



A Review of *God's Economy: Biblical Studies from Latin America*

by Lee Van Ham

How bold to entitle a book *God's Economy*! That is what editors Ross and Gloria Kinsler and publisher Orbis, 2005, have done. A collection of 13 articles by as many different authors makes the case for the title. Readers benefit from the devoted work of Elsa Tamez, Jorge Pixley, Jose Miguez Bonino, Alicia Winters, Pablo Richard, Haroldo Reimer, Jose Severino Croatto, Carmina Navia Velasco, Leif Vaage, Ivoni Richter Reimer, Rene Kruger, and Franklyn Pimentel Torres, and Nestor Miguez. All the authors are immersed in the Latin America realities, hence the subtitle, *Biblical Studies from Latin America*. None of the articles has been available in English before; most of them here translated by the Kinslers.

Pablo Richard explains in his *Preface* that all of them are part of the movement in Latin America called the “popular reading of the Bible.” Kinslers add the note that “popular” has, in this movement, a meaning similar to “people’s” in Howard Zinn’s, *A People’s History of the United States*. In his *Foreword*, Ched Myers speaks of *Revista de Interpretacion Biblica Latinamericana (RIBLA)* as an association giving voice to this important movement of re-reading the bible from the perspective of the people who experience the continuing impact of the 500 plus years of conquest, colonialization, empire, and imperial church. The Kinslers were eager to make these articles available in English as undergirding for their work on *The Biblical Jubilee* and *the Struggle for Life* (Orbis, 1999), and the Sabbath Economics Collaborative (see www.sabbatheconomics.org) was eager to make this project a priority.

The authors have all learned to see, think, and write out of the Latin American reality. They are Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist. All have developed the capacity to re-read the bible listening attentively for the economic, political, and social reality that shape the lives, writings, and redactions of the authors. They then make a careful and bold hermeneutical link to the contemporary economic, political, and social reality in Latin America. We, the readers of their articles, see both obvious and eye-popping connections between the biblical re-reading and the neo-liberal empire fashioned today by the G-8 wealthy nations, led by the U.S. As each article led me to re-read segments of the bible, the message was consistent and unrelenting: top-down globalization as shaped by neo-liberalism, int’l financial institutions, global corporations, “free” trade agreements, the World Trade Organization’s non-democratic processes, G-8 nation summits, and U.S. militarism is the Human Economy to which God’s Economy is resistor, liberator, and alternative. Today’s Human Economy wears contemporary names, but the practices of power and asset accumulation are very ancient. *God’s Economy* compels us to counter the Human Economy’s aggressive practices of stripping assets

from the poor, natural life species, and the earth; externalizing costs to achieve greater profits; making debtors and slaves through structures of tribute and trade as resources amass wealth for the few.

The sabbath and jubilee are re-read and unpacked in several articles as capable carriers of God's Economy, both in vision and in practice. Authors show how sabbath and jubilee were not static, but flexed and evolved as various historical situations spurred the creativity of the people under the tribute systems of various empires – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The themes of sabbath and jubilee carry God's Economy forward into the 21st century and place it as a counter action to the Human Economy of the current U.S.-led empire.

Articles re-read texts from all segments of the Hebrew and Christian bible – priests and Torah, prophets, wisdom writers, gospels, letters and stories of the early church, and apocalyptic writings in the process of fleshing out God's Economy.

I call out the following sample of the many challenging issues addressed with great care and capacity:

- God's Economy requires a communal, tribal, and consensual flow of power instead of hierarchical and dominating models (especially Alicia Winters, but also others).
- The early church practiced radical sharing out of a determination to make community central and an ethic of sustainable community, not because they devalued economic responsibility in anticipation of Jesus' quick return (Nestor Miguez).
- A re-reading of Proverbs 31:10-31, the "ideal woman" passage, as the strong woman who can resist the feminization of poverty under neo-liberalism and live God's Economy (Carmina Navia Velasco).
- Honestly acknowledging the use of the bible to sanction the conquest of Latin America and its continuing subjugation under the Human Economy, plus the rejection of the bible, therefore, by some indigenous peoples while others are incorporating their own sacred texts in their worship (Elsa Tamez).

God's Economy: Biblical Studies from Latin America contributes significantly to broadening the conversation between people of faith in the Global South and Global North, as we seek practices faithful to the Creator in the hemispheric apartheid between poor and rich. It is a conversation that carries hope for deeply-rooted conversion of life and practice engaging heart, mind, feet, hands, economics, and politics. Can such conversion happen broadly enough to impact the extensive destruction of the current devotion to the Human Economy? As we live with the hope that it can, *God's Economy* helps us to "be the future we wish to see" (Gandhi).