

Confession time; there are moments when I feel like I am shouting into the void; especially when talking about the reality of economic disparities in the United States. The prophetic voice that speaks to the reality of economic oppression is easily drowned out and dismissed in a nation whose primary god is money, wealth, capital, etc. The United States, since its inception, has always worshiped wealth and the accumulation thereof at the expense of other human beings. “Americans have deified capitalism to the point that it is no longer just an economic system but a way of life, a moral worldview in itself.”<sup>1</sup> Unfettered capitalism, in order for it to work, without fail has to dehumanize other people. That’s not to say I am some kind of socialist (though if you read Jesus carefully you’ll see more socialism than less). However, capitalism without guardrails will inevitably lead us to the place where we currently find ourselves: wealth heavily concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people creating an economically elite that have no concept of the day to day reality of the working class. In chapter 10 Davis quotes Gary Dorrien, the Reinhold Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics at Union Seminary in New York, when he says that our society has “stoked and celebrated greed virtually to the point of self-destruction.”<sup>2</sup> While I in no way condone the murder of the United Healthcare CEO nor do I condone his actions being valorized, I also cannot say that I am really surprised. Davis goes on to say that “we have built an entire economic system on the collective delusion that material acquisition is the path to ultimate fulfillment and that unfettered profit is more important than social solidarity. Our investment in this delusion is so complete, says Dorrien, that we cannot see how our abandonment of mutual accountability and responsibility is the root of our economic problems.”<sup>3</sup> Davis confirms that I am not crazy nor am I the only one shouting into the proverbial void. He points out how “caring for the poor is seldom listed among important ‘moral values’ when the media takes up the subject”<sup>4</sup> even despite, according to Jesus anyways, it should arguably be the most important moral value; far above any of the ones we have previously discussed up to this point. The United States has never been a Christian nation because it has never evaluated its relationship to wealth by biblical standards. “... in the Hebrew Bible [that is to say, the Old Testament] the use of wealth is consistently evaluated in terms of responsible stewardship. What makes for good stewardship is defined by another prominent theme of the Hebrew Bible, economic justice, or more specifically, economic arrangements that promote fairness but that also ensure basic sustenance for the economically disadvantaged in the community.”<sup>5</sup> What Davis is referring to is a concept I’ve preached a lot about recently; shalom. With shalom, fairness is about equity. I’ll use the example again. Elon Musk and I both paying \$100 in taxes is equal. But it is not fair. Nor is it equitable. It is not shalom. It is not good stewardship. It does nothing to alleviate the economic disparities that led to the murder of the United Healthcare CEO. The United States needs to practice better stewardship at a minimum.

As politics has completely sold itself out to unfettered capitalism (the Harris campaign spent \$1.5 billion and the Trump campaign spent \$356 million) religion serves as the last bastion for holding the country to account for its economic atrocities; and we can, hopefully, find some commonality across various religious backgrounds. It is not just theological progressives who are crying out for economic justice but the socially conservative Catholic Church has perpetually been at the forefront of the call for economic justice. Pope Benedict argued that “a hypercapitalist mentality has tempted us to reduce human fulfillment to individual material acquisition, and to ignore the social, ethical,

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<sup>1</sup> Davis, James Calvin. *In Defense of Civility: How Religion Can Unite America on Seven Moral Issues That Divide Us*. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY; 2010. pp 151-152

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p 148

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p 148

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p 143

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p 145

and spiritual dimensions proper to being human”.<sup>6</sup> And Pope Francis has doubled, or even triple downed, on this same sentiment as his predecessor since his ascension to the papacy. The American Church has been grossly neglecting its responsibility to hold the United States to account for its worship and blind allegiance to the false god mammon. But there is every hope that that same body can find unity in such a common message. Social conservatives and progressives alike can join together in declaring that Jesus is Lord, not capitalism.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p 150