

TENTMAKERS

Financial Counsel for Pastors, Deacons, and Seminarians

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THE SQUEEZE ON PASTORS' INCOMES

by Gary North

We live in the century of mass inflation. The reason for this is simple: we live in an age of increasingly unrestrained humanism. The civil government recognizes no God above its sovereignty. The voters see themselves as the source of sovereign power, so the State manipulates the people in the name of the people. The State is the god of the 20th century. Like any god, it sees itself as the source of all law, all reality. Money is one of the most important realities of all in the eyes of State planners.

Nothing must challenge the State's authority over money creation. The State wants men to recognize its total control over the monetary unit. Counterfeiting is a crime against the State. Why? Because theft — the printing of legal tender notes in order to confiscate private wealth — is a legal monopoly of the State. Gold and silver, the money of the Bible, are regarded as anachronisms; gold is a "barbarous relic," to quote the most influential economist of our day, the homosexual pervert, John Maynard Keynes. (Keynes had an uncontrollable lust for Tunisian boys and fiat money, but the majority of his intellectual heirs have limited their preference to the latter form of deviance. For those skeptics who think the story of Keynes' deviant behavior is an undocumented slander, see Michael Holroyd's definitive biography of one of Keynes' playmates, *Lytton Strachey* [New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968] especially Vol. 11, p. 80.)

The State's authorities want to expand their area of influence over every area of economic life, and money is the common denominator in every economic transaction in a modern economy. The planners want to spend more, but they fear the reaction at the polls by the public when direct taxes have to be increased to finance the State's new expenditures. Therefore, we see the modern State turning to the creation of money. With the newly created money, the State can buy what it wants from the private sector, while blaming any price increases on the selected scapegoats: big business, big labor, Arabs, speculators, and so forth. Until quite recently, this strategy has worked quite well.

The huge future deficits of the State's social welfare programs, especially Social Security, guarantee continued money creation. The State does not dare tax directly to cover the multi-trillion dollar expected deficits. So it is easy to predict that price increases will plague all people, but especially the fixed income and relatively fixed income members of the population. Inflation has only just begun. The years of serious inflation lie before us.

This means that pastors will face a continuing squeeze on their real income level, meaning disposable purchasing power

after taxes. Modern Christians do not tithe — the direct product of their lack of concern and the specifically antinomian preaching of pastors who have rejected the requirements of biblical law. Pastors have failed to preach on the moral requirement of the tithe, and their churches have burdened themselves with huge long-term debts to make up the difference. "Give what the Spirit leads you to give," is the slogan; and men's spirits lead them to give very little. Americans want their religion, but they want it cheap.

As a result, most pastors cannot sensibly expect their incomes to exceed the rate of price increases in the 1980's. A minority of successful pastors will do all right, but the average pastor in the average urban congregation can look forward to a decade or more of tightening budgets and falling real income. Younger men who are beginning to start churches may avoid this problem, only because their congregations may grow, leading to increased income. But men who are over age 40 have probably seen their churches reach a stable size, and they will feel the pinch.

What can be done about it? First, the preaching of biblical law. Congregation members must be exhorted to give at least 10% of their after-tax income to Christian ministries, including the church. Pastors must start preaching against consumer debt, living beyond one's means, and being caught up into the race for ever-increasing material goods. They must start preaching the virtues of thrift, family budgeting, and long hours of work. And when they do, they may see their churches temporarily depleted of members.

The second thing that can be done is for pastors to start seeking outside temporary employment. I realize that this is difficult. It puts strains on family life and church work. But if the congregations will not respect the concept that the laborer is worthy of his hire, then the laborer had better start hiring himself out to heathens who do respect the principle.

There are already pastors who do this, by necessity. A group of theologically liberal pastors have started an organization called the National Association for the Self-Supporting Active Ministry, and they publish a newsletter, *NASSAM*. Interested pastors may wish to contact them to receive a sample issue:

NASSAM
8 Newbury St.
Fourth Floor
Boston, MA 02116

One of the officers of *NASSAM*, Rev. James Lowery, has written a book, *Case Histories of Tentmakers*, published by

Morehouse-Barlow, 78 Danbury Rd., Wilton, CT 06897 (\$3.50). It is interesting that they have also latched onto the word "tentmakers."

There are some overly pietistic neo-Puritans – one might even call them semi-mystics — who are repelled by the very idea of a pastor who is supported by "secular" work. I have heard a taped sermon by one of the leaders of this movement who stated specifically that pastors who are supported by income earned outside the church have a terrible tendency to preach sermons that are not appreciated by the congregations. It is no doubt a statement of fact, one which Paul himself pointed out in defense of his independent ministry (II Cor. 11:9; I Thes. 2:9; II Thes. 3:8-9). But the pietistic gentleman who delivered this fiery sermon against independently employed pastors was critical of the practice, which is rather odd, given his own background as a medical doctor. When you can always return to the practice of medicine, even in socialist Great Britain, you obviously have a measure of independence in your pastoral ministry. (On the other hand, if I were a physician in Great Britain, I think I might seek to be ordained, and I can assure you that on occasion I would preach a stirring sermon against the ungodly nature of a socialist State that would cripple the practice of medicine by nationalizing it. But, then again, I'm not a pietist.)

It pays a pastor to develop skills outside his pastoral calling. Perhaps these might be skills in counseling. Yes, I believe such skills can legitimately be sold, in a free market, to those desiring them. In fact, I suspect that if pastors sold such services to those in the congregations who eat up many hours in free "hand-holding" sessions — not poverty-stricken, psychologically disturbed members (who may need expensive professional counsel anyway), but people who want a free ear to gossip into — there might be more hours left in the days of hard-pressed pastors. If members had to pay to conduct their gossip and self-pity, there might be an added incentive for them to straighten out their lives.

Some pastors may have mechanical aptitudes. I know one pastor who repairs cars and watches. This is a very good source of additional income for someone who possesses the skills. Or maybe a man can teach. Why not set up an independent, profit-seeking school? What about other small businesses? Gardening? Mail-order? Lawn mowing? (Have you tried to hire a non-Japanese, part-time lawn mower recently?) Car waxing? Chimney sweeping? There are many ways to earn a buck besides preaching guarded sermons to tight-fisted congregations.

Does all this sound crass, materialistic? Tell me, does 10% price inflation sound crass and materialistic? How about 15%? If it hits 20%, how crass will lawn mowing sound to you then? At some point, at some rate of inflation, at some level of government-imposed shortages, lawn mowing will not sound materialistic to even the most pietistic pastor. Or at least not to his wife and children. (Show me a pastor who has supported his ministry for 20 years by having his wife teach in the secular, government, atheist "public" schools, and I'll show you a man who should have mowed lawns and kept his wife at home. Better yet, who should have established a private Christian school for both him and his wife to teach in.)

Pietism has a price tag. Inflation will reveal that some men have a higher price than others, but the breakdown of the monetary unit will eventually force pastors to seek part-time alternative employment, unless their congregations return to the principle of proportional giving, and ultimately giving in kind — chickens, not dollars; fresh fruit, not paychecks. Better hand-me-down clothes than hand-me-down money, when inflation is over 10%. (This will create a real problem for Protestant missionaries, since American Protestants have traditionally saved their old clothes for missionaries.)

If I were a pastor, I would be devoting time and capital to developing my skills in some calling other than preaching. I would be seeking to serve my fellow men in ways other than passing out tracts. I would be trying to find a way to convert my hobbies into income. I would be reluctant to become wholly dependent upon the generosity of my antinomian congregation.

Even more to the point, if I ever intended to retire, I would start looking for a secondary profession. The "old folks' home" is a godly place for old, infirm people or old, incompetent people, but not for old people as such. Retirement is a pagan concept anyway. "Six days shalt thou labor" was not qualified with "until you reach age 65." It is ironic, yet fitting, that pagan policies of subsidized retirement (Social Security) literally created the symbolic figure of "age 65" as the appropriate age to begin defying God's law of labor (Ex. 20:9), which in turn made it necessary for the State to expand the creation of fiat money, which is now leading to the enforced poverty and the enforced return of retired people to the labor markets. God will not be mocked.

The mercies of even the most godly Christians are today mediated by an increasingly unmerciful monetary unit. You had better learn to show mercy, receive mercy, and most of all, escape any need for mercy that is denominated in paper money.

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