

**Toilet Paper as Jubilee:**  
*Examining the Theological Underpinnings  
of the Personal Essentials Pantry*  
*Zion Church ELCA ♦ Madison, WI*

Christine J. Thompson  
Ministry in Urban Congregations  
Dr. Richard J. Perry, Jr., Professor  
Maymester 2010

## Foreword

Sharon Ringe, whose book, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, I drew upon greatly in developing this paper, begins her Preface with:

This book began with a sermon. The pastor of a congregation on Manhattan's West Side reflected on what might happen to the beleaguered city of New York and its many poor people if suddenly someone declared a Jubilee. The images of Leviticus 25 began to haunt me, and I found myself drawn into the study of their history and subsequent interpretation in Hebrew Scripture and in the Gospels of the NT. In the process of that study, I learned something about the power of images to shape human life, and about Jesus Christ as the herald of liberation. p. xiii

As Ringe credits that sermon for focusing the studies that led to that book, so I credit Ringe for providing the liberating and clarifying image for my work and ministry at the Personal Essentials Pantry. It was in reading her book that all my thoughts, all my analyses, all my wonderings were brought together into coherence.

*cjt*  
*Maymester 2010*

## Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Starting Out: A journey of discovery .....</b>          | <b>1</b>  |
| The beginning of the Personal Essentials Pantry .....      | 1         |
| Pantry as <i>Charity?</i> or Pantry as <i>Grace?</i> ..... | 1         |
| It wasn't enough .....                                     | 3         |
| Proclaiming Jubilee .....                                  | 6         |
| <b>Proclaiming Jubilee .....</b>                           | <b>6</b>  |
| Jubilee in the Hebrew Scriptures .....                     | 6         |
| Jubilee in the New Testament .....                         | 10        |
| Jubilee as Liberation .....                                | 13        |
| <b>Jubilee versus Empire .....</b>                         | <b>14</b> |
| The Idol of "The Economy" .....                            | 14        |
| Defining "The Economy": Who and what is included? .....    | 15        |
| "The Economy" and Jubilee .....                            | 16        |
| Empire Economy and Poverty .....                           | 18        |
| Whose failure? .....                                       | 20        |
| Concluding thoughts .....                                  | 22        |
| <b>The Personal Essentials Pantry and Jubilee .....</b>    | <b>23</b> |
| Pantry Guests and Jubilee .....                            | 23        |
| Jubilee and Pantry Products .....                          | 27        |
| Jubilee and Community .....                                | 29        |
| The Pantry and The Economy .....                           | 30        |
| <b>Conclusion .....</b>                                    | <b>32</b> |
| <b>References .....</b>                                    | <b>33</b> |
| <b>Appendices</b>  |           |

This page left blank intentionally.

**Toilet Paper as Jubilee:**  
*Examining the Theological Underpinnings  
of the Personal Essentials Pantry*  
*Zion Church ELCA ♦ Madison, WI*

**Starting Out: A journey of discovery**

**The beginning of the Personal Essentials Pantry**

The Personal Essentials Pantry began as a very unstudied, uncalculated, Spirit-driven response to a question about what the community needed, and where Zion Church ELCA could/should put its energies in “doing more for the community.” As James H. put it, “Food pantries are always being asked for toilet paper, for shampoo, for deodorant, for laundry detergent – and they never have enough.”<sup>1</sup> Food pantries never have a broad enough selection of the various products needed, and they never have enough of any given product to meet the demand.

Based on James’ comment, agreement was reached – such a pantry was an excellent idea. Within four days, the initial shelving was installed in what had been the church’s library; a week later, the initial list of products was identified; two weeks later, the paperwork and forms were ready; and an astoundingly short four weeks after the initial idea was raised the Personal Essentials Pantry registered its first two households.<sup>2</sup> The Pantry was modeled very much along the lines of a “traditional” food pantry, but with no food on the shelves – just three dozen or so product types considered essential to personal and household hygiene, including toilet paper, dish soap, laundry soap, combs, brushes, deodorant, bath soap, shampoo, conditioner, diapers, and baby products.<sup>3</sup>

**Pantry as *Charity*? or Pantry as *Grace*?**

As a “traditional” food pantry, PEP displayed many of the operational characteristics often found in food pantries, some of which were problematic. In the beginning, volunteers staffing the

---

<sup>1</sup> Since I was not present at this original session, I do not have James’ exact words; but this is the phrasing that has been repeated to me by several of the congregation members involved in the Pantry’s development.

<sup>2</sup> The milestones in the development of the Personal Essentials Pantry are provided in Appendix A, *History of the Personal Essentials Pantry*.

<sup>3</sup> A full listing of the products that the Personal Essentials Pantry [PEP] dispenses can be found in Appendix B, *PEP Product Specifications*.

Pantry generally took the stance that the Pantry's guests were in poverty because of personal fault – lack of character, laziness, poor morals; whatever brought them to poverty, it was essentially their fault. While courtesy and friendliness were certainly emphasized, the underlying attitude among the Pantry personnel was that what we provided was a service that guests had to *earn*, to show themselves *worthy of*, not only by proving, or at least attesting to, their poverty, but by appropriate gratitude, appropriate attitude. And the requirement of “appropriate” was even extended to clothing and transportation: heaven help the poor (and I use the word in both its meanings here) guest whose clothes were stylish, who was driving a late-model car, who used a cell phone. The thought that perhaps this guest was newly brought to poverty and still wearing clothes that they'd owned before disaster hit, the consideration of whether selling a car would in fact bring in enough money to make a difference (or how they'd buy a replacement car after selling their old one with their income low enough to qualify for the Pantry's services), the fact that pre-paid cell phones are obtainable without any credit check or need for verifiable income but contract-based, land-line service is not – those considerations were outside the experience and therefore the thought process of many of our early volunteers.

When I came on board as the Pantry's Coordinator in August of 2007, my viewpoints and theological backgrounds began informing the Pantry's policies. Central to this was my understanding that none of us stands in a position of privilege or authority before God; all of us have been blessed through God's grace rather than our own worth, and are called to respond in grace so as to be a blessing for those around us and all of creation.

That understanding was reflected formally in the mission statement we adopted as part of our Plan of Operation in 2009:

*Having been blessed by God with an abundance of gifts,  
we share God's love and God's kingdom,  
helping with the essentials of personal and household hygiene,  
showing God's grace and love through these tangible gifts.*

And that core statement was augmented with the statement of intent for our praxis:

As we carry out our activities,  
we need to always remember:

- We are *sharing God's kingdom*, not doling out charity.
- We are *proclaiming God's grace*, not passing judgment.
- We are *serving with joy*, not establishing our own glory.

This shapes all of our policies and procedures,  
from what we expect of staff and volunteers,  
to who is eligible for the Pantry's services,  
to our specific procedures for intake,  
order fulfillment, and record-keeping.

It's a good start, realizing that we do what we do not because we're trying to be "good" people but because it is our response to the grace that we have already received. It's a good start, seeing those who use our Pantry as guests rather than "those people" or even "clients." It's a good start, recognizing that this response has to be embodied throughout all of our practices and procedures; that it cannot remain simply a statement of philosophy and still remain true.

But it wasn't, it isn't, it could never be, enough.

### **It wasn't enough**

My realization that what we were doing wasn't "enough" began with my exploration of why these products aren't regarded as essential, why they were left out of the list of eligible products purchasable with food stamps – and further, why they seemed to be left out of any measure of poverty whatsoever. While it's understandable that a program aimed at alleviating food insecurity and hunger would focus on food, didn't anyone realize that the food would be safer to eat if the dishes got washed once in a while? Did no one understand that things like soap and deodorant and diapers were in fact necessary for health and education and employment? It would seem, looking at models for measuring poverty and models for family budgeting, that this is the case. Generally speaking, even where data are gathered on how much is spent on these products, in any discussions of the data the costs involved with personal and household care are subsumed under "Other" or "Miscellaneous" if they are discussed at all – and while it may be true that the team conducting the study considered the

expenses as normative and even required, the undeniable understanding of these words generally is “Optional.” For example, the 2008 Consumer Expenditure Survey (U.S. Department of Labor) includes data on *Housing/Housekeeping operations* and *Personal care products and services*, but there is no detailed analysis of those expenditures. The analyses that were published as part of the CES Anthology include health care spending, expenditure patterns of young single adults over two generations, spending on telephone service, and housing expenditures across ethnic backgrounds. This last analysis, which might reasonably have been expected to include the cost of housekeeping operations and housekeeping supplies, devotes only two brief paragraphs to the issue, and then only in terms of the expenditures of renters. No analysis is conducted on the cost for personal care and hygiene. It may be taken as a given, but it is not deemed worthy of any further comment or analysis. Similarly, a major effort underway looking at the economic security of elders defines *Housing* as rent or mortgage, heat, utilities, insurance, and property taxes; *Miscellaneous* is the category used to capture “cleaning products, personal and household needs...” (Russell et al., 2006, p. 6).

Part of the problem is that there is no definition of what is “enough” housework; and with no definition of “enough,” there can be no delineation of what “enough” costs. This is not a situation unique to housework and personal hygiene; as Citro and Michaels point out:

...General agreement about basic needs does not mean that everyone agrees about the level of consumption that distinguishes a state of poverty from a state of adequacy. Thus, there is a question about how much food, shelter, and clothing distinguish a person in poverty from one who is not in poverty. This question cannot be answered in the abstract. No concept of economic poverty... will of itself determine a level for a poverty threshold.... Moreover,... no matter what the particular concept, the determination of a poverty threshold invariably considers people's actual spending patterns and hence, inevitably, has a relative aspect.

*Measuring Poverty...*, p. 23

But housework and personal hygiene are particularly difficult to define; there seems to be always something more that could be done or should be done. Gail Collins discusses the huge differences in expectations of “housekeeping” between 1950 and the first decade of this century, from a time when laundry was done perhaps once a week, with a strong risk of personal injury, to the expectation of washing several times a week if not daily. In fact, she observes, although



the technology available to handle laundry, dishes, and cleaning generally changed drastically, the time spent on housework did not seem to diminish:

A methodical study... that used pretty much all the data available concluded that in the 1960s, the full-time homemaker spent fifty-five hours a week on her domestic chores. That was actually a little more than in the 1920s, when women were washing by hand and keeping their food cold in iceboxes.

*When Everything Changed*, p. 51

It would seem that what constituted “enough” changed as the time available to achieve “enough” changed – the more time available, the more there was that should be done; the more labor-saving technology available, the more there was that should be done. And although the “soap opera” is becoming a thing of the past, or at least is no longer relegated to the 10:00 am to 3:00 pm time block that was presumed to be the domain of housewives, advertising for household products is still aimed very much at women rather than the entire family, still attempts to imbue housekeeping with a halo of feminine pleasure, and still suggests that the truly fulfilled woman is the woman whose house is perfectly clean, perfectly decorated, perfectly polished, sweet-smelling....

Adding to the problem is the fact that this area of personal and household hygiene is an area that has traditionally, up until very recently, been considered “women’s work.” As such, it has been left out: overlooked in both the models and measures of poverty and in economic models generally. In *What Language Shall I Borrow?*, Brian Wren summarizes “the economy” through the eyes of what he terms Masculinity as We Know It.<sup>4</sup> In brief, he contends that the traditional view of economic activity, of activity that “counts” in the eyes of politicians, policy makers, and economists, includes (only) the activity of workers (automatically eliminating the activities of anyone under the legal age to work and anyone in retirement) during their hours of employment (automatically eliminating any activities during the other 14-16 hours of the day) who are engaged in paid employment (automatically eliminating the work of maintaining home and family) (Wren, pp. 43-45).

---

<sup>4</sup> Also see Appenic C, The “Standard Economic Model” from *What Language Shall I Borrow?*

It would seem that in the eyes of The Powers That Be, the products that we are concerned with are supplied by the Toilet Paper Fairy, and therefore certainly don't need to be considered within the realm of economic activity, nor counted within budgeting models, nor included in measures of poverty.

Unfortunately for this point of view, the Toilet Paper Fairy has retired.

### **Proclaiming Jubilee**

And so I began thinking much more deeply about what it was that we were saying and doing here at the Personal Essentials Pantry, which led me to a much deeper exploration of the impact of public policy and general societal structure and assumptions on the lives of those in poverty. Were we simply a relief agency, providing short-term "band-aids" for the problems of individuals and families in poverty? Or were we perhaps being called to something more?

Eventually, my ponderings and explorations led me to the understanding that what we're really doing here at the Personal Essentials Pantry is proclaiming Jubilee. We are calling out the injustice of welfare policies as they currently exist and of "economy as we know it," and calling for and working for renewal of right relations with each other, within society and societal structures, and with God.

### **Proclaiming Jubilee**

As encountering Brian Wren's description of economy as defined by Masculinity as We Know It led me to realizing the reasons for our area being so thoroughly overlooked, encountering Maria Harris' and Sharon Ringe's books on Jubilee led me to the understanding of toilet paper as Jubilee. They led me to the biblical traditions equating economic justice with God's reign, and to the understanding of Jubilee as an ideal for society generally.

### **Jubilee in the Hebrew Scriptures**

It is unclear to what degree, if any, the Jubilee Year was actually observed within the history of the people of Israel. Ringe notes:

Historical accounts and records similarly fail to clear up the mystery surrounding the observance of the Jubilee. Neither Hebrew Scriptures, nor the intertestamental literature, nor secular accounts

mention the observance of a Jubilee year in any part of the Jewish community. The argument from silence would suggest, therefore, that whatever the intent of these laws, they were not enacted as part of public policy.... The redactors of the Holiness Code, like the priests and other official leaders, appear to have approached the problems of Israel's resettlement [after exile] by concentrating on the concrete ordinances and judgments that would prepare the way for God's dwelling in the midst of the people. The Jubilee laws are significant in that, in the very midst of the Holiness Code with its emphasis on cultic matters, these laws bear witness to the continuing power of the image of God as sovereign over Israel, and to the fact that such an image of God has ethical consequences.

*Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, p. 28

Jubilee is a potent thread running throughout not only the Torah but also the books of the prophets. Ezra, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah all use Jubilee imagery. It is held up as the ideal to which the people of God should aspire, not only as a semi-centennial event but as the normative model for the socioeconomic structure.

The key text for the establishment of the Jubilee Year is found in Leviticus 25, and specifically 25:8-12:

<sup>1</sup>The LORD said to Moses on Mount Sinai, <sup>2</sup>"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. <sup>3</sup>For six years you sow your fields, and for six years you prune your vineyards and gather their crops. <sup>4</sup>But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. <sup>5</sup>Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. <sup>6</sup>Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you,<sup>7</sup> as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

<sup>8</sup>" **'Count off seven sabbaths of years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup>Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. <sup>10</sup>Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. <sup>11</sup>The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. <sup>12</sup>For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields.**

<sup>13</sup>" In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to his own property.

<sup>14</sup>" If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other. <sup>15</sup>You are to buy from your countryman on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. And he is to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops.

<sup>16</sup>When the years are many, you are to increase the price, and when the years are few, you are to decrease the price, because what he is really selling you is the number of crops. <sup>17</sup>Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the LORD your God.

<sup>18</sup>" Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land.

<sup>19</sup>Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. <sup>20</sup>You may ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" <sup>21</sup>I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. <sup>22</sup>While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.

NIV

Jubilee, then, is not so much an isolated festival as an embodiment of the ideal for social and economic policy. Indeed, as Ringe points out,

Two strands of Israel's tradition come together in Leviticus 25. The first of these is made up of sabbath-year laws (Exod. 21:2-6; 23:10-11; Deut. 15:1-18). These laws, which regulate the repayment of debts and establish an agricultural fallow year, recognize a connection between such social responsibility and the worship of a God who is at once sovereign in and liberator of Israel. The second strand of tradition... consists of various royal decrees of amnesty or "release" found in the surrounding culture of Mesopotamia as well as in biblical stories (Jer. 34:8-22; Neh. 5:1-13). These decrees further accent the connection between confession of God as sovereign and obedience to laws requiring social justice....

*Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, pp. 16-17

We can note the emphasis on Jubilee as an extension of Sabbath understanding – and in that reflection, an understanding that part of Sabbath is the relinquishing of our reliance upon our own powers, our own capabilities, and confession that we are reliant upon God and God's economy. We can also note the emphasis on God's sovereignty, on the primacy of God's economy over human economy. We will return to this theme with the Parable of the Banquet, below.

Gornik points to the clear connection between confession of God as sovereign and human politics in his comments on Nehemiah:

No sooner had the actual crisis [the threat of military action by Samaria] ended than an internal conflict arose that was at least as distracting. It concerned the inequality of members within the community. The landless (5:2) and the small-scale farmers (5:3), always just a lost job or failed harvest away from dire poverty, had sunk deeply into debt. The king's tax was harshly felt by the most vulnerable of the city's citizens, and the consequences were grim:

Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others. (Neh 5:5)

Clearly it did not make sense to rebuild the walls of the city but not the economic life of its citizens. Economic relationships could not be compartmentalized, separated from moral and spiritual values....

*To Live in Peace*, pp. 139-140

We would do well to remember that, like the landless and small-scale farmers of Nehemiah's age, all too many of us are only one paycheck, only one serious illness, away from dire poverty.

Jubilee as an expression of God's sovereignty in contrast to earthly empire remains a frequent, if not always explicit, referent for the prophets throughout Israel's history. Ringe comments:

It is clear that God is the source of both the authority of the speaker and the hope underlying this passage [Isa. 61:1-2]. It is also clear that what is envisioned is not merely a historical event such as the return of the Jews to Palestine, but the advent of God's eschatological reign. Nevertheless, the visionaries who produced the passage make it clear that the consequences of what is hoped for are experienced in the institutions of everyday life and the attributes of the created order. In Isa. 61:1-2, as indeed throughout Third Isaiah, social and political institutions whose oppressive power is broken are highlighted as the place where God's transformative intent is manifest. Although "new heavens" and a "new earth" summarize the promise (Isa. 66:22), that newness must take root in human deeds and choices. In the midst of the optimism of the return to the land, and of the myriad details confronting the people as they sought to rebuild their society, the visionary community carried on the themes and concerns of Isaiah and his exilic follower (Second Isaiah). In so doing, they celebrated God's commitment to justice and concern for the poor and suffering, and the requirement that people confess their faith in God by showing that same commitment and concern.

*Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, pp. 31-32

Couture also points to prophetic emphasis on social justice:

God liberated people from their bondage in Egypt simply because they were vulnerable, not because the Israelites had done anything to earn God's favor. God simply heard their cry for help and acted. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, however, the people lose sight of this basic teaching. They begin to believe that attention to religious practice absolves them of any need to care for the poor and marginalized, especially the widow, orphan, and resident alien. Isaiah charges that the community has lost its way – that people now prey upon the poor (Isa. 10:1-2). Jeremiah proclaims that if people returned the care of the poor, God will look with favor upon them (Jer. 7:3-7).

*Child Poverty*, p. 19

And, as Ringe confirms, this social justice is not rooted in *human* power and authority, but in *God's* grace, as demonstrated in the seminal event for Israel's history of the Exodus from Egypt:

The rationale for the legislation throughout Exodus 23, including the laws relating specifically to the agricultural fallow year, is found in 23:9 (RSV): "You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." That rationale grounds the legislation in the religio-historical self-understanding of the Israelites. It is their experience of liberation at the hand of God that is the basis of their subsequent actions, and these actions in turn are their expression of allegiance and obedience to God who is sovereign over them.

*Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, p. 19

Further, in spite of our predilection in today's "morality" to focus on individual sins and individual morality, the prophets far more frequently point to *corporate* and *social* sin:

The prophets also alert us to the fact that idolatry, personal sin, and social sin are a seamless package. We all associate Sodom with sins of sexual impurity. Ezekiel speaks of their "detestable practices," when declaring Israel an "adulterous wife" who has become "more depraved than they" (Ezek 17:48). Then he surprises us when he describes Saddam's sin: "she and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy" (Ezek 17:49).

Myers, *Walking with the Poor*, p. 32

The idea of Jubilee in the Hebrew Bible, then, is very much concerned with the overall structures of society, from the most exalted principles right down to the most nitty-gritty

expression in economic practice. While Jubilee may never have been put into actual practice as a once-every-fiftieth year event, it remains the ideal of Israel's life as the people of God.

### **Jubilee in the New Testament**

Jubilee comes front and center in the New Testament in the first explicitly quoted sermon that Jesus preaches. Although Luke informs us that Jesus "taught in their [Galilee's] synagogues" (Lk 4.15), he gives us no detail on the content of any of that teaching, beginning instead with Jesus' proclamation in the synagogue at Nazareth:

<sup>16</sup>He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup>The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

<sup>18</sup>"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to release the oppressed,

<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

<sup>20</sup>Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, <sup>21</sup>and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (NIV)

As Harris notes, these words are not intended as some other-worldly ideal, but are firmly rooted in the pragmatics of need:

[Grace Harding] reminded me that the words of Isaiah and of Jesus in citing the Jubilee were not only, not even primarily, metaphorical. "Sight to the blind" means precisely and especially that: attending to those with the inability to see. Then Harding pointed out that those texts also refer to the proclamation of hearing for the deaf, and ramps, wide doorways, and accessible bathrooms for those who must use wheelchairs.

*Proclaim Jubilee!*, p. 89

We can well imagine that "good news to the poor" would similarly be focused on changes experienced in the nitty-gritty details of daily life, not reserved for some future heaven.

We will not see another such overt reference to Jubilee in Jesus' teaching, but Jesus' life, witness, and ministry will be centered on the experience of Jubilee, living in God's economy rather than Empire or earthly economy. Ringe sees Jesus as the very herald of Jubilee:

...[I]n that focus [of Christ as the herald of the Jubilee] the images of the Jubilee traditions highlight the fact that in Christ people are met by the healing, freeing, redeeming presence of God at their points of greatest pain. The redemptive work of Christ is depicted as touching all of human life. The Jubilee images point towards God's liberating and healing intent wherever institutions, customs, or physical conditions are seen to limit human life. Divisions between sacred and secular

are removed. The political, economic, and social realities of life do not provide mere illustrations of the way in which God's reign is experienced. Rather they are identified as the precise arenas where the impact of God's reign is felt.

*Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, pp. 92-93

Although Couture does not use Jubilee language explicitly, it is clear that she agrees with Ringe that Jesus *lives* Jubilee:

[Jesus] sees evil truly, and he resists it. But he is not one of the party of Zealots who revolt against Roman rule. He demonstrates what he means in the Sermon on the Mount when he says, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." He meets sin and evil with moral good, and he depends upon the contrast between evil and good to convert people to increasing good. If he had met evil with violence, he would have played into its hands. Meeting violence with force, as war is designed to do, may overpower violence, may displace violence, may slow violence, but does not end the cycle of violence as Jesus sought to do. Ultimately, violence must be met with its extreme opposite, good, to show the way, not only to reduced or displaced violence, but to peace.

*Child Poverty*, pp. 132-133

Jesus' announcement that the Kingdom of God has arrived is not, then, an announcement that some gleaming, other-worldly realm has come down to replace this reality, nor a triumphal demonstration of political and military power, but a rejection of Economy as We Know It, a rejection of The Powers That Be, in favor of Jubilee Economy, God-Economy, practiced and demonstrated in the quotidian.

And so, in the parables of Jesus we are met with the idea of Jubilee in examples drawn from daily life, but turned so as to grab our attention, to refocus our thoughts onto the question of what it means to live in the kingdom of heaven, to live Jubilee:

"These parables provide readers with an insight into the moral universe, created by the kingdom of heaven, in which Jesus' disciples live. In effect, they describe what it means to live in the light of the kingdom of heaven." [quoting Matera, from *New Testament Ethics*]

Even more important, the parables describe the kind of ethical behavior necessary for entrance into the kingdom.... To be sure, the kingdom is God's gift. But "to enter it one must do God's will, produce the fruit of righteousness worthy of the kingdom, be vigilant, enterprising, compassionate, and merciful." [Matera]

Blount, *Then the Whisper Put on Flesh*, p. 67

And as Ringe says (p. 4),

"The episodes of the story function not to impart information, but rather to confront the hearer or reader by their unpredictable patterns of behavior and sequences of action, such that the story itself becomes an experience of God's reign."

*Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, p. 4

Neuger, quoting Nicola Slee,<sup>5</sup> makes the point even more strongly:

The parables suggest that within the context of the domestic the unexpected, the wholly gratuitous and unlooked for, erupts – but in so doing, the very world of the everyday is irretrievably shattered, irreversibly transformed. This provides no easy solution to the conflicts women experience between the domestic and the professional, home and work, family and society, and others, but it does hint that to discover the presence of God within the confines of the mundane and domestic is radically and explosively to transform these realities – and this may be as uncomfortable as it is unexpected.

*Pastoral Counseling as an Art*, p. 103

We may indeed, it would seem, look for grace demonstrated in a roll of toilet paper, a package of diapers.

And so we have the parable of the Kingdom of God as leaven:

What, for example, is being said about God's reign by the parable of the leaven... (Matt. 13:33)? No data are conveyed, but one is confronted with the daily task of bread baking, and in the pondering of that task various details come into focus. One is immediately aware of the contrast in amount of working leaven and inert dough, and of the hiddenness of the leavening process. One is at least subliminally aware that the leavened dough is a live organism, and not an inert product of human action or creation. The finished bread serves to nourish people at a most basic level of their lives. The whole episode is drawn from household experience and what then was women's work. It centers on the substance, the leaven, which was banned from ritual cereal offerings (Lev. 2:11, 6:17) and banned from every household during the holy season of Passover (Exod. 12:14-20). Such details are jarring when juxtaposed with the holiness of God's reign. In fact, they run counter to people's usual notions of what is appropriate to a "reign," and to normal human perceptions of power and majesty....

*Jesus, Liberation and the Biblical Jubilee*, p. 4

In this parable, we are reminded through what was then a very mundane experience of the dependence on God's creation, on God's action in the very stuff of life, the basics of economy. And this particular parable is doubly relevant to Pantry experience because of its focus on *women's* work, on what was then and is now so often taken for granted that it becomes invisible.

Poling also points to the Jubilee experience in Jesus' ministry, with the story from the Synoptics of the Feeding of the Thousands:

The miracle was that the people discovered a different kind of economic reality. Rather than buying food in town according to the economic system of the time, Jesus distributed it to the people and urged them to share. And there was enough for everyone, a clear example of the redistribution system that the peasants were quite familiar with. Jesus thus created the Eucharistic symbol based on the daily life of the peasants: in the new community, the abundance of God will provide for all by creating a community of economic sharing that responds to the needs of everyone rather than the accumulation of wealth for individual enjoyment.

*Render Unto God*, p. 181

---

<sup>5</sup> Nicola Slee, "Parables and Women's Experience, in *Feminist Theology: A reader*, ed. Ann Loads (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press).



Where the Empire economy focused on accruing more and always more, on status made visible through the accumulation of wealth through money, property, and possessions, Jesus invites those present to sit down, to bring forward what they have, and to share it. Whether the miracle was that the available food was truly multiplied to many hundreds of times its original quantity, or that strangers were brought into community, the miracle remains one of Jubilee, one of experiencing and making space for God's economy rather than Empire economy.

Ringe emphasizes the priority of God's economy, of Jubilee economy, over Empire economy in her comments on the Parable of the Banquet, and the excuses offered by the original invitees:

[The excuses] are remarkably similar to the first three of the four reasons for deferment from the Army in the Holy War of God (Deut. 20:5-8). Those four excuses are: having built a house but not yet dedicated it; having planted a vineyard the fruit of which one has not yet enjoyed; having married but not yet consummated the marriage; and being fainthearted. In the parable, however, the host does not consider the excuses adequate grounds for deferring participation in the banquet. Whether Luke intended to call to mind this list from Deuteronomy is of course impossible to know. Given the importance of both the messianic banquet and holy war as images related to Jewish eschatological expectation, such a reference would not be impossible, particularly at a pre-Lucan stage of the tradition. If such a reference is present, it makes the point of how the reign of God transcends traditional expectations and confounds those who might have thought themselves to be protected from the need of for immediate response to such a moment.

*Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, p. 57

There is, there can be, no excuse drawn from Empire Economy sufficient to justify rejection of Jubilee, of God-Economy.

### **Jubilee as Liberation**

The importance of Jubilee is central to the good news that Jesus proclaims and lives cannot be separated, then, from the good news of salvation. If the Kingdom of God is here, it is a kingdom that is based on Jubilee, on right relationship, on grace and justice, rather than power and force. Again we hear from Ringe:

"The poor" in the gospel are thus all those people without presumption of privilege, to whom Jesus' message comes as good news. There are very few to whom that message is totally good news, because most people claim something that sets them over others – age, or gender, or race, or religion, or ability, or health – even if they are economically poor. Therefore, an understanding of "the poor" as an economic category (which it always remains), but also as a category of people that includes those whom the tradition labels as outcasts, enables us to avoid idealizing the economic condition of poverty. The point of these Gospel texts is that the word about God's sovereignty *is* a word of promise particularly for those who can find no security or hope in the structures of its human institutions or the plans of human rulers. To those "poor" the news of God's reign *is* a welcome message. To them the invitation goes out to begin the feast and to share in the banquet.

*Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, pp. 59-60

And:

...[E]thical and cultic concerns in general can be distinguished but not separated in Gospel usage. Both are means of talking about the effect of the advent of God's reign in breaking the tyranny of evil in all its forms. In that context, "release" is more than a metaphor for God's work of redemption and reconciliation, and the economic image of the cancellation of debts is not simply another way to speak of God's forgiveness of humankind. Rather, "forgiveness" or "release" in all arenas of human life is portrayed as one of the principal characteristics of humankind's encounter with God's reign. Building on the background of that term in the Jubilee traditions, one can see that it is in social, political, and economic arenas that the sovereignty of God finds its primary expression, breaking the stranglehold of the old order on those we've come to recognize as "the poor."  
*Op. cit.*, p. 66

Jubilee is a liberating force that breaks the structures of Empire and replaces them with reconciliation, with right relationship, with freedom, with grace. We are not *required* to change our ways – we remain free to live in the bonds of Empire economy – but we are invited to choose to live in grace.

### **Jubilee versus Empire**

In contrast to the Jubilee understanding of economy stand today's economic structures and policies. And as with the "Pax Romana" of Jesus' time, we have an economy today that demonstrates a preferential option for the already rich and powerful and with little concern for the poor and weak, an economy far more concerned with its own continued existence and power than with the real needs of real people.

#### **The Idol of "The Economy"**

We begin with the fact that "The Economy" has essentially become an idol. Instead of being understood as (only) one model of activity that can help us better understand social processes and address injustice, "The Economy" has become an embodied abstract, a thing that is considered as an independent being that must be placated, catered to, worshiped.

The core definition of "economy" as Poling gives it would seem to be fairly straightforward:

An *economy* is a complex system of material activities and exchanges that determines how wealth and resources will be created and distributed within the population. It is a system that organizes human desire, deciding what values and behaviors will shape the personal experiences of groups.  
*Render Unto God*, p. 11

But we might note that Poling does not use “the” but rather “an,” suggesting that there are in fact many economies, many different systems. It is true that we are seeing increased interaction between economies, but even with the rapid onset of globalization it becomes apparent that there is in fact no such construct as The Economy; rather, there are systems that get used by different people in different places in different relationships to organize what they recognize as wealth.

Nonetheless, the idea that The Economy exists and lives is the prevalent idea for today’s Westernized culture. Turn to almost any newspaper, any news magazine, any TV news show, and you will find The Economy: *The Economy has taken a nosedive...*, *Reports show The Economy improved last month...*, *Government experts are worried about trends in The Economy...* The term won’t be capitalized, but it will nonetheless be used as a proper noun, as a referent for a single thing that exists as an autonomous entity. The questions that should be asked in any analysis of economic activity, economic structures, or economic policy...

What is the economy for?  
How does it work?  
How big should it be?  
What is a fair distribution of its benefits and burdens?  
How should it be governed?

Brown & Carver, *Right Relationship*, p. vxi

...are passed over completely, and replaced by concern for The Economy as a seemingly autonomous organism, an entity complete unto itself, and answerable only to itself.

### **Defining “The Economy”: Who and what is included?**

Even allowing for a theoretical single economy, The Economy as it is currently defined and measured suffers from serious gaps in its coverage. As noted before, the standard models of economy have been far too focused on far too few areas of human activity, with a particular tendency to disregard what it cannot quantify.

Paul Ekins summarizes the issue:

Whereas our pre-industrial ancestors mostly worked to produce goods and provide services for themselves and one another on a person-to-person basis outside the economy, we now work to produce goods and services as paid employees of organizations which provide them to customers, consumers, and clients. In other words, work has migrated from the informal to the formal economy.... So pervasive has been this process of formalization, that politicians, economists, business people, trade unionists and many other people now assume that the formal economy, in

which people's work takes the form of jobs and in which transactions have a money tag attached, is the only part of the economy that counts....

The assumption that people's economic and social activities don't really count unless the economists, accountants and statisticians can actually count them, is an example of the much more general 'Cartesian' approach that has been typical of every field of understanding during the industrial age. However, in the last few years the arbitrariness and irrationality of the assumption that the only important phenomena are those which can be measured and calculated has begun to be seriously challenged in such fields as medicine and science. Similarly, in the last few years an increasing number of people have begun to realize that we do actually live in a dual economy, part informal and part formal; that what we do for ourselves and one another outside the formal economy is significant; and that for the future the informal sector of activity may prove to be one of the most important areas for economic and social progress and for work.

*The Living Economy*, pp. 92-93

Nor is this overlooking of the informal sector a trivial matter, as Ekins points out in an earlier discussion:

The sheer size of the so-called 'invisible' informal sector, especially in poor countries, makes it so important that excluding it from discussions about a nation's economy or living standards will give us a totally inadequate and misleading image of reality. We have little information about the size, variety and extension of the informal economy in Third World countries. In Sweden, time budget studies have shown that the working time in the formal economy, private and public sectors, amounts to 6 billion hours per year. The volume of work in the so-called 'white' economy, which only includes house-work (cooking, cleaning, washing), shopping, work with children, upkeeping [*sic*], travel and a miscellaneous category, amounts to almost 7 billion hours per year. If such is the proportion in a country like Sweden, we should not be surprised if in many poor countries the size of the informal economy, which goes far beyond the 'white' economy, might be twice or three times that of the formal economy. Therefore, if we exclude such a voluminous sector from economic analysis, we shall only produce economic policies and development plans based on pure fiction.

*Op. cit.*, p. 48

At the Personal Essentials Pantry, we're well aware of the difference between what "The Economy" counts and measures and calculates and what people actually need; it's the very reason for our existence.

### **"The Economy" and Jubilee**

"The Economy" is Empire Economy; and Empire Economy is anti-Jubilee. Period. Looked at from any angle, from all angles, the chief goals and strategies of Empire Economy are in absolute contradiction to grace, to justice, to freedom. The rules are made by those who have the power, for the purposes of maintaining that power, at whatever cost to those without power.

Poling notes this, in his discussion of the witness of Mark's Gospel against Empire:

Mark's larger point is important to remember: that those with economic and political power always argue that their power is legitimately gained and that their decisions are for the benefit of all. But Mark gives witness that those with power in a world of oppression rule only by corruption, and their corruption must be exposed by nonviolent, direct action in order to destroy the symbolic

world that makes oppression seem natural and right.

*Render Unto God*, p. 194

Wilson, in his discussion of the sociopolitical structures at play in creating an “underclass,” notes Reagan’s achievements in convincing the middle class of their privilege of power:

In the face of hard economic times, Pres. Ronald Reagan was able to persuade the middle classes that the drop in their living standards was attributable to the poor (and implicitly, minorities), and that he could restore those standards with sweeping tax and budget cuts.... What is interesting, however, is that the Reagan administration [showed] far less willingness to cut significantly the much more expensive universal programs such as Social Security and Medicare, programs that are not income tested and therefore are available to people across class lines. In this connection, one of the reasons why [*sic*] western European social welfare programs enjoy wide political support... is that they tend to be universal – applied across class and racial/ethnic lines – and are therefore not seen as being targeted for narrow class or racially identifiable segments of the population.

*The Truly Disadvantaged*, p. 120

In other words, government support is fine when it is intended to benefit those who already have; but it is considered a drain on the public purse when it is intended to benefit those who have not. Sklar also notes the disparity in the views of subsidies for those in power and those without:

We hear a lot about the supposed "underclass cycle of dependency." Not about the upper-class cycle of dependency on unequal opportunity. When it comes to who gets what from government, language helps discriminate. Labor, women and people of color are called "special interests" although together they are the great majority of the population. The private profit-making interest of Corporate America substitutes for the "national interest."

*Chaos or Community?*, p. 103

And Peters points to the tendency of The Economy and our general culture to replace human values with economic values:

...[T]he values we assign to relationships and even to people sometimes conform to the “supply/demand” material resources triangle rather than the “human value” triangle. While the espoused public rhetoric in society generally affirms adherence to valorizing the importance of all people and human life, frequently social, economic, and political realities reveal that materialistic values have been assigned even to human beings....

Examination of the economic and racial constituencies most frequently expelled from public schools, arrested, without adequate employment or access to health coverage, and living in sub-standard housing conditions reveals some statistical realities that suggest poor people and those of certain racial groups... are apparently less valued in society as reflected in their overrepresentation in these debilitating social conditions..... These types of comparisons suggest that the supply/demand *material* values of society have a *human* value corollary involving economics and race that seems to place certain human beings in society at a higher value level than others.

*Urban Ministry*, p. 64

Similarly, Poling notes the reliance of Empire Economy on the existence of poverty to enhance wealth, especially as economic interests intersect with racism:

Both conservative and liberal theories attempt to hide the systemic effects of white racism and the fact that capitalism depends on the existence of a large labor pool at low wages. If African Americans can be blamed for their exclusion from the benefits of capitalism, then capitalism as a system can remain legitimate in the eyes of the majority of the population. The same elitism that creates colonialism and defines the majority of the world's poor as nonpersons also ignores the economic vulnerability of African-Americans within the United States. Racism justifies and excuses capitalism both at home and abroad for its oppression of people of color.

*Render Unto God*, p. 90

And so, “The Economy” has become not only a tool to further oppress those who have less, it becomes a system to further reduce those who are deemed to *be* less. Indeed, Empire Economy’s predilection to using its forces to enhance the powerful and dis-enhance the non-powerful has become a boast for some:

Former Citicorp Chair Walter Wriston has boasted of how “200,000 monitors in trading rooms all over the world” now conduct “a kind of global plebiscite on the monetary and fiscal policies of the governments issuing currency... There is no way for a nation to opt out.”

Sklar, *Chaos or Community?*, p. 167

The Economy is truly coming into its own as an autonomous, independent entity, with no connection to or control from actual human beings.

### **Empire Economy and Poverty**

Given the focus of Empire Economy, The Economy, on its own success, we should not be surprised at how little attention is really given to its failure and to poverty. Wilson notes the dearth of poverty research at the time of Johnson’s “Great Society” – a time when, in the flush of economic success following World War II, the presumption was apparently that everyone was just fine:

...[V]irtually no poverty research was undertaken in the scholarly community during the post-World War II period. Indeed, the dearth of research was so pronounced that in the early months of the Johnson administration a task force assembled to study the problem of poverty in America began “almost from scratch,” and had to rely upon a bibliography running “less than two pages.” So little research had been conducted that “when the poverty issue arose,” states Bell, “nobody was really prepared, nobody had any data, nobody knew what to do.”

*The Truly Disadvantaged*, p. 169

Nor have things improved much. Although there is now a vastly larger body of research, the standards for defining poverty have not changed greatly:

The official poverty line, formulated in 1964 by the Social Security Administration, was drawn by combining a set of rock-bottom food allowances... with estimated proportions of yearly family income directed to food purchasing. Except for a few modifications, such as pegging changes in

the poverty schedules to general inflation, the official poverty line has remained fundamentally as originally formulated....

As Schiller succinctly put it: “The line we have drawn separating the poor from the nonpoor does not indicate what is enough – it only asserts with confidence what is too little....”

*Op. cit.*, pp. 170-171

As noted above (page 4), Citro and Michaels also note the inadequacy of our current measures.

While we use economic deprivation as the underlying concept of poverty... we acknowledge that it is not easy to specify in a precise manner what it means to be economically deprived, even in a narrow sense. The general idea certainly seems intuitive and transparent.... [Within] virtually any concept of economic deprivation, the issue is how to define the key terms – “necessaries,” “indecent... to be without,” “customary behavior.” Although there may be a general sense in a society of what are “necessities” or what is “customary behavior,” the attempt to be specific inevitably raises questions and leads to debate about the very meaning of economic poverty.

*Measuring Poverty*, pp. 21-22

We might further note that many things that are considered necessary for those with adequate means are decried as luxuries *by* those with adequate means *for* those in poverty. Even prepaid cell phones – which, as was noted earlier, are the only mechanism generally available to those with inadequate or irregular income to obtain phone service – are often seen as luxuries by the very people who have landline service *and* a personal cell phone, if not a cell phone for every member of the family.

Not only is the definition of poverty level poorly drawn, so is the understanding of what poverty means to those who experience it and deal with it. Corbett and Fikkert note the difference in how poverty is seen by those living in and with it and those observing it:

In the vast majority of cases, [middle-to-upper class, predominantly Caucasian, North American churches] describe poverty very differently than the poor in low-income countries do. While poor people mention having a lack of material things, they tend to describe their condition in far more psychological and social terms than our North American audiences. Poor people typically talk in terms of shame, inferiority, powerlessness, humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression, social isolation, and voicelessness. North American audiences tend to emphasize a lack of material things such as food, money, clean water, medicine, housing, etc.

*When Helping Hurts*, p. 53

While Corbett and Fikkert’s work generally contrasts general North American/ Western culture with the poverty of so-called Third-World nations, their observation is also true in terms of the poor and nonpoor within the United States. All you have to do to understand the difference is to look at folks coming in to the Pantry for the first time and to hear the tears of shame and

frustration in their voice. It is not the lack of material things that they find most frustrating; it is the depression, and particularly the shame, that they feel about their new situation.

### **Whose failure?**

By definition, poverty is “a condition created by the failure of the economic system” (Poling, *Render Unto God*, p. 12). However, poverty is rarely viewed by The Economy or its proponents as the fault of the economic system; it is, rather, the fault of the impoverished. As both Couture and Wilson point out, the personal characteristics and morals of those in poverty all too often become the target for analysis.

[case study: Joyce] “In the months around the birth of my twin sons, I was unemployed and received public assistance in the form of food vouchers from a nutrition program for women, infants, and children known as WIC.... One day at the grocery store I got in line with my basketful of all the things to which I as an anemic new mother of twins was entitled in this program – cheese, cereal, carrots, lots of milk. I decided at the last minute to add a small bag of corn chips to my purchases, along with a few other items, such as disposable diapers, for which I would pay cash.

“Two women in line behind me, seeing my WIC vouchers, began to talk about my groceries and me. ‘Look at that. They just don’t know how to spend their money. That’s why welfare doesn’t work. You give these people money for food, and they buy potato chips with it.’ Neither of the women said anything like, ‘Oh, look, that good mother has a basketful find nutritious foods that will contribute to her health and health of her babies.’ Instead, their attention went directly to that which to them was evidence of poor choice by a person they deemed poor, relegated to the ranks of ‘those people.’”

Couture, *Child Poverty*, p. 16

(And we might note here that, under current regulations governing the use of food stamps, the corn chips would be a legitimate, supported purchase, but the diapers Joyce needs would not be.)

...Whereas American poverty analysts have produced volumes of research on the work motivation of the poor, problems of human capital (whereby poverty is seen as a reflection of insufficient education and occupational skills), and the effects of income maintenance programs on the labor supply, they have largely neglected the impact of extremely high levels of postwar employment of the poor.... It is an intellectual paradox that living in a society that has been a sea of unemployment, American poverty researchers have concentrated their research interests on the work motivation of the poor.

Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, p. 130

In the final analysis, the policy agenda set by the architects of the Great Society... established the vision for the subsequent research analysis of minority poverty. Although this vision attributed the behavioral problems of the poor to adverse social conditions, the emphasis was mainly on the environments of the poor, “the disarray at the bottom of society” where ignorance is widespread, crime is rampant, positive role models are lacking, and apathy is endemic. Since this vision did not consider poverty as a problem of American economic organization, efforts to alter the characteristics of individuals through employment and training programs were seen as the most efficacious way to fight poverty.

*Op. cit.*, p. 131



Clearly, it cannot be the fault of the *system* that labor, and therefore employees, are seen as a cost and not a resource; it must be that those who can't find work are simply too lazy.

Sklar offers another instance of focusing on the lack of values among those impoverished rather than the lack of resources offered by The Economy:

Wealthier citizens argue that lack of money isn't the problem in poorer schools – family values are – until proposals are made to make school spending more even. Then money matters greatly for those who already have more. "Research experts want to know what can be done about the values of poor segregated children," writes Kozol. "But they do not ask what can be done about the values of the people who have segregated these communities. There is no academic study of the pathological detachment of the very rich." Sklar, *Chaos or Community?*, p. 107

This focus on the character of the impoverished rather than economic and social policies can be seen quite clearly in the emphasis on self-reliance, which has been a buzzword in poverty abatement for at least the last forty years. The goal was to have those receiving government aid achieve the status of being "self-sufficient." As Couture describes the trend:

The language of self-sufficiency pervaded at least two movements for reform which have restructured the lives of parents and children in the U.S. in the last two decades. The first reform, the reform of laws governing divorce, began in California in the late 1960s and early 1970s and continues to proliferate in various forms of state legislation. The second reform, the reform of welfare, was enacted in 1988. In both reforms, the goal of individual "self-sufficiency" of the single parent household emerged as the norm of the day. "Self-sufficiency" meant the capacity of a single adult (male or female) household to provide for its dependents without help from society and often with little assistance from other family members.

*Blessed Are the Poor?*, p. 17

Unfortunately, self-sufficiency as a goal is not only deceptive, it is often actively discouraged by the actual policies meant to achieve it.

Couture describes the assumption...

*Self-sufficiency encourages personal responsibility.* This assumption undergirds much of the reasoning of people who want poor women to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and of people whose only model of women's equality suggests that women must compete in a male world for male power without relying at all on men. A model which promotes the idea of political equality of women and men of aristocratic classes was outlined by Plato in *The Republic*... In a just city, women and men of the aristocratic classes could be equal if they were self-sufficient. People could be self-sufficient if they were educated to understand the responsibilities of freedom, if they renounced their domestic attachments, if they took full responsibility for the conditions of their own lives, and if they allowed compassion to enhance the wisdom of their judgment....

...[There was also] the question, "if women can do what men can do, can men do what women do?" Should men take on the domestic tasks of the household? Socrates, however, was unwilling to talk about that question, claiming that it makes the story too long. Plato did not value the tasks of the household enough that men should also consider participating in them. He was unwilling to acknowledge that the life of contemplation and public action was not self-sufficient but has depended on the labor of women and slaves who were necessarily unequal.

*Op. cit.*, pp. 74-75

...and the reality within current social policy and The Economy:

Self-sufficiency also normalizes perverse race and class relations. In Greek thought, those who are not self-sufficient, who provide basic support services for those who are deemed self-sufficient, are designated subhuman. Traditionally, Americans regarded blacks and women as legally subhuman. . . . Despite our present legal valuing of each person, the tradition of self-sufficiency reflects the Greek and American traditions of subhuman designation. Under our present norm of self-sufficiency, those persons who live in communities which have few stabilizing social institutions, underfunded public schools, decreased interpersonal job networks, and fewer opportunities for employment which can support a family, are held as morally responsible for their “self-sufficiency” as those who live in communities with stable institutions, well-resourced public schools, and high-paying employment opportunities. *Op. cit.*, p. 165

And as Corbett and Fikkert point out in *When Helping Hurts*, self-sufficiency is difficult to achieve when the chief mechanisms for achieving it are actively discouraged:

Unfortunately, while public policy has historically encouraged wealth accumulation for middle-to-upper-class people, it has often discouraged wealth accumulation for the poor. Middle-to-upper-class people are encouraged to accumulate wealth through such things as tax-deferred (and often employer matched) retirement savings (IRAs, 401Ks, 403bs) and mortgage-interest tax deductions. At the same time, poor people have been forced to deplete their assets before qualifying for welfare assistance and have been penalized with the loss of benefits if they somehow managed to save and invest too much! The result is that many poor families are highly vulnerable to economic shocks and unable to even think about their financial futures.

*When Helping Hurts*, p. 188

Finally, the ideal of “self-sufficient” as currently defined and used within The Economy applies only to *some* aspects of life:

The problem about the conventional right-wing is that it is one-eyed. It expects people to be more reliant in what it sees as the ‘social,’ or welfare, department of life, but not in the ‘economic,’ or wealth, department. Conventional right-wing policies actually increase most people’s economic dependence on others more rich and more powerful than themselves, for such things as their work and incomes. They reduce the economic power of the state, not by enabling people to become more economically self-reliant, and therefore abler to provide for their own and one another’s health care and welfare, but by increasing the dominance of financial institutions, industrial and commercial companies, and rich individuals. For that reason, whether by failure of understanding or by deliberate deceit, whether by accident or design, the conventional right-wing rhetoric of self-reliance often runs the risk of appearing exploitative, disabling and corrupt.

*The Living Economy*, pp. 115-116

## **Concluding thoughts**

From whatever angle we examine it, The Economy as we so frequently hear it described is Empire Economy, not Jubilee Economy or God-Economy. It has become an idol, drawing uncritical worship from those who benefit from it and demanding repentance and atonement from those whom it disenfranchises. It blames its victims for their victimization, and offers no alternative except capitulation to its demands. Nonetheless, in spite of its own opinion of itself, it

is not all-powerful; it is still only a human-derived institution, and subject to God's authority. In the face of Jubilee, it falls and crumbles.

## **The Personal Essentials Pantry and Jubilee**

And so we return to the Personal Essentials Pantry and its proclamation of Jubilee. Where do we, where do *I*, see Jubilee proclaimed? What is it that we do and say that makes this proclamation?

Perhaps the simplest place to begin is where our guests begin; or perhaps the best place to begin is with the term "guests" itself.

### **Pantry Guests and Jubilee**

Words and labels have power. The old adage of *lex orandi, lex credendi* is true: what we pray, we end up believing; what we say, we end up thinking. To label those whom we serve as *guests*, then, is to say quite a bit about what we believe about them; and consistent use of that label reinforces those beliefs.

*Guests* are equals, if not more than equals, for guests have power, as much or sometimes even more than the hosts who invite them. Anyone thinking of inviting guests over for dinner will be thinking of the guests' needs first; they will be pulling out the finest table linens, the best china, and fixing the finest meal. They will think first and foremost of the guests' comfort. And although we don't fully capture that as we think about and prepare for our guests, some of that same ambience pervades our thinking. We smile; we make sure that the coffee pots are full and the cookies are out; we ask how things are going today; we do what we can to ensure that our guests feel welcomed.

This attitude is not universally approved; we sometimes encounter Empire Economy reactions:

I also changed "guests" to "recipients" [in the Mission Statement of the Pantry]. "Guests" has the connotation that we want to treat them as well as possible, and give them pretty much what they want.

e-mail from a United Way consultant  
October 2009

When I read this comment, my first reaction was essentially, “Yes? And your point is?” We *do* want to treat our guests as well as we possibly can, and to give them pretty much what they want, or at least as fully as we can within the limits of equitable distribution. Proclaiming Jubilee means proclaiming welcome, proclaiming hospitality, proclaiming abundance. That’s the very *reason* we use the term “guests.”

As powerful as the word is, though, it has to be backed up with concrete actions to reinforce the attitude it’s meant to instill.

So let’s move to the registration process. That process is intended to be as low-key, as empty of red tape as we can make it. It is true that, within the constraints of tight budgets, we have to exert some control; but we make every effort to make control compatible with grace.

So a new guest walks into the Pantry....

Good morning! Have you been here before? No? Right; let’s get started. Do you have a photo ID with you today? No, no, I just need yours, I don’t need the IDs for the entire family. We assume that you know the rest of the family; if you don’t, you have more trouble than we can help you with. [*A chuckle comes from the guest.*] Okay, thanks; *M-a-r-i-a [tab] G-o-m-e-z [tab]*. And is this your correct address, Ms. Gomez? No? What is the street number? *4-5-0-7 [tab]* and the street name? *O-a-k [space] C-o-u-r-t [tab]* That’s Monona, yes? *M-o-n-o-n-a [tab] 5-3-7-1-6*. Thanks, I’ve got the ZIP code; I live in Monona myself.

And how many in your family? 3? Yourself and who else... Ah; you, your husband, and one child – that would be this charmer? And she’s how old? 3? Okay; we’ve got it.

Okay, let’s get this printing out, and then we’ll generate your shopping list; here it comes. What I’d like you to do is to fill this top sheet out – no, I’ll send you down to the Fireside Room, where you can fill it out in something approaching comfort – I’ll need your signature here, that you’re in agreement with our rules and regulations...

Essentially, you’re here because you need us financially; we’re making this assumption about household income. You’re getting things only for your household, not for your neighbors, not for your best friend from high school, not for your favorite aunt in Iowa. [*Another chuckle from Ms. Gomez.*] You’re not going to take what we give you and sell it on the black market and move to some exotic locale – if you figure out how to do that, let us know; we could use the funding – and you’re not going to take us to court if your daughter here drinks the shampoo for dinner and gets sick; just have her burp gently. [*Another chuckle, and this time the daughter joins in.*]

I also need name, date of birth, and gender for all three of you – that’s so we won’t have to put you through this again. In addition to giving the computer this information, so it knows who’s in your household and therefore what products you need, we’ll be telling it what you get from us, and when you get it. The computer has a whole long list of rules for who can get what, how often – [*gesture to bulletin board where the rules are posted*] and that means that you can visit us as often as you need to, as many times as you need to. You just won’t be able to get a product that you’ve already gotten from us until its defined lifespan is up. In your case, you should find those definitions pretty much accurate, with the exception of razors and diapers; we’ll only let you request a pack of ten diapers every 11<sup>th</sup> day. We know it’s not enough, but we’re trying to stretch our budget as far as we can. Oh – your daughter is already toilet trained? Wonderful! You won’t have to worry about that at all, then.

Other than that, you should find that by the time you’ve run out of something, you can come back and get it again. And if we’re out of something – and we almost always are, I’m afraid – you

can come back as early as the next time we're open to see about getting it then.

Now, this sheet is your shopping list. These products with the rounded rectangles are products your household can share, so if you need any of those, just put a checkmark in the box to let us know *that* you need it. The products with the lines in front are products that touch the skin, and that therefore we don't think you should be sharing. I'm sure you and your husband love each other dearly, but I don't think sharing a toothbrush is a very good way to show that love.

[*Laughter and a headshake from Ms. Gomez.*] For those products, please write in the number so that we know *how many* you need; we're not allowed to read minds. The FCC says it needs all that bandwidth for reality TV shows....

Everything clear? Okay, take it out, fill it out, and then bring it back here, and we'll see what we can do for you.

And that is, pretty much verbatim, how a typical new registration goes. Quick, easy, pretty straightforward. But there are some points about it that are worth examining in more detail.

We asked Ms. Gomez (who doesn't actually exist, by the way – or at least there's no such person at that address, which is my home address) for her photo ID, which she had. If she hadn't had one, however, the only adverse comment would have been “Try to bring it with you next time you come, if you can.” We appreciate being able to verify a guest's identity, but we don't insist on it. Being able to see an ID makes it easier to spell the guest's name correctly, of course, but that's about the only value we place on it. As far as we're concerned, the fact that the guest has come to us is reason enough to serve them.

And that's why we didn't ask for IDs or verification of Ms. Gomez' husband or daughter; we presume she knows them, and that she can give us the information we need about them – their names, gender, and dates of birth. That's the information we need to generate a shopping list with products that match the needs of their household – that she needs women's *and* men's deodorant, that she needs adult *and* children's toothbrushes.

But now that we have that information, we won't need to ask her again, unless she and her husband have a second child; and we'll automatically know when her daughter turns 4 and is therefore no longer eligible for diapers or other baby products. We won't have to bother her by re-checking everyone's status every time. Also, since we have both her and her husband's name in the database, and (obviously) associated with her household, either one of them can do the shopping at the Pantry.

I also indicated, as I talked her through our policies, that we're making an *assumption* about household income, but we're not asking for verification. Again, the fact that Ms. Gomez has

come to the Pantry says everything we need to know about the reality of her need. As pleasant as we try to make the experience – and we’ve got feedback from a lot of guests that we’re one of the more pleasant pantries to visit – nobody comes to pantries for fun.

Assuming that the guests speaks English, so I don’t have to work through a translator or bring out my less than perfect Spanish, the whole process should take well under three minutes. Further, for those guests who do speak another language, we can print out their information – our policies and rules, and their shopping list – in the appropriate language. (The shopping list does print out with English subtitles, since not all of our staff are fluent in other languages.) Right now, we support Spanish, French, and Hmong, and we will probably be adding Vietnamese in the next year or so, and we have space in the database for as many more languages as we need.

And when Ms. Gomez makes her next visit, the process will be much simpler:

Have you been here before? Yes? Your first name? (*Maria*) M-a-r [tab] And your last name?  
(*Gomez*) G-o-m [tab][enter]. Any changes to the household? No? Okay... [enter] (*pause*) ...here’s your list. Go ahead and fill it out, and then bring it back to me, and we’ll do our best for you.

So, in the first few steps of the registration process, we’re already showing a preference for grace over red tape. (In fact, I’ll frequently joke about that with the guests – that the other agencies seem to have so much more fun with red tape, we figure we’ll leave it all for them, and we’ll concentrate on grace. That usually gets a chuckle, too.) We’re trying to make sure that any complexities get handled on our side, so that the guest has as little difficulty as possible, and that the process is as quick and simple as possible.

The question gets raised, of course, “What about folks who want to cheat?” It’s a valid question; but cheating is actually pretty difficult to do. The computer software that we use automatically double-checks every new registration against matches for name and address fields, which means that it’s pretty tough to register the same household a second time. As effective as that is at preventing cheating, though, we might note that it began as a way to ensure that *we* didn’t screw up. Before we went to the computerized system, we had a number of households that had gotten registered twice because we were asking the wrong question. When Tom Green hears the question “Have you been here before?” he assumes it means has *he*, Tom Green, been to the Pantry before; he doesn’t realize that what we *intended* by our question was “Is your

*household* already registered?” Since it was always his partner, Mary Smith, who did the shopping until she broke her leg last week and so couldn’t make it in today, no, he hadn’t been to the Pantry before. He answered honestly; we just didn’t ask the right question. With the new system, it’s not an issue; nobody can easily cheat, but it doesn’t look or feel like we’re paranoid about the possibility. Again, we emphasize grace.

And the fact that we’ve collected such detailed information about the household, registering name, and date of birth, and gender (as well as whether any member has allergies or is incontinent) means that products can’t be requested gratuitously – nobody can come in and stock up on men’s deodorants when there are no teenage or adult males in the household, or ask for several sets of diapers when there are no infants. But it also means that they *do* have access to the products that their household does need; they don’t have to keep proving their need by re-verifying who’s in the household. And for those with special needs, the information is automatically logged and tracked; nobody has to keep asking publicly for adult diapers, or explain repeatedly that their 11-year-old daughter has already begun menstruating. Again, grace.

### **Jubilee and Pantry Products**

We are discovering that the way we handle and control the products themselves is also proclamation of Jubilee. The very fact that we exist is a proclamation that personal and household hygiene are needs to be taken seriously, and proclaims the worth of that otherwise invisible sector of activity. Beyond that, how we define and distribute product says a lot, we think, about economic liberation.

James’ original statement back in May 2006 was, “Food pantries are always being asked for toilet paper, for shampoo, for deodorant, for laundry soap – and they never have enough.” From the point of view of the food pantry, these products are “extras,” to be provided if, when, and as they are available. The result of this, however, is inevitably an economy of scarcity. There is never a way to predict how much of what there will be, except that there will not be enough; there is never a way to plan. And when access to that unpredictable and unreliable supply is restricted, as is so often the case, by some arbitrary number of days between allowed visits, the

result is chaos. That chaos, though, often looks from the outside like greed, because in an economy of scarcity, where there is never enough and it's never predictable, the absolute best survival strategy is to get everything possible whenever possible. To those living in economies of enough or even abundance, this seems like selfishness and greed; but for those living in an economy of scarcity, it is survival.

In rejection of establishing an economy of scarcity, we have done our level best to create, within the Pantry at least, an economy of enough. Rather than attempting to control distribution by modifying the guests' access to the Pantry itself, we came to the realization that it made much more sense to control distribution based on product function and lifespan. If a product should last a family like Ms. Gomez' 30 days, then it should only be offered to Ms. Gomez every 31<sup>st</sup> day; but if it lasts only three weeks, then it should be offered every 22<sup>nd</sup> day, and if it should last six months, it should only be offered every 181<sup>st</sup> day. That's the basis of the PEPbase software we use; the software has the information as to who got what, and when they got it, and it also has the definitions for how long a product should last for a given family or household, and it takes that information into account as it generates the shopping list for Ms. Gomez or Mr. Sung or Mrs. Smith as they visit for the first or fourth or sixteenth time.

However, we quickly realized that it wasn't just *time* we needed to consider; we also needed to look at product size. It's one thing to say that a 15-ounce bottle of shampoo should last a household of four 52 days; but it's quite another to hand that household a hotel-size bottle of shampoo and make the same statement.

And so we've come to our list of product definitions: *who* would be logical users of the product, *how long* it should last those users, and *how much* of the product is "enough." It sounds straightforward, but it means that, for the first time, our guests can predict what they'll be able to get, and how often, and can plan accordingly. For families trying to make effective use of limited resources, this is a huge blessing. It is, in fact, a declaration of Jubilee – that we believe that they are as worthy as we of "normal" life, that they are as worthy as we of having enough, that they are as worthy as we of receiving first fruits rather than remnants and left-overs.



This is not, of course, to say that we always have enough; far too often, guests find that their shopping list is far shorter than it should be because we have run out of products midway through the service shift. At least, however, they understand that the problem is with our resources, not a result of another guest's misuse of the limited resources or because we don't think they "deserve" a product. They understand that we're in the same situation of struggling within The Economy while trying to live Jubilee Economy.

### **Jubilee and Community**

It may be that one of the hardest things to do is to acknowledge that our guests are in fact our equals, and that they are equally capable of giving. When I first had a guest offer to help with washing the coffee cups, my instinct was to deny the request; we were serving her, right? not she us! But the truth of the matter is that we are equals; we are both in need of grace, and we are both capable of bestowing grace. And when I learned to accept such offers of help, I discovered that all of us were richer for it. We had moved from being "us and them" much closer to simply being "us."

And as I was writing this – not just this paper, but this very section – a guest stopped by the Pantry (which isn't open for service today) to drop off two bags of books and magazines, including a number of children's books. When she was here last week, I had been bemoaning the fact that I was out of children's books to hand out; and she responded that she had lots of extra books at home, and would bring some in. Those two bags will be gone within the first two hours of Pantry service this coming Thursday, because they'll be taken home to brighten a lot of lives. We not only give out here at the Pantry, we receive back.

It is also difficult to move from being "Lady Bountiful" to being co-workers. I had been unaware, until one of our guests mentioned it, that many pantries do not allow their guests to become staff until and unless they no longer need the pantry. But if we begin with the assumption that all of us are children of God, members of the same family, how can we defend this division? How can we truly proclaim that we are sisters and brothers together if we consider some of us to be unqualified because of their status as guests for what we do as hosts?

And so our staff members include folks who also use our Pantry as guests; and our guests include folks who have served the Pantry as staff. That makes for a much fuller understanding of the constraints from both sides of the table, and a much more grace-full community.

And that community becomes very visible in the hour or so before the Pantry opens on Thursday and on Sunday. Guests who are long-time Pantry users reach out to those among them who are new to the Pantry and its operation, explaining the “take-a-number system,” reassuring them that things move along quite quickly, welcoming them in. They point out the coffee and cookies, and confirm that all are welcome to those refreshments. They get into conversations about shared connections of neighborhood or school or mutual experiences. They provide directions to a nearby food pantry. They share information about health resources for handling fibromyalgia, arthritis, eczema, hay fever. They share news about school events. They even stick around after their order has been filled so they can continue the chat with a new acquaintance, who may in time become a new friend, about Obama’s last appearance or the latest news about the BP oil spill.

Some of them join us for worship on Thursday morning, sharing word and prayer about God’s intent for this world, for God-Economy rather than Empire Economy. Together we proclaim God’s presence, confess our limitations, hear God’s continued assurances, celebrate God’s good news, and prepare ourselves for continued mission as children of God in the world. We pray for assistance and support generally, and some weeks we pray for very particular concerns brought forward by a member of the worshipping group.

If Jubilee includes building right relationships with each other and with God, then the community that builds in the Pantry every week is a Jubilee community.

### **The Pantry and The Economy**

Given the invisibility of this area generally, one of the most valuable components of our Jubilee witness is simply explaining the importance of this area to traditional poverty-abatement areas:

What we do certainly doesn't end hunger; but folks will eat a lot safer if they can wash the pots and pans they cook the food in. What we do isn't education; but both kids and adults learn a lot better if they aren't worried about classmates teasing them about their clothes, their odor, their appearance. What we do isn't employment, but it's a lot easier for folks to get and keep a job when they're able to shower, shampoo, shave, wash their clothes, use deodorant. What we do isn't housing, but the landlord will probably be a lot happier if the floors and windows and toilet are cleaned occasionally, and getting the security deposit back will almost certainly not happen without that. What we do isn't health, but folks are much less prone to a whole host of health problems if they can brush their teeth on a regular basis, and simple scratches are a lot less likely to turn infected if soap and band-aids are available. What we do isn't community involvement, but it's a lot easier to be accepted in the community if one's poverty isn't a visible and olfactory stigma.

In addition to the simple witness given through our existence, we provide witness in the information we collect and share about the degree of the need. Because of the PEPbase software, we have numbers and data about the need: how many households are registered; how many new households we register every month; how many visits the typical household makes, and how often; how many products the typical household needs. We have hard numbers to show to people who don't think the need is real because they have never had to think about it. We can demonstrate the impact we have on the lives of people in poverty, and how much, in dollar terms, we can add to their resources. We can talk about how widespread the need is – that poverty isn't limited to *those* areas of the city, but that there are people living in poverty throughout the city, in even the “best” neighborhoods. We can talk about how many households are coping by joining forces, taking on custody of nieces and nephews, reaching out to siblings and aunts and uncles.

Statistics may get written off as bean-counting, peripheral to “real” ministry; but numbers are important in communicating to The Economy and its proponents the reality of poverty. The information we gather says that we take this need seriously, and that we take it seriously enough to study it and to learn more about it.

## Conclusion

A man was standing beside a stream when he saw a baby struggling in the water. Without a thought he jumped in and saved it. No sooner had he placed it gently on the shore than he saw another and jumped in to save it, then another and another. Totally focused on saving babies, he never thought to look upstream to answer the obvious question: Where were the babies coming from, and how did they get in the water?  
*Anonymous*

When we began the Personal Essentials Pantry back in 2006, we had not undertaken any examination of the issues beyond the fact that there was a need. We were, in effect, proposing to jump in and rescue babies from drowning. We had not considered the question of why the babies were in the water, nor where they were coming from.

As we have examined our ministry further, and particularly as we have looked harder at why this need exists in the first place, we have begun to realize that, while pulling babies out of the river is good, it is a never-ending struggle. Until and unless we can make significant progress on addressing the root causes of the need, we will always be jumping into the river.

In beginning to understand the difference between Jubilee and Empire Economy, we begin to understand our role as agents of change. The mere fact that we exist serves to challenge the assumptions of The Economy that “women’s work” is inconsequential, that personal and household hygiene are unimportant “miscellaneous” areas affecting nothing more than surface appearance.

The fact that we choose to emphasize grace rather than suspicion in our policies and procedures, that we choose to assume need rather than insisting that people prove need, says much about our regard for those we serve: that they are equally children of God, equally deserving of grace, equally deserving of “enough.”

Finally, the fact that we choose to base our ministry solidly in the assumptions and ideal of Jubilee demonstrates our rejection of the tenets and belief system of The Economy, Empire Economy. It proclaims that there is another way, a better way. There is Jubilee, *God-Economy*.

Now all we have to do is live it:

*Having been blessed by God with an abundance of gifts,  
we share God's love and God's kingdom,  
helping with the essentials of personal and household hygiene,  
showing God's grace and love through these tangible gifts.*

## References

In addition to the traditional bibliographic information on each reference, I have included the ISBN number, OCLC call number, and/or website to assist the reader in more easily locating the reference. I have also included a brief description or summary. If these are not my own, but I am rather quoting from an introduction or book cover, the description is in italics. Any URLs cited were verified in preparing this listing.

Blount, Brian K. (2001) *Then the whisper put on flesh: New Testament ethics in an African American context*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. ISBN 0-687-08589-6. BS 2545.E8 B56 2001.

The question has been raised whether African-American slave culture's interpretation of scripture is warranted, or whether their interpretation brings in overmuch of their own perspective and culture. Blount's answer is a resounding *No!*, and demonstrates in no uncertain terms the liberating message that God offers to those in oppressed circumstances.

Brown, Peter G. and Geoffrey Garver. (2009) *Right relationship: Building a whole earth economy*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publications, Inc. ISBN 978-1-57675-762-8. HC 59.72 .E5766 2009.

Brown and Carver examine the economy from the perspective of the health of the planet as a whole. For them, "economy" must come to mean more than simply the financial activity of human life, and be transformed into the business of the "household" of the entire planet. Human activity can only be sustained if the planet is sustained; and our lives can only remain rich and full if the planet which sustains us is rich and full.

Citro, C. and R. Michaels (eds). (1995) *Measuring poverty: A new approach*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/povmeas/nas.html>

A report of the National Academy of Sciences' Panel on Poverty and Family Assistance, which undertook evaluation and review of the poverty measures being used to define eligibility for government assistance. The panel concluded that the measures were significantly outdated and that the basic methodology was flawed, and proposed new standards and metrics.

Collins, Gail. (2009) *When everything changed: The amazing journey of American women from 1960 to the present*. New York: Little, Brown and Company. ISBN 978-0-316-05954-1. HQ 1421.C64 2009.

*A comprehensive mix of oral history and ...research – covering politics, fashion, popular culture, economics, sex, families, and work – When Everything Changed is the definitive book on five crucial decades of progress.... Collins describes what has happened in every realm of women's lives, partly through the testimonies of both those who made history and those who simply made their way.*

Corbett, Steve, and Brian Fikkert. (2009) *When helping hurts: How to alleviate poverty without hurting the poor ...and yourself*. Chicago: Moody Publishers. ISBN 978-0-8024-5705-9. BV 639 .P6C67 2009.

Our efforts to do good have all too often become do-good-ery, “Lady Bountiful” – acts that make us feel good rather than that achieve good. Beginning with an exploration of why Jesus came to earth and what his ministry demonstrated, Corbett and Fikkert discuss general principles and practical strategies for actually helping people in poverty and need rather than merely making ourselves feel noble.

Couture, Pamela D. (1991) *Blessed are the poor? Women’s poverty, family policy, and practical theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. ISBN 0-687-03615-1. HV 1445 .C681 1991.

Couture examines the interaction of our [at least nominally Christian] ideal of self-sufficiency on policies and practices concerning family life, and sees in that interaction a strong contribution to poverty, especially among women and children. The very goal of poverty abatement programs is, as her analysis demonstrates, a major contributor to the poverty they seek to abate.

Couture, Pamela D. (2007) *Child poverty: Love, justice, and social responsibility*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press. ISBN 978-0-827205-09-3. BV 639 .C4C685 2007.

*[In this book, Couture] urges the church and individual Christians to assume responsibility for children in need, to quit accepting child poverty as a given in our local communities and around the world.... Developed from the task force for the United Methodist Bishops Initiative on Children and Poverty, this book examines concrete cases and ministries, giving the reader examples to follow in this vital fight. Where love and justice thrive, so do children. Where either or both are missing, children suffer. And where churches are addressing such suffering by going beyond programs that only ease poverty’s symptoms, God’s grace is flowing.*

Ekins, Paul (ed.) (1986) *The living economy: A new economics in the making*. London: Routledge. ISBN 0-415-03937-1. HB 171 .L76 1986.

*Economics is in trouble. Its policy instruments are blunt, its experts disagree and its theories are in disarray in the face of global economic disorder: unprecedented levels of indebtedness, endemic inflation, high unemployment, deepening world poverty and gross environmental degradation. The Living Economy analyses conventional economic theory in the light of contemporary economic problems and finds its basic premises and assumptions flawed and its methodology suspect in several important respects.... The book is based on the first two years’ work of The Other Economic Summit (TOES).*

Gornik, Mark R. (2002) *To live in peace: Biblical faith and the changing inner city*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. ISBN 978-0-8028-4685-3. BV 537.G63 2002.

*“...Gornik shows us, through both theological analysis and gripping narrative, that biblical faith matters greatly to the social existence of Christians, to the way we locate ourselves in towns and cities as well as to the way we respond to the challenges of civic responsibility and the brokenness of creation....”*

Harris, Maria. (1996) *Proclaim Jubilee!: A spirituality for the twenty-first century*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. ISBN 0-664-25661-9. BV 4501.2 .H3597 1996.

Ms. Harris' work on Jubilee as it relates to people individually and communally, and in this book from 1996 looks at how Jubilee theology might be made visible in our century – a century we are now a decade into. Her discussion ranges from the seemingly simple obedience to a Sabbath for the land to forgiveness to liberty to justice.

Myers, Bryant L. (1999) *Walking with the poor: Principles and practices of transformational development*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. ISBN 1-57075-275-3. BX 2347.8 .P66M94 1999.

Myers re-examines the philosophy and praxis of transformational development, seeking to identify strategies that truly bring about transformation from within, rather than the all-too-usual temporary transformation imposed from outside and abandoned as soon as outside influences take their leave.

Neuger, Christie. (1996) Pastoral Counseling as an Art of Personal Political Activism. In Christie Neuger, *The Arts of Ministry* (1996). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. ISBN 0-664-25593-0. BV 4016.A78 1996.

*[Neuger's] chapter on pastoral counseling explores how a feminist approach might move through four processes in helping women, men, and relationships in times of distress. Using scriptural themes to help articulate the meaning of these processes, I discuss the tasks of coming to voice, gaining clarity, making choices, and staying healthy. The focus is on the work of pastoral counseling in the parish – a work that is too often and too quickly abdicated to secular mental health resources.*

Peters. (2007) *Urban Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. ISBN 978-0-687-64225-0. BV 635 .P48 2007.

*In this seminal work Ron Peters refuses to accept 'urban ministry' as a euphemism for work among the disadvantaged minority populations of our nation's cities. He invites us instead to envision the city as an 'egalitarian metropolis' built upon a foundation of restorative justice and reflective of the beauty of 'a city called heaven.'*

Poling, James Newton. (2002) *Render unto God: Economic vulnerability, family violence, and pastoral theology*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press. ISBN 0-8272-3250-0. BV 539.P6 .P57 2002.

Poling brings together research and expertise in pastoral counseling, economics, and family violence, analyzing the forces that define and sustain vulnerability – to economic injustice and to violence – and looking at what the Gospel has to say about ways to heal and empower people oppressed by economic and domestic injustice.

Ringe, Sharon H. (1985) *Jesus, liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress. ISBN 1-59244-713-9. BT 202.R55 1985.

*Ringe addresses the Jubilee in the images and traditions in the Synoptic Gospels, especially in Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God. She illuminates how the Jubilee traditions served as a source for early Christian ethics and Christology: "to confess Jesus as the Christ –herald of the Jubilee, messenger, and enactor of liberation -- is to participate in acts of liberation." Ringe concludes that the agenda of liberation*

*constitutes the very core of both the gospel message and biblical faith: "the word of God fulfilled in the presence of Jesus of Nazareth is alive with images of liberation.*

Russell, Laura Henze, Ellen A. Bruce and Judith Conahan. (2006) *The WOW-GI National Elder Economic Security Standard: A methodology to determine economic security for elders.* Gerontology Institute, John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston and Wider Opportunities for Women.  
<http://www.wowonline.org/ourprograms/eesi/documents/FinalWOWGINationalMethodology.pdf>

*The Elder Economic Security Initiative... offers a conceptual framework and concrete tools to shape public policies and programs to promote the economic well being of older adults, whether or not they have the capacity to be fully self-reliant or are in need of certain public supports to age in place with dignity and autonomy.*

US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2008) *Consumer expenditure survey anthology, 2008.* Report 2009. <http://www.bls.gov/cex/csxanthol08.htm>

*...[T]he third in a series of reports presenting articles pertaining to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey... [A]rticles discussing ongoing research and methodological issues pertaining to the CE and analytical articles using this survey's data are included in this report.*

Wilson, William Julius. (1987) *The truly disadvantaged: The inner city, the underclass, and public policy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0-226-90131-9. HV 4045 .W55 1987.

Wilson undertakes a systematic examination of the overlapping and confounding effects of economic, social and racial policies in creating what is effectively an "underclass" of citizens, prevented from upward or forward motion because of those policies – policies which in many cases were intended to be a solution but instead have contributed greatly to the problems.

Wren, Brian. (1989) *What Language Shall I Borrow? God-talk in worship: A male response to feminist theology.* London: SCM Press. ISBN 978-0-334-02420-0. BR 115 .L25W74 1989.  
*If all naming of God arises out of human experience, then societies and cultures with a male-dominated tradition are bound to have affected religious attitudes and practices. That is the presupposition of [this book, which] aims at remedying the situation, at least in worship.*



**Appendix A**  
**History of the Personal Essentials Pantry**  
**Zion Church ♦ Madison, WI**

| <b>Date</b>  | <b>Event</b>  | <b># Households</b>                              |
|--------------|---|--|
| May 11, 2006 | Adult Stepping Stones discussion: what does this neighborhood and community need from us?   |  |
| May 15, 2006 | Pantry shelves installed; Zion Library recommissioned as Pantry   |  |
| June 2006    | Sue Marks takes on responsibility of coordinating the Pantry. Shopping lists prepared; guests will be allowed 1 visit per month, 12 visits per year   |  |
| June 1, 2006 | Pantry open for business  |  |
| June 8, 2006 | First two Pantry guest households registered  | 2 households                                     |
| January 2007 | Pantry rules revised to reflect dramatic increase in number of households; families still able to visit once per month, but only able to visit six times per year   | 172 households                                   |
| Aug 2007     | Christine Thompson takes on formal job of Pantry Coordinator  | 437 households                                   |
| Aug 15, 2007 | Thrivent provides a \$15,000 grant to the Pantry  | 462 households                                   |
| Sept 2007    | First Pantry database of households established   | 488 households                                   |
| Nov 2007     | Interim Pantry Advisory Board formed: Allison Christians, Peter Luisi, Sue Marks, Lois Roth, Peter Uttech   | 592 households                                   |
| January 2008 | Pantry rules revised in anticipation of PEPbase: guests may visit as often as needed, as many times per year as needed; shopping list to be controlled by product longevity rules and household composition | 823 total households;<br>599 active households   |
| June 8, 2008 | PEP Rally held, celebrating PEP's second anniversary  | 1286 total households;<br>1062 active households |

|                |   |  |
|----------------|---|--|
| July 2008      | PEPbase household database up and running; tracks composition of households, facilitates prevention of duplicate registration of same household   | 1431 total households<br>1192 active households  |
| Aug 24, 2008   | Front-page, full color article on Pantry in Wisconsin State Journal by reporter Sandi Kalio   | 1512 total households;<br>1312 active households |
| January 2009   | PEPbase household, product and shopping history databases linked to provide customized control of shopping lists  | 2070 total households;<br>1719 active households |
| Mar 2009       | PEP Plan of Operation finalized and approved, ready for implementation beginning June 2009  | 2216 total households;<br>1817 active households |
| April 2, 2009  | PEP Benefit Concert with Lou & Peter Berryman, Dan Newton & Daddy Squeeze Trio; formal community sponsorship drive kicked off   | 2216 total households;<br>1817 active households |
| April 2009     | PEPbase V1.0 being released for use by other pantries and agencies  | 2245 total households;<br>1908 active households |
| May 2009       | ELCA World Hunger Program grant of \$3,000 received   | 2434 total households;<br>1961 active households |
| August 2009    | Presentation at <i>Understanding and Overcoming Poverty</i> , Wausau WI, in conjunction with the PEPs at St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, Wisconsin Rapids, and First United Methodist Church of Rhinelander             | 2742 total households;<br>2119 active households |
| September 2009 | Changed policies with regard to listing of out-of-stock products. Having gathered data on total need for January-August 2009, we are de-listing products as they go out of stock, and re-listing them as they come back in stock. | 2861 total households;<br>2187 active households |
| October 2009   | Initiation of some community-based, participatory research, taking a “snapshot” of Pantry guest ethnicity and conducting open-end interviews to better understand how guests perceive our ministry                                | 2964 total households;<br>2240 active households |

|               |   |  |
|---------------|---|--|
| November 2009 | Initial data extraction and analysis of PEPbase data, for presentation at 2009 <i>Poverty Matters!</i> Conference (see below). Library of data search strategies being compiled for use in longitudinal comparisons.  | 3050 total households;<br>2336 active households |
| December 2009 | Reviewed presentation on what we can now say about the depth and breadth of the field of personal and household hygiene at <i>Poverty Matters!</i> , 2009 WISCAP Conference, Appleton, WI.  | 3114 total households;<br>2293 active households |
| May 2010      | Received Year 2 funding from ELCA Domestic Hunger program<br>First significant drop in number of active households  | 3435 total households;<br>1377 active households |
| May 2010      | Included in Bishop's presentation for South Central Synod of Wisconsin's Annual Assembly, <i>Where Is God Taking You?</i> , as one of three ministries highlighted  | Data not available at time of compilation        |
| June 2010     | Began a project of networking with other agencies in Madison, with joint use of the PEPbase software and database, in an effort to broaden the availability of personal and household hygiene products across multiple agencies in a coordinated and effective fashion. | Data not available at time of compilation        |

This page left blank intentionally.

## Appendix B: PEP Product Specifications

This table lists the products that the Personal Essentials Pantry regards as core products. Although we cannot always guarantee that we will have enough of all of these products for all of our guests, these are the products we budget for. Each product is defined in terms of whether it is for individual (I) or general household (G) use, how much constitutes a “unit” of product, and how long the product is expected to last for a given number of users. *Please note that we use “number of users” rather than “household size,” since not all members of a household may be using a given product. For example, if the household includes eight members, but two of them are age 3 or younger, there will be six users of shampoo and body soap, and two users of baby shampoo and baby powder, but eight users of laundry soap.* In general, products that directly touch the skin are distributed individually to eligible household members; in these instances, the allotted product duration is the same across all household sizes.

The allotted duration for these products is set based on a combination of on household experience and budgetary constraints. We recognize that this may not represent actuality for every household, but practicalities of both budget and staffing force us to set general limits.

|  |            |                 | <b>Allotted Duration per Number of Users<br/>(in days)</b> |            |            |            |             |              |            |
|--|------------|-----------------|--|------------|------------|------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>General Household</b>                           | <b>I/G</b> | <b>Unit</b>     | <b>1-2</b>   | <b>3-4</b> | <b>5-6</b> | <b>7-8</b> | <b>9-11</b> | <b>11-13</b> | <b>13+</b> |
| Toilet paper                                       | I          | 1 roll/ea       | 31   | 31         | 31         | 31         | 31          | 31           | 31         |
| Kleenex  | G          | box ≥100        | 31   | 28         | 25         | 22         | 19          | 16           | 13         |
| Laundry soap                                       | G          | ≥ 36 loads      | 31   | 28         | 25         | 22         | 19          | 16           | 13         |
| Dish soap  | G          | ≥ 16 oz         | 31   | 28         | 25         | 22         | 19          | 16           | 13         |
| All-purpose cleaner<br><i>vinegar, baking soda</i> | G          | ≥ 16 oz<br>each | 50   | 44         | 38         | 32         | 26          | 20           | 14         |
| Paper towels                                       | G          | 100-sht         | 31   | 28         | 25         | 22         | 19          | 16           | 13         |
| Garbage bags                                       | G          | 10 lg           | 45   | 40         | 35         | 31         | 25          | 20           | 11         |
| <b>Personal Care</b>                               |            | <b>Unit</b>     | <b>1-2</b>   | <b>3-4</b> | <b>5-6</b> | <b>7-8</b> | <b>9-11</b> | <b>11-13</b> | <b>13+</b> |
| Hair pick  | I          | 1 each          | 365  | 365        | 365        | 365        | 365         | 365          | 365        |
| Comb   | I          | 1 each          | 365  | 365        | 365        | 365        | 365         | 365          | 365        |
| Brush  | I          | 1 each          | 365  | 365        | 365        | 365        | 365         | 365          | 365        |
| Lip balm   | I          | tube;<br>1 each | 130  | 130        | 130        | 130        | 130         | 130          | 130        |
| Dental floss                                       | G          | 100 yd          | 130  | 115        | 90         | 75         | 60          | 45           | 31         |
| Nail clipper                                       | G          | 1 each          | 365  | 365        | 365        | 365        | 365         | 365          | 365        |
| Emery board  | I          | 1 each          | 90   | 90         | 90         | 90         | 90          | 90           | 90         |
| Toothbrush<br><i>separate adult, child</i>         | I          | 1 each          | 190  | 190        | 190        | 190        | 190         | 190          | 190        |
| Razor  | I          | 1 each          | 20   | 20         | 20         | 20         | 20          | 20           | 20         |
| Deodorant<br><i>separate men's, women's</i>        | I          | ≥ 2 oz          | 60   | 60         | 60         | 60         | 60          | 60           | 60         |
| Q-tips   | G          | pack ~50        | 31   | 28         | 25         | 22         | 19          | 16           | 13         |
| Band-aids  | G          | pack 10         | 31   | 28         | 25         | 22         | 19          | 16           | 13         |
| Adult diapers                                      | I          | pack of 10      | 11   | 11         | 11         | 11         | 11          | 11           | 11         |

|                             |   |             | <b>Allotted Duration per Number of Users<br/>(in days)</b> |            |            |            |             |              |            |
|-----------------------------|---|-------------|--|------------|------------|------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>Personal Care, cont.</b> |   | <b>Unit</b> | <b>1-2</b>   | <b>3-4</b> | <b>5-6</b> | <b>7-8</b> | <b>9-11</b> | <b>11-13</b> | <b>13+</b> |
| Incontinence pads           | I | pack of 10  | 11   | 11         | 11         | 11         | 11          | 11           | 11         |
| Body soap                   | G | ≥ 4 oz      | 31   | 25         | 20         | 16         | 11          | 5            | 5          |
| Toothpaste                  | G | ≥ 6 oz      | 60   | 55         | 50         | 45         | 40          | 35           | 31         |
| Shaving cream               | G | ≥ 11 oz     | 45   | 40         | 35         | 31         | 25          | 20           | 16         |
| Body powder                 | G | ≥ 13 oz     | 90   | 80         | 70         | 60         | 50          | 40           | 31         |
| Skin lotion                 | G | ≥ 8 oz      | 90   | 80         | 70         | 60         | 50          | 40           | 31         |
| First aid ointment          | G | ≥ 4 oz      | 190  | 160        | 140        | 130        | 110         | 80           | 60         |
| Vaseline                    | G | ≥ 4 oz      | 45   | 40         | 35         | 31         | 25          | 20           | 16         |
| Tampons                     | I | pack 10     | 25   | 25         | 25         | 25         | 25          | 25           | 25         |
| Sanitary pads               | I | pack 10     | 25   | 25         | 25         | 25         | 25          | 25           | 25         |
| Panti liners                | I | pack 10     | 25   | 25         | 25         | 25         | 25          | 25           | 25         |
| Shampoo                     | G | ≥ 15 oz     | 60   | 52         | 44         | 36         | 28          | 20           | 13         |
| Conditioner                 | G | ≥ 15 oz     | 60   | 52         | 44         | 36         | 28          | 20           | 13         |
| <b>Baby Products</b>        |   | <b>Unit</b> | <b>1-2</b>   | <b>3-4</b> | <b>5-6</b> | <b>7-8</b> | <b>9-11</b> | <b>11-13</b> | <b>13+</b> |
| Baby wipes                  | G | ≥ 80 shts   | 20   | 19         | 16         | 14         | 13          | 11           | 8          |
| Diaper rash ointment        | G | ≥ 4 oz      | 45   | 40         | 35         | 31         | 25          | 20           | 16         |
| Baby powder                 | G | ≥ 15 oz     | 45   | 40         | 35         | 31         | 25          | 20           | 16         |
| Baby lotion                 | G | ≥ 15 oz     | 31   | 28         | 25         | 22         | 19          | 16           | 13         |
| Baby shampoo                | G | ≥ 15 oz     | 60   | 52         | 44         | 36         | 28          | 20           | 13         |
| Diapers                     | I | pack 10     | 11   | 11         | 11         | 11         | 11          | 11           | 11         |
| Pull-ups                    | I | pack 10     | 11   | 11         | 11         | 11         | 11          | 11           | 11         |

## Appendix C

### The “Standard Economic Model” from *What Language Shall I Borrow?*

Since we live in a patriarchal society, it comes as no surprise to find its values influencing economic and political thought and behavior. The vocabulary of the current phase of industrial capitalism has a MAWKI<sup>♦</sup> tinge, as in the emphasis on hardness and toughness, and on the “realism” whereby nurture and caring are secondary to the quickest possible profit. Today’s achievers are “aggressive, restless, greedy, urban technocrats... interested in money to the point of obsession,” writes the head of a head-hunting agency specializing in business talent. “Let them make a million and they’ll strive for ten. That’s the way they are and that’s the way we want them.”<sup>17</sup>

Raymond Williams looks at the economic model where toughness is unquestioningly accepted as a virtue. He argues that since the 1930s the conventional model for the market economy has divided it into three sectors. The “primary sector” comprises agriculture and the mining of raw materials, the “secondary sector” covers the manufacture of goods, and the “tertiary sector” covers everything else, including “services.” Since the Industrial Revolution, the “primary sector” has declined dramatically as a source of paid employment. Now manufacturing (the “secondary sector”) is going through a similar decline in Western market economies. The so-called “tertiary sector” is a ragbag – more a lumber room than a clearly defined category. It includes paid work as diverse as construction, transport, white-collar professions, and entertainment. Some of the so-called “services” are the indispensable infrastructure of manufacturing (hence hardly “tertiary” to it). Others include the agencies of public order and the more obvious meaning of “services” as the servicing of individuals.

The three-sector model is an inadequate way of describing the most important features of our economy. It is a model not for the whole economy, but for the three stages of production for the market – namely, the gaining of raw materials, their manufacture into goods, and the distribution of those goods by sale for consumption.

This model excludes work devoted to the care and nurture of human beings (on which the system itself depends for its continuation) unless that work is paid employment. Moreover, the paid caring that is included is relegated to the “tertiary” sector, which is supposed to depend on what is produced by the first two sectors. This is by no means a play on words, since this relegation prompts governments following the model to cut public expenditure on health care and education. Yet the care, nurture, and education of human beings is mutually interdependent with the process that extracts raw materials and turns them into goods, since neither can continue without the other.<sup>18</sup>

The three-sector model originates in the philosophical exclusion of caring, nurturing, and domestic labor noted earlier in this chapter. These essentials were left out of consideration when our political and economic theories were first developed, because they were associated (by the

---

♦ MAWKI is Mr. Wren’s short-hand for “masculinity as we know it” – p. 11 of *What Language...*

<sup>17</sup> Chief executive of Korn/Ferry, quoted by Andrew Phillips, “New Cult of the Golden Calf,” *Observer*, 12 April 1987.

<sup>18</sup> Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto and Windus/Hogarth Press, 1983), pp. 88-101

men who first formulated the theories) with the “femininity” and femaleness that their lordly reasoning downgraded and despised.

The global effects of patriarchal economies are deadly and dangerous.<sup>19</sup> Only by an inconceivable expansion in world trade, stemming from an increase in production surpassing both the probable limits of natural resources and the environment’s capacity to absorb the resultant waste products, could the present type of market economy give the middle class in Third World countries the living standards now enjoyed by the middle classes in Western Europe and the United States. Such an expansion would not benefit the majority of the world’s people, who live in dire poverty, since the best evidence shows that expansion along these lines does not “trickle down” to them. In the prophetic words of E.F. Schumacher nearly two decades ago, “This industrial way of life cannot spread to all of humankind, and cannot last.”

If the world economy is to become sane, humane, and ecologically sustainable, the fundamental issue it needs to address is the care-and-nurture question: “What should a society produce and trade in order to meet the basic needs of all its people?” In Western economies, this is overridden by a different question, namely, “What can be produced and sold for the highest financial return in the global market?” – a question stemming in part from male-centered economic models excluding the essential activities of reproduction, caring, and nurturing. When Alan Sugar, the head of a successful electronics company, says that “if there was a market in mass-produced portable nuclear weapons, we’d market them,”<sup>20</sup> he shows both the dominance of that question and its absurdity.

---

<sup>19</sup> See Paul Eikins, ed., *The Living Economy: A New Economics in the Making* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); other publications from the New Economics Foundation; and “The Other Economic Summit” (annual conferences paralleling meetings of Western finance and trade ministers)

<sup>20</sup> Alan Sugar, head of Amstrad Electronics, quoted in Philips, “New Cult of the Golden Calf,” *Observer*, 12 April 1987.