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CHRISTIAN ECONOMICS IN ONE LESSON

Part 1: Knowledge and Dominion

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And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26-27).

God said this, not man. Having spoken, He then created man. God's actions followed His word and were in conformity to His word. But unlike His acts of creation on the previous five days, God did not speak man into existence. Man alone was the product of God's direct interaction with the creation: formed of the dust, with a God-breathed soul (Gen. 2:7). Man is therefore special: made in God's image, formed originally by God's specific acts, not just His fiat word.

In what ways is man special? First, man is made in the image of God. He can therefore understand God's words to him. These words are the words of a master over a servant, but also a father over a son. God gives commands to man, and man is expected by God to respond obediently. To be obedient, man must be able to understand and act accordingly. Man has been given an understanding of cause and effect: first with respect to the coherence of ideas (hearing); second, with respect to human action (doing). This derivative creaturely coherence rests on the absolute coherence of God's word and the absolute conformity of the creation to God's coherent word: God's comprehensive decree. God is absolutely sovereign over the creation, including man. This gives order to the creation.

This leads us to point two: man is subordinately sovereign over the creation, under God. Man is under God in a hierarchy of authority: God > man > nature. This means that man is uniquely and directly responsible before God for his administration of nature. Man can understand God's word, and he can act in terms of it. Both his understanding and his authority are re-creative, not originally creative. They are therefore inescapably ethical. Man is required to think God's thought after Him.

Third, man has been given a two-fold assignment by God: to exercise dominion and to multiply. He is bounded by the laws associated with this assignment. Man was also given an ethical command: to refrain from eating from a specific tree (Gen. 2:17). This was a test for man: to see if he would honor God by honoring the restrictions God placed on him. Unlike the creatures under his authority, man can understand the operations of nature as aspects of God's creation and His providential maintenance of nature. This providential adminis-

tration involves ethical boundaries: restrictions on what man is allowed to do with God's creation. Man has been given authority to direct the processes of nature by guarding and dressing it (Gen. 2:15).

Man's exercise of scientific power is possible only because the creation is under God's law independent of man's decree. The vegetable world reproduces in terms of laws given before man arrived on the scene (Gen. 1:11). The world of the heavens - created after the vegetable world (Gen. 1:14-19) - is orderly because it has a purpose: to serve man as a guide for the seasons (v. 14) and to serve nature by providing light (v. 15). The heavens were created for earth's sake and for man's sake. That is, the heavenly bodies are **teleological**: directed by God to meet the needs of as-yet uncreated humanity. Any rival theory of the sequence of the six-day creation undermines the Bible's explicit announcement of the purposeful aspect of nature. It also undermines men's faith in the source of this cosmic purposefulness: a Creator God who brings all things to pass in terms of His sovereign word.

Fourth, man is to respond to God in obedience before he receives further blessings. Adam named the animals (Gen. 2:20) before he was given a wife (Gen. 2:22). This temporal sequence taught him that his reward was performance-driven. Eve was a positive sanction for Adam's successful completion of the preliminary phase of a specific task. He completed his assignment by naming her (Gen. 2:23). There is a process of sanctions and rewards in history: unmerited gift (creation and life), general assignment (exercising worldwide dominion), specific representative assignment (guarding and dressing the garden), preliminary task (naming the animals), completion of task, reward (Eve), secondary task (naming Eve), next assignment (multiplication).

Fifth, there was a promise of heirs and succession: men in the future would leave their fathers' households to marry (Gen. 2:24). This meant that Adam would have heirs, and they would have heirs. The succession of plants (Gen. 1:11) and animals (Gen. 1:21) would be matched by the succession of man.

This five-point sequence indicates that the dominion assignment is a covenant. Every biblical covenant has all five points: God's sovereignty, man's hierarchical authority under God, law, sanctions, and succession. We shall return repeatedly to this biblical theme.

Every God-honoring science must begin with this view of origins. Any theory of origins that deviates in any way from the sequence of creation described in the Bible is an attempt by covenant-breaking man to escape His responsibility under

God. To deny the sequence of Genesis 1 – heaven and earth, light, vegetable life, heavenly orbs, animals, and mankind – is to deny God's explicit revelation of Himself and His creative work, and therefore to deny man's inescapable responsibility as God's designated subordinate. All evolutionary systems deny that the earth's vegetation appeared in history before the heavenly orbs appeared. Every compromise on this point is an attempt to substitute evolutionary process for God's creation by His fiat word. Every such attempt must be rejected as either heretical or apostate.

On the Origin of Purpose

The issues that divide modern evolutionism from the Bible's account of creation are not the main ones. From the 1830's to the 1920's, Protestant intellectuals accepted as truth the long chronology of the earth proposed by James Hutton and Charles Lyell. All of them, including anti-Darwinist Charles Hodge, rejected the six-day creation. The six-day creation has become a divisive issue within evangelicalism. But the six-day creation is not the really crucial theological issue; it is merely the academically representative issue. The real issue is covenantal: the question of purpose in the universe. The debate between Darwinism and biblical creationism is a debate over God's sovereign purpose vs. autonomous man's sovereign purpose.

Darwinism asserts that there was no cosmic purpose before the evolution of man. This is the heart, mind, and soul of Darwinism, not the specifics of biological evolution. The mind of man – an unprecedented biological leap of being not manifested anywhere else on earth – is said by Darwinists to have brought purpose into history for the first time. Except for man's scientific breeding of plants and animals, there is no purpose in biological evolution. Man alone gives conscious direction to evolution.

Darwin argued that a change in one species that benefited another species had to benefit the first species. "What natural selection cannot do," he wrote in *Origin of Species*, "is to modify the structure of one species, without giving it any advantage, for the good of another species. . ." (Modern Library edition, p. 60). He called this the "utilitarian doctrine," namely, that "every detail of structure has been produced for the good of its possessor" (p. 146). There were some naturalists who denied this in his day, arguing that God made creatures "to delight man or the Creator," but this cannot be true of nature if natural selection is true, he said. "Such doctrines, if true, would be absolutely fatal to my theory" (p. 146).

Yet the Bible affirms something far more teleological than mere variations in a species; it affirms that the stars were created to benefit mankind, prior to the creation of mankind. This, far more than the comparatively minor issue of creation in six literal, 24-hour days, is the offense of the biblical account of creation. The motivation of the evolutionist is not to discover the exact date of creation; his motivation is to strip God's purpose and law out of the universe. But why? **To escape the biblical doctrine of the final judgment.** The evolutionist wants above all to deny the doctrine of hell.

At a 1989 meeting at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago, attended by almost 400 members of the National Association of Evangelicals, a majority voted to reject the doctrine of eternal punishment. This should come as no surprise. Having imbibed deeply throughout their careers on various Christian academic compromises with the humanists' doctrine of cosmic evolution, they finally accepted the true bottom line of Darwinism: a denial of God's eternal torturing of all those who in history reject saving faith in His Son. For generations, evangelical scholars had told their creationist critics that the acceptance of Lyell's chronology for the earth

would not compromise Christians' faith in the fundamental doctrines of the Christianity. They were wrong. In our day, the compromise with Charles Lyell has delivered evangelicals into the tender mercies of Charles Darwin's spiritual heirs. It has undermined the crucial motivation of Christian missionary activity: to bring before lost men the ultimate distinction between heaven and hell, covenant-keeping and covenant-breaking.

From Good to Better

The biblical account of the sequence of the creation week has crucial implications for economics. God created the environment before He created man. He created the heavenly orbs for the purposes of man. Man inherited a ready-made creation. In short, **grace precedes law in history.** Even before man appeared, the creation was designed to meet his needs.

This view of law and grace rests on the concept of God's cosmic purpose and His absolutely sovereign eternal decree. Man entered a world that was good, yet it was undeveloped. It was good, yet it could be made better. It is man's God-given task to make it better.

Put a different way, man has been given an unmerited gift: life and the resources that sustain life and make it pleasant. He is required by God to respond in faith to this gift, improving it for the glory of God, and in so doing, make his own life better. He is to be a steward over the earth under God. He improves his own situation by improving his environment. Because he is made in God's image, and because there is a covenantal (judicial) relationship between obedience and additional blessings, when man obeys God as a steward, his own fortunes improve. There is covenantal cause and effect: grace to law to additional grace. This additional grace is God's response to man's obedience. Adam began with resources. He exercised dominion over a small portion of these resources when he named the animals. He was then given his reward, Eve. The process of dominion is covenantal, but it begins with grace, not law. Dominion is not by law alone, but by law through grace.

The earth is filled with resources. There are mineral resources (Gen. 2:12). There are animal and vegetable resources. There are, above all, human resources. Man alone is made in God's image. He alone has been given the authority to improve the earth. Each person shapes his allotted portion of the earth in terms of his own purposes. These purposes are to reflect God's purposes for the creation. Each man is supposed to think God's thoughts after Him, in a creaturely fashion. He is then supposed to act in terms of what he knows is both true and good. Obedience is a judicial act: the invocation of God's blessings in history. In an unfallen universe, for a man to obey God in terms of God's cosmic purpose – His dominion over nature by means of His representative agents – to call down the blessings of God ~~was~~.

To convert idle resources into actual resources, man must add his labor, including intellectual labor, to the natural resources in the environment. Plants and animals multiplied before Adam appeared on the scene, but it was Adam's presence that brought covenantal purpose into the creation. The creation was governed purposefully before man, but it was not governed representatively. God created man to work for God. It was not that God needed man in order to provide growth and direction in the creation. God does not need man. But God shows grace to man by allowing him to participate in the dominion process.

God told man to multiply. This should make it clear to everyone what the fundamental resource is: humanity. Why humanity? It is not because some men understand mathematics or certain forms of mechanical or biological cause and effect that the creation can be brought to fulfillment. Rather, it

is that all men understand that God has given them appropriate **individual tasks** in the **corporate assignment** of the subduing of the earth. In his rebellion, man suppresses this knowledge of his subordinate relationship to God (Rom. 1:18-22), but he never completely loses his awareness of his responsibilities before God (Rom. 2:14-15). Man is impelled by his legal status as God's primary covenantal agent to extend his dominion over the earth, if not in the name of the God of the Bible, then in the name of some other god.

Exhaustive Knowledge

God placed a "No Trespassing" sign around one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent told Eve: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). The details of this lie were accurate; it was its covenant-breaking motivation that was false. Men would indeed know much more about good and evil. They had not been given the definition of evil by God. Instead, they had been told what not to do. They would break God's law by violating the sacred boundaries that God had placed around the tree. They would commit sacrilege: the violation of a sacred boundary. This would be an evil act. They would experience the knowledge of good and evil in retrospect. But they had been given sufficient knowledge in advance. They did not require additional knowledge in order to make God-honoring decisions. In fact, they were required by God to avoid making a specific decision without knowing, experientially or theologically, the reason for the prohibition.

The word of God was sufficient for man, but as a matter of grace, God also supplied an additional reason: the sanction of death. That is, for covenant-keepers, the negative sanction of death was a matter of grace. It provided an added incentive to keep God's word. It reflected the magnitude of God's concern regarding this matter. It enabled them to make better judgments. Nevertheless, they rebelled. They sinned against greater knowledge rather than lesser.

Some knowledge was prohibited. Man was told by God that man did not require access to this knowledge in order to be productive. Put another way, exhaustive knowledge is not a legitimate goal for man, i.e., the knowledge possessed by God. The creature does not require, nor should he seek, exhaustive knowledge. He is allowed to seek progressive knowledge, but not exhaustive knowledge. He is to acknowledge his finitude and rely of God's grace to carry him through the blind spots of life. There will always be blind spots for man, as surely as the shape of the eye creates a blind spot that must be filled in - averaged out - by the mind.

We are told that everything affects everything. This is another way of saying that the universe is interconnected. Then how can cause and effect be perceived accurately by man? How can man's knowledge of it be harnessed for man's purposes? If anything can affect anything, and everything affects everything, then of what importance is **this** for **that**? How can anyone know?

God holds men responsible for their actions, so He provides them with knowledge of His law and the cause-and-effect relationships in life. Men cannot attain exhaustive knowledge, but they can attain knowledge sufficient to please God and gain His blessings. God knows everything; God brings all things to pass in terms of His eternal decree; so, covenant-keeping man does not require exhaustive knowledge in order to be successful in his assigned tasks. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Limits on Knowledge

The creation's resources are finite. God alone is infinite. So in some fundamental sense, the creation cannot be infinite. Yet there is a sense in which it is infinite: temporally. This brings us back to the doctrine of heaven and hell. Heaven, like hell, is temporary. The bodily resurrection at the final judgment ends both. Men's souls are reunited with perfect bodies. A great division then occurs. Men are assigned to one of two final environments: the New Heaven and the New Earth (Rev. 21; 22) or the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15). These environments are eternal, i.e., not bounded by time. There was a beginning of time (Gen. 1:1), but will be no end for any man's existence.

There will be intellectual growth. God is infinite. As such, He cannot be perfectly comprehended by man. There are secret things of God (Deut. 29:29). Man is not smart enough to encompass God. Man is finite, yet man can learn. Man is required to learn. He learns more about God, his environment, and the relationships among God, man, and the environment. As a finite creature in a finite world, he can learn more about God forever. The infinity of God and the chronological infinity of man's existence are different. The creature does not equal the Creator. The being of God is forever distinct from the being of man. The knowledge possessed by God is always greater than the knowledge possessed by man or men. Yet the knowledge possessed by covenant-keeping mankind can and will continue to grow forever. This unbounded growth of knowledge, though approaching creaturely infinity as a limit, cannot bridge the gap between God's knowledge and man's. Despite the absence of a chronological limit on covenant-keeping man's existence, he will never equal God in any respect, including knowledge.

The economist says that in a finite world, there cannot be exponential growth forever. Exponential growth reaches limits. It runs out of resources. Yet in the world beyond the final judgment, there will be exponential growth in knowledge, despite the finitude of man. Man will not multiply forever, but he will gain in knowledge forever. In this sense, knowledge is fundamentally different from physical extension.

If knowledge can and will grow forever, then the well-being of covenant-keeping mankind will grow forever. The dominion process never ends. Man gets richer over time: richer in knowledge, meaning richer in his ability to manipulate and transform the creation. Because man's knowledge can grow forever, economic growth is infinite in duration despite the creation's limits on the quantity of "stuff." The limited supply of "stuff" - matter-energy - is not a limit on man's ability to make use of this "stuff" in creative, wealth-extending ways.

The fundamental scarce economic resource, therefore, is man: his knowledge. (Grace is the fundamental resource, but it is not scarce, i.e., not bounded by created limits. Men cannot buy it.) Man's knowledge can continue to grow even though "stuff" does not expand in quantity. Man cannot speak a new creation into existence. God as Creator alone does this, though of course He can do it again if He so chooses. If man runs out of "stuff," God can always make more. But we are not told that He will do this, nor is it implied that He will. What is implied by the Bible is that covenant-keeping man's knowledge and worship will grow forever, for as long as the Church persists. The growth process begun in history will extend into eternity.

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God (Col. 2:18-19).

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:10).

The fact that there are no chronological limits on the growth of knowledge means that there are limits on knowledge at every point in time. It grows; therefore, it is limited today. We do not possess infinite knowledge. Knowledge develops, just as the creation in Adam's day was supposed to develop under his administration. This means that **knowledge is not a zero-price resource**. We must give up something of value – money, time, and effort – in order to gain better knowledge. As knowledge grows, wisdom should also grow. It must be actively pursued (Prov. 4:4-8).

The Division of Intellectual Labor

The primary economic resource is mankind's knowledge. Unlike God's knowledge, this knowledge is not lodged in one place. It is dispersed. This is why Paul calls on Christians to unite in the Church: "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). The Church assembles the scattered fragments of men's knowledge through a division of intellectual labor. The Bible warns us not to make decisions by ourselves. "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Prov. 11:14).

Here is the practical problem: to bring together the scattered, specialized knowledge possessed by individuals in order to focus on a specific problem. To solve a problem, the person in charge of making the final decision must develop a plan of action. He seeks appropriate knowledge. He must either pay for this knowledge or ask specialists to donate it as a gift. But because knowledge is valuable and time is valuable, the plan-maker usually must buy the knowledge he seeks. But where?

Specialized markets for knowledge appear when wealth-seeking individuals recognize that there are buyers of knowledge who are willing to pay for it. These wealth-seekers create ways to collect and sell this information in formats that buyers are willing to pay for.

In the modern world, the most important single source of information for plan-makers is the price system. Buyers and sellers of all kinds of goods and services make transactions, and the records of these prices on open markets are of great value for making plans. Prices reveal the terms on which past exchanges have been made. Prices enable plan-makers to count the costs, a biblical injunction:

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish (Luke 14:28-30).

The free market enables people to adjust their plans to the shifting conditions of supply and demand. Never forget: knowledge is not a zero-cost resource. To gain accurate infor-

mation relevant to plan-making, the individual must pay for it. What he wants is a system of social institutions that provides such information at low prices. The market is the pre-eminent social institution that provides this to large numbers of people.

Nevertheless, the Church is the model. The difference between the free market and the Church is this: the Church is not a profit-seeking institution. It is an institution entered into by means of an oath sign under God: baptism. This oath sign calls forth God's blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The Church is supposed to be funded by the tithes and voluntary donations of believers. It is not a profit-seeking institution.

Participation in the free market, as with participation in the Church, is voluntary. But this participation is by contract, written or implied, not by covenantal oath. The free market is established when men come together voluntarily to make exchanges. It is open to all, just as the Church is. It involves legal obligations, just as the Church does.

Conclusion

Prior to the fall of man, God instructed men to multiply. Unless he was calling covenant-keepers to die of starvation before the fall – a preposterous suggestion – He was calling them to increase their wealth. The ideal of economic growth is fundamental to the dominion assignment. Population growth and economic growth are supposed to be linked. When we find that they are not linked over long periods of time, we know that God has brought a society under His negative sanctions.

The Bible begins with the account of creation: the beginning of time. It ends with a description of the post-judgment world. In between there is to be spiritual progress. But because the positive sanction of growth is linked to covenant-keeping, economic growth is an ideal for the post-fall world, not just Eden. This was re-stated by God with Noah:

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things (Gen. 9:1-3).

The key to economic growth is widespread covenantal faithfulness to God's covenant law. Man is called to extend dominion in history, and God has provided the means of grace to accomplish this. The basis of this faithfulness is grace: grace precedes law. One means of grace is an increase in knowledge, as long as this knowledge is a product of prior faithfulness and intended to glorify God. This knowledge cannot be exhaustive, but it can increase. Men must not seek exhaustive knowledge, but they must seek growing knowledge. They must acknowledge that they are neither entitled to nor capable of exhaustive knowledge, but they must seek knowledge and moral wisdom. This can and will produce greater wealth, the reward of prior faithfulness and the means of further dominion.

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