



Capitalism of the Heart

Michael Skinner
www.gratiareflections.com
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“I’m sending a giant statue of the digit ‘2’ to Jeffrey B., along with a silver medal.”

ELON MUSK (after becoming the world’s richest person with a net worth of \$200 billion)

“When one loves, one does not calculate.”

SAINT THERESE OF LISIEUX

America has been referred to as a “shining city upon a hill”, famously by two of her most popular presidents, John F. Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan.¹ Both Kennedy and Reagan borrowed this imagery from John Winthrop’s 1630 sermon titled “A Model of Christian Charity” and each incorporated these suggestive words into memorable speeches delivered during their presidencies. While Winthrop’s treatise emphasized the primacy of God’s grace and the teaching of Jesus Christ as the bedrock for the new nation - “*He is our life and our prosperity*”² - America’s secular culture has progressively eroded its spiritual foundation, choosing instead to fix itself upon material ideals of wealth and power - “*Prosperity is our life and our God*” now seemingly the nation’s preferred mantra. Despite this sad reality, the knowledge and experience gained from building treasure on earth can be applied to the good - and far more consequential - work of saving souls for eternity; that is, principles of American capitalism can be employed as an effective model for the growth of Christian enterprise. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ proclaims his shining city³ and commands the building of treasure in heaven.⁴ As Catholic faithful we must build eternal equity in Christ’s church through the investment of love in one another and the deployment of spiritual capital to its greatest and most efficient use.

The Book of Proverbs warns, “Hell and destruction are never full; So the eyes of man are never satisfied”.⁵ According to Saint Thomas Aquinas, the consequence of original sin is separation from God and a disposition to fix our gaze on the trappings of the ego, the Latin word for “I”. This manifests in a disordered and insatiable appetite for worldly treasures: wealth, power, honor, and pleasure.⁶ Nowhere is this hyper-charged insatiability more apparent than in

¹ David Frum, *Is America Still the ‘Shining City on a Hill’?*, The Atlantic, January 1, 2021

² Governor John Winthrop, *A Model of Christian Charity*, 1630

³ Matthew 5:14

⁴ Matthew 6:19-20

⁵ Proverbs 27:20

⁶ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Secundae Partis, Question 2

the United States of America, where a veritable “culture of consumption” permeates every corner of society and inflicts every demographic group, from sea to shining sea. While the victory achieved over Fascism in World War II liberated Europe and marked the culmination of modernity⁷, the post-war period also paved the way for an accelerated and especially pernicious form of economic liberalism which “subordinates society to the selfish use of the individual.”⁸ A few of the more striking - daresay outrageous - illustrations are provided here to demonstrate the manifestation of post-modern liberalism as the spectacle of 21st century American consumerism:

- There are more than 60 different types of *Ken’s Salad Dressing* available “to inspire any number of tastes”⁹, not to mention dozens of other salad dressing brands each with their own dizzying selection of flavors to choose from;¹⁰
- On average, Americans spend over 1300 hours annually - nearly four hours per day - on social media, devoting nearly an hour per day on Facebook alone.¹¹ Furthermore, a recent study on smartphone usage estimates that the average person will spend nearly nine years of their life staring at their phone;¹²
- Netflix, the ubiquitous and #1 ranked on-demand video streaming service¹³, and purveyor of “binge-worthy” programming, has nearly 75 million subscribers in the U.S. and Canada alone - roughly 20% of the population - and generated profit of \$4.5 billion in 2020¹⁴. Other major brands in this category covering, ostensibly, the entire populace include Disney+, Hulu, HBO Max, Amazon Prime, and Apple TV;

⁷ Dr. Andrew Jones, Franciscan University of Steubenville, *Interwar Years and World War II*, Catholic Studies 751

⁸ Pope Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris*, 29 (1937)

⁹ www.kensfoods.com

¹⁰ Werner Brandes, *The Best Salad Dressing Brands*, ranker.com, December 17, 2019

¹¹ Peter Suci, *Americans Spent On Average More than 1300 Hours on Social Media Last Year*, Forbes, June 24, 2021

¹² Chris Holmes, *5 Ways to Limit Screen Time at Bedtime*, WhistleOut, November 5, 2020

¹³ Sarah Shelton, *Best Streaming Services of 2021*, U.S. News and World Report, September 29, 2021

¹⁴ Netflix Revenue and Usage Statistics, *Statista*, 2021

- The self-storage market - the market for rental units to store excess personal possessions - is estimated to grow at a compound annual rate of 135% over the forecast period of 2020-2025, and Bill Gates recently became part owner in one of the world's largest self-storage companies;¹⁵
- Total credit card debt in the U.S. now stands at a whopping \$807 billion,¹⁶ a figure considerably more than the GDP of most developed nations.¹⁷ To put this figure in further perspective, if you saved \$1 million dollars a day, every single day, from the birth of Jesus Christ through the end of 2021, you still wouldn't have saved enough money to cover the credit card bill for America's spending obsession.¹⁸

These alarming but true illustrations are endless.

The wealth, power, and influence possessed by the United States is unparalleled across the globe, and the material privilege and economic fortune experienced by her citizens is, by any objective measure, unmatched in the history of the world. However, despite the limitless supply of products and services to meet every conceivable need and desire of consumers, the U.S. consistently ranks among the most depressed and anxious countries in the world.¹⁹ Even the most popular form of therapy for America's mental-health crisis - that of the self-help variety - is gripped by the affliction of rampant consumerism; an Amazon.com book search on the subject of "anxiety and depression" produced over 50,000 results, including such vulgar and provocative titles as "You Are a Badass", "Unf#ck Your Brain", and "Get Your Sh*t Together".²⁰

¹⁵ Scott Meyers, *A Look at Self-Storage Growth Trends Now and Post-Pandemic*, Forbes, December 1, 2020

¹⁶ Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances, 2020

¹⁷ International Monetary Fund, *Report for Selected Countries and Subjects*, June 2021

¹⁸ \$1 million x 365 days per year x 2021 years = \$737.7 billion (figures not adjusted for compound growth)

¹⁹ Deirdre McPhillips, *U.S. Among Most Depressed Countries in the World*, U.S. News and World Report, September 14, 2016

²⁰ Amazon.com

A thundering tempest of consumerism and insatiability “tosses Americans through life like a rudderless ship on a violent sea, and the winds of a polluted and cacophonous culture make our disorientation even worse.”²¹ More money, more wealth, more power; more food, more drugs, more sex; bigger houses, new clothes, nicer cars; better vacations, better schools, better clubs; larger salaries, bigger bonuses, fatter investment accounts; higher honors, greater recognition, more respect; bigger, faster, stronger; up, up, up; more, more, more; and on, and on, and on - with no end in sight. “And the more we turn toward earthly things to seek refuge from the howling storms and the pounding waves, the farther off course we drift from God’s truth and love.”²²

The tyranny of ‘More’ enslaves America, and Hell has plenty of capacity to spare.

Wretched and miserable are we; who will rescue us and set us free?²³

“God, and God alone, provides the safe harbor we seek.”²⁴ In the words of Saint Augustine, “*Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.*”²⁵ Throughout the Gospel Christ thirsts to instruct and comfort mankind: “My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, be not afraid.”²⁶ In the most famous “self-help” seminar ever delivered - *The Sermon on the Mount* - Christ “declares war against the world”²⁷ and provides the greatest set of instructions ever conceived to realize earthly peace and happiness. Included in Christ’s sermon are, among other priceless words of wisdom, *The Beatitudes*, *The Lord’s Prayer*, and the *Teaching about Almsgiving*.²⁸

²¹ Michael Skinner, “*Peaceful Heart Rosary*”, GratiaReflections

²² Michael Skinner, “*Peaceful Heart Rosary*”, GratiaReflections

²³ Romans 7:24

²⁴ Michael Skinner, “*Peaceful Heart Rosary*”, GratiaReflections

²⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1

²⁶ John 14:27

²⁷ Brother Andre Marie, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Catholicism.org, November 27, 2012

²⁸ Matthew 5, 6, 7

“When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were astonished at his teaching.”²⁹ More than two thousand years later what must we learn, once again, from the “Wonderful Counselor”?³⁰

Christ commands the building of treasure in heaven - “For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”³¹ - not as a confiscatory judgement, but rather as the antidote to earthly anxiety and depression, and the pathway to peace, simplicity, detachment, and ultimately - love. As Saint Paul instructs, “Indeed, religion with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it”.³² But it is the eternal wisdom of Christ that provides the most direct warning against material indulgence: “For what good will it do a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul?”³³

Gratefully, “we know that all things work for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.”³⁴ As such, the key principles of American capitalism, including laws of supply and demand, active investment management strategies, and the miracle of compound interest, can be employed to build eternal equity in Christ’s Church and to grow Christian enterprise in the United States and beyond. And save our souls in the process.

With annual GDP of \$21 trillion³⁵ the United States is consistently ranked as the world’s largest, and most powerful economy. And in America there is no more fundamental economic tenet than the “law of supply and demand”. This economic law says that at higher prices sellers will supply more of a product or service, while buyers will demand less. The “market” price of a product or service is established at the point where quantity supplied meets quantity demanded.

While the supply/demand principle is fairly straightforward with common, discretionary

²⁹ Matthew 7:28

³⁰ Isaiah 9:6

³¹ Matthew 6:21

³² 1 Timothy 6:6-7

³³ Matthew 16:26

³⁴ Romans 8:28

³⁵ Yen Nee Lee, *Here are the 10 biggest economies in the world*, CNBC, April 20, 2021

products - for instance, salad dressing - it becomes more complicated when applying the law to necessities. Known as “price inelasticity”, this theory maintains that buying behavior will remain relatively unchanged regardless of the price of a product or service; for example, a diabetic, theoretically, will pay any price for insulin because his life depends upon it. The point is this: consumers will be willing to pay nearly any price for goods which are priceless, and producers will likewise be anxious to supply as much of those goods as possible.

In God’s economy our lives depend on love; love is the lifeblood of humanity. God, of course, is love³⁶ and “love for God and neighbor is the first and greatest commandment.”³⁷ The people of the earthly city may debate this point in word and deed, but the truth remains that “love never fails, and the greatest of these is love.”³⁸ Love, according to Thomas Aquinas means “to will the good of the other.”³⁹ And though “laying down one’s life”⁴⁰ - that is, sacrificing my needs for yours - requires a high degree of personal suffering, in God’s marketplace it is the precious blood of Christ - the divine currency of love - which covers the cost of suffering for all of mankind. “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁴¹ It is Jesus Christ, the free gift of God, who can never be outdone in generosity. Through Christ, the earthly laws of supply and demand have been turned on their head; miraculously, the love of Christ is simultaneously the most precious, and most plentiful commodity available to mankind, and the more love we give away to others, the more we receive in return. “Give, and it will be given to you. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”⁴² The need for love in the world is incalculable, and through Jesus Christ the

³⁶ 1 John 4:7-21

³⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, 24 (1965)

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:8, 13

³⁹ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Secundæ Partis, Question 26

⁴⁰ John 15:13

⁴¹ Romans 6:23

⁴² Luke 6:38

supply of love is endless. When we open our hearts to Christ, he fills up our mortal souls like a bucket of water poured upon a thimble; and because God never lets anything go to waste⁴³, our hearts - now overflowing with the love of Christ - must direct that love outward to those in the world who need it most. And in extending Christ's love to others, it is returned to us several-fold, for it is only through giving that we fully realize the life and love of Christ. Consider the enduring, beautiful words of Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe, the Catholic priest and Franciscan friar who selflessly laid down his life for a fellow prisoner in the Nazi prison camp at Auschwitz: "A single act of love makes the soul return to life."⁴⁴

According to Adam Smith, the Scottish moral philosopher and father of "free-market" economic theory, an "invisible hand"⁴⁵ guides supply and demand. Smith's theory contends that the best market outcomes occur when people look after their own best interests. Through a free-market (i.e. low government regulation) economy, and the ensuing competition for scarce resources, sellers, driven by a profit motive, have a strong economic incentive to deliver the best possible product at the lowest possible price. In Smith's free-market view, it is this unseen force, i.e. "the invisible hand", that directs the flow of capital to its most efficient use, and in doing so lifts the fortunes of individual participants in the economy, as well as the nations in which they reside.

The practicability of Smith's theories are nowhere more apparent than in the U.S. stock market, and in particular the American mutual fund industry. "A mutual fund is an investment company that pools money from shareholders and invests in a portfolio of securities. In 2020 an estimated 102.5 million Americans and 58.7 million households owned mutual funds,

⁴³ John 6:12

⁴⁴ Oblates of the Virgin Mary, *Honoring St. Maximilian Kolbe on His Feast Day*, August 14, 2021

⁴⁵ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776

representing nearly \$24 trillion in assets.”⁴⁶ Mutual funds are the primary savings vehicle for average Americans who invest for a variety of long-term goals including the funding of college savings programs and workplace retirement plans. Mutual fund managers oversee baskets of individual securities - stocks and bonds - and actively select (or deselect) individual companies for their portfolios. The end result is the movement of trillions of dollars in investment capital into, and out of businesses, large and small alike, across the globe. Companies that perform well - that is companies producing a high return on investment (ROI) - attract more investment capital, while poor performing companies attract less. In the aggregate, capital flows throughout the world steered by Smith’s “invisible hand” to its best and most efficient use.

With all due respect to America’s best mutual fund managers⁴⁷, God Almighty is the greatest investor of all time, and he too expects his invested capital to earn the highest ROI possible. “For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.”⁴⁸ God’s marketplace is the economy of salvation, and in his plan for the management of the world there likewise exists an invisible hand; “The economy of [God’s] law and grace...instructs [men] in the desires of the Holy Spirit who satisfies man’s heart.”⁴⁹ It is Jesus Christ who “pours out the Spirit among his members to nourish, heal, and organize them in their mutual functions...Through the Church’s sacraments, Christ communicates his Holy and sanctifying Spirit to the members of his Body.”⁵⁰ It is the Holy Spirit - the invisible hand of God - working through mankind to “build, animate, and sanctify the Church.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ Investment Company Institute, *2021 Investment Company Fact Book*

⁴⁷ Sarah Bush, *Meet the Winners of the 2021 Investing Excellence Awards*, Morningstar, June 21, 2021

⁴⁸ Matthew 25:14-30, *The Parable of the Talents*

⁴⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2541

⁵⁰ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 739

⁵¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 747

God is the ultimate portfolio manager, investing his “talents” in his creation to build the Church of Christ - to extend the heavenly garden - throughout the world. It is the Holy Spirit working through all of humanity to allocate God’s precious capital, the gifts of “wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord”.⁵² Through the love of Jesus Christ we are asked to open our hearts and minds to the gifts of God, and by the strength of Christ to use our gifts to produce strong results on our earthly journey. And as we work toward our own salvation it is God working in us, through the Holy Spirit, to achieve the results that he intends for the fulfillment of his divine plan.⁵³

“To discern God’s will, begin with your state in life now—that is, start where you are, not where you aren’t”⁵⁴ - and open your heart and your mind to the unseen power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ. Ask yourself, “*Is what I am doing with my talents giving greater glory to God?*”⁵⁵ “Next, examine your gifts, talents, and desires, and recognize when God wants to inspire us to do something, he puts within us a strong passion to do it.”⁵⁶ Finally, look for the ROI from the gifts of the Holy Spirit now working in you. “The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.”⁵⁷ When it comes to using your talents to do God’s work, consider these words from Saint John Paul II, “Life is entrusted to man as a treasure which must not be squandered, as a talent which must be used well. Man must render an account of it to his Master.”⁵⁸

⁵² Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1831

⁵³ Philippians 2:12-13

⁵⁴ Michael Skinner, “*Peaceful Heart Rosary*”, GratiaReflections

⁵⁵ *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Society of Jesus

⁵⁶ Michael Skinner, “*Peaceful Heart Rosary*”, GratiaReflections

⁵⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1832

⁵⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 52 (1995)

The overwhelming majority of mutual fund assets are held in retirement accounts⁵⁹ which have fast become the most common form of long-term savings for the average American investor. The benefits of retirement savings vehicles such as these are numerous, including professional money management, portfolio diversification, tax-free investing, dollar-cost averaging, dividend reinvestment, the ease and simplicity of monthly payroll deductions, and employer matching-contributions. Perhaps the most powerful feature of the modern retirement account is the benefit of compound interest which according to Albert Einstein is “the eighth wonder of the world.”⁶⁰ A common, but compelling example begins with a mere penny - one cent - doubled each day for seven days. At the end of one week, the initial investment is now worth 64 cents. However, if the doubling continues for a month - let’s say the month of October - the initial one penny investment will have grown to over \$10.7 million. As Benjamin Franklin described it, "Money makes money. And the money that money makes, makes money."⁶⁰

But beware - the “miracle of compounding” works both ways; it is wonderful while earning interest but devastating when paying it. When applied to America’s consumer debt balance (as previously discussed), the average interest rate on current credit card accounts - over 14%⁶¹ - renders an annual interest payment of \$117 billion. This cautionary computation applies too in God’s economy; as C.S. Lewis instructs, “Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance.”⁶² Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, and her “Little Way” provides the most practical advice in this regard: "Our Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our actions, nor even at their difficulty, but

⁵⁹ Investment Company Institute, *Quarterly Retirement Market Data*, September 29, 2021

⁶⁰ Jim Schleckser, *Why Einstein Considered Compound Interest the Most Powerful Force in the Universe*, Inc., January 20, 2020

⁶¹ Matt Schultz, *The Average Credit Card Interest in America Today*, LendingTree, September 17th, 2021

⁶² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Chapter 9, *Charity*

at the love with which we do them...Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love."⁶³ As with investing money in an earthly retirement account, in God's divine plan it likewise pays handsomely to invest love in small increments and allow compounding to occur over time.

"We live in a loud and restless world,"⁶⁴ shackled under the tyranny of 'More' and bound by our own sinful insatiability and the outgrowth of runaway economic liberalism. With restless hearts and outstretched arms we seek the antidote to earthly anxiety and depression, and the pathway to peace, simplicity, and detachment. "At the source and summit of the economy of salvation, as the Alpha and the Omega of human history, Christ sheds light on man's condition and his integral vocation."⁶⁵ The call of Jesus Christ to each and every one of us is "to spend what little time we have on this earth committing our lives to God's work, so as to spend eternity with him in paradise."⁶⁶ Key principles of American capitalism, including laws of supply and demand, active investment management strategies, and the miracle of compound interest, can be employed to build eternal equity in Christ's Church and to grow Christian enterprise in the United States and beyond. Only by employing capitalism of the heart will we finally vanquish the "Tyranny of More":

- We must first avail ourselves to the eternal love of Christ, which is available in abundant supply, his "treasury of compassion inexhaustible";⁶⁷

⁶³ Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*, 1898

⁶⁴ Michael Skinner, "Peaceful Heart Rosary", GratiaReflections

⁶⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 8 (1993)

⁶⁶ Michael Skinner, "Precious Life Rosary", GratiaReflections

⁶⁷ Saint Maria Faustina Kowalska, *Diary*, 950

- We must next open our hearts and minds to the unseen power of the Holy Spirit to discern God's will and apply our talents to their best and most efficient use, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."⁶⁸
- We must finally demonstrate our love for others, through Christ Jesus, not by great, heroic acts, but by building treasure in heaven, penny by penny, person by person, one day at a time. "Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ."⁶⁹

Build treasure in God's shining city by building his Church on Earth, as Christ so calls us to do. Simply stated, we are called to love one another.⁷⁰ "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his field."⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ephesians 2:10

⁶⁹ Ephesians 4:32

⁷⁰ John 15:12

⁷¹ Matthew 9:37-38