

Task Force on the Theology of Money
Zoom Meeting July 16, 2019
Meeting Notes Taken by Steven Tomlinson

Checking In

- Evan, Fayetteville, just bought a home, calling it “ours.”
- Erin, St. Paul, enjoying July in Minnesota.
- Kirk, Assisi and meeting the Pope.
- Bill, NY, garden.
- Gayle, Boston, two pairs of beautiful birds.
- Celeste, El Camino Real, no fog and Maine trip and new bishop.
- Gia, CA, summer produce.
- Walker, sea turtle nests.
- Larry, Garden City, kayaking.
- Gawain, White Plains, final edits done!
- Steven, debate prep.

Proposal for Structuring Our Work

- How we had structured our work was missing a key component.
- Let’s ask: What theological resources are available to us? What practical considerations are driving our search for theology?
- Then ask: Who all is speaking theologically to our church? Who is doing work with respect to investment?

Discussion on Proposal

Kirk: good work! Bill: useful.

Celeste: In what order will we approach these questions? Can we go back and forth?

Evan: Always a continual dialogue. If we sit down with the resources and people at CPG without a sense of our aspiration *and* practical. That said, we can go back and forth between #3 and earlier.

Erin: This process leaves room for other resources, emerging and established. Theology is steadfast, but the landscape of fundraising and economy (how people view and use money) is shifting quickly.

Evan: We can’t possibly survey all voices. We can point the church toward where perspectives are emerging and highlight the most promising voices.

Gia: How to hear the voices that are not on the task force — especially people in their 20s, POC — what questions are they asking?

Larry: We allow ourselves the advantage of individual resourcing ourselves to give voice to bodies of people we might represent. I won’t come to this conversation before speaking to congregations that represent different perspectives and experiences.

Erin: A nonprofit I’m part of researching giving behavior in congregations of color. We want the groups we speak to to be diverse.

Gawain: I'm Asian-American and serve Native congregation. POC scholars or clergy who can offer raw data.

Evan: It's important to name resources we have access to, also to name limitations. We should seek out voices that aren't in our group.

Gayle: We can talk with caucuses and affinity groups to get perspective from people who aren't in this meeting. Urban Caucus, UBE, etc. We bring a wealth of our own experience.

Evan: What about the timeline? When it's time to pull our resources together, we might find a funding to come together. Let's think about ways we can facilitate a gathering.

Celeste: Emerging communities. What does that mean? Spanish speaking? Young adults?

Evan: Voices that have not come from established hierarchical institutions like ECF, House of Bishops, etc. Any groups or congregations, dioceses, etc. that are doing something new and promising.

Gia: We're talking about practical vs. official theology. How are we living this out practically.

Evan: At the end of our conversation next time, we can start dividing into subcommittees. We will also get a better sense of the labels we want to use and approach. Let's talk about our initial work. Most of us have contributed to the shared document. We already have a good list of theological resources. Let's review that with the hope and highlight the things that jump out at us, the practical considerations. As you think about Scriptural, Liturgical, and other texts. What are your key inspirations, cornerstone resource. What would you highlight for us now?

Erin: Four presuppositions of Walter Brueggemann. 1. Money and possessions are not ours.

Gawain: Ideology of money is attributed to sacrifice. Money becomes a substitute for a violent act of killing an animal. Prescriptive element: Money is to keep moving, not stay in anyone's hand. David Graeber and origin of money in debt (sin). Samuel and the beginning of the state. God says you shouldn't. The prophets' interest in interest.

Gia: Acts 2 and "sell everything."

Evan: What texts are most interesting?

Steven: 2 Cor. collection for the churches.

Erin: Exodus campaign. What keeps us on our mat?

Gawain: The Benedictine experience, Dennis Mumby (God and Society) "private frugality and public luxury." You create beauty and luxury that even the poor can experience in common.

Kirk: Good Samaritan, money is used to accomplish a greater good. NT, money bad. OT, God's blessing. Luther and Wesley, use money to accomplish a greater good.

Larry: Church's mutual responsibility for the whole Church. Accumulated wealth of the American church should be taken as collection for missionary work in the church at large. Those concepts find their root in Benedictine commitment to garner resources for a good effort. The money we have actually belongs to the other. We can't avoid the sin of selfishness. Church bodies become parochial.

Gawain: Money allows us to experience envy at a low simmer than at a highly intensified way. The market economy allows for easy distraction rather than intensifying our energy in any one direction (rather than stealing, etc.)

Steven: Ely Wheeler and Zhang, psychology and money.

Erin: Russell James (neuroscience), charitable giving changes our synapses. Impact on our bodies and on our souls and minds.

Gia: Boston College Center and Wealth and Philanthropy. How does money narrow our perspective? Wealthy people are less happy because of how complicated their lives are. Always need more to feel secure.

Evan: I need to step away from the call. Gayle will you lead us for three minutes. We need an answer to the question: Show us what you're talking about when you're talking about a theology of money.

Gawain: William Temple *Christianity and the State*. Frances Perkins created Social Security.

Kirk: The offertory sentences, Praise God from whom all blessings flow, all things come of thee O Lord and from thy own have we given thee.

Gia: Text of the doxological hymn. Swell of organ chords. This looks like the climax of the liturgy.

Gayle: Bp Curry says we have different ways of having money. I want the sort that had dollar bills. Loaves and fishes.

Steven: The miracle is money as an excuse for communion, and to enjoy others.

Gawain: We measure our wealth in the number of people we connect with. We should accumulate money and spend it to connect with people.

Celeste: Our audience is broad and deep. A good portion is may not be able to quote the Bible. Can we use part of our time to ask them to tell stories about money — when did it bring you joy or sadness? When did it connect you with others? To speak with the people in the pew, we've got to connect in a way other than scholarship.

Evan: I think the work we're doing now is like painting a picture. We are naming for our committee the colors and shapes and fabrics that help us paint a picture of God's dream for how money might be used. It's as simple as a parable and as rich as a patristic theological statement. The next step is to draw a map, all the moments when people encounter decisions about money. Our product is the intersection between that map and our dream. It's not our job to interpret all our resources to the church. We want to say: Does this lead us from the consideration or decision to the dream or vision or aspiration. I want to resist the temptation to jump too quickly to the end. What are the other considerations that might help us get there.

Really fruitful! The next job for our plenary group to go back to our shared document to add bulleted list from this conversation. What is the dream or vision (from scripture, etc.)? Begin thinking about what are the questions you face as an individual, household; communities, congregations, organizations; larger communities. Very practical considerations.

Gawain: I've been working on how congregations make economic decisions. The relationships between time and money. Land vs. liquid cash. Repair or buy new. Amateur or professional. Disposable vs. reusable. Nice or cheap. There are ways churches make these decisions in practice. I'd like to post after I have a couple of examples of each.

Evan: Our job as a task force is not to answer these questions, but to make sure the theology we're articulating connects with the practical questions people are asking. What does our church have to say that helps connect those questions to those aspirational moments. Conscious of the decisions being made, knowledgeable about the aspirational texts, what can we say to a person, diocese, congregation facing these decisions. This is our theology of money and we offer that to share. Gawain, please share that document and we'll build on it.

Work Between Now and August 20

- Review list of aspirational texts.
- Review Gawain's list of congregational questions: Contribute your own experience as an individual, household or representative of an institution.

- Ask someone with different experience and perspective — What are your aspirational resources? What decisions do you have to make in the intersection of faith and money?