

# GOD THE ECONOMIST

M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989),  
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## INTRODUCTION (P. 1-45)

Definition of economy by Webster's Dictionary

### A NEW METAPHOR FOR GOD

According to M. Douglas Meeks who says 'GOD is THE ECONOMIST.'

Economy of God is the distribution of God's righteousness. Righteous God is the one who does steadfast love and justice (Jer. 9:24; 23:5; Ps.15:1-2). God's righteousness is God's power to create/ liberate out of the power of nothingness.

Few people perceive God as an economist. However, the author is right by referring God to economist because the root of the term comes from the meaning of "household."

### BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF ECONOMY: GOD THE HOUSEHOLD

Meeks calls this God "Economist." Greek word from which we derive economy, oikonomia, is a compound of Oikos, household, and nomos, law or management. Therefore, economy means literally "the law or the management of the household." **Household is connected with the production, distribution, and consumption of the necessities of life.** Therefore, the word, household means the site of economy, the site of human livelihood. Household is the mediation of what it takes to live. God is public household. God's own economy is God's life, work, and suffering for the life of the creation (Meeks p. 3).

### ECONOMY, POLITICS, AND POWER (P. 4-5)

#### Democracy

Future democracy depends on the outcome of the context between **liberty and justice**. This context is taking place in a society shaped by the accumulation of **wealth** based on the exchange of property rights. Accumulation of wealth and exchange have replaced livelihood as the center of economy. The Value of economic organization are often held higher than human dignity (Meeks 4). The more the few gain power and privilege through property rights at the expense of the many, the more democracy is injured and no longer counted on as the shape of our future (Meeks 5).

### ECONOMY, DOMINATION, AND EQUALITY (P.10).

#### Equality

means the thrust to abolish the differences that result from wealth, racial and sexual supremacy, ecological rape, and meritocratic privilege. Equality works against the experience of subordination. It works against some people having to fawn, defer, bow, and scrape because other people or groups have power over them. The equalitarian impetus of God's economy is against all forms of domination by which the powerful "grind the faces of the poor." It intends the end of the master-slave relationship; all domination over others (Meeks p. 11).

## ECONOMY AND SCARCITY

### **Scarcity:**

The most basic assumption of modern economy is “scarcity.” Scarcity, it claimed, is the universal presupposition of exchange relationships. No matter how much society will be able to produce, it is claimed, there will always be scarcity. There is never enough to go around because human being always wants more. There is no limit in human wanting (Meeks p. 12).

### **Abundance:**

The biblical tradition uncover God as the Economist who construct the household with a radically different assumption: *If* the righteousness of God is present, there is always enough go to go around. From the manna in the desert, to Jesus’ feeding of the multitudes, to the Lord’s Supper, the biblical traditions depict the superabundance (*pleroma*) of God’s Spirit as the starting point of God’s household and its practice of hospitality (Meeks p. 12)

## **CHAPTER 1. GOD’S ECONOMY AND THE CHURCH**

### Social Situation in Chapter II of the Dissertation

Poverty, homelessness, budget cut for social service program etc, etc,  
I can get these from 25 policy sources also

### **SCARCITY, SATIATION AND SECURITY**

The sense of scarcity does hateful things to the human animal. Territorial, survival, and competitive instincts appear, instincts that are not healthy for homemaking and for enlarging the table for those who do not have enough to survive the day. The sense of scarcity makes the members of the household less accepting and compassionate (Meeks p 17).

Scarcity, satiation, and security produces not only amnesia, but also anesthesia. Drug, alcohol, overconsumption, narcotics for overconsumption, passive absorption in television, and the compulsion to batten down the hatches all have the effect of making us unsensitive to the suffering around us and to inert to remember what we have a right to hope for (Meeks p 18).

Christians think charity is all they can do. But charity doesn’t extend to the basic questions of economics. Same way in regards to homeless issue, charity does not offer them homes or dealing with socio-economic question why people are homeless.

## **THE SEPARATION OF THEOLOGY AND ECONOMICS**

The worship and life of churches in our society appear isolated from the economic context. Christians have often been unaware of the ways in which economic system have

distorted Christian faith and the way in which perverted religious notions have dehumanized economic relationships. The predominant economic values have sometimes been virulently anti-Christian. Yet church people have tended to assume that the economic environment of the church had nothing to do with faith. (Meeks p 19).

Meeks assert that **unjust economic conditions destroy the true worship** of the Triune God and worshiping God in distorted ways contributes to the dehumanization of economic life. Both comments suggest that God and economy must be thought together because theology and economy are correlative (Meeks p. 20).

### **FAITH AND THE AMBIGUITY OF ECONOMICS**

American theologian Andrew Carnegie suggested we could give surplus to “deserving poor,” and Meeks comments that the voluntary giving of left-over money and time is often as far as the church goes in dealing with economy (Meeks p 23).

### **THE CHURCH’S OIKONOMIA**

Meeks claims that the doctrine of the church is the doctrine of the economy of God’s household (Col. 1:25; 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2). Because the church exists for the sake of God’s love of the world (John 3:16), there can be no sound teaching about the church that does not include the relationship of the church to our society’s economy and the world’s economy (Meeks p 23).

God’s interest is transforming the world into a household in which all God’s creatures can find abundant life. God’s economy in Israel and Jesus Christ is to begin with the poor and oppressed, those who are most threatened by death and evil, in order to build a new household for all of God’s creatures (Meeks p 24).

We realized that the first thing theology should serve is the liberation of the household of Jesus Christ from many of our own self-interests. Meeks claim that the North American theology is continually threatened with the temptation to forget the church. He asks ourselves are not our churches among the most segregated, sexist, and classist institutions in our society? (Meeks p. 24).

Some times we focus on liberating the poor and the oppressed without even being aware that their poverty and oppression are immediately connected with our sin and our death-serving systems (Meeks p. 25).

## **CHAPTER 2: RECONCEPTUALIZING GOD AND ECONOMY**

Meeks claims that for the new testament writers and the early theologians, “economy was not only knowledge of God’s two great works, creating the world and saving human beings, but also every detail in the life of the world that might have to do with God (Meeks p. 29) because matters of life and death, good and evil, order and disorder, all belong to economy. Thus the redemptive work of God has traditionally been referred to as God’s “economy” (Meeks p. 29).

### **OIKOS AS CORRELATIVE TERM**

1. The Old Testament traditions had already appropriated *oikos* (or bayith) from their environment and used it with decisive theological intentionality. Israel’s life in relation to God and its historical environment is often described in terms of having a home or being at home in opposition to being homeless or being uprooted from home. The household is at the heart of most Israelite. The household is at the heart of most Israelite definition of community. Oikos is a principal way of speaking of God’s covenantal bond with Israel (Ex. 19:4-5). God has created Israel as a household out of many tribes and is accordingly viewed as constructor and ruler of the household. The wrath of God brings down unfaithful households and restores anew the household of faith (Jer. 31:28; 33:7; Amos 9:11) (Meeks p. 34).

2. From the perspective of biblical traditions *oikos* can be understood first as the household in which God wants to give people access to life; second, it is the household of the creation in which God wants God’s creatures to live together in symbiosis; third, the *oikos* is the world that God wants to make into a home by establishing God’s justice and peace among the peoples and nations. God’s oikic work integrates economy, ecology, and *oikoumene* and demonstrates that redemption must be found interdependently in all of these dimensions (Meeks p. 34).

3. Oikos can be a key for both social analysis and hermeneutic. Oikos is a way of speaking of the collaborative character of the disciplines and fields that serve the church (Meeks p. 35).

4. Oikos encompasses the question of inclusion in the household as well as solidarity with those who are excluded from the household, both of which are primary signs of liberation (Meeks p. 36).

To receive God’s justice is to receive access to home. What is home?

In Robert Frost’s poem “the Death of the Hired Man,” “home” is defined as “the place where, when you have to go there, they have take you in.” Home is where everyone knows your name. Home is where you can always count on being confronted, forgiven, loved, and cared for. Home is where there is always a place for you at the table. And, finally, home is where you can count on sharing what is on the table. According to the creation narratives, not just human beings but every one of God’s creatures has a right to a name and access to “table” (Meeks p. 36).

5. Finally, Oikos is an ecclesiological key for speaking of the church as the “household of God,” existing for the sake of God’s liberation of the polis and the kosmos

through God's liberation of the poor, the oppressed, the sinners, and the dying. To be no longer "strangers and aliens" but "members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19-22; cf. Heb. 10:21) means becoming a part of God's attempt to bring all of God's creatures into God's economy of life (Meeks p. 36).

### **GOD'S JUSTICE AND THE MARKET LOGIC (P. 37).**

For Crisis for the Christian church in North America is that it has become too much absorbed into the market society in whose logic God's grace and God's justice cannot appear. The more the market logic threatens to become the church's way of organizing its life, the more the economy of the church is defined by the prevailing economy of our society and the more market rules determine what we mean by justice (Meeks p.37).

### **Logic of the market economy and the logic of God's economy (p. 37)**

Every developed country has **markets**, including Soviet Union and its satellites. The modern market is one of the most powerful social arrangements in our memory. Its successes are immense. It has wrought astounding "miracles" in raising the standard of living for millions of people over the past 150 years. As a system of distributing commodities it is unparalleled in effect (Meeks p. 37).

The **problems** are basically two. **The first** is the pretension of the market logic when it is considered a complete system for the distribution of all social goods. The market logic is pretentious when it enters many spheres of human social life and threatens to determine the whole of life. In our time the market logic is again presented as the fundamental way of organizing all of life. **The second problem** has to do with the way the privileges of capital bring about domination in the market despite the official claims that the market is free of domination (Meeks p. 39).

Karl Polanyi has called it "**market society**." Exchange relationships replace all other social relationships. The logic of accumulation and exchange invades every dimension of life. When this happens many persons are excluded from livelihood. "Surplus people," those who cannot be fit into the existing modes of production and consumption, are created (Meeks p. 38).

According to the most zealous prophets of the **market**, there is nothing that is not potentially a commodity for exchange. They argue that we can solve our problems by transfiguring water, air and health into commodities and putting them into the market .There are some good aspects to the anonymous, automatic workings of the market. But it does not distribute all social goods justly (Meeks p. 38).

**The gospel has a logic;** it is a logic which comes from the Logos, Jesus Christ. The logic of the gospel is meant for the world. which God loves with God's whole being. The church is an agency of God's gospel economy for the world. The church cannot be such a servant of God's passion for the world if it is determined by the market logic (Meeks p. 39).

Israel and the church have always known that parent-child relationships cannot be put into the market logic. Other social goods that Israel and the church have always known

cannot be placed into market include kinship, recognition, offices, food, housing, and farm fields (Meeks p. 40).

The interest of God in Jesus Christ is that the poor, the oppressed, the sinners , and the dying may live abundantly (Meeks p. 40).

### **Ways of Correlating God and Economy – P. 41**

#### **WAYS OF CORRELATING GOD AND ECONOMY;**

1). **Disclosive approach** emphasizes the way God concepts influence economics. Divinity finds its image in human and social constructs. The way we think about God ultimately will be the way we think about ourselves and our institutions (Meeks p. 41).

2). **The critical method** stresses the way God concepts are actually produced by the economic conditions of society. God concepts, it is claimed, emerge out of the modes of property, work, and consumption in society. God concepts simply reflect the social, economic, and political conditions. This approach recognizes that human beings project their own gods. They produce god out of their wish desires, their aspirations, and out of a compulsion to legitimize their power advantages (Meeks p. 41).

3). **Transformative approach** is concerned with transformative character of religious truth. To speak of the truth of faith one must speak of how faith transforms human action (Meeks p. 42).

#### **THE CONTEXT OF TRANSFORMATIVE CORRELATION**

Theological correlation of the God of Jesus Christ and economy should take place in the midst of and for the sake of those who have been denied access to the household in our society and to the global household. This context and starting point is indicated by God's own economy and God's own character, not simply by social analysis. **God's own economic work begins with those who have been excluded from the household** (Meeks p. 43).

Theology sets out in critical solidarity with victims of the way property, work, and consumption are practiced. The victims are those who have no work or whose work distorts their lives and who thus cannot contribute to the household. the conditions and relationships of their work often destroy the possibility of home.

They are those whose lives are distorted by the modes of consumption in our consumer society, which puts consumption of luxuries ahead of the needs of others and defines certain people culturally as losers. Christian theology, because of who God is, begins in solidarity with those who are excluded (Meeks p. 43).

This means that Christian transformative correlation of God and economy should be lodged in the church. The church is God's attempt to build a household that will join God in making the world into home (Meeks p. 44).

Economics should be basically about the relationship of those within the household. In Jesus' taking up the towel, God's power for life is disclosed as servanthood. The household is constituted by *diakonia*, by the mutual self-giving of the persons of the household in service to each other. Diakonia is not simply church members serving each other. Rather it is the praxis by which Christian disciples learn how to engage in the economic work of God in the world (Meeks p. 45).

The "household" of God exists as an agent of God's work to make the world into a household in which all of God's creatures will find access to life. The church's public acts of evangelization and mission will have increasingly to focus on God's economy in relation to the world's existing economies (Meeks p. 45).

## **CHAPTER 3: GOD AND THE MARKT LOGIC. P. 47**

God is not needed in the modern market.

### **THE ECLIPSE OF GOD IN THE MARKET**

17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, beginning with the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 political economy had almost completely removed God as a concern of its work. Adam Smith was the first to envision a vast economic universe that could function on its own. His main point was that it should be left to function on its own (Meeks p. 48).

Meeks claim that modern liberal theology for the most part has spoken of God as a dimension of human experience and has left the economic as well as political and natural dimensions to the sciences and technologies which can discern the laws of the accumulation of capital, of the rational control of people, and of the extraction of resources from nature (Meeks p. 48). *Oikos* underwent extreme truncation (cut): *oikos became market*. Hegel described a society whose public life was totally determined by the "laws" of production and consumption. Hegel noted a small area of life left free, namely the private, the interior, the intimate, the familial. Much of modern theology has traded on this area of life as the only dimension left to theology and the church. Theology has put itself in the position of having little to say about access to livelihood (Meeks p. 48).

In our society, power is denominated in the form of capital. In the modern world the church-state antagonism over authority has been replaced by the configuration of state and market. State authority and market exchange/production are the two basic ways in which modern society is organized. And theology became essentially apolitical, privatistic, and individualistic. Under the regime of capital, conception of God and economy together became unnecessary due to the powerful success of the modern market (Meeks p 49).

Market economy was produced and then a market society. Karl Polanyi describes: Market economy organized human beings into industrial units ...mainly engaged in buying and selling for profit. Man's ultimate dependence on nature and his fellows for

the means of his survival was put under the control of the market. And the whole society embedded in the mechanism of its own economy – *a market society*(Meeks p 50).

### **MARKET AND LIBERTY (P. 50).**

The liberal theory is a theory of liberation from despotism and poverty. It can organize millions of human beings and coordinate massive human energies *without external authority*. The distribution of income, the allocation resources, and the growth of economy can all be accomplished by the market without coercion. Thus, it is claimed, the control of human behavior in the market mechanism works without domination, coercion, and exploitation. Its assumptions promote liberty in such a way that domination is masked (Meeks p 51)

**The consequence** is that the market can take the place of state and church and even the family. God concepts that provided these institutions with authority systems could be replaced; unintended outcome of self-interested, self-guided activities of individuals (Meeks p 51).

Precisely this is domination; the expansion of the logic of distributing commodities to nearly all spheres of social goods in society. Such dominative power destroys the access to livelihood of many persons, distorts human life as possessive individualism, and undermines democracy (Meeks p 52).

### **THE PECULIARLY ECONOMIC: EXCHANGE OR LIVELIHOOD? (P. 52).**

**A gain in value:** When people choose between alternatives in a particular way, that is, by incurring a **loss** through choosing what is worth more, we refer to an economic reality. What constitutes an economic choice is that people **give up** something of value in order to get what they value more (Meeks p. 53).

Thus the peculiar characteristic of economic reality is *costly choice*. What is it worth to me? What do I have to give up to get it? Therefore, any aspect of life can be looked at from an economic perspective when we ask, Who pays the costs of a costly choice? In principle anything can be exchanged, put into the market to be bought or sold. Lionel Robbins' **classic definition of economics** demonstrates the components of the modern definition: "**Economics is the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses**" (Meeks p 53).

**Formal and Substantive definitions of economics:** While the substantive definition denotes *livelihood*, the formal definition denotes *scarcity*. The two meanings have separate roots; they have nothing in common. **The formal definition of market exchange excludes *livelihood*** from the shaping of the household. This the most fateful development in modern economy. It accompanies the eclipse of God from the market (Meeks p 53).

**The substantive definition** (of economics) points to the fact that human beings cannot exist for long without a physical environment that sustains them and without fellow beings who provide institutions through which they can relate to their surroundings. The

wants to be satisfied are by no means exclusively bodily needs, but so longs as wants depend for their fulfillment on material objects, the reference is economy (Meeks p 53).

The laws made clear that the great mechanism of the market was governed exclusively by the human incentives of *hunger an gain* (that is, the fear of going without the necessities of life and the expectation of profit).

Thus the nineteenth-and twentieth-century market society has ideologically organized itself around *hunger an gain* as the sole effective motives for the individual's participation in economic life (Meeks p 54).

In market society one-fifth to one-fourth of its members have been excluded from the livelihood of he public household (Meeks p 55). This (market economy) is the root cause why the U.S. has 45 million people suffer from poverty.

### **THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF THE LIBERAL THEORY (P. 55)**

**God is public household** and everyone is invited in and allowed to live there forever. The world as a household exclude people. Instead of housing them leave them homeless, instead of feeding them leave them starving. If God is the household church must be the household which means church must welcome all those who are not making it on their own. Our modern economic system is entirely opposite from God's and even our household. In our household we don't let any member go hungry, naked and cold. No matter how poor we may be we share the little we have with one another.

**When Korean independent movement leaders worked underground in China in 20s-30s,** one time they were so starving but had only one cup of noodle for three of them. It was such small amount that they decided that each one would eat the noodle with one piece of chopsticks so that no one can eat more. That is the spirit of true household. In our household if one member is sick or unhappy the whole household is unhappy sharing the pain of other members. That is the true household. If human household is this way, how much more the God's household would welcome and share? Therefore, God's household economy is entirely different from the world economy. Household of God opposes all domination and master-slave relationship. It is loving relationship. I like this way of describing God so much that I will love to use this in my dissertation.

### **Theological Critique of the Liberal Theory (P. 55)**

Liberation theology argues that solidarity with the poor and oppressed is the means of thinking theologically, for it is the only way that does not mask reality with the stubborn blindness and insensitivity of the liberal theory to those who suffer from market arrangements (Meeks p. 56). Church and theology in North America must become conscious of the economic functions of their belief, worship, organization, and mission in society.

Theology would need, first, to unmask the claim that God is absent in the market economy by showing the presence of dominative God concepts in the ideology of the market society and, second, to point to the presence of the living God of Israel and of

Jesus Christ in the struggle of those who suffer economic, political, and cultural domination (Meeks p. 56).

It is generally understood that the way human beings think about God will determine the way they think about themselves. It has been characteristic to think of God in terms of mastery and thus to ground the rulership of human beings over others. This political function of theology in traditional society has been noted by many theologians since Augustine. But in our time it is scarcely recognized by theology and church that the view of the human being in market culture provides a similar ground for rulership; and mastery (Meeks p.56).

“Livelihood” traditionally was the fundamental meaning of oikonomia. Market theory offers liberty by failing to include livelihood within exchange relationships. Politico-economic theology will ask about ways in which the market fails to allocate what is necessary to life and will point out the lack of freedom and equality in a market system in which everything is directed to the accumulation of wealth (Meeks p. 57).

#### Roots of Domination in the Market (P. 58)

“Domination” means unaccountable power to command and control the behavior of others. It is also the ability to determine the logic of distribution in a sphere beyond a social good’s own proper sphere of distribution (Meeks p.58). Domination enters into exchange and production relationship by means of the determination of property and work (Meeks p. 59).

In market society capital is not a material thing, goods, or money, but rather a social process. It is a “web of activities.” A crucial factor in the shaping of the social formation of the market society is that wealth is understood as an “expansive value” instead of the traditional “use value.” What characterizes surplus in a market society is that wealth is used not as an end in itself but as a means for gaining more wealth. The capitalist form of extracting wealth is an expansive use of surplus, that is, it is the utilization of surplus to increase the power of a dominant class. The regime of capital is the” form of rulership we find when power takes the remarkable aspect of the domination, by those who control access to the mans of production, of the great majority who must gain “employment” (Meeks p. 59).

In the market society wealth “inhabits things only transiently.” We speak of capitalist wealth only when there is a continuous “transformation of capital-as-money into capital-as commodities, followed by a retransformation of capital-as-commodities into capital as money.” No object of wealth is an end itself but rather only a stage of a never-ending cycle of expanding metamorphoses. The fundamental logic or trajectory of the market society, then, is the process of the accumulation of wealth. The nature of capitalism is the sublimation of the drive for power into the driver for capital (Meeks p.59).

Whereas in precapitalist societies wealth was generally associated with prestige, in the market society wealth is a social category inseparable from power. What

distinguishes wealth from mere prestige goods is its power to mobilize activities of society, to enlist command and obedience on a vast scale. The ability to command comes from the rights of denying others access to the goods that constitute livelihood. These rights are property rights (Meeks p. 59).

This gives rise to the decisive social relationship of domination in market society: the social dependency of propertyless persons who have lost access to means of livelihood. This relationship of dependency requires the dissolution of older social formations, in particular the dissolution of the laws and customs that allowed peasants to retain a portion of the crops they raised and supported the worker's owning their means of production. The result was the disruption of centuries-old rights of direct access to the product of one's own work. In their stead came new rights by which peasants and workers could be legally excluded from access to what they needed to live and work (Meeks p.59-60).

Wealth cannot exist in a simple egalitarian society in which all have access to the resources needed for life lived in a customary way. Wealth, at least wealth as power, exists when and only when the right to access of all members of society to livelihood is denied, so that being able to control this access assumes life and death proportions (Meeks p. 60). Wealth can exist only when there exists a condition of scarcity. The "scarcity" in the logic of the market is not an insufficiency of resources but rather an insufficiency of the means of access to resources. The domination of capital will work only if the means of access to livelihood can be made scarce (Meeks p. 60). In this market logic, the owners of money have the rights of exclusion; the right to refuse to allow their possessions to be used by others. The power wielded by capitalists is the power to withhold support, no matter how necessary to life that support may be. The right to withhold things from use for livelihood if their owners see fit constitutes their domination of and authority in the sphere of production and exchange (Meeks p. 60).

There is no visible symbols of power that point to the capacity of capitalists to utilize force or inflict suffering on those who refuse to obey their commands, as is the case in the social relationship of soldier to officer, citizen to state official, or sinner to priest. Implicit is the notion of voluntary submission to the commands of the owners of capital. When one submits "voluntarily," one cannot be said to be dominated (Meeks p. 61).

Where is domination? Property rights and wage labor. Property (p. 61)

Labor is the other primary dimension in which the dominative power of capital is present. If people are compelled to work only by the impersonal requirement of the system, it cannot be said that they are being forced by human authority. So, it is claimed, there is no coercion, no domination, within exchange situations of work.

Impersonal coercion is not authority and does not threaten freedom. Whatever happens within exchange is acceptable because it has been chosen (Meeks p. 62).

Both the employer and the employee have the right of refusal (exit) that protects each from the coercive use of his or her property (capital or capacity to labor). This is the essential political foundation of capital and its essential moral justification (Meeks p. 62).

Livelihood is at stake in market systems. When people have nothing to offer in their pursuit of livelihood except their labor, they must depend on jobs alone to protect their freedom in the market. They are vulnerable to coercion when jobs are scarce and insecure. When livelihood is involved in exchange, the employer can coerce the employee. Anyone who has job to offer can coerce a job applicant (Meeks P. 63).

Market arrangements ruled by absolute exclusive property rights and wage labor are not free of power to coerce and thus cannot be free of politics (Meeks P. 63).

### **THE ACQUISITIVE HUMAN BEING: JUSTIFYING THE PROCESS OF ACCUMULATION P. 64)**

Capitalist's efforts to acquire wealth are subordinated to the objective requirements of the market, that is, the purchase of buyers. Production and exchange follow the wants and needs of consumers. This claim is a central way in which domination is masked. For it can then be idealistically claimed that the capitalist, forced to accept the costs and price levels imposed by the market, is without any power whatsoever. This is the historic apologia for capitalism: The needs and the desire of the public must be satisfied in order to gain wealth (Meeks P. 64).

### **GOD CONCEPTS IN THE MARKET ASSUMPTIONS (P.64)**

1) In the first God concept, God is infinite, immutable, indivisible, immortal, independent and self-sufficient (having no needs), and impassible(incapable of suffering). The God defined this way does not go outside of himself and does not have relations with other beings, for he is self-sufficient. He has no needs outside of himself. This being does not change or suffer and therefore cannot love but only be loved. This being does not change his mind or repent and therefore incapable of forgiving. He does not suffer from death. This God is a radically individual being, a monas. This was imperial God. This God is as absolute “owner of the world” is a theological key to Western politics down to the seventeenth century and in a hidden way remains a key to economics in our time (Meeks p. 67). Human being became God in market economy

2) The second way is eliminating this God: This God concept was the ground of political rulership by which limits were placed on all transactions. Eliminating such a God concept seems to be required to make way for an anthropology adequate to a market economy. The market psychology of the “economic human being” led to a new image of personality. Whereas God had once been thought of as the transcendent, ultimate “maximizer,” now the human being takes over the attributes of “infinity.” The human being is now viewed as an infinite acquisitor, an infinite appropriator, an infinite antagonist against scarcity, and an infinite consumer.

The human being is naturally infinitely desirous. This is human nature, which, according to the official doctrine of market society, cannot be changed. And thus all possible economic theory and practice must be measured by the opportunistic human

being with a constant sense of scarcity and urge to competition and maximization. In market anthropology it is assumed that the unlimited human capacity for production/creativity grounded in progress overcomes absolute scarcity. Divine attributes in the classical concept of God are now lodged in the market definitions of the human being. They become the substance of a concept of the market human being. The market human being becomes an uncritical reflection of the emperor deity. The human being as producer or growth and efficiency and as rational calculator of costs and benefits has to have unlimited power to dispose property. Now it becomes natural to think of the human being as possessing the infinite attributes of God. The “imperial” attributes remain but with no limit. The human being as “owner of the world” is the key to the basic behavioral assumption of modern economics. Domination in the market is justified by attributes of human nature that are derived from older concepts of God. The older power and authority attributes of God have been assumed by the human being (Meeks p. 68-69). Those who own are free to rule.

3). A third way of speaking of God renders God with the biblical traditions and thus speaks of God as the promiser, as the one who makes covenants, as the one who dwells with human beings and sides with the poor and oppressed, as the one who is immanently present in the creation and as the one who is God precisely by constituting God’s power in these ways. The human being is uncovered in the oikonomia tou theou, in which God is present for the sake of human livelihood, indeed, for “life abundant.” This is the way God’s oikonomia, the gospel, renders God (Meeks p. 70).

The Trinity is the view of God that arises out of, interprets, and through constant criticism protects the gospel’s rendering of God as the communal relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which comes to expression in the history of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the Trinity may be understood as a kind of logic of God’s economy that creates access to livelihood by the gifting of God’s righteousness, which is God’s power for life. The Trinity will therefore be a means of demythologizing God concept that undergird utopian and ideological depictions of exchange and production. Trinitarian views of God’s freedom and power should be set over against claims made about liberty, property, and work according to the modern rules of exchange and production based on the market view of the human being (Meeks p. 70).

**The Trinity** came and comes from the church’s primary experience of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Who God is we know from the history of God’s righteousness with the world.

Who God is we know through the story of Jesus, which is continuous with the story of Israel and ultimately includes the creation and the eschaton. In the first place the Trinity is a formula for understanding and living the story of Jesus. Everything that can be said of the Trinity emerges from the relationship among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the story of Jesus.

The Trinity is a name for God’s economy in Jesus. The Trinity is thus the conceptual framework for understanding that the history of Jesus crucified and raised is the history of God (Meeks p. 71).

The character of the **triune community** is not empty infinity but rather faithfulness to the love that is God's being. This love is not pure expansiveness but has the character of self-giving seen in Jesus Christ. God's love is God's freedom not to forsake God's character. God's freedom is God's ability to remain faithful to God's love. The God known in Jesus and Israel is not impassible but rather suffers and identifies with those who suffer. The God known in Jesus and Israel is a community constituted by the relationships of persons with peculiar characteristics and tasks. Each is constituted by his/her reciprocal relationship to the others. There is no domination of others and no principle of hierarchy. Each has distinctive identity and work, but except for these, they have all things in common. The work of the God known in Jesus and Israel does not coerce the other in an ends-means relationship but is the free gifting of God, which serves life and invites the free response of the other for the sake of the life of the community (Meeks p. 72).

Life in the church of Jesus Christ should make plain that human beings are fully responsible for all social relationships in which they enter (Meeks p. 73)

## **CHAPTER 4: GOD THE ECONOMIST. P. 75**

In antiquity, an “**economist**” was a household servant, one who was by definition unfree. An economist was what our culture has termed a “steward.” The English word “steward” is derived from the Middle English *stigweard* or *styward*. A styward was one who kept the pig pen in the summer so that the household would not starve in the winter. *Styward* became *steward*, which signified one who cared for the livelihood and survival of the household. *Steward* nicely catches the ancient significance of one who lived an economic existence rather than a political existence (Meeks p. 76).

It made sense to refer to God as a political being because God in the Greco-Roman culture was by definition absolutely free. God could be called a “household” or a *pater familias* (father of the household) because householders were free persons and thus capable of living politically. In antiquity only those who possessed property could leave the economic sphere, in which the necessities of life were produced and reproduced, and enter into the free public space of the polis. Politics was to rule economics, the householder was to rule the household, as the mind rules the body or the man rule the woman. To speak of God as an Economist would have designated the divine attributes that made God freely omnipotent and omnipotently free. God could epitomize political existence but could not be associated with economic life (Meeks p.76).

In the modern world, **economist** is connected with power gained through the market. Given the fact that our culture generally regards economy as more important than politics, it will perhaps be possible for many in our time to appreciate the notion of God as property-owning householder.

We shall argue, however, that the biblical traditions speak of God (1) as householder in radically different ways than either antiquity or modernity would construe that word, and (2) as Economist in the ancient sense of the word, namely, as household servant. In both senses the biblical perspective on God as Economist would seem scandalous not only in

antiquity but also in modernity. But it is precisely this different perspective on God and economy that the church has to offer today in the struggle for a more humane economy. To call God the economist means that the God of Israel and of Jesus Christ is fundamentally identified through what God does in relation to household building and management. Calling God Economist is in no way meant to designate God, but rather to express God's life and work with biblical concreteness (Meeks p. 77).

The economy of God is the distribution of God's righteousness. *Righteousness* in the biblical traditions, refers to God, the "righteous one" (Is. 24:16), the One who does "steadfast love, justice, righteousness in the earth" (Jer. 9:24; cf. Jer. 23:5; Ps. 15:1-2). Righteousness is the expression of God's being in what God does. God's righteousness means God's power to create/liberate life out of the power of nothingness (*nihil*). God's economy is fundamentally about God's struggle with death, the power of the *nihil* (Meeks p. 77).

This struggle can be seen in the great economic acts of God: the exodus, the creation, and the resurrection. Each economic act calls forth corresponding economic acts on the part of God's own economist, the human being (Meeks p. 77).

### **THE LIBERATOR ECONOMIST (P. 78)**

The exodus is the initiating event of Israel's history in which through the act of righteousness God calls the people of Israel out of the death which is slavery. The event is thoroughly economic. The first truly historical question of Israel is in whose household and in what kind of household it will live. Israel's history begins in the household of slavery. Israel lives in Pharaoh's economy. Israel comes to know God through its history of struggling to conform to God's economy, which is a household of freedom (Meeks p 78).

"In the land of affliction" Joseph, the lowly Hebrew, is blessed by God and elevated to great heights. As Pharaoh's economist, Joseph manages the food stores so well that he redeems the nation from famine. His economic work leads to his being called :the lord of the land," for, the Egyptian say, "You are like Pharaoh himself" (Gen. 44:18).

When his brothers are finally confronted by the well-disguised Joseph, he gives a stirring definition of a true economist: "God sent me before you to preserve life ... And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors " (Gen. 45:5b, 7). The work of an economist is preserving, keeping alive. The biblical traditions treat Joseph as the first great economist, on whom "all the earth" was dependent and whose economics meant survival (Meeks p 78).

Joseph's economic power grew into massive political power. He used famine as a way of centralizing power, gaining control over the land, and creating a labor force. That led ultimately to the affliction of God's people. In some senses it is as insightful as the analyses of modern political economists. In the midst of extreme famine the people came to Joseph to buy food. When their money had run out, he required them to pay with their cattle and flocks and asses, their means of livelihood and work. When money and

stock were gone, he required their land and work in exchange for food. “Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we with our land will be salves to Pharaoh ....(Gen. 47:19). “So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for all the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them.” And then comes that most ominous report which sets the stage for God’s history with us to the present day: “**The land became Pharaoh’s; and as for the people, he made slaves of them from one end of Egypt to the other.**” To whom does the land belong? To whom do human beings belong? Without money, without livestock and tools, without land, **the people had only themselves and their labor to sell.** Joseph’s management of Pharaoh’s economy had certainly been successful at first. But its logic became inhumane. “**Economic miracles**” often lead to conditions in which some become masters of the many, in which some exclude others from household (Meeks p 79).

“Only the land of **priests** he did not buy; for the priest had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh, and lived on the allowance; therefore they did not sell their land” Gen. 47:20-22). Throughout the premonarchical and prophetic traditions those in charge of the economy and those in charge of the religious cult are mutually dependent on each other. **Economic oppression cannot exist without its religious justifications** (Meeks p 79).

**The conditions of slavery that the children of Israel were to suffer were prepared by a son of Israel.** The greatest economist succumbed to a household management that seemed to promise life but ended by serving death, an economy of slavery. Israel could not expect ever again “economic miracle” from an economist the likes of Joseph. “There arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” (Ex. 1:8). Now Israelites were integrated in the economy of slavery. The taskmasters “made the people of Israel serve with rigor, and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field; (Es. 1:13-14). **Joseph’s people build the Pharaoh’s storehouses as slaves. To be slaves means to be excluded from the household** while providing the life conditions for others in the household (Meeks p 79-80).

**The liberating Economist God** defines God’s life in radically different terms. Not abstracted beyond human suffering and need, the Economist speaks this way: “ I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them ..”(Ex. 3:7-8b).

**This is the God who dwells among the slaves, who makes God’s home among the forsaken so that they can come out into a new home of freedom. This God has a domicile in a people who are no people** (Meeks p. 80).

Moses, yet another but exceedingly reluctant economist in God’s dealing with Israel, confronts the strange phenomenon of the burning bush that is not consumed. Out of it comes first the promise of God’s dwelling with God’s people, Immanuel. Then, on the basis of this promise comes the voice, a command that Moses go to Egypt and free the Economist’s people. Moses’s immediate reply is, “Not on your life!” For one thing Moses has already been to Egypt; he knows firsthand the harsh repression of Pharaoh’s political economy. ... Moses wants to know how it is possible to speak of the liberating

Economist (God) in the midst of the Egyptian economy. How can a life giving counter-Economist be known in an economy determined by death-serving systems from which only a few benefit and which even slaves see a destiny to be endured? (Meeks p. 81).

### God's Household is like this: Litany of Home:

- Leader:** Dear Jesus, you are our *home*.
- People:** Your home is filled with your unconditional *love*.
- Leader:** Your home is filled with your *life* that raises the perishing.
- People:** Your home is filled with your *hope* that uplifts the despairing;
- Leader:** Your home is filled with your *grace* that forgives unforgivables.
- People:** Your home is filled with your *compassion* that feels other's pain.
- Leader:** Your home is filled with your *shalom* that ends all wars.
- People:** Your home is filled with your *security* that stops all violence.
- Leader:** Your home is filled with your *justice* for all the suffering.
- People:** Your home is filled with your *freedom* that knows no slavery.
- Leader:** Your home is filled with your *equality* that knows no discrimination.
- People:** Your home is filled with your *wholeness* that heals all brokenness.
- Leader:** Your home is filled with your *rainbow colors* that shatters all racism.
- People:** Your home is filled with your *unity* that mends all divisions.
- Leader:** Your home is filled with your *honor* that praises the most lowly.
- People:** Your home is filled with your *welcome* that embraces all the strangers.
- Leader:** Your home is filled with your *bread* that is shared with all the hungry.
- People:** Your home is filled with your *water* that quenches all the thirst.
- Leader:** Your home is filled with your *abundance* that knows no poverty.
- People:** Your home is filled with your *rooms* for all the homeless.
- All:** God created us in the *image* of God's home. But our greed and injustice evicted us and others from your home. Dear Jesus, restore us back to your home. Amen

(Jean Kim. Jubilee Manual).

God's command will send Moses into the place where God is working for a new household for God's people. There in the midst of this struggle for a new economy, Moses will find out who God is. The Economist God will be known insofar as one takes part in God's economic work (Meeks p. 82).

The great event of liberation is leaving the household of hated slavery. The name of God becomes a narrative description of God's economic act: "I am the one who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house (economy) of bondage"(Ex. 20:1). God is

economist as the One who brings us out of economy of bondage. God does not appear as a landlord or a real estate agent. God appears as one who liberates slaves from a household where people cannot be fully human (Meeks p. 82).

Yahweh's exclusive right to or claim on the household of Israel is based on his liberation of them from the house of bondage (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6, 7-21). "And you shall remember that you were a slave (oiketes) in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out ..." (Deut. 5:15). This God is interested in a new household whose distribution will make for life against death. This God stands against all justifications of slavery, against making people commodities for the economic process. This God wills to create an economy of freedom (Meeks p. 82).

This liberator Economist demonstrates faithfulness by doing economic acts of righteousness. Going before the people, Yahweh "does a righteousness," by providing the people with manna in the wilderness or with water from a rock in the desert. Succoring and nurturing God's people, God makes home for them in uninhabitable place. "Yahweh's house" refers often to the cultic tent or the Temple in Jerusalem. But it also refers to dwelling in or with Yahweh as the One who takes in the "resident alien," Israel. In the God's "courts" or "tent," or under the "shadow of God's wings," God is Economist as host who gives the hospitality of life, that is, as the One who provides everything that is needed for the life that is not subject to slavery (Meeks p. 82).

### **THE TORAH KEEPER AS ECONOMIST**

Life in God's household of freedom means living in obedience to God's way of distributing righteousness. Keeping God's Torah economy is life; disregarding God's Torah economy is death. Those who live in the exodus community, in the household of freedom, learn in covenant faithfulness what the Torah requires in the distribution of what it takes for everyone in the household to live (Meeks p. 84).

Torah means guidance for the life of righteousness in God's household. The Torah intends to ground laws that defend the poor. "Laws favoring the weaker members of society demonstrate the ethos of the exodus experience wherein Yahweh delivered helpless slaves ... Poor and weak Israelites were given the identity of brothers and sisters to encourage society to care for them." The Torah rests within the framework of Yahweh's promise that poverty will cease (Deut. 15:4-5). The economic ethos of early Israel can be summed up as follows:

You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless (Ex. 22:21-24; cf. Deut. 24:17-18) (Meeks p. 84).

The Covenant Code (Ex. 20:22-23:33), the Deuteronomic Code (Deut. 12-26), and the Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26) all protected the endangered livelihood of the weak. They

picture what is necessary for all of God's people to have access to the household, to what it takes to live (Meeks p. 85).

The motive for God's defense of the poor, the stranger, the orphan, the widow, and the needy is made transparent through out the legal codes; Yahweh himself liberated Yahweh's people when they were strangers and oppressed; therefore Yahweh's redeemed people should show the same compassion toward the homeless ones in their midst (Ex. 22:21; 23:9), for to be homeless means to be subjected to slavery.

It is as if Yahweh says constantly, "It cost me too much suffering and grief to bring my people out of the economy of slavery, I will not tolerate that they be again submitted to slavery." God's economy is based on and enfleshes God's own suffering love (Meeks p. 85).

Israel condemned interest. "If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him a creditor, and you shall not exact interest form him" (Ex. 22:25; cf. Deut. 23:19-20). The problem with interest is that it leads to poverty and to various forms of slavery. Israel's experience was that interest was a means by which the needs and rights of human beings were violated, with the result being life-denying poverty (Meeks p. 85).

And if your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall maintain him; as a stranger and as a sojourner he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or increase, but fear your God; that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him food for profit. I am the Lord your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God (Lve. 25:35-38) (Meeks p. 85).

In modern household we all are slaves to and live on huge debts – mortgage, credit cards, car payment, many other payments. When many people couldn't keep up with interest it threatens their life and livelihood.

"If ever you take your neighbor's garment in pledge, you shall restore it to him before the sun goes down; for that is his only covering, it is his mantle for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate" (Ex. 22:26-27; cf. Deut. 24:6, 10-13; 15:7-11). Claiming collateral in a way that would destroy a persons' access to livelihood cannot be allowed in God's economy. The reason interest on loans was so crucial for God's household was that it so often forced people to sell themselves into slavery.

When people are claimed as property this destroys the household Yahweh has intended by precluding Yahweh's own claim on Yahweh's people. "For they are my people, whom I brought forth out of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him with harshness, but shall fear your God (Meeks p. 86).

In a society that runs on credit, loans, interest, debt, and collateral this household rule may seem quaint. But the lives of persons, families and communities are disastrously torn apart by the system of interest. For example, farm families who lose their land

because they cannot repay their loans are thrown into the hidden slaveries of our society...Only an economy that serves a household of freedom will resist the oppression of the land (Meeks p. 86).

Even slave is to be treated like a wage-earning guest (Lev. 25:40) and is to be released after six years (Ex. 21: Deut. 15:) of fifty years (Lev. 25). The life of a slave is set on a par with that of a free Israelite( Ex. 21:20-21, 26-27) (Meeks p. 86).

### **Gleaning Rights:**

Further ways in which the **Torah provides** for distribution within God's household of freedom in order to prevent the return to a slave economy are **gleaning rights, traveler's rights, and the poverty tithe.** The poor are given access to God's economy of life through the right to share in the harvest. "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:9-10; cf. Deut. 24:19-22; Lev. 23:22; Ruth 2:). These laws prevent the poor from begging for their survival and show that God's claim on redeemed slaves constitutes their **right to the means of life.** This right supersedes the right to land and produce. Gleaning rights are not voluntary acts of charity of the rich toward the poor; they are the poor's right to livelihood (Meeks p. 86-87).

### **Tithe:**

Crucial to God's economy in the household of freedom is the law of the **tithe.** The tithe exists for the sake of the poor's access to livelihood (Deut. 14:22-29). We often think of the tithe in our time as a means of supporting a religious institution. But the tithe is rather a means of building up the household by making certain that no one is excluded from the livelihood of the household. The tithe is for the poor; it belongs to them by God's right. The reason for tithing is the same as the one repeated for other household codes: "You shall remember you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you" (Deut. 24:18,22). At the end of every three years you shall bring forth all the tithe of your produce in the same year, and lay it up within your towns; and the **Levite**, because he has no portion of inheritance with you, and **the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are in your towns**, shall come and eat and be filled; that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do" (Deut. 14:28-29; cf. Deut. 26:12; 16:13-15) (Meeks p. 87-88).

### **Hospitality**

is a central way in which God builds household of freedom. The abundance of feast (Passover, Booths, and Tabernacles ) is meant for sharing with the stranger and sojourner, as well as with the widow, the orphan, and the servants (Deut. 15:7-11).

Almost all of the prophets are concerned with the replacement of hospitality in God's household by empty worship and malicious feasts. Isaiah connects the worship of God and hospitality for the poor and stranger:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
 to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,  
 to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?  
 Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
 and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter;  
 when you see the naked, to clothe him,  
 and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?  
 Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
 and your healing will quickly appear;  
 then your righteousness will go before you,  
 and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.  
 Then you will call, and the LORD will answer;  
 you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I (Is. 58:6-9; cf. Is. 1:12-17; Amos 2:6-7; 5:21-24). True worship is living the economy in which God invites into the household all those who are excluded by being denied God's gifts for life (Meeks p. 88).

### **The Jubilee Year**

The Jubilee Year of the Holiness Code, closely kin to the Sabbatical year, adds a further provision which makes it the most radical household command of the liberator Economist. Every forty-ninth year Yahweh requires the following so that the household of freedom will not succumb again to slavery: (1) slaves are to be freed, (2) debts are to be canceled, (3) the land is to lie fallow, and (4) the land (wealth or access to livelihood) is to be returned or redistributed to its original holders (Lev.25:23-24). Even if the Jubilee year cannot be proved to have been practiced, it has been remembered by Israel as what Yahweh desires in the *oikos* of freedom (Meeks p. 89).

### **THE IMAGE OF GOD AS ECONOMIST (P. 89)**

The human being is more than simply a part of nature. The biblical view is that we are not only creatures sharing finitude in solidarity with all other creatures, but that we are also [created in the image of God](#). Corresponding to the creator Economist is the “image of God,” who can be called economist. The image of God” has traditionally been thought of as a piece of divine being or as the immortal soul (Meeks p. 90).

I always thought of the image of God in us meant not only our immortal soul but also our ability to discern, choose, love, do justice, and our ability to follow God’s will.

According to Meeks, the metaphor of the “image of God” comes from the Near Eastern practice of the emperor putting in the hands of ambassador a medallion with the emperor’s image on it and saying to the ambassador, “When you go to the outlying country or a foreign land, show this: This image is my commission, my authorization of you to represent my will.” (Meeks p. 90).

Meeks put the image of God in us in terms of economist saying that in God’s economy the only thing that separates the human being from the rest of the animals is that

the human being is called into being in order to keep God's household. Being human is an economic commission to join God the Economist in distributing righteousness so that the world may live. What does separate us from the rest of the creation is that we are called to be God's representatives, God's economists, collaborators in representing and obeying God's will for the creation. Thus the work of God's Economist is to be reflected in the work of human being as economist for the creation. To be a human being means to be sent as God's economist to live and work for God's will for the creation (Meeks p. 90).

Meeks also claims that to be human means to have a right to a life-giving share of the world's resources so that one can serve God's life-giving economy for the creation (Meeks p. 91).

### **THE RESURRECTION GOD AS ECONOMIST (P. 91)**

God's acts of righteousness in the exodus and the creation lie behind the New Testament view of the resurrection. Through the Spirit of righteousness (Rom. 1:3-4; 8:11) God the Father calls the Son out of his bondage to death. Thus the Economist comes to be known as the One who "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17). The resurrection Economist is enfleshed in the poor man Jesus and in him identifies with the poor (Meeks p. 91). The resurrection is not just a private occurrence in and for Jesus; it is the beginning of the "new creation." Thus the resurrection has significance for the whole household/cosmos.

### **THE DIAKONOS OF JESUS AS ECONOMIST (P. 92)**

Those who live from the table of God's household are no longer simply advocates of those who struggle to live without what is necessary for life; they have become brothers and sisters of these people (Meeks p. 92).

The salvation of the world is taking place through the identification of this God with the weak, the foolish, the low and despised, even what is dead in the world (1 Cor. 1:20-31). The economy of this God is to provide righteousness, the power of life, to those who are most threatened with death, poverty, oppression, and sin (Meeks p. 92).

God becomes the economist in the sense of housekeeper, homemaker, the steward, the diakonos, or the household slave. The epitome of this claim is found in Jesus who, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a (household slave, *doulos*) ..." (Phil. 2:6-7). God overcomes human mastery by becoming a slave.

God overcomes the scarcity of what it takes to live by becoming the Household Slave, by seeking to distribute to all what it takes to live and live abundantly. God opens up the household which has been closed to the homeless by becoming the Economist (Meeks p. 92).

God in Jesus performs the lowest and dirtiest work conceivable by taking upon Godself the sin and evil of all human beings. This is household economist work which only God as household Economist can do. And it was not only sin and evil God takes on but also the result of sin and evil, death itself. God overcomes death by taking death

into the divine communal life. Thus the center of God's economy is found in the cross of Christ. "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one had died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (1 Cor. 5:14-15) (Meeks p. 93).

The heart of Jesus' message is, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). In distributing bread, freedom, a new name and identity, peace with nature, and faith and hope Jesus enters into a controversy with his own people over the meaning of righteousness, a controversy which leads to his crucifixion by the Roman authorities in the name of Caesar's economy. The controversy has to do with God's economy. The proclamation, ministry, and death of Jesus show that God's economy is the gifting of righteousness through God's own self-giving. In Jesus Christ God is seeking to call into being and sustain an *oikos* in which all of God's creatures will have access to life (Meeks p. 93)

### **TRANSFORMATIVE CORRELATION OF GOD AND ECONOMY (P. 93)**

#### **Greco-Roman Household:**

Aristotle's economics demonstrates the oppressive characteristics of the *oikos* in the Greco-Roman world. It reflects the racism and sexism that were built into the Greco-Roman definition of the household. By definition not everyone in the household is a candidate for living well. This is possible only for the one who is truly freed by the *oikos*, namely, the *pater familias*, the household, the owner of all household property. Slavery and subordination mean having access to livelihood through the sufferance of the *pater potestas*. The other members of the household, slaves, women, children, tenants, workers, assistants in crafts and trade, were all defined as unfree because without property and without and unfree. The hierarchy of the Greco-Roman *oikos* entailed domination and subordination in its very definition (Meeks p. 94).

How did the early Christian movement transform this conception of *oikos*? Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza fills out the picture of how the Jesus movement and the earliest Pauline missionary movement subvert the *oikonomia* of Hellenistic Roman society. The Jesus movement is a socioreligious reality within Palestinian Judaism. It does not totally reject the validity of Temple and Torah as symbols of Israel's election but offers an alternative interpretation of them by focusing on the people itself as the locus of God's power and presence.

Integrating prophetic-apocalyptic and Sophia theology, Jesus' praxis and vision of God's rule of righteousness is directed toward the household of Israel. The reality of the *basileia* transforms the *oikos* of Israel. Its peculiar character is that everyone in Israel is invited into the *basileia oikos* (Meeks p. 95).

Jesus claims the *basileia* for three distinct groups: (1) the destitute poor, (2) the sick and crippled, and (3) tax collectors, sinners and prostitute. The table community of Israel's household is now to include women and even sinners. The distinguishing factor

of all of these people is that they had been denied access to *oikos*, to livelihood, to the family of Israel's God (Meeks p. 95).

The right that the gospel gives is not the right to dispose property but rather property in God's household, the right to be included in God's own economy, which is the source of life. A discipleship claim on access to God's economy entails the responsibility of giving access to livelihood to others, "the least of these, my brothers and sisters" (Meeks p. 95).

Jesus' proclamation subverts structures of oppression by envisioning different household relationship in which *all* persons of Israel are welcomed by God's gracious goodness. Those who do the will of God, who live the gracious goodness of God, come together as the disciple-family of Jesus and form a new "household" (Mark 3:31-35). The new discipleship community overturns the claims of the patriarchal family and forms a new familial community (Meeks p.95).

The message of 1 Peter is that the household of God offers these homeless people a home. Their name is now "the ones shown mercy" (2:10). The Peterine response to *paroikia* (homeless) is *oikos*. Through God's mercy strangers experience "infamilialization." Access to God's *oikos* depends neither on property nor on the incentives of hunger and again. Access to the *oikos* is given by the gracious goodness of God. Hunger and gain are eclipsed as incentives to enter the economy by the *pleroma* of God, which negates scarcity. Access is at once God's gracious invitation and one's acceptance or responsibility of returning the hospitality of God's economy (Meeks p. 96).

In the early Christian movement, therefore, there is a qualitatively different God-*oikos* correlation than in the economics of antiquity and modernity. In the Jesus' movement and the early Pauline missionary movement God takes the form of a household servant, a homemaker, and thereby radically subverts the patriarchal hierarchy that excludes some from livelihood. In the case of Asia Minor Christians addressed by 1 Peter God is a householder who invites all who are homeless into the household of life (Meeks p. 96).

## **CHAPTER 5: GOD AND PROPERTY. P. 99**

### **THE PROMISE AND THREAT OF PROPERTY: FREEDOM AND MASTERY**

#### **Meaning of property:**

Our ordinary usage of the word "property" refers to things, whereas in the legal and philosophical tradition it refers to rights to things or their use. Property in this sense is a reference not to objects, such as a house, a piece of land, a television set, or an insurance policy but to "claim on" these objects.

When speak of property in the most basic sense of properties belonging to persons or things, property is then a means of finding order. People or things can only be identified by their properties or attributes. Theology is familiar with this sense of “property” in referring to what is distinctive in God with the words *propria* or *propriatates*. We refer to the color green as a property of leaves or refer to showing respect to elders as a proper way of behaving. Property in this sense is a way of identifying or describing a mode of being of a person or thing (Meeks p. 100).

Property becomes both a promise and a threat. Property promises home, but it also threatens homelessness (Meeks p. 101).

Having property means not being left defenseless against the capriciousness of overlords, nature, and fate. It means that one does not have to depend on others for livelihood. It means that one is less likely to be subordinated and reduced to servitude or made a client. The Western consciousness remembers the long struggle against lords, kings, and states and how property rights have been an essential weapon against those whose rule entailed claiming all things of value for themselves. Property is the promise of protection against despotism. Thus in the history of civic society those who have property are also said to possess liberty, independence, and responsibility (Meeks p. 101).

But if the promise of property is liberty and security, the threat of property is domination. Those who gain their own freedom and guarantee their own future through property are often prone to deny property to others. Property is the threat of mastery.

**Property that is *access to life* is vastly different from property that gives one the power to exclude and hence control others.** Property that makes one independent is qualitatively different from property that makes others dependent. The one is a means of realizing one’s vocation as a human being; the other is potentially a means of destroying the humanity of others and one’s own humanity. The one is the means of entering the household; the other is the means of the privileged to exclude others from the household. It can mean both power for life as inclusion in livelihood or power for death as exclusion from livelihood. Property promises freedom, but it also threatens to destroy human dignity (Meeks p. 101).

**Example** related to violence connected with property; Jazebel and Ahab (I Kings 21:16-).

### **PROPERTY AS RIGHT: INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE PROPERTY (P. 103)**

Traditionally, property rights were derived from essential human needs. Thus most societies agreed that the equal rights to life requires personal property rights of two kinds. The first kind is some property in consumable things needed for revival. This must be an exclusive private right, that is, the right to exclude others from food, shirt, toothbrush, and bed I sue. Some form of exclusive property seems to be basic and necessary to human life. The second kind of personal property is a claim on the means of labor, that is,

the resources, the land, and capital, access to which I need in order to use my gifts and my capacities. This need not be exclusive property.

In fact, it can be another kind of personal property, that is, the right not to be excluded from suing or enjoying some resource or good. If the first property is a claim on the means of life to ensure continuous life, a right to *living*, the second property is a share of *living well*.

### **THE MODERN THREAT TO INCLUSIVE PERSONAL PROPERTY (P. 105)**

The meaning of property has been drastically narrowed in modernity. The most momentous change was the loss of the traditional inclusive property right (Meeks p. 106).

God intended to give the necessities of life to all people equally, this meant that private property was neither natural nor inevitable, neither religiously valuable nor necessarily socially meritorious.

If there are no poor by God's design, the disparity between rich and poor could only have happened through exploitation, expropriation, extraction and dispossession. (Meeks p. 107).

The property as an exclusive right both to sue and dispose material things is bound to result in inequality of wealth and the power. Not very one is equal in skill and energy. Exclusive and disposable property rights lead to some getting more than others. The more one gets the easier it is to get still more. This results in a constant transfer of part of the powers of the non-propertied to the propertied. Many persons in a market society upholding this right will be constantly submitted to the threat of inhuman existence (Meeks p. 109).

### **TRINITARIAN REFLECTION OF GOD AND PROPERTY (P. 109)**

The notion of exclusive alienable property and the ideologies connected with it are at least in part grounded in the concept of God as exclusive owner. Behind the modern concept of absolute exclusive private property are the market anthropological notion which reflect three classical assumptions about God: (1) God is self-possessor, (2) God is the exclusive property owner *par excellence*; and (3) God's freedom consists in the power to dispose property. This notion views God as emperor. (Meeks p. 110).

### **GOD AS SELF-POSSESSOR AND THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY**

The doctrine of God in Western teaching has often conceived God as a self-possessor, a self-proprietor. Behind the three divine persons is the absolute being, a simple, indivisible, self-sufficient individual. God's absolute existence is in and for God's self. On this model, God's self is the property of God (Meeks p. 110).

The description of God as a simple, undivided, atomistic essence is the description of the human being as private individual in our economic life today. According to C.B. Macpherson, "The individual in market society *is* human as proprietor of his own person.. his humanity... depends on his freedom from any but self-interested ... relations with others" (Meeks p. 111).

To conceive of myself as my ultimate property which I must protect at all costs is to make me unable to give myself away to the other and to recognize the other's right not be excluded from what he or she needs to live abundantly. The *homo Americanus* is the private individual, who is absolute, exclusive owner of himself or herself. Economic freedom comes to mean having no claims laid upon oneself by others. It is the freedom to view oneself as one's own property. It is the freedom to make oneself and remake oneself and thus to be "on the make." It is the freedom not to have to suffer when the other suffers. It is the freedom to serve one's own self-interests. The possession of self as property and property as self prevents the formation o f human community (Meeks p. 111).

Meeks suggest we need to reconstruct the social doctrine of the Trinity. The new social doctrine would emphasize that God is not an individual, self-sufficient individual. God is not a self-possessor. God is a rather community, a community of persons united in giving themselves to each other and to the world.

God is not a closed self, acting autonomously without regard to impact on the community as when God worshiped as an absolute private property owner.. The Triune God is the inexhaustible life that the three persons share in common, in which they are present with one another, for one another, and in one another. There can be no simple notion of self-possession because God is a community in which persons find their distinct identities in mutual relationships of self-giving. God "has" God's self precisely in giving God's self away (Meeks p. 111).

In the Jesus movement the rule of God's righteousness embodied in communal relationships defines property. The communal relationships within the Jesus movement and the primitive community of Acts 4 lead to different forms of property. Karl Polanyi designates these forms "reciprocity" and "redistribution" as over against the modern market form of property. These forms of property also lead to abundance and often to a more equally divided abundance. Fro the household of God the tendency of property to create domination is to be overcome in oikic relationship of mutual self-giving, in which possessions are used for the realization of God's will in the community (Meeks p. 113).

The self-giving life of the Trinitarian community of God is a criticism of the self as private property. Human possession, wither it be personal attribute, personal property, or capital, is basically a means to nurture koinonia. Ownership is a means of fulfilling our calling to be God's economist through community with God, other human beings, and nature. Property is a function of the community, a performance of a social function. Ownership is a responsibility. Property entails the necessity and protection of community (Meeks p. 113).

#### **GOD'S MODE OF POSSESSING: PROPERTY AS GIFT AND COMMODITY (P. 114)**

God has a claim on the creation and all creatures not as maker (labor theory of property) or owner (first occupancy), but rather as creator and liberator. As the heart of God's act of liberating/creating is God's suffering and self-giving.

God's work of suffering is the source of God's claim in, that is, God's property in creation. God brings the world into being through God's costly struggle against the power of the *nihil*. God has suffering for the creation and will not allow it to fall into vanity or be

alienated. The creation is properly God's because God's power of righteousness makes its life fundamentally a gift of God's grace. No one else, including Pharaoh, ahs the power to suffer and prevail against the power of nothingness (Meeks p. 114).

The life of the poor with their suffering is not an ascetic ideal nor is it in harmony with God's will. Poverty is not from God. God intends daily bread sufficient for all of life's needs, even for the unrighteous and ungrateful (Luke 6:35); Jesus seeks to live life in a new community in which the needs of one persona re met by the gifts of others, where there is a common sharing of possessions according to need, where a supportive community suffers and rejoices together, and where one can trust God without fear or anxiety over earthly needs (Meeks p. 115).

God builds God's household by breaking down the conditions of inequality between God's people. Wealth is a problem when one is wealthy before the others are. The problem is *differentiating wealth*, the condition in which some are poor while others are rich. The early Christian theologians deplored the fact that under the institutions of private property the rich could live luxuriously while others were reduced to dehumanizing poverty. "It is absurd (*atopon*) that one man live in luxury when there are so many who labor in poverty." The discrepancy of wealth and poverty distorts human community and thus ruins the purpose of property which is to serve human community (Meeks p. 115-116).

**Jesus affirms possessions as good gifts of God necessary to human life**, which is reflected in the church tradition. The early church theologians did not condemn possessions as such. Clement of Alexandria was fairly typical in teaching that material goods were gifts of God provided by God's gracious goodness. Absolute renunciation of them cannot be made an end in itself. **Yet, when property is treated as an end in itself, it destroys the life of the household.** What God gives for us to claim must preserve God's claim on it. **All property is obligated to meeting one's basic requirements of life and to keeping God's command to love neighbor** by which God seeks to build an economy open to those who have no property claims (Meeks p. 116).

**Jesus spent his entire public ministry as an itinerant teacher, without permanent residence or occupation and "no place to lay his head."** He led a possessionless life. Not only was Jesus himself poor by most external measurements, he also spent most of **his ministry in the midst of the poor.** The household of God will not be established unless the righteousness of God gives entrance to the poor.

Jesus causes the greatest offense by offering home to the marginal people, the homeless and sinners, and by offering good news to the poor and the exploited (Luke 7:23) (Meeks p. 116).

Jesus' call of his disciples into this new household seemed to **require a total relinquishment of their possessions.** This is true not only for the fishermen who "left everything (*panta*)" (Luke 5:11) and the Twelve and the Seventy who left their homes and lived in constant fellowship with Jesus but evidently of every potential disciple: "**Whoever of you does not renounce all that he or she has cannot be my disciple**" (Luke

14:33). Instead of martyrdom the call to relinquish one's possession is, in some instances, the supreme test of discipleship. Such total abandonment is obviously an imitation of Jesus' life (Meeks p. 117).

**Idolatry:** The biblical traditions make plain that all possessing has a proclivity toward **idolatry**. An idol is a possession that we trust to give us life and power, something we authorize by our possession. It is possessed by us to do our bidding. The worship of an idol causes us to take on the character and attributes of the idol and in the end makes us to the bidding that has become reified in the idol. The mystery of idolatry is that persons reflect what they possess. Idolatry is being possessed by a possession and thereby refusing God's claim on oneself and shrinking one's responsibility toward others in the community. Idolatry is the loss of freedom. Property can be instrumental to freedom, but it can also mean the destruction of freedom (Meeks p. 117).

Jesus is not trying to do away with property. Jesus' understanding of property as gift as opposed to property as commodity (Meeks p. 117).

**Gifting is circular. Every gift calls forth further giving**, and then giver and recipient cannot always be easily traced. Gifts literally cease to be gifts if they are not used, if they are not constantly consumed, if they are not relinquished. When gifts are sold they change their nature. **Our choice is to keep the gift moving** or to be eaten by it. Our property can devour us if we hoard it. **God the Economist seeks to keep the gift in motion** (Meeks p. 118).

Fundamental logic of the **economy of God** is that Jesus Christ is the *Charis* (which means both gift and grace), the unexcelled generosity by which **God has gifted us with God's won life in order to redeem us from the nothingness of death**, and that this gift is what obligates, moves, and empowers our lives for serving life against death in the world (Meeks p. 119).

That something will come back to the giver is not the condition of the gift, though the character of gifting is that something does come back and also goes further. Property as commodity perishes for the one who gifts so that all people in the household may have property, that is, a claim on what it takes to live and live abundantly. Ex: a widow who give all (Luke 21:1-4); cf. Mark 12:41-44). The rich bring large Temple tithes for the poor, but they give only out of their surplus. The widow drops in an offering of only two copper coins. "Truly, I tell you this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on" (Meeks p. 119).

#### **GOD'S FREEDOM AS PROPERTY RIGHTS OR AS LOVE? (P. 120)**

The biblical narratives do not speak of God's freedom as the power of exclusive and alienable ownership. God's freedom is not free choice. God's freedom is God's love. In culture such as ours in which property is the measure of the possibility of happiness, the biblical woes sound menacing or quaint. The woes announce the great reversal of God's justice and the reverse side of "good news to the poor." Though the rich prosper

now, the coming rule of God's righteousness will bring an end to their present status of privilege and prosperity. Unable to live economically with the weeping and the hungry, they will be excluded from the eternal life (Meeks p. 121).

A vivid illustration of the coming reversal and the need of repentance for irresponsible use of property is the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The clothing, mansion, and daily feasts of the rich man contrast with Lazarus's miserable existence. Lazarus reflects the social poverty of the common people of the land. Every detail makes vivid the misery of poverty.

Lazarus scrounges the waster from the daily feast of the household. His emaciated body is covered with sores, which dogs continually irritate. Propertyless, he is excluded from the livelihood of the household. But, not even decently buried, Lazarus, whose name means "God helps," sits at t able with Abraham in God's eschatological household (Meeks p. 121).

Properly mourned and interred, the rich man experiences the hell that the poor Lazarus had known in his lifetime. The great chasm is fixed. God's justice turns everything upside down. The Economist has "scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thorns, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty (Luke 1:51b-53). Can the rich avoid the eschatological reversal? Not without repenting whatever in their lives makes them hoard themselves and their and their possessions (Meeks p. 122).

Property is for use, not holding or hoarding. To be possessed justly, property must be used according to its nature to meet human needs and create human community. God has given human beings authority to use possessions according to these purposes (Meeks p. 122).

Using property justly means the rich are accountable for meeting the essential needs of the poor from their surplus wealth. It is God who has entitled the poor to what they need for life. This led to a harsh conclusion by the early church theologians: The rich are in jeopardy of being thieves. If you claim as your own what is common (koina) by right, it is clear that you are forcibly taking what belongs to another. Not to share one's resources, the refusal to take part in redistribution, is robbery. According to Augustine, "The superfluous things of the wealthy are the necessities of the poor. When superfluous things are possessed, other's property is possessed.

Thus if the rich have more than they need and the poor are in urgent need of goods like those the rich possess, the rich have a compensatory obligation in justice to bestow from their surplus goods what is needed to sustain the deprived

Redistributing possessions is thus basically an act of restitution. "Not from your own do you bestow upon the poor man, but you make return from what is his.

Property is meant to serve the livelihood of others, not their domination and exploitation. This is the basic reason that the Christian tradition through the Reformation condemned the injustice of usury. Basil, Aquinas, and Luther all point to usury as a way of enslaving the borrower. Through the payment of interest the borrower often contracts a voluntary servitude for life. Usury damages the community because of the “unlimited bosom of the rich” (Basil) (Meeks p. 122). Walter Brueggemann describe this “Sort out what belongs to whom and return it to them.

### **TOWARD A REVISION OF PROPERTY: THE INCLUSIVE RIGHT TO LIFE AND WORK**

Property is the occasion of massive struggles between liberty and equality, efficiency and justice, the right to possess and the right not to be excluded. The major justifications of property in the modern world (labor, utility, and liberty) favor the liberty of the individual to accumulate wealth without limit and without accountability for its use. Exclusive property claims are freighted with moral significance as the bulwark of the sacred notion of the liberty, but they can easily eclipse the rights of those who do not measure up to the standards of liberty as defined by white, male property owners. The results of exclusive, alienable private property contradicts one of the basic justifications of property, that human needs cannot be met without that institutions. The ultimate justification of property is still that it serves the fullness of life in community. Whatever the appropriateness of exclusive private property for commodities in market exchange, new forms of property have to be devised for our time that reflect the centrality of the right to be included in the livelihood of the community (Meeks p. 123).

Meeks urges the church to engage in a critical retrieval of property as the right of each person not to be excluded from whatever it takes to be in life-giving community with other human beings and with nature and in those relationships to serve God’s will for the creation (Meeks p. 124).

## **CHAPTER 6: GOD AND WORK. P. 127**

### **THE AMBIGUITY OF WORK**

#### **Positive Side of Work**

Work has been extolled as the single way in which human beings can find meaning and purpose in life. The promises work are that it justifies a person’s existence, it proves a person’s salvation, it gives a person value and dignity, status, and security; it guarantees

the future; it gives an upper hand over the competitor; it creates the self and the self's world.

In the United States, especially during election times, political parties vie to elevate work as the reason for America's success in the world. Every American, it is assumed, is born with the inclination to work with enthusiasm and devotion (Meeks p. 128).

### **Negative Side of Work**

Work has been connected with animal needs and denigrated as a dehumanizing distraction from the higher pursuits of the human soul. Work destroys what is peculiarly human. Work promises nothing but bare survival and that with considerable pain. "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread....." (Gen. 3:19). This is the recognition of those who lead lives of hard work but never expect to find fulfillment in it. It requires only mild objectivity to see the inequities, brutalities, and exploitation of work in the global household. Studs Tekel caught this assessment "This book, being about work, is by its very nature, about violence – to the spirit as well as body" (Meeks p. 128).

**Paradox of work:** The paradox of work abound. Some say work is the deepest satisfaction of their lives and has made them who they are; others say work has destroyed their health and their family life. Some say technology has overcome backbreaking work; others say machine work and the division of labor have caused social fragmentation and boring and demeaning work. Some say work is the great democratizer; others say workers have had ever less participation in shaping their own work and determining how the resources and product of their work are controlled (Meeks p. 128).

So there appear to be two deeply opposed views of work. Work, on the one hand, seems to be a curse such that it would be better for people to fold their hands and cease all human activity. On the other hand, work seems to be a blessing associated with the use of work's product and with satisfaction in accomplishment (Meeks p. 129).

There will be a difference in perspective between those who do work and those who control work. The average life span for a migrant farm worker is forty-nine years, as compared to seventy-two years for the average American. Work will be regarded differently by those who do hard, dirty, and grueling work and those who do self-determined and satisfying work. And, of course, work will appear differently to those who have no work and those who take their work for granted (Meeks p.129).

In recent years one might read front-page headlines declaring the administration's conviction that those who do not work are not "entitled" to what it takes to live and in the next column an announcement that two hundred thousand jobs are being eliminated in the automobile, steel, or other industry. How is it possible for a societal household to say both things: (1) those in the household who do not work will have no dignity, and yet (2) there is not enough work in the household for everyone to do? It is possible because of ideologies of work (Meeks p. 130).

### **IDEOLOGIES OF WORK AND A TRINITARIAN VIEW OF WORK (P. 130).**

Historically, there seem to be two choices: coerced work or ideologies of work that convince people to work “voluntarily” or so cover up the dehumanization of work that it can be tolerated.

Ideologies of work seek to make hard work, underpaid work, or lack of work seem legitimate in a divided society. Seeking at all costs the cooperation of subordinates, work ideologies keep us from remembering what in the tradition would make us conscious of the suffering of people from work in the present.

Church doctrine of God has sometimes aided the camouflage of ideologies, making them seem common sensical assumptions, generally agreed upon (Meeks p. 130).

To become free from dehumanizing ideologies of work requires that we remember the biblical narratives of God which open up a new praxis of work and criticize the God concepts that shore up the prevalent ideologies of work. Politico-economic theology should seek to detect the theological components of work ideologies and to ask whether they serve the will of God as known in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ or whether they serve the dehumanization and alienation of human beings through work. To do this, theology should ask about the work of God as known in the triune community’s uncovering in the history of Israel and of Jesus.

In the biblical traditions work is filled with theological content. It is the epitome of the doctrine of salvation. The human distortion of work makes God’s work of redeeming human work necessary. God’s work is against domination and exploitation through work. It is against individualistic, noncooperative, falsely motivated, and unjustly disturbed work (Meeks p. 130).

### **The Market View of Work**

According to market view the purpose of work is to produce goods or services in return for money which in turn is spent on goods and services. It is held that people work harder in order to get more. This view assumes that the best way to distribute work is through market mechanisms. That one earn money to buy goods by entering the market distribution of work is basically all the market demands (Meeks p. 131).

The market view of work will require ideologies that make it appear reasonable that some people do not have work and that some people have degrading work. Early on, Adam Smith saw that the division of labor at the heart of modern industrialism would make cooperation almost impossible. According to Adam Smith, cooperation was to be provided not by a benevolent regard each for the other’s welfare but rather through self-interest.

The resulting moral principle of selfishness is a process of demoralization unprecedented in history. When fear of losing one’s job is the whip with which employers extract greater work effort, work destroys community rather than supporting it. This necessitates ideologies exalting the individual at work in isolation (Meeks p. 132).

### **A Trinitarian Perspective on Work**

1. Each person of the Trinity engages in *distinctive personal work*. Each person of the Trinity is described in the narratives of Jesus/Israel as working. Each makes a

specific contribution to the divine economic work in and for the world. The tradition has usually identified the work of the Father as creating, the work of the Son as redeeming, and the work of the Holy Spirit as creating anew. Or, more immediately focused in the story of Jesus, we could say that the Father does the work of sending, the Son the work of being sent, and the Holy Spirit the work of empowerment of the mission of the Father and the Son. No person of the divine community is left without distinctive work. Each has a name, a reputation, a dignity, a place within the community of work. The Trinity is a criticism of all systems of work that exclude some people in the household from distinctive personal work (Meeks p. 133).

2. The Trinity engages in *cooperative work*. The whole community is involved in each work, event, or process of God. The Father does not work as an isolated individual; every work the Father does is in cooperation with the Son and the Holy Spirit. The same is true for the Son and the Holy Spirit. They each contribute their own work to creation, redemption, and new creation. Thus the second hermeneutical key is the *co-work* of the persons of the triune community. God's work is the cooperative work of the three persons of the community of righteousness. Each persons' distinctive work coinheres in the work of the other members of the community, that is, each person's work cannot be done without the cooperation of the others. God's work is thoroughly communal or social work. The distinctive work of one member of the Trinity is made possible by the cooperation of the other members. Their freedom is to communicate themselves to each other in love (Meeks p. 133).

The Trinity is a criticism of all structures of work that atomize the worker by separating his or her work from the other members of the community, the worker from the product of his or her work, or working classes from nonworking classes (Meeks p. 133).

3. The third hermeneutical key is the *equalitarian work* of the triune community. While the three persons of the Trinity have their own work, the work of no one of them elevates that person higher than the others.

**Traditionally the Father's work has been given ascendancy** resulting in a hierarchy or stratification of work within the divine community. This in turn has given justification to an authoritarian order of subordination for human work. **The master-slave relationship** has found a justification in the notion of the hierarchically arranged work of God. But the fact that the Father initiates the work of triune community does not mean that the Father's is a higher, more valuable work. The Trinity is a criticism of all forms of work that incur relationships of **domination** (Meeks p. 133).

4. The fourth hermeneutical key is the integration of the Triune community's work through the *self-giving* love of each other. The work of each is done for the life of the community. The motivation and incentives of the triune community's work is the fullness of life of the other and the redemption of the creation. God works for the sake of God's faithfulness, for the sake of keeping God's promises and thus showing God to be God.

God's work is aimed at the fulfillment of what God has promised. God's work is the expression of God's faithfulness (Meeks p. 134).

This calls into question all human attempts to integrate work through coercive means, such as state laws, or through dehumanizing incentives such as poverty or the drive to unaccountable accumulated wealth. The unity of God's work is not gained by the uniformity of being or a notion of self-possession but by the suffering of each person for the other and for the creation. The work of love is the unifying and integrating of God's work. Life-giving work is suffering love. The Trinity is a criticism of ideologically defined motivations and incentives of work. All ideologies of work stand under judgment by the integration of God's work through suffering love.

God's work is personally distinctive, cooperative, equalitarian integrated by love, and faithful to God's promises. There are three major tendencies detectable in modern ideologies of work: the (1) degradation, (2) exaltation, (3) redemption of work (Meeks p. 134).

## THE DEGRADATION OF WORK

### God the Economist Works

According to the biblical narratives, [God the Economist works](#) to bring creation into being, to redeem creation, and to create all things anew. God is not the distant emperor or city-state king living the life of leisure while expecting God's people to do all of God's hard work. God is the slave-freeing Economist, the liberator from the household of bondage, and the builder of the household of freedom. God's work of liberation and creation is the ground of an affirmative view of work. Work is neither condemned nor sacralized. Even after the expulsion from the garden, [work itself is not seen as a cursed fate](#); rather hardship and difficulty that accompany work are the result of sin (Gen. 3:17-19). [Work belong to human existence and is commanded by God](#) (Gen. 2:15). God's work, to be sure, is qualitatively different. Human beings do not do God's work. There is a definite limitation to human work: It must be done within the finitude of the created order. Yet [God calls the human being into partnership](#) with God's creative work. Every human being, as the image of God, is called to correspond to God's work as he or she represents God's will to the creation. While human work cannot create something out of nothing, it can with imagination be similar to God's doing a new thing. Work is the power to answer with effort God's call to be God's economist in God's household. That God the Economist works and that human beings are given their own proper work by God means that work in itself is not to be denigrated (Meeks p. 136-137).

### God the Economist Rests

God's Sabbath rest is justification for neither the hatred of work nor the degradation of the worker. Workday and Sabbath are not divided into sacred time and worldly time. The Sabbath is reserved for gods and aristocrats and workday for slaves and laborers. It is in God's rest that the work of human beings find its limit. For the human being, a finite creature, Sabbath is first of all a limit to the toil, pain and fatigue of work. "So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God's rest also cease

from his labors as God did from his" (Heb. 4:9). The human being, unlike God, needs recuperation. "Sweet is the sleep of the laborer" (Eccles. 5:12) (Meeks p. 137)

Jesus does not do away with the Sabbath; he radicalizes it. Jesus announces to the household of Israel that it is called to live by the righteousness of God's Sabbath at all times and all places.

The Sabbath is made for the human being and thus must be removed from every cultic attempt to separate it from the situations in which work destroys human beings. The Torah and the Gospel grant to the human being Sabbath time, redeemed time (Meeks p. 138).

### **THE EXALTATION OF WORK**

The second ideological tendency is the valuing of work as the means of the ordering and self-justification of life. When Christian teaching isolates the Abba/Father from the economic community with the Son and Holy Spirit, there arises a model of the overbearing task-master who works capriciously to control the work of subordinates. These notions are the mainstay of ideologies of work that attempt to justify master-subordinate relationships. They uphold the "Father God" who works by fiat. This tendency also resulted in a model of the isolated, self-sufficient worker (Meeks p. 139).

According to Max Weber, the new economic situation of nascent capitalism required and was partially cause by what he called "the spirit of capitalism," which emerged from the Protestant Reformation (Meeks p.139).

The notion of God as Father-taskmaster or as a monadic worker provides justification for (1) laissez-faire and libertarian freedom of entrepreneurs to do anything they want without regard to the other's needs and desires in order to realize one's own interests; (2) paternalistic freedom to sue the work of others for one's own ends under the guise of fatherly concern and protection; (3) individualized freedom and power to make one's destiny exclusively by dint of one's own work and denigrations of all those who lack the initiative to be competitive in work. These ideologies portray a view of work that coincides with the nature of the market society as accumulation of wealth. Poverty is the reason for progress, for without the threat of poverty, people would not work.

If you do away with the worker's poverty, you remove the worker's incentive to work and thus their sole means of bettering themselves Since poverty is the motivation for work, it is also the reason for humanity's unhindered happiness and welfare (Meeks p. 140).

The laissez-faire ideology of work is the most extreme in its support of hierarchical, individualistic, and egoistic modes of work. Laissez-faire condemns the interference of do-gooders because their good intentions always harm those they seek to help by ruining their only chance of getting out of poverty: self-restraint. Laissez-faire ideology drops out the religious motifs of deferred other-worldly rewards for work. The poor now have to be left to their own attempts to better their lives. Manufacturers gained from laissez-faire a

sanction to do almost anything as long as it was not benevolent and well-meaning (Meeks p. 141).

In the face of the brutalities of the laissez-faire view of work, **paternalism** seems more human. It gives to the superior a religious obligation to reward and punish, to care for and dismiss his employees and the right to expect their dutiful service. As does God the isolated Father who rules with an iron will, the owner has the unquestioned right to control the work and life conditions of his workers. For example, George M. Pullman gave a kind of security to his workers while taking away their dignity in their work and family life. He provided his worker with housing and minimal schooling and health care but in exchange expected only unquestioning obedience in work but also compliance in his own conception as to how necessities of life were to be delivered. **Paternalism** has usually protected both servants and masters from the worst aspects of laissez-faire. But paternalism imperfectly disguised, is the appropriation of one human being's labor power by another (Meeks p. 141).

In response to the deadening aspects of laissez-faire and paternalism ideologies the most influential and persistent work ethic in the modern world was developed. The **success ethic** is the individualized theory of progress writ small, in the life of the individual. Success does not depend on traditional privileges of inherited wealth or even talent. Positive belief in work and in self are sufficient for overcoming every obstacle. Work allows one to take personal responsibility for one's own well-being. Self-made people do not need to cooperate with anyone else. Like laissez-faire the success ethic contends that benevolence should be suspended, lest it impede persons from improving themselves through work (Meeks p. 142).

### **THE REDEMPTION OF WORK (P. 143)**

The third tendency is the distinctively modern ideology of the redemption of work through work. It uses psychology and sociology to restructure the worker's attitude and work situation. The promethean ideologies of work exalt work to the highest conceivable dignity (Meeks p. 144).

In this view, work is not slavery; rather, it is the means of humanization. For **Hegel** the dialectic of works is the self-formation and emancipation process of the human spirit. In work human beings create not just something according to an idea, but actually create their world and therefore themselves through work. In work one achieves individual identify by going outside of self and actualizing oneself in the world. I am, because I work. I am what I made out of myself (Meeks p. 144).

According to Marx we express our humanity through artistic, theoretical, and technological work. Work is the revelation of one's hidden, inner self. Our cultural totality is the ongoing labor of men and women in history. Production is the foundation of the relationship, laws, ideas, and institutions of society. Thus the worker is of decisive

importance in world history. Marx argues that workers have become alienated because capital has dehumanized their relationship to work. Human beings have produced their surroundings, but they have been stolen from them. Human beings are important precisely because of their work, but yet work robs and impoverishes them. The market definition of work explained work and its dehumanizing relationship as self-interest (Meeks p. 144).

Because human beings create themselves, their world and their future through work, work must be redeemed at all costs. The messianic themes of God's work can be used for this purpose, but only if they are isolated from the creating and sanctifying work of God. When the Trinity is distorted in this way, we are left with the human become Promethean messiah in whose work rests the survival and salvation of the world. The human being takes back all the human excellences which have been projected on God. Now it is up to the human being to go it alone without God. The kingdom of God become merely a cipher for human effort or for human agreement with inevitable progress (Meeks p. 145).

In view of the failure of he ideologies designed to overcome alienation in modern work, both capitalism and socialism have turned to managerialism as a way of redeeming work. They agree that the problem is to overcome capitalism's impoverished appeals for work and the bleak picture of the work's situation in work ideologies. Capitalist managerialism claims that the problem of capitalism is work; socialist managerialism claims that the problem of work is capitalism. The capitalist approach assigns to the manager the Promethean task of saving capitalism by redeeming work. Toe socialist approach to work assigns to the manager the promethean task of redeeming work by fulfilling and transcending capitalism (Meeks p. 145).

[Sin, Evil, and Work \(P. 146\).](#)

[God the Economist Redeems Work \(P. 148\)](#)

### **[REDEEMING WORK \(P. 151\).](#)**

[The Right to Work](#)

[Incentive for Work](#)

[Work in Community](#)

The value of work has to do with increasing relationship among human beings and between human beings and God. Destroying the community fo work through relationship of domination and dependence dehumanizes work (Meeks p. 154).

### [The Equity of Work](#)

Greed and fear become the work incentives if workers have no equality in working relationships or direct relation to the results of their work. Democratic participation and work security lead to commitment and cooperation. Equity in work depends upon workers having guaranteed individual rights, corresponding to political liberties. In the present-day workplace the problem of equity centers on status, pay, and share in the

product of work. Equity is in fact the precondition for work that is both communal and efficient (Meeks p. 155).

## **CHAPTER 7: GOD AND NEEDS. P. 157**

God the Economist works to build household in which all of God's creatures can find home. What we think about needs shapes our belief and practices about consumption and about what, how and to whom the goods of the *oikos* should be distributed. The praxis of economic justice is shaped by the character of needs. The character of needs is decisive for the *oikos*. The perceived character of God and the way human beings live before God will ultimately determine both the shape of needs and the means for meeting need (Meeks p. 157).

Needs can be defined systemically in such a way that many people have no access to provisions for their needs while others are free to luxuriate in the imagination of one need after another. Some have no daily bread while others claim massive wealth to titillate their dulled senses and occupy their empty time. When in the same public household some live in luxury while others scrounge for the barest means of survival, a cancerous injustice is planted that will eventually destroy the entire household.

There is no doubt that sin shows itself prominently in the needfulness of human beings. But sin is no excuse for the church to turn its back on God's own work to overcome our sinful distortion of needs (Meeks p. 157).

To the church is left the care of emotional or “spiritual” needs. Many churches also try to meet the needs of starving and homeless people on our city streets or in North African deserts. But they seldom question the meaning of needs in the public discourse of our economy, a discourse that has also invaded the life of the church, and the effect of that discourse on society. The church often simply assumes that it is a need-meeting institution and thereby lets itself be shaped by the public language and experience of needs. Whereas both capitalist and Marxist conceptions of needs based in nature steadfastly exclude God in formally defining needs, our economy nevertheless depends on God concept to justify needs and patterns of consumption that are dehumanizing. Should not the church ask whether the public language of needs in our political economy has played a major role in shaping its worship of God, or whether its own understanding and worship of God plays a role in the way needs are officially defined in our society? (Meeks p. 158).

The church's public witness and its contribution to the question of needs in the global household should depend on the peculiar perspective on needs that the Triune God gives us. Needs arise and are met in the context of God's creating and sustaining a just household for God's creatures. Human needs are a dimension of God's righteousness in giving access to livelihood to all creatures. Life in the economy of the Triune God calls into question the way we perceive, name and practice needs in our public household (Meeks p. 158).

## **THE NEEDFULNESS OF HUMAN BEINGS**

Hegel described modern society as a “system of needs” and thus articulated the decisive importance of needs as the glue of modern society. All human beings are inherently insufficient in themselves.

It is in struggling to meet to meet their needs that they become aware of themselves, of history, and of nature. Awareness of one’s own lack leads to social relationship in which persons engage each other in order to meet each other’s needs. The human project is the progressive, mutual meeting of our needs (Meeks p. 160).

### **NEEDS IN THE MARKET SOCIETY**

In the market society **needs** must be as expansive and limitless as the desired growth. Neoclassical economic theory employs *need* as the centerpiece, a technical term means to guarantee the unlimited growth of the economy. Need satisfaction becomes simply a dimension of rational economic behavior (Meeks p. 161).

The urgency of need declines with increasing satisfaction. People can have too much of a good thing. If they are satisfied, it does not make sense to increase the volume of goods and services they can use. They will not desire an every-increasing standard of living. If each individual could reach a point where more goods and services yielded less satisfaction, economic growth would be desirable neither for individuals nor nations. Orthodox economists depict this fact with the term “declining marginal utility.”

### **GOD CONCEPTS IMPLICIT IN MODERN NEEDS**

#### **DIVINE ASEITY AND THE LIBERTY OF THE INDEPENDENT HUMAN BEIGN**

#### **DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND NEEDS AS NECESSITY**

#### **DIVINE INFINITY AND HUMAN INSATIABILITY**

#### **A TRINITARIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: GOD AND SCARCITY (P. 170)**

Both the Gospel and Paul speak about the relationship between the Father and Son as one in which the Father has delivered over the Son and the Son has delivered over himself to death on the cross.

The deepest suffering of the Son is the experience of being Godforsaken, of being infinitely separated from the one with whom he had claimed the greatest intimacy: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15: 34). The deepest suffering of the Father, on the other hand, is his suffering the death of the Son. This is a deeper suffering, just as our suffering through the death of a loved one is greater than our suffering our own death. The Father gives away the Son, and the Son gives away himself; both go outside themselves and both suffer. Thus with the cross before us we must criticize every concept of God that defines God as radically individual, self-sufficient, and passionless, just as we must criticize every concept of the divine that depicts the Spirit as sheer dynamism, motivation, or empowerment without suffering. God’s economic work in the cross continues in the history of the Holy Spirit, through

whose power Jesus has offered himself up to the Father (Heb.9:14) for us. The Holy Spirit *is* the reality of love between the Father and the Son, their sacrifice “for us,” their going beyond themselves, and the self-giving of each for us (Meeks p. 170-171).

### [Scarcity or Pleroma?](#)

The Christian perspective on needs and consumption is that God the Holy Spirit is providing enough of what it takes for all to live and live abundantly. Christianity will therefore be subversive in calling to question the deepest assumption modern economics, namely, scarcity. Nothing is deeper in the spirit of capitalism, and of socialism as well, than the belief that there is not enough to go around. The church, however, is called to live and organize itself out of the faith that God the Holy spirit is willing and providing whatever is necessary for all persons and the whole creation to live (Meeks p. 171).

**Scarcity:** Insufficiencies, lacks, and shortages are not the same thing as the modern economic definition of **scarcity**. The **insatiability** (탐욕) of human nature is said to be the ground of scarcity. What the market mechanisms actually require is scarcity in the sense of withheld or blocked access to what people need for livelihood and work. **Scarcity** in this sense is the condition for exclusive private property. But as justification for this, the meaning of **scarcity** is made to trade on the character of the human being as infinite desire and infinite acquisitor (Meeks p. 172).

In the presence of the Holy Spirit all we can do is confess the **abundance**, the richness, the fullness of God’s righteousness. To be human and to live abundantly is exclusively the gift of God’s grace, of which there no scarcity, no lack. Demystified work is a response to the abundance of God’s grace. It will not be an end in itself, but rather a servant of the abundance of life. That is why the celebration of the resurrection comes on the first day of the week as the precondition of work, not on the last day of the week as recuperation from work (Meeks p. 172).

### [The Crisis of Consumerism in a Consumerist Society](#)

#### [God’s Righteousness and Scarcity](#)

In the biblical traditions it becomes clear that the crucial issue is not how many goods are present, but whether the righteousness of God is present. The righteousness of God brings manna in the wilderness; there is enough. The pretense of **scarcity** is not tolerated as the starting point for economics (Meeks p. 175).

The heart of **God’s economy** is found in **God’s own self-giving**, which produces **abundance** for life. Thus the church, though it be an incredible scandal to the world, will say with Paul: “He who did not spare his only son but gave him up for all, will he not also give us all things with him? (Rom. 8:32). The early church spoke of the **presence of the Holy Spirit** in superlatives, in the language of **abundance** and superabundance; “God is able to provide you with every blessing and abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide an abundance for every good work” (1 Cor. 9:8; cf. Ps. 78:19). “Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (Ps. 34:106) (Meeks p. 175).

The point of the gospel is not simply to have one's needs met, but to have [one's needs met so that one can meet the needs of others](#). When the church represents itself as merely a place where people can have their needs met, it robs them of their right to the joy of their own ministry. [Preoccupation with one's own needs](#) and wants leads to hoarding possessions (Luke 8:14). "Take heed, and beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15; cf. 1 Cor. 6). Greed and avarice divide the household (Luke 12:13-14). [The parable of the rich landowner](#) shatters the seductive hold of life centered in self-definition of wants (Luke 12:13-34). The landowner builds new and bigger barns to store a bumper crop in order to play the futures market or as security for an early retirement and a life of ease. By playing upon scarcity he profits from the needs of others. Not only has the rich man threatened his neighbor with the loss of livelihood, but he has also disabled his own life through hoarding. The ultimate damnation of avarice is that it leads to loneliness; "Woe to you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land" Isa. 5:8). (Meeks p. 176)

[God's verdict](#) is that such acts make one a "fool" (Ps. 14:1). [The fool](#) thinks and acts as if there is no accountability to God and community. Faced with death, he realizes that his commodities have deceived him because he has falsely accounted his needs. Fulfilling needs defined as self-enhancement have separated him from God and neighbor. He has falsely assumed that he could regard his life as his own and that it could be measured by possessions. He has falsely assumed that his property was meant to fulfill only his own needs, thereby violating God's lordship and his own role as a responsible steward. The images of the building of storage barns, the business that prevents the acceptance of an invitation, the rich man protecting his hall with a spear are all images of the decision for death before death (Luke 11:21-22) (Meeks p. 176).

The deepest scarcity of the human being comes from the scarcity created by our finitude and mortality, the scarcity of time, energy, and life. Each of us is subject to anxiety and regret because there is never enough time, never enough energy, never enough life. This can be translated into the gnawing sense of lack that can be assuaged only by buying, possessing, storing, and consuming. It is the form of life that leads to death, because it precludes the thrust of the gospel. A household that trades on these senses of scarcity and anxiety is already a household in love with death. The economy of God rests ultimately on God's destruction of death in Jesus and God's promise of the ultimate destruction of death in the whole creation (Meeks p. 176).

Because of God's intention to meet the needs of all of God's creatures (Luke 12:31), anxiety about "the cares of this life" have no place in the faith devoted to the Economist's *basileia* (Luke 21:34). The only need human beings have is for the reign of God's righteousness. Everything else human beings need is given with God's righteousness. If Abba so abundantly provides for the needs of nature, "how much more" will Abba's own children be provided (Matt. 6:31) (Meeks p. 176).

#### **[JUSTICE AND THE MEANING OF SOCIAL GOODS \(P. 177\).](#)**

What are the shared meanings of social goods because of the character of God the Economist? What does the character of God suggest about the relationship and rules for distribution? It is characteristic of the biblical narratives that in rendering God they provide the communal shared meanings of social goods. For example, the history of God's relationship to bread communicates a shared meaning of bread and how bread is to be distributed and to whom and under what household relationships. This history does not simply establish an abstract right to bread for a subjective need for bread, but rather provide a social meaning of bread by narrating historical relationships (Meeks p 177).

The history of bread begins with Joseph as the first great economist. Something exceedingly important had happened to the shared social meaning of bread in the time between Joseph's economic miracle and the people's crying out from starvation in the new famine in Egypt. It was placed in the storehouse economy of Pharaoh and Joseph. Bread had become a commodity, and now it had to be exchanged. It had to be a market item. As a commodity bread can be used as political instrument or as a bargaining chip in international relationships. This shared communal understanding meant that bread could become a means of dominating those who had nothing to exchange (Meeks p 178).

But when the people leave the economy of Pharaoh and begin living in God's household, bread must have a new meaning. The people should cry not for Pharaoh's bread but for God's bread. A new shared communal meaning of the social good bread is given: Unleavened bread reminds us of the difference between the bread of grace and the bread of slavery (Ex. 12: 15-20), the bread of joy and the "bread of tears and affliction" (Ps. 80:5; cf. Ps. 127:2) (Meeks p 178).

God is the giver of bread. God gives a bread that is not a commodity, a bread that cannot not be put into exchange relationships. The manna cannot be stored (except for the Sabbath); if you store it, it will rot. In God's economy food cannot be used as a way of gaining political power and domination over other people (Meeks p 178).

God is the doer of righteousness who gives bread for life in just distribution. According to the logic of gifting, according to what each could eat, no more, no less. "And the people of Israel did so; they gathered, some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing left over, and he that gathered little had no lack; each gathered according to what he could eat" (Ex. 16:17-18)

It is the bread we have looked for ever since:

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Com, buy wine and milk without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Harken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness (Is. 55:1-2) (Meeks p 178).

The gift that is passed along remains abundant. In fact, a gift multiplies. Gifts that remain gifts can support an affluence of satisfaction, even without numerical

abundance. Those who share are satisfied. Hoarding means that you are fed only while you eat; the meal finishes in hunger (Meeks p 179).

At the Eucharist we can learn the meaning of the social goods in the community. Eucharist uncovers the fundamental shared meaning of all social goods. All are invited freely to this meal, the only proviso being one's awareness of all those others who are also invited to share the meaning of all social goods through Christ's body, namely, the poor, the oppressed, the sinners, and the dying. This meal blocks all use and exchange of things for the purpose of domination. The meaning of this good requires its distribution in ways additional to exchange. Certain goods, those social goods are necessary for life abundant (Meeks p. 179).

Aubrey R. Johnson's reading of Psalm 23 depicts the work of God's economy overcoming scarcity in God's household:

With Yahweh as my shepherd there is nothing that lack;  
he seeth that I lie down where there is grass for pasture.  
He leadeth me where restful water may be found, satisfying my need to the full.  
He guideth me along the right tracks, thus answering to his name.  
Even if my way lieth through a valley deep in shadow, I dread no evil;  
for thou are with me, my fears allayed by they club and thy staff.  
Thou does show mine enemies that I am welcome at thy table,  
pouring oil on my head, my cup filled to overflowing.  
Yea, I shall be pursued in unfailing kindness every day of my life,  
finding a home in the Household of Yahweh for many a long year (Meeks p 180).

## **CONCLUSION. P. 181**

We have attempted to understand God as the **community** of righteousness united in self-giving love, and we have argued that **Economist** is a proper and necessary metaphor for the triune God. The **Trinity** serves as criticism of the old authority attributes of God, which have been taken over by the human being as defined by the **modern market theory**. We have become aware that the **church's worship, structure, and life** can uncritically sanctify unaccountable power and mask privilege in economy. Even if economic theory assumes the **absence of God in the market**, focusing on the doctrine of the **Trinity** as a way of critically retrieving traditional views of God's economy has led us to criticize God concept that justify assumptions abetting **domination** in the economic sphere. These assumptions behind the market mechanisms endorse conditions under which many people are led into an economic dependency that is just as antagonistic to personal rights as in political dependency.

Under such conditions, communities are corroded and people cannot realize their capacities. The conditions of **economic dependency** for the many in our society also destroy the full human development of the few who are powerful in their wealth. Democratic culture cannot thrive under such conditions, and, without democratic culture, democratic institutions soon wither (Meeks p 181).

Perceiving **God as Economist** has reminded us that the partitioning and narrowing of economy in the modern world have occurred at great **cost to the human being**. Despite

its sensational successes in the modern world, **modern economic theory** has forgotten that **economy must be fundamentally concerned with livelihood**. A more humane public household will depend on our learning that **human dignity in community** is prior in value to economic organization. Economic action is not an **end** in itself; it is a **means** toward **communal human praxis** determined democratically. **Economy** should serve democratic community, which in turn serves the creation of conditions of human beings finding their calling. The great success of **the market economy** and its tendency to draw everything into commodity exchange relationships **has conditioned us** to treat ever more dimensions of life as private, that is, unaccountable. The future of our society and its possible constructive contribution to the global household depend on our learning to **restore** many aspects of economy to community accountability (Meeks p 182).

If we rightfully appreciate the market's logic of the exchange of commodities as a tremendous instrument of economy, we nevertheless have to be aware that there are many **social goods** whose shared communal understanding should require different logics of property, work, and distribution. This means that the market should be blocked in some spheres of society. This, of course, cannot happen without **democratic policies**, which in turn, are impossible without communities of **shared values** (Meeks p 182).

Seeking to live the economy of God, the congregation can contribute to a more **just public household**. The **church's economy** and ultimately **its mission** to the public economy should take shape in the peculiar "economic instruments" of **the Holy Spirit**: the Word as Gospel, baptism, the Eucharist, hospitable *koinonia*, and *diakonia*. Together they point to alternative ways of producing and distributing what is necessary for an inclusive household of life. And thus will **the church claim in its life that God's economy is the foundation of livelihood for all of God's creatures and in so doing will be a living hope for a just society** (Meeks p 182).

The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) is a story about economy *par excellence*. In it we have a picture of the Host who yearns for a new household that can be hospitable to the poor, the forsaken, the lost, the dying, for economy is the question of giving access to life to the Host's own child. In what kind of household can this take place? (Meeks p 182).

It is a **resurrection household** that God is struggling to build. The decisive fact is that the **resurrection changes the household rules**. So it is when the prodigal son returns from the heroin nightmare of his extreme liberal bout with unaccountable freedom, expecting to find a new lease in the conservative legalism of the old household rules. **Redemption happens** on the road, beyond all best thoughts of liberalism and conservatism, when the father breaks **every rule** of what appears to be proper household management. The father rushes to embrace the foul-smelling, dirt-caked child, whereas all power-

shrewd people know that he should have stayed in his wing-backed chair surrounded by all of symbols of his paternal authority.

He forgives the son even before the confession is completed. The father orders clothes, not work clothes or causal wear, but the three-piece suit, which should have been saved for the highest event of the year. The father calls for a ring, not his fraternity ring, but his father's own ring, which should have been saved for the older son. The father asks for meat, not the rump roast, but filet mignon, which should have been saved for holiest feast of the year. The father announces a party, not a regular Saturday-night soiree, but the most joyous occasion in the household memory, which should have been saved for celebration for the older son's patrimony. Why all this? "For this my son was dead, and he is alive" (Meeks p 183).

The story does not end happily because the oldest son does not go into the celebration of the resurrection economy. And those of us who are older daughters and sons know why: It is simply not fair that the household rules be changed. But who of us, after all, is not an older daughter or son? We stand between the economies, on the one hand is the old household in which each of us knows what we will inherit and are so intent upon it that we do not even question the old household rules. And on the other hand is the new household that God is building. The church in the developed world is standing in the position of the older son. The household rules are changing. Whether we shall work for the household of life and experience its joy is our question (Meeks p 183).

The invitation to dance is being given freely in the new household. The medieval pictures of the risen Lord dancing, with his cloak extended to include everyone in the dance, catch the spirit of this resurrection household. Would that we let the Holy Spirit catch us up into this dance. Would that we devote our work and our property to this new household, with its strange, frightening but utterly joyful dance. In a world that seeks everything but home, the only unity and consensus worth searching for is that found in the crucified One who nevertheless dances because of an economy that gives to all access to life and life abundant (Meeks p 183).