

## Reflections on The Earth Is the Lord's

### READINGS

My sense of guilt over having plenty of money has lessened to the point where I can openly say I like money, and am happy that God has chosen to entrust me with some. My abundance, however, still contributes to a need to be generous. I'm sure if I lacked money, my pride would leave me feeling great indebtedness to those who helped me, and I would be seeking ways to "pay them back." If I subsidized another person as a regular dependency, I would probably not be able to avoid putting expectation on the other person to show me their gratitude, and to exercise great thrift with the money.

I am in the process now of writing a caring will, and am working with the distribution of the assets I have identified. I am in the position of having no direct dependents and self-sufficient parents. Probably the only family members to be named in the will will be my parents, and perhaps my ex-husband. The majority of my bequests will be directed towards areas where they can be employed, such as the Potter's House of the Church of the Saviour, Jubilee Housing, and Release. I don't know if the poor and the rich can ever live happily together, but I do support the effort to try, and these organi-



*The Sower (after Millet), by Vincent Van Gogh. Pen. 1881.*

zations are real places making real differences in the wide gap between the worlds of the rich and the poor.

More equitable standards of living will have to be accompanied by close and genuine contact, great empathy, and an openness for questioning and sharing of one another's cultural heritage in mutual respect. Probably only a common bond through Christ can bridge such disparities.

I can't believe there is such a thing as a private will, for it is well-known to God. I want my will to speak as a last testimony of the difference Christ has made in my life, in respect to money and its rightful ownership.

—Wellspring<sup>1</sup>

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Our name has been engraved  
on a fully signed check  
to be drawn at will  
from God's bank account  
countless gifts  
of verdant meadows  
and sparkling streams  
of family relationships  
and other friends  
differing talents  
of teaching, singing  
and administration  
of sowing and reaping  
and a multitude of things  
with joy let us cash our check  
with care let us spend it  
with praise let us worship  
Him who gave it

Lois Shank Hertzler<sup>2</sup>

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First of all, property is not grounded in the nature of man or of the things of this world. Rather, it is a privilege that by the will of the Creator is granted to man. If that were not the case, there could be nothing that man would be unable to own and to control. Human property is possible and legitimate only because as Creator, God is Lord of the whole universe—"the earth and the abundance of things in it belongs to the Lord" (e.g., Ps. 24; Hag. 2:8)—and hence man's property rights are to be exercised only within the limits for which they have been granted. It is as God's administrator that man is to own things, and he is to use them for the end for which God made this world. Nothing could be farther away from the truth than the brazen contention of modern man that he is the absolute master of his property and that he can use it for whatever purpose he pleases. The divinely set limitations of ownership apply both to individuals and to collectivities, and they determine their use and consumption as well as the ends for which we employ our money. Man's ability, for instance, to assemble nuclear missiles or to send astronauts to the moon is by no means tantamount to his right to engage in such endeavors. God's comprehensive and sovereign ownership makes it necessary both for the earthly owner and for the church to subject all property and its use to constant scrutiny in the light of God's will. In turn, however, we cannot agree with the ancient Church Fathers, such as Chrysostom and Augustine (in Psalm 118:8,22) who contended that greed only could speak of property rights.

The divine ownership manifests itself in the fact that God not only has brought all things into being, but also keeps them in being, enables them to multiply and through the moral order of the universe prevents wickedness and vices from completely destroying them. Since all of the good things of this world belong to God—and this applies to money no less than to the bounties of nature—they are to be used for the common good of mankind. All existence is based upon the fact that no thing and being exists for itself. They all contribute to each others' lives, and we would not a moment remain in existence or be able to live as a human being if our environment, both human

and nonhuman alike, contributed continuously and permanently to our life and well-being. It is God's will that through our life and property we should enable other people to attain to the full development and fruition of their life. As has been shown, the realization of that goal does not preclude the existence of social classes, nor the operation of cosmic forces. Yet the pattern of holy history, as described in the Bible, requires in the first place particular action. Each act of sharing, even though it may benefit a single individual only, serves the common good when it is motivated by the desire to help him, because he is a human being (cf. the Good Samaritan), that is to say, one whom Christ considers as his brother (Matt. 25:40).

—Otto A. Piper, in *The Christian Meaning of Money*, pp. 47-48<sup>1</sup>

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As I grow in the awareness that God has not only made me a steward (trustee) of all of life as well as the particular of money and possessions, I discover in new and delightful ways the joy and responsibility of giving starting with a critical minimum of the Biblical tithe. As God leads me out into wisdom and generosity and love beyond the tithe, some of the following questions need to be looked at by both the giver and the receiver of the gifts of money.

1. What turns me on, excites me (fulfills) about God's mission in the world—places where I have personal relationships, involvement, or am convinced of effective ministry by others I trust. keeping in mind local, national, and international global concerns as did Christ himself?

2. In my prayer life I ask what persons, groups, institutions, causes have most given and nurtured life in me and my family, that have brought me to this place of wanting to give more to others.

3. Are there other Christian causes about which I need in-

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vestment counsel from trusted advisors, as I might if I were investing in the business world where it's impossible to know all the vital enterprises going on? There are good and poor investments to be made in both the secular and sacred worlds. How can I be stretched appropriately to witness (mission) to the uttermost parts of the earth through my money? Have I considered Third World causes such as hunger and poverty, evangelical and social action and Christian education at all levels?

4. Do I want to make a few major gifts with maximum impact or many smaller encouragement and "thank you" gifts—or a combination of both?

5. Have I secured the finest expertise available to advise me about outright cash gifts, deferred giving, wills, planned giving, etc., so that my total estate is seen in perspective? Am I aware that a very small percentage of lawyers and trust officers (even Christian oriented) are familiar with personal growth potential as well as charitable giving benefits? Do I realize most of these same advisors are by training and spirit more conservative and technically oriented? While this technical understanding is vitally important, a free and liberated spirit of generosity in Jesus Christ is of equal or greater importance and extremely difficult to find. The Grace of giving is more than sterile intellectualism, sentimental emotionalism, activistic pragmatism. It is the very Spirit of Christ incarnate in me as steward and trustee. Money is a part of the power of my being! It is an extended part of myself in this life, and through my will, in the next!

6. Am I aware in myself and in others around me in the Church that *fear*, *insecurity*, and *guilt* are probably the greatest blockages to my liberation and growth in Jesus Christ? Unconscious taboos and uneducated intuition can stifle the life of the power of God right out of my soul.

—Don McClanen, in "The Christian Giving and Receiving of Money"<sup>1</sup>

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## QUESTIONS

1. Why is it so difficult for us to accept the fact that we do not "own" our money and possessions?
2. What are some of the practical implications of the biblical teaching about God as the sole absolute owner of all things? What areas of your life will be influenced by this idea?
3. In what ways would the widespread acceptance of this biblical idea change the economic system in our country?
4. Can you recall any incidents from your past life (especially your childhood) which confirmed your need to possess certain things? Is there anything that could be done to raise children with less of a proprietary attitude toward things in the world around them?
5. Many persons find the idea of God as the sole owner of all things very threatening to their sense of security. Others find it very liberating. What are your own feelings about this and what do these feelings tell you about the nature of your relationship to God?

## MEDITATION

*"Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"* (Psalm 106:1)

Thank you, eternal God, for the wonder, beauty and richness of creation, and for these ageless words that affirm your enduring love and goodness. As they draw me into your presence, the cares of my heart are slowly released. Tightness and tension melt away, and I become more aware of your love flowing through me, as it flows through all creation, restoring and renewing. O Lord, thank you!

### *Quiet*

Thank you, loving God, for the surging power of wind and sea; the steady growth of mighty trees; the sparkle of sunshine

and the sharp cold of snow; the song of a bird and the scent of a rose. Thank you for the miracle of the human body, and for all the experiences the senses bring. Thank you for the warmth of friendship and the many persons who enrich life in countless ways.

Lord, forgive me if I am careless with the earth's resources, or ungenerous and uncaring with others. Help me learn to know the parts of myself that cling to destructive habits and attitudes. How welcome is the good news that you know all people as we really are, with both strengths and weaknesses; that you love us, forgive us when we sincerely ask, and transform us in wonderful ways.

I offer you my self: enter my life in a new and powerful way, teaching me what I need to learn through prayer, your word, and other people. I rejoice that all this mighty and marvelous creation is yours, and thank you for the joy of living as part of it.