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Recommended Citation
CRUCIFYING CONTEMPORARY CHRISTS—SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS OF WARTIME ECONOMICS

CLIFF MARRS

A fter Jesus told the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, his disciples asked, “Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty… or sick…and did not help you?” To their questions Jesus replied, “Whatever you did and did not do for one of the least of these…you did and did not do for me.” (Matthew 25:44-5) In a day when believers could claim ignorance regarding the needs of the world we might have escaped the stern words of Jesus, but in an age of mass media and global information access none of us can claim the “innocence” of ignorance. The ways we respond to the needs of the world, however, betray not only our humanitarian loyalties; they also reflect our deepest spiritual commitments.

In antiquity the relationship between a deity and a person or community was basically contractual, a combination of divine promises and human obligations. “I will be your God and you shall be my people, obey and worship me and I will bless you,” declares the God of Israel. Sacrifice was the human expression of devotion and loyalty that confirmed and helped cement the communion. It was a costly act; hence King David can proclaim “I will not…sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing” (I Chronicles 21:24), but not a disinterested one. Sacrifice was something of a gamble; the price of the offering was paid in the hope that voluntarily relinquishing something of value now would ensure greater gain in the future. It was an attempt to placate the deity in the hope of ensuring its future protection and blessing—peace and prosperity (see for example Exodus 12:21-27: Ps. 50:14-15, 107)—even in eternity (see II Maccabees 12:38-45). If the sacrifice involved taking a life, a “blood sacrifice” as opposed to a cereal sacrifice, it amounted to a religiously sanctioned act of violence against animals: sacred violence, ritual killing.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was interpreted by Paul and others as a blood sacrifice. The Church, in the light of Easter, has spiritualized the event; Francis Watson writes: “The earliest known statement about Christ’s death is that he ‘died for our sins’ (I Corinthians
The language...reflects the Jewish idea of the sin-offering (alluded to in Romans 5:6)...References to the blood of Christ (e.g. Romans 3:25 & 5:9) show that the idea of sacrifice is in mind. This is worked out in great detail in...Hebrews. This emphasis has tended to de-historicize the execution, reflected in the fact that none of the passages mention the historical Jesus but refer instead to the Christ of faith or to the Son of God. Yet Jesus’ death was a historical event in an historical context occurring amidst the realpolitik of first century Roman-occupied Judea. In this context his execution was an act of political sacrifice. As John 11:50 reports, the high priest Caiaphas reckoned “it is better that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” (See also Luke 23:2; John 19:12, 19; Mark 15:2; Matthew 27:11.) The political nature of the sacrifice is reflected in the political form of the execution: crucifixion by the political puppet-masters rather than stoning by the subdued locals (the form of execution for religious transgressions; see Acts 6:8-7:60). The temple hierarchy paid the price to Judas—thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-15).

In Matthew 25 Jesus identified himself with the poor, and today close to 27 million poor “Christs” are sacrificed each year. Whereas Jesus’ death was a political sacrifice today’s victims (i.e. “living creatures offered in sacrifice”\(^5\)) are crucified by a trinity of affliction—poverty, hunger and disease—for economic gain. The *Economist* reports: “Although the idea that poverty leads to ill health has long been accepted, economists have only recently begun to show that disease leads to poverty...There are obvious costs to ill health, since sick people spend less time at work and more money on medical treatment.”\(^6\) Hunger aggravates the problem since the bodies of starving people (malnourished is the sanitized description) are weakened making them more prone to disease and less able to work potentially impoverishing them further and causing another cycle of hunger which in turn increases the risk of more disease and a descent into even more abject poverty. The diseases include TB, malaria and HIV/AIDS exacerbated by polluted air and water and poor sanitation. UNFPA’s “The State of World Population 2001” report informs that annually dirty water and poor sanitation kill approximately 12,600,000 people with air pollution accounting for a further 5,200,000 and TB another 3,000,000. UNAIDS reports that 3,000,000 people die each year from AIDS. According to the Malaria Vaccine Initiative malaria causes 2,700,000 fatalities per year. This total of nearly 26,500,000 averages a staggering 72,500 per day, a figure which does not include...
Market. For Harvey Cox, “The Market is becoming more like Yahweh...not just one superior deity contending with others but...the only true God whose reign must now be universally accepted and who allows no rival...an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God.” He notes that throughout history there have been numerous ways of doing things—“bazaars, rialtos, and trading posts—all markets...[and] other centers of value and meaning, other gods,” but that gradually over the last two hundred years The Market has been increasing its dominance. It could be said that it finally emerged triumph in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the “end of history”—when no competitors remained, hence high priestess Thatcher’s credo: TINA—“There Is No Alternative.” In referring to “process theology” Cox recognizes that whilst The Market desires to possess the divine attributes that it does not yet possess them in full, “but is definitely moving in that direction.” Its omnipotence is reflected in Thatcher’s mantra, “you can’t buck the Market.” Brother Tony (Blair) concurs: “Globalization is irreversible and irresistible” (like Calvin’s concept of grace?). For Cox, its omniscience is suggested inasmuch as “The Market is able to determine what human needs are...it knows the deepest secrets and darkest desires of our hearts.” Its omnipresence is evident in the way economic values have crept into every area of human life, including the body itself and our most intimate relations. Everything has become a commodity; everything has its price. For example, sperm, ova and wombs are now traded; someone has also calculated that a “good marriage” is worth £72,000 per annum (unfortunately no calculation was provided). There has also been talk of a new discipline—economic theology—that seeks to ascertain an economic value on religious activity. For example, by calculating how much time, money and energy we devote to our religious life a monetary value can be computed. Presumably, if one only goes to the church down the road for an hour once on a Sunday and leaves in the collection plate less than the admittance price of going to the cinema or a football match, the value is probably not very high. Cox concludes: “The Market is not only around us but inside us.”

Whereas Yahweh desired justice and mercy (Psalm 33:5; Hosea 6:6) The Market desires relentless economic growth. Says Cox, “there is never enough.” Like the proverbial shark that stops moving, The Market that stops expanding dies.” To ensure its desire, The Market has its own 10 Commandments:
deaths from other widespread diseases such as diarrhea, hepatitis, respiratory infection and bilharzias.

These diseases are called “poverty-related preventable diseases” because money is at the root of alleviating them. It is not the case that we do not have effective treatments. The World Health Organization (WHO) calculates that of the nearly 56 million deaths across the world each year that nearly 40% are preventable. According to UNFPA: “An estimated 60% of the global burden of disease from acute respiratory infections, 90% from diarrheal disease, 50% from chronic respiratory conditions, and 90% from malaria could be avoided by simple environmental interventions.” The problem is not ignorance but investment because the cost of even the most basic treatment is frequently far beyond the means of the suffering themselves. The 2001 Commission on Macroeconomics & Heath report for the WHO calculated that if the affluent nations spent $27 billion per annum on the war against poverty-related diseases 8 million lives per year could be saved. The Economist translates this thus: “A colossal number of lives could be saved...for about $25 per rich-country citizen each year...less than many parents...will be spending on a Harry Potter video game for their children.” With regard to hunger the problem is not one of production but of policy. Julia Hinde notes: “most scholars agree that there is sufficient food to feed the world population of 6 billion, with many countries producing food surpluses. Hunger is not a simple production issue.” Brian Heap concurs: “today’s farmers produce enough food to feed everyone in the world.” He identifies one of the major problems: “world grain output has fallen...primarily because of the effect of economic curbs on production by major producers in North America to maintain cereal prices.” Jermey Rifkin identifies another problem: millions of acres of Third World arable land is used to grow feed grain for European livestock rather than food for hungry people. Proverbs 13:23 seems apt: “The field of the poor may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away.” He also notes that two-thirds of US grain exports goes to feed livestock. As Kevin Danaher observes, “The world economy produces more food...than ever before yet we have more people hungry than ever before.” Zackie Achmarr’s assertion rings true: “poor people die only because they are poor.”

“Preventable” means choice—to prevent or not to prevent—that the deaths do not have to occur: tragically the choice is to let them. Who chooses? The god of globalization, the new world religion: The
“blood sacrifices” and gain from them, but unlike in antiquity, today’s pious are not the ones who pay the price. This is borne by the victims who pay the ultimate price. They die as a result of the decisions of the devout as they implement the 10 Commandments. Their decisions center on aid, the use of resources and the rules of trade.

In 1990-92 the world’s richest nations donated an average 0.33% of their Gross National Product (GNP) to aid; this has now fallen to 0.22%. At the IMF in November 2001 Gordon Brown called for a $50 billion per annum International Development Trust Fund to finance “a global campaign against poverty.” He has had, though, little support. In June 2002 African leaders beseeched the G8 for $64 billion to fight poverty and disease on the continent. The super-rich G8 could find just $1 billion of new money (the same amount they spend each and every day subsidizing their own farmers). On resources, millions of people go hungry because millions of tons of grain and millions of acres of land are used to grow food for livestock rather than for hungry people. Who gains from these sacrifices? The agribusinesses that produce the seeds, chemicals and cattle and that control the slaughterhouses and the marketing and distribution channels for beef. Resources are also channelled to generate foreign currency to repay international debt with dietary staples giving way to cash crops for export (for example, Kenya provides M&S with fresh roses). The WB, IMF and WTO govern the conditions attached to aid and determine trade rules. In following the 10 Commandments they impose austerity measures that cause immiserization, a fact admitted after years of denial by both the WB and IMF. Hardship results from the insistence on the removal of subsidies, on the imposition of full cost recovery and user-fees, privatizations and the honoring of international debt.

Like Jesus’ followers in Matthew, we might also ask: “When did we see you hungry and not feed you?” With the denial of aid, for one example. At the World Food Summit in June 2002 the UN Food & Agriculture Organization’s call for $26 billion per annum to halve world hunger won no support from either the US or EU. We also neglect “the Christs” of our day when food is denied to the hungry by the removal of subsidies, with using land and grain to produce food for animals instead of humans, and with the replacement of food production for domestic consumption for export crops to generate currency to service loan repayments.
I am the lord your god who brought you out of poverty and bestowed upon you freedom.

1. Thou shall have no other gods before me.

2. Thou shall not make for thyself any idol (do not be seduced by the lures of isolationism or protectionism), for I am a jealous god, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.

3. Rather, embrace competitiveness and adopt liberalization, that thy markets may be open to all.

4. Eliminate conditions that discriminate in favor of local producers and providers (labor regulations, subsidies, tariffs, quotas, etc.).

5. Thou shall minimize the role of the state, reducing taxation and limiting public provision and government procurement.

6. Promote privatization.

7. Remove environmental protections.

8. Remember thy debt and honor thy creditors: work without ceasing to repay, that it may go well for thee.

9. Covet thy neighbor’s wealth, thy neighbor’s possessions and thy neighbor’s lifestyle, and seek to emulate them.

10. Keep the faith and persevere in time of trouble: things may get worse before they get better, but remember, no pain no gain!

Disobedience will incur The Market’s wrath: “I will repay you in accordance with your conduct and the detestable practices among you….I the Lord do smite” (Ezekiel 7:8-9). Wrath is thus the divine reaction to human sin and manifests itself in actual situations (e.g. Deuteronomy 29:23; Exodus 4:14; II Samuel 6:7). The Market’s wrath is manifest in the withholding of blessings (aid), the withdrawing of favours (through disinvestments) and the abandonment of apostates and sinners (by relocating assets) to their fate (one of socio-economic and political instability, commodity shortages, unemployment etc.—just look what has happened to Argentina).

In obeying The Market, its worshippers—the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO) and the G8 and their multinational corporations—effect...
evasively asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Whether or not he was guilty, his punishment confirmed his culpability.

Today’s victims lack any kind of power or influence and hence cannot escape or alter their position. Lack of choice relieves them of responsibility for their fate. Can responsibility be apportioned elsewhere? The G8 and their multinationals have the ways and means to ease the problems. They chose not to do so. Are they responsible? Isaac Newton recognized that for every action there is always opposed an equal reaction, and just as we recognize that rights have responsibilities, so it is not difficult to see that every choice has a consequence. Having the means to prevent deaths but choosing not to do so condemns those who are in no position to resist. Economics is a matter of life and death. David Held argues that those who determine the fate of others by virtue of their power and influence bear responsibility for those others, especially the impotent. This relates to the stewardship motif of Luke 12:48b: “to whom much is given much is required.” The Market faithful need to acknowledge that choices coexist with consequences and that theirs directly and adversely affect the lives and billions of others and that they have a responsibility for the consequences of their choices and so for those lives.

Stalin is credited with the saying: “one death is a tragedy, a million deaths a statistic.” We are repulsed at the thought of human sacrifice in ancient civilizations, but often our ancestors were giving up their most precious possessions—the lives of their children—which it is difficult to imagine could have been done lightly. The modern practice is unparalleled in scale and almost unimaginable, particularly as the victims are silent and hidden, largely absent from our TVs. The stark statistics of death mask the individuality and humanity of today’s crucified Christs. Absence from our TVs helps insulate us from their reality, but tolerating poverty-related preventable diseases leading to mass destruction deserves consideration as a crime against humanity. Saskia Sassen exhorts us to “no longer turn our backs on the misery of rising debt, poverty, and disease.” Edgar Cahn proclaims: “Justice has to mean No More Throwaway People.” As poverty-related deaths are preventable, there do not have to be “Throwaway People.” We do not have to tolerate human sacrifice today; something can be done. There is nothing immutable about our aid budgets, how we use resources and the way we trade: they reflect the way we choose, and we can choose differently. This is because whilst The Market may be “becoming like Yahweh,” it is in truth no more than a golden calf—man-made, a social construct.
Or, we might ask: “When did we see you thirsty and not give you something to drink?” With the denial of aid and the abandoning of public works to provide effective sanitation and clean water as government spending is slashed, and the privatization of water supplies which invariably cause consumer costs to spiral often beyond the means of the poor (the IMF made water privatization a condition of loan agreements to 12 African countries in 2001). Hopefully a recent development may stimulate a (no doubt long-term) process to ease the situation. In November 2002 the UN Committee on Economic, Cultural & Social Rights recognized water as “a limited natural resource and a public commodity fundamental to life and health.” It declared access to water to be a human right noting that it is a “social and cultural good, not merely an economic commodity.”

And, “When did we see you sick and not provide for your healing?” we might ask. With the denial of health-care aid: in June 2001 Kofi Annan launched a Global Health Fund to raise $10 billion per annum for treating HIV/AIDS. It has been extended to cover TB and malaria but so far has received only $2 billion. Also, with drug companies putting profits before people by insisting patented medicines be used instead of cheaper generic ones. For example, the patented antiretroviral drugs that keep western HIV sufferers alive cost about $10,000 per patient per annum; their generic equivalents cost $300—still too much for the vast majority of Africans, who are the vast majority of sufferers, to pay. (The leading 11 US & European pharmaceuticals have combined sales of $115 billion.) When, in December 2002, 143 WTO member countries agreed to relax patent rules so essential drugs would be more affordable to poor countries one nation dissented, the richest in the world, the US (whose governing party are bankrolled by the pharmaceuticals) torpedoed the policy.

Kwesi Owusu monitors the multinationals, G8 and other global institutions for Jubilee Plus (the successor to Jubilee 2000). In the months preceding the Genoa summit she “watched the world’s richest men and their hired merchants of spin talk themselves out of any vestige of real concern for the plight of the poor.” If they have little concern how can they conceive of any responsibility? Genesis 4 tells the story of Cain and Abel. After God rejected Cain’s vegetarian offering, which possibly resulted in the curse of a bad harvest the following year (hence his “downcast” demeanor, NIV, 4:5b-6)—Cain sacrificed his brother, possibly using his blood to moisten the soil in the hope of bringing it to life. When God inquired after Abel, Cain
all the calls for aid were responded to fully, the cost would still fall far short of the multi-trillion dollar cost of wars (the cost of Gulf War 2 has been variously estimated at anything from $2-10 trillion depending on duration and levels of success).

In every age, people must choose whom they will serve. In a day when The Market calls for submission to its values and mandates, promising prosperity and blessing to those who bow down and worship it, the poor of the land are sacrificed to the idols of the land. To follow Jesus, however, goes against the grain. Rather than putting Christ to death again by our inaction and indifference, regarding others as “Christ” might cause us to look for alternatives to present dilemmas. These are not the political words of a 21st century Marxist dinosaur refusing to acknowledge The Market’s supremacy, but the prophetic words of an early Celtic saint:

As you did it to the least of these…

Remember the poor when you look out on fields you own,
on your plump cows grazing.

Remember the poor when you look into your barn
at the abundance of your harvest.

Remember the poor when the wind howls
and the rain falls,
as you sit in your dry house…

The poor have no food except what you feed them
no shelter except your house
when you welcome them,
no warmth except your glowing fire.
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(see Exodus 32)—and its commandments are not gospel. There are alternatives; hence, it is not omniscient, and there are prophets (such as George Soros), apostates (such as Joseph Stiglitz) and heretics (such as Amartya Sen) whose hearts and minds have not been seduced; hence it is not omnipresent, and their challenges indicate that it is not omnipotent.40

Gordon Brown recognizes: “this generation has it in our power—if it chooses—to abolish all forms of human poverty.”41 This might cost the rich something but they are not being called upon to be self-sacrificial—to give everything (see Matthew 19:16-21; Luke 21:1-4)—or even to tithe (the UN target for aid giving is just 0.7% of GNP). Much could be achieved for relatively little. For example, the sums involved in the various calls for increased spending on anti-poverty measures, food, medicine, etc. may seem huge but are in fact minuscule when compared to US and EU annual farm subsidies and consumer and military spending. Americans spend $27 billion per annum on confectionary, $70 billion on alcohol and $550 billion on their cars whilst Europeans spend $11 billion per annum on ice cream: the animal lovers of the north Atlantic axis of consumerism spend $17 billion per annum on pet food. Within three days of 9-11 the US Senate found $40 billion for their war on terrorism and in February 2002 George W. Bush increased the US military budget by $48 billion to take it to $380 billion (this after he had initiated a $1.5 trillion tax-cut).42 This expenditure is of a completely different magnitude to that needed to feed the hungry, relieve the thirsty and treat the sick.

However, as Amartya Sen recognizes: “It would be…naïve to expect that there is a real chance of making major ‘transfers’ of assets and resources across the border of the rich and poor worlds.”43 It is probably unrealistic to appeal to common humanity or to expect the world to adopt the ethics of Jesus44 but perhaps an appeal to enlightened self-interest might work. For example, investing $27 billion per annum in Third World health care which resulted in saving 8 million lives per annum would generate an extra $186 billion per annum for the global economy.45 There may also be a glimmer of hope from the tragedy of 9-11. Many, including the CIA, recognize, in the words of James Wolfensohn (President of the WB), “that global poverty breeds terrorism.”46 Instead of wars against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction it might just be worth considering making the world a more humane—and so a safer—place for everyone. This could even be promoted from an economic as opposed to a humanitarian perspective. If
NOTES

1. As in the Sinai/Mosaic covenant; see Exodus 19:3-5, 8; 20:24; Deuteronomy 3:15-20.


6. Economist 12/22/01.

7. See R. Rabinoich, Guardian 7/8/02.

8. For more information see S. Boseley & L McGregor, Guardian 30/11/01: Socialist Worker 12/1/01: Newsnight & Steps for the Future both BBC2 11/26/01.


10. See Church Times 11/9/01.

11. Economist 12/22/01.

12. J. Hinde, “If Food Is in the Larder, Then Why Not on the Table?” Times Higher Education Supplement 9/6/02.

13. B. Heap, “If Food Is in the Larder, Then Why Not on the Table?” Times Higher Education Supplement 9/6/02.


35. For a sacrificial reading of Abel’s death see D.C. Benjamin in *Eerdmans Dictionary*, p. 208-9. Cain may also have been guilty of idolatry, of sacrificing to the earth gods, “the chthonian deities who belonged to the soil and the underworld.” (Smart, *World’s Religions* p. 229) Sacrificing to them meant that the blood “instead of spurring up to heaven…poured downward through a hole in the ground,” hence Genesis 4:10-11, Abel’s blood cried out from the ground which had “opened its mouth to receive [it].”


40. There is not space here to provide details but see Marrs, “Globalization,” pp. 105-7 (esp. footnote 114 which lists further sources); C.J. Marrs, *NonViolentAction* (December 2002) p. 2.

41. *Guardian* 11/19/01.


43. A. Sen, “Addressing Global Poverty,” *Living with Capitalism*, LICC.


45. *Economist* 12/22/01.


47. From *Celtic Fire*, compiled by R. van de Weyer (DLT 1990) p. 45.
G. Bewkes, Dean of the School of Religion, together with three other Colgate professors, published a book called *Experience, Reason and Faith*. It undertook “the difficult assignment” of presenting “a fairly extensive impression... of the philosophical and religious material... so easily overlooked or slighted in dealing with the development of Western culture.”

Published by Harper & Row, it met a long-felt need. A number of colleges and universities adopted it as a text for general courses in philosophy and religion. After a quarter of a century, however, the book became quite out of date, and Calvin Keene, who had assisted in preparing it, was assigned to doing a complete revision, including considerable rewriting. In the interest of reflecting its contents more precisely, the title was changed to *The Western Heritage of Faith and Reason*.

That was in 1953. Since 1943 Calvin Keene had been at Howard University helping to establish its School of Religion. Mrs. Pearl L. Bailey, referred to above, writes of him as follows:

I met J. C. K. in June 1945, a country girl, a recent graduate of a small college, I had a lot to learn. I was joining a large, complex university system and adjusting to an urban community. I was not yet 21 years old.

Throughout my orientation and development with the School of Religion family J. C. K. stood out as a refreshing spirit—tall, lanky, personable; humble and unpretentious; respectful; and cooperative in honoring the rules, regulations, and requirement issuing from the Dean’s office. His refreshing spirit stood out because the faculty could get caught up in professional competition, undue emphasis on degrees, rank, status, tenure. Calvin Keene was above all that. He was secure in his own person.

The students were in awe of this scholar of the highest order, well steeped in his field of systematic theology. Nonetheless, they found him thorough, patient, and generous with his time both in the classroom and in conference. Dr. Keene cultivated a teaching-learning climate. To him, an understanding and a mastery of his course offerings by his students superseded their working for a passing grade (although that was the likely product).

When the Dean of the School was on leave with a Fulbright Scholarship in India on his sabbatical from Howard in 1947-48, Calvin Keene served as Acting Dean. He did not throw his weight