

Biblical Principles of Economics

Part 1: The Dominion Mandate

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Introduction

In this series of essays on the Biblical Principles of Economics our goal is to show that the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation confute the notion of a planned economy. Also known as statism, this economic philosophy advocates the granting of unlimited powers to government in ruling over its subjects. We will also attempt to establish the case for the free market which gives individuals the liberty to buy, sell and contract with limited government intervention. The free market is subject only to the absolute, moral laws established by Christ.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The first verse of the Bible establishes the foundation of Christian doctrine. God’s omnipotence and sovereignty over created matter ascends from each word. According to John Calvin the word for God, *Elohim*, “expresses those powers which God exercised in creating the world.”¹ God is omnipotent creator and transcends all that He created. The “universe is not self existent... it does not have an independent, autonomous existence.”²

Dr. Henry Morris writes, “it is vitally important, if we would ever really fully understand anything in the Bible, or in the world in general, that we first understand the teaching of Genesis 1:1.”³ Furthermore, Dr. Morris states that this verse refutes every false philosophy concerning the origin and meaning of the world including, “atheism, pantheism, polytheism, materialism, dualism, humanism and evolutionism.”⁴ I would add “statism.”⁵

Man’s Dominion

When God created man, he created him in His own image and likeness and gave him dominion over the earth and every living creature upon the face of the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). Some Christians believe this “dominion mandate” was terminated by man’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden.⁶ However, this position cannot stand the close

¹ John Calvin, *Genesis* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), p. 70.

² Donald Chittick, *The Controversy: Roots of the Creation-Evolution Conflict* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1984), p. 73.

³ Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 39.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 38.

⁵ The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines statism as “subservience to political expediency in religious matters; government of a country by the state; centralized state administration and control.” I like to define “statism” as “the state acting as god.”

⁶ See, *The Open Bible*, Expanded Edition: The New King James Version (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), p. 5.

examination of God's Word. Centuries later David declared, "What is man that you are mindful of him.... You have made him (man) to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet" (Psalm 8:3-9). Clearly man retains dominion over the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea.

Much modern thinking relegates man to the level of other created things. The New Age idea that "all is one" (Monism) sees everything as interrelated and interdependent. "Ultimately there is no difference between God, a person, a carrot or a rock.... Any perceived differences between separate entities...are only apparent and not real."⁷ To some the idea of dominion appears dangerous and exploitive to the earth's environment. "Deep ecology gives a clear message that all life has equal value; humans have no superior rights over any other life."⁸ Their solution involves the need to regain, "the perspective of the American Indians and think only of how we can work in harmony with the earth and each other."⁹ One such Indian medicine man believes that through his teaching, "you begin to realize your interconnectedness with the earth and with all other life."¹⁰

One New Age thinker determines that, "as we become more aware of our essential unity with all life, we will one day find it contrary to human nature to violate the environment."¹¹ To some New Agers the killing of animals for food and cutting down trees for firewood constitutes a violation of mother earth. These views truly weaken the value of human life and put man on a lower plain equal with animals and nature. Teachings such as "monism" rob God of His glory and man's God given right to exercise dominion over the earth. The idea that man is simply one with nature is a lie. Since "no lie is of the truth" monism and New Age thinking must be rejected.

Author, Russell Chandler, tells of an incident that occurred in Hawaii in 1983 which illustrates the clash between man's right to exercise dominion over the earth and New Age, earth worshippers. In an attempt to tap the geothermal energy of Mount Kilauea, the Department of Land and Natural Resources drilled into the sides of the mountain to extract its precious supply of energy. Worshippers of the goddess Pele, who is said to reside in the mountain's volcano, protested saying the actions violated their religious rights and were destroying their object of worship. One defender of Pele worship stated, "They are punching holes in what we consider her body."¹²

Godly Dominion

God created man in His image and gave him power to rule over the earth. Man is subordinate to God and must rule His creation concurrently with His laws. According to

⁷ Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 18.

⁸ Russell Chandler, *Understanding the New Age* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1988), p. 197.

⁹ Constance Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow* (Shreveport, LA: Huntington House, 1983), 234.

¹⁰ Chandler, p. 112.

¹¹ Cumbey, p. 235.

¹² Chandler, pp. 119-120.

economist Gary North, numerous heresies have emerged as a result of elevating the supervisory role of man over nature above his being the image bearer of God.¹³

In the field of economics perhaps no heresy substantiates this accusation more than Marxism. Karl Marx sought to destroy the family, home education and religion. Concerning religion Marx declared, “Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality.”¹⁴ In Marx’s thinking God does not exist. If God does not exist, then man is not created in His image and man becomes free to rule over the earth in whatever way the “ruling class” devises. For Marx, Communism (total state control) would eventually lead to a classless society and a perfect utopia. One needs only to read the horrors of Lenin and Stalin to see the vanity in this philosophy.

When men deny the sovereign rule of God they begin to set up their own power. In the market place this autonomous rule of man apart from God seeks to enlist the assistance of civil government to establish economic control for a privileged elite. Gary North correctly observes that, “the operations of the market, like the operations of the atom, are ultimately guided by and upheld by God. In fact the strongest philosophical and theological argument in favor of the free market is that it thwarts the attempt of power seeking men to attempt to imitate God by centralizing the economic planning system through civil government.... The free market decentralizes economic power, thereby limiting the quest for personal power.”¹⁵

Encompassed in the “dominion mandate” is man’s freedom to utilize the earth’s resources for good without the interference of a central planning commission. Henry Morris observes that, “here is the primeval (belonging to the first age of existence) commission to man authorizing both science and technology as man’s basic enterprises... for the greater good of all earth’s inhabitants.... This twofold commission to subdue and have dominion, to conquer and rule embraces all productive human activity.” Dr. Morris continues by asserting that, “this primeval commission has never been abrogated-man is still under its obligations.”¹⁶

By this admission, Dr. Morris sees the imperative need for Christians to inculcate the “dominion mandate” for the benefit of mankind. He concludes that, “man would find himself immeasurably more productive and effective in such pursuits if he would only approach them in the reverent and believing attitude of an honest and good servant of his maker.”¹⁷ Only when man is free to labor as God’s steward, using his full capabilities and natural resources unhampered by bureaucratic interference can we truly fulfill the “dominion mandate” and exercise Godly dominion over the earth.

¹³ Gary North, *The Dominion Covenant* (Tyler, TX: ICE, 1987), p28.

¹⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1964), p. 92.

¹⁵ North, p. 10.

¹⁶ Morris, p. 77.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 77.