

*The Christian World View of  
Economics*

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## What is the Coalition on Revival?

The Coalition on Revival is a network of evangelical leaders from every major denominational and theological perspective who share a vision for and a commitment to revival, renewal, and reformation in Church and society in America.

People of Anabaptist, Arminian, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Wesleyan denominational backgrounds are all represented among COR's leaders. Pre-, a-, and post-millennialists are cooperating with each other, sharing the exciting task of getting God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven insofar as that is possible between now and whenever Christ comes back to Earth. Charismatics and non-charismatics, covenant and dispensationalist theologians, have joined arm in arm in prayer and hard work to see revival, renewal, and reformation in the Christian Church and the American culture.

COR's vision is to see Christians everywhere doing all they can in the power of the Holy Spirit to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), in every aspect of life. Toward that end, we have developed a series of worldview documents that set forth what we believe are the fundamental and essential points of the total Christian world and life view. The COR worldview documents state what we believe are the biblical principles for all spheres of human life including theology, evangelism, discipleship, law, civil governments, economics, education, family, medicine, psychology and counseling, arts and media, business and professions, and science and technology. We believe that the COR worldview documents state where the entire Church must stand and what action it must take to accomplish its task in the remaining years of the Twentieth Century and on into the next century.

COR steering committee members from all walks of life were joined by many hundreds of other interested Christian scholars, pastors, and laymen in developing the COR documents during many series of workshops and conventions. Each document therefore, reflects input from theologians, philosophers, professionals in their respective fields, pastors, and lay Christians. We have sought to avoid denominational and theological bias in the documents; our aim has been to focus on principles so fundamental that we are convinced no Bible-believing Christian who studied the major questions related to each sphere of life would come to a contradictory conclusion.

COR views itself as a "Bible obedience, holiness movement" that crosses denominational and theological lines. The next step on its agenda, now that its basic documents are complete, is to disseminate them widely and to educate hundreds of thousands of Christians on how to make Christ Lord of absolutely every aspect of life. We plan to do that through publications, and through seminars, and training workshops in the major cities of America and Canada. COR will also work in cooperation with other Christian networking groups to help unify the pastors in major population centers around the vision of mobilizing their people to "Get God's will done in their city as it is in heaven" to whatever degree that is possible before the return of Christ. We believe America can be turned around and once again function as a Christian nation as it did in its earlier years. We believe that wherever the pastors of any city in the world join together in unity to make Christ Lord of every sphere of life, and, with Spirit led strategy, mobilize their people into a unified spiritual army; that city can and will become "a city set upon a hill" and be "a place where righteousness dwells."

## About the 17 World View (Sphere) Documents

COR developed the 17 World View Documents, which set forth what we believe are fundamental and essential Biblical principles governing 17 major areas or *spheres* of human life and activity: law, government, economics, business and professions, education, art and media, medicine, science and technology, psychology and counseling, Christian unity, local and world evangelism, discipleship, helping the hurting, educating Christians about social and political moral issues, revitalizing Christian colleges and seminaries, marriage and the family, and pastoral renewal. These documents offer Christian leaders concise and comprehensive Biblical principles of how to apply the Truth of the Bible to all spheres of life and ministry. Each document includes short, creed-like statements of affirmation and denial that we believe state non-negotiable Biblical truths for that sphere of reality.

The 17 World View Documents were developed within 17 different committees made up of leaders with experience and expertise in the 17 different fields over an intensive three-year period of dialogue, critique, editing, and finally, a consensus conviction. Sixty of COR's National Steering Committee members with over 300 other theologians, pastors, lawyers, doctors, businessmen, and Christian workers made up the 17 committees. COR sends forth these documents to the Church at large with the prayer that they may be used by God's Spirit to get God's will done on earth, as it is in heaven—to whatever degree that is possible prior to the Return of Christ.

## Preface

### *What is Economics?*

Today hundreds of millions of people suffer starvation, hunger, and malnutrition. As many are homeless, lack protection from the raw forces of nature, and live in unsanitary conditions. The only appropriate response for the Christian is to cry from a compassionate heart, “Oh Lord, how can we help? What can we do to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and protect the vulnerable?”

This paper focuses on one aspect of God’s answer to that prayer as revealed in Scripture: economics.

Economics is the study of the principles and methods of allocating scarce resources to achieve optimal production, distribution, and consumption of wealth. Its chief purpose is to discover and refine just and loving means of creating, distributing, and consuming wealth to overcome poverty and to increase the material and spiritual prosperity of man. Proper understanding and application of economic principles are necessary if we are to offer the best help we can to the hungry, the naked, and the vulnerable. Therefore, proper understanding and application of economic principles are essential elements of real *compassion*.

For a view of economics to be called “Christian” it must offer a description of man and society based on Biblical truth, must identify and describe scriptural truths that explain current conditions, and must offer both operative and normative principles for achieving the most just economic system and individual behavior possible in our fallen world. It is not the function of Biblical economics to describe the tactics of implementing policies or programs but to offer principles and truths that, when implemented as policies, programs, and individual behavior, will conform the economic conduct and condition of men and society to the norms of Scripture.

Of primary importance in such an undertaking are two overriding considerations: 1.) the stewardship given to man, which from the language of the ancients we understand as “house-ruler-ship”—the form of the word itself (*oikonomos*), “law of the house”, revealing a linguistic link to what we now call “economics;” and, 2.) the Fall of man, which brought about the perversion of man’s stewardship and laid the foundation for misuse of talents and forsaking of responsibilities. Biblical economics provides a charter of divinely given responsibilities tempered by periodic warnings against sin, and calls men to honor God in economic activities.

In a sin-filled world, economics—like all other spheres of life—cannot be perfect. Because of the Fall, all the principles and truths of Biblical economics, and all the various forms of wealth, are abused by fallen men. Economics therefore reveals man’s base nature, his covetous strivings for power and wealth, and even fleeting delusions of independence from God. One’s economic behavior reveals his heart.

Modern economics as a science has lost the ethics of an older economics rooted in the spiritual tradition of mankind<sup>1</sup>. But economics as a discipline and economies as societal structures cannot function ethically without being rooted in spiritual reality. Thus as Christians we challenge those seeking a normative system by which to bring perspective to the raw data of mechanical economics to consider Christian ethics as that system. And we extend to all — whether on the political/economic Left, Right, or Center — an invitation to discuss peaceably the economic implications of the Christian world view.

The principles of economics revealed in Scripture and stated in brief below provide the spiritual and ethical foundation for economics that is just and is best suited to increase human joy and glorify God.

### *The Present Situation*

Americans today are deeply divided by the economic ideologies of Left and Right, of capitalism, socialism, interventionism, liberation theology, and communism. The effect is a citizenry bewildered and confused, weakened in its ability to respond wisely to the myriad choices it faces.

Adherents of competing ideologies and goals pull the economic structure of American society in opposing directions. The present welfare system promotes the breakdown of families by giving higher payments to mothers without husbands, thus encouraging husbands to abandon their wives and children. Tax structures and policies are tools of social engineers used to create what they believe is a “just” society, but, because of the conflicting ideologies that contribute to policies, the structures become confusing and confused. People disagree not only about specific policies but also about fundamental issues such as the nature of justice, the legitimate functions of civil government (especially related to economics), and the nature of rights and duties.

The result of all this confusion and conflict is a crippled economy. Unemployment, though falling in recent years, remains high. Federal deficits, which rob posterity of its inheritance, climb to astronomical heights. Governmental regulations hamper free and efficient economic relationships among individuals and groups. Competing interest groups clamor for special protection against their competitors at home and abroad. Consumers, as a result, pay higher prices for goods and services — a state of affairs hurtful to all but especially to those with low income.

Envy, jealousy, and resentment<sup>2</sup> spawn fraud, theft, and violence as people pursue every means of increasing or clinging to their wealth, even at the expense of others. Calls abound for the abolition or restriction of private property, and for coerced sharing and redistribution of wealth, oblivious to the integral connections among life, liberty, and property. All of these attitudes and actions exalt wealth as if

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1. For instance Adam Smith, the great British economic thinker of the eighteenth century, was first and foremost a moral philosopher. His famous *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), which played a fundamental role in the development of free market economics, was largely an explanation, application, defense, and demonstration of the principles of economics that he set forth in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

2. *Ressentiment* is a French word whose meaning goes far beyond the sense of either resentment or envy in English. It indicates a jealous hatred of one's superiors that leads not to trying to raise oneself to their level but to trying to drag them down to one's own level, by whatever means, and incites rejoicing at another's misfortune. See Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*, Nashville, Tn.: Thomas Nelson, 1983, pp. 51f, 55, 58, 70, 74, 78, 97, 106.

it were God, and therefore amount to what the Apostle Paul condemns as greed, which amounts to idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

Christians themselves are deeply divided over these problems. We are pulled in opposite (and equally dangerous) directions by “Christian socialism,” which purports to be the only compassionate response to poverty, and the “gospel of success,” which baptizes the love of money, “which is the root of all sorts of evil, and entices some away from the faith” (1 Timothy 6:10). Some condemn the rich merely for being rich, while others “who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge many men into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9).

Only reexamining fundamental Biblical principles can restore a broad based consensus among believers who position themselves on every part of the political and economic spectrum.

In light of these troubles, we humbly offer the following statements of affirmation and denial to the Church and the world, hoping that these may clarify thought and action to the end that poverty might be overcome, the well-being of man might be served, and God might be glorified.

## Statements of Affirmation and Denial

### *First Principles of Biblical Economics*

1. We affirm that God freely created all things and so has the right and the power to rule all things, spiritual and physical, and that He is the ultimate Owner of all things; that God sovereignly exalts whom He will and abases whom He will; that all men are accountable to God in all their activities; that God, through creation and decree, is the sole Author of many kinds of spiritual and material wealth, particularly individual and corporate existence, the existence of raw materials, and the operation of moral and physical laws governing the physical and spiritual universe; and that God sovereignly disposes of these to His creatures as He will (Psalm 24:1,2; John 1:1-3).

We deny that Satan, angels, or mankind possess any authority, power, or ownership over any aspect of creation apart from God’s delegation of limited authority; that men are unaccountable to God in their economic activities; and that all men have rights to equal portions of those forms of wealth of which God is the sole Author.

2. We affirm that God is Truth and is the Source of all truth, and that the Bible is the only inerrant and infallible channel by which God communicates truth — both theoretical and practical — to man; that in the Bible God has communicated all truths necessary to life and godliness, including the basic principles governing every aspect of human life; and that a true, consistent, just, and adequate system of economics must be constructed on the basis of Biblical principles (Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 119:142; Romans 1:20; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

We deny that the Bible errs in anything it teaches; that it is inadequate to the needs of man for life and godliness; and that a true, consistent, just, and adequate system of economics may be constructed without submission to the authoritative and morally binding requirements of the Bible.

3. We affirm that man is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26); that all men are invested by God with equal value in the sight of Him who is no respecter of persons (Romans 2:11); that man is both spiritual and physical (Genesis 2:7); that he is capable of moral choice and thus is morally accountable (Genesis 3:22); that all men are sinners by nature because of the Fall of Adam (Romans 5:12-19); and that each individual is unique in body, temperament (Psalm 139), character (Proverbs, *passim*), and spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12, 14; Ephesians 4:11,12).

We deny that all men's moral equality before God implies that they are equally gifted in spiritual, intellectual, and physical capacity; that men are capable of moral perfection in this life; and that one's vocation (calling) can be discovered properly without understanding his uniqueness.

4. We affirm that all economic relations ought to be governed by justice; that justice means rendering impartially to each his due according to a right standard; that what is due to each is based on his conduct relative to the commands of Scripture and on his service to others; and that the primary requirements of justice are revealed in the Ten Commandments and in the moral, civil, and judicial laws throughout Scripture that expand upon and apply the Decalogue (Leviticus 19:15; Acts 10:34; Matthew 25:14-29; Romans 3:31; 13:7).

We deny that all men are due equal wages for their labor regardless of their conduct or function (1 Timothy 5:9,10); that all men can justly be required to think or act identically; that justice means equality of condition among men; that justice ever permits a violation of any of the Ten Commandments; and that justice may be maximized in any society that ignores the moral principles of the Bible.

5. We affirm that love is fulfilling God's law in relation to others (Romans 13:10); that it always requires obedience to the Ten Commandments (Romans 13:8-10); that loving one's neighbor is the best way to prevent injustice; and that it involves both discipline of self and others, and voluntary sacrificial giving of oneself and one's property for the benefit of others (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; Galatians 2:20).

We deny that love ever permits a violation of the Ten Commandments (1 Corinthians 13:6; Romans 13:8-10); that love can be coerced; and that sacrifices made merely because of coercion, without charitable intent, demonstrate love (2 Corinthians 8:12; 9:7).

### *Wealth and Poverty*

6. We affirm that the Bible refers to three economic categories of people: the "rich" (*plousios*), who are able to sustain their lives entirely on the basis of their investments in capital goods and others' work; the "poor" (*ptochos*), or "lacking" (*endeos* — Acts 4:34, the only occurrence of the word in the N.T.), who lack the necessary material goods to sustain life (food, clothing, and whatever shelter is necessary to protect against the elements — 1 Timothy 6:8; Proverbs 30:8,9) independent of charitable gifts, and who also lack the means of producing those goods for themselves (the *ptochos* are often also the weak or feeble [*asthenes*]); and all those in between, who must work to support themselves (*penes*).

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3. See the denial of #15 below.

We deny that those who possess the means of their own sustenance and the liberty to use them<sup>3</sup> are “poor” in the Biblical sense; that the materially rich are condemned in Scripture merely because they are rich; and that those who must work to sustain themselves are materially “rich” in the Biblical sense.

7. We affirm that wealth is material and non-material; that Christian economics must address both kinds of wealth; that non-material wealth includes (but is not limited to) life, liberty, intellect, ideas (especially understanding of God’s moral Law), emotions, will, time, personal relations, and goodwill; that material wealth includes (but is not limited to) raw materials, labor, and manufactured materials; that the various kinds of wealth are valued differently in the Bible and ought to be valued differently by men according to their unique personalities and needs; that the highest kind of wealth is a right relationship with God; and that material and non-material wealth are blessings of God related to His purposes and to the degree of our obedience to Him (Deuteronomy 8, 28; Hebrews 11 indicates that there are exceptions).

We deny that wealth is only material; that material or non-material wealth ought to be pursued at the expense of a right relationship with God; that all human valuations of wealth are equally consistent with God’s valuations; and that godliness should be pursued for the purpose of material gain (1 Timothy 6:3-6).

8. We affirm that material and non-material wealth consists of economic goods, which result from combining natural resources with physical labor and mental creativity; that economic goods can include material goods, services, and ideas; that these economic goods have value only to the extent that they satisfy human needs; and that their value changes from time to time as human needs and the supply of goods change.

We deny that the amount of economic goods is ever fixed over time; that the amount of natural resources available to an individual or group determines or limits its wealth; that the creation of wealth by one individual or group comes at the expense of others; that one form of economic good is always superior to any other; and that the value of economic goods is ever permanent.

9. We affirm that in producing economic goods, man acts individually and in concert with others in imitation of and obedience to God; that wealth consists of economic goods created by work and retained by postponing consumption (“thrift”) and meeting current needs of others; that work is made more efficient and productive by the prudent use of such items of capital as ideas, tools, machines, buildings, and transportation, which enable men to increase the volume and decrease the cost of production; and that work is more productive when planned and executed consistently with the Biblical world view, which accurately reflects God’s moral and physical principles.

We deny that work is a curse; that all men exercise diligence and creativity with equal perseverance or effectiveness; that the prudent are always able to achieve their goals or the same results from their labor since natural conditions and other forces may result in differing results from similar efforts because of different values at different times or locations; that world views are irrelevant to the production of wealth; that work executed consistently with non-Christian world views will be as productive as that executed consistently with the Biblical world view; and that the economic differences among men resulting from differing world views or the differing productivities and resources of individuals or groups are unjust.

10. We affirm that prosperity results from man's prudent use of land, labor, intellect, gifts, and resources consistent with Biblical economic principles of work, thrift, and providing for family, church, neighbors, and society; and that there is no true enjoyment of work apart from God (Proverbs 10:15; Psalm 1; Ecclesiastes 2:24,25).

We deny that any individual or nation that operates inconsistently with Biblical principles will ultimately prosper, although in this sin-filled world material poverty and wealth may not always be equated with either an unrighteous or a righteous relationship with God (Matthew 5:45); and that security may be found in material possessions instead of God (1 Timothy 6:17).

11. We affirm that spiritual poverty is lack of a right relationship with God, of knowledge of God's moral standards, and of knowledge of and obedience to God's moral standards; that spiritual and material poverty are ordinarily causally connected; and that material poverty is the lack of such material goods as are necessary to sustain life independent of charitable gifts from others (James 4:2,3; Deuteronomy 28:15ff).

We deny that material poverty ought to be defined relatively, i.e., on scales based on proportions of the total wealth held by individuals in a society, and that those may be called materially "poor" in the Biblical sense who possess what is necessary to sustain life (food, clothing, and shelter) independent of charitable gifts<sup>4</sup>.

12. We affirm that the root cause of all poverty — spiritual and material — is the Fall of man; that material and spiritual poverty may be brought about and sustained by human sin, oppression, and divine judgment on sin; that, historically, poverty is therefore the ordinary condition of fallen mankind; that poverty caused and perpetuated by oppression is unjust; that the less consistent a world view is with the Christian world view the more likely it will be to perpetuate the poverty of those who believe it; that poverty caused by an individual's own sin is just; and that the Bible and observation confirm that most poverty is due to disobedience to God's laws by individuals and their societies (Deuteronomy 8:18; 28; Proverbs 24:30-34; 6:6-11; Romans 1:18-31; Matthew 21:33-45; Job 1:21).

We deny that poverty may properly be understood without reference to the Fall of man; that men have a right to wealth merely because of their existence; that the causes of individual or societal poverty may properly be diagnosed, or the cures properly prescribed, without reference to religious world views; that all poverty is the result of oppression; and that poverty caused or perpetuated by injustice ought to be remedied by a new injustice.

13. We affirm that people ought to live within their means and not contract debts, which encumber them with the desires of the world and its love of multiplied material possessions and money; that poverty often results from financial irresponsibility manifested in contracting unnecessary debts; that interest on loans to sustain the poor is prohibited by Scripture; that interest on all other loans should reflect the value of money in the lending market as determined by supply and demand; and that the Bible so strongly warns against going into debt as to call the borrower a slave to the lender (Proverbs 22:7; Romans 13:8).

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4. See the discussion of *ptochos* in #6 above.

We deny that all debt is forbidden by Scripture; that debt is a prudent and wise means of fulfilling wants; and that high interest rates, when they reflect the supply and demand for money in the marketplace, the risk of the lender, or inflation, are usurious.

14. We affirm that the birth of new people ought to be greeted with joy and thanks because they bear God's image and have the capacity to enrich others both spiritually and materially; that there is no consistent causal relationship between population density or growth rate and economic well-being; and that the idea of planetary "overpopulation" is a myth, although local overcrowding strains the limits of some local economies (Psalm 127:3-5; John 16:21; Genesis 1:26ff).

We deny that high birth rates necessarily weaken economies; that the amount of material wealth in the world is static; that higher population necessitates smaller divisions of the world's wealth; that population growth ought to be slowed or stopped; that immigration, so long as the marketplace of goods and services remains free, is injurious to an economy or to citizens of the host community; and that God's capacity to provide for population can ever be met or surpassed.

### *Work*

15. We affirm that true work is the productive expenditure of energy — mental or physical — designed to produce beneficial results; that because God is a Worker and man is created in His image, man is a worker by nature, calling, and commandment; that work expresses God's image in man; that the effects of the Fall often frustrate man's intentions in work; and that true work is dignified because of God's example (Genesis 1-3; Exodus 20:9; Proverbs 31).

We deny that true work is the mere expenditure of energy without the intent of producing beneficial results; that any honest work is undignified (Proverbs 14:23; Psalm 62:12); that work is a curse; that work done halfheartedly honors God (Ephesians 6:5,6; Colossians 3:23); and that men or governments ought to hinder opportunities for men to work to support themselves and their families.

16. We affirm that inherent differences in human beings result in differences in thought and behavior; that God calls them to differing occupations; that they differ in productive capacities and aptitudes; that all who are able have a duty to work (Exodus 20:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:10); that charitable giving is one form of work; that differing economic conditions resulting from unique characters, thoughts, and behavior are just; and that nations and cities possess unique capacities and advantages just as do individuals (Galatians 1:10; Proverbs, *passim*; 1 Timothy 6:5-10; Titus 3:1).

We deny that the differing economic rewards for different callings are unjust; that lesser economic rewards for any calling imply a lesser dignity and worth of the individual before God; that anyone has a right to any particular job unless he and the employer have made a free agreement regarding that job; and that coercively leveling out the economic condition of society resulting from men's uniquenesses is just.

17. We affirm that God made men and societies with unique capacities, interests, and callings; thus a division of labor beneficial to mankind ensued (Romans 12:6,7; 1 Corinthians 4:7; 12:12ff).

We deny that this division of labor is unjust.

18. We affirm that God's unique gifting equips some individuals to organize and direct the work of others better than others; that this difference in equipping is beneficial to mankind and is a special instance of the division of labor; that employers and employees, managers and laborers, need each other to enhance their productive capacities; that the competition of employers for employees and of employees for jobs contributes to efficient productivity, improvement of working conditions, and a felicitous relationship between wages and work; that voluntary exchanges between employers and employees are morally valid when they are within the limits set forth in God's moral law; and that employers and employees both rightly enter into exchanges with each other expecting net benefits to themselves.

We deny that there is inherent conflict of interest between employers and managers on the one hand, and employees on the other hand; that civil governments or anyone else ought to erect barriers that inhibit competition among employers and employees other than to prohibit fraud, theft, and violence, and to punish those who commit them; that it is necessarily greedy or unjust to desire profit from transactions; and that exploitation is involved in such free transactions unless one party requires immoral acts from the other as one of the terms of exchange (e.g., sexual favors, fraud, violence, theft, etc.).

19. We affirm that in a free market, competitive economic system, there is more cooperation than competition to gain economic ends; that destructive competition results mostly from interference in the market economy by civil government, which causes special interests to attempt to use the coercive power of civil government for their own benefit at others' expense; and that the competition engendered by the free market is a competition to supply people's demands.

We deny that the competition engendered by the free market is ethically wrong; that civil government ought to limit such competition; and that civil government can interfere in the free market without pitting class against class, group against group, special interest against special interest, thereby damaging the cooperation inherent in the workings of the free market.

20. We affirm that when the Bible condemns the rich for withholding wages (James 5:4; Leviticus 19:13) it condemns their enjoying the benefits of another's labor while delaying payment; that agreements between employers and employees should be open, honest, and voluntary, but morally binding once made since both parties are bound to the standard of truth-telling and enter such transactions expecting net benefits (Leviticus 19:13); and that it is morally consistent with Biblical standards of justice for an employer to be more generous with some employees than with others, so long as he meets his agreements with them (Matthew 20:1-16).

We deny that God's condemnation of the rich for withholding wages refers to extremely low wages voluntarily accepted because of low skill, the scarcity of jobs, or the need to work (Matthew 20:1-16); that God condemns anyone simply for the possession of material wealth; that employees are exploited in transactions when they have voluntarily agreed to do specified work for a certain wage and are paid promptly, unless the employer requires immoral acts as part of the terms of the exchange; and that it is right to attempt to gain wealth at the expense of others, particularly the poor who often are defenseless.

21. We affirm that people's differing desires, needs, abilities, and behavior result in their producing differently and thus in their deserving different rewards.

We deny that different rewards for different labor are unjust.

## Property

22. We affirm that ownership of property (material, intellectual, etc.) is a just reward for labor (Luke 10:7; Deuteronomy 8:18); that rightful ownership also ensues from receipt of inheritance or gifts (Genesis 31:14-16; 48:6; Leviticus 25:44-46; Numbers 18:21; Proverbs 13:22; Matthew 21:38); that ownership means stewardship of property under God; that stewardship means the use of property accountably to God; that man is accountable to God for the use of all kinds of wealth, material and non-material, including talents, time, land, labor, materials, knowledge, relationships, and any other means of producing, maintaining, and distributing wealth; that responsible stewardship requires knowledge of the ethical principles of Scripture; that stewardship is both individual and corporate; that stewardship requires responsible liberty to think, speak, and behave according to one's conscience; and that accountability requires ability to control that for which one is accountable.

We deny that the Christian concept of stewardship negates private and familial ownership of property; that stewardship may be conducted without ownership and liberty; that individuals and groups may exercise stewardship properly while coerced by civil government or others; and that accountability to God requires the same use of wealth by all people (Luke 19:26; 8:18; Matthew 13:12; Mark 4:25).

23. We affirm that the products of work rightly belong to those who produce them in proportion to their relative contributions in production through capital, management, and labor; that ten percent of the increase of such products belongs to God as first fruits; that the remainder is entrusted to the owner, as steward for God and his family; and that the owner should be free, under God, to use the remainder through saving, investing, giving, or consuming, subject to the moral laws of Scripture and appropriate taxation (cf. #34 below).

We deny that the value of such products may rightly be measured solely on the basis of the labor involved in their production without regard to the capital and management of human and natural resources necessary for efficient production and distribution and without regard to the free market value of such products.

24. We affirm that the Biblical requirement of giving one tenth of one's net income (tithing) to the Lord remains in force under the New Covenant; that the Christian committed to building God's Kingdom ought to go beyond tithing in his giving to the Lord insofar as he is able; that he who sows sparingly will reap sparingly; that he who sows bountifully will reap bountifully; that Christian giving should be done voluntarily rather than under coercion; and that God will always provide everything His children need if they seek first His Kingdom and righteousness (2 Corinthians 9:6-11; Matthew 6:33).

We deny that God ceased commanding a tithe from His people with the advent of the New Covenant, and that the voluntary nature of Christian giving excuses refusal to tithe.

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5. For instance, Leviticus 25:17 requires that sellers exercise responsibility for the welfare of buyers. It justifies restrictions on exchange designed to protect health and safety, and condemns the idea of *caveat emptor* espoused by some proponents of capitalism.

25. We affirm that private property and personal liberty (civil and religious) are so inextricably intertwined that destruction of the one must either require or cause destruction of the other.

We deny that people dependent for their sustenance on civil government have all the freedom God intended for them.

26. We affirm that the Biblical concept of ownership must include the right to buy, sell, or trade property freely within the restraints of the moral laws of Scripture<sup>5</sup>; that the free and honest exchange of ideas, goods, and services is a basic right of human beings, in which atmosphere they are able to achieve the most from their work; that freedom of exchange includes the right to initiate and fulfill contracts (Exodus 20:15; Matthew 20:1-15; 2 Samuel 24:24); and that ownership implies the duty to use and exchange one's property in manners not injurious to the life, health, liberty, and property of others.

We deny that coerced exchanges of property (other than in forced restitution or penalty for a crime) are just; that coercive setting of prices or conditions of exchange is just; that the right to free use and exchange of property protects uses and exchanges characterized by fraud, theft, violence or the threat of violence, collusion (a type of fraud), or injury to the life, health, liberty, and property of others; and that anyone ought to inhibit free exchanges of goods and services aside from enforcing laws against fraud, theft, violence or the threat of violence, collusion, and injury to the life, health, liberty, or property of others (Luke 12:13-21, 48; Acts 5:1-10).

### *Value, Price, and Money*

27. We affirm that an economy is most productive for all levels of people when people produce and exchange goods, ideas, and services freely at prices of their choice within the limits of Biblical laws against fraud, theft, and violence; that the just price of goods, ideas, and services is that at which the property may be exchanged freely and honestly in the marketplace; and that the free market price of any material good is a function of the relationship of supply to demand (Proverbs 20:14; Leviticus 19:9,10; 23:22; Genesis 23:3-16; Proverbs 20:10).

We deny that central planning and other coercive interferences with personal choice can increase the productivity of society<sup>6</sup>; that civil government has authority to set the value of property; and that the Bible teaches any "just" price other than that resulting from the interaction of supply and demand in a marketplace of free people (Hosea 7:1; 1 Kings 21:1-16).

28. We affirm that the Fall resulted in relative scarcity of wealth; that God has given man talents and abilities which, used in obedience to God's rules, increase usable wealth and resources; and that God uses the scarcity of wealth and resources to restrain the wickedness of man.

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6. The story of Joseph's prudent and righteous rule over Egypt preparatory to and during famine, however, indicates that some centralized planning may be justified in cases of national emergency. It should, however, be the exception rather than the rule, and should end as soon as the emergency that occasioned it ends. Such central planning should be seen as part of God's judgment on a rebellious nation, as it was in Joseph's day.

We deny that the amount of material wealth on Earth will ever prove insufficient, under God's sovereign hand, for the needs of the population God permits, so long as people live consistently with God's laws.

29. We affirm that money is a medium by which property and services are exchanged and by which measurements of value are conveniently ordered and communicated; that it serves as a store of value in savings for future use; that as such it should not be subject to fiat creation by individuals or government since fiat creation of money devalues currency by increasing its supply relative to demand, thus stealing from people an amount equal to the amount of devaluation of their money; that to inhibit such fiat manufacture of money God graciously provided scarce and precious metals such as gold and silver for use as bases for monetary systems; that money, by Biblical standards, is a commodity or a representative thereof, with a preference for gold and silver; and that the Bible demands the use of just weights and measures in monetary affairs (Deuteronomy 25:13-16; Isaiah 1:22; Proverbs 8:19).

We deny that anyone, including civil governments, ought to confiscate wealth through monetary inflation (Amos 8:4-6; Isaiah 1:22), and that monetary inflation is justified by a civil government's desire to reduce unemployment.

### *Orders of Responsibility*

30. We affirm that God has ordained orders of responsibility in the economic spheres of life; that able individuals have first responsibility to care for themselves; that whoever refuses to work ought not to expect to be fed by others; that families have responsibility to care for those members unable to care for themselves; that the Church and other voluntary organizations have responsibility to care for those unable to care for themselves when no care is available from their families; and that the abdication of this responsibility means abandoning the poor to the state and other institutions, which invariably results in threats to liberty and property (1 Timothy 5; 2 Corinthians 8-10; 1 Thessalonians 3).

We deny that anyone who is able but refuses to work has a just claim to be supported by others; that those unable to work ought not to have their needs met by their families and, if necessary, by the Church or other voluntary organizations; that family members fulfill their responsibilities toward God who refuse to provide to the best of their abilities for the needs of their family; and that the civil government is commanded by God to provide for the economic needs of anyone other than by the enforcement of laws against fraud, theft, and violence, and by paying its employees and contractors.

31. We affirm that the first responsibility of the Church in caring for the poor is to members of the Body of Christ, and that its second responsibility is to those outside the Body of Christ (Galatians 6:10).

We deny that the Church's responsibility to care for the poor inside the Body of Christ displaces its responsibility to make disciples of believers, and that its responsibility to care for the poor outside the Body of Christ displaces its responsibility to preach the gospel.

### *Civil Government and Economics*

32. We affirm that the primary duty of civil government in the economic sphere of life is to deter and punish violations of and injuries to life, liberty, and property, and to protect by enforcement of law ownership and exchange of property from fraud, theft, violence, and collusion (Romans 13:1-7).

We deny that civil government ought to control or limit exchanges of property among men other than to the extent necessary to prevent fraud, theft, violence, and collusion; that God desires civil government to redistribute property from rich to poor; that any such redistribution is consistent with either justice or love; and that any injury to life, liberty, or property ought to go unpunished by civil government.

33. We affirm that it is the duty of civil government to protect citizens' property rights rather than property values and that civil government has the authority to protect against specific threats to life, health, liberty, and property, but not to protect the value of property as such.

We deny that any person should be permitted to infringe the rights and liberties of others, or to use civil government to do so, in order to maintain the value of his property.

34. We affirm that the God-ordained functions of civil government — law enforcement, defense, the judiciary, and such functions as are necessary in discharging these duties — ought to be provided for by taxation of its citizens at a uniform rate and by uniform user fees for services.

We deny that taxation for the purpose of redistributing wealth is just, and that taxation of citizens at different percentages of income ("graduated income tax") is just.

### *Helping the Poor*

35. We affirm that the first step toward helping the poor is enforcing justice in civil society by ensuring that the life, liberty, and property of each citizen is protected by civil government and by the moral discipline of society, because in such a state people are at liberty to make the most of their own abilities by producing and exchanging goods, ideas, and services freely with others to meet their own and others' needs.

We deny that justice for the poor includes receipt of property taken coercively from others or enforcement of any degree of economic equality among citizens; that coerced redistribution of wealth is the exercise of social justice; and that the Sabbatical and Jubilee year laws of the Old Testament had as part of their purpose the maintenance of any degree of economic equality among God's people.

36. We affirm that charitable, sacrificial giving is commanded by God as an expression of love to help the poor; that to be truly charitable, giving must be voluntary and consistent with what one has, not with what one does not have; that coerced or manipulated "giving" is not giving at all but theft or fraud by those coercing or manipulating it, and is therefore contrary to justice and love; that charitable giving ought to be carefully planned and executed to bring about the best benefit to its recipients; and that material relief to the poor ought always to be accompanied by spiritual ministry (2 Corinthians 8, 9).

We deny that truly charitable giving can ever be forced, and therefore that civil government can ever have a part in truly charitable giving; that charitable giving ought to be conducted in such a way as to deny or discourage personal accountability on the part of the recipients or to reduce incentive to develop productive knowledge and behavior; and that charitable giving of material relief without spiritual ministry truly meets the needs of the poor.

37. We affirm that the proper recipients of charitable giving are those who are unable to provide for their own needs (the *ptochos*).

We deny that those who are able but unwilling to meet their own needs have any just claim on charitable gifts.

38. We affirm that charitable responsibilities to other believers have priority over other charitable activities, and that in emergencies Christian families are asked by God to give through the Church beyond the tithe, but proportionately to their assets, so that other Christians may be relieved of great scarcity (2 Corinthians 8:14).

We deny that the use of the word “equality” in 2 Corinthians 8 requires equality in ownership of wealth among Christians.

39. We affirm that, because non-Biblical world views, values, and behavior (all effects of the Fall) are the primary causes of poverty, the primary means of overcoming material and spiritual poverty is evangelism followed by discipleship to establish belief, thought, and behavior consistent with the Christian world view, values, and behavior among believers and in society (Joshua 1:8; Proverbs 21:5; Psalm 92:12).

We deny that long-term deliverance from poverty may be achieved apart from renewing society according to the Christian gospel, world view, values, and behavior.

40. We affirm that true discipleship includes instruction in basic Christian doctrines and ethics, in the Christian world view and values, and in Christian practice, and that among the values to be taught in discipleship are justice, love, the habits of self-discipline that lead to material and spiritual prosperity through the use of the means of grace (the Word, the sacraments, prayer, the counsel of the Body of Christ), and the means of material prosperity (planning, work, cooperation, free exchange, saving, inheritance, etc.).

We deny that true discipleship is merely teaching doctrine, internal piety, or elementary Christian practices such as prayer, Bible study, witnessing, and fellowship, though it must always include these.

41. We affirm that a key element of economic discipleship is teaching Christians the lessons of Ephesians 4:28: that the former pagan converted to Christ (a) must steal no longer, but (b) must work, (c) doing something useful through his labor, in order that (d) he may have something to share with those in need.

We deny that any person converted to Christ should be permitted to remain lazy, idle, and unproductive, or to continue in a life of indolence and thievery.

42. We affirm that a free market economy is the closest approximation in this fallen world to the system of economy revealed in the Bible; that it is the natural result of man's God-given nature; and that, of all the economies known to man, it is the most conducive to producing a free, just, stable, peaceful, and prosperous society for all participants.

We deny that communism, socialism, interventionism, economic egalitarianism, and liberation theology are Biblical; that they produce good results for the poor; that they tend toward more peaceful societies; that they respect man's God-given rights to liberty and property; and that they are Biblically appropriate moral options for Christians.

## A Call to Action in Economics

### *General Actions*

Because of the preceding convictions, we call upon all men and women who name Christ as their personal Savior and Lord to join us in:

1. examining earnestly these affirmations and denials in the light of God's Word to see if they are true, and informing us directly of those points in which they believe we have departed from Scripture or logic;
2. re-examining our own economic theories and practices and asking God to show us where we are falling short;
3. repenting of all known sins, confessing and forsaking them, asking forgiveness both of God Himself and of all those who have been offended, and then making all possible restitution;
4. praying for God to fill all of His people with the enabling power of the Holy Spirit in order that we may bring our personal lives and our economic and practice into closer conformity to His revealed will on a permanent and consistent basis;
5. seeking guidance from our brethren and local church authorities as to how we can mutually support and influence one another to make our economic practices glorifying to God.

Having dealt with our own personal sins and failures, and placing ourselves accountable to the Bible and to the brethren, we now commit ourselves to:

1. influencing any known Christians or Christian associations with whom we work to consider seriously our affirmations and denials with the goal of enlisting their responses;
2. influencing those in the field of economics who agree with our affirmations and denials to implement these proposals in their work;
3. mobilizing and networking our Christian resources and working in concert with the other professional spheres both inside and outside COR, to see public perception and awareness of economics and the behavior of the Body of Christ, the economic community, and our nation

changed to approximate more closely the view of reality and morality presented to us in the Holy Scriptures.

## *Specific Actions*

### *Goals*

To these ends, we commit ourselves to the following goals:

1. recouping Biblical perspectives on the values that underlie right understandings of economic relationships among men;
2. understanding justice, rights, and duties; love, compassion, and charity; production, distribution, and consumption; labor, capital, and value — all as God decrees and defines them and as He reveals the truth about them in His Word;
3. calling our society to repentance for the destructive acts it takes against life, liberty, property, family, community, and posterity by casting all its cares upon civil government;
4. proclaiming to the world, and working to establish, an economic order that accords with the teachings of Scripture;
5. calling forth, and working to establish, an order that recognizes the integral connections between work and reward, between property and liberty, between justice and inequality, between love and charitable giving, and between the sinfulness of man and the importance of individual liberty in a society with strictly limited civil government;
6. helping churches to identify charitable organizations that function on the basis of Biblical economics and those that do not, so that they can increase their support of the former and discontinue their support of the latter;
7. working to restore to the proper persons responsibility for the physical needs of all members of society, in accord with the three levels of such responsibility revealed in Scripture: the individual, the family, and the Church and other voluntary associations. The one who will not work must not be allowed to eat (1 Thessalonians 3:10). The one who refuses to care for his own family has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8). And the Church that does not care for the poor, particularly those among its own people, disobeys God's explicit command (Galatians 6:10).

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7. We refer here particularly to the "simple life style" made popular in such books as Ronald Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 2nd ed. revised (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), and *Living More Simply—Biblical Principles & Practical Models* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1980). We recognize that the Bible condemns covetousness, discontent, and acquisitiveness, and that insofar as a "simple life style" would mean the determination to overcome these sins and the resulting needless accumulation of possessions, it is a proper principle of Christian living.

8. reminding individuals and society alike of the built-in principle of accountability that governs the world, moral and physical: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:7-10).

### *Concrete Steps*

Toward the achievement of these goals, we commit ourselves to the following steps:

1. exemplifying stewardship and charity in our own lives;
2. seeking positions on our churches’ missions and benevolence committees in order to guide them according to the principles in this document;
3. influencing our churches to support Biblical economics and organizations that teach and practice it;
4. teaching courses in churches on Biblical economics;
5. disseminating this document as broadly as we can among our acquaintances, in churches, and among professional economists and others with special interest in economics;
6. preparing an annotated version of this document with references to scholarly literature that support its various propositions and a bibliography of recommended readings for laymen and specialists in economics;
7. writing a book based on this document that will explain and defend each affirmation and denial at length from Scripture, history, reason, and modern experience;
8. founding an American Society for Economic Ethics as a forum for discussion, development, application, and dissemination of Biblical principles of economics;
9. holding a national conference on Christian economics within two years;
10. founding a monthly newsletter describing and defending the ethical principles and practical insights in economics set forth in this document and revealed in Scripture;
11. lobbying Congress and state legislatures, partly through the American Society for Economic Ethics, to enact laws consistent with Biblical principles of economics and to repeal laws inconsistent with Biblical principles of economics;
12. opposing publicly such unbiblical economic systems as communism, socialism, interventionism, economic egalitarianism, and liberation theology, through such media as letters to editors of publications, opinion articles in newspapers, and oral presentations before law- and policy-making bodies;

13. making special, focused efforts to diminish the influence of so-called “Christian socialism,” the “simple life style,”<sup>7</sup> the “Evangelical Left,” and other such ideas, movements, and their representatives, among evangelicals, other Christians, and non-Christians.
14. opposing unbiblical economics in the Evangelical Theological Society, the Evangelical Philosophical Society, the Theological Students’ Fellowship, and other Christian scholars’ organizations through original papers, rebuttals, and face-to-face, loving confrontation with those who represent such ideas during meetings of the organizations;
15. preparing and publishing sound, irenic answers to Christian publications that endorse unbiblical economic systems.