

A Biblical View of Economics and Industrial Relations

or

Why everything the Evangelical Alliance says about economics is wrong...

July 2007

*Andrew S. Kulikovsky B.App.Sc.(Hons), M.A.
SA Co-ordinator, Centre for Worldview Studies
<http://worldview.kulikovskyonline.net>*

INTRODUCTION

In light of the recent reforms by the Australian Federal Government, economic issues and industrial relations have become central points of both public and theological debate. Christian leaders have felt the need to speak out either for, or against, the new laws, and have framed the debate in terms of morality, fairness, justice and even family life.

That Christian leaders have chosen to speak out is a welcome and encouraging sign. However, it must be said that many of their remarks have not been well thought out, and reflect an embarrassing ignorance of both biblical and basic economic principles. Christian organisations such as the Australian Evangelical Alliance, and Christian leaders including Senator Steven Fielding, Reverend Tim Costello and Kevin Rudd all advocate policies which are well-meaning but ultimately counterproductive.

This paper attempts to outline a biblical view of economics and industrial relations as well as demonstrating the errors of most of the present Christian responses. This will be achieved by:

1. Demonstrating that what many Christian leaders have claimed to be the biblical view is in fact not biblical at all; and
2. That their assertions have been—and continue to be—proven wrong both in history and in present reality.

Although this paper tends to focus on the commentary and policies advocated by the Australian Evangelical Alliance, the intention is not to doubt the Christian commitment, motives, or sincerity of that organisation's leadership, but to critically analyse their stance both theologically and pragmatically. Iron sharpens iron.

BASIC ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES

Given that few people have formal training in economics or any appreciable grasp of its basic principles, it is instructive to first consider the basics. Economics is primarily concerned with the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Central to the field are three key elements: (1) the market; (2) taxation; and (3) private property rights.

The various economic perspectives may be represented as a spectrum governed by the three above-mentioned key elements, as shown in Figure 1. The left side of the spectrum represents economies that adopt varying degrees of socialism. In other words, the government takes increasing control of the means of production, and employs regulatory frameworks and high progressive taxation in order to redistribute wealth. At their extreme, leftist economies lead to Communism and Totalitarianism.

The right side of the spectrum represents those economies that adopt varying degrees of free-market capitalism. Unlike socialism, capitalist economies are primarily concerned with the creation of wealth rather than its redistribution. The means of production is privately owned and governments are only called upon to protect private property rights and to restrain coercion and fraud. This provides all people with the opportunity to participate in the *free and peaceful exchange of goods and services without fraud, theft or coercion*.

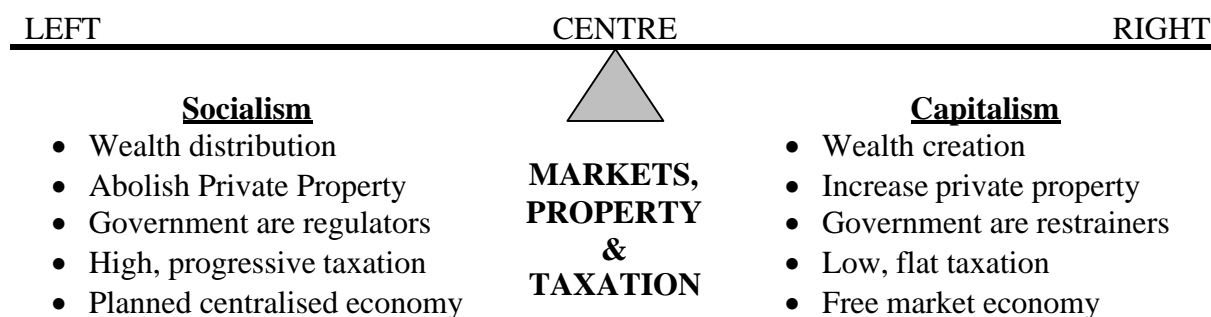


Figure 1: The economic spectrum

It should be noted that no economy today is strictly a free-market capitalist one. Australia's economic system includes elements of both capitalism and socialism.

Note that history teaches us that when governments have been given total control of the economy, not only have they destroyed or severely diminished their country's wealth and prosperity, but they have often committed great atrocities, sacrificing many of their own citizens' for the 'greater good' of the state.¹ The blood of millions of dead Russians, Chinese, Cambodians, and Cubans cry out against the evils of socialism. More recently, Zimbabweans have seen their once wealthy country stripped bare as a result of socialist policies implemented by dictator Robert Mugabe. According to Muleya, it is the fastest shrinking economy in the world outside a war zone.²

¹ See R. J. Rummel, *Death By Government*, rev ed (Transaction Publishers, 1997).

² Dumisani Muleya, "Zimbabwe: Economic ruin, not MDC, will bring Mugabe down" *Business Day* (May 4, 2006) <<http://www.afrika.no/Detailed/11808.html>>

The Way Markets Work

The term ‘market’ simply describes the process by which goods and services are sought, supplied and exchanged. Markets are governed by the principle of ‘supply and demand.’ If there is no demand for a particular product or service, then no market will exist to support their supply. Alternatively, if a particular product or service is so abundantly available, then the asking price will be extremely low. Thus, Brian Edgar, Director of Theology and Public Policy with the Evangelical Alliance, is correct to point out that “something has exactly and only the value that someone is prepared to put on it, and in a free market, it makes little difference whether the commodity is salt or sex, houses or health. The market treats them all as commodities.”³ However, Edgar goes on to (wrongly) equate the commodification of labour with the commodification of people: “If labour is treated as just another resource for business to control then people simply become another commodity.”⁴ However, workers do not offer themselves as persons, they offer their labour, and, unlike commodities, workers can choose who they offer their labour to.

Edgar and other advocates of ‘Christian socialism’ are concerned that labour markets that are freed from government regulation and the collective power of unions will result in a one-sided employer-employee relationship with virtually all the power lying with the employer. This is especially detrimental to those “disempowered by circumstance or lack of innate ability.”⁵

However, such views are short-sighted and indicate a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of markets and the forces that drive them. Firstly, as Murray Gleason, Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, has pointed out, “[a] person is not in a position of relevant disadvantage, constitutional, situational, or otherwise simply because of inequality of bargaining power. Many, perhaps even most, contracts are made between parties of unequal bargaining power, and good conscience does not require parties to contractual negotiations to forfeit their advantages, or neglect their own interests.”⁶ Secondly, markets are not static and employers do not always have all the power. This is evident in Australia at present where there is a massive shortfall in tradesman and other specialised skilled workers.

Like technology, free market capitalist economies are amoral. One can make money by honest and legitimate means, but one can also make money in unscrupulous and dishonest ways. However, as discussed below, market forces and the competition that capitalism operates under, tend to have a civilising effect on market participants. History and present experience demonstrate that unscrupulous and dishonest participants may win in the short term, but will ultimately lose in the long run.

Edgar also objects to the casualisation of labour because it “diminishes satisfaction and meaning, especially among young people” and that work is “increasingly perceived as merely a means to an end.” Moreover, he asserts that this is driven largely by employers rather than the changing preferences of young people.”⁷ Again, this view is totally divorced from reality. There are two chief reasons for the casualisation of labour. Firstly, workers want it. This is particularly the case for young people who are studying, and women seeking to return to work after having children. Students want casual work to support themselves through university or TAFE. They are not

³ Brian Edgar, “Industrial Relations and the Free Market” *Faith & Community* 7 (November 2006)

<<http://ea.org.au/content/documents/Faith%20&%20Community/FaithAndCommunity7.htm#industrial>>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Australian Competition and Consumer Commission v CG Berbatis Holding Pty Ltd* [2003] HCA 18 at 11.

⁷ Edgar, “Industrial Relations and the Free Market”.

interested in full-time positions at this point in their lives. Likewise, many mothers trying to balance work and family life only want to work a few days a week or a few hours a day. These people are casual workers by choice because it suits their present circumstances, and, in many cases, is indeed a “means to an end.”

Secondly, employers also often prefer casual labour especially where their business is seasonal or is frequently subject to busy periods and lulls. When work is slow employers simply cannot afford to pay staff to sit on their hands and do nothing. Casual labour allows businesses to take on additional staff to handle the busy periods. Employers also prefer casual labour when legislative restrictions make it difficult to terminate the employment of poorly performing workers, or to retrench workers when there is a downturn in business.

Ultimately, casual labour exists because the market demands it. There are no real losers. Everyone wins to the extent that each derives a equitable benefit from offering their services and skills for hire. In any case, the demand for casual labour is not universal. There is still great need for full-time workers, and in Australia, this area of the economy has grown significantly since the new industrial relations reforms began operating.⁸

The Civilising Effect of Free Markets

A common view among Christian socialists is that free market capitalism is based on, or at least promotes, self-interest and greed.⁹ Again, this demonstrates a failure to understand how markets actually function. Contrary to popular perceptions, market forces operate to inhibit greed, and to encourage good service.

In order to succeed, market participants must offer quality goods and services at a price people can afford to pay. On the other hand, market participants who provide products and services that are inferior or too expensive will not succeed. A greedy capitalist who charges exorbitant prices for their goods or services may achieve short term gains, but eventually their customers will tire of paying such high prices and either find an alternative supplier or an alternative product. Alternatively, if no other options exist, customers may simply choose to make do without.

Of course, there are many large companies that make extremely large profits (e.g. some of Australia’s major banks), but it is simplistic to view these extremely large profits as another manifestation of corporate greed and exploitation. Companies that make huge profits also pay huge taxes. The corporate tax rate in Australia is 30% so a company that reports a \$2 billion profit would have paid \$1 billion in taxes! These extremely large taxation revenues are used to support government welfare programs and investment in infrastructure which benefit everyone. Moreover, the remaining profits do not go to the company management or directors (these expenses are part of a company’s operating expenses). Rather, company profits are usually reinvested in the company in order to fund wage increases for current employees, to fund expansion (including employing more people), or for the development of newer, better and cheaper products. Any remaining profits are distributed back to shareholders as a return on their investment. Moreover, it is important to note that the biggest shareholders in Australia are not a select group of extremely wealthy individuals, but superannuation funds which exist to fund the retirements of normal working people. Therefore, when companies make very large profits it ultimately benefits everyone.

⁸ See “Labour Force Australia” *Australian Bureau of Statistics* (May 2007) 6.

⁹ See, for example, David Begg, “Christianity and the Just Society” *Conference on Church and Theology in the Contemporary World* (February 11, 2002) <<http://www.ictu.ie/html/news/briefcase/s110202.htm>>

Market participants must also act in a manner that is courteous and polite. If they do not act amiably toward customers and serve their needs, customers will simply go elsewhere. In other words, markets force participants to act in a civil manner even if they are not civil, to play fair even if they do not want to.

Economic Competition

Competition is a central element of free market capitalism. It is the driving force behind both product and process improvement and innovation. Yet advocates of Christian socialism view it as entirely negative. Edgar, for example, states that a competitive economy “affects some people negatively,” communicates a competitive social attitude, “places growth above equality” and “affirms the rightness of the strong being rewarded ahead of the weak.”¹⁰

Once again, such views betray a shallow and myopic understanding of competition and market forces. The so-called “weak” actually gain from the process of economic competition. For example, consider the millions of people who experience hunger and malnutrition, or who suffer from disease or from vision or hearing impairment, or who lack the strength and/or agility to live in harsh environments. Many of these people may have perished, if it were not for the technological innovations in farming, medicine, pharmaceutical products, eyeglasses and hearing aids, and the development of countless labour-saving and life-enhancing devices. Yet the instigators of all of these developments were motivated by the desire to gain a competitive advantage in the market place, in the pursuit of profit.

As Reisman points out, “[e]conomic competition is not a process by which the success of the biologically fit bring about the extermination of the biologically weak. On the contrary, it is the process by which the success of better products and more efficient methods of production promotes the survival and well-being of *all*. It is a process in which *the success of the more able raises the productivity and improves the standard of living of the less able.*”¹¹ In other words, the more able take charge of production, and as a result, the less able are more productive because they work under the direction of the more able. The companies founded and run by the more able, create the job opportunities for the less able. Moreover, these companies produce the new and improved products developed as a result of the innovations of the more able. Because these products are produced in greater abundance and at lower cost than before, they are more readily available and more affordable, thus enabling even the least well off to benefit from them. Those who object to market competition must face reality and explain why capitalism alone has not only succeeded in greatly improving the material conditions of everyone who lives under it, but has also dramatically lengthened life expectancy.¹²

This is not to say that competition and economic development will produce only winners. There will indeed be some losers—at least in the short term. This is an inevitable, yet necessary function of the market. The automobile benefited everyone except the manufacturers of buggy whips. But if we only settle for a 100% win-win situation, then “[n]o major innovation would ever have occurred, from the dawn of history to the present, no matter how great its benefit to mankind,” because there would always be “someone somewhere who [would be] worse off because of it.”¹³

¹⁰ Edgar, “Industrial Relations and the Free Market”.

¹¹ George Reisman, *Capitalism: A Treatise on Economics* (Ottawa, Illinois: Jameson Books, 1998) 344. Original emphasis.

¹² *Ibid.*, 345.

¹³ John Hospers, “A review of ‘A Theory of Justice’” *The Freeman* (December 1973) 753.

In the long run, however, this is not a problem. If an unskilled worker's job is made redundant there is no intrinsic reason why the period of his loss should be any longer than a few weeks or months. Because he is unskilled there is no requirement to retrain in order to acquire a comparable job paying a comparable wage that also requires no specific skills. This, of course, assumes that comparable jobs actually exist. Nevertheless, life experience tells us that there has always been plenty of unskilled jobs available to those who want them. The job notices section of newspapers are never bare or empty. The available jobs may not be exactly what the redundant job seeker wants—they may feel that being a cleaner, or a waitress, or a petrol station attendant, or a factory worker is demeaning, but this indicates more of a deficiency in the job seeker rather than the economy.

Government Intervention and the Unions

There are a few popular—but erroneous—perceptions that dominate people's view of the market economy. The first is that, given the opportunity, businesses will exploit their employees to full extent by paying them as little as possible and offering them the least favourable terms of employment.¹⁴ Secondly, such businesses would inevitably succeed if it were not for the union movement acting as a power balance. Thirdly, the government must intervene in the market to ensure that wealth is more fairly and evenly distributed.

However, as Reisman points out, government intervention is the cause of economic hardship, not market competition, because intervention infringes freedom.¹⁵ A classic example of well-meaning but mistaken intervention is the imposition of minimum wages and conditions. People believe that the best way to help unskilled workers on the lowest wage rates, is to guarantee that they receive a generous minimum wage that is capable of sustaining them in reasonable comfort.

However, the imposition of artificial wage rises ultimately leads to two negative consequences. Firstly, it causes a rise in inflation because the cost of the higher wages will naturally be passed on to consumers—including the low paid workers who have had their wages increased. In other words, their pay increase is quickly eaten up by the higher cost of living brought about by the inflation *resulting from that pay increase!* Thus, there is ultimately no *absolute* increase in real wages.

Secondly, in highly competitive markets where there is strong downward pressure on prices, it may not be possible to pass on increased costs to consumers because consumers will simply go elsewhere. Therefore, employers may have no choice but to significantly reduce their staff levels or shut up shop altogether. Either way, the artificial wage increase leads to unemployment.

Thus, the net effect of imposing minimum wage laws is the very opposite of what its advocates wanted: a reduction in the general standard of living brought about by unemployment, high inflation and a lower productivity of labour. It is only a rise in the productivity of labour that makes it possible for prices to rise less than wages and so bring about an absolute rise in wages. A worker can increase his productivity by becoming more efficient at his job or by raising his skill level so that he is able to perform a more demanding and higher paying job.

The same effect occurs when powerful labour unions force employers to pay wages greater than what the market can tolerate. With few exceptions, the union movement has openly and deliberately opposed the rise in the productivity brought about by technology and innovation:

¹⁴ See, for example, Edgar, "Industrial Relations and the Free Market".

¹⁵ Reisman, 345.

They have opposed the introduction of labour-saving machinery on the grounds that it causes unemployment. They oppose competition among workers. They force employers to tolerate feather-bedding practices, such as the requirement that firemen, whose function was to shovel coal on steam locomotives, be retained on diesel locomotives. They impose make-work schemes, such as requiring that pipe delivered to construction sites with screw thread already on it, have its ends cut off and new screw thread cut on the site. They impose narrow work classifications, and require that specialists be employed at a day's pay to perform work that others could easily do—for example, requiring the employment of a plasterer to repair the incidental damage done to a wall by an electrician, which the electrician himself could easily repair.¹⁶

Therefore, given that union policies reduce productivity, it follows then that the leading enemy of rises in real wages, is the union movement itself: “The truth is that, while claiming to have the purpose of raising the workers’ standard of living, the unions are dedicated to the active combatting of the rise in real wages, along with the creation of artificial inequalities in wages and of unemployment.”¹⁷

Furthermore, the failure of the union movement and the general public to understand the role of productivity, has led to the mistaken belief that whenever there is a rise in productivity in a particular industry, the workers in that industry are automatically entitled to a corresponding increase in wages. Such people simply do not understand that improvements operate to raise the real wages of the workers who *buy* the product, and that it is natural that the wages of workers who produce the product will often fall because the improvement leads to a temporary oversupply of their labour.¹⁸

Because of the unemployment they cause, minimum wage laws prevent unskilled workers from gaining work experience, and deny them the opportunity to receive training and to acquire new skills as a result of their employment. It is a critical mistake to think that—in the absence of minimum wage laws and other regulations imposing artificial wage constraints—workers employed on lower wages would be stuck on such wages for the rest of their lives. Minimum wage laws are generally only applicable to unskilled or low skilled workers who have the least to offer employers. Workers with more skills and experience obviously have more to offer employers, and as a result, attract a higher price for their labour. It follows then, that the best way for a worker to secure an increase in wages is to gain experience and acquire more skills. This may be achieved via further education, or by on-the-job training and the general experience of having a job—even a low paying one. In other words, low paying jobs requiring little or no skill or experience are merely entry level jobs and should not be viewed as a long term career choice. Rather, these jobs allow an unskilled worker to step onto a ladder of opportunity. When an unskilled worker seizes the opportunity to work at a low paying job, the basic skills and experience he gains will open up other opportunities. This has been the general experience of generations of workers in free market economies in Australia and elsewhere.

Although minimum wage laws are intended to help unskilled workers gain a higher income, their actual effect is the exact opposite: they prevent low skilled workers, who are the most vulnerable and most disadvantaged members of society, from competing with higher skilled workers by offering to willingly work for lower wages in exchange for the opportunity to acquire new skills and experience.

¹⁶ Reisman, 658.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 659.

UNIONS AND HISTORICAL REVISIONISM

A popular perception is that during the industrial revolution, capitalists were able to exploit poor workers including children, forcing them to work very long hours, to endure appalling working conditions, and to experience an extremely poor standard of living in general, and it was not until the advent of labour unions that things began to improve and the poor began to receive economic justice. This view, which dominates at all levels in the education system, is based on a Marxist interpretation of economic history, but bears little—if any—resemblance to actual historical fact.

As Reisman points out, the low standard of living was not a result of exploitation but of low productivity of labour.¹⁹ In other words, people had to work much harder and for longer just in order to produce enough to survive. This was largely because everything was done by hand or using primitive tools or the most basic machinery. Therefore, one cannot fairly compare today's standard of living with the standard of living during the 19th century. The technology and innovations which make today's standard of living so much better were simply not available! In other words, working conditions were bad because the means of making them better simply did not exist at that time. There was no electricity, let alone electric lights. There was no air-conditioning or modern plumbing, and there was virtually no safety equipment or protective clothing. Moreover, children were not forced to work by heartless exploiting employers, but by their parents, and as a matter of necessity. Indeed, if children did not also work, both they and their families would very likely die. Sending children out to work was the only way families could make ends meet.

Again one must consider the relatively recent origin of various goods commonly available today: cars, aeroplanes, air-conditioners, photo copiers, computers, telephones and mobile phones, television sets, audio and video recorders, radios, motion pictures, refrigerators and freezers, electric lights, antibiotics, and anaesthetics. None of these existed in the 19th century. Moreover, the goods that did exist had to be produced by hand and were extremely labour intensive (aided only by animal, wind and water power), and therefore were produced slowly and in small quantities. Therefore, as Reisman points out, it should not be surprising that just one hundred years ago, children were forced to work long hours, and the average standard of living was miserably low. In fact, by modern standards, even the standard of living of the wealthiest people was extremely low.²⁰ It is simply not possible to own goods that did not yet exist, and most people could not own many of the goods that did exist, because they could not afford them or because they were in such short supply.

Thus, working conditions were very poor because the means of making them better simply did not exist. It was not until the discovery and adoption of technological advances, and a general improvement in efficiency and use of capital goods, that working conditions began to improve and productivity dramatically increased. Furthermore, because increased productivity resulted in real wage increases, workers could also afford to reduce their hours of work. For example, at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, many people needed to work eighty hours a week in order to earn enough to support a family. However, when new technology and innovations began to dramatically increase productivity, the resulting increase in real wages made it possible to earn the same (or more) income from less hours. It was this increase in productivity, not legislation or union power, that made it possible for workers to have a shorter working week, and eliminated the need

¹⁹ Ibid, 642-643.

²⁰ Ibid, 643.

for parents to send their children out to work.²¹ In other words, unions and child labour laws deserve no credit for the abolition of child labour:

The abolition of child labor was an accomplishment of capitalism and the rise in the productivity of labor it achieved. As in the case of maximum-hours laws, insofar as child-labor laws merely ratified the abolition of child labor already being achieved by the market, they were superfluous. Insofar as they went ahead of the market, and imposed reductions in child labor beyond what parents judged their families could afford, they were destructive. Along with depriving poor families of urgently needed income, they had the effect of forcing children to work at lower wages and in poorer conditions than they needed to.²²

It must also be remembered that the primary purpose and goal of all unions is to act for the benefit of their own members, not the general good of society. Unions are not interested in helping the unemployed or protecting non-union members. Therefore, in this context, union opposition to child labour had very little to do with genuine concern for the welfare of children. Rather, union opposition was driven primarily by the desire to protect the pay and favourable working conditions of their members.

Likewise, unions have actively opposed foreign workers coming to Australia under the pretence that they will take “our jobs”—despite the fact that Australia is suffering from massive labour and skills shortages—and the false assertion that they will undercut current wage rates by accepting less.²³ Even when unions do stand up for members, their protection appears to be shallow. When one of Mitsubishi’s manufacturing plants in Adelaide closed down, the Australian Manufacturers’ Workers’ Union called on governments to assist retrenched workers (most of which were union members), and when assistance did come, the Union complained it was not timely enough.²⁴ One must ask why the Union itself did not assist these workers? It could hardly be said that they did not have enough resources given that they have already raised and spent millions on advertising campaigns opposing the Federal government’s industrial relations reforms.²⁵

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

Although the Bible offers little in the way of explicit teaching on economics and industrial relations, there are many principles that can be drawn out from numerous texts and passages.

Property Rights

Property rights are foundational to a biblical view of economics. They allow a person to do whatever they like with their own property, provided that what they do is within the law.

Property rights are implied in many early passages, and explicitly affirmed in the eighth commandment, “You shall not steal” (Exod 20:15) since stealing is, by definition, taking something that belongs to someone else.

The effect of property rights are also affirmed in scripture. In the parable of the workers (Matt 20:1-16), Christ tells the story of a landowner who employed workers to work in his field. At the end of

²¹ See Reisman, 644-645.

²² Ibid, 662.

²³ See, for example, John Sutton, “Opening the Floodgates” <http://workers.labor.net.au/features/200604/c_historicalfeature_sutton.html>

²⁴ “Car plant to rev up Adelaide economy” *ABC Online* (August 19, 2004)

<<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200408/s1180058.htm>>

²⁵ Paul Robinson and Josh Gordon, “Unions levy millions for IR battle” *The Age* (August 26, 2005).

the day, each worker received the same wage despite the fact that some had worked longer than the others. When those that had worked longer complained, the landowner responded: “I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. *Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money?* Or are you envious because I am generous?” (vv. 13-15).

Likewise, in Acts 5:4, Peter chastises Ananias and Sapphira for lying to God about the proceeds of the sale of their land: “*Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal?* What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.”

The Value and Importance of Work

The value and importance of work is also affirmed in many places, including Proverbs 12:24: “Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.” This principle is extended in Ephesians 4:28: “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need,” and repeated in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12: “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may *win the respect of outsiders* and so that *you will not be dependent on anybody.*”

Stewardship

As the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe, God is ultimately the owner of everything (Psalm 50:10-11), and human beings are merely stewards entrusted to deal with his property in a way that reaps the greatest benefits for God’s kingdom. This is the message of the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30). The master rebuked the servant who failed in his duty to act as a good steward of his master’s property:

You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (vv. 26-30).

The Market

The market is an amoral concept since it merely refers to the process by which parties produce and voluntarily exchange goods and services for the mutual benefit of each party. There are countless scriptures referring to the existence of markets and the act of trading for profit (e.g. Prov 31:16, 18, 24), but none of these make any moral judgments—good or bad—about the market.

The Causes of Poverty

Social justice advocates, including those in the Evangelical Alliance, appear to believe that poverty is the result of either exploitation—direct or indirect—or systemic oppression,²⁶ and where “the

²⁶ See, for example, Brian Edgar, “Don’t Mention Politics: The top five reasons for not preaching on industrial relations” <<http://ea.org.au/content/documents/pdf%20files/Politics%205%20Reasons.pdf>>

strong [are] rewarded ahead of the weak.”²⁷ But this is a Marxist interpretation of the causes of poverty.

The Bible, on the other hand, presents a very different view. While there is no doubt that some are poor as a result of oppression (Isa 10:1-2), there are many other reasons why people become poor. Proverbs in particular, as well as various other scriptures, explicitly state that poverty can come about as a result of laziness (Prov 6:6-11, 10:4, 19:15), foolishness (Prov 10:8, 14-15, 11:29, 21:20), short-sightedness (Matt 7:24-27), sleep (Prov 20:13), selfishness (Prov 11:24), lack of discipline (Prov 13:18), lack of action (Prov 14:23), impulsiveness (Prov 21:5), preoccupation with pleasures (Prov 21:17), drunkenness and gluttony (Prov 23:21), greed (Jer 6:12,13), and chasing of fantasies (Prov 28:19). Wealth and prosperity, on the other hand, come from honouring the Lord (Prov 3:9-10), from wisdom (Prov 8:12-18), diligence (Prov 10:4), generosity (Prov 11:24), and righteousness (Prov 15:6). Moreover, there appears to be a strong correlation between immorality and poverty. As Carl F. H. Henry pointed out, “moral poverty often dooms its victims to ongoing material poverty.”²⁸ In short, poverty is *not* a money problem.

In addition, God promises prosperity and blessing to societies that abide by His laws (Exod 23:24-26, Deut 28:1-14, 30:19-20), but warns that misery and judgment will come to those societies that reject them (Deut 11:26-28, 28:15-68, 2 Chr 24:20, Isa 65:11-14). Thus, prosperous societies can attribute their prosperity—to a large extent—to their observance of Biblical principles of law, justice and hard work, and their discovery and acknowledgment of God’s natural law. It is instructive to remember that all prosperous western societies are the product of the Christian worldview,²⁹ whereas those societies that have adopted atheistic, humanistic or pagan values, have either suffered economic calamity (USSR) or perpetual impoverishment (India).

God Does Not Show Favouritism

Several Evangelical Alliance publications assert that the Christian gospel is biased “towards those who are disadvantaged”³⁰ and “calls for preferential treatment for the socially and economically poor and disadvantaged.”³¹ Ron Sider makes the same claim but adds a multitude of qualifications:

[T]here are several important things I do not mean. First, God is not biased. Second, material poverty is not a biblical ideal. Third, the poor and oppressed, just because they are poor and oppressed, are not thereby members of the church...Fourth, God does not care more about the salvation of the poor than the salvation of the rich. Fifth, we dare not start with some ideologically interpreted context of oppression (for example, Marxist analysis) and then reinterpret Scripture from that ideological bias. Sixth, God does not overlook the sin of those who are poor because of sloth or alcoholism.³²

Sider’s qualifications ultimately make his claim meaningless. If they are accepted, then in what way can it be said that God is “on the side of the poor”?

In any case, such views are ***absolutely heretical*** and ***inexcusable distortions of the gospel***. The claim that God is on the side of the poor simply because they are poor is flatly denied by scripture (Exod 23:2, 3, 6). God is on the side of the righteous and he stands against the unrighteous

²⁷ Edgar, “Industrial Relations and the Free Market”.

²⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols (Waco, Texas: Word, 1976ff) 4:549. For examples, see Theodore Dalrymple, *Life at the Bottom: The Worldview that Makes the Underclass* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001) 134-143.

²⁹ See especially Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005).

³⁰ Edgar, “Industrial Relations and the Free Market”.

³¹ Brian Edgar, “Christian Values and Economic Policies” <<http://ea.org.au/election/aEconomics.htm>>

³² Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990).

regardless of whether they are rich or poor. As Peter and Paul point out, God is impartial (1 Pet 1:17) and does not show favouritism (Eph 6:9; Col 3:25). “It is heresy to state that God’s love for people varies in [inverse] proportion to their wealth and social class. It is nonsense to suggest that all the poor are good and all the rich are evil.”³³

Nature of the Gospel

Similarly, many ‘Christian socialists’ seek to reinterpret Jesus’ earthly mission in exclusively economic and political terms. In their view, Jesus came primarily to deliver those who were poor and oppressed in a material sense. Yet they forget that all human beings are poor in the sense of being spiritually bankrupt. Jesus came to end our spiritual poverty by imputing to us His perfect righteousness so that we may satisfy God demands. He came to seek and to save those who were lost. Indeed, Jesus showed great compassion toward the extremely wealthy Zacchaeus even though Zacchaeus had cheated many people (Luke 19:2-10).

In addition, Jesus Himself explicitly rejected all suggestions that He would be a political deliverer or social revolutionary. When the people wanted to make Him King after seeing his miracles, Jesus withdrew (John 6:14-15). When the people found Him, Jesus noted that they were looking for Him not because of the miraculous signs, but because they wanted to be fed again (John 6:26-27). Jesus also declared that His kingdom was “not of this world” (John 18:36-37).

The Jubilee Year

Jim Wallis asserts that the Biblical Jubilee year of Leviticus 25 teaches a regular economic redistribution in order to level our material wealth to rectify the “human tendency toward overaccumulation by some while others lose ground.”³⁴ This, however, is a highly selective reading of the description of the Jubilee year. Firstly, the Jubilee did not provide for the cancellation of debts. In fact, in normal circumstances a person who was indebted to another and could not pay was forced to work for the person to whom they were in debt. A family member could redeem them before the Jubilee year, but they had to pay a price for doing so (Lev 25:23-24; 47-54). Thus, the person owed the debt would not necessarily lose anything at the time of the Jubilee, since they would have had the benefit of the debtor’s (free) labour for a period of time.³⁵ Secondly, the release of slaves related only to Israelites who possessed fellow Israelites as forced labourers as a result of unpaid debts. It did not affect the possession of foreign slaves (Lev 25:44-46). Thirdly, the return of property affected only that property that lay outside the city walls (i.e. agricultural land). It did not affect land inside the cities, or other economic resources such as fishing boats and livestock (Lev 25:29-30). Fourthly, the Jubilee redistribution did not always help all the poor. It provided nothing to immigrants who had no original inheritance. People born just after a Jubilee year would still have to suffer almost 50 years of economic inequality, and being poor, many would die before the next Jubilee year. In reality, the Jubilee year would have little effect and provide little immediate assistance to many of the poor. Fifthly, the amount of economic levelling would be minimal, because knowledge of when the Jubilee year was due to occur would almost certainly affect the way

³³ Ronald Nash, “Socialism, Capitalism and the Bible” *Imprimus* 14/7 (July 1985).

³⁴ Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1994) 273. See also Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 79.

³⁵ Obviously if the debtor became a forced labourer just before the year of Jubilee they would only have to suffer under this situation for a very short period of time. However, the person owed the debt would have the power to determine when their debt is called up. They could simply wait for a year or so until after the Jubilee has passed (since the Jubilee does not require cancellation of debts) and then call up the debt. This would mean the debtor could potentially serve up to fifty years.

trade and commerce was conducted. No reasonable person would pay full price for a piece of land that they would have to return in one or two years time. Thus, the value of land would be highest just after the Jubilee and gradually decrease as the next Jubilee approaches. A person who buys land just after a Jubilee year will pay a price in the full knowledge that he will have to surrender it in 50 years. He will hold the land during this time and have every opportunity to use it as an economic resource to produce wealth. On the other hand, a person wishing to purchase land one or two years before a Jubilee year would only ever pay a fraction of what the land would normally be worth because he knows that he has only a limited period of time to use the land to create wealth (cf. Lev 25:15-17).

Wallis also asserts that the Sabbath year of Deuteronomy 15:1-9 offers a Biblical mandate for the periodic cancellation of debt. Verse 1 (NIV) states: “At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.” However, there is much debate over whether this refers to permanent cancellation of debt or a temporary suspension for one year.³⁶ The Hebrew word rendered as “cancel” in the NIV, NLT and GNB is מִחַוֶּה (š^emīṭṭā) and is only used in this passage. However, all the standard Hebrew lexicons define this word as ‘remission’ rather than ‘cancellation.’³⁷ Although the verb שָׁמַט (šāmāṭ), from which the noun is derived, has a much broader meaning, there is one instance which is helpful. In Exodus 23:11, the verb refers to letting agricultural land lie unused for a year so that the poor may get food from it. This was not a permanent release of the land, and the following year the owner would use the land again. In addition,

a temporary respite is suggested both by the wording of v. 2 (‘he [the creditor] shall not press his neighbor’) and by the fact that a special Year of Jubilee would have been unnecessary if the intention of the sabbatical law had been the total, permanent cancellation of all debts and the permanent restoration of all mortgaged property...It seems, then, that Deut 15:1-3 is instructing creditors to return pledges to debtors and not to press for any loan repayments for the duration of the year of release...In v. 9, those who are in a position to lend are exhorted not to be grudging and halfhearted in their response to poverty and hardship, but to give cheerfully and generously, even when the seventh year, the year of remission...is imminent.³⁸

It should also be noted that after the Israelites conquered the land of Canaan, the land was not divided up evenly between the tribes in the first instance. The allocation was done by lot, and some tribes received larger parcels of land than others. Manasseh, for example, received two huge parcels, whereas Benjamin received only one small parcel, and the Levites were given no significant land at all (Josh 18-19).

The Early Church

Other social justice advocates cite Acts 2:32-35 and assert that this passage teaches that property should be shared so that the needs of the community could be met. It should be noted, however, that the book of Acts is a descriptive historical account of what happened in the fledgling early church. It is not a prescriptive theological treatise. Secondly, the selling of property and distribution of funds to the poor was an entirely voluntary act. No command was issued from the apostles nor was any coercion involved. Thirdly, this practice caused an unnecessarily heavy social obligation on community members, and resulted in Ananias and Sapphira lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:10-11).

³⁶ Earl S. Kalland, ‘Deuteronomy’ in Frank E. Gaebelin (editor), *Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992).

³⁷ See R. Whitaker, F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *The Abridged Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Princeton Theological Seminary, 1997, c1906); William L. Holladay (editor), *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988); Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner et. al., *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

³⁸ See מִחַוֶּה in *NIDOTTE*.

Fourthly, the practice also resulted in preferential treatment and neglect (Acts 6:1), and eventually the community ran out of both property and money, which is why Paul and his team had to ask other churches to support the church in Jerusalem (e.g. 2 Cor 8).

Sider, on the other hand, cites 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 as support for economic redistribution.³⁹ However, in this passage Paul encourages the Corinthians to give aid to the Jerusalem church out of their abundance. Note that Paul did not command or coerce the Corinthians. This was to be a *gift* according to their own discretion (2 Cor 8:7-12).

ECONOMIC INEQUALITY: JUST OR UNJUST?

Some people have much—more than they could ever need—while others are destitute and dying. On the face of it, such situations appear to be unconscionable. What should Christians do?

In order to determine what must be done, it is necessary to look again at what causes poverty. Clearly some people are poor because they are oppressed by others (Isa 10:1-2, Zech 7:10), but the Evangelical Alliance and other Christian socialists tend to view poverty as almost entirely a result of oppression, either directly (in the case of workers being oppressed by their employers), or indirectly (in the case of systemic denial of equality). They rarely acknowledge that many people—especially those who live in wealthy western societies—have brought poverty upon themselves through laziness, foolishness, impulsiveness and the like. Moreover, they believe that any economic inequality is intrinsically unjust regardless of the cause of that inequality, and any widening in the wealth distribution gap between the richest and the poorest is inherently immoral. Furthermore, they object to any economic growth that “comes at a cost to the already disadvantaged,”⁴⁰ even though such costs are often only temporary. Yet, if we applied the ‘no cost to the disadvantaged’ test in the real world, its intellectual and logical vacuousness becomes apparent, for no major innovation would ever have occurred, from the dawn of history to the present, no matter what benefit it provided to society, because there would always be some disadvantaged person somewhere who would end up worse off.

Marxist Influences

Nevertheless, the Evangelical Alliance advocates policies that either directly or indirectly result in the transfer of wealth from the rich to the poor, including minimum wage laws, protectionism, collective agreements, and the limiting of economic growth. They talk about “how the market can be modified to better society by enhancing social equality.”⁴¹ They perceive the government’s recent industrial relations reforms to be “maximising overall economic growth by affecting the working conditions and benefits of the weakest and least rewarded employees” and then ask: “Can this be seen as anything other than running counter to biblical principles concerning protection of the most disadvantaged members of the market and enhancing social economic equality...?”⁴²

Christian socialists such as those in the Evangelical Alliance, appear to have the same pervasive prejudice against wealthy and successful people as the secular left. This is not simply a case of the ‘tall poppy’ syndrome at work. Rather, they appear to have uncritically accepted Karl Marx’s view of capitalist societies. They perceive that the wealthy (or their ancestors) became wealthy as a result

³⁹ Sider, 78.

⁴⁰ Edgar, “Industrial Relations and the Free Market”.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

of lying, cheating, and/or exploiting others. Rarely do they acknowledge that most wealthy people got wealthy through the use of their intelligence, through innovation, through persistence and hard work, or through good money management, sacrificial saving and judicious spending.

These socialist views present two problems: Firstly, to presume that wealthy people gained their wealth in some illegitimate way is to bare false witness against one's neighbour (Exod 20:16). Secondly, such presumptions only serve to intellectually cripple those who need to learn most of all from the wealthy. If the poor perceive that the only way to be successful in business and obtain wealth is by being shrewd and heartless exploiters, then many will never be interested in aspiring to be successful in business.

Note also that, contrary to Edgar's baseless assertions, the Bible does not support any concept of economic equality, least of all one brought about by coercive means.⁴³ In fact, Jesus Himself tells of the parable of the workers, where a landowner went out at various times during the day and hired labourers to work in his vineyard (Matt 20:1-16). Although, the standard daily wage was one denarius and those who did not work a full day would not have expected a full day's wage, all workers received the same wage regardless of how long they had worked—even those who had only worked an hour. However, those who had worked a full day complained to the landowner, who responded: "Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" (vv. 13-15). The landowner's response reinforces a number of principles, including the binding nature of contractual rights (the workers hired first agreed to work for a set wage and were not legally entitled to anything more), private property rights (the landowner was entitled to do what he wanted with his own money), and also serves as a denunciation of envy. Furthermore, there is no condemnation of the landowner paying his workers unequally.

Similarly, in the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30), Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a landowner who entrusted some of his money to three of his servants before going on a journey. However, each servant was entrusted with a different amount of money. When the landowner returned he called his servants to account, but the one who was entrusted with the least had failed to invest it and generated no return. The landowner severely rebuked him and commanded that the money that had been entrusted to him be taken away and given to the servant who had been entrusted with the most. Again, there is no hint of either equality of distribution or equality of reward.

In addition, the scriptures never condemn the rich merely for being rich. In fact, wealth is often a mark of God's blessing (Deut 8:18, 2 Chr 1:12, Prov 10:22). It is only when the rich oppress the poor, are greedy, or seek to gain wealth through unjust means, that they attract God's condemnation.

In any case, economic inequality is not necessarily detrimental. The mutuality of gains (one man's gain leads to other men's gain) is inherent in the very nature of a free market capitalist society, where parties cooperate by voluntarily entering into agreements in the expectation that both parties will benefit. Both parties participate in order to obtain something they value more. No party will participate in an exchange unless it receives some benefit, even if that benefit is relatively small. Thus, the progressive rise in the productivity of labour and the mutual gains from exchange are two

⁴³ Note the earlier discussions in regard to the Jubilee Year and the communalism of the early church.

ways in which one man's gain becomes the gain of others. In addition, the success of one person can be copied by others so that they may also gain.

The inequality in productive ability between the naturally gifted and disadvantaged is also dynamic in the sense that those of outstanding ability succeed in steadily raising the productivity and real wages of those of lesser ability. In other words, the economic inequality that exists in a free market capitalist society

is an inequality in which the greater success of some is the cause not of the failure of others, but of their success too. It is in its most important respects simply an inequality of success and progress—an inequality in which some are merely further ahead than others on the road of improvement. The inequality of such a society is an inequality in which the 'rich' and the 'poor' *both* grow richer, and in which the classification of any given individual as belonging to the class of the 'rich' or the 'poor' is constantly subject to change by virtue of his own efforts and abilities.⁴⁴

Yet a common objection to capitalism among socialists is that 10% of the population owns 90% percent of the wealth. But even if this claim is accurate, there would in fact be nothing wrong with such a situation provided that the 10% acquired their wealth through legal, just and fair means. In essence, the situation is indicative of the fact that some people have contributed more to production than others, because they introduced major improvements and innovations. Therefore, the 90% of the wealth that is not only owned but also *created and earned* by that 10% (or by their parents or grandparents), ends up serving the rest of the population that did not contribute as much to production.⁴⁵ Furthermore, if the rest of the population (or the government) attempt to force a transfer of wealth from that 10% to the most disadvantaged—as the Evangelical Alliance proposes—they will ultimately destroy the creation of the wealth that serves the least disadvantaged and destroy any hope they have of escaping their disadvantaged state. This is because the Christian socialists in the Evangelical Alliance have no concept of the production of wealth and how it is accumulated, but instead begin with the myth of the 'distribution fairy': that there is a finite amount of wealth in the world and that it is meant to be evenly distributed among everyone. These views come not from the Bible but from Karl Marx, and would naturally lead to the implementation of coercive policies that legally sanction theft and lead to a world that is physically empty of the production and accumulation of wealth. *Instead of evenly distributing wealth, such policies end up evenly distributing poverty!* As Reisman put it, the "thieves" end up as "starving wretches."⁴⁶ The truth of the above principles is born out in the actual history of all those societies that have adopted communism and other forms of socialism, and Zimbabwe, once the bread basket of Africa, is a current example of the poverty and economic ruin that comes from such policies.

Nevertheless, the views of the Evangelical Alliance echo those of Marx when they assume that the inequality between employer and worker is essentially not much different from the inequality that prevailed in earlier periods of history between master and slave or between lord and serf. The Evangelical Alliance's constant reference to, and preference for, the "poor" and "socially disadvantaged" is indicative of their support for a kind of class struggle between the poor and disadvantaged (good) and the rich (bad).⁴⁷ Like Marxists, they view workers as 'wage slaves' and employers, if given the opportunity, would readily become ruthless exploiters driven by the market to force workers deeper into poverty. Therefore, like Marx, the Evangelical Alliance appears to believe that society's only salvation from exploitation and class conflict, and the only way to

⁴⁴ Reisman, 330.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ There is, of course, nothing wrong with advocating for those who are poor and disadvantaged, but it is wrong to think that such people are inherently righteous, or that the wealthy are not inherently worthy of the same support.

achieve a world of equality, peace and harmony, is to adopt socialist principles. The only difference is that their plea is wrapped in theological language and assertions of biblical support.

But, as Reisman pointed out, “[e]very aspect of the Marxian doctrine on inequality is false and vicious”⁴⁸ because it does not consider the nature and cause of inequalities. Marxists also equivocate on the use of the word ‘force.’ Marxists argue that reality compels a person to work because otherwise they would not eat, so for all practical purposes, a worker must work for an employer. This is really the basis for the Evangelical Alliance’s objection to the Federal government’s industrial relations reforms because the reforms change the balance of power in favour of the employer, and so workers have little choice and are ‘forced’ to accept whatever conditions the employer offers. In other words, the distinction between freedom and slavery is nominal if a worker must work in order to avoid starvation. The same point was made by J. K. Galbraith.⁴⁹ However, this idea is absolutely preposterous, and reflects the Orwellian world of *1984*—that freedom is really slavery. As Reisman pointed out, “the difference between freedom and slavery is as sharp as day and night, even when a worker must work to avoid the pain of hunger. For even in this case it is not the capitalist employer who *causes* the worker’s hunger. On the contrary, he provides the means of *satisfying* the worker’s hunger.”⁵⁰ A worker is a slave only when he chooses *not* to work but is compelled to do regardless, by means of physical force. Although it is true that few people can choose not to work at all, they can always choose not to work for a *particular employer*, whenever another employer offers them better wages and/or conditions.

Yet, despite the unbiblical basis and logical vacuousness of socialist principles, and the manifest failure of all socialist societies, the Evangelical Alliance are still intent on pushing socialist policies including those that result in a direct or indirect redistribution of wealth. However, as shown above, the belief that the poor standard of living in the past was a result of an unjust distribution of wealth and income, and that the standard of living was improved by the imposition of a more just distribution of wealth and income, is completely wrong. Before the rise and entrenchment of capitalism, there was, in fact, very little wealth to redistribute. Workers of the early 19th century did not lack food, clothes, furniture and other basic goods because the wealthy were keeping them all for themselves. Rather, these things were simply not in abundance like they are today. Moreover, the many electrical and mechanical labour saving devices available today were not available then—even for the extremely wealthy—because they simply did not exist! Even the goods that did exist were in short supply because they were generally all produced by hand with little or no automation. Furthermore, if the limited supplies of such goods owned by capitalists had been redistributed, the improvement in conditions of workers would hardly have been noticeable. Worse than that, seizing the wealth of capitalists, to improve the consumption of the masses, would result in capital decumulation, which would destroy the foundations of the productivity of labour and the growth of real wages. In other words, it would impair the increase in the supply of capital goods and thus the increase in the productivity of labour. Thus, it would hold down the rise in real wages, and ultimately reduce real wages. Indeed, as Reisman notes, “the major victims of redistributionism are always the wage earners. Taxes imposed on profits and interest are paid largely with funds that otherwise would have been used to purchase labor services and capital goods.”⁵¹

There is no doubt that Christians have a responsibility to help the disadvantaged and give to those who are in need. But scripture makes it clear that this responsibility is personal, voluntary and discretionary. In other words, the amount given and the object of the gift are determined solely by

⁴⁸ Reisman, 330.

⁴⁹ J. K. Galbraith, *The New Industrial State*, 2nd edition (New York: New American Library, 1971) 141.

⁵⁰ Reisman, 331.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 653.

the giver, and this responsibility should not be delegated to the government. Of course, helping the disadvantaged and assisting the poor is only possible if individuals have the ability to accumulate capital. Socialist redistribution policies, however, makes this very difficult, and usually end up making everyone less well off.

The Objective Success of Free Market Capitalism

In contrast, free market capitalism—including the Federal government’s recent industrial relations reforms—has had stellar success in improving the living standards of the poor. Edgar rightly points out that “[t]he claim that the new legislation will assist economic growth and thus result in more jobs for [unskilled and low skilled workers] is one that can be evaluated both economically and theologically” but adds that, “[e]conomically this approach seems deficient given the renewed strength of the argument that reducing the minimum wage does not affect overall employment. A business saving on employment costs will not necessarily mean the employment of another person. Businesses may take the saving as profit or use it in other ways.”⁵² On the contrary, in the two years from May 2005 to May 2007, over 500,000 jobs have been created, and over 400,000 of these are full-time jobs.⁵³ Moreover, in the March quarter 1996 to March quarter 2007, real wages⁵⁴ have increased by 20.8%, whereas under the previous Labor government (March quarter 1983 to March quarter 1996) real wages actually fell by 1.8% (seasonally adjusted). Since the new industrial relations reforms were implemented, real wages have increased by 2.4% (March quarter 2006 to March quarter 2007).

The wages gap between men and women has also been reduced. Under the current Coalition government, the gender earnings ratio (female hourly earnings⁵⁵ as a percentage of male hourly earnings) has increased from 87.1% in February 1996 to 89.4% in February 2007.⁵⁶ Since the introduction of the new industrial relations reforms, the gender earnings ratio has risen from 88.3% in February 2006 to 89.4 per cent in February 2007.

In addition, the average hours worked of full-time employees have fallen from 40.9 hours per week (12 month average to March 1996) to 39.8 hours a week (12 month average to March 2007).⁵⁷ Since the introduction of the new industrial relations reforms, hours worked of full-time employees have fallen from an average of 40.4 hours per week (12 month average to March 2006) to 39.8 hours a week (12 month average to March 2007).

⁵² Edgar, “Industrial Relations and the Free Market”.

⁵³ Seasonally adjusted figures from “Labour Force Australia” *Australian Bureau of Statistics* 6202.0 (May 2007).

⁵⁴ As measured by average non-farm compensation per employee deflated by the implicit price deflator for final consumption expenditure – households from the ABS *Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product* publication (Cat. No. 5206.0) – AusStats spreadsheets 2, 3 and 20. The data are seasonally adjusted.

⁵⁵ Average hourly earnings are calculated by dividing full-time adult average weekly earnings (in original terms) (from ABS *Average Weekly Earnings* Cat. No. 6302.0) by the number of hours worked by full-time employees, aged 20 years and over in all industries except Agriculture, forestry and fishing for the relevant quarter (from ABS *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly*, February 2007 Cat. No. 6291.0.55.003). The hourly gender earnings ratio is the percentage of female average hourly earnings to male average hourly earnings.

⁵⁶ The ratio reached a high of 90.5% in February 2001.

⁵⁷ ABS *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed-Electronic Delivery*, (Cat. No. 6291.0.55.001) May 2007. Please note data on hours worked are highly volatile and can vary considerably from month to month. For example, in January 2007 the hours worked of full-time employees were 28.4 compared with 41.6 in February 2007. Averaging the data over a period of 3 to 12 months provides more reliable indicators of changes in underlying trends.

A REALISTIC VIEW OF WORK AND LIFE

At the present time, it is fair to say that people in modern societies have never been so well off. They have far superior working conditions, receive higher wages, and work less hours. Yet, many people still complain about all these things. They still believe they are being exploited, that their rights are being stripped away, and that their work-life balance has been destroyed by ever increasing work demands. However, it appears that many people have extremely unrealistic views about work.

Basic Rights

Firstly, having a job is not a right, let alone a basic human right. Entrepreneurs enter into business ventures in order to make money, but they can only do that by providing quality products or services at an affordable price. If they cannot do this, their business venture will fail. The problem is that labour is often the most significant cost in providing those goods and services. Thus, a wage is not just the selling price of one's labour. For the employer, it is also the buying price of a person's labour. This means that if a person will only sell their labour at a price that the employer cannot afford to pay (or is prohibited from selling their labour at a lower price), then the employer will either choose, or be forced, to terminate their venture. They are not obliged or required to be in business, nor are they required to employ people, but they do so because they believe they (and society in general) will benefit from it. If they see no benefit, they will take their capital (and their potential jobs) elsewhere.

Secondly, success is also not a right. No one is born to succeed, and success cannot be bought, learnt, inherited or stolen. Rather, success is an achievement. It takes time, effort, discipline and a lot of hard work. Some people are more successful than others (and therefore wealthier than others) because they were prepared to do what it takes to be successful. There is nothing inherently wrong or unjust with being successful.

Thirdly, not all employers are unscrupulous, ruthless, exploiters. There is no doubt that some employers are like this but they are relatively few, because, as noted above, the market has a civilising effect on its participants. In fact, the vast majority of employers do the right thing by their employees because they recognise that good loyal staff are often hard to find and are a valuable asset to their business. On the other hand, not all employees are saints. Many employees put in a minimal effort, abuse privileges, and steal time and resources from their employer. As Ian Harper pointed out, petty theft in the workplace is rife. The public service auditor, for example, cannot account for thousands of laptop computers that have gone missing from government departments over the last five or six years. Even genuinely hard working and honest people often do not think twice about taking their sick leave as just another form of paid holiday.⁵⁸

Work and Family Life

In addition, the Evangelical Alliance and others have expressed concern about the impact of the Federal government's industrial relations reforms on the family life of employees. According to Edgar, less time at work allows "time for people to spend serving others in their communities." Furthermore, he points to a "potentially significant shift in the social philosophy of the way that time and social relationships are viewed in our society" and a "potential shift in the proportion of

⁵⁸ Ian Harper, "Christian Morality and Market Capitalism: Friends or Foes?" Acton Lecture, *Centre for Independent Studies* (November 19, 2003).

time to be spent in work as compared to other activities [which] affects relationships between people, families and other social groups and the ability of individuals to provide for dependants.”⁵⁹

In his keynote speech at the 2007 ALP national conference, Kevin Rudd, a self-confessed ‘Christian socialist,’ appeared to portray work as an intrusion into regular life, a departure from normalcy, an imposed affliction: “Mr Howard’s industrial relations laws are saying to people we can make it so you have to work this weekend, without any prior notice...Australian families...to hold themselves together, cherish their weekends.”⁶⁰ In other words, work-free weekends, public holidays, and penalty rates are sacrosanct human rights.

The Bible, however, presents a very different view. In Genesis 2:15, God gave Adam and Eve the task of tending and working the Garden of Eden. Thus, work is part of God’s natural order. Secondly, because of the curse, God told Adam that he would now have to work much harder than if he had not disobeyed God, and that his work would be frustrated by the effects of the Fall (Gen 3:19).

It is important to understand that the whole concept of work-life balance and the idea of spending more time at home with the family is a relatively modern phenomenon. One hundred—even fifty—years ago it was simply not possible for main bread-winners to spend more time with family. People had to work much harder and for much longer in order to just survive. It was not until mechanisation and automation in manufacturing and office administration became wide spread that it was possible for people to spend less time at work and more time with family.

Note also that some workers have always been required to work on weekends and public holidays often without any additional pay. This is especially true of emergency services personnel, police, nurses, doctors, and firemen, but also includes petrol station attendants, waitresses, public transport workers and the like. Yet, most people, including Christians—do not think twice about going out to a café or restaurant, buying petrol or going to the cinema on the weekend. Moreover, they do not expect to pay higher prices for regular goods and services on weekends and public holidays, even though many believe such workers deserve to be paid extra for working at these times.

Yet this has not stopped Kevin Rudd asserting that free markets destroy family and community. In a recent article, he quotes David McKnight: “Hayek’s intellectual paradigm has turbo-charged the privatised, marketised economy, which is relentlessly encroaching on the life world of family, friends and community. The invisible hand is clutching at the invisible heart and slowly choking it.”⁶¹ But according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ *Australian Social Trends 2006*, the last decade has not overseen the demise of family, church or community:

On the contrary, Australian families seem to be thriving. Between 1995 and 2005 the total number of families increased by 15 per cent to 5.5 million. The overall fertility rate has not changed much but the internal trends are good, with the proportion of births to young single women down, and the proportion to older married women up. The divorce rate is down overall, and quite dramatically so in families with children under eighteen...The social indicators of community tell the same story. The proportion of people acting as volunteers has leapt from 24 to 34 per cent. Parents are pleased about a greater choice of schools. Christianity is enjoying a strong revival in the new outer suburbs. These are the consequences that the dreaded neo-liberalism has brought for family, church and community since John Howard took office.⁶²

⁵⁹ Edgar, “Industrial Relations and the Free Market”.

⁶⁰ As cited in Frank Devine, “Rising tide of workers' pride here to stay, King Kevin” *The Australian* (May 4, 2007).

⁶¹ Kevin Rudd, “Howard’s Brutopia” *The Monthly* (November 2006).

⁶² Keith Windschuttle, “The Struggle for Australian Values in an Age of Deceit” *Quadrant* 51/1-2 (January 2007).

On the other hand, what did contribute greatly to the breakdown of family and community was, among other things, “the rapid rise of unemployment in the late 1970s and early 1980s which devastated many Australian families and for which the much-maligned neo-liberalism has proven itself the only cure.”⁶³

HELPING THE GENUINELY POOR AND DISADVANTAGED

‘Poor’ is a relative term. When former Soviet President Mikael Gorbachov first visited America, one of his first remarks was “My, how rich are your poor!” The so-called ‘poor’ of the USA and Australia are, in reality, extremely wealthy when compared with genuinely poor people in Africa, South America and parts of Asia. Leviticus, however, defines the poor as those who are lowly because their ‘power [lit., hand] wavers’ (25:35) or is insufficient (14:21). They do not have the capacity to provide for themselves the essentials of life.

Caring for the poor and disadvantaged is, of course, obligatory for all Christians who have the means. However, Christians disagree over how best to help such people. Edgar, Director of Public Policy for the Evangelical Alliance, argues that

[caring for the needy and disadvantaged] seems to be a particularly difficult task for a free-market where individual liberty is seen as supreme; where a focus on one’s own interests in a competitive (rather than just co-operative) environment appears to be an intrinsic aspect of the process; and where economic growth is regarded as the supreme measure of success. Should care for the less able and the disadvantaged be addressed in some other way than through the market? By, for instance, personal generosity and charity, or church and state based welfare systems?⁶⁴

In other words, Edgar believes the best way to help the poor is through socialist policies that effect a redistribution of wealth.

As discussed above, socialist redistributive policies solve nothing and, more often than not, make things even worse. Furthermore, although personal charity is certainly a key part of Christian service, Christians are also called to be good stewards of the resources God has given them. Therefore, Christians must exercise wisdom in their giving and ensure that their gifts are used effectively. Indiscriminate charity can have a disempowering effect on recipients, because it makes them too dependent on hand outs. Like drug addicts, serial charity recipients cannot get by without their ‘fix,’ and lose all motivation to improve their situation and free themselves from their dependence. Indeed, Federal Treasury Secretary, Ken Henry, noted that decades of misguided government policy encouraging passive welfare had disempowered many Australians—particularly Aborigines. “Governments that designed these policies were no doubt motivated by compassion. In practice, they were consigning many Australians to a life of economic and social exclusion.”⁶⁵ These sentiments are repeated by Noel Pearson. When speaking about the socialist policies of the left, he says:

They say we have a right to passive welfare. We say we do not have a right to dependency and, indeed, we have a greater right to take up a fair place in the real economy. They say economic integration is antithetical to our identity. We say our culture cannot and will not survive as long as we live in the social dysfunction caused by economic dependency. They say poverty is our main problem. We say passivity is our main problem because it prevents us from taking advantage of opportunities to get out of poverty and the resources we get are squandered.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Edgar, “Industrial Relations and the Free Market”.

⁶⁵ As reported by Tony Koch, “Compassion keeping people dirt poor” *The Australian* (June 27, 2007).

⁶⁶ Noel Pearson, “Leftist policies pave kids’ road to hell” *The Australian* (July 21, 2007).

One must also recognise the limited capacity of governments to promote moral behaviour in human beings. It is a mistake to think that government should be used to compel a particular moral vision. As Thomas Jefferson once said: “Never give power to a good man that you would not give to an evil man.” Thus, Harper argues that “[i]f we rely too heavily on the state and bolster it, with a view to deploying its coercive power to our purposes, we may regret it when at some point the state begins to enforce values antipathetic to our own.”⁶⁷

In addition, Christian social justice advocates, like Edgar, tend to minimise the importance of work, and the success of free markets in combating poverty. As Allister Heath pointed out, it is multinational companies that have done more to improve the lives of the poor, than any charity:

[T]he stark reality is that the remarkable alleviation of poverty witnessed in recent years in Asian countries such as India and China has nothing to do with handouts and everything to do with governments embracing the institutions of capitalism. The only way sub-Saharan Africa will be able to feed and clothe its people is if African politicians follow suit, and that is where multinationals, the foot soldiers of the market economy, come in.

The widespread view, even among those who should know better, is that multinationals exploit workers in poor countries by paying them extremely low wages and keeping them in sweatshop conditions, then make a bundle by selling the goods they make at huge profit margins in the West.

A related argument is that multinationals regularly violate the human rights of their poorest workers and perpetuate the disgrace that is child labour. But the truth, as is so often the case, is the opposite.

...Far from exploiting the rock-bottom wage rates generally paid in the poorest countries, multinationals tend to pay well above the going rate in the areas in which they are located.

In the case of US multinationals, pay is 40 per cent to 100 per cent above local wages. No wonder locals queue up to get a job whenever a multinational opens its doors in a poor country: wages that may look miserable to us allow their recipients in Burma or Bangladesh to live in relative comfort.

Working conditions in factories owned and operated by multinationals are invariably superior to those of their local competitors. Western firms also know better than to employ child labour, if only to protect themselves from adverse publicity back home. Multinationals help to transfer capital, resources, skills and technical know-how across borders. Workers trained by global companies are invariably more productive than those in local firms, and when the workers move on they take their knowledge with them, helping to spread better working practices, increased productivity and higher living standards.

It is also wrong to believe that multinationals make huge profits from factories in Asia or Latin America. Competition is such that producing manufactured goods to export to the West is a low-margin business. After wages, raw material costs and transport are taken into account, there is little left.

The case of Vietnam is especially instructive. Workers fortunate enough to work for multinationals there enjoy a standard of living that is twice as high as that of the rest of the population.

In a paper debunking the sweatshop myth, Paul Glewwe, a leading development economist, revealed that the average wage-earner in Vietnam earned US23c an hour, but workers in foreign-owned businesses fared far better, making an average of US42c an hour. When Glewwe conducted his work, 15 per cent of Vietnamese were classified as very poor and 37 per cent as poor. But nobody working for multinationals was classified as very poor and only about 8 per cent were poor, proving that working for a foreign company is the best way to escape poverty and deprivation. Foreign employers drive wealth creation, pushing up everybody's wages.

The presence of multinationals in Vietnam also disproportionately benefits women and the young, two groups that are usually marginalised in poor countries. Two-thirds of workers in foreign-owned businesses in Vietnam are women, and nearly two-thirds are in their 20s, confirming that globalisation is driving social change and female emancipation.⁶⁸

Likewise, the Australian Commonwealth Treasury recently published data showing the dramatic effect of 100 years of economic growth on the material living standards of the world's inhabitants.

⁶⁷ Harper, “Christian Morality and Market Capitalism.”

⁶⁸ Allister Heath, “The gift of work is best of all” *The Australian* (December 19, 2006). See also Paul Glewwe, “Are Foreign-Owned Businesses in Viet Nam Really Sweatshops?” *University of Minnesota Extension Service Newsletter* 701 (Summer, 2000) <<http://www.extension.umn.edu/newsletters/ageconomist/components/ag237-701a.html>>.

The poorest 25% of people living in the year 2000 were—on average—richer than all but the richest 25% of those alive in 1900. In other words, 75% of the world's people alive in 2000 were richer (taking into account inflation) than the richest 25% alive a century earlier. Much of this improvement occurred in the last third of the 20th century with the rapid economic development of East Asia. Moreover, these figures reflect only narrow income-based measures of economic welfare. If non-economic factors like life expectancy, literacy, infant mortality, drinking water quality and the like were included, the picture would be equally dramatic.⁶⁹ Of course, there are still many millions, indeed billions, of people still living in desperate poverty, but these figures demonstrate that free market economics offers the best hope for relieving world poverty. Indeed, Professor Amartya Sen points out that no free society—no democracy—has ever suffered famine, and his remedy for world poverty is more market capitalism, not less—because of the proven wealth-creating properties of free market economics.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the Evangelical Alliance calls on Christians to do the following:

1. Sign the 'Micah Call';
2. Support Jubilee Australia;
3. Send an 'Unhappy Birthday Card' to the World Bank;
4. Visit the Jubilee Australia web-site;
5. Spread the word and encourage friends to also sign the call;
6. Encourage leaderships of churches and other Christian organisations to sign the Call; and
7. Write or speak to local politicians about the Challenge.

The 'Micah Call' refers to *The Micah Challenge*—a creature of the World Evangelical Alliance that aims to fulfil the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.⁷¹ These are worthy goals in themselves, but the Micah Challenge's preferred method of achieving these goals is to advocate for the implementation of policies of economic redistribution at various levels. Steven Bradbury argues that

the Micah Challenge is a deeply spiritual conviction: that the Creator of the universe requires all governments to "give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and destitute", and to "rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Psalm 82). What we have in this Psalm is a profound prophetic vision. The world's political leaders are gathered by God into a global forum...God is in charge. He has but one question to ask of these powerful men and women: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?" "Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." This is God's mandate to all governments, regardless of their political ideology or religious persuasion. All political leaders are accountable to God for their performance in delivering policies that respond effectively to the needs of poor and oppressed communities.⁷²

However, Bradbury's appeal to Psalm 82 as scriptural support for his view is misguided, and another instance of lazy exegesis where one reads their own interpretation back into the text instead of doing the exegetical hard work. Psalm 82 is an exhortation in the form of a prophetic vision. The presence of the similes "like humankind" and "like the princes/chieftains" in verse 7 make it impossible to assume that the "gods" could be human beings.⁷³ Rather, the "gods" are pagan deities, distortions of the One True God (v. 6: "sons of the "Most High") and are portrayed as being nothing more than subjects who must render an account to the God of Israel for all their evil and unjust acts. The imagery of the pagan pantheon of gods is used to dramatically present God's impending

⁶⁹ Harper, "Christian Morality and Market Capitalism".

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ See <<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>>

⁷² Steven Bradbury, 'Seizing the Time – the Micah Challenge' Australian Evangelical Alliance, 2004, <<http://www.evangelicalalliance.org.au/election/aMicah.htm>>.

⁷³ Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1998) 340.

judgment of evil rulers who oppress the people.⁷⁴ Therefore, Psalm 82 offers no support for the view that national governments may take on complete responsibility for eliminating world poverty.

The second and third things the Evangelical Alliance asks people to do is support Jubilee Australia—a lobby group attempting to pressure governments and financial institutions to cancel 3rd world debt—and to send an ‘Unhappy Birthday Card’ to the World Bank. But cancelling debt achieves almost nothing. Cancelling debts will only encourage corrupt despotic regimes to rack up even more debt in the secure knowledge that it will ultimately be forgiven. Moreover, debt cancellation does not address the reasons why the debt occurred in the first place. And sending an ‘Unhappy Birthday Card’ to the World Bank is just plain juvenile.

As alluded to by the seventh action, one of the primary methods employed by the Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Challenge, is to lobby governments to increase their foreign aid payments to poor nations. They wish to encourage governments of wealthy western nations to contribute 0.7% of their Gross National Product toward official development programs in accordance with the UN Millennium Development Program.⁷⁵ This is because the Evangelical Alliance believes that such foreign aid policies fulfil the Christian mission to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt 22:39).⁷⁶ But our responsibility to love our neighbour is a *personal* responsibility. Christians will be judged according to how they personally treated their neighbour, and in particular, those in need (Matt 25:31-46). Thus, lobbying government to increase foreign aid is not a fulfilment of our Christian responsibility—it is a complete abdication of it!

In any case, foreign aid is more often than not counterproductive. As Kenyan economics expert, James Shikwati, explains, foreign aid to Africa “does more harm than good.” Shikwati’s plea to western governments and aid organisations is “...for God’s sake, **please just stop!**”⁷⁷ He continues:

Such intentions have been damaging our continent for the past 40 years. If the industrial nations really want to help the Africans, they should finally terminate this awful aid. The countries that have collected the most development aid are also the ones that are in the worst shape. Despite the billions that have poured in to Africa, the continent remains poor...Huge bureaucracies are financed (with the aid money), corruption and complacency are promoted, Africans are taught to be beggars and not to be independent. In addition, development aid weakens the local markets everywhere and dampens the spirit of entrepreneurship that we so desperately need. As absurd as it may sound: Development aid is one of the reasons for Africa’s problems. If the West were to cancel these payments, normal Africans wouldn’t even notice. Only the functionaries would be hard hit. Which is why they maintain that the world would stop turning without this development aid.

Shikwati adds:

When there’s a drought in a region of Kenya, our corrupt politicians reflexively cry out for more help. This call then reaches the United Nations World Food Program—which is a massive agency of apparatchiks who are in the absurd situation of, on the one hand, being dedicated to the fight against hunger while, on the other hand, being faced with unemployment were hunger actually eliminated. It’s only natural that they willingly accept the plea for more help. And it’s not uncommon that they demand a little more money than the respective African government originally requested. They then forward that request to their headquarters, and before long, several thousands tons of corn are shipped to Africa...and at some point, this corn ends up in the harbor of Mombasa. A portion of the corn often goes directly into the hands of unscrupulous politicians who then pass it on to their own tribe to boost their next election campaign. Another portion of the shipment ends up on the black market where the corn is dumped at extremely low prices. Local farmers may as well put down their hoes right away; no one can compete with the UN’s World Food Program. And because the farmers go under in the face of this pressure,

⁷⁴ Mattitiah Tsevat, “God and the Gods in Assembly” *HUCA* 40-41 (1969-70) 123-37.

⁷⁵ See UN Development Program <<http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/press/07.htm>>

⁷⁶ “Response to the Invitation to Comment on the Forthcoming White paper on the Australian Aid Program” *Australian Evangelical Alliance* (August 8, 2005) <<http://ea.org.au/content/documents/pdf%20files/Overseas%20Aid.pdf>>

⁷⁷ “For God’s Sake, Please Stop the Aid!” *Der Spiegel* (July 4, 2005).

Kenya would have no reserves to draw on if there actually were a famine next year. It's a simple but fatal cycle.

In relation to the AIDS 'epidemic,' Shikwati observes:

AIDS is big business, maybe Africa's biggest business. There's nothing else that can generate as much aid money as shocking figures on AIDS. AIDS is a political disease here, and we should be very skeptical...Millions of dollars earmarked for the fight against AIDS are still stashed away in Kenyan bank accounts and have not been spent. Our politicians were overwhelmed with money, and they try to siphon off as much as possible. The late tyrant of the Central African Republic, Jean Bedel Bokassa, cynically summed it up by saying: "The French government pays for everything in our country. We ask the French for money. We get it, and then we waste it."

With respect to material assistance from western countries, Shikwati asks:

Why do we get these mountains of clothes? No one is freezing here. Instead, our tailors lose their livelihoods. They're in the same position as our farmers. No one in the low-wage world of Africa can be cost-efficient enough to keep pace with donated products. In 1997, 137,000 workers were employed in Nigeria's textile industry. By 2003, the figure had dropped to 57,000. The results are the same in all other areas where overwhelming helpfulness and fragile African markets collide. It would be helpful if the aid organizations were to pull out.

It should be clear, then, that when it comes to assisting the poor and disadvantaged, good intentions and a desire to do God's will are not enough. God not only gave His people hearts of compassion, He also gave them brains, and He expects His people to use them. If we truly desire to help the poor and disadvantaged, then we must bring them the true gospel: that human beings are creatures of God, that we have rebelled against our Creator, that all people are sinful and inclined to do evil, and therefore stand condemned, but that Jesus Christ has offered to pay the penalty on our behalf if we turn and follow Him. All people, including the poor and disadvantaged, need to know the objective difference between good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice. It is only then that people will be able to identify and fix the problems, the corruption and the injustice in their own communities. As discussed above, the only proven way to achieve this is through free market capitalism combined with secure property rights and the rule of law.⁷⁸

SUMMARY

Christians need to realise that being a Christian only qualifies a person for salvation. It does not qualify a person for anything else. It does not qualify a person to fly an aeroplane, to install electrical equipment, to fix cars, or to perform surgery. Yet an alarming number of Christian leaders think that it qualifies them to lecture on economics. Even more disturbing, is the claim that their ideas are drawn from, and supported by, the Bible, when, demonstrably, they are not! Put differently, nonsense is still nonsense even if Christians speak it—including those with a theology degree! Speaking nonsense and advocating nonsense policies only serves to damage the Christian cause. It reflects badly on the Church and on Christ Himself. If Christians wish to be taken seriously, then they must think and act seriously. Yet the Evangelical Alliance advocates for policies that sound good but achieve nothing—or worse—are actually counter productive. Their views appear to be more influenced by the political left than by the Bible. This is evident by the complete lack of serious biblical analysis in all their articles and policy documents, and the small amount of biblical support they do offer is usually limited to a few 'proof-texts' ripped from their biblical context.

⁷⁸ For a more thorough discussion of the role of Christianity in the development of capitalism, see Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005).

Therefore, nearly everything the Evangelical Alliance suggests to eliminate poverty will either make things worse or simply be ineffective. This is because they simply do not understand what causes poverty, nor do they understand how wealth is created. Their policies and methods appear to be more concerned with feeling good than doing good, and their basic belief that economic redistribution is the solution, is demonstrably false. Instead of evenly distributing wealth, it evenly distributes poverty.

It should not be surprising then that all the Evangelical Alliance's objections to the market economy's effect on unemployment and prosperity are refuted by reality. As noted above, the latest ABS statistical data regarding wages growth, falling unemployment and working hours paint a picture that is the exact opposite of their negative predictions.

It is difficult, then, to understand why Christian organisations like the Evangelical Alliance persist with such ineffective, harmful or counterproductive policies. Keith Windschuttle's assessment is probably not far from truth:

...for the past thirty years, the Evangelical Left has bloated itself on such a diet of myth, propaganda and atrocity stories about Australian history, about our role in the contemporary world, and especially about our chief ally and best friend, the United States, that it no longer believes in or cares about objective truth.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Windschuttle, "The Struggle for Australian Values in an Age of Deceit".