

CAPITALISM AND THE FACE OF THE OPPRESSED: A RESPONSE TO KATHRYN TANNER AND DEVIN SINGH

NICHOLE M. FLORES

Introduction

“Whoever has the power to project a vision of the good life and make it prevail has the most decisive power of all.”¹ In *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, William Leach exposes the development of advertising and marketing techniques in consumer capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century United States context. Department stores such as Wanamaker’s and Woolworth’s mastered the “arts of decoration and display” influenced by L. Frank Baum to generate technicolored images of prosperity to help sell clothing, housewares, and appliances.² While the architects of these methods were not explicitly or directly influenced by religious belief, they appealed readily to Christian religiosity (holiday-themed store displays for Christmas and Easter, for example) to help sell goods that could cultivate consumer desire. These marketing and display techniques have been honed over the past century, adapting to the new terrain of online shopping and social media even as brick-and-mortar retail has declined from its former dominance. Whether in store or online, marketers sell more than just specific products; they sell a vision of the good life.

Leach’s argument resonates with the arguments in both Kathryn Tanner’s *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*³ and Devin Singh’s *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West*.⁴ Tanner and Singh each explore how the interaction between capitalism and Christianity generates a vision of the good life that wields this decisive power in our contemporary society. If, as Tanner argues, finance-dominated capitalism disciplines all areas of economic activity, then religion and theology discipline the grammar and vocabulary of these systems, as

Nichole M. Flores

Department of Religious Studies, University of Virginia, P.O. Box 400126, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4126, USA
Email: nichole.flores@virginia.edu

¹ William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York, NY: Random House, 1993), xiii.

² Leach, *Land of Desire*, 41. Besides trimming department store windows, Frank L. Baum’s diverse pursuits included writing children’s fairy tales. He is the author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

³ Kathryn Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

⁴ Devin Singh, *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).

Singh argues. The result is a Christian faith that both *disciplines* and *is disciplined by* capitalism.

Both Tanner and Singh aim to clarify the relationship between capitalism and Christian theology. They demonstrate how systems of finance and currency, respectively, structure human relationships with the divine, with others, and even with ourselves. While Tanner's analysis highlights the pervasive and pernicious influence of finance-dominated capitalism on economic life in the twenty-first century, Singh's unearths the role of Christian theology in developing the very systems that theologies of liberation seek to upend. Read together, these texts offer a bleak picture of the modern global economy, confronting the reader with the entrenched nature of these systems and our committed participation in, and even enjoyment of, these arrangements.

These texts illustrate how moral agency in the modern global economy and in the context of the Roman empire, respectively, is restricted by unjust economic structures. Neither text, however, offers an account of how these systems impact the lives of those whose agency is most severely curtailed or denied outright in the twenty-first century. While Tanner identifies how certain enduring features of finance-dominated capitalism (i.e., debt and payday loans) restrain the agency of economically vulnerable populations, she does not explore the implications of these systems for the most vulnerable participants in the global economy today. She misses an opportunity to draw our attention to the implications of finance-dominated capitalism for those whose agency is denied by human trafficking and modern-day slavery or for those who are exploited in maquiladoras on the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexico border, whose economic agency is undermined by both global economic policy and systematic threats of violence. Singh's analysis, for its part, highlights the pernicious implications of imperial semiotics advanced through coinage on those on the underside of empire but demurs from articulating a constructive theological or ethical response that would undermine the tangible effects of these systems for the most vulnerable members of contemporary society.

While neither text grapples with the implications of their respective arguments for those who are most oppressed in the global economy, their texts contain helpful insights for articulating a response to injustices within the global economic system that they identify. I explore the capacity of these texts to recognize and to respond to the situation of the oppressed, offering a vision of a good life that refuses to look away from the face of the oppressed in the twenty-first century global economy. I suggest that the aesthetic and semiotic dimensions of Tanner and Singh's respective texts can be extended to expose the human suffering that results from the economic and theological systems they identify. Their works have the potential help to identify distinctive Christian resources for articulating a vision of the good life that opposes the one offered by capitalism in the twenty-first century global economy.

Response to Tanner

Beginning with the idea that religion can offer powerful psychological sanctions for economic behavior,⁵ Tanner articulates an anti-work ethic that reasserts human worth independent of capitalist virtues. Her anti-work ethic has three central aims: "(1) breaking the link between a right to well-being and work; (2) breaking one's identification with one's 'productive' self; and (3) breaking the time continuity, the time collapse, that constrains imaginative possibility under the current configuration of capitalism."⁶ Echoing Leach, Tanner identifies the power that

⁵ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 4.

⁶ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 30.

finance-dominated capitalism wields in shaping human imagination, desires, and conduct in the context of the twenty-first century economy: “Without the need any longer of religious backing, capitalism may now have the power itself to shape people in its own image.”⁷ Responding to capitalism’s formative influence, she grounds the anti-work ethic in an account of Christian theology that she sees as radically opposed to the spirit of finance-dominated capitalism. The spirit of capitalism must be confronted by “a counter-spirit of similar power.”⁸ Religion, she explains, is “one of the few alternative outlooks on life with a capacity to shape life conduct to a comparable degree . . .” Given religion’s own formidable power to shape human imagination, desire, and action, it presents itself as a “critical force against [finance dominated capitalism].”⁹

Tanner here identifies religion (specifically Christian beliefs) as a possible counter-spirit to the spirit of finance-dominated capitalism.¹⁰ She writes as a Christian systematic theologian, marshalling the resources of this specific theological tradition to articulate this powerful counter-spirit. While she acknowledges Christianity’s outsized role in shaping capitalism, she is confident that she can articulate a Christian response that undermines the system: “What Christianity gives it can also take away . . . Whether [Christianity was] amenable to capitalism at its start or not, my own Christian commitments as I hope to show are inimical to the demands of capitalism now.”¹¹ Christian theology can be leveraged in a way that either supports or resists capitalism. What truly matters is the practical application of Christian beliefs. In this way, Tanner signals to the significance of practical ethical reflection to her theological argument.

How does the Christian anti-work ethic offer an ethical vision that prevails over the capitalist one? Although Christian commitments can take different emphases, as illustrated by H. Richard Niebuhr’s models outlined in *Christ and Culture*, Christianity often understands itself to be making truth claims that shape the beliefs and actions of the believer.¹² But while both capitalism and Christianity contend for the defining influence in the lives of its believers, capitalism succeeds in this ambition to a much greater extent today. Christians participate in finance-dominated capitalism, often very enthusiastically and uncritically. Indeed, as Tanner has demonstrated, the vision offered by finance-dominated capitalism is one that many Christians find positively enticing on theological grounds, seeking salvation in work and the pursuit of profit. On a practical level, capitalism has become the primary framework through which many Christians evaluate their own worth.

David Cloutier’s analysis in *The Vice of Luxury: Economic Excess in a Consumer Age* helps illustrate how capitalist formation contends with Christian formation. A capitalist system obsessed with accumulation of wealth has elevated vices such as greed and luxury to the list of worldly virtues.¹³ As Cloutier argues, the desire for luxury is not seen as a sin to be overcome but a goal to be pursued. He argues that our contemporary culture lacks the language that we need to critique economic excess, including how living luxurious lives influences the lives of others. Cloutier identifies an essential ethical problem that resonates with Leach’s historical analysis and Tanner’s theological analysis: the desire for more has shaped action and agency within a

⁷ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 8.

⁸ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 8.

⁹ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 8.

¹⁰ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 4.

¹¹ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 7.

¹² H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, first edition (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1951).

¹³ Nichole M. Flores, “Greed,” in *Naming Our Sins: How Recognizing the Seven Deadly Vices Can Renew the Sacrament of Reconciliation*, edited by David Cloutier and Jana Bennett (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 73–88.

global economic system that is unconcerned with how others fare, as long as we are able to live lives of abundance.¹⁴

Tanner's anti-work ethic illustrates how the desire for consumer goods leads us to develop a commodified relationship with our own labor: "Employees are willing to put up with tasks they would otherwise prefer not to perform because of what their wages will get them—the consumer goods that promise to satisfy both basic needs and desires for fulfillment that fundamentally have nothing to do with work."¹⁵ This view of our time and labor develops in us a training in self-commodification. Tanner describes the kind of business relationship that we develop with ourselves within a system structured by finance-dominated capitalism: "It is a business model that is being extended here to cover all dimensions of life, so as to draw one's self-understanding into increasing alignment with how actual businesses are run in finance-dominated capitalism."¹⁶ Buying into a vision of capitalism that views the entirety of one's life, person, and personality as commodities renders the entire self as a center for profit-generation. For those seeking to solidify their economic standing, this vision offers the promise of making even more profit, or, as Dr. Tanner says, "Why make a little when one could make a lot?"¹⁷

Its ability to shape our desires and identities so completely is one of the most disturbing aspects of finance-dominated capitalism. The capitalist spirit of today encourages, and even incentivizes, identification with our ability to produce capital. This view of the self leads to an anthropology with an excessive view of individuality.¹⁸ This view tends to inhibit human capacities to relate to others in ways that are loving or, at a minimum, just.

But even the most enthusiastic participants in this system experience the rupture of identity, relationship, and society. As Tanner's text demonstrates, few (if any) participants in global capitalism are immune from the personal and social burdens of this system. While she acknowledges that the current manifestation of capitalism makes it difficult to imagine and enact reforms, she identifies distinctive resources within Christianity for altering the economy in a revolutionary way. "Christianity," she writes, "is a religion of radical time discontinuity, promoting thereby expectations of radically disruptive transformation."¹⁹ Tanner cites baptism—a sacrament through which we believe that we die to our former selves and are born to new life in Christ—as a means of undermining systems of debt that require "unbreakable continuity with one's past self" in order to function.²⁰ Baptism as a theological basis for an ethic of debt forgiveness demonstrates the power of a distinctive Christian belief to reject the logic of finance-dominated capitalism and to envision a "new heavens and a new earth" as imagined in Isaiah 65:

They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,

¹⁴ David Cloutier, *The Vice of Luxury: Economic Excess in a Consumer Age* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015), 3.

¹⁵ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 67.

¹⁶ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 74.

¹⁷ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 75.

¹⁸ Nichole M. Flores, *Journal of Religion and Society* 20, no. 1 (2018): I argue that Tanner's emphasis on the analogical interval between divine and human identity helps to reinforce the dignity of individual persons without forgoing the anthropological basis for a community committed to the common good.

¹⁹ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 31.

²⁰ Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 31.

and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain,
or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—
and their descendants as well. (Isa. 65:21-23)

This eschatological vision of the good life (both already and not yet) in which labor contributes to a flourishing human life, without being identified with human well-being and worth, underscores Tanner's argument for an anti-work ethic that reconfigures human identity in relation to finance-dominated capitalism. This eschatological vision of a good life, shared by both the Jewish and Christian scriptural traditions, rejects capitalism's objectifying tendencies that morph all people and relationships into profit-generating objects in favor of one that reconnects labor to creativity, flourishing, and justice.

But for those living on the brink of economic demise, this vision of the completely commodified self provides perhaps the only hope for making ends meet. As Michael Sandel asserts in his introduction to *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, "We live in a time when almost anything can be bought and sold."²¹ For evidence of this point, he offers examples of people renting out space on their foreheads as billboards and serving as human guinea pigs in drug safety trials. But beyond these colorful illustrations, the consequences of economic desperation in this economy are dreadful. For example, migrant workers from Mexico risk ever-increasing threats to life and safety to cross the northern border to work amid sweatshop conditions for sub-poverty wages in the United States. The economically vulnerable who stay face exploitation in the workplace along with social violence that seeks to sacrifice innocent life in order to protect the economic and political interests of the powerful.

This mode of economic survival in a finance-dominated economy emerges at times in Tanner's work, especially in her identification of the deleterious consequences of economic arrangements for debt repayment in this system. But Tanner does not plumb the depths of this system to ask what happens to those who are harmed most profoundly in the twenty-first century global economy. Her analysis elides crucial distinctions in personal and social agency in the global economy: She shows the manner in which finance-dominated capitalism undermines the agency and flourishing of those who are harmed in this system, illustrating how the system limits agency. But she does not address how those whose agency is extremely limited or completely denied are affected by this system. She does not explain how the anti-work ethic might look in these cases. She forgoes an opportunity to speak to the theological and ethical issues that arise on the bottom rungs of the economy. As within the system of finance-dominated capitalism that she critiques, the face of those victimized by this system remains hidden from view.

Despite this limitation of her analysis, I would like to suggest that Tanner's text offers important resources for responding to the situation of those most profoundly harmed in this economy. Specifically, Tanner's work gestures to Christianity's aesthetic and affective dimensions to de-center the totalizing capitalist narrative by reshaping human desires. This reshaping is necessary for cultivating the will to reconstitute economic arrangements that will not tolerate the exploitation or enslavement of another human for the sake of profit.

Toward the end of Chapter Six, Tanner offers a tantalizing hint about how aesthetic experiences, especially those experienced in the context of community, might help us to overcome the ruptures of this system, offering an alternative vision of the good life with the power to overcome

²¹ Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 5.

the one offered by finance-dominated capitalism. One's experiences of pleasure or enjoyment, she explains, are augmented when others experience these things too. "The experience is something like watching a sunset with someone else," she writes. "One is very glad to share the experience; other people's presence enhances one's own experience."²² If, however, there is something preventing another from enjoying the experience, such as the experience of pain, everyone in the experiential community suffers. Tanner's illustration makes clear the way encounter with others—in the flesh, and in the context of shared experiences of joy and suffering—can reshape our desires. Tanner's exploration of this relational terrain offers an important clue to how a Christian spirit of community cultivated through embodied solidarity can undermine the spirit of finance-dominated capitalism that is at once self-centered and self-denying.

Response to Singh

While Tanner's work helps us to see what Christianity can offer in terms of ideas and practices in response to the ravages of finance-dominated global capitalism, Singh offers a crucial critique of problems contained within Christian thought itself that prop up capitalist systems that undermine human dignity. Singh's work offers a fresh argument about the relationship between theology and money. "Revealing the links between money and theology from these beginnings of formal Christian theological expression," he writes, "demonstrates that money cannot be dismissed as a corrupting influence on such ideas but is a critical structuring principle in theological thought."²³ Money is not a corrupting concept for theology; it is a structuring one. Christian theology has shaped the capitalist vision of the good life and thus should be interrogated for its capacity to resist the prevailing vision.

Singh's text is most persuasive and powerful when demonstrating the interweaving of Christian theology and the language of currency. Employing a genealogical method, Singh illustrates the way that ideas about economic and political power are both *rooted* and *take root* in Christian theology. He offers myriad examples of the formative role of currency in the exercise of political, economic, ecclesial, and household authority. He also demonstrates how the language of currency empowers some actors within these systems, rewarding them for representing the powers signified by currency (bureaucrats, bishops, and "the matron of the house," for example).²⁴ Singh's method and argument illuminates the way that our governments, churches, and homes are structured by the ecclesial and imperial powers signified by money. Reading his argument challenges and changes the way the reader hears the language of scripture, liturgy, and theology. Economic, specifically monetary, metaphors are pervasive in Christian theology; one wonders how it would be conceivable to speak of Christianity without this language. The reader might also become attuned to the way that the language of currency imbues every other aspect of our lives, gesturing to how Christian theology influences how we think about economy and currency in the present global system.

"Metaphors matter," writes Singh. "Metaphors linger, ossify, and become embedded in social understandings and social institutions."²⁵ Singh's assertion resonates with enduring concerns among religious ethicists about the power of language to inform practices.²⁶ Metaphors contribute to discourse which shapes thought and action. Singh provides compelling evidence that

²² Tanner, *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism*, 216.

²³ Singh, *Divine Currency*, 3.

²⁴ Singh, *Divine Currency*, 65, 90.

²⁵ Singh, *Divine Currency*, 19.

²⁶ James F. Childress and Mark Siegler, "Metaphors and Models of Doctor-Patient Relationships: Their Implications for Autonomy," *Theoretical Medicine* 5 (1984): 17–30.

Christianity cannot claim discursive or practical innocence in the development of ideas of currency that support the “theopolitical economy”²⁷ which he exposes in his work:

To the language of gift, value, and treasure traditionally ascribed to Christ, as well as to the discourse of payment and ransom in relation to redemption, we should add the apparatus of economic governance. In other words, given the broader theopolitical context of the Son marking a sphere of economic management of resources aimed at profit, the wide-ranging associations between Christ and various economic terms in Scripture and tradition are unsurprising and give new depth of meaning.²⁸

Some of the central theological metaphors for Christ are economic ones; they influence how Christ is conceptualized and, therefore, what is believed in Christian theology. In other words, “Christ’s life is monetarily marked—indeed, bookended.”²⁹

Singh’s analysis demonstrates the significance of our words, metaphors, and discourses for shaping political and economic systems. Metaphors matter for how we think and speak, but they also matter for how we live our lives. For this reason, I was surprised that Singh did not address the practical implications for his argument on Christians who continue to profess faith in Christ, including those who would base resistance to economic injustice on the theological grounds that he critiques. To be fair, Singh has not framed his project in a way that has lived experiences of today’s Christians as its focus.³⁰ Nor does he frame it as a work of liberation theology that would take as its central concern, as Gustavo Gutiérrez described it, “the demands of the gospel as seen today in the development of an oppressed but Christian people.”³¹ In fact, due to its lack of genealogical engagement, Singh is skeptical of liberation theology’s discourse to examine “theology’s role in contributing to the legacy it criticizes.”³² D. Stephen Long, in his review of *Divine Currency*, explains the thrust of Singh’s work: “joy arises only when we have fully confronted the despair produced by recognizing that everything has died at our hands.”³³ Indeed, Singh’s argument exposes the depths of Christian theology’s entanglement with economic imperialism, leaving his reader to confront the situation without the comfort of recourse to an uncorrupted theological truth to serve as a touchstone. In this manner, Singh’s work bears affinity with Miguel A. De La Torre’s ethic of hopelessness, which critiques theologies that demand hope in the face of the bleak lived realities of those most profoundly oppressed in our society.³⁴

While liberation theologians frame the incarnation narrative as one of emancipation of those living in the context of an imperial economy, Singh points out that it is also the “crucial interface that drives monetary economy at its very heart.” He explains:

²⁷ Singh, *Divine Currency*, 12.

²⁸ Singh, *Divine Currency*, 38.

²⁹ Singh, *Divine Currency*, 47.

³⁰ Devin Singh, “The Anxiety of Influence: Devin Singh Responds to D. Stephen Long,” *Marginalia Review of Books*, March 15, 2019, <https://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/the-anxiety-of-influence/>. In response to Long’s critique of Singh’s lack of elaboration of the link between the problems he identifies in the late antique period and the rise of modern capitalism: “Certainly our tendency is to want to know how this relates to us, here and now. I can only gesture to such links.”

³¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), xxxiii.

³² Singh, *Divine Currency*, 210n18.

³³ D. Stephen Long, “Can Christians Be Capitalists? D. Stephen Long Reviews Devin Singh,” *Marginalia Review of Books*, February 15, 2019, <https://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/can-christians-capitalists/>.

³⁴ Miguel A. De La Torre, *Embracing Hopelessness* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=5059863>.

Symbolically, then, the labor pangs that brought Christ into the world stem not only from a people under foreign occupation and oppression. The incarnation, that moment of material connection between the realm of divine sovereignty and the immanent, governed sphere, also coincides with a key moment of exchange between imperial sovereignty and its subjection, as measures are taken to extract monetary value from those ruled.³⁵

Singh confronts the reader with Christian theology's imperial legacy. Christian theology is not only corrupted *by* capitalism, it has *contributed* to the system's very structure.

Singh's work is composed in the key of lament. He intends to confront the reader with the influence of Christian soteriology with the structures that crucify the oppressed; he wants us to mourn the devastating consequences this has borne. Confrontation and lament are both integral to upending oppressive social, economic, and political arrangements, but they are not the final answer. Writing about the anemic response to racism in magisterial Catholic social teaching, Bryan Massingale argues for a forward-looking conception of lament. According to Massingale:

Laments honestly name and forthrightly acknowledge painfully wrenching circumstances, and yet proclaim that in the midst of the pain there is another word to be heard from God—a message of compassion and deliverance. Lament thus facilitates the emergence of something new, whether a changed consciousness or a renewed engagement with external events. It is indeed a paradox of protest and praise that leads to new life.³⁶

Massingale's analysis affirms Singh's project of lament as a means of confronting the bleak reality of Christian theology's leading role in constructing economic systems that fail to foster authentic freedom. But his work parts ways from Singh's project in its theological emphasis on God's capacity to speak a word of truth and liberation to those who suffer. Lament is not an end in itself; it is a catalyst for hope for a changed situation: "Lamenting can propel us to new levels of truth seeking and risk taking as we grieve our past history and strive to create an ethical discourse that is more reflective of the universality of our [faith.]"³⁷ For Massingale, theology in the key of lament directs the church toward practical responses to concrete experiences of suffering that must not only be made visible, but must also be addressed.

A discussion of the theological underpinnings of today's economy—even in the key of lament—is remiss if it overlooks the excruciating experiences of suffering among those most profoundly exploited in this system. Singh's work clarifies the monumental scope of this task in Christian theology, which has contained these metaphors since the fourth century. Still, theologians and ethicists whose work wrestles with realities of oppression in the twenty-first century global economy have demonstrated the distinct capacity for Christian theologies to respond to these issues.

For example, Singh's analysis exposes the economic metaphor operative in Christian soteriology:

At the basis of an establishment of cosmic peace. . . was a payment. This notion of transaction or exchange—whether of blood, suffering, honor, obedience, credit, or sinless innocence, for instance—remains constant in the major strands of soteriology that develop in

³⁵ Singh, *Divine Currency*, 47.

³⁶ Bryan Massingale, "The Systematic Erasure of the Black/Dark-Skinned Body in Catholic Ethics," in *Catholic Theological Ethics, Past, Present, and Future: The Trento Conference*, ed. James F. Keenan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 121.

³⁷ Bryan Massingale, "The Systematic Erasure of the Black/Dark-Skinned Body in Catholic Ethics," 121.

Christian tradition. As a complement to the remitting of coins as a metaphor for salvation . . . we must therefore consider the employment of this incarnated savior as cosmic currency in redemptive exchange. For the coin of God was intended to be used in redemptive transaction.³⁸

His critique adds wattage to the critical soteriologies articulated by Delores Williams in her landmark critique of surrogate suffering in *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* and, more recently, Nancy Pineda-Madrid's *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez*, in which she constructs a Christian soteriological response to the scourge of femicide, the systematic killing of women on the U.S.-Mexico border, who are treated as *mujeres desechables* (disposable women) in economic arrangements that enrich the most powerful participants in the global economy.³⁹

Indeed, Singh's contribution demonstrates the ease of sliding into theological metaphors that inadvertently justify the oppression of those whose agency is most severely curtailed or denied. But, as Pineda-Madrid's analysis of soteriology reveals, it is necessary to name and to resist the abuse of soteriology while not capitulating to it. She emphasizes the necessity of the voices and advocacy of those whom have been victimized by the systematic killing of women in Ciudad Juárez, including those who live under constant threat of violent death at the hands of drug cartels, to participate in their own liberation:

The victimized have created practices of resistance that demonstrate how individual persons and the community have identified the evil in their midst, have faithfully attempted to subvert it and dismantle it, and have used collective religious symbols as a means of entering into the living mystery of life, thereby ensuring their community's survival. These practices of resistance "claim a space" that enables those to be "present to" but not "consumed by" their experience of suffering. As such, the claiming of space enables the victimized to realize some release from their experience of evil, and in that very release they come to know a healing presence, God's saving presence.⁴⁰

Pineda-Madrid argues for the necessity of attending to the voices of those who have been victimized in order to articulate theologies that resist the concrete reality of suffering. Women who have been victimized by femicide have used pink crosses as their symbol of resistance against the systematic killing of women on the U.S.-Mexico border. While the symbol of the cross contains imperial implications that should be named and critiqued by scholars of religion and theology, the women of Ciudad Juárez have reinterpreted the symbol to make their suffering visible and to identify Christ's suffering with their own. Painted pink with the name of each victim written across the crossbar, the cross is reasserted as a symbol of feminist and anti-imperial lament. It also stands as a critique of the twenty-first century global economy that hides the exploitation and abuse of Mexican women working in maquiladoras by confronting the world with their suffering. In this way, Pineda-Madrid's soteriological commentary on the pink crosses of Ciudad Juárez provides compelling evidence for Tanner's claim of the possibility of reclaiming resources from within Christian theology itself in opposition to the harms of capitalism in today's economy.

³⁸ Singh, *Divine Currency*, 134–35.

³⁹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993); Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 86. Singh cites Williams's work as a "classic critique" of atonement theologies: "Many writers find such an image offensive, as well as problematic in its social implications, because it is taken to serve a notion of divine surrogacy in which God requires the suffering of Christ and, by extension, Christ's disciples" (Singh, *Divine Currency*, 244n4).

⁴⁰ Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation*, 98.

Divine Currency contains brief glimpses of its implications for how theological language can transform life for those who are most oppressed in the global economy, but does not fully elaborate how the language of currency might be shifted, subverted, or transformed to decenter these powers. Singh's text raises questions about what kind of theological concepts, language, and metaphors might respond to this suffering. In *Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics*, Alejandro García-Rivera argues that Christian theology concerned with justice for the oppressed must "lift up the lowly."⁴¹ García-Rivera offers a theological semiotics based in the Magnificat: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:52). García-Rivera argues that the aesthetic act of foregrounding suggests the "strong ethical implications" of "lifting up of a foreground out of a background and giving the foreground value." He explains, "Such 'lifting ups' are mentioned over and over again in the Scriptures each time giving new sense to what a theological aesthetics might look like."⁴² This method results in the decentering of power, bringing the face of the oppressed into full focus.

Singh's work "lifts up the powerful" by confronting us with the bitter fruits of Christological tradition. But its confrontational posture is also crucial to the work of "lifting up the lowly." This concept of lifting up the lowly is easily romanticized, invoking a breezy vision of inclusivity that does very little to upend unjust economic systems. But Singh's analysis shows us how genealogical methodology is essential to this work. By "subvert[ing] the quest for origins" in favor of identifying links between the economic, the political, and the theological, his method helps us to unmask the forces that cause systemic oppression.⁴³ At the same time, his calls for confrontation and lament might be opened to productive engagement with the voices of those who have been affected most adversely by current economic arrangements. It might help us to understand the necessity of this confrontation, and its essential place in theological and ethical reflection in the context of the twenty-first century global economy.

Conclusion

García-Rivera's theological semiotics of "lifting up the lowly" highlights the potential of Tanner and Singh's respective texts to engage the situation of those unequally burdened by the spirit of finance-dominated capitalism. Tanner's text gestures to how human desires might be reshaped in the context of a society currently dominated by finance-dominated capitalism. The anti-work ethic helps us to reclaim human identity from the system of finance-dominated capitalism, reaffirming the inherent worth of each person independent of her ability to produce. Applied to the situation of the most vulnerable members of the global economy, Tanner's analysis prompts us to ask: what are the distinctive contributions that Christian theology can make toward imagining a more loving, just, and beautiful vision of the good life to emerge in the twenty-first century global economy? *Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism* hints at the significance of attending to the human capacity for aesthetic experience toward imagining a vision of the good life that can overcome the deprived vision offered by twenty-first century finance-dominated capitalism.

Singh's project admonishes us to maintain a constant critical tension between Christian theology's participation in crafting justifications for empire, colonization, and denial of human agency, on one hand, and its capacity for cultivating resistance to these dynamics among those

⁴¹ Alejandro García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999).

⁴² García-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful*, 181.

⁴³ Singh, *Divine Currency*, 8.

who have been most severely harmed by the imperial legacies of Christian theopolitical economy, on the other. His use of genealogical method to identify interlocking structures confronts the reader with the imperial operations of the modern economy. Singh's analysis prompts a question: is hope a possibility in light of the theopolitical economy he identifies in his work? While he does not give the reader the comfort of an answer to this question, he exhorts Christian theologians, especially those committed to projects of liberation, to employ genealogy toward identifying how their inherited theological tradition works against their goal.

Harvesting these potential contributions requires assent to the possibility that Christian theology, despite its oppressive inheritances, has the capacity to make a distinctive contribution to the liberation of the oppressed. The witness and practical strategies of those who have been harmed most profoundly by these systems, such as those victimized by human trafficking, modern-day slavery, or feminicide on the US-Mexico border, already affirms this capacity. These lived experiences of resistance to capitalism in a Christian key would be a useful point of reflection for these authors, and for any theologian seeking to evaluate the relationship between capitalism and Christianity.

KATHRYN TANNER. Copyright Date: 2019. Published by: Yale University Press. One of the world's most celebrated theologians argues for a Protestant anti-work ethic. In his classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber famously showed how Christian beliefs and practices could shape persons in line with capitalism. In this significant reimagining of Weber's work, Kathryn Tanner provocatively reverses this thesis, arguing that Christianity can offer a direct challenge to the largely uncontested growth of capitalism. Exploring the cultural forms typical of the current finance-dominated system of capitalism, Tanner shows how they can be countered. Oppressed people have the most experience with oppression's effects, and in fighting for their humanity they demonstrate how necessary liberation is. However, at the beginning of this fight, oppressed people sometimes act like oppressors themselves. Freire asserts that an oppressive system shapes the attitudes of oppressed people, and makes them believe that they should become just like oppressors. This means that oppressed people do not always see themselves as "oppressed" at first, holding onto the "fear of freedom" mentioned in the Preface. Freire boils down the oppressor/oppressed relation.

Money Matters: A Response to Devin Singh and Kathryn Tanner. Luke Bretherton & Devin Singh - forthcoming - *Zygon*. The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs. E. B., Trilochan Singh, Jodh Singh, Kapur Singh, Bawa Harkishen Singh & Kushwant Singh - 1960 - *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 80 (4):393.

Divine Empathy. Kathryn Tanner - 1998 - *Modern Theology* 14 (4):555-560.

Christ the Key " By Kathryn Tanner. James J. Buckley - 2011 - *Modern Theology* 27 (4):698-701.

Scripture as Popular Text. Kathryn Tanner - 1998 - *Modern Theology* 14 (2):279-298.

Review of *Body of God*, by Sallie McFague. [REVIEW] Kathryn Tanner - 1994 - *Modern Theology* 10:417-419. Chri