components of microfinancial initiatives undertaken both by the governmental as well as the non-governmental organizations as an alternative to meet the onslaught of macrofinancial processes of national and global economic enterprises that engulfed all countries of the world, whether they are rich or poor, affordable or ill-affordable. Here is a case study by the Centre for Rural Health and Social Education (CRHSE) that can well illustrate the experiment.

### The current study and its purpose

In view of the above, it was felt necessary to undertake a study about the members of the Self - Help Groups (SHGs) and understand to what extent the CRHSE has contributed through micro-credit and micro financial initiatives in empowering them.

### The objectives were:

1. To study the impact of Micro-credit and Micro-financial initiatives in general,
2. To evaluate the efficiency of SHGs in operating their micro-credit and micro-finance programmes,
3. To study the changing pattern of social, economic and cultural lifestyles of SHG members,

4. To understand certain changed discipline related to their conduct,

5. To find out the contributions made by CRHSE as a promoter in the Micro-credit and financial initiative process

6. To understand the extent of women empowerment through Micro-financial initiatives.

### Micro-finance – An Overview

Micro-finance is gathering momentum to become a major force in India. The Self-Help Group (SHG) model with bank lending to groups of (often) poor women without collateral has become an accepted part of the rural finance. This paper discusses the state of SHG-based microfinance in India. With the traditionally loss-making rural banks shifting their portfolio away from the rural poor in the post-reform period, SHG-based microfinance, nurtured and aided by the NGOs, has become an important alternative to traditional lending. The government and NABARD have recognized this. Over half a million SHGs have been linked to banks over the years, mostly in South India. Microfinance in India is still too small to create a massive impact in poverty alleviation, but if pursued with skill and the objective of opportunity-development of the poor, it holds the promise to alter the socio-economic face of India's poor.

Home to the largest number of poor people in the world, India has been a natural candidate for experimenting with microfinance as a tool for poverty alleviation. With a nationalized formal banking sector that has emphasized rural and developmental banking for several decades now, India's involvement with small credits targeted primarily at the rural poor is hardly new. However, the recent years have generated unprecedented interest in microcredit and microfinance in the form of group-lending without collateral; thanks in part to the remarkable success of institutions like the Grameen Bank in the neighboring Bangladesh and BRI, BancoSol and others in more distant lands. The performance of organizations like SEWA in Western India and SHARE and BASIX in Southern India have convinced many a sceptic that microfinance can, indeed, make a difference in India as well. Over the past decade, NABARD's 'SHG-Bank Linkage Program' aimed at connecting Self-Help Groups of poor people with banks, has, in fact, created the *largest microfinance network in the world*.

Microcredit, in the sense of small loans to the poor, is of ancient origins in India. Traders and moneylenders have traditionally provided credit to the rural poor, usually at exorbitant rates of interest leading to considerable hardship and impoverishment of borrowers, including undesirable and

### The Banking Sector and lending to the rural poor – Background

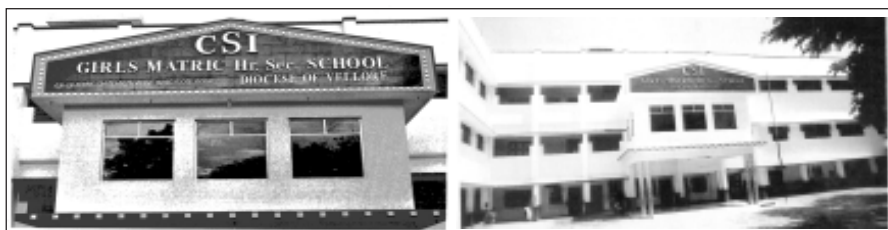
India has built up a network of rural banks that is rare if not unparalleled in the world. In 1999, 196 RRBs had over 14,000 branches in 375 districts nationwide, covering, on an average, about three villages per branch. The rural banking system, in its entirety, has an even more impressive coverage. Together, the RRBs, the nationalized commercial banks and the credit cooperatives have one branch for every 4,000 rural residents (Bhatt and Thorat, 2001). In spite of such an impressive coverage, the formal banking sector has had a limited impact on microfinance or lending to the poor.

For the first two decades of their existence, political pressure and focus on outreach, at the expense of prudent lending practices, led to very high default rates with accumulated losses exceeding Rs. 3,000 crores in 1999. The reforms in the mid-90's, following the recommendations of the Narsimhan Committee Report, removed some of the constraints on the functioning of RRBs. The financial situation of the RRBs has improved. However, much of this turnaround has resulted from a shift to investment in government bonds and loans to the non-poor in rural areas.

Microfinance provides an important way to balance the outreach among the rural poor while keeping the cost of lending low. To the extent that the costs of credit risk assessment and monitoring can be

Contd. Page 16 Col. 1 ..>>>

With best wishes



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Tirupattur, Vellore Dist., Tamil Nadu, S. India

Correspondent:

E-mail: csischool2001@gmail.com

Ph: 04179-220988, Cell: 9443965966



When you say  
**GREEN**  
automatically, you  
**GRIN;**  
But when you say  
**BLACK,**  
you unknowingly, draw  
**BACK**





## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# Money Matters in God's Economy ?

Jegadish Gandhi



[Dr. P. Jegadish Gandhi is former Professor of Economics, Voorhees College, Vellore.]

Money has existed since the beginnings of civilization, and it is at the root of all human progress. From metallic to plastic money with mobile money today, it is a long journey affecting, shaping and swaying all worldly affairs. Money has become 'touche-pad' for all age-groups irrespective of nationalities. Over the ages in all societies, the most debated issue is: "Does money matter or not, in Christian life?"

As a professor of economics for over three decades, I taught repeatedly the evolutionary dialectics and revolutionary dynamics of "money" as a medium of exchange, a unit of account and a store of value in the borderless communities. Historically, money was invented to overcome the inherent difficulties of double coincidence of human wants in barter system. In the present day context, people say, the powerful money can do and undo

In God's economy He is at the centre, in the human one, we are. For the Christian, all of life falls under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This includes money matters. The Christian life has implications for the believer's attitude towards wealth and poverty. It is not surprising, then, that economic matters are prominent in the teachings of the Bible and the social ethics of the Christian church.

receives greater emphasis.

Jesus speaks often about money. In the parable of the rich fool (Lk. 12:19) he shows the folly of being materially rich but poor with God. He

anything and everything in the globalised system. That is why the American economist F.A. Walker said: "Money is what money does". People have become money-obsessed mammon – worshippers with "gold calf" culture chanting daily the psalm of "money ascents".

The British historian Niall Ferguson in his famous book *'The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World'* which was published in 2008 writes: "Bread, Cash, dosh, dough, loot lucre, moolah, readies, the wherewithals; call it what you like, money matters". The book deals descriptively with the rise of money as a trade form and tracks its steady progression, secular development, and effects on the globalised society into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Truly, money has become a Frankenstein monster over-ruling the creator today! Alas! The high ascendancy of humans towards heaven is thwarted due to too much lust and hot pursuits for money alienating God and the humans. Yet money's ascent has not been, and can never be, a smooth one. On the contrary, the financial history is the roller – coaster ride of 'ups and downs', bubbles and busts, manias and panics, shocks and crashes. Now the society has become a den of money-makers, money manufacturers, money launderers, black and illegal money holders and wealth hoarders and money murderers.

### Dynamics of God's Economy

"The economy of God" is a quotation from 1 Timothy 1:4. According to the Greek, "Economy" is from the Greek word "oikonomia" which primarily signifies the household management. It is used with the intention of stressing the focal point of God's divine enterprise, which is to distribute, or dispense, Himself to man" (Witness lee).

**In God's economy, things are often upside down and inside out, at least from our perspective, because we tend to value things differently from what God does.**

God says, "The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil". (1 Tim. 6:10) This verse, along with the passage about the rich young ruler, causes most of us to pause and consider how different from our ways, God's ways are. Money is not intrinsically bad. Money, by itself, is neither bad nor good. The "love of money", not money itself, is a root of evil. It is not the money, but how we treat it that is the problem. The "love" comes from us, not from money, itself. The fact is that money has no intrinsic value at all; rupee bills are just pieces of paper. Coins are just inorganic substance. A rock might as well be just as valuable as a rupee bill. So, if money has no intrinsic value, we (people) are the ones who ascribe value to money. In God's economy, however, value is ascribed much differently than the values projected

by people in the human market-place. It should be no surprise, then that value in the economy of God is ranked according to the greatest Commandment (to love God above all things) and in the Second greatest Commandment (to love our neighbors as ourselves). If we are going to be rich in God's economy, we should value what God values. The real issue lies with us. Our treasure is where our hearts are. If we do not value God above all things and love other people only second to our love for God, we have the world upside down and inside out. Money, in God's economy, has no intrinsic value, but it may be valuable to the extent that it can be used to the benefit of what God values.

### Does money matter in Christian life?

It is a highly sensitive issue about which Christians are often reticent, but it is also a topic which God's world tells us we cannot ignore. Do you know, there are 500 passages in the Bible on faith, 500 on prayer and 2350 on money? **In God's economy He is at the centre, in the human one, we are. For the Christian, all of life falls under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This includes money matters. The Christian life has implications for the believer's attitude towards wealth and poverty. It is not surprising, then, that economic matters are prominent in the teachings of the Bible and the social ethics of the Christian church.** Deuteronomy 2:6 is the first mention of the word money. "You shall buy food from them with money, that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them with money, that you may drink". So water was a purchasable commodity in those days! For most of the OT period, day to day transactions took place on the barter system – exchange of goods for goods. The Bible's first wealthy man, Abraham, with the currency cattle or goats and precious metals, lived under this type of system as described in Genesis 13:2. Abraham is described as "very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold" (Gen. 13:2). Job was a man of great wealth, and Solomon was granted riches and honor unparalleled among the kings of his day (1 Kin.3:13). In Proverbs we see "the blessing of the Lord brings wealth" (10:22), and describes a simple work ethic: "A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (10:4). Of course, the Old Testament is not without its warnings about wealth. **We must not forget the source of our wealth: The O.T. institutions of the tithe, the Sabbath, and the Jubilee served in part to remind the Israelites that their wealth was ultimately the Lord's and that they were to use it to his glory.**

The picture of money changes slightly in the New Testament, which emphasizes the breakthrough of the kingdom of God in the coming of Jesus Christ. Here the negative side of money

condemns the idolatrous attitude of treating money as a deity (Mammon): "No man can serve two masters. ...." (Lk. 16:13). Jesus reminds us that money is God's creation and is not to take God's role of ruler of our lives; we must seek first the kingdom. Riches can choke the word and render it unfruitful in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:22). For this reason, it is difficult for the rich to come to faith (Matt. 19:23-24). The poor have an advantage, not simply because they are poor, but because they are unable to rely on their own resources and thus are more prepared to submit to Christ's Lordship. For this reason Jesus blessed the poor (Matt.5:3).

### Why is money important?

There are, at least, four reasons. First, how we handle money affects our relationship with Jesus, and, hence, it affects the quality of our spiritual life. Second, money and possessions are likely to be major competitors with Jesus for the Lordship of our lives, as in Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters." Third, money can actually harm us. See how Paul puts it in 1 Tim 6:9-10 "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil". Fourth, money affects a very large part of our lives. We spend a great deal of time worrying about and thinking about money. God understands this. So on this crucial matter he wants us to have his advice on all aspects. Look at this list of Jesus' parables: investment (Matthew 13:44-5), savings (Matthew 13:52) debt (Matthew 18:23-25) wages (Matthew 20:1-16), capital and interest (Matthew 25:24-30), money lending (Luke 7:41-3), inheritance (Luke 11:15-32) and rich and poor (Luke 16:19-31). Oswald Chambers saw a strong connection between our desire for the immediate and lust: "Lust simply means, 'I must have this at once'; it may be a bodily appetite or a spiritual possession..... I cannot wait for God's time, God is too indifferent; that is the way lust works." We live in a world that worships the immediate. The key to passing the test of wealth is simply found in trusting God, who is infinitely greater than all the wealth in the universe. The biblical teaching on money is, thus, twofold; money is gift from God, a sign of his blessing. But it is not to be a god in itself. The Bible is not ascetic; poverty is not inherently virtuous, nor is wealth sinful. But true wealth, the Bible teaches us, is spiritual, not material.

To be continued

In the next issue

Christian Lifestyle

WE BELIEVE IN  
PEOPLE  
MORE THAN  
PIZZA  
BUT WE ALSO BELIEVE  
THAT  
PIZZA  
CAN BRING  
PEOPLE TOGETHER

With Best Wishes:-

FAVOURITE  
MAZHUVANGAD P. O.  
NEAR TRICARE DIAGNOSTICS  
TIRUVALLA  
KERALA



## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# Taking the lid off

M. J. Joseph



[The Rev. Dr. M. J. Joseph is former Principal of Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, Kottayam, and former Director of Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore.]

### “Big is not Great...”

“If the last four millennia had witnessed the ascent of man the THINKER, we are now living through the ascent of man, the BANKER”. These words of Niall Ferguson need to be studied in depth for a right attitude to wealth, life and human civilization. It is rightly said that the concern for the weak and the defenseless is a sign of the maturity of the heart. “A great city is that which handles its art and garbage equally well”. The question before us is to raise authentic questions regarding the wholesome understanding of wealth and its role in human development.”

In an earlier issue of the PR, it was rightly affirmed that “no one lives in dignity until all live in dignity”. In a similar tone, a speech delivered by Rabindranath Tagore in the London YMCA, said: “Big is not great; great is that which is nearer to the truth”. “Preserving the timeless while adapting to the times” is the need of the hour. The question before the world community is this: Whether an attitude or idea is wholesome for a sustainable future? If the common good of the total community is not taken seriously, then the paradigm shift in any branch of human development must be viewed critically. St. Paul writing to the Romans in 13:8, speaks about transparency and accountability in relationship. In his encyclical, *‘Laudato Si’* Pope Francis has exhorted us, as the Seers of old, when he said that social love must enable us to encourage a “culture of care” which makes life both sacramental and spiritual.

### Emergence of Knowledge Society

No one will deny that it was the Thinker of yesterday that had paved various avenues for the Banker of today. The complementary character must be held in view when we take pride in any new innovation. The legacy of the past must be accepted with humility. In a knowledge society, ideas always take legs in the generation of wealth. I would say that a “Thinker” will never be replaced by the “Banker” in human development.

In a write up attributed anonymously, one may come across the truth of the world community which has been eclipsed due to external and internal pressures. “The paradox of our time is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider

“The paradox of our time is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints; we spend more, but have less; we buy more, but enjoy it less; we have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values; we talk too much, love too seldom and hate too often; we’ve learned how to make a living, but not a life; we’ve added years to life, but not life to years”.

freeways, but narrower viewpoints; we spend more, but have less; we buy more, but enjoy it less; we have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values; we talk too much, love too seldom and hate too often; we’ve learned how to make a living, but not a life; we’ve added years to life, but not life to years”.

In the context of those paradoxical statements, the conversation between the Pope and Thomas Aquinas is recalled. It so happened that Thomas Aquinas, the Great theologian of the Church had visited Pope in his private chamber. The Pope was, then, counting the currency notes. Thomas Aquinas remarked: “Your eminence, we have now silver and gold; but remember we lack the power to lift up the lame recalling the incident of healing a crippled beggar (Acts.3). In an article under the title, *Christhava Mandalathile Almeeya Vhyavasayam* (Spiritual Trade in Christian Arena), the late Prof. Ninan Koshy has brought to light the Banker symptoms of Christian Spirituality rooted in miraculous healing episodes advocated by a few and followed by millions all over the world (The New Vision for a Changing World, Oct.2008). The question before us is to search for the track from which we have deviated and compromised with the tenets of material prosperity.

### Is Global economy Rootless?

The theme “The Ascent of Money and the Descent of the Human” seeks for a critical evaluation of the spiritual values for a sustainable future for humankind. The Global market heralds the new slogan, “We are what we buy”. For the Market lobby, the biblical norm “man does not live by bread alone” is only a spiritual slogan. In its philosophy of neo-liberal paradigm of development, the gossip is more for growth rather than development. The prevalence of poverty in the midst of plenty is a real problem. C.T. Kurien has rightly remarked, “India is an island of prosperity in the sea of poverty”. The basic question before us is this: What is the global economic *dharma* for the affirmation of life for all? When we speak about an ethic of common good, we need to ask legitimate questions concerning justice, peace and integrity of creation. What St. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 13:1 should send positive vibes to us. He categorically says, even if we have all the covetable and miraculous powers in the sight of all, absence of love reduces us to ‘a noisy gong or clanging cymbal’. The ambit of social life is more than the realm of economics. As human life is interconnected with value and vision as envisioned in *vasu dhaivakudumbakam*, (The world is one family) economic dimension of life should not be glorified beyond measure. “The Ascent of the human” must always be kept in view through the integration of the material and the spiritual. We need to remember that people do not exist for the economy, but economy for the people. The care for the least, the last and the lost is a spiritual

indicator for gauging the social health. In a free market, there is no place for compassion and sympathy; no brotherhood or sisterhood. Consumer values lead us to the temptation of various kinds. For example, conversion of agricultural lands to grow cash crops is, indeed, a total disregard of the human. The displacement of human beings, particularly the weak, in the name of development and the destruction of the natural habitat for the birds and animals are, indeed, justice issues. In an anthropocentric attitude to life, other creatures are denied of their basic right to eat and to drink. The birds of the air have no place to make their nests when there is a wanton destruction of trees and forests around us. “Lead us not into temptation” in the Lord’s Prayer has its social implications. “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, and every rocket fired signifies, in a final sense a theft from those who are cold and are not clothed”. (Eisenhower).

### Philosophy of “having”, not “being”

Economics is a matter of faith. So also is ecology. The *oikos* root of economics, ecology and ecumenism, carry the weight of a moral code for creating just relationship in the household of God, the Creator. Life is meant to be lived with godliness. Wealth should be treated as one’s servant, not as a master. In Jesus encounter with Zacchaeus (Lk.19), he earned an honorific title as *The Son of Abraham*. In the global village of today, the Market paradigms, through the Media, have virtually invaded us setting aside all the spiritual norms. The introduction of mono-culture and homogenization of tastes have become the basis of the philosophy of Wealth. This has contributed to the marginalization of millions in the world. The instruction by “the pillar apostles” in Jerusalem to St. Paul in Gal. 2:10 is worth recalling: “Remember the poor”. The Market giants are exhorting us to “Forget the poor”. What a terrible descent of the human! The poor is

deprived of the privilege to make use of usable knowledge which has a potential to generate wealth. Joseph Stiglitz, the winner of the Nobel prize for Economics is quite frank when he said, “Life is difficult for developing countries; you should not make it more difficult by having unfair rules of the games”. The demand of the rich nations about the reduction of Carbon foot prints does support his argument. The proposal to dump nuclear wastes with a payment on the soil of the poor nations is quite an unethical act of eco-terrorism. The very idea of commodification of the divine gift of water has its own pitfalls too. Someone has rightly remarked: “I can buy Bed, not sleep; Books but not brains; Food but no appetite; A house but not a home; Medicine, but not health;...” “Yes, the impossibility of money should make us ashamed. True, the last word is not from Money.

### Impact and Challenge

The impact of globalization on the Youth and the adult of today is tremendous. The imitative culture, without a critical review or judgment, is a noted phenomenon. In a cyber-culture, the transfer of culture takes place along with the transfer of technology. The time has come for us to search for the human face of technology. The great temptation of today is to appreciate the package rather than the product. Having has superseded the question of being. Reality is replaced by appearance as a credible option. In a Cyber culture, the age old morals and ethics are also under fire. To run after “easy loans” and “plastic money” often have landed many into bankruptcy and Death trap. The immortal words of life- *satyam (Truth), sivam (Order) and sundaram (Beauty)*- are meant to be lived.

**Let me end this brief article with two quotes: the first one by a South Korean Poet and freedom fighter, Kim Chi Ha: and the second one by Charles Wesley (to the Methodist ministers): (I) “... An Asian whose body is broken, but whose song and move remain unbroken; who is held in solitary confinement, but has the company of thousands of men and women to whom people and dignity and reason matter more than profit, power and capital”(II) “Gain all you can, save all you can and give all you can”.**

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The Ascent of Money,  
The Descent of the Human

# Money, The Almighty

J. S. Murthy



From the fore-going narrative it becomes clear that human society will do well to opt for the love of God and faith in Christ and that alone will bring you the Kingdom of God for eternity.

**Proverbs 22: 1 – 2**

1: Good name is more desirable than great riches: to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

2: Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all.

**To borrow the words in the form of prayers before a 20 dollar bill by Michael Quoist, we can hardly respect money enough for the blood and toil it represents. Money is frightening. It can serve or destroy man. Sell what you have and give alms so providing yourselves with a purse that time cannot wear hole in an inexhaustible treasure laid up in heaven where no thief comes near, no moth. Where your treasure – house is, there your heart is too. (Luke XII 33 - 34 KV).**

O Lord, I offer you this Bill with its joyous mysteries, its sorrowful mysteries.

I thank you for all the life and joy it has given.

I ask your forgiveness for the harm it has done.

**But above all, Lord, I offer it to you as a symbol of all the labors of men, indestructible money, which tomorrow will be changed into your eternal life.**

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

As I spent time to comprehend this 'money, the Almighty' theme and its power and the evolution and the importance of modern human society and its dazzling attraction to possess it, I was forced to turn to the more precious and the only permanent reality in the scheme of God's creation as recorded in the Bible and related books.

Some unique sayings come to my mind: "Love for money is the root cause of all evil", "God's Bankers and their untold stories", (Book review by Damon Linker of the Week. @ The New York Times 2015), "Money is frightening. It can serve or destroy man". (Prayer before a Twenty dollar Bill – Prayers by Michel Quoist) "Eureka Diamond" (The Greek Word eureka means "I find it").

**Mark 10:18-22**

21: Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack" he said "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22: At this, the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

**Mathew 6: 19 – 22**

19: Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust

do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

21: For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22: The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.

**Mathew 25: 34 – 40**

34: Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."

35: For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

36: I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me".

37: Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?"

38: When did we see you a stranger and invite you in or needing clothes and clothe you?"

39: When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

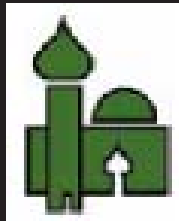
40: The king will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."



**[Dr. J.S. Murthy is Chairman of Photographic Society of Jabalpur, M.P., and recipient of National Journalism Award (1990) of Government of India.]**

[Please see the collage on page 1]

The assignment to reflect on 'The Ascent of Money, the Descent of the Human', offered me an opportunity to read and analyze the subject of "Money" undoubtedly the human world's 'greatest treasure'. Irresistible urge of the humans to acquire more and more, as if money is the only purpose and value in one's life - journey on earth is perhaps the most grievous sin. Human trust is misplaced in the power and might of "money" to buy anything valuable under the sun, and even eternal life or life after death!



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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

9<sup>th</sup> Consultation of the United and Uniting Churches

The Pilgrimage of United and Uniting Churches



# 'Living in Tents'

>>> Contd. from Page 2 Col. 4

Rev. Dr. Chris Ferguson, General Secretary, WCRC, spoke with passion about the Pilgrimage towards unity. He said, "The basic question is, how to remove or overcome the hurdles on our way to unity. We are living in a period of the *empire*, the *Babylon* where humanity is being destroyed. It is important to locate Jesus at the time of oppression." Chris Ferguson picked up the Nazareth Manifesto (Lk. 4.16-20) and asked the group to examine it as "God's project for life". He said, "The fast that God wants is justice activities. Right relationship is the key to enhance justice. We all become kin to each other through this."

### Biblical Studies

Rev. Dr. Ratnakar Sadananda, Rev. Dr. Sham P Thomas, Rev. Dr. Sunil Caleb, Rev. Dr. Santhanu Patro and Rev. Dr. Royce Manoj led the Bible Studies

### Pilgrimage: Keep digging new wells

Text: Gen. 26.1-33

Ratnakar Sadananda

First, Isaac settled down in Gerar as desired by the Philistine King Abimelech. There he faced the problem of identity and had to lie that his wife was his sister. However, he flourished there and became rich. He did not forget his father Abraham's life. He dug up the wells of his father which the Philistines had filled with mud.

Isaac was forced to move and even give up the new wells he had dug. Finally, Isaac came to Beer-sheba and settled down there and dug new wells. Our life is a Pilgrimage. In our journey we should not forget our tradition; at the same time we should be willing to give away our "wells" and keep digging new wells, always remembering that we are pilgrims.

### Unity: Several levels of unity

Text: Acts.3.1-11

Sham P. Thomas

Though this passage is never considered as a unity passage, there are some valuable insights about unity we can gather from this passage.

Peter and John were colleagues; yet they were, in a sense, competitors! They came together with one accord to heal the lame man. Together they stood and used the word of unity, "we". We can identify several levels of unity in their healing of the lame.

Unity in working together, unity in gaze, unity in gap (we do not have), and unity in solidarity. Bold witness of the united disciples emboldened the lame man.

What we need today is similar kind of bold witness.

### Justice: The fairness of God's justice

Text: Mt. 20.1-16

Sunil Caleb

The master is paying all the workers in the same way irrespective of the fact when they started to work.

No one who wants to work, should be denied of the chance.

This parable unequivocally declares that God wants that all the basic needs of all people need to be met. This demands that economic equality in the community must be established. Here we see the fairness of God's justice.

### Peace:

### Healing and forgiveness to establish peace

Text: John 14. 26-31

Santhanu Patro

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you." Jesus said.

World leaders are meeting to discuss climate change. They should be thinking about changing terrorism! It is not living in "tent", but "tents" because of the diversities. Tent is indicative that nothing is permanent.

Our nation is becoming very intolerant. Attempts to create exclusive communities are everywhere. Terrorism is spreading all over the world. Are we willing to give space for others in our tent? We are co-creators with God. We are called upon to build a world of peace. Peace that Jesus offered was an alternative to that of the world, but the world did not listen.

This world needs much forgiveness and healing in its struggle to establish peace.

### Witness:

### Who is 'Hagar' in our context?

Text: Gen. 6.1-16; 21.8-21

Royce Manoj

Hagar was brought from Egypt as a slave. Egypt was a civilized country. As a slave, was that journey a pilgrimage for Hagar? Hagar represents the millions of people who are refugees and migrants. Hagar did not have voice or choice. It was not Hagar's choice to become Abraham's wife. It was forced upon her. She had to run away unable to suffer Sarah's torture. God asked her to return to Abraham. God was with Hagar as much as he was with Abraham and Sarah. Was her running away and return pilgrimage? Finally, Hagar and Ishmael were thrown out from Abraham's tent and they were left in the wilderness. Was that part of Hagar's pilgrimage? Are we giving space for others in our tent – the space they deserve? Does God's message give Hagar comfort? Do we see the presence of God in today's refugees and migrants? Who is Hagar in our context? What is our witness to Hagar?

### Inter-Religious Panel:

There was an Inter-religious Panel discussion on 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. morning. There were four panelists. Dr. P. K. Abdul Rahman, Head of the department, Islamic Studies, Madras University. Dr.(Ms) Priyadarsana Jain, Head of the department, Madras University. Swami Laxmi

Narasimhan, representing Swami Chaturvedi of Ramakrishna Mission. The Rev. Dr. Ratnakar Sadananda moderated the session. The theme was Peace.

### Continuation Committee

A continuation committee was elected with the

following members: Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson (Chirperson) (USA), Rev. Charity Majiza (Australia), Rev. Dr. Ratnakar Sadanada (india), Rev. Susanne Erlecke (Germany), Rev. Christopher Mason (Jamaica and Cayman Islands), Rev. Dr. Leepo Modise (Southern Africa).

Reported by Ipe Joseph

[The Rev. Dr. Ipe Joseph, former General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in India, and presently the General Secretary of the Sunday School Association of India, participated in the Consultation representing the Metropolitan Joseph Mar Thoma of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church]

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

Money or God and the Human – Between Faith, Social Movements and Capitalism

# Are there possibilities of structural and personal transformation to find a new culture of life ?

Ulrich Duchrow

>>> *Contd. from Page 3 Col. 4*

patriarchy since only men could own property, which was a way of giving them political power, too.

So the **result** of introducing money as commodity and private property as an absolute, combined with imperial conquest, was the increased division in societies between masters and slaves, men and women, a more and more precarious situation of small farmers and in general, a dire impoverishment and suffering for the majority of people. This was not just a structural problem because money also changed people's souls and thinking. Besides, communicating through speech and cooperation they started calculating, including calculating each other's performance in competition, and defending their private property more or less violently. So the problem was not just structural, but took on a psychological and spiritual dimension.

Before looking at the religions and philosophies resisting these developments in the Axial Age and beyond, let us briefly analyze how the **modern capitalist civilization** has built on the early money-private property-economy, giving it a new dynamics. In early capitalism from the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century CE the market set out to conquer one sphere of life after the other. The basic step was the privatization of common land through enclosures subjecting agriculture to the mercantile coordination of labor. Another new element was the introduction of compound interest. However, the most decisive new factor was the invention of the double-entry book-keeping in the upper Italian trade and banking cities. Here everything was calculated according to debit and credit, costs and return, input and output – with the one goal to gain maximum profit. **This was not just a social technique but the**

Structural, cultural and personal greed started to be seen as something positive. Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith defined greed and egoism as a virtue and the decisive motor of the economy. The mechanism of continuous re-investing the profit in projects to gain higher profits created an obsessive accumulation machine. Money, constantly re-invested for accumulation, is called capital. Capital is not simply money but money or assets invested for getting more money. So greedy money is the description of capital.

**decisive characteristic of a new worldview.** The world became looked at as a functional mechanism geared at producing profit for one-self. The calculation of utility followed the means-end rationality, which is the typical way of thinking in European modernity and which meanwhile dominates the whole world. As the economy serves the one purpose of maximizing profits normal people judge everything according to a single yardstick: "What's in it for me?"

So structural, cultural and personal greed started to be seen as something positive. Finally, Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith defined greed and egoism as a virtue and the decisive motor of the economy. The mechanism of continuous re-investing the profit in new projects in order to gain higher profits created an obsessive accumulation machine. Money which is constantly re-invested for accumulation purposes is called capital. Capital is not simply money but money or assets in monetary terms invested for getting more money. So greedy money is the exact description of the nature of capital, of profit, thirsty for more profit. This is why capitalism is the precise term for the economic system and the form of society of western modernity.

**Industrial capitalism** deepened the division of labor and increased the split between the classes. Karl Marx was prophetic when he stated: "Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together

of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the laborer."<sup>11</sup> He also analyzed the obsession for accumulation by the commodity-money mechanisms as fetishism driving people and societies even against reason. **Theologically we call this idolatry. This is exactly what we experience today as growth fetishism destroying the earth.**

Today this fetishism has taken the form of **financial capitalism** after it turned out that infinite growth is not possible in a finite world. Within the financial sector the growth obsession has turned to speculation with ballooning financial assets in all kinds of forms. But it is not without a link to the real economy. Because when the balloons burst as we experienced in the years following 2007 the neoliberal governments take real money from the working tax payers and throw it into the voracious jaws of the money owners and their agents, the banks. It seems certain that the whole system will one day collapse, thereby increasing the suffering of people even more. Financial capitalism is the ultimate climax of a development starting in the Axial Age.

For me the **conclusion** is that we are not dealing with this or that crisis, but that this whole civilization is death-bound, not just the economy. It is only because the majority of the people and to some extent all of us are imprisoned in the same kind of logic, spirit and practice that the system

is still able to operate. Are there possibilities of structural and personal transformation to find a new culture of life, including a new political economy?

### Footnotes

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<sup>8</sup> BRODBECK, Karl-Heinz: *Die Herrschaft des Geldes. Geschichte und Systematik. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, (2009) 2012.*

<sup>9</sup> DUCHROW, Ulrich/Hinkelammert, Franz: *Transcending Greedy Money: Interreligious Solidarity for Just Relations. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.*

<sup>10</sup> KIPPENBERG, Hans G.: *Die Typik der antiken Entwicklung, in: idem, (ed.) Seminar: Die Entstehung der antiken Klassengesellschaft. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977. Concerning the debt mechanism cf. GRAEBER, op.cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, *Capital*, vol. 1 (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch15.htm>).

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**To be continued**

**In the next issue**

The response of the Axial Age faiths and philosophies, and of today's liberation theologies and spiritualities

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# Delusions of Information, Images and Money

John Samuel



**[Mr. John Samuel is the President of the Institute for Sustainable Development and Governance, and an International Consultant to the United Nations, and International development organisations, and former Head of the Global Programme on Governance of the UNDP]**

There are tonnes of information floating around the information highways these days. There is an app for everything under the sun. Money and all that money can buy is on your fingertips. And there are hoards of Internet junkies swimming around internet waters. But what does this information do for the hungry child or the thirsty village? How much of this information can fill an empty stomach? My concern is not about the validity of information, but that this contagious information fever is eclipsing reality.

All of a sudden, all of the cities are filled with hoardings promising instant

Earlier there was a very strong and balanced link between the signifier and the signified; between paper money and the resources it signified; between information and the reality the information sought to convey; between the image and the situation or the person behind the image. With the dotcom revolution, the free-floating money market and image merchandising, this vital link has been considerably strained. In the process money has taken precedence over resources, information has taken precedence over real life, and image has taken precedence over reality. When the medium itself becomes the message, those who control the 'mediation' become powerful.

information nirvana or a mobile application for any problem under the sky: from dating to dancing, from soyabeans to salvation, from cars to cricket, and from houses to headaches. The message is that you would not be able to survive without a mob application or Google guru for your daily fix of information. Of course, people need information, mobile and money. **And in the new age, politics is all about 'image marketing' and 'image management'. There is a link between the information fever, money market and image merchandise.**

The important thing is that there is a process at work here in which information, image and money become more vital than the ideas, reality or resources they are supposed to represent. There is a connection between the predominance of finance capital or the money market, the high-pitched information market and the emerging politics of images. The connecting link is that all these three new protagonists of the market are not real but some that represent the real. In other words money, information and image are signifiers of something else.

Money in itself is useless unless it represents other resources. Money cannot fill the stomach or quench thirst unless someone is ready to exchange the real resources (ie food, drink, clothing, commodities etc) for money. Money is not

wealth. It is something which signifies wealth, consisting of material things and services necessary for the survival and improvement of living conditions. It is the same with information. Information becomes important because it tells us about something else that exists in reality: about things, processes, situations, people, contexts etc. An image is some visual or perception that represents something else: a person, a situation, an idea etc. They are all in a sense mediums of exchange. In any society, social, political and economic exchanges and negotiations happen through these signifiers that serve as the medium of exchange. The story of each civilization is also the story of different kinds of mediations that serve social, political and economic functions in a given society at a particular time. From ancient rock paintings and pictograms, indigenous modes of social exchange and barter systems of exchange, socio-cultural history evolved to innovate mediums and modes of exchange. The barter system gave way to metallic forms of representation like coins and later paper money, and then plastic money, which is giving way to the concept of info-money.

One can trace a parallel socio-historical process that has helped to collate information from local specificity and utilities to a broader arena of

dissemination. This happened in the case of images as well, starting with images of the divine, going on to those of the king, and later becoming a broader socio-cultural phenomenon.

So what is so peculiar about the present predominance of the three key signifiers — information, money and images — in our lives? It has, after all, been a fairly long historical process. The key difference is that earlier there was a very strong and balanced link between the signifier and the signified; between paper money and the resources it signified; between information and the reality the information sought to convey; between the image and the situation or the person behind the image. With the dotcom revolution, the free-floating money market and image merchandising, this vital link has been considerably strained. In the process money has taken precedence over resources, information has taken precedence over real life, and image has taken precedence over reality. When the medium itself becomes the message, those who control the 'mediation' become powerful. That is why Rupert Murdoch becomes more powerful than citizens or even political rulers. Because it is not the what and why of information that matters, it is the 'how' of information delivery that defines the information itself. When the means itself becomes an end, the end becomes redundant. **Why has the sensex all of a sudden turned so sexy? Because the sensex operates on money, information and images.**

**To be continued**

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Recently renovated, the Human Resources Development Centre includes a library and documentation unit, a conference hall and a number of outdoor meeting areas. Accommodation for up to 60 people in bedrooms and dormitories with attached bathrooms is available for a reasonable service charge. Catering can also be provided for trainees and guests staying at the centre.

Yelagiri Hills can be easily reached by either train or bus from Chennai or Bangalore. The closest railway junction is at Jolarpet, 19 km from Yelagiri Hills. Regular bus services operate between Tirupattur and the Hills.

**Dr. Bennet Benjamin** Secretary, HRDC  
HRDC, 215 Kottaiyur Road, Yelagiri Hills – 635 853,  
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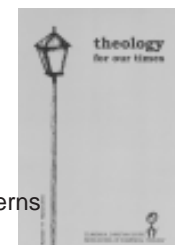
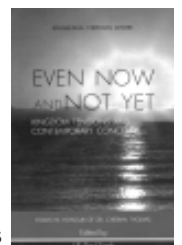
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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

Providing Alternatives to the Poor and the Excluded

# Opening the gates of a hitherto untapped reservoir of human enterprise

Bennet Benjamin

>>> **Contd. from Page 9 Col. 4**

reduced with the help of the NGOs, banks can actually reach out to a large number of truly poor households without incurring heavy transactional expenses.

### Self Help Groups (SHGs) as borrowing units

Self Help Groups form the basic constituent unit of the microfinance movement in India. An SHG is a group of a few individuals – usually poor and often women – who pool their savings into a fund from which they can borrow as and when necessary. Such a group is linked with a bank – a rural, co-operative or commercial bank – where they maintain a group account. Over time the bank begins to lend to the group as a unit, without collateral, relying on self-monitoring and peer pressure within the group for repayment of these loans.

An SHG consists of five to twenty persons, usually all from different families. Often a group like this is given a name. Each such group has a leader and a deputy leader, elected by the group members. The members decide among themselves the amount of deposit they have to make individually to the group account. The starting monthly individual deposit level is usually low – Rs. 10 or Rs. 20. For a group of size 10, this translates to Rs. 100 to 200 of group

savings per month. On the basis of the resolutions adopted and signed by all members of the group, the manager of a local rural or commercial bank opens a savings bank account. The savings are collected monthly from individual members and deposited in the bank account.

Joining an existing SHG is often a costly affair for an aspiring villager. In order to maintain parity among the members, a new member has to join by depositing the total accumulated individual savings and interest of the group. Besides the new member has to be accepted by every member of the existing group. Thus it is often easier for a person not affiliated with an SHG to start a new SHG than joining a pre-existing one. Loans are then given out to individual members from out of these funds. Such loans, fully funded out of the savings generated by the group members themselves, are called “inter-loans”. The repayment periods of loans are usually short, 3-6 months. After regular loan issuance and repayment for six months, the bank considers making a bank loan to the SHG. The maximum loan amount is a multiple (usually 4:1) of the total funds in the group account. This limit is also reached gradually starting from a lower (2:1 or 1:1). Thus a 10 – 15 member SHG with individual monthly deposit level of Rs. 20, completing a six-month successful

“inter-loaning”, accumulates total savings of Rs.1200/- and is eligible for a maximum bank loan of Rs. 4800/-.

### Linking SHGs to the formal rural banking sector

The main advantage of SHGs lies in their joint liability and consequent “peer monitoring” of member borrowers. In association with sponsoring NGOs, they serve to reduce the transaction and monitoring costs of small lending for the banks as well as to reach credit to the absolute poor. It is, therefore, hardly a surprise that they have attracted considerable attention in the rural banking sector as well as from the government in recent years. Several alternative models of SHG-NGO-bank relationship have emerged in recent years. One such model is where the bank lends directly to the SHG and the latter further lends it to individual members. As a variant of this model, an NGO may provide training and guidance to the SHG still dealing directly with the bank. This has been the most popular model in the Indian context. Alternatively, the NGO itself may act as an intermediary between the bank and the SHG, borrowing from the bank and lending it to (usually multiple) SHGs. Yet another model involves the bank lending directly to the individual borrower with the NGO and the SHG acquiring an advisory role. Here the NGO assists the bank in loan-monitoring and recovery.

### The Road Ahead – Prospects and Challenges

The path ahead is obviously strewn with challenges. Scaling up of projects and bringing millions of people within the fold of microfinance is no mean task. The most convincing feature of this form of financing, is the near-perfect repayment rates. The expansionary zeal of microcredit practitioners should be balanced with the

quality of loans – indeed a momentous challenge. Government involvement in SHG-based microfinance is a welcome development but it is not free from its ills. Government-aid almost always brings in its wake political favoritism and corruption. It is important to ensure that the government microfinance initiatives do not go the way of their several well-intentioned predecessors.

The biggest challenge in development, however, is the simultaneous development of investment potential and improvement of skill-levels of the borrowers. A glut of low skilled services is an unwelcome substitute for scarcity of credit. As microcredit alleviates the credit availability problem, the need for microconsulting, business planning and services like marketing, are being felt with greater acuteness. Microcredit cannot be expected to be a panacea for the rural developmental problems. In some sense, its role is similar to that of credit in the general economy. It is a string that can hold back progress, but it is almost impossible to push on a string. There is a very real need of investments that yield higher returns than the sustainable microcredit interest rates for the microcredit initiative to be truly successful. However, the evidences point to the several beneficial side-effects of microcredit.

In particular, empowerment of women and the inculcation of financial training and discipline amongst the poor will undoubtedly have long-term socio-economic benefits. The principles of self-help and microcredit thus hold the key to economic and socio-cultural freedom for India's millions of poor people, opening the gates of a hitherto untapped reservoir of human enterprises.

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Kerala



## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# The emerging world economic order and the challenge

V. Mathew Kurian



Jesus came across monetary transactions within the Jerusalem temple he got angry over it. Under the new



(Dr V. Mathew Kurian is the Joint-Director of Dr. K.N. Raj Centre, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam)

### 1. Introduction

Technology has been playing a crucial role in the political, economic and social advancement of all human societies. But this gain would have been impossible without the catalytic function of money. The economy got its dynamism mainly from the functioning of money. Without money no economy could actively exist. So 'money' is a necessary institution. However, in the present neo-liberal world order, money is instrumental in dehumanizing society and in this predicament, it is worth to explore 'the ascent of money' and 'the descent of the human'.

*This article starts with the introduction of money as a natural necessity. Then a brief profile of the evolution of money is given. Subsequently, we show the nexus between money and capitalism. Finally, we examine how the ascent of money and the descent of the human make the emerging world economic order unequal, unstable, unsustainable and unjust.*

### 2. Introduction of Money as a 'Servant' of the human

In primitive times, barter was the form

When at the centre of the system there is not any more man but money, when money becomes an idol, men and women are reduced to simply instruments of a social system and an economy characterized, indeed, dominated by deep imbalances.

of exchange. But barter requires double coincidence of wants with regard to quantity, quality and time. It seldom happens in real life. So human ingenuity invented money as a medium of exchange. With the establishment of political institutions, issuing money became a prerogative of the government. It is this governmental backing which imparts 'general acceptability' to money.

### 3. Evolution of Money- A Brief Profile

As a medium of exchange in human history we see multiple goods used as 'money'. Cowrie's shells and cocoa beans are two examples. Some goods created problems like storing, perishability. Those problems led to the issue of metallic coins, of course, with the stamp of the ruler concerned. In metallic coinage there were various monetary systems like mono metallism, bi metallism etc. There were also coins of metals like gold, silver, copper and the like. From metallic coinage, there arose paper money, fully convertible, partially convertible and non-convertible. Again, with the establishment of banking system, 'credit money' constituted the major chunk of total money supply. Now in the information society and economy, 'virtual money' in the form of credit cards and debit cards is in vogue. The so-called 'bit coins' are the latest innovation in monetary evolution.

### 4. Money and Capitalism

Though money was introduced as a medium of exchange, with the rise of capitalism as an economic system, it was elevated to the position of 'Capital'. Capitalists used money capital to procure the necessary factor inputs for production. When the products are transacted in the commodity market it could fetch more money which Marx dubbed 'Surplus Value'.

When the Government and the

banking system create too much money there would be 'inflation'. When the monetary system fails to supply adequate finance, there would be the 'deflation'. Capitalism has been subjected to such deviations sporadically. In the 1930's, it confronted a great depression making the life of people all over the world painful.

### 5. Ascent of Money in the Emerging World

Towards the latter period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, world economy experienced the rise of a new technology with grave implications on the life of people all over the world. The 'electronic revolution' and the consequent 'ICT revolution' radically changed the nature and functions of money. It has led to a world of 'virtual money'.

The ICT revolution drastically transformed the world economy. So the modern economy is characterized as 'information economy'. The world economy has undergone a structural transformation in favour of the 'service sector'.

**A dangerous trend under new globalised capitalism is the commoditization of 'money' and 'financial assets' on a world scale. Trillions of dollars are transacted in the world economy every day, not to cater to the exchange of real commodities. These monetary transactions are merely speculative transactions, making the global financial architecture highly vulnerable. Today's global capitalism is 'financialised' with its dangerous implications on human life.**

### 6. Ascent of Money and Descent of the Human: Two Sides of the Same Coin of 'Financialization'

In all religious traditions we find that 'usury' is forbidden. So money should not be used to beget more money. When

capitalist order, accumulation of money has become the main motto of human life. So 'money' is being secured not only by moral means, but also unethically. Drug trafficking, women trafficking all take place in pursuit of monetary rewards. There are even formal financial institutions to 'launder' such 'dirty money'.

Human dignity and human values are disappearing in the emerging materialistic world order. Capital is hungry for super profits. Thomas Picketty in his book 'Capital in the Twenty First Century' pointed out that the rate of growth of earnings of capital is much higher than the rate of GDP growth. The consequence is concentration of wealth in a few hands. Even in countries like the USA the growing inequality between the rich and the poor has led to people's protests. The 'Occupy Wall Street' protest is an example of it. Business magnets like George Soros and Warren Buffet have earned trillions of dollars not by making any productive contributions but by engaging in speculative transactions. When such 'unearned' profits accumulate, we find millions of people incapable of meeting the 'basic needs'. So the present financialized economy is inhuman and unjust. According to Pope Francis, it is killing people. To quote him: "When at the centre of the system there is not any more man but money, when money becomes an idol, men and women are reduced to simply instruments of a social system and an economy characterized, indeed, dominated by deep imbalances".

### 7. Conclusion

In this predicament, an alternative economic system is of utmost importance in which human values have to be installed in the place of unholy monetary values. This is the central challenge of virtuous people all over the world.

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# The Importance of Tax Justice Tax is a moral issue, and tax dodging is immoral

David Haslam

>>> *Contd. from Page 4 Col. 4*

Tax is wonderful and we should thank God for those who thought up the idea and created the system. I was disappointed when I recently suggested this to another Methodist minister who didn't seem to get the idea at all, and hated paying tax. Perhaps we Christians have been unduly affected by the portrayal of tax-gatherers in the Scriptures, but in those days, of course, taxes were collected by the Romans, the monarchy and the Temple, and none of them were returned to the people for any beneficial purpose. Unless you count the sacrificing of a dove or lamb as some kind of benefit.

Brooks points out that it cost the UK Revenue and Customs (HMRC) authorities just £3.5 billions to collect £446 billions in taxes in 2010/11, a collection fee of 0.8 percent. Tax 'evasion' (to use HMRC's term) they estimate at £5.5 billions, though campaigners talk more about £40 billions, perhaps including 'avoidance' as well. The companies talk about the legal difference between tax avoidance, which is legal, and tax evasion which is not. Campaigners tend to talk about tax dodging, which includes both. Tax is a moral issue, and tax dodging is immoral. Between 1999 and 2011 British companies' profits increased by 58 percent while corporation tax receipts rose only by 5 percent. Many of the largest 100

The companies talk about the legal difference between tax avoidance, which is legal, and tax evasion which is not. Campaigners tend to talk about tax dodging, which includes both. Tax is a moral issue, and tax dodging is immoral. Between 1999 and 2011 British companies' profits increased by 58 percent while corporation tax receipts rose only by 5 percent. Many of the largest 100 companies on the UK Stock Exchange pay no corporation tax at all, AstraZeneca was one such in 2015. Facebook paid about £4,300, while it gave its employees £35 millions in bonuses! No wonder tax receipts are insufficient to balance the UK budget!

companies on the UK Stock Exchange pay no corporation tax at all, AstraZeneca was one such in 2015. Facebook paid about £4,300, while it gave its employees £35 millions in bonuses! No wonder tax receipts are insufficient to balance the UK budget!

Like Shaxson, Brooks has plenty of ideas as to how this appalling situation can be addressed. The tax authority HMRC needs to be strengthened (it lost 35 percent of staff between 2005 and 2010), and prevented from making 'sweetheart' deals with the biggest avoiders. One of those was with Vodafone, who, some campaigners thought, got away without paying billions in tax. That company has also been in trouble in India for the same reasons. The budget for chasing up tax avoidance and evasion in the UK has almost halved from £3.6 billions to £1.9 billions, in five years - such a reduction in the most economically productive activity the UK has! We must stop asking the

accountants who assist the companies to dodge tax to help the UK Treasury to make the rules, which they do! Transparency is the key. The settlements of tax disputes must be open and those caught evading tax and those assisting them should be brought to Court. Brooks like Shaxson is part of the Tax Justice Network, a collection of seasoned and well-informed experts in the field of tax dodging, and more of them a little later.

**More and more information is now becoming available about the gap between rich and poor. In January 2014 it was reported that the 300 richest people on the planet are now worth \$3.7 trillions, the 300 richest became over \$500 billions better off than one year before. Bill Gates returned to the top of the tree at \$78.5bn, while at the same time his Microsoft companies are estimated to avoid up to £3bn annually by moving earnings through countries such as Ireland, Luxembourg and**

**Singapore. In the same month it was reported that the 67 richest US citizens are 'worth' more than the entire African American population of 45 million people.**

In that month also an Oxfam report said that the 85 richest people in the world had amassed \$1.7 trillions, as much as the "wealth" of the poorest half of the global population - 3.5 billion people. In October 2015 Credit Suisse announced that the "one percent" now owned over fifty percent of the world's wealth. In December 2015, while Facebook only paid £4,000 in UK tax its founder Mark Zuckerberg announced he was now able to give millions away to cure disease.

In Jesus's time the poor were weighed down by taxes, for the occupying Romans, King Herod and his court, and worst of all the Temple authorities. The High Priests and scribes kept themselves in comfort through using the money-changers and sellers of doves and pigeons at the temple entrance. When Jesus went there he was so incensed at the way the wealthy were exploiting the poor he turned over their tables, and whipped them out of the place. We should be doing the same to the tax dodgers of today, in whichever country they operate.

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**Greetings to Prof. Mammen Varkey and the PR Team  
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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

# Rediscovering Human by Resisting Market

Raj Bharath Patta



[Rev. Raj Bharath Patta is, now, engaged in Doctoral Research at University of Manchester, UK.]

**Reading from Luke 15: 11- 32**

'The ascent of money and the descent of the human' is the theme chosen for this annual special issue. Indeed there has been an ascendancy of capital or market or money and it is well captured in a Telugu saying, "**Dabbu lekhapothe chhachhinodutho samanam**" (A person without money is a dead person). Today it is money that determines life, and demonstrates the value of living in our contexts. With a cloud of market surrounding us, life and humanity are devalued and dehumanized. The system of marketization breeds inequality. In this process, the human is lost, shattered, broken, blurred, even erased and forgotten.

This parable of two sons in Luke 15 is one where the younger son becomes a victim of the forces of marketization, for he seeks his estate to be divided making his spending levels to scale on a high. Consumerism takes him captive, for he spends all that he has, for it is 'easy money', his father's money he inherited. When the markets crash, and when economy is in a bad state with forced austerity and famine, he realizes and rediscovers his humanity which he enjoyed in his father's house, for he recognizes that he has been captured by the forces of capitalism and money.

Complacency has been one of the manifestations of self-righteousness of our times, and has been a dire reality of Christian living. The ethos globalisation has always taught us is to be self-content, self-satisfied and made us more individualistic and selfish, no matter what happens to the other in our own community.

needs to feel for him/her. When one is fed, and everyone in the community is fed.

Therefore let our Churches and houses become the

Marketization promotes inequality, individualism and complacency, and here is this parable which is read against these forces, to rediscover humanity, for the younger son 'came back to his senses' (17v), recognizing the worth of life and living. Human is rediscovered by promoting equality, communality and by overcoming complacency. By this, the market and the system of marketization is resisted.

### 1. Equal Bread Builds Equal Society

Occupational discrimination has been still a rampant phenomenon in India, and particularly in the name of caste and gender there has been unequal distribution of wages. Unequal treatment of workers at work, some occupations are being looked down upon and have been attached to the caste-based works. The work force has been divided and ruled by the oppressive ruling class in our society. Market and corporations are only carried away by profits and are not interested in the lives of people.

The Parable of the Prodigal and his brother, when re-read in our times of hunger and food scarcity, it is moving around food politics. The younger son in a distant land, when he was dying of hunger thinks of his father's house, he could not but think of the plenty of food the workers enjoyed there (17v). The house of his father was an inclusive community where there was equal food for all in the house. No matter what the identity of a person is, what the work of a person is, if they are at father's house, whether hired ones, temporary workers, permanent workers, day labourers, his own sons and even himself, all had the privilege of enjoying food, which was served equally and justly. Probably what the father and his son ate was the same as for those hired hands in that house. All sufficient food was available for all those working at the father's house. No discrimination, no exclusion, no barriers, no boundaries, no gaps and no individualism, the bread was

enough and was even sufficient to spare for all those working at that house.

This parable calls us to fight against occupational discrimination in our society today. There should not be any discrimination at work. Like the father's house in the parable our Churches and homes should be examples where equality and sufficiency is maintained to all at work. When there is equality at work, there is peace and productivity.

### 2. Feasting Together Builds Inclusive Community

Bishop VS Azariah, in 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, in one of his speeches, said that 'missionaries have always prayed for granting us thrones in heaven but have never given their chairs in their own rooms for us to sit.' This has been so, for most of the Christian mission engagements elsewhere, even today. Most of us when people come in hunger, forget to address their hunger and have either prayed for those who are in hunger to be fed, or made hunger as the vulnerable situation for us to evangelize and show mercy and charity, and least of all have forgotten to feed them when they are hungry. By doing so, a hierarchical society is further made, with donor and receiver.

But the father, on seeing his son coming in hunger, first of all addressed his hunger by ordering a grand feast of non-vegetarian dinner (23v). Even though the son has asked for forgiveness, and expressed his unworthiness to be called as his son, long before he forgave him, he addressed the hunger of his son. By ordering a feast, father builds an inclusive community with the others over there. The father did not order to give his hungry son some left over food, nor did he give some snacks that were available instantly, nor took him to a restaurant for an individual private dinner. But the father organized a feast, where his hungry son was fed as well as the others in the community. If one is hungry in the community, everyone

places where hunger is addressed not by mere prayers, nor by charity but by inclusivity and justice. Inter-dining has been one of the key efforts Dr. B.R. Ambedkar proposed in overcoming caste discrimination, and it is high time that we organize food festivals inviting people of all ethnicities and tribes to join in, for by this forces of dehumanization are defeated and the human is rediscovered.

### 3. Complacency A Threat to Inclusive Community

Complacency has been one of the manifestations of self-righteousness of our times, and has been a dire reality of Christian living. The ethos globalisation has always taught us is to be self-content, self-satisfied and made us more individualistic and selfish, no matter what happens to the other in our own community.

The property had been divided equally between the two sons. Therefore, when his father on the return of his younger one threw a feast, it was from the elder's portion that he cooked some beef for the community. And probably that did not taste good to the elder one, for the father 'shared' from his portion. Complacency makes us not to share, and therefore frustration is shown. Complacency also made the elder one to allege that the younger one's hunger was his own making. Complacency breeds greed.

**It is high time that we Christians gave up complacency. Our attitudes need change, for sharing and caring are all part of community and inclusive living. For today, complacency is the great threat to inclusivity. Complacency is the new aristocracy, a characteristic promoted by forces of market, a threat to inclusivity and thereby to humanity. Resisting, overcoming and defeating complacency helps us to rediscover human in the context of growing ascendancy of money.**



Best wishes from:

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

### The diabolic medium

# Are we its slaves or its masters?

Gerhard Wegner



>>> *Contd. from Page 6 Col. 4*

a profound nuisance in practical everyday life. When they are replaced by money, it opens up very quickly a far greater measure of freedom in the world. I am then freed from the obligations of gratitude – or alternatively I can freely choose to accept them if it seems sensible to me. This may also be connected with an orientation towards God – financial donations and self-sacrifice continue to remain possible, of course. But I can no longer infer whether this is the case from the action itself: everything is reduced to a payment. Money reaches the apogee of its role in supplanting God when it seeks the limelight in the form of extreme wealth, a phenomenon we can observe in all its beauty in certain places predominantly inhabited by the rich. Everyone knows these places: Cannes and Nice, but also Kampen on the island of Sylt, or Heiligendamm. A particularly impressive example is the exclusive car park in front of the restaurant 'Sansibar' in Hörnum on Sylt. There a notice reads, in all seriousness: 'Only Porsches. Other cars are towed' – and people obey it. But why?

These observations about how money is in effect replacing God take us already right into the heart of the discussion about God and money. Money is a means of producing something other than itself – but what kind of medium is it? What we are concerned with here is an exact description of this medium vis-à-vis God. To pre-empt the conclusion: as has already been stated, the sentence 'money is there to be spent' already says everything there is to be said. So the right

Money really does have the power to alter everything. 'This metal can be changed into anything'. In Faust II, this idea is taken to the extreme. With the introduction of paper money, at first, economic life experiences explosive growth, because now receipts against debts can produce income. But then it quickly implodes: the slightest of grounds for doubting the convertibility of the receipts brings everything crashing down. Money attracts a faith and hope to a degree that is almost religious. Credit requires a creed. In order for this virtual entity to be put to general use, there has to be a real faith in its efficacy. If this faith breaks down, then the medium will collapse, and with it the entire economic system.

thing to do would be to talk about what should be done with money – and not about money itself. And if this is correct, then one cannot set one's heart on money. Certainly not in the sense of Luther's famous definition of God: 'That upon which you set your heart is your God'. But clearly the reality is different: we are indeed obsessed with money, because it gathers up within itself life opportunities that God no longer seems to offer us. Money has thus acquired a power to which it has no 'real' right (at least, not seen in religious terms), but which is entirely plausible. Is it even possible these days to maintain a purely instrumental attitude towards money? Are we its slaves or its masters? To put it another way: is it not the case that belief in God has long since taken on the form of money and become empty and exchangeable?

### 1. On money

Money is a medium representing something else – money is a means of exchange, in fact *the* universal means of exchange, the abstract commodity, 'the universal whore', as Karl Marx appositely put it. Money enables the exchange of goods without the need for them to have

anything at all in common – it transcends any kind of substantive determinism and thus makes everything subject to a common metric. This universal and universally equalizing currency of exchange has continuously built itself up over the past two hundred years. **The take-off point was the step in which it freed itself from any material or tangible equivalent, and especially from gold.**

It is above all bank money which is enabling the explosive growth in the importance of money. Money in this form no longer exists as a tangible object at all. It can be perceived only in the form of numbers on account statements and other such symbolic monetary processes. In this respect money is a virtual entity – only in the act of payment is it a 'given'. Then, for a split second, it appears, only to fade away again immediately to nothing. The money owned by the banks is above all a receipt against private debts: a 'receipt' which replaces things of real value. Money thus becomes a technique of deferral where a direct exchange of commodities is not possible. Transactions are taken out of the respective contexts in which they are actually anchored and initiated and are free

to be linked in new and completely different ways.

Money is thus the very essence of abstraction: 'Money is the radical measure that is in itself nothing but connects everything to everything else, subjects everything to its rule, the causal condition of the world and thus the thing that enters as pure function into each and every one of us.'<sup>1</sup> And everything hitherto concrete and distinct thereby contracts into one abstract quality: that of variation for the purpose of this universal function.

So money really does have the power to alter everything: interestingly, the figure of Avarice in Faust says that 'this metal can be changed into anything'.<sup>2</sup> In Faust II, this idea is taken to the extreme in one scene<sup>3</sup> which deals with the introduction of paper money. At first, economic life experiences explosive growth, because now receipts against debts can produce income. But then it quickly implodes: the slightest of grounds for doubting the convertibility of the receipts brings everything crashing down. Elsewhere, too, money plays a big role in Faust, in which it is made wonderfully clear how money attracts a faith and hope to a degree that is almost religious. Credit requires a creed<sup>4</sup>. In order for this virtual entity to be put to general use, there has to be a real faith in its efficacy. If this faith breaks down, then the medium will collapse, and with it the entire economic system.

And it is true: money works on trust. Everyone who uses money assumes that others whom he will never see will acknowledge the value of the money just as he does. His trust resides in the money

*Contd. Page 21 Col. 1 ..>>>*

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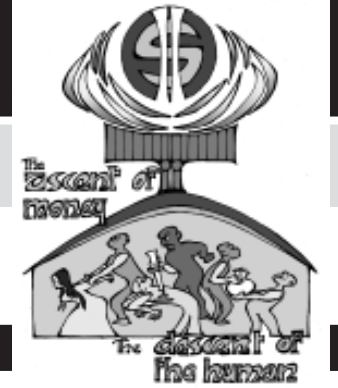


## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

### The diabolic medium

# The old criticism of religion returns in a new form

Gerhard Wegner



>>> *Contd. from Page 20 Col. 4*

itself – in a medium that in fact represents something else entirely. This requirement speculates on debt in a very real sense: my payment puts other people in a state of debt. In the religious sphere, it is the human experience of guilt (or debt to God) that points us towards God's forgiveness, because only this enables us to live. This is not the least of the ways in which people's obligations towards God are intensified: they owe him something. Their human existence is credit. A similarly drastic perpetual intensification of obligation takes place in the monetary system.

These relations can be seen most clearly where money enters into the service of productive processes, the classic case being that of work. This is something else that Goethe thought about deeply. Mephisto: "If I can pay for six horses, does their strength not belong to me? I rush on, and am a real man, as though I had twenty-four legs."<sup>5</sup> Marx, as interpreter of 'Faust', specifically on this scene: 'What I can pay, i.e. what the money can buy, that is me, the owner of the money himself. My powers are equal to the power of the money - The characteristics of the money are my - its owner's - characteristics and essential powers... As an individual I am weak, but money gives me 24 feet; so I am not weak; I am a bad, dishonest, unscrupulous, stupid man, but money is respected, and therefore so is its owner... money is the true genius of all things, so how could its owner be stupid?'<sup>6</sup>

#### In summary:

- Money is a means of exchange and more: it leads to an extension of the human value chain which is in principle infinite. Of course, money also incorporates ownership rights – what money regulates is not *what* is owned but *who* can enjoy those rights: whoever has money. In this regard money is a vehicle of social power; it suspends dependencies and affords freedom to those who have it – and vice versa.

- It accomplishes something that is strictly speaking unthinkable: it trades the future. It stores time, and speeds it up.

- But not only time: money opens up space, indeed the whole world.<sup>7</sup>

**So money is both wealth and power. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of**

**this came with the stock market hype at the turn of the millennium, when it was possible to get rich incredibly quickly. At that time the idea arose that money was able to spontaneously self-increase, as it were, without the intervention of any productive activity. The phrase 'profits without production' was doing the rounds. As is well-known, this did not go on for long; but the fact that it was possible even for a short time demonstrates the degree to which money has made itself autonomous and set itself up as master of the universe. This phenomenon was familiar already to Karl Marx: 'money generating money'.**

Money itself is empty – money has no content, no conception of human nature, no inherent dignity, and yet it transforms everything. Niklas Luhmann described this process using the term 'the diabolic medium'. He distinguishes this from symbolic media which bridge the contingencies of agency such as love, beauty, law, etc. Money 'is a diabolic medium inasmuch as it neutralises all other values at the level of codes and relegates them to the inferior status of reasons for payment or non-payment'<sup>8</sup>. All action or inaction is given its rationale on the basis of the code of payment or non-payment: either you can pay, or it won't happen. No money - no honey. No matter how honourable the motive, it cannot compete with the rationale of payment. Money makes not only goods equal, but motives too. It is perfectly acceptable to follow motives in one's personal life, but they have no social relevance.

Niklas Luhmann again: 'The problem of scarcity is not solved by money in the sense that it no longer applies when money is created; it is merely put into a different form...the form of money scarcity<sup>9</sup> – everything is possible, but the only thing lacking is money. The tangible experience of scarcity of things or opportunity is superseded by a second, artificial scarcity.

Behind all of this lies the diabolic, magical power of money – which, however, also has many good things about it. Above all, that it enables peaceful social interaction in place of interaction based on the use of force. For money resolves without resort to violence the question of whether anyone is legitimately entitled to resources. Answer: if they pay, they are always entitled<sup>10</sup>. Other interested parties have to put up with this and accept it – in

the face of this system they are all equal and all equally dependent on it. Those who cannot pay experience in a particularly drastic way the influence of the diabolic, or the Devil at work. And appropriately enough, Luhmann questions at this point whether those others will be prepared to tolerate an indefinite prohibition on their access to scarce resources only because of the requirement for payment<sup>11</sup>. Money can only fulfil its role as a peacemaker if everyone is drawn into its nexus – those subject to exclusion remain outside, and therefore might hit upon the idea of using force to realise their life chances.

So money links together as well as dividing. The symbolic and the diabolic functions of money are indivisibly coupled together. 'Whoever pays, gets what he wants. Whoever doesn't pay has to watch that happen.'<sup>12</sup> As the saying goes, 'We're only window shopping'. Luhmann sums up: 'Its symbolic cosmology (i.e. the cosmology of the economy, GH) might then be understood as suggesting that this, this unity made up of payment and non-payment, the whole, the unitary entity, is the Good. But as the Devil would have it, this is not the case. There are people who cannot pay. And as in all functional systems, what applies here is that inclusion is simultaneously exclusion.'<sup>13</sup> It seems then that the magical property of money, its power of transubstantiation<sup>14</sup>, has its limits.

But perhaps what is happening is that the economisation of all aspects of life which we are all experiencing today is intended precisely to draw us all into the sphere of money and thereby to bring peace and to reduce the temptation to use force to solve problems<sup>15</sup>. It is possible to observe how this link works in practice in ecological legislation, e.g. in emissions trading. The fact that the exploitation of scarce resources is governed by monetary mechanisms might just possibly prevent outbreaks of war and other forms of violence. However, the price that has to be paid for this is that such resources will remain accessible to those who can afford them, whereas for others who cannot afford them they will continue to be barred. But – and this is another magical effect of money – precisely because what is involved is money, which in principle all of us might earn at some time, we allow ourselves to be fobbed off with future promises. The old criticism of

religion as an empty promise of consolation returns here in a new form: it is not faith in God which enervates the here and now, but money: and especially the money that one doesn't have.

#### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Steinfeld, in a review article on Eske Bockelmann's *Im Takt des Geldes. Zur Genese des modernen Denkens. Springe 2004, in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2.8.04, p. 16.*

<sup>2</sup> Faust II V. 5780. Cf.: Jochen Hörisch: *Der mephistophelische Kapitalismus. In: Jochen Hörisch: Gott, Geld und Medien. Studien zu den Medien, die die Welt im Innersten zusammenhalten. Frankfurt a.M. 2004, p. 127.*

<sup>3</sup> Faust II, V. 6037 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Jochen Hörisch: *Gott, Geld, Medien. Studien zu den Medien, die die Welt im Innersten zusammenhalten. Frankfurt a.M. 2004, p. 131.*

<sup>5</sup> Faust V 1825 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx: *Ökonomisch-Philosophische Manuskripte (1844). In: MEW Ergänzungsband 1. Teil Berlin (DDR) 1968, pp. 465 - 588, here p. 562.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Christoph Deutschmann: *Transzendenz im Diesseits. Zur religiösen Natur des Kapitalismus. In: Gott, Geld und Gabe. Zur Geldförmigkeit des Denkens in Religion und Gesellschaft. Hg. Von Christof Gestrich, Beiheft 2004 zur BThZ, Berlin 2004, p. 70, here pp. 74 and 75.*

<sup>8</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *op.cit.*, p. 245.

<sup>9</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>10</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>11</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>12</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 267.

<sup>13</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 267/8.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hörisch, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> On this point see Hörisch again, *op.cit.* p. 101.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hörisch, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> According to SPIEGEL 42 / 2004 p. 65.

To be continued

In the next issue

Money and God

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## The Ascent of Money, The Descent of the Human

Gender Dimensions of the Ascent of Money: Who is the gainer and who is the loser?

# Remove the 'gendered' obstacles

Vibhuti Patel

>>> Contd. from Page 8 Col. 4

patients in public hospitals are now increasingly being given prescriptions to purchase drugs from outside at their own cost and this too against the background of drug prices having increased two to three times during the last 2 to 4 years. In the public hospital and health centres also user charges have been introduced. The net impact of introduction of charging fees for health services and issuing of prescriptions to purchase drugs, injections, syringes, bandages etc. from outside have reduced public hospital utilisation in most districts - and these would of necessity mean the poorest. All these ultimately push the poor to increasingly use private health providers, often at a cost of personal indebtedness, and makes public health institutions restricted to those who can exert influence thro' their connections with politicians and bureaucrats to grab the restricted but quality services. The poor women's health gets most neglected as poor household will use their scarce resource for male members of the family.

### Nutritional Deficiency more pronounced among women and girls

Even budgetary cuts for food makes women suffer the most due to hunger as women and girls eat last, least and the left-over in the households with scarce monetary resources. The ascent of money and ascent of starvation, hunger, ill-health and illiteracy among women and girls from the marginalized sections of economy are two sides of the same coin.

In India, 52% women and 74 % children are victims of under-nutrition, a silent catastrophe. The gap between the overfed population crowding the gyms and underfed millions groping for food in the empty cans and garbage is widening. Women and children suffer due to self-denial, learning to live with far less food and nutrition than the body needs. Women headed households suffer the most.

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### Reduction in educational opportunities

The marketisation of education has made school and higher education very expensive. A majority of the parents are reluctant to invest in the education of their daughters whose education does not

have a production - value because her income goes to the groom's family. It is important to focus on 'Gender-dynamics' of the Economics of Education. In the drive for privatization, women as students are the main losers as parents channelise financial resources for son's education; daughter's education is considered to be less important. NAAC study reveals that there is ghettoisation of women in general higher education (Arts and Commerce) and mostly men through professional colleges (Engineering, Architect, Medicine, Science & Technology).

### Where are the Indian Women in the knowledge economy?

Education is a necessity for all and not just a luxury for those who can afford it. Therefore, it must be a top concern for India as she ventures into the future, since without a solid educational spine, her economy will no longer be able to stand the test of time. At present only 7 % of total Indian women have been able to enroll themselves in the institutions for higher education.

The global market forces persuaded the Indian State to reduce budgetary allocations for state funded educational institutions in the 1990s. It was precisely the opposite of what was directed by the Constitution and resolved by the Parliament in the 1986 policy. The undeclared but operative strategy was to

"let the vast government education system (from schools to universities) starve of funds and, consequently, deteriorate in quality." As the quality would decline, resulting in low learning levels, the parents, even the poor among them, would begin to withdraw their children from the system. A sense of desperation and exclusion from the socio-economic and political space in the country would prevail. More importantly, the people's faith in the Constitution and the capability of the State to fulfill its obligations will be shaken up, thereby leading to a cynical view of the nation-state. This will lay the groundwork for appreciation of market as a means of solving people's problems.

Most of these changes have been at the behest of World Bank whose World Development Report (1993) has advised the nation states to privatise and commercialise education, health and insurance sector and open up health insurance market for global players.

### Gender Equity

Gender equity is increasingly cited as a goal of inclusive policy but there is considerable confusion about what this could mean either in theory or in practice. If policies for the promotion of gender equity are to be realisable their goal must be the equitable distribution of all resources. This requires people-centric, women-centric, child-centric, elderly centric-approach, not money-centric mindset that we see in this neoliberal market economy that believes in the principle, the might is right. It also necessitates an analysis of the gendered obstacles that currently prevent men and women from realising their potential.

## ISET- ECC and FFRC Joint Consultation

### Historiography: A Critical View on Perspectives



Participants in the consultation

The Indian School of Ecumenical Theology (ISET) of the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore, and the Federated Faculty for Research in Religion & Culture (FFRC), Kottayam, jointly organized a consultation on the subject 'Historiography: A Critical View on Perspectives' at ECC, Bangalore, on 24 and 25 November.

"In dealing with the critical perspectives on historiography, we need to problematize existing historiography, to locate the gaps and silenced voices, negating the absoluteness and domination it propounds. Discourse of mutuality need to be highlighted and used as methodological approach in a time of communal construction of history and society creating alienation and demonizing the "other". The history of mutuality needs to consider complimentary nature of the relationship between people, culture and communities and affirm multiplicity and mutuality in relationship and in social life", said the participants in the consultation in a statement.

Very Rev. Dr. Cherian Thomas, Director, ECC, inaugurated the Consultation. Rev. Dr. Reji Samuel, Dean, ISET welcomed the gathering. Rev. Dr. V. S. Varghese, Registrar, FFRC introduced the program. Fr. Dr. Jose John, Rev. Dr. Sunni E. Mathew, Rev. Sudhakar Joshua, Rev. Dr. Gladson Jathanna, Fr. Dr. M. O. John and Dr. Kaholi Zhimomi presented papers.

— ISET - ECC News

## IHPS Seminar

### 'Harmony Between Genders'



Prof. Savita Singh from IGNOU delivering the keynote address.

Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi, organized a seminar on 'Harmony between Genders' at Malviya Smriti Bhawan, New Delhi, on 05 December 2015.

Eminent scholar Prof. Savita Singh, Professor, School Of Gender and Development Studies, Indra Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, delivered the keynote address. Prof. S.M. Sajid, Professor, Department of Social Work, Jamia Millia Islamia Central University, New Delhi, chaired and moderated the session. Prof. Amar Pal Singh, Professor, School of Law and Legal Studies, Indra Prastha University, New Delhi, Ms Reena Banerjee, Founder Secretary and Director, Nav Srishti, and Dr M.D. Thomas, Founder Director, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi, were the other speakers.

In her key-note address Prof. Savita Singh, analyzed the depressing plight of women and the presence of blatant disharmony in gender relations in the Indian society, in the backdrop of disoriented religious theories and patriarchal laws, which have been highly exploitative from time immemorial. Quoting the book 'Gender Caste' by Uma Chakraborty, she asserted that discrimination of women was not created by modernity, but by the very thought of man. She went on to illustrate the unkind, un-courteous and cruel type of structural violence inflicted upon women by the un-negotiable system of patriarchy and caste discrimination.

— IHPS News



## Christmas Reflections - 2



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Mammen Varkey

## The Birth -

## Let us open our eyes, ears and intellect to the totality of the plan and purpose

***“And she gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” Luke 2: 7 (RSV). “And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” Luke 2: 20 (RSV). “Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.... And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, ..... he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou has prepared in the presence of all peoples.....” Luke 2: 22 – 32 (RSV).***

In the previous reflection, Along with Him – 315, we shared that we need to have the eyes to see the Saviour of the world in a manger, that too wrapped in ‘strips of cloth’, the ears to listen to the praises and glorifications of ‘shepherds’, people without even names, that too ‘unclean’, and the tongues to sing hallelujah and to prophesy, as Simeon did, holding a poor child who could offer only two doves as sacrifice, that too in the ‘temple’!

**Profound truths**

***There are some profoundly important truths rarely seen and seldom preached about.***

**As per the Divine Plan**

The birth of Jesus was as per the Divine plan. According to Luke and Matthew, Mary was chosen to bear the child; Joseph was informed in advance about it; Elizabeth also had prior information; the wise-men came all the way from the East; the shepherds were informed about the birth.

**The Birth was planned but no ‘place’ was prepared!**

According to Luke, in spite of all these Divine plans and proclamations, no reasonably comfortable place was arranged for Mary to give birth to the child,

no place that humans occupy was given even to ‘lay’ the child. The appearance of the stars, the prior announcements to Mary, Joseph, shepherds etc. are all eloquent declarations that the birth of Jesus was according to a great plan. But surprisingly, no usual ‘physical’ preparations for the actual birth of the child! Then it becomes all the more important and necessary for us to see and delve into the miserable situations and traumatic turns related to the birth of Baby Jesus. What are the truths that we should unfailingly see through these miserable experiences and traumatic developments? How many of us, in the noise and glitter of the Christmas celebrations, have taken time and pains to deliberate, meditate on that? We believe that the birth was according to a plan. Unknowingly, we shift the manger to air-conditioned cradles, the ill-clad, ‘unclean’ visitors surrounding the child to gorgeously dressed, jubilant spectators around the ‘cradle’. In simple words, we are totally failing to understand the plan and purpose of God for the Child and his life.

**King without a piece of land!**

Again, according to Matthew, though the wise-men had stopped looking at ‘the star they had seen’ in the east and detoured to Jerusalem, they, later, went to the house where the child was. ‘...they knelt-down and worshipped him’. Matt: 2: 11. And very symbolically, sending out a powerful message, they presented

gold, frankincense and myrrh to the child. It was the open declaration of their hope about the child. But, unbelievably, the child, who was hailed as one born to be king, had to flee the country of his own and beg for the mercy of the ruler of another alien country! Just think about the terrible pain and misery involved in, fleeing ‘that night itself’ in those days, to such a distant place as Egypt! We should not fail to see that. The One who was born king became the recipient of the mercy of a strange ruler! Even if we say that it was for the fulfillment of the prophesy, “I called my Son out of Egypt”, Matthew 2: 15, we cannot ignore certain facts. The fact of all the agony involved in the fleeing to a distant, strange country and the unlimited misery Joseph, Mary and child Jesus had to suffer.

**Sound and Silence!**

In the most luxurious celebrations of Christmas feasts, decorations and noise, do we have the eyes to see the absolute silence of the fleeing parents and child Jesus, the tears gushing down from the eyes of Mother Mary, and the indescribable agony of Father Joseph for managing the fleeing?

**Christmas celebrations without seeing the pathos of Child Jesus, Mary, the Mother and Joseph, without hearing the cries as they ran to Egypt, and without proclaiming these truths to the people around, are meaningless. Christmas inescapably calls us to have new eyes, new ears and new tongues.**

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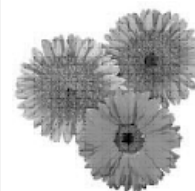
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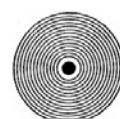
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# Faith Home for Children Overcoming HIV and AIDS Adoni

*Light shines in darkness and darkness has not overcome light (John 1.5)*



Children of Faith Home, Adoni, greet all the supporters and care-givers, and wish them

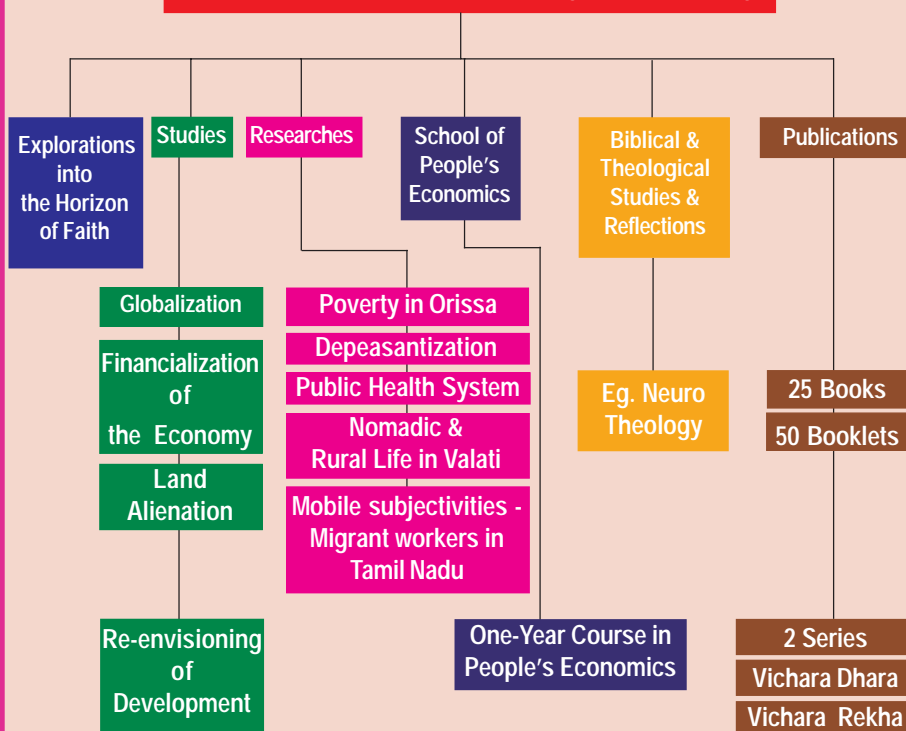
*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year*

## VICHARA

An Ecumenical Collective of Academics and Activists

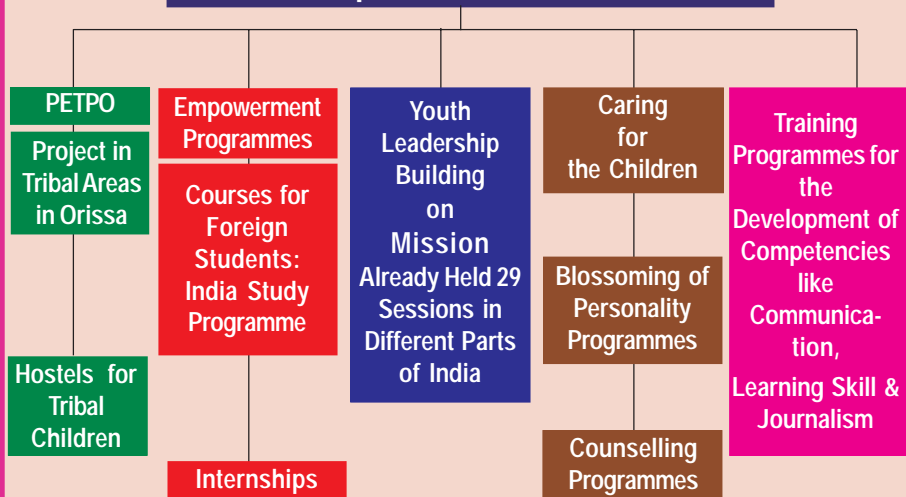
### VICHAR

*Vichar is the act of profound thinking and formulating*



### VICHARAM

*Vicharam is being engaged in acts of deep concern and care*



Spread love everywhere you go.  
Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier

– Mother Teresa



## COP21:

### Climate change affects access to our daily bread



*"The poorest communities face the greatest impact of climate change." Here, a cattle farmer walking on a dry river bed. © Sean Hawkey/WCC*

Climate change poses serious environmental challenges to meet current and future demands for food. The poorest communities, having the smallest carbon footprint on the planet, are facing the greatest impact of climate change. For many years, the right to food has been a key issue and priority for many parties, churches and ecumenical delegations involved in climate talks.

Food Security is the term used to describe the status of fair sharing of sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life. And we can't talk about food security without talking about agriculture.

The UN climate agreement does not mention agriculture. "The fact that food security is not specifically mentioned in the agreement is unfortunate," said Mattias Söderberg, head of the ACT Alliance at COP21, as he explained the current strategy of faith-based organizations.

Climate change has been directly affecting the livelihoods of marginalized

communities, farmers and fishing communities, who are crucial to the world's food security.

Dr. Manoj Kurian, coordinator of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), stresses the important role to be played by agro-ecological farming practices in the future. "These kinds of agricultural practices have a far lower footprint than the industrial model and a higher prevalence of biological diversity, which lowers the vulnerability to changes in climatic conditions brought upon by global warming", he said.

–WCC News

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Valiyapurayidam  
Mammen Varkki

For course outline, application form and other details contact : Mercy Kappen at mail@visthar.org  
Visthar, Kothanur Post, Bangalore - 560077  
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Email: mercykappen@visthar.org

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