
BIBLICAL ROOTS OF A NATIONAL DIVIDEND

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The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine…In all the land of your possession you shall grant a redemption for the land. If your brother becomes poor, and sells some of his possessions, then his kinsman who is next to him shall come, and redeem that which his brother has sold. If a man has no one to redeem it, and he becomes prosperous and finds sufficient means to redeem it; then let him reckon the years since the sale of it, and restore the surplus to the man to whom he sold it; and he shall return to his property. But if he isn't able to get it back for himself, then what he has sold shall remain in the hand of him who has bought it until the Year of Jubilee: and in the Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property

Leviticus 25:23-28 (WEB)

The passage above is part of the Jubilee celebration commanded by God for the economic and social welfare of the Hebrew people. This celebration, to occur every 50 years, provided among other things that land--the major productive resource at that time--could not be permanently sold or lost to debt since it belonged only to God. Because of this Divine claim, land could be temporarily purchased or seized for unpaid debt, but only at a price depending on the number of years to Jubilee. Sold or forfeited land could be redeemed at any time by the former owner or his relatives upon payment of an amount prorated according to the remaining years to the next Jubilee. At the 50th year of Jubilee all land except that inside walled cities reverted to its original owners as determined by Joshua's division and apportionment of land to the tribes of Israel following the conquest of Canaan.

The ethos or national character of Hebrew Israel was forged during their 400-year sojourn as slaves in Egypt. This transforming experience conditioned their values, beliefs and religious expressions for centuries and still plays a prominent role in Western theology and jurisprudence. Since the keynote of Israel's history was the slave experience and their Divine rescue, they were commanded by God to institute laws and ordinances designed to prevent anything like this from recurring. In addition, it was their considered destiny to administer the Jubilee laws of liberty to other peoples and nations wherever possible.

Here are several of the biblical principles designed by God to institute and maintain economic and social freedom for His people and whoever else will use them:

- Land, including its natural resources, belongs ultimately to God, who created it for the use and betterment of human kind.
- Every family was permanently assigned land (the major productive resource) for their financial welfare.
- Debt or foolhardiness could not permanently remove any family from access to the productive factors necessary to care for themselves.
- The assigning of land permanently indicates God's intention that all families should be provided with the resources necessary for decent living.
- All citizens thus shared in ownership of productive resources. Nobody could permanently gain control of these resources, nor could anyone create poverty, oppression or injustice for others through manipulation or monopoly of these resources.

So how could these biblical principles be carried into operation today? With modern transportation, communication and information systems, it is not necessary for everyone to provide for their financial welfare by owning land or other productive resources. But it is necessary that they share ownership in the development of such resources for the public good. The most simple way is through taxation of the corporations having the know-how and finances to develop resources and technologies; and the sharing of this wealth with all citizens through some form of Basic Income Guarantee (BIG), Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI), or what I call a National Dividend. Alaska already has a Permanent Trust Fund that shares part of its oil revenues with the people, and many foreign countries are now beginning such endeavors. Yes, there are difficulties. But if we can explore space, discover the secrets of the universe, and probe the deepest realms of the human mind, surely we can find some way to implement economic justice and decent living standards for all Americans.

For all citizens to share in the wealth of the U.S. is not a welfare program, nor is it charity. It is nothing less than a dividend returning to each person a small part of what they have contributed to a very profitable enterprise--the American economy. So it's economically just and fair in every sense of the term.