

*ECONOMICS AND THE GOSPEL: a review of
Jn. V. Taylor's ENOUGH IS ENOUGH: A BIBLICAL CALL FOR MODERATION
IN A CONSUMER-ORIENTED SOCIETY (paper, Augsburg/77)...Elliott #1210*

1. Though a book by an Anglican bishop on the British profit-system and its dismal human effects, almost everything in it can be said of the American situation; and two Americans have written an excellent study guide at book-end: "Supplement: Study Helps for American Readers"--making it a first-rate (as well as inexpensive) text for church discussion-groups.
2. The biblical savvy is, as seldom is true of books on this subject, also first-rate. The particular texts selected are the loci classici, and the Hebrew and Greek is handled in depth and responsibly.
3. Taylor is an old hand with economic problems, and he deftly deals with the Club of Rome's "Limits of Growth" (and criticisms thereof) and E.F.Schumacher's "intermediate technology"--giving a down-to-earth exposition of the latter, and making it even somewhat palatable to the affluent Christian.
4. While the author does not connect directly with Max Weber's thesis that ascetic forms of Protestantism were a significant factor in the development of the spirit of capitalism, he is keenly aware of the difference between asceticism for capitalization (accrued and funded profit) and asceticism for others' needs--and says that the primary shift in the developed world must be from the former to the latter. The fact that he does not deal with state capitalism ("communism") cannot be considered a weakness: he's talking to *us*, not *them*.
5. In my #1209 last week (the verbatim on my conversation with a black woman radical), I was coming at the same stewardship-and-ecology theme as Taylor's book. Tom says he plans to use it; Roger Shinn says it's a brand new approach to the Christian Have's discomfort vis-a-vis Have-Nots. It's one of the few things I've distributed to AF this autumn; no feedback except from Tom. It's realistic, and written out of fear that at the trustees' retreat we'll deal with pieces of the puzzle (such as NYTS investments) at the moralistic (no-no, naughty-naughty, boo-hiss / self-righteousness compounded on both sides) standoff level. (Personally, I fear to get into that discussion, for I am so radical vis-a-vis most of those most of whose convictions I share. But I could participate constructively if the arena for discussion were something like this verbatim.)
6. The OT competence of Taylor--e.g., his control use of "shalom"--is to be contrasted with most of the students who come to us, at any academic level. P.42 is a masterpiece of exposition of a biblical image-concept-ambience: "shalom" as related to wholeness and harmony in God-awareness, anti-greed and pro-moderation. It confirms me in my conviction that my course in "The Roots of the Roots" (which is also the substance of the Harper & Row book I've^{try} working on) is on the right track: remedial and corrective Bible study (i.e., not only does ignorance need to be overcome, but mislearning needs unlearning!).
7. P.21 is the book's essence: "Excess is the subject of this book and the enemy which I shall try to invite you to fight...."....I've ordered the book for the Library.

rich countries, taking the USA as a leading example. That country alone, containing only 5.6% of the world's population, has been consuming 42% of the world's output of aluminium, 33% of its copper, 44% of the world's coal, 33% of its petroleum and 63% of its natural gas. And all of these are non-renewable resources. Schumacher's comment is deadly.

It is obvious that the world cannot afford the USA. Nor can it afford Western Europe or Japan. In fact we might come to the conclusion that the earth cannot afford the 'Modern World'. It requires too much and accomplishes too little. It is too uneconomic. Think of it: one American drawing on resources that would sustain 50 Indians! The earth cannot afford, say, 15% of its inhabitants - the rich who are using all the marvellous achievements of science and technology - to indulge in a crude, materialistic way of life which ravages the earth. The poor don't do much damage; the modest people don't do much damage. Virtually all the damage is done by, say, 1.5%. It is obvious, therefore, that the Club of Rome exercise, which lumps all people together into a 'world population' and also lumps all production and all consumption together, as if everything were much of a muchness, far from clarifying the tense situation, obscures it. *The problems passengers on Space-ship Earth are the first-class passengers; and no one else.*¹

The heated argument of the doom debate will go on, no doubt, for a long time. I am not qualified to join issue over this or that prognosis of the world's sickness; I am more interested in diagnosis of its present state of health. I have a deep fear that those who might have the skill to give us accurate predictions will not be allowed to do so until it is too late. But a disciple of Christ should be the last person to put aside his share of responsibility for the future with the shrug of despair. As John Poulton has put it:

Man's future is upon him. Christians will be heard speaking of God most plainly when they are seen to cope with Future Shock as if there is One in control, the Lord of all change, the Lord always coming towards them from that Future.¹²

That faith does not equip us with the skill to measure and predict. We can only clamour through the corridors of power that the experts be aided to do that adequately for the survival of

our race. But in the meantime what everyone of us can do is to forgo the lethal folly of our ways and then to throw our whole weight into a sustained campaign against the attitudes of our affluent society and all those who deliberately seek to engender them in us. For, whatever the ins and outs of the doom debate, the message that comes through is clear and simple enough for action. It is intolerable to maintain the ever-rising standards of the few upon the poverty of the many. Any attempt to raise all to parity with the rich will destroy our world. The rich - ourselves - must learn to be content with less. That means that as import prices go up, wages, salaries, dividends, rents and tariffs do not, and we find humane ways of spreading the loss and finding new avenues of employment.

Such a change will certainly not be disastrous for our health nor for our peace of mind. If you doubt that, find out which are the countries with the highest incidence of cancer, thrombosis, back injury, neurosis and suicide. I am not against the good things of life, and I covet for all mankind a level of comfort and security that will make possible the fullest realization of our powers and our mutual enrichment. But those ideals are at the very opposite end of the moral spectrum from the excess which marks our Western way of life, however similar the two may seem to be on the surface. Excess means disproportion; and disproportion can never be a recipe for survival. Excess is the subject of this book and the enemy which I shall try to invite you to fight year in and year out. It confronts us in our rich countries whichever aspect of our situation we look at - our consumption of food and our accumulation of goods, our wage claims and price rises, our waste and pollution, the concentration and congestion of our cities, our destruction of living creatures and our plunder of fuels and minerals, our expenditure on armaments and the wanton disproportion of the way we use them - *excess* is the word that comes continually to mind: ruthless, unbridled, unthinking excess. We are being made to expect too much. We are taking too much. We are scrapping too much. We are paying, and compelling others to pay, far too high a price.