

Christianity and Capitalism Conference Schedule, March 11-12, 2016

Organized by the Designated Emphasis in Renaissance and Early Modern Studies

Location: Geballe Room, Townsend Center

Schedule:

Friday March 11

1:00-2:30

1:15 Welcome

1:30-3:00: Chair: Kate Driscoll

Aden Kumler, "*Pretium redemptionis*: the price of salvation in the medieval economy of salvation"

Beate Frick, "Making Marvels, Faking Matter"

3:00: coffee

3:30-5:00 Chair: Molly Borowitz

Mark Peterson, "From the Stump to the Library: A Protestant Aesthetic and the Spirit of Consumption in the Making of Capitalism"

David Hawkes, "The Weber Thesis in a Post-Secular Age"

Saturday March 12

9:30: coffee

10:00-11:30 Chair: Dexter Hough-Snee

Carl Wennerlind, "Capitalism, Matter, and Spirituality: Improvement during Sweden's Age of Greatness"

Ivonne del Valle, "Capitalism and Christianity: Jesuits, Mining and the Baroque"

11:30-1:00 lunch break

1:00-2:30 Chair: Rosie Wagner

Shannon Stimson, "Heterodoxy and Trade: Religion and Agrarian Capitalism in the Political Economy of Sir William Petty, 1651-1687."

John Martin, "Writing Christianity and Capitalism in Modern History Before Guizot"

2:30: coffee

3:00-4:00: Roundtable

Ethan Shagan and Elizabeth Honig, with conference speakers

Paper Abstracts in order of presentation:

Aden Kumler (Chicago) “*Pretium redemptionis*: the price of salvation in the medieval economy of salvation”

Notions of price, commerce, and profit played an important part in medieval Christian soteriology. In this paper, I am to take seriously medieval thinking about the "price of redemption" by attending to the trope's literalization in works of art and practices in the Middle Ages. The concept of "price," as has been long recognized, is central to practices of commensuration and exchange. Money— functioning as an artificial or conventional instrument of commensuration—has often been taken as a privileged expression of relative values, not least in the form of prices. What then can we learn about medieval Christian conceptions of the economy of salvation if we attend to the role "price" and monetary forms played in the period's soteriological thought and practices? While much attention (and polemic) has focused on the role of indulgences in the buying and selling of salvation, my paper turns instead to the chronologically prior and continuing tradition of medieval *sacrum commercium*, primarily in connection with the Eucharist. Without ignoring textual sources, I will focus primarily upon material works and practices that framed access to salvation as a mode (or modes) of economic participation, with particular emphasis on the concept of price.

Beate Fricke— (Berkeley) “Making Marvels, Faking Matter”

During the medieval period bezoar stones were most widespread as fancy ingredients of alchemical recipes trying always to achieve the impossible – e.g. cure the pain of scorpion bites with just a few sips, scare snakes away or attract all hidden scorpions with a picture surrounded by smoke. My first examples are taken from the Picatrix, or Gayat al-Hakim, an Arabic text translated into Spanish and then into Latin in the thirteenth century and widely read by Renaissance authors interested in forbidden stuff – such as magic and hermetism. To name just a few: Marsilio Ficino, Agrippa von Nettesheim, Johannes Trithemius, Johannes Hartlieb, Thomas Campanella, Giambattista dell Porta (*Magia Naturalis*), Rabelais and others. In short, the Arabic knowledge about bezoar stones is applied to the new objects, which were brought from far away to Europe, from the East and the West. These objects were traded and sought after like pearls, precious stones and spices, or somewhat later tulip bulbs. The common belief of emperors and others who lived in permanent fear to be poisoned by their enemies in the power of these stones let their numbers in European collections by Dukes, Kings and others grow impressively since the 16th century. To demonstrate that they did possess the powers to cure attributed to them, the French surgeon Ambrose Pare performed a public experiment to prove their ineffectiveness. However, this did not lessen the interest in bezoars, on the contrary, Engelbert Kaempfer remarks that Paré's bezoar may have been of inferior quality, and, moreover, bezoars could not be successfully used to counteract mineral poisons, but were only useful when vegetable poisons had been taken. (Kaempfer traveled to Russia, Persia, India, South-East Asia, and Japan between 1683 and 1693 and wrote two books about his travels, *Amoenitatum Exoticarum* important for the medical observations). They were

expensive, desired and came from far away – this was the moment of clever Jesuits in Goa. They fulfilled the increasing demand by faking bezoar stones – and making the so-called Goa-stones. Like in the case of icons or miraculous objects, their imitations rely on copies accompanied by stories. Art historians have discussed these mechanisms in the cases of the copies of the Mandyllion or the Holy House of Loreto, and many others. Less attention have got the framework accompanying these evident fakes – the copies of a miraculous work. The same is happening in the case of the framework of highest artistic standards in the case of the Goa stones.

Mark Peterson (Berkeley) “From the Stump to the Library: A Protestant Aesthetic and the Spirit of Consumption in the Making of Capitalism”

The paper argues for strong parallels between the forms of discipline and education that emerged with the Protestant Reformation -- the construction of souls that intensely desired (though rarely attained) access to the divine -- and the forms of discipline and education that taught consumers to develop a refined sense of self sought (though never fully attained) through access to consumer goods. In *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (2008), Jan de Vries refers to the “goods” in growing demand during the Consumer Revolution as “Z-commodities” (borrowing the term from economist Gary Becker) describing not just tea or textiles, china or chocolate, but the combination, presentation, and use of commodities that created an experience or sensibility of refinement. The experience of Z-commodities, I argue, bears a striking similarity to the construction of experience that godly folk referred to as “grace.” This paper outlines a larger set of questions about the relationship between the disciplinary revolution in western Christianity that began in the sixteenth century and the transformation in the experiences and practices of consumer demand and desire that followed and created the impetus for the transformation of productive capacity of the west as well. It explores what I see as the missing term in Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), the question of why and how the structure, content, and expression of people’s desires changed so much from the 16th century to the 19th century.

David Hawkes (Arizona State) “The Weber Thesis in a Post-Secular Age”

Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic* gives an accurate description of the psychology behind industrial, production-based capitalism, but it is inadequate to describe twenty-first century, exchange-based capitalism. This paper suggests some reasons for that inadequacy. It is no longer possible to conceptually divide the ‘economy’ from the rest of society, so that the debate on the relation between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure,’ which dominated discussion of the ‘Weber thesis’ for almost a century, is now obsolete. Religion and theology are powerful, independent forces in postmodernity, and can no longer be viewed as coded expressions of economic ideas or interests. Furthermore, the imperative to labor and saving that Weber found expressed in Calvinist psychology has been replaced by the necessity for people to indulge and consume. And more generally, the essence of capitalism is now revealed to consist in a reversal of natural subject/object relations. Today, financial value, the alienated representation of human life, has achieved autonomous agency and dominates the lives of the human beings whose objectified essence it constitutes. As a result of such developments, the very qualities of Protestant theology

that Weber identified as ideological supports for early capitalism provide an indispensable critique of capitalism's postmodern manifestation.

Ivonne del Valle (Berkeley) [Dexter Hough-Snee as commenter] "Capitalism and Christianity: Jesuits, Mining and the Baroque"

Karl Marx and Max Weber would seem to agree on the fact that the rise of capitalism owes not to Spain, but to developments in other parts of the world—the Protestant ethic in the case of the latter, and the displacement of the violence of primitive accumulation in the case of the former. Without challenging these long held ideas, in this paper I'll analyze the Catholic ethic that made it possible to acquire the resources for capitalism. I'll restrict myself to the Jesuits who have long been considered pivotal for both the supposed modern spirit of the colonial world and the creation of the Hispanic-Colonial Baroque.

John Martin (Duke) "Writing Christianity and Capitalism in Modern History Before Guizot"

This paper explores various ways in which writers after Bossuet imagined modern history (what we would call "early modern") prior to the development of the explicitly Eurocentric views of Guizot. In this talk I explore diverse figurations of a global Christianity and a global capitalism in Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*, Voltaire's *Moeurs*, and Raynal's *Histoire des deux Indes*.

Shannon Stimson (Georgetown) "Heterodoxy and Trade: Religion and Agrarian Capitalism in the Political Economy of Sir William Petty, 1651-1687"

To many contemporary economic theorists and historians, the lasting notoriety and relevance of the work of Sir William Petty (1623-1687) might be seen to rest on the characterization of him by Marx in *Capital*, vol.1, as a prescient analyst within an emerging theory of bourgeois capitalism, and the prototype for what Marx termed genuine "political economy" as "the economists who, since the time of W[illiam] Petty, have investigated the real internal framework [*Zusammenhang*] of bourgeois relations of production, as opposed to the vulgar economists [such as John Stuart Mill] who only flounder around with the apparent framework of those relations." This paper offers a reconsideration of Petty's political economic thought in another context, that of agrarian capitalism in the mid-17th century, and considers the place of religion and politics as fundamental to the structure and aims of Petty's economic reform thinking.

Petty was the author of one published, and numerous posthumously published works, including *A Treatise of Taxation and Contributions* (in print, 1662); *A Treatise of Taxation and Contributions* (in print, 1662); *Verbum Sapienti* (1665, in print, 1691); *The Political Anatomy of Ireland* (1671-2, in print 1690); *The Political Arithmetic* (1672-6, in print 1690); *Quantulumcunque concerning Money* (pamphlet, 1682, in print 1695). Within these political economic writings, Petty's considers, among other things, the economic impact of religious liberty of conscience, toleration, and heterodoxy within religion, as factors capable of improving productivity as well as trade within the national economy. He examines the Church as an economic as well as doctrinal institution and suggests economic reforms. In his political economic work, the struggle to advance capitalism for Petty is conceived on a national scale in England, and in the case of Ireland after 1652, a struggle to be conducted nearly *ex nihilo* upon the "white paper" of its conquered people and confiscated lands. The proffered political

economic analysis and policy solutions are framed in Petty's terms as ones of altering "superstructures" of both laws and an administrative apparatus of a political and religious conflict that threatened the growth of national wealth.

Carl Wennerlind (Barnard) "Capitalism, Matter, and Spirituality: Improvement during Sweden's Age of Greatness"

Sweden's sudden rise to geopolitical prominence during the Thirty Years' War triggered a vibrant debate about how the nation would create the kind of wealth required to hold on to its newfound status as a world power. While the Dutch and English emphasized trade, empire, and labor as the crucial ingredients of national welfare and imperial greatness, the Swedish improvement writers centered their attention on the advancement of knowledge about nature. Perceived simultaneously as a quest for spiritual enlightenment and material improvement, Swedish improvers believed that through a refinement of knowledge people would be able to discover and harness nature's hidden powers and untapped energies. By exploring the writings of Swedish reform writers, from Risingh to Linnaeus, I show how knowledge about the spirituality and physics of matter constituted the key to the nation's wealth and power.