

Foreword

It is impossible to live an authentic Christian life without wrestling deeply with issues of wealth and poverty. As the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has noted, it is “unmistakably clear that economics is a *core preoccupation* of the biblical tradition.”¹ Similarly, the church historian Justo González has observed that questions of economic and social order were “*central*” to the “life of the early church.”²

And yet most of us are blissfully unaware of this fact. Many Christians in twenty-first-century North America suffer from a collective amnesia about the centrality of issues of wealth and poverty in the Christian tradition. We forget that we minister to Jesus Christ whenever we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, and clothe the naked. And we forget that we will be called to account for our actions—or inaction—at the Last Judgment.³

This is precisely why *The Unjust Steward* by Miguel Escobar is such an important work for our time. Escobar helps us to reclaim our theological heritage with respect to issues of wealth and poverty. Like the eucharist, this book is a reminiscence, or *anamnesis*, of a past that continues to have deep relevance to our lives today.

Within the pages of this volume, you will discover many treasures about the issues of wealth and poverty in the Bible and in the early church. You will encounter reflections on the Lord’s Prayer, Saint Luke’s Gospel, and the Pauline epistles. You will also hear the voices of ancient teachers such as Justin Martyr, Antony of Egypt, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine of Hippo.

But this book is not just an excellent teaching resource about the Bible and the early church theologians. It will also help you to draw important connections between your life and these ancient texts. Escobar’s powerful reflection upon his own social location and life journey serves as a model for our own theological reflection. And the

discussion questions and “A Next Step” suggestions at the end of each chapter are a great way to move from reflection to action.

To that end, this book also addresses the important intersections between wealth and poverty and contemporary issues such as gender inequality, the COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Blackness, sexual racism, predatory lending, and modern-day slavery. As such, this volume will be a useful resource to those who are interested in intersections of economic justice with liberationist, postcolonial, and queer theologies.

Finally, this book is a wonderful resource for Episcopal parishes and seminaries that wish to engage more deeply with the theological and ethical dimensions of wealth and poverty. Miguel Escobar is a faithful Episcopalian who has served in a variety of contexts in the Episcopal Church, ranging from the Office of the Presiding Bishop to Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary. As such, Escobar’s work reflects the deep commitment of the Episcopal Church to issues of economic justice.⁴

To paraphrase Augustine of Hippo, pick up this book and read it. You are sure to find many riches within.⁵

The Rev. Patrick S. Cheng, JD, PHD
Visiting Professor of Anglican Studies
Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary

Endnotes

- 1 Walter Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), xix (emphasis added).
- 2 Justo L. González, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1990), xii (emphasis added).
- 3 See Matthew 25:31-46 (the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats).
- 4 See, for example, General Convention Resolution 2018-B026, which embraces the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which begin with "End poverty in all its forms everywhere" as the basis for the Episcopal Church's policy and action on development.
- 5 Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* XIII.xii ("tolle lege, tolle lege").