

Can Good Stewards Grow the Economy?

BEFORE THE WAR, a fellow brings some shoes to the repair shop to be resoled. The cobbler takes the shoes, writes him a claim ticket, and the man leaves, only to be called up for duty the next day.

The soldier forgets all about the shoes until he happens across the claim check several decades later. On a whim he takes it back to the repair shop. Sure enough, the aged cobbler is still at it. The fellow hands him the ticket. The cobbler peers at it and then rummages in the back of the shop for a bit. When he returns, he tells the guy, “Found ’em. They’ll be ready Tuesday.”

Globally, how do we resolve this?

I don’t tell that joke anymore. It’s too hard to explain:

“What’s a cobbler?”

“Why didn’t the soldier just go to WalMart to buy new shoes?”

“What’s a claim check?”

Forget it. I give up.

I know we can’t return to the days when it made economic sense to keep people working to fix stuff. Or can we?

That’s the dilemma, isn’t it? We should consume a whole lot less so that the environment won’t go to pot. But if we stop buying more stuff, then the economy goes south and tons of breadwinners are out of work. That’s not very loving.

So globally, how do we resolve this? I’ve heard these suggestions:

- get used stuff repaired instead of buying new all the time; make “retro” stylish.
- become big-time consumers of art, concerts, cultural events, and services, instead of “toys” and bling.
- take the money we save by not buying stuff and use it (through taxes and higher utility prices?) to create employment by building renewable energy resources, upgrading infrastructure, and swapping out energy-intensive stuff for more eco-friendly goods.
- have folks cut back on hours spent in the workplace and pay them to invest more time and energy in their kids, friends, churches, and communities.
- reduce freeway speed limits and vehicle sizes and ban cars from city centers.

Hare-brained? Maybe. Most of us have enough trouble balancing our checkbooks, let alone devising ways of balancing the wellbeing of the whole creation with the needs of humans.

So help us out, here: how can we live up to the awesome responsibility of being good stewards of God’s good earth, and do so in a way that doesn’t pitch other imagebearers into unemployment and poverty? How can we point the way to an economy that thrives when we conserve rather than when we consume? If we’ll ever be able to put wheels under the creation care report that’s coming to this year’s synod, we’ll need some very savvy economic advice to help us noodle out how that goes.

I extend this invitation to the economists among us: teach us how to get out of this bind and how we can help others do so too. We’ve reserved some prime real estate in this magazine so you can advise us non-economists how to do what’s good for our neighbor *and* for our planet.

Tell us how good stewardship can realistically grow our economy. We’re all ears. ■



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