



# Harvest Time

*Christians of wealth engaging with money as a doorway to spiritual transformation.*

## **Spirit and the New Economy** **By The Rev. Canon Steven C. Bonsey**

*“You send forth your Spirit, and they are created,  
and so you renew the face of the earth.”  
Ps 104:31*

I remember the anxiety I felt before the recent economic collapse. The stock market, property values, executive compensations all kept rising; there seemed to be no end to the free money, at least for those at the top of the food chain. At the same time the gap between rich and poor kept growing, and the likelihood of catastrophic climate change kept increasing. Things didn't feel right.

The sense of relief I felt when the collapse finally came, no doubt reflects something of my personal circumstances – I had the luxury to think such thoughts – but there was something more in it. I was relieved no longer to be waiting for the shoe to drop, but I also felt a hope that from this ruin we would rebuild an economy that looked different from what had come before. I longed for a means of increasing prosperity without fragmenting community or despoiling the environment.

In the years that have passed since the onset of the recession I have not heard much from the powers-that-be that would encourage my hope. Market pundits and political leaders continue to point to consumer spending as the key indicator of economic health, as if to say that, if we could just get back to buying things we don't need with money we don't have using up resources we can't replace, everything will be fine.

I don't find these voices encouraging, but neither do I resonate with others who express a nostalgia for some past golden age of pre-modern communal and planetary harmony. If we were to go back to a time when economic life did not involve exploitive impulses or destructive consequences, we would have to go pretty far back: before globalism or mass production; before commoditization of labor and natural resources; before colonialism, slavery and the subjugation of women; before the herding of cattle or the settled cultivation of crops. Our record of such a time does not extend beyond the first two books of the Bible.

I think that our path toward a place of economic harmony must lie forward and not back, and I think that it will involve some redemptive use of the very capabilities that have created our

present crisis. I think that the way of our economic salvation will involve enhanced creativity in technology, enhanced capacity for global communication, and enhanced market-based mechanisms for the efficient distribution of goods and services.

At the same time, a more hopeful way forward must lie through an appropriation of wisdom from our past that we have been too quick to leave behind, and an acceptance of humble creaturely limits of our humanity that we have too desperately tried to rise above.

Our teachers will be found among those that our civilization has rendered voiceless in the centuries of our misguided development: women and children, the poor, and people of primal cultures; as well as the disappearing birds of the air and the endangered flowers of the field. Those we have sought to put in the shadow must now become our sources of light.

The entry to this path of wisdom does not lie far from us. It begins within each of us at the still center point of our being, the place of emptiness and silence. Here it is possible to divest ourselves of the power we selfishly wield, which is also the power that enslaves us. Here it is possible to escape the lies we tell ourselves that have brought us to this peril.

In the solitude of this place, Spirit connects us with all else that shares this center: with rich people and poor; believer and unbeliever; friend and stranger; those who came before and those yet to come; creatures of land and sea; springs of water; soil and stone. This connection is not something transcendent or timeless; it is entirely of this world and of this moment.

For us it is carnal. We know it in our bodies and through our flesh. The human body, scripture teaches us, is, was and will be the ultimate form of divine creative energy.

If we view the world anew from this place of connection, our eyes will be opened to see evidence that already in our midst, today and everywhere on earth, a new way of being in the world and a New Economy is emerging. We see it anywhere a new enterprise sets out to create something useful and beautiful in a way that is mindful of the dignity of human labor, the bonds of local commonwealth, and the interdependence of all creatures and cultures.

I see this happening, in manners humble and grand, close to home and in far off lands. I see it in Boston and Louisiana, Rwanda and Tanzania. I see it in new alternative energy technology; new local and sustainable agricultural production; new mixed-use urban development; new women's craft cooperatives. It seems to be happening everywhere at once, and in each place uniquely. It is something being born in the midst of something old that has not yet died.

I see this new thing that Spirit is bringing forth, and I want to be part of it.

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