

# Not Always Right: Critiquing Christopher Wright's Paradigmatic Application of the Old Testament to the Socio- economic Realm

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Christopher J. H. Wright is one of the leading evangelical voices today addressing the theology of the church's mission. Wright, an Anglican pastor and Old Testament (OT) scholar, is a key figure in the Lausanne Movement, including his role as the Chair of the Cape Town 2010 Statement Working Group, which drafted the Cape Town Commitment, the third major declaration of the movement, following the 1974 Lausanne Covenant and the 1989 Manila Manifesto. Both the Cape Town Commitment and the larger body of Wright's publications exhibit his passion for Christians to apply Scripture, in particular the OT, to a broad range of ethical issues, including matters within the socio-economic realm of secular society. Wright notes that "the question of what authority the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible have for Christians and how they should be used for ethics is, and always has been, difficult and divisive."<sup>1</sup> But the complexity of the topic is met by Wright's zeal when he describes "the great love-affair of my life with the ethical study

and relevance of the Old Testament.”<sup>2</sup> Wright readily acknowledges that “I am not an economist, nor a politician, lawyer, or sociologist, and claim no special expertise in these areas,” but nonetheless believes that his paradigmatic approach to OT ethics provides a proper framework for considering modern economic questions.<sup>3</sup> This article will first describe Wright’s paradigmatic method, and then both commend and critique his approach in general, and finally evaluate some of the specific applications he makes to the socio-economic realm.

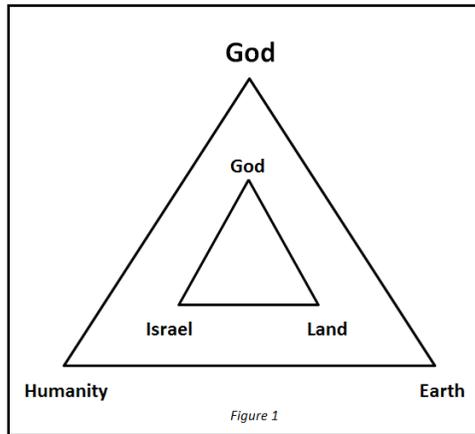
### **DESCRIBING WRIGHT’S PARADIGMATIC APPROACH TO OT ETHICAL APPLICATION**

When speaking of his paradigmatic approach to OT ethics, Wright uses the term “paradigm” in two senses.<sup>4</sup> First, he employs it to refer to a “wider conceptual paradigm,” an “overall matrix of beliefs, values and assumptions,”<sup>5</sup> what could also be labeled a ‘worldview.’ Following this first definition of paradigm, Wright sees the OT itself as providing an overarching worldview or broad paradigm.<sup>6</sup> Second, Wright uses “paradigm” in a narrower sense as “a concrete model, a practical, experimental exemplar of the beliefs and values” of the wider paradigm.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, within the larger OT worldview, OT Israel is a particular application of that broader worldview to a certain time and place—a “case study” as it were. OT Israel as a case study or narrow paradigm provides us with “actual experimental results” and with a “historical exemplar of what [the OT worldview] meant in practice for one human community.”<sup>8</sup> This illustrates Wright’s conviction concerning the indivisibility of God’s particular will for OT Israel in history and God’s universal will for mankind throughout history. Though Wright resists making a simplistic transfer from the particular to the universal, he does assume that “the laws and institutions God gave to Israel accurately reflected, within the particular historical and geographical context, his desire and design for human life in the world.”<sup>9</sup> Wright sees this connection between historical Israel and God’s universal purposes for humanity as an “important hermeneutical principle [which] helps to unlock the relevance of the Old Testament for our own ethical construction.”<sup>10</sup>

Wright outlines four basic steps for moving from the paradigm of Israel to contemporary applications. First, the reader must acquire a general and broad understanding of OT law and its various categories and functions.<sup>11</sup>

Wright's main point is that readers must begin by seeking to "step inside [the OT world] and understand the law from Israel's own social perspective" and, in so doing, determine "the different ways [the] law functioned in Israelite society, the different kinds of law that operated, and the different patterns of judicial administration."<sup>12</sup> Readers should aim "to put ourselves in Israel's position and understand how Israel perceived and experienced their relationship with God and how that experience affected their practical living as a community."<sup>13</sup> Step two is to turn from the OT law broadly considered to the analysis of *particular* laws and institutions.<sup>14</sup> This analysis includes understanding the relationship of individual laws to the overall system of law and the function of those individual laws within the society, an analysis requiring in-depth engagement with "the fields of Old Testament economics, politics, sociology, [and] legal history."<sup>15</sup> After attaining an understanding of Israelite society and law, including the function of individual laws, step three seeks to clarify the objective or objectives of those individual laws.<sup>16</sup> Finally, step four transfers the understood objectives and functions of particular laws from within the context of OT Israelite society to the new context of contemporary society.<sup>17</sup> According to Wright, this process of translation from ancient to modern is an attempt to achieve the underlying objectives of OT laws within society today or, at the very least, to "bring our own social objectives to point in the same direction" as OT Israel's.<sup>18</sup> Through this four-step, paradigmatic ethical application, Wright seeks to establish a framework or outer boundary for believers' behavior, even while permitting "a degree of variety and disagreement among Christians over the details of ethical decisions and social policies."<sup>19</sup>

The continuity of purposes which Wright desires to translate from the OT context into contemporary settings is not merely drawn between the Old *Covenant* people and the New *Covenant* people but is also continuity in God's purposes for all humanity, including humanity presently *outside* the New Covenant. Therefore, Wright believes that OT Israel is intended to function as an ethical model for Christians to apply in *secular* society today: "What God did with Israel in their land functions for us as a model or paradigm from which we draw principles and objectives for our socio-ethical endeavor in secular society."<sup>20</sup> Though Wright acknowledges the asymmetrical relationship between Israel as "a redeemed community" and present day secular society as a mixture of believers and unbelievers, he holds that



Israel as a model was rooted in unchanging, universal “creation ordinances.”<sup>21</sup> Consequently, Wright believes that Christians today *should* also apply OT ethics to secular society using his paradigmatic approach.<sup>22</sup>

In his major work on OT ethics, Wright explains his overarching goal as “outlin[ing] the broad contours of the worldview that lies behind the wealth of laws and exhortation in the Old Testament, as well as the moral values implicit or explicit in the narratives, worship and prophecy. Old Testament ethics are built upon Israel’s worldview.”<sup>23</sup> He goes on to identify God, Israel, and the land as “the three pillars of Israel’s worldview.”<sup>24</sup> Wright presents these three key elements as existing in a “triangle of relationships,”<sup>25</sup> with the three corners labeled “God,” “Israel,” and “the Land.” Wright describes this triangle as an interaction between the theological (Israel’s relationship with God), the social (Israel’s life as a people), and the economic (Israel’s possession and use of the land).<sup>26</sup> Then, to demonstrate the correlation between the particular “case study” of OT Israel and the universal biblical worldview, Wright places this triangle within a larger triangle (See Figure 1). The apex of the larger triangle is also labeled “God.” But the other two corners of the larger triangle are labeled “Humanity” (corresponding to “Israel”) and “the Earth” (corresponding to “the Land”).<sup>27</sup> According to Wright, in the biblical worldview, just as God was centrally concerned with OT Israel’s relationship to the covenant land, so God continues to care deeply about all humanity’s relationship to the whole earth.

While Wright acknowledges that his approach is similar in many respects to Walter Kaiser’s method of deriving intermediate moral principles from the OT

through a “ladder of abstraction” and John Goldingay’s process of distilling “middle axioms” from the OT,<sup>28</sup> Wright describes his paradigmatic approach as “tak[ing] it a step further” than Kaiser and Goldingay by “look[ing] not only at the principles that may be discerned in specific individual laws, but also at how the whole fabric of Israel’s law and the socio-economic and political structures embodied in it constitute an overall paradigm of the kind of society God calls his people to be.”<sup>29</sup> Wright terms this further step as “descending the ladder of abstraction” in such a way that moves beyond “highly generalized principles” to “more sharply articulated objectives” which then should be applied in “the realm of specific policy and action in our world,” applications which Wright describes as “authorized” by the historical paradigm of OT Israel’s socio-economic reality.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, not only the explicit commands of the OT have applicatory authority for New Covenant believers, but also both the “wider conceptual paradigm” of the OT worldview and the narrower “concrete historical paradigm” of OT Israel are themselves “divine revelation,” bearing the weight of God’s authority for our lives today.<sup>31</sup>

### COMMENDING WRIGHT’S PARADIGMATIC APPROACH

Commendably, Wright’s method joins Kaiser’s in interpreting the OT in a “systematic, unified way, in spite of its manifest diversity,” as well as approaching the OT as a text which “does still hold moral authority for the Christian,” an authority that, for Wright, moves beyond generalized principles to specific applications.<sup>32</sup> Further, though Wright believes that the OT paradigm *should* be applied by Christians *beyond* the New Covenant community, he also states clearly that “the social relevance of Israel must surely have its primary application” *within* the church.<sup>33</sup> In their present-day usage of the OT paradigm both within and beyond the New Covenant community, Wright also cautions Christians against any simplistic attempt to “jump straight from the text to modern application without analysis and assessment,” exhibiting a laudable concern to handle the text judiciously.<sup>34</sup>

#### ***Respect for Authorial Intent***

Wright sees his paradigmatic approach as completely consistent with a proper emphasis on the hermeneutical authority of the human author(s)’ intended

meaning as communicated by means of the text. Wright affirms that “our primary way of finding out accurately what God wants to say through a passage is by paying very careful attention exegetically to what the human author wanted to say when he or she wrote it.”<sup>35</sup> Wright calls this “the most common sense way of reading any piece of writing,” in which one assumes that “the best way to understand any written communication is to ask what the original writer meant to say.”<sup>36</sup> Even though he believes authorial intention can only be discerned *through* the text, Wright clarifies that “texts by themselves ... are objects. If we speak of [the texts themselves as] having ‘intention,’ we surely can only mean that there were people somewhere in the process of them coming into existence who had ‘intentions’—intentions now carried, successfully or otherwise, and, of course, with all kinds of indeterminacy, within the texts and their arrangement.”<sup>37</sup> In addition to the initial interpretive task of “seeking to determine as far as is possible [the biblical texts’] authors’ and editors’ intended meaning in the context they were spoken or written” by “careful application of grammatico-historical tools,” readers must also “move to appropriate the significance and implications of these texts” within their contemporary circumstances, whereby Wright appears generally to affirm E. D. Hirsch’s distinction between originally-intended “meaning” (as well as valid “implications” or extensions of original meaning) and contextual “significance,” an interpretive approach which likewise maintains authorial intent as the locus of textual meaning.<sup>38</sup> In commending a focus on “the natural meaning of the text,” Wright alerts his readers to the danger of “assum[ing] that there are all kinds of hidden meanings and clever codes [in the text],” encouraging his readers to “be very suspicious of books and speakers who try to persuade you of amazing ‘meanings’ of the Bible that don’t look like anything you think the text could ever have meant.”<sup>39</sup> In all of this, Wright advocates for a sturdy and tested interpretative approach to biblical texts, an approach which for him obviously fits well with his paradigmatic method for OT ethics.

### ***The Authority of the Canonical Text***

Along with his stated desire to uphold the primacy and divine authority of original authorial intent, Wright’s paradigmatic method also helpfully presupposes the “final authority” of “the completed text in its canonical form.”<sup>40</sup> One result of this presupposition is that, for Wright, “we cannot

fully interpret any single text with confidence that we have ‘heard the mind of God’ on the matter, until it is set in the wider light of canonical teaching.”<sup>41</sup> An important characteristic of the canonical form of Scripture for Wright is its four-phase storyline: “creation, fall, redemption in history, and the eschatological hope of new creation.”<sup>42</sup> Another crucial element of the canon which Wright identifies is “the sequence of the covenants.”<sup>43</sup> According to Wright, “the story of the covenants in the Bible is the story of God, and vice versa,” since “the succession of covenants recorded in the Bible is like a series of signposts in the developing story of God’s saving response to the plight of humanity,” meaning that “to trace the sequence of major covenants within the Bible is a very useful way of seeing the Bible as a whole.”<sup>44</sup> When readers “seek to interpret any passage ethically,” they must “locat[e] it within the biblical framework of relationships” which “includes all the essential features of that relationship between God and his people for which the term covenant was used.”<sup>45</sup> By his emphasis on the unified, covenantal storyline of Scripture, Wright highlights the organic continuity within the narrative from beginning to end. But Wright also correctly recognizes structural *discontinuity* along with continuity in the progressively developing plotline of the Bible. For instance, though the Noahic Covenant is a part of the overall covenantal structure of Scripture, Wright understands the Noahic Covenant as a “common grace” covenant between God and all of his creation which is “the basis of God’s *providential* preservation of all life throughout the span of human history.” In contrast, Wright identifies the Abrahamic Covenant as “the basis of God’s *redemptive* work within human history.”<sup>46</sup> Related to this discontinuity between the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants, Wright recognizes a distinction between “the general blessing of God [upon all humanity] and the specifically covenantal blessing that is enjoyed by the descendants of Abraham and Sarah through the line of promise.”<sup>47</sup>

Following his identification of both continuity and discontinuity between the covenantal articulations within the canonical macro-structure, Wright at times explicitly highlights the impact of such distinctions upon the proper interpretation of the text. For instance, in examining the question of the relationship between the people of God and the state as revealed in the OT, Wright emphasizes that the question must be answered with careful attention given to the “five different phases of [Israel’s] OT history” (patriarchal period, exodus to judges period, monarchy period, exilic period, and

post-exilic period), with the discontinuity between these different phases, at times, leaving the reader with “apparently contradictory viewpoints on the relationship between [God’s people and the state].”<sup>48</sup> But the salutary result of such careful textual treatment is that Wright cautions against making any monolithic pronouncements about ‘the’ OT view of the proper interaction between God’s people and the state.<sup>49</sup> Wright demonstrates that, though his paradigmatic method of OT ethics is fundamentally a means of showing ethical *continuity* within the canon, he also rightly sees aspects of discontinuity.<sup>50</sup>

### **CRITIQUING WRIGHT’S PARADIGMATIC APPROACH**

Even while generally agreeing with Wright in his desire to allow the OT to speak authoritatively to Christians concerning contemporary ethical issues, one might still question the level of specificity with which Wright believes the OT addresses certain moral and social matters. In contrast to the more generalized ethical principles derived from the OT that remain “higher up the ladder of abstraction” and less precise in their required application, Wright believes that the particularity of the “land economics of Israel” provides the contemporary reader with “a greater degree of practical specificity and sharpness” in discerning authoritative biblical answers to “economic and environmental ethics in our day.”<sup>51</sup> Wright is convinced that his paradigmatic method enables (and compels) Christians to use the OT to engage in “specific policy and action in our world” with “much more sharply articulated objectives” in matters of “ethical decisions and social policies.”<sup>52</sup> For Wright, a paradigmatic approach opens up the possibility of believers, as they participate in the socio-economic realm, advocating more definite policies that can be said rightly to bear the moral weight of biblical authority.

#### ***An Expanded View of Authority***

In his conviction that the OT must be allowed to speak authoritatively to a broader range of ethical questions, including secular socio-economics, Wright proposes that evangelicals must “move ... towards a more dynamic understanding of the authority and role of the Bible in a post-modern world.”<sup>53</sup> While not denying his own, above-stated emphasis on the primary authority of the author-intended meaning of the text, Wright follows Oliver O’Donovan in embracing a wider concept of authority. O’Donovan defines “authority”

as “a dimension of reality that constitutes sufficient and meaningful grounds for action.”<sup>54</sup> O’Donovan goes on to propose that “the created order itself, coming from the hand of God, provides that range of authority within which we are free to act in a great variety of ways, for authority is a pre-condition of freedom.”<sup>55</sup> Wright applies O’Donovan’s conception of the inherent authority of *the created order* and of all reality to the authority of *Scripture*: “The authority of the Scriptures lies, at least in part, therefore, in their revelatory witness to that created order and the God who stands behind it.”<sup>56</sup> Wright concludes, “The authority of the Bible is that it brings us into contact with reality—primarily the reality of God himself,” and secondarily with created realities.<sup>57</sup> In turn, these various realities “generate authority that governs our responsive behavior.”<sup>58</sup> Wright further elaborates:

Reading and knowing Scripture causes us to *engage with reality* [original emphasis]. That in turn functions to authorize and to set boundaries around our freedom to act in the world ... these realities authorize our action in mission. They make our mission appropriate, legitimate and indeed necessary and inevitable. The authority for our mission flows from the Bible *because* [emphasis added] the Bible reveals the reality on which our mission is based. I have three realities in mind, which are rendered to us first by the Old Testament Scriptures and then confirmed in the New. In these biblical texts we encounter the reality of *this God*, the reality of *this story*, and the reality of *this people* [original emphasis].<sup>59</sup>

In this view of biblical authority, in addition to the reality of God himself, Wright proposes that “the locus of ethical authority” is the reality of “what God has actually done in history” with the result that Christians are “authorized” to act on the basis of “the authority of concrete historical events.”<sup>60</sup>

Though Wright’s application of O’Donovan’s concept of the inherent authority of reality/creation to how one understands the authority of Scripture is thought-provoking, Wright seems too ready to equate the “authority” that creation can be said to possess to the “authority” that the biblical text possesses. Even if one grants O’Donovan’s premise concerning the authority of created reality, it does not follow that this is also the proper way to conceive of the authority of Scripture. In considering the question of the locus of textual authority, better to hew more closely to Wright’s own, above-noted words commending the narrower and more limited authority of the author-intended

meaning of the text rather than the broader and more open-ended authority that could be said to be possessed by the realities themselves to which the Bible points. In spite of Wright's declaration that "we have no other access" to the reality of God other than "through these Scriptures"<sup>61</sup> and that "our authority is 'what the Scriptures say,' not 'what Israel was like,'"<sup>62</sup> he uses his conception of the inherent authority of the historical realities referenced in the text (such as OT Israel) to "authorize" a broadened range of mission tasks for the church, such as creation care, tasks that otherwise often lack extensive textual warrant or explicit, direct command.

One way to describe Wright's blurring of the distinction between the authority of author-intended textual meaning and the authority of the realities to which the text points is a blurring of the distinction between text-revelation and event-revelation. John Sailhamer describes a text-based hermeneutic as one which "focuses on the text of Scripture as the locus of revelation," while an event-based hermeneutic "looks beyond the text to the events in the history of Israel or to the ideals embodied in the text as the locus of revelation."<sup>63</sup> The text view acknowledges that God has, in one sense, revealed himself in the historical events referred to in the OT, while at the same time recognizing that many who have personally experienced event-revelation (i.e., Israelites in Moses' day or Jews in Jesus' day) profoundly misinterpreted what they experienced. In the text view, event-revelation is acknowledged as a legitimate category, but text-revelation remains the only focus for determining authoritative meaning, since it is the only divinely-inspired interpretation of event-revelation. As noted in the previous paragraph, Wright, at times, seems to adopt a text-revelation focus, recognizing "no other access" to authoritative revelation beyond the text. But Wright also believes that Christians "need a broader understanding of revelation,"<sup>64</sup> in which "[Israel's] social structure, aspirations, principles and policies ... were also part of the content of that revelation,"<sup>65</sup> requiring carefully study of Israel's social life because it is "a major part of God's self-revelation" and because "God's message of redemption through Israel was not just verbal; it was visible and tangible."<sup>66</sup> Since Wright admits that reconstructing a picture of Israel's social life is "to a large extent ... built on inference and analogy,"<sup>67</sup> the ability of the historical reality of OT Israel itself, including its socio-economic structure, to "carr[y] authority"<sup>68</sup> which Christians then should paradigmatically apply today is highly questionable. Rather than a broadened or blurred doctrine of revelation,

a clear distinction between text-revelation and event-revelation should be maintained, with authoritative guidance for ethical decision-making sought only in text-revelation and not also in event-revelation.

### ***Over-Emphasis on Continuity***

Another critique of Wright's paradigmatic method concerns the particular way he conceives of the mixture of continuity and discontinuity within the Bible's covenantal storyline. While he clearly affirms elements of discontinuity between the covenants, rejecting "a flat identity between the two Testaments" which would "overlook the diversity within the Testaments and the crucial developments between them," Wright also holds that "the organic *unity and continuity* of God's work of revelation and redemption in history, from the call of Abraham to the return of Christ, is *the fundamental key* to understanding the whole grand-narrative of the biblical canon," with the result that "discerning the unity of the narrative *exercises hermeneutical priority over* isolating its parts."<sup>69</sup> In contrast, Wright identifies other evangelicals as proposing an "unfortunate dichotomy ... between the Old and the New Testament,"<sup>70</sup> one which does not recognize that "the unity of God's people in the Bible is *a far more important* theological truth than the different periods of their historical existence."<sup>71</sup>

Wright's emphasis on the continuity between the covenants is one important aspect of how he develops the functional authority of OT ethics for the present day, in particular in the application of the reality of OT Israel to the New Testament (NT) church. Therefore if, for example, someone raises the objection that the NT does not record Jesus explicitly giving the church a mission of creation care, Wright dismisses such an objection as unwarranted since "it is a distorted and surely false hermeneutic to argue that whatever the New Testament tells us about the mission of the followers of Christ *cancels out* [original emphasis] what we already know about the mission of God's people from the Old Testament."<sup>72</sup> For Wright, the continuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is such that Old Covenant responsibilities are assumed to continue into the New Covenant, *unless explicitly abrogated*. This contrasts to a view of greater discontinuity which assumes that Old Covenant responsibilities do *not* necessarily continue into the New Covenant, *unless explicitly reaffirmed*. Concerning a macro perspective of continuity, Wright proposes a level of continuity between the mission of

God and the mission of the church such that “the scope of our mission *must* [emphasis added] reflect the scope of God’s mission, which in turn will match the scale of God’s redemptive work.”<sup>73</sup> For Wright, the scope and scale of “God’s comprehensive redemption” is best seen in Israel’s historical exodus from Egypt, a work of redemption that involved salvation in the political, economic, social, and spiritual spheres.<sup>74</sup> Since OT Israel has paradigmatic authority for Christians on the basis of the continuity of God’s work in history, therefore the church *must* likewise embrace “exodus-shaped redemption,” and “exodus-shaped redemption demands exodus-shaped mission.”<sup>75</sup>

Wright’s championing of paradigmatic continuity extends beyond the connection between OT Israel and the NT Church to also include the link between OT Israel and broader human society. Consequently, the exodus is not merely a paradigm for God’s work in the church but is also a “model for the way God wishes to act in the world.”<sup>76</sup> Wright agrees with John Stott’s critique that liberation theologians’ use of the exodus does not typically recognize sufficient discontinuity between the position of those *within* the covenant and those *outside*, but Wright goes on to claim that Stott’s point of objection is “not the whole truth” since Stott does not go “far enough in recognizing the paradigmatic nature of the exodus on the basis of the paradigmatic significance of Israel itself for the rest of humanity”—that is, Stott does not embrace a position which acknowledges *enough* continuity between the society of OT Israel and general human society.<sup>77</sup> Wright’s view of “essential continuity”<sup>78</sup> between OT Israel and all humanity is visually expressed in Wright’s double triangle illustration, whereby he sees “unmistakable correspondence between the ‘redemption triangle’ of Israel’s faith (God, Israel and the land) and the ‘creation triangle’ (God, humankind and the earth).”<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, Wright believes that “unavoidably ... we are led to see that what God did in and to [OT Israel], what he demanded of them, is intended to relate to the wider stage of God’s creation” since, by “assuming [God’s] moral consistency,” Christians *should* be able to “argue for social objectives and policies which are comparable in principle to Israel’s, even in the wider world of fallen humanity around us.”<sup>80</sup> Wright identifies this continuity and correspondence between OT Israelite society and broader human society as “the theological key which unlocks the ethical relevance of the Old Testament to the wider world of nations and the global mission of the church” through means of his paradigmatic method,<sup>81</sup> empowering Christians to “work to bring their society nearer to conformity

with the overall paradigmatic structure of principles underlying the concrete laws of Old Testament society.”<sup>82</sup>

But even if one does not embrace a view of discontinuity between the covenants as radical as some forms of dispensationalism, the level of continuity claimed by Wright is dubious. As soon as one proposes greater covenantal discontinuities than Wright allows, such as, in contrast to Wright, perhaps seeing *both* covenantal continuity *and* discontinuity as being more equally “fundamental key[s] to understanding the whole grand-narrative of the biblical canon” and as “exercise[ing] [a more equal] hermeneutical priority,” then Wright’s assertions of extensive paradigmatic ethical continuity between OT Israelite society and broader human society lose much of their force. If one believes that “the unity of God’s people in the Bible,” rather than being “*a far more important* theological truth than the different periods of [God’s people’s] historical existence,” is instead *a more equally important* theological truth, then Wright’s paradigmatic application of OT Israel to secular society becomes increasingly questionable. As well, though Wright’s position of continuity in covenantal responsibilities between the Testaments *unless explicitly abrogated* is a defensible one, a position of discontinuity in covenantal responsibilities *unless explicitly reaffirmed* is at least equally defensible. Likewise, Wright’s claim that “the scope of our mission *must* [emphasis added] reflect the scope of God’s mission ... [and] the scale of God’s redemptive work” does not seem to allow the possibility of more significant discontinuity between the scope and scale of God’s work and the scope and scale of the church’s work. Just because Scripture reveals a certain scope and scale to what God is doing does not mean that Scripture also assigns the church today a responsibility of similar scope and scale. Furthermore, the mere fact that, in the historical exodus, God delivered Israel in the political, economic, social, and spiritual spheres, does not prove that the church is thereby given an “exodus-shaped mission” in broader society. Rather, believers should pay closer attention to the responsibilities which the NT *explicitly* assigns them.

### **QUESTIONABLE PARADIGMATIC APPLICATIONS OF THE OT TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC REALM**

Based upon Wright’s proposal for paradigmatic continuity within the

covenantal storyline of Scripture, he argues that “the economic sphere is thus legitimately included within the scope of a biblical understanding of redemption and its missional implications.”<sup>83</sup> Wright freely admits that many contemporary economic matters, such as “international debt or agricultural subsidies” are “not directly addressed by the Bible,” but he still believes that Christians are able to “seek an *authoritative biblical perspective* [emphasis added] on such matters” by means of his paradigmatic approach.<sup>84</sup> In light of “the nature of the socio-economic ground of [OT Israel’s] covenant relationship,” a relationship “rooted in ... [the] social, economic, and political” realities of ancient Israel’s society,<sup>85</sup> Wright is convinced that Christians are “justified therefore in taking the social and economic laws and institutions of Israel and using them as models for our own ethical task in the wider world of modern-day secular society.”<sup>86</sup> Wright goes so far as to label such paradigmatic economic application of OT Israel as “redeemed economics.”<sup>87</sup>

### ***Communal Property Rights and “Equitable” Distribution***

For Wright, “redeemed economics” is grounded not only in the socio-economic reality of OT Israel but also in the creation reality of Genesis 1-2. Wright interprets Genesis 1-2 as portraying “man’s economic stewardship.” According to Wright, one derivative principle from Genesis 1-2 is that “since the earth was given to all mankind, access to and use of its resources were meant to be shared and available to all. The creation narratives cannot be used to justify privatized, individual ownership, since it is to mankind as a whole that the earth is entrusted.”<sup>88</sup> Wright quickly qualifies this statement by clarifying that he does not think this means that “there can be no legitimate private ownership of material goods” but only that “individual property rights, even when legitimate, always remain subordinate to the prior right of all men to have access to and use of the resources of the earth ... The right of all to *use* is prior to the right of any to *own*.”<sup>89</sup> But Wright’s claim that Genesis 1-2 teaches corporate human ownership of material goods as taking precedence over individual human ownership is a weak textual claim. Yes, human property rights are not ultimate because God is the supreme owner of all his creation, but this fact does not mean that Genesis 1-2 assigns priority to common human ownership above individual property rights. Rather than speaking to the relative priority of corporate or individual property rights, Genesis 1-2 fundamentally addresses the issue of human “stewardship” of creation,

not human “ownership” of creation, two concepts which are not equivalent.

But Wright not only discovers biblical support in Genesis 1-2 for an ongoing requirement of the equitable distribution of land and other natural resources. Wright also believes that the distribution of the covenant land between the tribes of OT Israel demonstrates God’s will that “ownership of the land should be as widely and equitably spread as possible”<sup>90</sup> and that “equal rights of access and use of [the land]” for all Israelites be guaranteed.<sup>91</sup> Wright’s textual evidence for his claim that Israelite land distribution also embodies a principle of equitable resource dissemination comes from Numbers 26, in which a census of Israel in the wilderness establishes the metric for the future division of the covenant land “in proportion to” the relative size of each tribe (Num 26:52-56), and from Joshua 13-21, which is the record of the actual division of the land.<sup>92</sup> Wright is certain that the narrative of Joshua establishes that God “clearly intends that the possession and use of the land should be distributed as widely as possible throughout the whole kinship system.”<sup>93</sup> One problem with these claims is the question of one’s definitions for “equitable,” “widely distributed,” and “equal rights of access and use.” The accuracy of the description of the initial division of the land as roughly “equitable” and “widely distributed” in a way that could be said to provide “equal rights of access and use” was even called into question by Israelites at the time. For instance, at the distribution time, Ephraim and Manasseh complained to Joshua that their allotment was *not* equitable for the size of their tribes (Josh 17:14, 16), a complaint which Joshua dismissed (Josh 17:15, 17-18). As well, even if the relative size of the tribal lands could be called “equitable” according to initial population, some parts of the land were undeniably more desirable than others. The family assigned a rocky, arid plot would seem justified in questioning the principle of “equity” and “equal rights of access and use” when another family received an equally-sized plot of fertile, well-watered land. In addition, according to the Mosaic law, when land *within* a family was to be divided by a father between his sons, the firstborn should always receive a double portion, which is “the right of the firstborn” (Deut 21:17). This also does not appear to fit any obvious standard of “equity.” These objections to Wright’s claim makes it more convincing to see the emphasis in the initial division of the land not as an expression of a principle of “equity” but rather as the embodiment of the fact that God himself had determined the distribution of the land and allotted

the portions according to his will (“divided by lot,” Num 26:55-6; 33:54; Josh 14:2; 18:6, 8, 10).

Furthermore, even if the initial land distribution under Joshua could be described as “equitable” according to the comparative populations of the tribes at that time, those population ratios changed over time, meaning that the amount of land a tribe or clan possessed by inherited right might be significantly out of proportion to their relative population hundreds of year later. For example, the tribe of Benjamin was reduced to 600 men in Judges 20:47 after having been numbered at 45,600 in Numbers 26:41. Though Benjamin’s land allotment was first based on 45,600 men, their original allotment remained their lasting inheritance even when they were reduced to 600 men, an outcome that no longer reflected the “equity” of the initial distribution. These observations further call into question Wright’s emphasis on the “equitable” distribution of the land as the underlying and timeless principle. Instead, the more dominant principle appears to be the inalienability of God’s sovereign allotment.

Beyond the initial division of the covenant land, Wright also discerns the principle of “equitable distribution of the resources of the earth, especially land” as underlying the jubilee of Leviticus 25.<sup>94</sup> Even in making this claim, Wright provides multiple caveats. For instance, Wright acknowledges that the jubilee “does not describe redistribution or equalization of wealth, but, more precisely, a restoration to an original status quo,”<sup>95</sup> a status quo which “may not necessarily have been strictly egalitarian,”<sup>96</sup> and that applying the jubilee to “the infinite variety of human socio-economic life and environments will be a complex matter.”<sup>97</sup> But even with these caveats, Wright believes that “the jubilee still remains a powerful model in formulating Christian biblical ethics,” in particular, expressing God’s desire for the “broadly equitable distribution of the resources of the earth.”<sup>98</sup> Therefore, in Wright’s interpretation, these jubilee principles and objectives are “certainly not irrelevant to welfare legislation or indeed any legislation with socioeconomic implications. And indeed, taken to a wider level still, the jubilee speaks volumes to the massive issue of international debt.”<sup>99</sup> The jubilee means that the church is responsible for a “holistic, exodus-shaped mission,” requiring the combination of “effective evangelism and discipleship” with efforts to “work for political reform,” to “devise programs of economic uplift and community development,” and to “campaign for redistributions of resources.”<sup>100</sup> Wright goes so far as to

state, “If in our day the rich—individuals or nations—cannot be *persuaded* [original emphasis] to make the sacrifices necessary to enable a more equitable deal for the poor, we face the moral and political question of whether they should be *compelled* to do so, whether by radical revolutionary means or by the more gentle process of redistributive taxation.”<sup>101</sup> But with all the objections and caveats noted above to Wright’s paradigmatic use of Genesis 1-2, of OT Israel’s initial land distribution, and of the jubilee, Wright’s bold economic conclusions appear to go well beyond what the text of Scripture authoritatively warrants.

### ***Economic and Political Presuppositions***

Along with “broadly equitable distribution of the resources of the earth,” Wright interprets Genesis 1-2 as also requiring a “growth in material production and provision” which is “bound to lead to a surplus of some products in some places, and scarcity of some in others, so that exchange and trade are natural consequences of human growth in all its dimensions.”<sup>102</sup> But though Wright therefore does *not* see the economic market, private property, or wealth creation as inherently tainted, he *does* believe that the church must “engage in missional conflict with ... [the ideology of] destructive global capitalism and the greed that fuels it.”<sup>103</sup> Wright sees capitalistic ideology as a key cause of both global poverty and climate change.<sup>104</sup> Churches must therefore “have courage to declare that the world cannot address, let alone solve, the problem of poverty without also challenging excessive wealth and greed ... [since] greed perpetuates poverty.”<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, “world poverty and climate change need to be addressed together and with equal urgency” since “probably the most serious and urgent challenge faced by the physical world” is “the threat of climate change.”<sup>106</sup> But, “for the church to get involved with issues of environmental protection it must be prepared to tackle the forces of greed and economic power.”<sup>107</sup> A primary way Wright calls the church to confront global capitalism and address poverty and climate change is to “advocate for [the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals] before governments” and to “exert legitimate means to persuade governments to put moral imperatives above political expediency on issues of environmental destruction and potential climate change.”<sup>108</sup>

Like his argument for a mission of equal resource distribution, Wright develops his main biblical warrant for a church mission of creation care and

environmental advocacy through his paradigmatic method of interpretation and application.<sup>109</sup> But not only should the adequacy of Wright's paradigmatic method be called into question, so should the adequacy of his economic positions. Is Wright correct to identify global capitalism as a prime culprit behind poverty and environmental destruction and to urge the church's advocacy before governments as a central solution to these problems? Or to put it more crudely, is capitalism the problem and government the solution? A more balanced perspective would see that human governments are themselves a significant cause of global poverty and environmental destruction and that free markets are also a crucial part of the solutions. Economist R. Mark Isaac describes the "three essential components of what might be broadly called a market economy: well-defined property rights; voluntary exchange and contracting; and voluntary agreements for collective action."<sup>110</sup> Rather than free market capitalism being primarily an ideology that Christians must oppose, it can also be seen as an economic system "for improving the lot of mankind in processes that avoid the zero-sum, winner-take-all outcomes of actions such as warfare, theft, plunder, and so forth."<sup>111</sup> If Christians are concerned to reduce global poverty, they must consider "how markets and freedom of contracting can facilitate the path of human progress, increase material well-being, and reduce poverty."<sup>112</sup> They must also consider the downside of advocating government action to address poverty since "government slows economic progress when it becomes heavily involved in providing favors to some at the expense of others" and "central planning replaces markets with politics, which wastes resources and retards economic progress."<sup>113</sup> Conspicuously lacking in Wright's economic applications are the moral and ethical arguments *in favor of free markets*.<sup>114</sup>

Likewise lacking in Wright's economic solutions to environmental abuse is any recognition of the *ineffectiveness* of the typical government solutions to environmental problems and the relative *effectiveness* of free market solutions. Economist Jonathan Adler proposes that "the fundamental problem with existing environmental laws is that they embody a command-and-control, government-knows-best mentality," as well as being based on the false assumption that markets, by their very nature, "fail to address environmental concerns," because such matters are "external' to the price signals that regulate market transactions," thereby requiring government intervention to safeguard the environment.<sup>115</sup> But in truth, "centralized regulatory agencies are

ill-equipped to handle myriad ecological interactions triggered or impacted by private activity,” leading to “a growing consensus that federal regulatory policies are too costly and ineffective.” In contrast to a government-driven approach which seeks to “regulate each new potential risk to environmental quality, free market environmentalists advocate the creation of institutional arrangements that facilitate private solutions to environmental concerns. Markets are not perfect, but they are superior to the regulatory alternative.”<sup>116</sup> Adler observes that “environmental activists often disparage private ownership” even though “the record of private owners in conserving resources is superior to that of government agencies.”<sup>117</sup> Economist Fred Smith agrees that “wherever resources have been privately protected, they have done better than their politically managed counterparts—whether we are speaking of elephants in Zimbabwe, salmon streams in England, or beaver in Canada. Where such rights have been absent or suppressed, the results have been less fortunate.”<sup>118</sup> The starkest example of this truth is the environmental destruction that occurred under the centrally-planned, communally-owned economies of the former Soviet Union and her allies.<sup>119</sup> Some had once argued that in the Soviet Union there would be “no pollution because the absence of private property, the profit motive, and individual self-interest would eliminate the motives for harming the environment.”<sup>120</sup> But, “the opening of the Iron Curtain exploded this myth, as the most terrifying ecological horrors ever conceived were shown to be the Communist reality. The lack of property rights and profit motivations discouraged efficiency, placing a greater stress on natural resources. The result was an environmental disaster.”<sup>121</sup> In disagreement with the claim that free market capitalism is one of the main causes of environmental abuse, free market environmentalists suggest that

such problems are not the result of market forces, but rather of their absence. The market already plays a critical role in protecting those resources which are privately owned and for which political interference is minimal. Therefore, those concerned with protecting the environment and ensuring human prosperity should seek to expand capitalism, through the extension of property rights, to the broadest possible range of environmental resources. Our objective should be to reduce, not expand, political interference in both the human and natural resources.<sup>122</sup>

Representing in this article the alternative approach of free market environmentalists is in no way a blanket endorsement of their positions. Instead, it is merely to call into question the economic adequacy of approaches to environmentalism, such as Wright's, which appear to see the free market system as a central cause of environmental problems and increased governmental regulation as a required solution.

## CONCLUSION

To engage with Christopher Wright's prolific body of work is to engage with the mind of a committed evangelical who loves the Scripture, loves God's people, and loves the larger world of humanity and all of God's creation. In this, Wright is a wonderful model for other believers to follow. But in his zeal to bring the authority of God's Word to bear on contemporary ethical questions, including those in the socio-economic realm, Wright's conclusions claim a biblical warrant that goes beyond the clear data and teachings of Scripture. There are other ways of conceiving of the covenantal macro-structure of the canon that do not demand the specificity and force of authoritative economic application that Wright proposes.<sup>123</sup> But even where one disagrees with Wright's conclusions, he makes an important and rigorous contribution to the complex question of how biblical truth relates to ever-pressing economic questions.

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1 Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament: A Survey of Approaches, Part 1," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43:1 (1992): 101.

2 Christopher J. H. Wright, "My Pilgrimage in Theology," *Themelios* 19 (1994): 4.

3 Christopher J. H. Wright, *An Eye for An Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983): 10.

4 Thomas Kuhn proposed these two senses of the word "paradigm" in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

5 Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Authority of Scripture in an Age of Relativism: Old Testament Perspectives," in *The Gospel in the Modern World: A Tribute to John Stott* (ed. Martyn Eden and David F. Wells; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 43.

6 *Ibid.*, 46. This approach seems to parallel the pre-critical understanding of Scripture which "saw in the biblical narratives a coherent world in its own right that had a reality of its own and into which the biblical interpreters have to fit their own lives." John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 36.

7 Wright, "The Authority of Scripture," 44.

8 *Ibid.*, 46.

9 *Ibid.*, 45.

- <sup>10</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "God or Mammon: Biblical Perspectives on Economies in Conflict," *Mission Studies* 12:2 (1995): 148.
- <sup>11</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament: A Survey of Approaches, Part 2," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43:2 (1992): 229.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 19.
- <sup>14</sup> Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament, Part 2," 229.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.
- <sup>20</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 175-76.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> In an earlier published work, Wright describes "two major ways in which I believe the social and economic dimension of the Old Testament should be taken up into Christian ethical construction." The first way, he labels "typological," designating it as the application of the Old Testament model *within* the New Covenant community. Wright labels the second way "paradigmatic," a term describing the ethical application of the "socio-economic life and institutions" of OT Israel to broader human society *beyond* the New Covenant community. Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, xviii. In later writings, Wright seems to use the term "paradigmatic" to describe the ethical application of OT Israel *both within and beyond* the NT church.
- <sup>23</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 17.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>26</sup> Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 19.
- <sup>27</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 394-95.
- <sup>28</sup> Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament, Part 2," 208.
- <sup>29</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "Biblical Paradigms of Redemption: Exodus, Jubilee, and the Cross," in *Transforming the World? The Gospel and Social Responsibility* (ed. Jamie A. Grant and Dewi A. Hughes; Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2009), 334-35.
- <sup>30</sup> Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament, Part 2," 230-31.
- <sup>31</sup> Wright, "The Authority of Scripture," 46.
- <sup>32</sup> Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament, Part 2," 204.
- <sup>33</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Ethical Relevance of Israel as a Society," *Transformation* 1:4 (1984): 19.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "Understanding the Bible as the Words of Human Authors," in *Understanding and Using the Bible* (ed. Christopher J. H. Wright and Jonathan Lamb; London: SPCK, 2009), 27.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.
- <sup>37</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "Response to Gordon McConville," in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, et al; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 288.
- <sup>38</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 40. Originally, Hirsch only spoke of "meaning" and "significance." E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1967). Later, Hirsch nuanced this distinction by describing "implications" that are also rightly understood as part of textual meaning, even if they go beyond what the author consciously intended. This is because these implications are in keeping with and fall legitimately under the umbrella of the author's intended meaning and therefore are not merely a part of the reader's personal significance but ought to still be understood as part of textual meaning. See E. D. Hirsch, "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted," *Critical Inquiry* 11:2 (1984): 202-25; *idem*, "Coming with Terms to Meaning," *Critical Inquiry* 12:3 (1986): 627-30; *idem*, "Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory," *New Literary History* 25:3 (1994): 549-67.
- <sup>39</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "Understanding the Bible as the Word of God," in *Understanding and Using the Bible* (ed. Christopher J. H. Wright and Jonathan Lamb; London: SPCK, 2009), 18.
- <sup>40</sup> Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 64.
- <sup>41</sup> Wright, "Response to Gordon McConville," 286.

- <sup>42</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord: The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1995), 275.
- <sup>43</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 325.
- <sup>44</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God: Celebrating the Bible's Central Story* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 87.
- <sup>45</sup> Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 63.
- <sup>46</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 90. Original emphasis.
- <sup>47</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 214.
- <sup>48</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "The People of God and the State in the Old Testament," *Themelios* 16 (Oct/Nov 1990): 4.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.
- <sup>50</sup> Wright sees his position of continuity and discontinuity as "a combination of the best of the Alexandrian and Antiochene" approaches to biblical interpretation, with the Alexandrian tradition representing an emphasis on "the unity and continuity of the Testaments" and the Antiochene tradition emphasizing the "historical development and fulfillment" within the canon. Wright, "The Authority of Scripture," 34. Wright also identifies Calvin and Luther as representing, in some measure, a similar interpretive divide at the time of the Reformation, with Calvin promoting greater canonical unity/intertestamental continuity and Luther, through his law/gospel emphasis, advocating for greater discontinuity within the progressive narrative of Scripture. Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament, Part 1," 105-8.
- <sup>51</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "Biblical Reflections on Land," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17:2 (1993): 161.
- <sup>52</sup> Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament, Part 2," 231.
- <sup>53</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "Christ and the Mosaic of Pluralisms," in *Global Missiology for the 21st Century: The Iguassu Dialogue* (ed. William D. Taylor; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000): 76.
- <sup>54</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 52-53.
- <sup>55</sup> Wright, "The Authority of Scripture," 32.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>57</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 53.
- <sup>58</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 469.
- <sup>59</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 53-54.
- <sup>60</sup> Wright, "The Authority of Scripture," 35.
- <sup>61</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 54.
- <sup>62</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 62.
- <sup>63</sup> Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 31.
- <sup>64</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 451
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 61, 62.
- <sup>67</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 73.
- <sup>68</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 57.
- <sup>69</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 315. Emphasis added.
- <sup>70</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Use of the Bible in Social Ethics: Paradigms, Types, and Eschatology," *Transformation* 1:1 (1984): 19.
- <sup>71</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Whole Church: a Brief Biblical Survey," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34:1 (2010): 19. Emphasis added.
- <sup>72</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 304.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 268-69.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 275. According to Wright, exodus-shaped mission is demanded because "the Christian Gospel presents us with an accomplished victory over the effects of the fall in every dimension of our lives – spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social, as well as the cosmic realm. This has the crucial implication for our social ethics that in wrestling with the problems and brokenness caused by sin in the social realm, we are not struggling to achieve victory but to apply a victory already won." Wright, "The Use of the Bible in Social Ethics," 12-13. The question this statement leaves unanswered is "How much of the accomplished victory of Christ is able to be applied in the broader social realm *now* versus only in the new heavens and new earth?"
- <sup>76</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 275.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

- <sup>78</sup> Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord*, 144.
- <sup>79</sup> Wright, "The Use of the Bible in Social Ethics," 17.
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>81</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 175.
- <sup>82</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 321.
- <sup>83</sup> Wright, "God or Mammon," 147.
- <sup>84</sup> Wright, "Understanding the Bible as the Word of God," 82.
- <sup>85</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "The Israelite Household and the Decalogue: The Social Background and Significance of Some Commandments," *Tyndale Bulletin* 30 (1979): 102.
- <sup>86</sup> Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 89.
- <sup>87</sup> Wright, "Biblical Reflections on Land," 161. As noted in the intro, Wright prefaces his engagement with socio-economic topics with the caveat that "I am not an economist, nor a ... sociologist, and claim no special expertise in these areas." But in spite of this, Wright makes some fairly expansive economic claims, such as, "In the end all the complexities of economic science go back to *what grows on or is dug out of the soil of our planet* [emphasis added]," that is, to natural resources. Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 67. But this view of economics tends toward reductionism. Economist John Mueller defines "economics" as "the science of human provision – personal, domestic, and political – for oneself and other persons, using scarce means that have other uses," a more complex picture highlighting the interaction of natural resources and human creativity. John D. Mueller, *Redeeming Economics: Rediscovering the Missing Element* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010), 129. As Mueller observes, "wealth may take either of two forms: what modern economists call human capital (the useful qualities embodied in human persons) and nonhuman capital (the qualities embodied in property)," *ibid.*, 25. Since natural resources are physically finite resources that are distributed unevenly in the world, a focus on natural resources as the key factor in economics also tends toward a "zero-sum" view of economics, in which the existence of "haves" always requires an equivalent number of "have-nots," the wealth of one always creating the poverty of another. But when wealth and economics are properly understood as a more complex interaction between human capital and non-human capital, including the possibility of wealth creation that does not come at the expense of others, an emphasis on natural resources alone as the essence of economics is an inadequate framework for approaching such questions. Economist Fred Smith goes so far as to state, "It is essential to understand that physical resources are, in and of themselves, largely irrelevant. It is the interaction of man and science that creates resources: Sand and knowledge become fiber optics. Humanity and its institutions determine whether we eat or die" (Fred L. Smith, Jr., "The Market and Nature," in *Ecology, Liberty, and Property: A Free Market Environmental Reader* [ed. Jonathan H. Adler; Washington, D.C.: Competitive Enterprise Institute, 2000]), 34. While perhaps Smith overstates the case, his point is still one that calls into question the adequacy of Wright's economic presuppositions, including the ones that inform his view of "redeemed economics."
- <sup>88</sup> Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 68. Not only does Wright believe that Genesis 1-2 teaches a "shared right" of "access to, and use of, the resources of the earth" which limits individual property rights, but these two chapters also teach that "the right to consume or enjoy the end-product of the economic process that uses the resources is limited by the needs of all." Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 70. Therefore, not only should undeveloped natural resources be shared with some measure of equity on the basis of the priority of common human ownership but so also should the results of human manufacture and production.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid., 68-9. Original emphasis.
- <sup>90</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 177.
- <sup>91</sup> Wright, "The Ethical Relevance of Israel as a Society," 16.
- <sup>92</sup> Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord*, 199.
- <sup>93</sup> Wright, "God or Mammon," 150.
- <sup>94</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 207. Wright also concludes that, overall, "general equity ... characterizes Israel's civil law." Wright, "The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament, Part 1," 110.
- <sup>95</sup> Wright, "The Use of the Bible in Social Ethics," 16.
- <sup>96</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 179.
- <sup>97</sup> Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 101.
- <sup>98</sup> Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord*, 210.
- <sup>99</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 298.
- <sup>100</sup> Wright, "Biblical Paradigms of Redemption," 79-80.
- <sup>101</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 179.
- <sup>102</sup> Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 69-70.

- <sup>103</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 417.
- <sup>104</sup> Wright appears to assume the reality and extensiveness of anthropogenic climate change (as well as the resulting ill effects), not seeming to recognize the highly debatable nature of these presuppositions. For an alternative view, see the Cornwall Alliance <http://www.cornwallalliance.org>.
- <sup>105</sup> Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism, *The Cape Town Commitment* [on-line], accessed 25 June 2015; available from <http://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>; Internet. Though authorship of *The Cape Town Commitment* is not Wright's alone, as the Chair of the Cape Town 2010 Statement Working Group, which drafted the Cape Town Commitment, Wright's own views are largely represented by the positions of the document.
- <sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>107</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 417.
- <sup>108</sup> Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism, *The Cape Town Commitment*. There are eight United Nations' Millennium Development Goals: (1) To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (2) To achieve universal primary education; (3) To promote gender equality; (4) To reduce child mortality; (5) To improve maternal health; (6) To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; (7) To ensure environmental sustainability; (8) To develop a global partnership for development.
- <sup>109</sup> For a more detailed examination of Wright's paradigmatic arguments for a creation care mission, see John A. Wind, "Does the Old Testament 'Authorize' a Creation Care Mission of the Church? Examining Christopher Wright's Claims." *Journal of Global Christianity* 1:3 (forthcoming, 2016).
- <sup>110</sup> R. Mark Isaac, "Markets and Justice," in *For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty* (ed. Anne Bradley and Art Lindsley; Bloomington, IN: Westbow Press, 2014), 151.
- <sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-78.
- <sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.
- <sup>113</sup> James D. Gwartney, Richard L. Stroup, Dwight R. Lee, and Tawni H. Ferrarini, *Common Sense Economics: What Everyone Should Know About Wealth and Prosperity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), 93, 94.
- <sup>114</sup> See, for example, Austin Hill and Scott Rae, *The Virtues of Capitalism: A Moral Case for Free Markets* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2010) and Jay W. Richards, *Money, Greed, and God: Why Capitalism Is the Solution and Not the Problem* (New York: HarperOne, 2009). Interestingly, in his earlier published works, Wright describes the paradigm of OT Israelite society as a decentralized economic and political system. Wright, *An Eye for An Eye*, 37-8. Wright states, "The patterns of political activity and power in the Old Testament ... were diffused and decentralized ... [with] resistance in Israel to centralized power and a preference for diverse and participatory politics" (Wright, "The Ethical Relevance of Israel as a Society," 14). The initial paradigm of OT Israel was a society "with no bureaucratic or centralized state structure or heavy external taxation" (Wright, "God or Mammon," 281). If Wright were to follow this paradigm more consistently, perhaps he would be more ready to recognize the merits of a free market approach to addressing global poverty.
- <sup>115</sup> Jonathan H. Adler, "Introduction," in *Ecology, Liberty, and Property: A Free Market Environmental Reader* (ed. Jonathan H. Adler; Washington, D.C.: Competitive Enterprise Institute, 2000), 10, 13.
- <sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.
- <sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>118</sup> Fred L. Smith Jr., "The Market and Nature," in *Ecology, Liberty, and Property: A Free Market Environmental Reader* (ed. Jonathan H. Adler; Washington, D.C.: Competitive Enterprise Institute, 2000), 37.
- <sup>119</sup> See, for example, Peter J. Hill, "Environmental Problems Under Socialism," *Cato Journal* 12:2 (1992): 321-35.
- <sup>120</sup> Smith, "The Market and Nature," 29-30.
- <sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.
- <sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.
- <sup>123</sup> For an alternative proposal for understanding the covenantal framework of Scripture that produces a more nuanced and appropriately less dogmatic application of biblical authority to the socio-economic realm, see John A. Wind, "Do Good to All People as You Have the Opportunity: A Biblical Theology of the Good Deeds Mission of the New Covenant Community," Ph.D. Diss. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015.