

## **Economic Elephants: notes on a practical theology of *enough*.**

### **1. Aperture**

The concern of this paper is to help “fuel” how The Salvation Army in Aotearoa New Zealand can engage with the current economic crisis. Are we simply at the mercy/tyranny of a global economic market or have we at our disposal “enough” alternative practices from which we can prophetically forge/imagine newer economic possibilities? How could the concept of “enough” counter the dominating/destructive hypes of entitlement, excess, greed, individualism, over-consumption, over-production and scarcity? And lastly, if we were to intentionally engage with a practice of “enough” how/where could it resource/strengthen the healing presence of The Salvation Army in communities hurting from the global market meltdown?

### **2. Elephants**

The global economic crisis has hijacked our imaginations and is filling our lounges and places of study and work with imagery of bankruptcy, bailouts, credit-defaults, credit-card debt, national debt, deflation, foreclosures, dropping indexes, investment fraud, toxic assets, evaporating retirement savings, fiscal responsibilities, liquidations, and redundancy, images that speak of *what we don't have* and of *what we have to control, grasp, keep, protect and save* if we hope to make it through the recession.<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann captures the depressing mood and speak of our times:

“... the dominant text of our culture is despair... there are no new gifts to be given, and there is no Giver who might give new gifts. There is nothing more than management and distribution and redistribution, wars about distribution of land and oil and water, nor more gifts. Everything is limited and scarce, to be guarded and kept, to be confiscated and seized. It is so in the public domain of economics, not less so in the intimate world of human transactions and emotional need – not enough of love, a shortage of forgiveness, and finally a deprivation of grace in this age and in the age to come.”<sup>2</sup>

It seems that everyone, everywhere is listening to and speaking this *despairing language of crisis management, this language of grasping, loss and scarcity*. There is less talk today of *what we already have*, less talk of *gratitude*, and even lesser talk of *what we could redistribute or share*. The future is finite, limited, and closed to surprise.

*Is there a large elephant at our dinner tables that we're ignoring?*

Shane Claiborne comments:

“I am convinced that God did not mess up and make too many people and not enough stuff. Poverty was not created by God but by you and me, because we have not learned to love our neighbors as ourselves. Gandhi put it well when he said, ‘There is enough for everyone’s

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<sup>1</sup> “Jobs and holding onto them is what everyone is talking about...”, a byline from *Sunday*, 8, 3, 2009, TVNZ.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, 2006, *The Word that Re-describes our World*.

need, but there is not enough for everyone's greed.' So I would suggest we need... a theology of enough."<sup>3</sup>

See the elephant? The elephant is that *there is "enough"*, and if this economic crisis fuels a shift of our energies/interests from the over-consumption of desire to the meeting and sharing of need, then there is going to be "enough" in the future.<sup>4</sup> It's the elephant that no one seems to be mentioning, or, for that matter, even seeing. Who has the courage to defy the depressing-speak of the immediate economic crisis and talk of the "enough" we already have? What difference could the concept of "enough" make to the cyclic nature of our global/local/national financial markets? What difference could a practical theology of "enough" make to how we practice our faith? Is there a Scriptural mandate for living within and practicing a story of "enough"?

### 3. Elephants in Scripture

The concept of "enough" is a major thread of Scripture. Traces of it can be spotted in both the Old and New Testaments.

#### *Elephants in the Old Testament.*

The chronicles of Genesis start with God creating existence to be a "good gift that keeps on giving."<sup>5</sup> There is "enough" goodness for everyone and everything. The chronological flow of Genesis is then disrupted with the image of God deliberately interrupting His own cycle of creative labour and production with the practice of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is to be a *corrective discipline* that enables the *fair distribution and just redistribution of "enough" goods* for every living organism. It ensures that creation can continue to be "enough", that creation can continue to be equally "good" everywhere. John Dominic Crossan comments on the divine intentions of the Sabbath:

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<sup>3</sup> Shane Claiborne, 2006, *The Irresistible Revolution*. See Jeffrey Sachs, 2008, *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet*, for a more technical exploration of the possibilities of "enough" that exist on our planet today.

<sup>4</sup> There is of course a danger in claiming that there is "enough" because "...it seems to let us off the hook about human responsibility and human work. If there is "enough" and "God will solve all these issues, we need not work so hard at it. But that is the unavoidable risk of a faith grounded in radical grace. The risk is that the good gifts and poignant promises of God will lead to indifferent abdication. Turn it all over to God... and no longer care. The gospel, however, will take that risk, because this religion of gift and grace anticipates that such an assurance from God leads not to resignation but to resolve. It asserts that God's powerful resolve to re-create provides the context for our answering resolve to take on the management task... We may (be) perfectly confident in God's good management, therefore unencumbered with anxiety for self. We are thereby fully liberated from the task of good management, held accountable, capable of daring thought and risky action, and not needing to be self-serving and self-securing, because all is assured." (Walter Brueggemann, 1993, *Using God's Resources Wisely*). And, then there is the danger that we could simply excuse (and with that, continue) our excessive consumption and destructive production with the same confidence that there is always going to be "enough." The "enough" of God is a consequence of practicing a mutual responsibility of redistributing and sharing resources, not the thought that we have infinite or limitless resources. See the difference? Brian McLaren notes: "... the insanity of believing that growth – the consumption of 'ever-more' – is the solution to all problems must eventually become obvious even to those who currently defend it as orthodoxy." He goes on to cite Herman Daly (1997, *Beyond Growth*): "One only need try to imagine 1.2 billion Chinese with automobiles, refrigerators, washing machines, and so on, to get a picture of the ecological consequences of generalizing advanced Northern resource consumption levels across the globe..." (Brian McLaren, 2007, *Everything Must Change*). The concept and practice of "enough" is only possible if everyone shares some of the responsibility of evenly/equally redistributing resources, which is exactly what I think the Scriptures stress.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1.11-13, 20-31. Rob Bell, 2006, *Velvet Elvis*; Walter Brueggemann, 2006, *The Word that Re-describes the World*.

“The seventh day was not a rest *for* worship but rest *as* worship. It was a day of equal rest for all – animals, slaves, children, and adults – a pause that reduced all to equality both symbolically and regularly. The Sabbath Day was about the just distribution of basic-rest-from-labour as symbol and reality of God’s own distributive justice... the Sabbath was about the justice of equality as the crown and climax of creation itself.”<sup>6</sup>

A little later in these chronicles of our Genesis, this same God is in the Garden of Eden giving *the man* gardening tips when He issues the solemn command of ‘*thou shalt not eat:*’

“The LORD GOD took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”

(Genesis 2.15-16).

The command “*you must not eat*” curbs the excessive consumptive capacity of humanity. It curtails our greed. It is the image of God intentionally limiting our destruction and exploitation of His creation, our “indiscriminate devouring of the earth”<sup>7</sup>, and, in a graver echo of the Sabbath, it is God ensuring that there is a continuum of “enough” to sustain the life of everyone and everything, everywhere. It is the image of humanity *caring for creation* in/through “*eating*” and *living* from within the God-given limits of what is necessity and self-restraint.

Somewhat later in the Genesis chronicles, when decay, death, *dis-ease* and disorder have entered creation, there is a famine in the land,<sup>8</sup> and a fearful Pharaoh, frightened that there is not going to be “enough” starts to control, “hoard”, “manage the crisis”, and monopolize what is a threatened food supply. The “enough” of the creation seems to be only a distant legend, a fanciful memory of the past. Anxiety and the fears of loss and scarcity now dominate the landscape and the narratives of people. The future looks contracted, closed. The Pharaoh anxiously embraces excessive cycles of over-consumption/over-production, greedy hoarding, and hardnosed exploitation to “manage the crisis.”<sup>9</sup> He dictates to the Israelites:

“Get back to your work!” (v. 4)

“That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and overseers in charge of the people: ‘You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don’t reduce the quota... Make the work harder for them so that they keep working...’” (v. 6-9)

“Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.” (v. 11)

“The slave drivers kept pressing them...” (v. 13)

“Make bricks! Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.” (v. 16)

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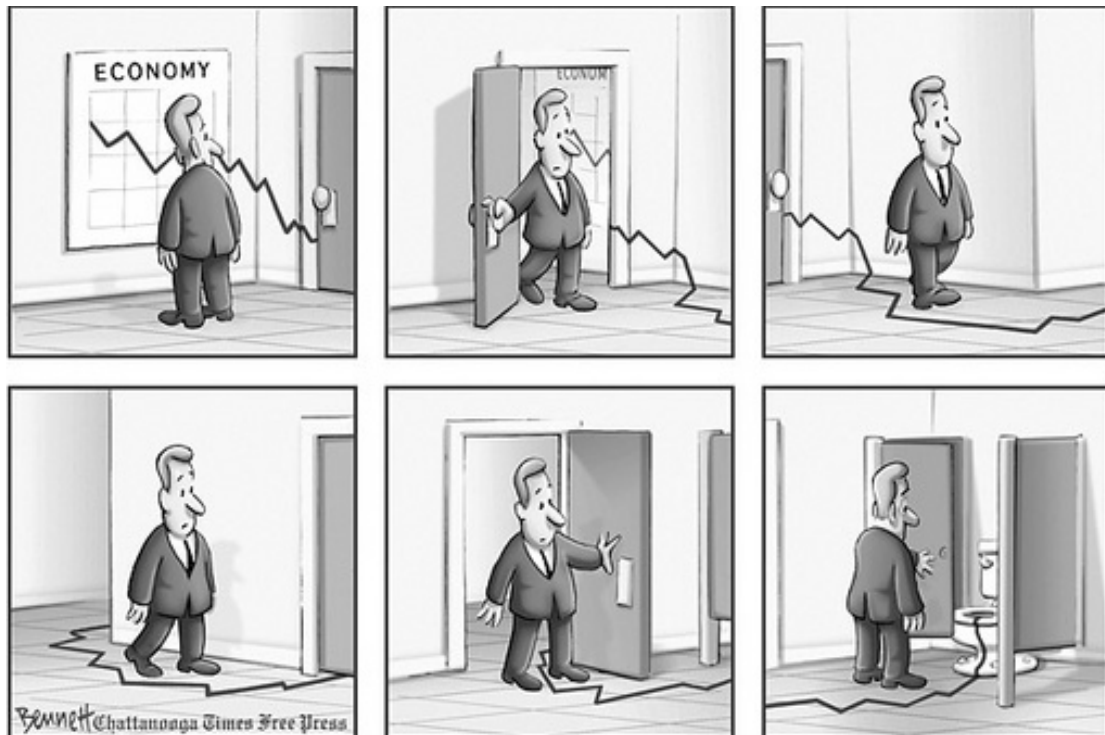
<sup>6</sup> John Dominic Crossan, 2007, *God and Empire*; see too Ched Myers, 2002, *The Biblical Vision of Sabbath Economics*. See Genesis 2.; Deut 5.14; Exodus 23.12. Similarly Walter Brueggemann comments on the practice of the Sabbath in the texts of Isaiah: “I suggest that the Sabbath was a public, disciplined enactment of difference, because it broke the vicious cycle of productivity that defined imperial life. Without a Sabbath, the busy scheme of production and consumption turns all of life, neighbor and self, into a succession of commodities with only utilitarian value. The Sabbath announces that Jews are distinctive because they do not believe that production, achievement, competence, numbers success, and power are what life is all about.” (Walter Brueggemann, 1993, *Using God’s Resources Wisely*).

<sup>7</sup> Walter Brueggemann, 2006, *The Word that Re-describes the World*.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 47.1-31.

<sup>9</sup> I have to confess in the face of these texts I’m thinking that history has duplicated itself. Somewhat fascinatingly, though largely scary, the former Presidency of the United States encouraged its citizens to counter the terrorism of 9/11 by “shopping”. See the similarities?

“Lazy, that’s what you are – lazy! Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks.” (v. 18)  
(Exodus 5. 4-18).<sup>10</sup>



The empire of the Pharaoh is on a downward spiral. Walter Brueggemann describes its final moments:

“By the end of Exodus, Pharaoh has been as mean, brutal and ugly as he knows how to be -- and as the myth of scarcity tends to be. Finally he becomes so exasperated by his inability to control the people of Israel that he calls Moses and Aaron to come to him. Pharaoh tells them, ‘Take your people and leave. Take your flocks and herds and just get out of here!’ And then the great king of Egypt, who presides over a monopoly of the region’s resources, asks Moses and Aaron to bless him. The powers of scarcity admit to this little community of abundance, ‘It is clear that you are the wave of the future. So before you leave, lay your powerful hands upon us and give us energy.’ *The text shows that the power of the future is not in the hands of those who believe in scarcity and monopolize the world’s resources; it is in the hands of those who trust God’s abundance.*”<sup>11</sup>

The Israelites exit Egypt. The narratives of the Exodus contest the exploitative excesses of Pharaoh with imagery of a gift-giving God who gifts Israel with a new freedom and with alternative liberating economic practices that continue to re-imagine the possibility of “enough”. The Israelites were only days from Egypt when they were faced with a food crisis in the desert; they looked nostalgically at Egypt and started to long for the food chains and market supplies of the empire. There is a complaint, and the magical image of a gift-giving God who tirelessly listens. A miracle fell from the sky – more than “enough” manna for everyone:

<sup>10</sup> Walter Brueggemann, 2006, *The Word that Re-describes our World*. See too Eugene Peterson, 2005, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, for a good descriptive interpretation of the encounter between Pharaoh and Moses.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Brueggemann, 1999, *The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity*, *Christian Century*, March 24-31, *emphasis mine*.

“Moses said to them, ‘It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. This what the Lord has commanded: ‘Each one is to gather as much as they need... The Israelites did what they were told; some gathered much, some little. And when they measured it... the one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered just as much as they needed.’”  
(Exodus 16. 15-17).

Walter Brueggemann comments:

“In that odd moment, (the Israelites) learned that when there is escape from Pharaoh’s kingdom of scarcity into YHWH’s generous zone of abundance, there is plenty for all – no famine, no scarcity, no rationing, no acquisitiveness, no anxiety, enough and more than enough. Never mind that it was the wilderness; it was wilderness taken under the aegis of the creator God who gave plenty. And all of the contempt from Egypt is lifted in this moment of generous mercy (c.f. Ps.123.3-4). The contrast of scarce, anxious, Egypt, and abundant wilderness could not be sharper. It is an elemental contrast for Israel as an experimental social revolution founded on a miracle.”<sup>12</sup>

The gift of manna signaled the start of a new experimental community that’d commit itself to the practice of “enough”. The ensuing self-defining codes, commandments, laws, poverty relief and social policies of Israel inscribed in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy<sup>13</sup> were in essence something of a national experiment in countering the consumptive coveting, the excessive over-consumption and the fearful greedy over-production of Egypt. The lessons were simple: There is “enough” when there is no coveted excessiveness. There is “enough” when we give up the place of control and place ourselves in a place of surprise, in the place where the “gift giving” of God is trusted. There is enough when consumption is not at the expense of others. There is “enough” when there is hospitality, when there is a generous making of space for others, when there is a mutual neighborliness. There is “enough” when people get prioritized prior to profit. There is “enough” when there is no objectification of people, when there is no “*reduction of relationships to market transactions.*”<sup>14</sup> There is “enough” when everyone is imagined to be equal and no one is seen or treated like a thing that can be got, sold, traded or used. The contrast with the economy of the empire of Pharaoh is stark:

“Pharaoh will have no Jubilee, no year of release, no debt cancelation, no Sabbath, only a process whereby the privileged work their privilege. But YHWH has defeated Pharaoh and *Israel is YHWH’s social experiment to see if the economy can serve the community.* The claim is clear and its implications for material practices of the community are clear enough. And so the Torah of Moses develops what is nearly a mantra of ‘widow, orphan, alien’, the marginalized and vulnerable, now valued, noticed, protected, entitled. Outside of this stringent costly provision, there is nothing but Pharaoh, nothing but anxiety, scarcity, and eventually fresh waves of bondage.”<sup>15</sup>

The Psalmist continues to echo a confidence in the everyday, practical possibility of “enough”, a confidence in the “gift-giving” of the economy of God:

“These all (the animals, birds, the fish, humans, land, sea, the stars - the entire creation) look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.”

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> See Exodus 20.17; 21.1-36; 22.1-31; 23.1-13; Leviticus 25.1-54; Deuteronomy 5.1-32; 6.1-25; 7.11-26; 8.1-18; 15.1-18; 31.20.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *ibid.*, *emphasis mine.* It is interesting to compare and contrast this “good” governance of the gift-giving God with the flawed management of the Kings of Israel (see 1 and 2 Samuel; 1 and 2 Kings): God *gifts* “enough”; the Kings *grasped and took* “too much.”

(Psalm 104.27-28)

A little later the Psalmist directs the community of Israel in what looks like the *daily graces* we pray at the dinner table:<sup>16</sup>

“Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”

(Psalm 145.13-16)

The poetic imagination of Proverbs cautions that if we chase dishonest “excess”, controlling what we feel we’re entitled to, hoarding nervously what we think is our “own”, we’ll deny the gift of “enough” and eventually forget God the giver of “good” gifts:

“Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”

(Proverbs 30.8-9)

Similarly, the Hebrew prophets chastise the Israelite nation with the claim that the frightened and insatiable grasping of “excess” has no place in its story:

“Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land.”

(Isaiah 5.8)

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood. Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

(Isaiah 58.7)

“Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance.”

(Micah 2.2)

“Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor. ‘Should I not punish them for this?’ declares the LORD. ‘Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?’”

(Jeremiah 5.27-28)

“From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.”

(Jeremiah 6.13-14)

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<sup>16</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *ibid.* See Mark Douglas, 2005, *Confessing Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* for a look at how our simple prayers at the dinner table can contest/counter the dominance of the market economy.

### *Elephants in the New Testament.*

The Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John imagine a Jesus who challenges the false economy of the empire head on.<sup>17</sup> The Jesus of these gospels contests how the imperial economy of “excess” depends on a fateful competitiveness, and, in place of its “dog-eat-dog” exchanges, He counters its exploitative financial practices with a gentler image of a “common good.” The egotistical economy of Rome is dismantled little by little with what Brian McLaren calls a counter-cultural financing of “mutual neighborliness.” The Gospels imagine a Jesus who:

“... through sign and wonder, (practices) a radically different economy, one that doesn’t depend on spending more and buying more, but on *discovering what you already have and sharing.*”<sup>18</sup>

The prayers of this Jesus were equally defiant:

“Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. *Give us each day our daily bread.* Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”

(Luke 11.1-4, emphasis mine)

The economic plea “*give us each day our daily bread*” is a confession of confidence in the “enough” of the gift-giving economy of God and a confession of our *connection to* and (*inter*)*dependency on* others.<sup>19</sup> It is not only *my* bread that I’m praying to *get*; it is intentionally *our* bread that *we seek together.*

The early communities of Jesus-followers simply mimicked this economic confidence in the “gift-giving” of God and this compassionate connectivity with others. The Christians practiced a new form of community centered on a distribution and redistribution of “enough”:

“...Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and

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<sup>17</sup> The economic challenge of Jesus litters the entirety of the gospels. See Mark 2.23-27; 3.1-6; 5.1-21; 6.7-13; 6.30-44; 8.1-10; 10.17-45; 12.1-44; 14.1-11; Matthew 2.1-12; 4.4; 5.1-48; 6.1-34; 8.18-22; 10.1-42; 12.1-14; 13.1-58; 14.13-21; 29-39; 17.24-27; 18.1-35; 20.1-28; 21.1-46; 22.15-22; 23.1-39; 25.1-46; Luke 1.46-56; 3.1-20; 4.1-13; 6.1-11, 17-36; 8.1-15; 9.1-9, 10-17; 9.46-50; 10.25-37; 11.1-13; 12.13-59; 14.1-35; 15.1-32; 16.1-14; 18.18-30; 19.1-27, 20.20-26; 21.1-4; 22.24-30; John 2.1-25; 5.1-15; 6.1-14, 25-71; 10.1-21; 12.1-11; 13.1-17; 21.1-23. See Brian McLaren, 2007, *Everything Must Change* for a more detailed look at how Jesus goes head to head with the false economy of “excess.”

<sup>18</sup> Brian McLaren, 2007, *Everything Must Change*, *emphasis mine*. I love how McLaren interprets “enough” to mean the “*discovery of what we already have and sharing*” that with others. It is the only hope I think we have of challenging the despairing talk of the current crisis and of stopping the endless economic cycles of *downturn and growth.*

<sup>19</sup> Mark Douglas notes: “We don’t have to ask for a life’s supply of bread because we trust that the same Lord who has fed us today will bring us new bread tomorrow. And since our daily bread does not magically show up on our plates, to pray for that daily bread is to pray our way into the market. For even the context of our eating and drinking connects us to the mechanisms of production and distribution. These mechanisms are not just – but neither are they so unjust that they must simply be rejected or destroyed. They create suffering – but as the Lord works through them (and through us), they also resolve it. They are not perfect – but they will be perfected by the One who makes all things new. And our table manners, when thoughtfully applied, help us to see that.” (Mark Douglas, 2005, *Confessing Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*).

sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

(Acts 2.43-47)

Shane Claiborne comments that wherever these early communities of faith were “housed” they essentially *ended poverty* in the neighborhoods that hosted them:

“Just as ancient Israel was an alternative to the exploitative economies in Egypt and Canaan, so too these early Christians understood themselves as set apart in all areas of their lives, including economic. Christians didn’t need Caesar’s power to create an alternative society. They lived in the spirit of Jubilee. They practiced radical economic sharing, so much so that it could even be said they ended poverty in the small pockets they lived in. One of the results of the birth of the church at Pentecost was that the church ended poverty: ‘and there were no needy persons among them.’ They lived with one another, sharing a common rule of life, daily sharing worship and friendship. They, as their hearts became softened to the love of God, enacted ‘release to the captives, and freedom for the prisoner, slowly dissolving the structures of oppression within their households.’”<sup>20</sup>

The Epistles of Paul incited the early Jesus movement to habitually practice “collections”, a discipline that ensured the *common good* of everyone. These “collections” were a form of *practical generosity* that constituted some of the *shared purse* spent to fund the newer God-shaped economy of “enough.”<sup>21</sup> Smack in the centre of the Letter to the Corinthians there is a concern to try and correct the churchgoers who were greedily devouring *more than* “enough”, *more than* a fair share of the food shared at the church’s communal pot-luck dinners.<sup>22</sup> The Letters to the church-houses at Ephesus and Colossae<sup>23</sup> were critical of the *covetousness* in these communities and how this coveting had led to “greed” and to “idolizing” self-centeredness. The early churches were to be *differently odd* and engage in “giving” freely and generously without mimicking the imperial power-games of the “sword” and its ruthless “taking”. The Jesus movement embraced a different economy of “common goodness” that eradicated poverty where they were at, a “gift-giving” economy of “collections”, “open homes” and “shared tables”, alternative economic practices that ensured everyone within its sphere of influence had “enough.” See that?

And, lastly in Revelation there is the climatic destruction of Babylon<sup>24</sup> and with it the collapse of its global economy. The economies of every empire that had traded commercially with the Babylonian superpower and had “grown rich from... (its) luxuries”<sup>25</sup> crash too and there is something of a global financial melt-down. The careless and egotistical devouring of earth - the excessive investments in over-consumption and over-production - were never going to be sustainable:

“When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxuries see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: ‘Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!’ The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore... They will say, ‘The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.’”

(Revelation 18.9-11, 14)

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<sup>20</sup> Shane Claiborne, Chris Haw, 2008, Jesus For President. See Rob Bell, 2005, Velvet Elvis for a similar interpretation of the economic significance of these early church-houses.

<sup>21</sup> See Acts 11.29; Romans 15.26; 1 Corinthians 5.1-5; 16.1-2; 2 Corinthians 8, 9.

<sup>22</sup> See 1 Corinthians 11.

<sup>23</sup> See Ephesians 5.5; Colossians 3.5.

<sup>24</sup> See Revelation 18, 21.

<sup>25</sup> Revelation 18.3.



There is something eerily familiar in this, isn't there?

The narrative of Revelation closes with the contrasting hopeful image of a futuristic city of God.<sup>26</sup> It is a new city founded on a fairer economy of “enough” and, with God the “gift giver” at its centre, it is a city without anxiety, decay, death, greed, scarcity or violence. The “enough” of Eden is restored.

#### **4. Elephant practices of The Salvation Army**

There is within these Scriptural images of “enough” *fuel and fodder* that can help how The Salvation Army of Aotearoa New Zealand engages with the current global financial meltdown. These images call The Salvation Army to:

##### **a. Champion that “there is enough.”**

The Salvation Army has to counter the despairing speak of “crisis management”, the current economic hype that is focusing only on *what is* with a championing of a public discourse on *what could be*. We have to engage in *celebrating what we already have (where is the evidence of grace and peace interrupting?)*, and in the same breath, we have to courageously point to where there *could be a fairer distribution or redistribution of “goods”* to ensure that everyone, everywhere has “enough” of the economic pie. We have to engage deliberately in a *prophetic voicing of “enough”, in a practice of public visioning*.

##### **b. Covenanted Community.**

The Salvation Army has to *re-covenant* itself to the communities that host our church edifices. The majority of Salvationists *commute* some distance to get to church. What if we were to encourage and empower Salvationists to *be church* exactly where they live? What if every Salvationist home could be something of a hub of *community ministry*? What if we could resource every Salvationist household to become something of a food-bank? What if we were to rediscover the practice of hospitality, the practice of sharing our dinner tables with others, the practice of sharing what we traditionally label our *own and private*? What difference could that make to the communities with which we live and mix?

We have benefited from and trade on our “good” history, a history that contributes to a healthy public image today. The generosity of the public, combined with *how we're seen in public*, has helped position The Salvation Army in a place of *pull-power*<sup>27</sup> that other smaller and less known charities or community organizations don't enjoy. What if we were to be generous stewards of this *pull power*? What if we were to employ our *public pull* to collaborate financially with other community groups who, with the economic downturn and the shrinking cash flow, now face the impossibility of securing decent funding sources? The collaboration could help close some of the cracks that communities fall through, limit the growing sense of competitiveness between organizations, and stop the inefficient duplication of social services.

We have to be careful in this time of crisis that *fiscal responsibility* isn't something that means we play it safe and entrench ourselves into cost-cutting centralized dispensaries of professionalized care. Shane Claiborne comments:

“It is much more comfortable to depersonalize the poor so we don't feel responsible for the catastrophic human failure that results in someone sleeping on the street while people have spare rooms in their homes. We can volunteer in a social programme or distribute excess food and clothing through organizations and never have to open up our homes, our beds, our dinner tables. When we get to heaven, we will be separated into those sheep and goats that

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<sup>26</sup> Revelation 21, 22.

<sup>27</sup> ‘The Salvation Army is the most preferred charity in Aotearoa New Zealand.’ Anecdotal comment from the Public Relations Department of The Salvation Army, Wellington.

Jesus talks about in Matthew 25 based on how we cared for the least *among us*... I'm not convinced that Jesus is going to say, 'when I was hungry, you gave a check to United Way and they fed me', or, 'when I was naked, you donated clothes to The Salvation Army and they clothed me.' Jesus is not seeking distant acts of charity. He seeks concrete, personal acts of love: 'you fed me... you visited me in prison... you welcomed me into your home... you clothed me.'<sup>28</sup>

He goes on, and this is the primal challenge of The Salvation Army today:

*"If the church becomes a place of brokerage rather than an organic community, she ceases to be alive. She ceases to be something we are, the living bride of Christ. The church becomes a distribution centre, a place where the poor come to get stuff and the rich come to dump stuff. Both go away satisfied (the rich feel good, the poor get clothed and fed), but no one leaves transformed. No new radical community is formed."*<sup>29</sup>

We have to recommit ourselves to *community development*, to being a living, messy, organic network of partnerships.

### ***c. Green and equalize our faith.***

The Salvation Army has to engage intentionally in creation care. We have to ensure that we're practicing whenever we can the trio of *Recycle, Reduce, and Reuse*, and wherever we can, we have to try and lessen our *Wastage*. The hike in grocery prices and the looming global food crisis makes it critical that we extend our investments in and resourcing of the growing of community gardens. The care of a community garden is a practice that entire communities can contribute to and enjoy the rewards of together. It is something that makes the resurrection seeable and it is a significant shift toward the "enough" of "mutual neighborliness" and *sustainability*.

We have to recommit ourselves to living from within our national policy of *Fair Trade*. The small investments we make in *Fair Trade* goods ensure that there is something of a safety net in place for the people most exposed to the economic downturn and most likely to suffer from the escalating debt and the shriveling cash flow. The practice of *Fair Trade* connects our faith to the correcting of injustices in the global financial market and guarantees that there is a minimum of "enough" for everyone, everywhere. It is a *good* economic policy and a healthy practice of our "mutual responsibility."

### ***d. Reciprocity.***

The Salvation Army has to re-explore and reinvest in policies of "*Reciprocity*." We have to move our energies and practices from *doing stuff for people* to *doing stuff together with people* to *doing stuff of the people*. We have to help the communities we connect with feel and see that they can contribute to something good, that there is some expectation on them to add something of real value. We have to shift from "hand-outs" to "hand-ups" to "sharing the workload together." The expectation of *reciprocity* creates a:

*"... community that (can) embrace not just the poor and their advocates, but the better-off as well. For the poor will not only be less poor if they work (contribute); they will become less alien to (and less distant from) other people. That is a vision that is politic, speaks to the real needs of the poor, and advances the gospel's vision of a unified society."*<sup>30</sup>

What could this reciprocity look like? It could mean that clients of our E+ programmes get invited to help Salvationists and other interested groups establish and sustain community gardens. It could mean that clients of our Bridge or Oasis programmes get invited to help

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<sup>28</sup> Shane Claiborne, 2006, *The Irresistible Revolution*, emphasis mine.

<sup>29</sup> Shane Claiborne, *ibid*, emphasis mine.

<sup>30</sup> Mary Jo Bane and Lawrence M Mead, 2003, *Lifting Up the Poor*.

with the preparation and serving of community meals. It could mean that clients of our Food Banks get invited to volunteer time in community projects. It could mean that congregations get invited to leave the church edifices on Sunday and collaboratively partner with clients of our Supportive Accommodations and with other local community groups to “beautify” neighborhoods. If handled carefully, *reciprocity* can increase the felt dignity of individuals and strengthen the communal feel of connectivity. There is a renewed sense of *what is possible together* and of how “*we’re (truly) in this together.*”

***e. Relational Tithing.***

The Salvation Army has to courageously re-imagine its discipline of the tithe and in place of a sole focus on “Planned Giving” we have to embrace at the same time a larger practice of “*Relational Tithing.*”<sup>31</sup> Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw explain what this could involve:

“Some of us who were pretty discontent with how the church was embezzling money belonging to the poor to build buildings and pay staff began to dream again what it would look like to *re-imagine tithes and offerings, which God intended to be instruments of a redistributive economy.* We considered how the early church brought their offerings and laid them at the feet of the apostles to be redistributed to folks as they need. And we came up with something beautiful and small - the relational tithe.

Relational Tithe is a network of reborn friends around the world organized like little cells in a body taking care of each other. All offerings and needs are brought before the community and shared, just like they were in the early church. But unlike the early church, we have a blog and can wire the money across the globe. We pool 10 percent of our income into a common fund. Regularly, the needs of our neighbors and villages are also brought before the community, and we meet them as we are able. Meanwhile, we are building relationships that tear through the economic walls that formerly divided us, from economists to homeless folks, all the time trusting that we can do more together than we can alone... (We believe its something of) God’s vision for a human family with a divine wallet.”<sup>32</sup>

Imagine the impact of this *relational tithe* in our communities? Imagine if every Salvationist formed something of this *communal wallet* where they lived and with the people they mixed with. What difference could that make to the expression of “enough” in communities? What difference could that make to the relational strength of our neighborhoods? See how this *communal wallet* could make the alternative and fairer economy of God possible? See how this communal wallet makes *God Himself* seeable/tangible? Rob Bell comments that the early Christians knew that:

“To be part of the church was to join a countercultural society that was partnering with God to create a new kind of culture, right under the nose of the Caesars. These Christians made sure that everybody in their midst had enough to eat. They made sure everybody was able to pay their bills. They made sure there was enough to go around. The resurrection for them was not an abstract spiritual concept; it was a concrete social and economic reality... They understood that people are rarely persuaded by arguments, but more often by experiences. Living, breathing, flesh-and-blood experiences of the resurrection community. They saw it as their responsibility to put Jesus’ message on display. To the outside world, it was less about proving and more about inviting people to experience this community of Jesus’ followers for themselves.”<sup>33</sup>

See how the image and practice of “enough” starts to define our faith? It is not only that we open our purses to make space for others; it is the “litmus test” of whether or not we honestly believe in what God says is possible.

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<sup>31</sup> See [relationaltithe.com](http://relationaltithe.com)

<sup>32</sup> Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, 2008, *Jesus For President*.

<sup>33</sup> Rob Bell, 2005, *Velvet Elvis*.

### ***f. Richness Wash.***

The Salvation Army has talked now for some time of “mission washes.” What if we were to engage in national/local/individual “*Richness Washes*”? Ron Sider explains what this could look like:

“I think we must confess that rich Christians are largely on the side of the rich rather than the poor. But imagine what would happen if all our church institutions – our youth organizations, our publications, our colleges and seminaries, our congregations and denominational headquarters – would all dare to undertake a comprehensive two-year examination of their programmes and activities to answer this question: Is there the same balance and emphasis on justice for the poor and oppressed in our programmes as there is in Scripture? If we were to do this with an unconditional readiness to change whatever did not correspond with the scriptural revelation of God’s special concern for the poor and oppressed, I predict that we would unleash a new movement of biblical social concern that would transform the world.”<sup>34</sup>

The Salvation Army today is *Relationship Rich* and *Time Rich*. How we inspire the communities we engage with to *spend* our relationships and time is pivotal to the promise of a God-shaped economy of “enough.”

## **5. Elephants Re-visited**

The hope of this paper is that it can help strengthen how The Salvation Army faces off with the current context of a global economic meltdown. The concept and practice of “enough” litters the pages of Scripture and is a countering to the current despairing talk of crisis management and scarcity. It is the contention of this paper that “*there is enough*”, and, that if we can shift communities from excessive over-consumption and over-production to economic practices of “mutual responsibility” and sustainability, then there is going to be “enough” for our common future together. The “gift-giving” of God is trustworthy.

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## **6. Discussion Questions**

- a.** What is your experience of the current economic crisis? How is it impacting on the community where you live, study or work?
- b.** Do you think there is “enough”? Why, why not? Do you think the concept of “enough” could make a difference in how we manage our local/national/global economies? Is the concept of “enough” a challenge to you personally?
- c.** How do the Scriptures define *what is enough*? Where else could you encounter the “gift-giving” economy of God in Scripture? Where else could you see the Scriptural promise of “enough”?
- d.** How would you like to see The Salvation Army engage with the current economic crisis? What do you think of the challenges of this paper? Is there a culture of “excess” or a culture of “enough” in The Salvation Army?
- e.** What can you do to ensure that *there is “enough” for everyone, everywhere*?

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<sup>34</sup> Ron Sider, 1997, Rich Christians in an age of Hunger.

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