## Productivity

God is the one who gives his people the ability to obtain wealth and he is the

one who takes it away. These resources are taken away with idolatry and

oppression.11 These bring a curse on the land.

### The Role of Dusty Humanity

Humans were made from the dust of the earth.12 They were created to subdue

and bring it into subjection, to rule the life in the earth, the sky and the sea.13

It is delegated authority. They are to rule as the image of God,14 in a caring

way of tilling and keeping. This creation mandate is not an excuse for an

ecological crisis.

The way that God ruled was to give every living thing that he created away.

Every plant and animal was given away for the provision of humanity. If this

is the image in which we were created, then we also must have the same

attitude when it comes to our resources. They must be given away for the

provision of others, not so they may simply eat off our production, but so

they also may produce off the resources we have created.

Therefore, our role is to both create resources to be given away and to

produce things that will be pleasing to God. If we are producing resources

for our own gain or that will be displeasing to God’s reflection, then we are

not existing in the way in which we were created, and not being children of

the Kingdom of God. This is the way of godly economics, the way of love.

Prosperity & Wealth Creation

The managing of the earth so it is productive (2), is a foundational principle. To

work hard in the tilling of the soil, brings an increase on average of perhaps

3% per year. On this productivity, societies could be built. There are others

mentioned in the Genesis narrative who became specialists, artisans,

indicating the transition from a tribal form of society to one where there is

enough excess income to support such specialists.

Wealth in the Old Testament was usually attributed to righteousness within

the tribe. Beginning with Abraham, when the people were obedient to God’s

commandments then they prospered. Amos warned God’s people that they

must obey his commands or the Northern Kingdom would be destroyed. The

people did not obey and God followed through on his promise.15 Wealth and

riches are two aspects of the world’s resources that it is our responsibility to

manage - all resources which must be used to please God and serve humanity.

Prosperity is the result of the Lord’s blessings.

You crown the year with bounty

And your carts overflow with abundance.

The grasslands of the wilderness overflow

…they shout for joy and sing.16

God blessed Abraham because of his faith. He blessed him because of his

tithe to Melchizadech, the priest of Salem.

God’s prosperity and blessing is not the same as the Pentecostal TV

evangelist’s prosperity gospel, which is a form of manipulation and magic. It says,

“if you give your tithe to me, God’s anointed, God will bless you”. That is

manipulation for personal gain, not dissimilar to the old Catholic practice of

buying one’s way to heaven. Magic is when one makes a relationship between

one thing being the cause of another. It makes logical links that are not valid

or truthful. First, that because someone (the TV preacher) has money or

crowds, they are successful and blessed. Secondly, that there is a magical

relationship between giving and blessing. Jesus taught that the widow’s mite

was blessed because of her heart. The rich man gave but was not blessed.

The formula is not universal. It is relational. Thirdly, that giving aside from

following other financial principles is all that one must do to experience

God’s blessings. We need to apply all ten of these Biblical principles to see

prosperity! We need to be obedient to all his teaching! This is little different

to the magic many lived under before they were converted!

### Production with Social Responsibility

Economy itself is the creation and production of value. Since at its root, value is an expression of spiritual qualities with moral implications, religion which is the promulgation of values, is intimately connected to the economy. From this perspective religion can be seen as supply-side in nature...true economy becomes the active expression of God-derived qualities in human endeavour, including the process by which we give raw matter value and purpose and turn it into economic “goods”.[[1]](#endnote-1)

The Gospel creates a new productive system as new communities emerge. This has been reinforced in my thinking as I grapple with how the slums generate their own economic systems. A continual influx of people creates new wealth, new markets. Similarly, as a church develops, there is an increasing amount of resources set free for the Kingdom, and a small economic system develops (unless the church invests too heavily or prematurely in buildings or pastoral staff).

Part of the original *Lifestyle and Values of Servants* as we set up a mission among the poor said this:

*We will seek to uplift the economy of the poor by working where possible to get the skills to produce the means of production and control of production into the hands of the labouring poor. This involves assisting those in the richer nations or classes in transferral of technology, tools of production, and initiating capital to the poor. We will encourage the development of cooperatives , home-based industries, and vocational training. Our intended model is development from within communities based on existing and developing values, skills and motivations of the poor, rather than large-scale externally imposed projects*.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Those statements remain as guides to lifelong progressions thirty-five years later. And they reflect broader Christian theological commitments to pressure governments to a process of encouraging productivity that engages the poorest and benefits the poorest through their work.

The Biblical statement of reality that *the poor you will have with you always*, linked to the core Biblical commitment to loving others results in societies that care for the weak, the widows, the orphans, lame, blind etc. We are to share one another’s burdens. This requires an inclusiveness that seeks to overcome social and racial barriers. Including in the workplace.

Social controls are necessary to check inevitable inequalities in any economic system. While we have freedom to *manage the earth*, so that it grows in fruitfulness, this does not grant freedom to *exploit the earth* till it becomes barren as has occurred in Northern India, or in the destruction of Indonesian forests. This in principle puts a limitation on the production of wealth.

Secondly, production is for the common good, the good of all, not simply the good of the individual. Over-production or mal-distribution or lack of access to necessities are all violations of this principle of service to the common good. Economics must have social goals not simply financial ones. Some have suggested the triple bottom line as a methodology for accomplishing this with corporations, but there is little common agreement.

The Sabbath also indicates that a people-based orientation to efficient production is necessary. Production and wealth-making are to be paced to the needs of our human capacities. This is foundational to the development of community organisations, trade unions, cooperatives, that seek to balance the structuring of the needs of the producers against the needs of those who provide capital (the capitalists).

The Jubilee was a clear modelling of a principle of limits to consumption and speculation. It also indicated the necessity of periodic restitution, for all systems develop inequities and injustices.

The concept of justice is not simply a grand theme but involves diligent scrutiny in every society so that there are just transactions at each point.

The nature of work being good is that products must have intrinsic value. Gambling, for example, is not considered good work for it produces nothing of intrinsic value in a community (apart from its destruction of the lives of many, particularly the poor), thus a good society would not have a gambling casino at the centre of a city.

Due regard to social and ecological consequences of production, the means of production, the relationships within the productive system, the relationships between the earth and its people are thus all inherent in the Biblical narrative and provide a basis for constant critique of all economic systems by Christian prophets.

In the area of New Zealand economics, one could ask, to what extent Evangelicals have enabled society to respect the dignity of the human being. Jane Kelsey, in *Reclaiming the Future: New Zealand and the Global Economy*,[[3]](#endnote-3) documented the effects of overly rapid commitment to the positive benefits of free trade with concomitant loss of jobs in several sectors, including 21,000 in the textiles and clothing sector, the loss of sovereignty over many of our national assets and increase in inequity and insecurity. This is 21,000 people who lost their sense of identity and dignity for a time because of a socialist vision hastily imposed on them. That violates the biblical principles of the worth of personhood.

But one must recognise the right wing American perspectives that often surface in the analysis of economic freedom. Since a very high percentage of New Zealand’s GDP is related to exports, we are by necessity committed to a globally open trading structure. However, an *extreme* free trade agenda has demonstrably damaged whole sectors of New Zealand’s business; Margaret Thatcher-style selling of New Zealand’s assets to foreign investors has sold much of New Zealand’s assets that the government managed on behalf of the people to foreigners involved in asset stripping; openness to foreign competition from countries that print billions of dollars is not competition – it can be a tidal wave of dispossession.

Yet one should applaud the attempt to quantify economic freedom which has some roots in the Biblical affirmation of private property. At the same time, we need to reflect from a Biblical perspective whether these measures fulfil the Jubilee mandate of the scriptures to freedom for individual workers not just corporate and financial interests, of periodic redistribution (in post-modern societies this tends to be though yearly redistribution of the tax take through social welfare means).

Alternative approaches might consider the quality of distribution, the protections of workers’ rights rather than the freedom from regulation that protects their rights, the sustaining of an underlying health care and educational systems, the right to free tertiary education, the ratio of income of top executives to workers (Switzerland debated a 7:1 ratio), all as elements essential to national economic freedoms.

## Research on Production in the Slums

We are interested in the nature of economic production in slums and in the manner and extent of integration of this production in globalizing urban economies. The premise is that slums as economic sites are an important “neglected spatiality” in urban and economic geography. Thus far, slums have been studied one-sidedly as places of residence but they are better understood as places of living and working.

Moreover, the conventional liberal economic assumption of slums as an economic category of dysfunctional exclusion is an unsatisfactory explanation. Instead, our thinking is informed by recognizing a myriad of uneven relationships between slums and the wider space economy. The ways in which the production in slums is integrated in the urban economy is likely to shed light on questions of formality/informality, integrated modes of production, and the overall spatial organization of the urban economy.

We present a theoretical argument as to why it is to be expected that production takes place in slums, i.e., why production inside slums makes sense; and why this production is likely to be differentiated as well as stratified in terms of connectivity. Our reasoning is informed by value chain research on small/informal enterprises (Kaplinsky & Morris 2000; McCormick & Schmitz 2001) that specifies the interconnectedness of individual enterprises and links within a chain of production. The distinction between links which are enterprise-to-enterprise and enterprise-to-many enterprises and between vertical (up and down the chain) and horizontal links are useful starting points to our research effort. Firms in slums are also likely to vary in terms of their relationship with intermediaries that shape their connections to markets. Firms may hold a more or less subordinate position in the value chain. It is not clear to what extent production is low-profit, non-core function that is externalized to a competitive and decentralized system of subcontractors (Gibbon & Ponte 2005). It is also possible that production in slums is highly specialized and involves relatively scarce skills, suggesting significant vertical linkages and relatively high added value.

The comparative empirical analysis focuses on economic activities inside slum areas in Mumbai and Johannesburg. We document the nature of production, how it ‘fits’ the milieu of the slum, and how this production is connected to the wider urban economy.

1. What is the nature of economic activity in slums? What kinds of sectors/products? Where does production take place (home/workshops)? Who controls production? What explains the location of production? What is the nature and extent of agglomeration and clustering?  
2. How is this activity connected to the wider economy? What are the relations to suppliers, buyers, associates, partners, producer services, owners? Where do the products end up? How important is this production site to this particular sector, slum and the overall urban economy?

Neglected Spatiality: Economic Geographies of Slums in Mumbai and Johannesburg. Funded by: National Science Foundation, USA (2007-2009). Principal Investigators: Richard Grant and Jan Nijman, University of Miami, USA

1. Brookes, 1986. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Grigg, 1981*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Kelsey, 1999. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)