

Scarcity & Abundance: A View from Matthew's Gospel



1

More than Reading: "Correspondence of Relationships"

☞ We need not, then, look for formulas to "copy", or techniques to "apply", from scripture. What scripture will offer us are rather something like orientations, models, types, directives, principles, inspirations- elements permitting us to acquire, on our own initiative, a "hermeneutic competency," and thus the capacity to judge- on our own initiative, in our own right- "according to the mind of Christ", or "according to the Spirit", the new, unpredictable situations with which we are continually confronted. The Christian writings offer us not a *what*, but a *how*- a manner, a style, a spirit.

☞ Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans. Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), 146-150, quotation from 149.

2

The 21st Century Context

- ☞ Our society disguises its values as "common sense"
- ☞ Sociologists call this a "hegemony"- an engineered consensus
- ☞ The gospel calls us to examine the values on which our society is based.
- ☞ We look critically at the "common sense" hegemony.

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Common Sense Today 1

☞ Since Marx, "common sense" has been dominated by economics.

☞ This applies to both left and right.

☞ Alisdair MacIntyre on the effects of utilitarianism: the values that modernity imbibes are those of profit, power and status.

These have become the goods of effectiveness replacing goods of excellence. (*summary*)



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Common Sense Today 2

- ☞ A market economy
- ☞ An "economy of scarcity"
- ☞ The promotion of competition
- ☞ The fear of loss.

- ☞ How does this shape our behaviour? As Individuals?
As a society?

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Common Sense Today 3

☞ Who thinks this?

☞ David Hume:

"If nature supplied abundantly all our wants and desires...the jealousy of interest, which justice supposes, could no longer have a place"

Treatise of Human Nature, III.2



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Common Sense Today 4



☞ Nicholas Rescher:

“An economy of scarcity is, by definition, one in which justice (in a restricted sense of the term) cannot be done because there is not enough to go around: if everyone is given a share proportional to his claims and desert then someone- or everyone- is pressed beneath the floor of the minimally acceptable level.”

Public Concerns:

Philosophical Studies of Social Issues, 123



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Ancient Common Sense



- ☞ An Honour/Shame Society
- ☞ Cultural anthropology and ancient rhetoric
- ☞ but like ours one living in tension between goods of excellence and goods of effectiveness

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Ancient Common Sense



1. Honour is the pivotal social value
2. Seeking honour for the family was the primary task of males
3. Honour was limited in supply: to gain honour meant someone else lost it.
4. A loss of honour demanded retaliation of some form. The society was thus agonistic and competitive in nature.
5. Status and honour were revealed in the ways in which participants were treated in social settings such as meals.

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Ancient Common Sense



Desirable attributes in a spouse include:

- ☞ Rank (citizenship, social rank)
 - ☞ Wealth
 - ☞ Character/Education (?)
 - ☞ Looks
 - ☞ Health
- ☞ Are these goods of excellence or external goods?
How might our values compare?

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Matthew's Jesus in Contexts



- ☞ The contexts align: limited good/scarcity
- ☞ Inverting or rejecting “common sense”?
- ☞ Putting a stress on goods of excellence through the rejection of goods of effectiveness

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Jesus' “Goods of Excellence”



- ☞ *Dikaosune*- righteousness/ justice
- ☞ Not based on human conventions (how often are popular views of justice reflections of the *lex talionis*)
- ☞ Based on God's character and action
- ☞ Available for everyone
- ☞ Based on a paradigm of forgiveness and love
- ☞ See how this expands to include all: the inclusivist biblical tradition, but not universalism

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“Come as You Are”?



- ☞ Come as you are, that's how I want you.
- ☞ Come as you are, feel **quite** at home.
- ☞ Close to my heart, **loved** and forgiven;
- ☞ come as you are, why **stand** alone? (Deidre Brown/Paul Gurr)
- ☞ Really?
- ☞ “God loves us as we are, but loves us too much to want us to stay that way” (Rev'd Dr A. Bayley, approx.)

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Means of Acquisition



- ☞ The gospel often stresses the difficulty of attaining goods of excellence.
- ☞ This can make Matthew look very legalistic and depressing.
- ☞ An alternative view: the impossibility of DIY demands a different approach: reliance on God

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Matthew 6: 19-34



- ☞ The audience live in a time of great economic uncertainty
- ☞ Roman colonialism and the end of the old Galilean order
- ☞ How are we going to live?- scarcity
- ☞ Answer- reliance on God

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Challenging Scarcity: Matthew 1:18-25



- ☞ Societal norms of marriage and betrothal
- ☞ Joseph in “scarcity”
- ☞ What is the “common sense” answer?
- ☞ The reliance on God outcome



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Challenging Scarcity: Matthew 2:1-18



- ☞ A Tale of [4?] Kings
- ☞ A Tale of Two Countries
- ☞ Common Sense/Scarcity- Herod and Judaea
- ☞ Reliance on God: the Magi and Egypt

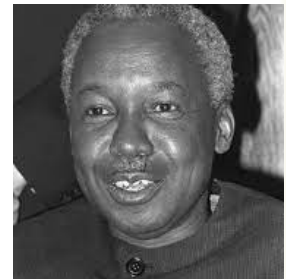


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Challenging Scarcity: Julius Nyerere



- ☞ Staunch Christian (Roman Catholic)
- ☞ Pan- Africanism
- ☞ Rejection of (Kisw.) *ukabila*
- ☞ Non-alignment
- ☞ Support for liberation movements
- ☞ An option for the poor



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Challenging Scarcity: An Historical Reflection with Ramifications?

- ☞ Australia (HDI 3) budgeted 13000 refugee places (May 1994)
- ☞ Burundi 1993. 325,000 refugees enter Tanzania (130 HDI)
- ☞ Rwanda: 1994. 535,000 refugees entry Tanzania



<https://www.unhcr.org/en-au/news/latest/2003/1/3e15a6397/eight-year-rwandan-refugee-saga-tanzania-comes-end.html>

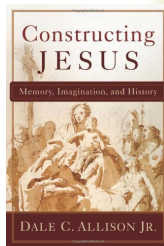
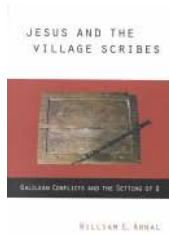
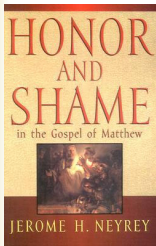
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Questions for Discussion

- ☞ Where does an economics of scarcity drive our current thinking on social and political issues?
- ☞ What does Matthew's programme say to those "common sense" concerns?

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Suggestions for further Reading



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