

TOWARD AN ADVENTIST PHILOSOPHY OF WAGES

By David Grams

When it comes to salary issues, emotions run high. Opinion is not lacking. Fervent exclamations abound, asserting either that someone is “scandalously overpaid” and thus “worldly”, or that minimal stipends are a “travesty of justice”.

Add to the above volatile mix the fact that we are now in the midst of a Weimar-wage-dilemma and you have quite a “stew” indeed! For example, in the above title why did I not speak of a “Weimar philosophy” instead of just an “Adventist” one? Ah! Could it be that it is only right and just that a “Weimar Wage” discussion be couched in the larger sphere of the church we claim to serve?

From the NAD Working Policy, here’s the general rationale for “Conference” salaries:

“The philosophy of this remuneration scale is predicated upon the fact that a spirit of sacrifice and dedication should mark God’s workers...”

“The Church believes that modesty and good taste with reasonable comfort will govern the lives of Christian employees.” Page 445, 1994-1995 edition

Interestingly, when speaking of salaries, the term “living wage” is not only employed by the Adventist Church, but also by the government. So...what is a “living wage” anyway?

The following are the annual median (average) salaries in California:

*Registered nurses-\$54,070; College teachers-\$48,000;
Non-profit organization employees-\$45,000;
Stockroom laborers-\$20,170; Janitors-\$18,770;
Fast food workers-\$14,980...*

And Weimar? The median salary is about \$14,000 a year, plus housing (significant) and health (basic) benefits.

And what about the Adventist Church wage structure? Well, an academy or college teacher in California could expect to earn a bit more than \$36,000 yearly plus an additional cash housing allowance of \$10,000---more or less, depending on the employees location.

So, what does all this say about a “living wage”? What again, should we consider a wage that an employee might respectably live on while in the State of California? Well, let’s begin with a brief plunge into a divergent theory or two on wages and Ellen White’s Last-day prophetic directives. We’ll close with Scripture.

Communism states that “property, (especially real property and the means of production) is held in common.” Columbia Encyclopedia on Communism, parenthesis original

In other words, the “means of production”, that is, salaries and tools, would be controlled by the community for the sublimation of the individual and the exaltation of the “group”.

“The Neoplatonists revived the idea of common property...These opponents of private property held that property holding was evil and irreligious and that God had created the world for the use of all humanity.” Ibid.

Of course, it goes without further remark that these skewed concepts denying the rights of individuals to hold property also infringe on the rights of men and women to *gain the means whereby they could hold property---that is, a “living wage”!*

Fascinatingly, the **Medieval Church** proclaimed in stentorian tones this Neoplatonist view and refined it to an art form. Listen to these amazing statements from the Catholic Encyclopedia: [All citations from the section on “Poverty”]

“The question arises, what poverty is required by the practice of this counsel [Roman Catholic edict] or, in other words, what poverty suffices for the state of perfection?”

“The state of perfection, understood in its proper sense, requires also that the renunciation should be of a permanent character...”

“Among the followers of perfection, the spirit of poverty was manifested from the first by giving up temporal possessions; and among those living in community, the use of goods as private property was strictly forbidden...”

Note! Poverty, as understood by Catholic theologians for over a thousand years, is like a sacrament to perfection whereby one works his/her way into the graces of God by the supreme penance of forsaking all real personal material worth, including property.

The Catholic Encyclopedia continues:

“The express vow of renunciation of all private property was introduced into the profession of the Friars Minor in 1260.”

Now, what does all this have to do with wages? The answer is self-explanatory---one can unwittingly be subscribing to Medieval Catholic Dogma by elevating stipends (instead of wages) to the “will of God”; thus assuring economic slavery in the Name of Jesus!

Oh, the Medieval Church eventually allowed most orders to hold property as a group, (but not as individuals) as further explained in the Catholic Encyclopedia:

“Consequently, the Council of Trent...permitted all monasteries, except those of the Friars Minor Observantines and the Capuchins, to possess immovable property [real estate], and consequently the income derived therefrom; but the Carmelites and the Society of Jesus, in its professed houses, continue to practise the common poverty which forbids the possession of assured incomes.”

Stunning! Overwhelming really...

Who practices “common poverty which forbids the possession of assured incomes?”
The Jesuits! [Society of Jesus]

And why? Because the *basic assumption of RC Dogma is that you must relinquish the right to exercise your God-given individuality; instead you are cajoled to ‘commit to the Cause for the greater good’. How twisted! Yet how seemingly inviting to some who would “save money” for a “worthy organization”...*

No wonder that the little lady who wrote Great Controversy speaks so passionately against those medieval “vows of poverty”---vows that are in reality an abdication of basic human dignity.

Oh...let her speak:

“No greater dishonor can be shown to God than for one man to bring another man’s talents under his absolute control. *The evil is not obviated by the fact that the profits of the transaction are to be devoted to the cause of God.*” CE 164 italics added

“No greater dishonor”? Yes! There is “no greater dishonor” than to deprive workers of a just remuneration for the supposed sake of ‘carefully managing God’s money’...
Indeed, for Ellen White there was absolutely no place for that kind of disingenuous talk!

She continues:

“Let not authors be urged either to give away or to sell their right to the books they have written.” [emphasis added] Yet that is precisely what we’re being asked to do at this very time at Weimar Institute. As staff members we are being told that it is only right and proper that we “sell our right” to a “living wage” so that others can manage institute income for us.

To this argument, Ellen White offers a blunt rebuke:

“In such arrangements [forfeiting deserved income] the man who allows his mind to be ruled by the mind of another is thus separated from God and exposed to temptation. In shifting the responsibility of his stewardship upon other men, and depending on their wisdom, he is placing man where God should be.” Ibid.

There is the key! When we “allow” others---in the name of God even---to take away our individual right to a living wage, we are in actuality rejecting God’s plan of stewardship.

Would Sister White actually *repeat* the above assertion? Listen to what she said about those leaders who would take benefits away from a worker for the ‘good of the organization’:

“Let it be borne in mind that it is not our own property [the context is income] which is entrusted to us for investment. If it were, we might claim discretionary power; we might shift our responsibility upon others, and leave our stewardship with them. But this cannot be, because the Lord has made us individually His stewards.” CE 163 [emphasis added]

As if that wasn’t strong enough, with minimal comment I’ll allow the following breathtaking quotations to shout for themselves:

“When settlements are made with the laborers in His cause, they should not be forced to accept small remuneration because there is a lack of money in the treasury.” 5T 374

“Those placed in leading positions should be men who have sufficient breadth of mind to appreciate persons of cultivated intellect and to recompense them proportionately to the responsibilities they bear...we should not expect that those who are capable of doing with exactness and thoroughness work that requires thought and painstaking effort should receive no greater compensation than the less skillful workman...those who cannot appreciate good work and true ability should not be managers in our institutions...” 5T 551

Does not the above quotation speak directly of those medical and educational personnel who’ve invested a great deal of time and money in advanced training?

“At times you have encouraged the workers to think that their wages would be raised and then you have failed to fulfill the promise made. Is this letting your light shine forth in good works?” MM 183

“I was shown that you have oppressed hirelings in their wages. You have taken advantage of circumstances and secured your help at the lowest figure. This has not been pleasing to God. You should have paid your help liberally, all that they earned.”
2T159

“LOOK! THE WAGES YOU FAILED TO PAY THE WORKMEN WHO MOWED YOUR FIELDS ARE CRYING OUT AGAINST YOU. THE CRIES OF THE HARVESTERS HAVE REACHED THE EARS OF THE LORD ALMIGHTY.” JAMES 5:4 NIV

“YOU TRAMPLE ON THE POOR AND FORCE HIM TO GIVE YOU GRAIN...”
AMOS 5:11 NIV

Let it be said clearly and unequivocally: There is more than one way to “force” people to “line up.” In a place like Weimar, all one has to do is appeal to “consecration”, “commitment”, “sacrifice” and “devotion” and anyone who would dare speak up is castigated as “greedy”, “worldly” and “grasping”. Thus, almost absolute control is imposed---in the Name of the Lord!---on those who are least able to speak for themselves.

As you ponder the citations on the Medieval Church from this monograph, I leave you with the following apocalyptic warning:

“AND ALL THE WORLD WONDERED AFTER THE BEAST... WHOSE DEADLY WOUND WAS HEALED.” REVELATION 13:3,12

