

What I've been looking for! A paperback useful in groups, on economics and the gospel, of contemporary feel and sensitivity and with scholarly competence both hermeneutic and economic. (Based on a 1972 lecture to lawyers at Tutzing, the Bavarian evangelical academy I've fond memories of.)

1. From early Christianity we can't straight-line into (viii) "a ready-made programme" for our "own belief and action," but we can and should get "basic impulses." The author has the courage to do what he suggests: 84-88 is "Ten Concluding Theses."
2. Early-Xn dealing with the property question was not straight-line from OT, but rather more based on pagan natural-law considerations conjoint with the biblical doctrine of creation. We need to develop on the same base to take in two new factors in our situation: (1) Massive capital accumulation, both private ("capitalism") and public ("communism"); (2) Public-and-private-institutional take-over of the formerly only personal/private/voluntary-institutional "care and protection" of the weak and marginal in society (i.e., those who, without judgment of liability, are relatively defenseless in face of economic-political forces).
3. The "'love communism'" of early Xny was (85) "a theonomous community ethic" of (Gal.5.6) "'faith working through love.'" There, the property question was handled within the sphere of personal and small-group ethics.
4. The gospel calls us to live in some life-style experiencing the tension of this/that-worldliness. This rules out collaborationism (=uncritical INVOLVEMENT) and calls into question a life-style withdrawing from the tension (a DETACHMENT which throws up its hands and cops out into romantic simplism); but it does not rule out some forms of ascetic witness paralleling and continuous with early Xn asceticism, "the rejection of riches," visible as early as mid-2nd century (Didache 11.5ff; and a bit later, in extenso laid out in the Acts of Thomas), in imitation Xi (51). The radical rejection of property on the part of some early Christians became the foil for the social preaching of Basil, Chrysostom, and Ambrose. (Here I remember "Golden-Mouth"'s sermon "Can the Rich Man Be Saved?")
5. While Hengel alludes to the Stoic ideal of "autarkeia" ("self-sufficiency"), he does not develop it, as I think should be, into what in America (but not in his W. Germany) is called "the human potential movement." I see the current middle-and-upper-class listen-to-your-own-skinbag individualism as an uncritical extension of capitalism's hypertrophied "ownership" ("private property" as self-insulating use of wealth, i.e. the use of wealth for such a thick blanket of protection against vicissitudes as impedes sensitivity to the cries of the poor: exactly where Amos comes in). Here is the dilemma: I want to use property to deliver my loved ones from my economic dependency on them, and so also to deliver society from the economic burden of Willis' existence-in-the-flesh; BUT my efforts in this altruistic direction have the subtle effects of (1) reducing the threatening untowardnesses most human beings are up against, and so (2) thickening my skin against the cries of the poor (which then tend to sound only like whines). Of course this is how it stands with W.Germany and USA vis-a-vis the Third World, and Hengel is competent here. Currently, Roger Shinn is teaching a course precisely on this in my own church (Sept/78, Chappaqua UCC), with extensive congregational involvement: "the rich" Christians do seem to be becoming a bit more sensitive and sophisticated on the spiritual issue of property.
6. In reading Hengel, I wondered why it felt as though I'd read and studied all this before. I had! Shirley Jackson Case and Shailer Mathews, beginning early in the present century, sociologized Xny in much the same fashion as Hengel here does. It

came to be called "The Chicago School of the Social Gospel." Behind it was the even earlier social sensitivity of another Baptist (in NYC, then Rochester NY), Walter Rauschenbush (whom my maternal grandmother remembered, for she too was German Baptist, an ethnic denomination which became participant in what is now the American Baptist Churches, formerly the American Baptist Convention). Note the denomination: the Baptists, while evolving elites, were and are close to the am-ha-aretz, the people of earth and street. Their 1866 seminary grew, in 1890, into the University of Chicago with its Divinity School literally in the center. With earth-and-street savvy, some of these became robber barons, and used their wealth somewhat compassionately (e.g., Rockefeller giving \$78 million to a Baptist preacher, Wm. Rainey Harper, to expand the Chicago Baptist Seminary into the U. of Chicago; and \$35^{million} to another Baptist preacher, a schoolmate of my Baptist father--Harry Emerson Fosdick--to build Riverside Church)....And now that I'm on rich Baptists, I'd like to make a class remark about the Southern gentry at Southern Baptist Seminary (Louisville) before WWII when I arrived to study there. The place was crawling with upperclass Confederate gentility, the fair-haired and favored sons of "the Great Southland," young men whose spiritual formation motivated them to assume they'd be high achievers....and my classmates did use their self-confidence and networks so: to start Koinonia Farms, Church of the Savior, etc.; and to do the Good News Bible, etc....Which leads me to remark that the one disappointment I have with Hengel's book is that it's not as class-sensitive as our current national-and-world situation calls for. In particular, I'm concerned to be objective about the good/evil effects of class as much as the good/evil effects of wealth. (When class goes threadbare among those who formerly had both upperclass status and wealth, as in many Britons today, we have specimens that would reward study toward understanding class and wealth as not entirely interdependent realities.)

7. Hengel is prophylactic against the ideologization of Xny: Deuteronomic "God loves the rich" or "liberation theology"'s "God loves the poor." Biblically, Messiah just comes: Messiah does not come to rich or poor, but to humanity. We work with those who respond to us; and if our message threatens power and wealth, those will hear us who have an interest in threatening power and wealth and those of power and wealth will not hear us but will listen to us with a view to protecting their interests against us...the most dramatic instance of this being the crucifixion of our Lord, whom "the common people followed gladly" till they too, as formerly the powerful and rich, discovered that what they assumed to be their best interests were threatened by Jesus. Any vested interest tends to be seductive of attention and to the misuse of power; therefore, (85) "the misuse of power must be prevented by public controls and ...those who use it must be obliged to use it also for the well-being of" others; and "a man's status and value in no way depends on his capacity to accumulate... wealth. Readiness to refuse to become a consumer and to renounce luxury in a world in which extravagance and poverty often stand side by side can also very well be motivated by the Xn tradition" (whereupon Hengel goes after the current dominant consumerism in his own W.Germany, and makes some pertinent remarks about the Third World). ...86: "Egoistic private interests" are not just individual but also group, associational, party, trade-union, and national. "The crisis of property also proves to be the crisis of man, his selfish desire to assert himself, his struggle for power and his mercilessness...what the fathers called original sin"--which forewarns Xny against utopianisms (e.g., Marxism) and "equality" (the latter as ideology leading only to a violence that leaves the poor worse off, unless it's limited to equality of opportunity to develop one's humanity and gifts, and equality as "the satisfaction of basic human needs" (87)).

8. I remember how Reinhold Niebuhr sounded out his phrase "the approximation of justice," a phrase which both task-gives and warns against utopianism. Hengel (87) suggests that we define "progress" as compromises in the interest of the reduction of evils, for the Kingdom of God (he says elsewhere) is God's gift rather than our achievement or even goal. Like "the first Xn communities," we should seek to "resolve the tension between poor and rich...a healthy detachment from external goods."