

# Summary of Remarks

## Columbia River Pastoral Letter

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While one doesn't necessarily think of the Bible as an economics textbook, in fact a great deal of what it has to say concerns money, means of production, and just use of resources. In preparing my discussion, I have used a concept first brought to my attention by the Rt. Rev. Mark McDonald, Bishop of Alaska, viz. God's economy vs. Pharaoh's economy. Pharaoh's economy, best known from the story of the Exodus in the Old Testament, is an economy where everyone is working, but all the wealth funnels up towards the top, while the weight is borne at the bottom. In structure, we might think of it as a pyramid. And **there is no rest**. In God's economy, everyone has enough and benefits from creation, although the living may be simple and one may tire of manna! **Rest is a requirement**, a commandment from God, with the 7<sup>th</sup> day, the 7<sup>th</sup> year, and the 50<sup>th</sup> year set aside for rest for everyone, including animals and the fields. While these are simplifications, they contain the essential points needed for the rest of this discussion.

The requirement for freedom from Pharaoh was land, and ownership of land. The story of the Old Testament moves from the garden in Genesis, where the man and the woman tended it on behalf of God, to Nomadism, with its occasional periods of famine, to life as dwellers in the land of Egypt, but not possessors of land, back to the 40 years of nomadism in the Exodus and finally to ownership of land. The stories connect God with land, with creation, and indicate that it is the job of mankind to follow God's will for creation. Land is the metaphor for creation, and for abundance, DF famous passage from Deuteronomy 26, the "land flowing with milk and honey." [I make no value judgments here about the validity of the stories, either their historical authenticity or their basis for land claims: I am looking at what the stories tell us about God and creation].

The talks given so far at this conference have focused on the Bible as a source of ethical principles. The understanding of the principles of religion as a means of codifying belief and a guide to moral behavior vis a vis the natural world is a valid one, in my view. But I think there is another way of approaching scripture, and that is

to look at it as story. What do the stories of the Bible tell us about people's behavior towards creation, and God's view of creation? If one turns to the New Testament and examines the parables of Jesus, one finds that he talks a great deal about money, work and creation. Some phrases that spring to mind are found in our common lexicon today: "Consider the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin, but I say to you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these;" "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be;" "How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven;" "The love of money is the root of all evil;" "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and render unto God the things that are God's." This last saying takes us back to Pharaoh's economy vs. God's economy.

The New Testament counterpart of Pharaoh's economy is Caesar's economy, where production funnels to the Roman Empire in the form of both goods and taxes. The land is occupied by the Romans. But the four Gospels do not focus on land, but on water. As many as seven of Jesus' disciples were connected with the fishing industry, and much of his ministry took place in small ports of the sea of Galilee, with side trips to marine ports such as Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean. I think of the New Testament as "midrash" on the old, with the economy of the land being replaced with the economy of the water.

There are oblique references in the "Gospels to a shortage of fish on the Sea of Galilee. We hear of the disciples fishing all night and catching nothing; of 5000 people gathered together to hear Jesus, but only 1 person, a child, has anything to eat. Certainly the Herodian building programs, which dramatically increased the urban population around the Sea of Galilee, would have increased the pollution from human waste and affected fish populations. But when Jesus appears in the fishing stories, there is abundance. Examples include the great haul of fish in Chapter 5 of Luke, the coin in the mouth of the fish (Matthew 17); the stories of feeding of large crowds of people, found throughout the Gospels; the post resurrection appearance in the last chapter of John's Gospel. The other connection is the feeding of people

with discipleship: the suggestion that the disciples feed the multitude in Matthew 14:6; the last supper; and the last commandment at the post resurrection appearance in John 21, "Feed my sheep."

I view the Columbia River Pastoral Letter as a guide to God's economy on the Columbia River. What is it that the marine stories of the Bible tell us about what God views as a healthy economy on the water? It is clear that the fishermen's encounters and stories of the divine on the water are expressed in terms of abundance. Where Jesus is, is abundance. The fishermen's encounter with the divine is God's economy on water.

On the Columbia River, fishermen, both native and non-native, still retain a memory of what abundance looked like here, as both have rich oral traditions. In addition, many of them go to Alaska each summer, to fisheries where salmon are still abundant. I have told this story several times, about my first trip through the Wrangell Narrows, when the coho were so plentiful that you could not look anywhere without seeing the white splashes where they were jumping. And it was once like that on the Columbia. The memory of the fishermen still retains that concept of abundance and what it actually looks like, that perhaps many in our wider society are unfamiliar with. The fishermen's contribution to the Pastoral Letter, and to the Columbia River salmonid crisis, is the memory of what was here. They do not want to see tiny little remnant runs, "cameos" of the past, or remnant gene pools. They are interested in abundant natural runs of salmon, which rely on high quality water and a clean environment in order to survive. Such abundance can only come about with a conversion of our society from its wasteful living style to a simpler way of life that permits all creatures to have a share of the benefits of creation.

Note: These remarks follow several other public presentations made by the author at various meetings regarding the Columbia River Pastoral Letter. For copies of previous presentations, or a fuller explanation of some of the concepts in this document, please contact the author at P.O Box 83, Skamokawa, WA 98647, 360-795-3920; imartin@tdn.com