On Brueggemann, Money, and Possessions

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I was both pleased and privileged to serve as one of the endorsers of Walter Brueggemann's recent book, *Money and Possessions*.[1] As a starting point for the present essay, let me repeat that blurb, which appears on the back of the book's dust-cover:

> Who else could write this book but Walter Brueggemann? For decades, his work has touched on the topics of money, possessions, and power that he takes up here extensively and directly in his inimitable, incisive, and insightful way. All the trademark qualities of his scholarship are on display once again: his gifts with language; his ability to comprehend, categorize, thematize, and interpret a stunning range of texts; his unmatched canonical dexterity across both Old and New Testaments; and his eye on present-day sociopolitical and theo-ecclesial realities. We have become accustomed to Brueggemann's ways (and books) among us, but this volume will easily stand out among the best in his large and most impressive oeuvre. The opening chapter alone left me in awe.

This paragraph, while perhaps a bit long as "blurbs" go, is rather brief given the significance of *Money and Possessions*, and so I again felt both pleased and privileged to be invited to say more about Brueggemann's remarkable book in this essay. If I may, and in something akin to a preaching mode, I would offer that my endorsement relates to what follows on analogy with the way a text relates to a sermon based on the same. What follows below is not exactly a sermon, of course, but if it is not entirely homiletical, then it is at least, I hope, expositional: not only of my blurb but of Brueggemann's book, providing preachers an *entrée* into this work and its great utility for the crucial, indeed indispensable task of preaching—especially for preaching that matters in the real world, which is, in our time and place, a world ruled by Almighty Dollar, another worthy epithet for that apparently omnipresent and omnipotent god, Mammon. Still further, if my "sermon" at points deviates from my text—or put more generously—moves beyond it...well, preachers will recognize, I suspect, that that is often the case with many sermons with respect to their initial, inspiring textual origin!

Who but Brueggemann?

Certainly Walter Brueggemann needs no introduction to the readers of this journal. Not only is *Journal for Preachers* closely associated with Columbia Theological Seminary, Brueggemann's academic home prior to retiring, but his own work has appeared in the pages of this journal numerous times—by my count, no less than forty or fifty times. That figure alone would surpass many scholars' total for an entire academic career, but for Brueggemann it is just a drop in the bucket. His publications are far too numerous to recount here,[2] but it is not just the *quantity* of his publications that makes Brueggemann well-known; it is also and more importantly their *quality*—still further, their *gravity*. As Richard Horsley nicely puts it in his foreword to *Money and Possessions*, "He is surely the most widely admired and appreciated biblical scholar of this generation. His books on biblical theology have decisively shaped the thinking of a whole generation of teachers, students, ministers, and laypeople."[3] Brueggemann has made this impact through a host of impressive publications—book-length and otherwise. Among the former, one thinks immediately of his breakthrough works *The Prophetic Imagination*, *The Message of the Psalms*, and *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*.[4] This trilogy is imposing: again, most mere (scholarly) mortals would dream of only writing one book that could have the kind of impact each of these three has had, and to underscore the point even further, there are still other, equally well-known books from Brueggemann's pen that might have been mentioned alongside or in lieu of these.[5]

Despite this most impressive (and massive) oeuvre, I believe that *Money and Possessions* will endure as one of Brueggemann's most significant works for at least two reasons, both of which are mentioned, though not enumerated in quite this way, in my endorsement above—namely, (1) that "for decades, his work has touched on the topics of money, possessions, and power" especially given his ever watchful "eye on present-day sociopolitical and theo-ecclesial realities"[6]; and (2) "his unmatched canonical dexterity across both Old and New Testaments which allows him "to comprehend, categorize, thematize, and interpret a stunning range of texts."[7] These factoids and factors prompted me to ask, as did Horsley, "Who else could write this book but Walter Brueggemann?"[8]

But astute readers (and preachers) will go further, adding these two items together for a calculus that is nothing short of a great gift to the task of preaching and the life of faith: *Money and Possessions* is a one-stop shop on one of the most important topics—perhaps *the* most important topic—of and for our times, written by one of the most gifted interpreters of our time. The latter point, Brueggemann's scholarly status, seems uncontroversial, not to mention incontrovertible; but the former, the importance of money and possession, needs further explication.

Brueggemann on Money and Possessions in Money and Possessions

Brueggemann offers exactly that sort of explication, and from the very beginning—indeed, already on the very first page of his own preface to *Money and Possessions*:

> The purpose of this book is to exhibit the rich, recurring, and diverse references to money and possessions that permeate the Bible. While we might conventionally assume, as we do in practice, that economics is an add-on or a side issue in the biblical text, an inventory of texts such as I offer here makes it unmistakably clear that economics is a core preoccupation of the biblical tradition.[9]

So, first and foremost, the subject matter at hand is important because, as Brueggemann himself testifies, "I have, in ways that have surprised me, come to the conclusion that the Bible is indeed about money and possessions and the way in which they are gifts of the creator God to be utilized in praise and obedience."[10] Of course, matters are never so simple as "praise and obedience"—not in the case of the Bible or in

Brueggemann's analysis thereof, nor in the human experience of money and possessions. And so, he immediately qualifies matters: "Money and possessions are of course intensely seductive, so that they can reduce praise to self-congratulations and obedience to self-sufficiency."[11] Another intriguing if not complicating factor—beyond the sheer mass of biblical material, which Brueggemann admits to finding a bit overwhelming[12]—is the fact that "the economy, in ancient faith tradition, merited and received much more attention than is usual in conventional church rendering."[13]

Right from the start, therefore, we are faced with what is the central conundrum of the book—a kind of interpretive but also existential dyad (such formulations are quintessentially "Brueggemannian"),[14] or rather, set of two dyads:

1. The Bible (and life) is everywhere about money and possessions, *but* we are loath to talk about that (especially in church!).
2. Money and possessions are to be used faithfully in praise and obedience, *but* they are frequently employed to the contrary and only for the most selfish of ends (including in church).

On the first dyad, *Money and Possessions* can be seen as a means to let the Bible have its fulsome say about these matters, especially to those who belong to the church and are tasked with its leadership and care. In this way, the book begins a conversation—or better, proves to be a crucial facilitator or first speaker in a long overdue interlocution about money and possessions and (and within) the church. Certainly, *Money and Possessions* could be used, at the very least, to fund an extensive sermon series on these matters or as a resource for individual sermons on the same (hopefully more than just on the once-a-year "Stewardship Sunday"). But *Money and Possessions* would also repay longer engagement: as the basis for an extended small group study, whether led by clergy or not.

On the second dyad, *Money and Possessions* is important because, as Brueggemann stresses throughout the book, this is the very stuff of life, well-being, flourishing, survival. And, insofar as the God of Scripture cares about these matters—matters of money and matters of possession—those who claim to care about this God, worship this God, even love this God must pay deathly close attention to these matters lest their claims prove, in the end, to be nothing but lies because the tale of the money shows otherwise.

It is not surprising, then, to find Brueggemann advocating certain positions when it comes to the Bible's say about money and possessions and how these intersect with the real world of life and survival. He insists he did not set out to advocate, but was instead content to report about the texts. What he found, however, was "that the texts themselves pressed in the direction of advocacy."[15] Of course Brueggemann is well aware, since he is a responsible interpreter, that not all of the texts drive in the same direction; he knows that there are, as it were, counter-traditions that are not as easily received,[16] but he is also clear as to where the primary testimony or weight of Scripture lies.[17] It is with "a decisive either-or" that pits God vs. Mammon.[18] And so, again, we find another Brueggemannian dyad—another kind of either-or: "an *economy of extraction*, whereby concentrated power serves to extract wealth from vulnerable people in order to transfer it to the more powerful" vs "an *economy of restoration* that pivots on debt cancellation."[19] This latter dyad, no less than the other two delineated earlier, is operative throughout *Money and Possessions*, even if that operation is sometimes under the surface. Also operative throughout the book, though rarely explicitly, are the six theses about money and possessions that Brueggemann identifies in his introduction, which is subtitled "A Material Faith."[20] As I said in my endorsement, this chapter left me in awe; in my judgment it alone is worth the price of the book and should be read and reread as a substantive primer on what the Bible says on these matters. The six theses are as follows:

1. Money and possessions are gifts from God.
2. Money and possessions are received as reward for obedience.
3. Money and possessions belong to God and are held in trust by human persons in community.
4. Money and possessions are sources of social injustice.
5. Money and possessions are to be shared in a neighborly way.
6. Money and possessions are seductions that lead to idolatry.

Brueggemann proceeds to unpack each of these theses, even if only briefly. So, for example, with regard to the first thesis, the proper human response to God's gifts is *gratitude*, and a practical effect of this thesis is to *resist all temptation to self-sufficiency or autonomy*, lest, in forgetting the giver, the gifts themselves are distorted destructively.[21] Or, in the case of the second thesis, the Bible shows that God "is not indifferent to human conduct."[22] Obedience brings us in sync with God and God's created order with the result being a life that will flourish.

Brueggemann also makes clear that these theses stand in marked contrast "to the conventional wisdom of the ancient world and…the uncriticized wisdom of market ideology."[23] So for example, the first thesis "contradicts market ideology in which there are no gifts, no free lunches; there are only payouts for adequate performance and production."[24] Or the third thesis, that money and possessions are held in trust from God, "contradicts the pretention of market ideology that imagines, not unlike Pharaoh with his Nile, that 'my money is my own; I earned it and can do with it what I want.'"[25] Or again the sixth thesis, which acknowledges that money and possession can be idolatrous seductions, "contradicts the market view that money and possessions are inert and innocent neutral objects."[26]

"We live," Brueggemann insists at the end of his introduction, "in a society that would like to bracket out money and possessions (politics and economics) from ultimate questions. The Bible insists otherwise," which means that "biblical testimony invites a serious reconsideration of the ways in which our society engages or does not engage questions of money and possessions as carriers of social possibility."[27] "The Bible talks relentlessly about economics," he continues, "about the management and distribution of life resources so that all the neighbors can live an 'abundant life'…. That abundant life, however, includes all the neighbors, human and nonhuman. That inclusiveness requires a recharacterization of the body politic as an arena for the performance and embodiment of the will of the creator God, a will that contradicts much of our preferred, uncriticized practice."[28] That is how the opening chapter ends; I am still in awe.

The remaining chapters of *Money and Possessions* then walk through the Bible, in canonical order, hitting on the main texts that Brueggemann deems most pertinent to the discussion, even if, as he himself notes, there are others that might be discussed.[29] Brueggemann begins with what he calls "Israel's Core Narrative: No Coveting!" (chapter 2), which covers a good bit of the Torah besides the Tenth Commandment proper, before moving to "Deuteronomy: The Great Either-Or of Neighborliness" (chapter 3); "Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings: The Contest" (chapter 4); "1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah: Empire and Extraction" (chapter 5); "The Psalms: Torah, Temple, Wisdom" (chapter 6); "Proverbs and Job: Wise Beyond Smart" (chapter 7); "The Prophets: Wealth Ill-Gotten and Lost, Wealth Given Again" (chapter 8); "The Five Scrolls: Scripts of Loss and Hope, Commodity and Agency" (chapter 9); "The Gospels: Performance of an Alternative Economy" (chapter 10); "Acts: Community amid Empire" (chapter 11); "Paul: Life in the Land of Divine Generosity" (chapter 12); "The Pastoral Epistles: Order in the Household" (chapter 13); "The Letter of James: The Deep Either-Or of Practice" (chapter 14); "The Book of Revelation: The Ultimate Alternative" (chapter 15). Obviously this recounting of the chapters is only a listing, and doesn't begin to suggest the provocative insights that Brueggemann raises, though three things should be mentioned, the first two of which are clear already from the table of contents.

First, and simply put, there is a lot in the Bible about money and possessions! As already noted, Brueggemann admits to a selective presentation, but his coverage is extensive—and this is not only due to Brueggemann's interpretive skill but due to the riches of his text-base. Put differently, the table of contents alone suffices as robust witness that the Bible indeed is preoccupied—obsessed may not be too strong a word—with money and possessions.

Second, Brueggemann feels free to engage the New Testament and does so in no less than five chapters. Therefore, the coverage is broad in terms of Brueggemann's treatment of money and possessions and in terms of the Bible's own treatment of the same. Since I am not a New Testament scholar, I am certainly not the best evaluator of these five chapters, but in my judgment they are every bit as lucid and insightful as those on the Old Testament, even as it is clear that Brueggemann depends a bit more on secondary literature when he treats the New Testament materials.

Third, true to Brueggemann's concern for the here-and-now and his keen awareness of present-day sociopolitical (as well as theo-ecclesial) realities, one finds throughout these chapters frequent and poignant connections between the Bible and today's world. Here are but three brief examples:

- In speaking of the golden calf episode in Exodus 32, Brueggemann states, "It does not require much imagination to transpose the bull of gold to the icon of Wall Street, with its 'bullish' markets, to see the allure of money that may distort neighborly covenantal relationships."[30]
- On the biblical laws against bribery, "an act that permits economic leverage to skew neighborly justice," Brueggemann writes, "the tradition knows about the ways money corrupts neighborly practices of justice. It is but an extension of the abusive power of money noted in these verses to connect this regulation to the recent court ruling *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. This Supreme Court ruling has permitted those with immense wealth to distort democratic processes in the United States by the undue impact of money that is on offer in exchange for preferential

consideration on government policy."[31]

- On the description of the monarch in 1 Samuel 8, Brueggemann notes, "It is the verb 'take' that dominates the description. Monarchy will be a confiscatory regulatory agency that will tax the produce of the peasants…every aspect of productive agricultural life….The term [for the king's 'justice' in this text, Hebrew *mišpāṭ*] suggests more than 'way, custom or practice'; it asserts that the coming monarchy will regard confiscatory practice as justice, as the proper and right deployment of wealth and possessions."[32] Brueggemann is clear that the proper modern-day analogue, at least here in the United States, is not some sort of caricaturized "big government" paradigm but is instead to be found far more extensively, and insidiously, in terms of globalized business replete with their major, multi-national corporations who would, if permitted, be more than happy to charge for water because every foodstuff "should have a market value" and because everything "has a price."[33]

Where to Now?

I trust that this brief overview of *Money and Possessions* is enough to demonstrate its great utility for present-day preaching, present-day theologizing, and present-day practice. I have no *caveat emptor* nor *caveat lector* to enter here, apart from the wish that the *lector* (of this essay) become an *emptor* and that buyers of the book, in turn, actually read it![34] But what should preachers do, specifically, once they have secured a copy of this book and digested it for themselves? This question is just another way to ask another—the perennial "where do we go from here" which is not entirely unrelated to still another, "Will this preach, and if so, how?"

I certainly don't have all of the answers to these questions. Excellent exegesis—and *Money and Possessions* is nothing if not that—should eventuate in excellent practice(s) that is both nimble and prudential. As a means of pointing toward such practice(s), I want to lift up one of Brueggemann's more trenchant remarks in the book and reflect on it. Here is the arresting judgment he enters: "Given such an economic map that receives many variant articulations in the Bible, it is simply astonishing that *the church has willingly engaged in a misreading of the biblical text in order to avoid the centrality of money and possessions in its testimony*."[35]

Brueggemann immediately specifies how this misreading has been achieved—namely, "by focusing on individual destiny (and sin), by spiritualizing and privatizing evangelical testimony (among both liberals and conservatives), and by offering hopes that are otherworldly."[36] A pernicious dualism that permits a too-easy bifurcation between the spiritual and the public underwrites much of this, to be sure, but Brueggemann also notes that this "deceptive misreading is aided and abetted by a lectionary that mostly disregards the hard texts on money and possessions."[37] Alongside the guilty lectionary we might, or rather *must*, also implicate preachers and liturgists who are often complicit in these crimes—crimes that are, as *Money and Possessions* repeatedly shows, against God, against our neighbors, and against God's good gifts of earth and food. *Mea culpa! Nostra culpa!*

So, again, what to do? Brueggemann's attention to the deficiencies of the lectionary is instructive, I would suggest, as it gestures toward concrete and liturgical ways that our many and churchly infidelities in the matter of money and possessions might begin to be rectified. So, as a way of reflecting on Brueggemann's critique of church and lectionary, I'd like to offer a bit more exploration of the problem before offering a more concrete suggestion toward better practice(s).

Elsewhere, I too have noted several serious deficits in the well-rounded biblical "diet" that the lectionary, generously interpreted, intends to offer us.[38] In my own study, the demerits in question had to do with the extent of the Old Testament readings more generally; for Brueggemann, the problem is with the absence of important texts that deal with money and possessions more specifically. Ways to move forward, in either case, include the crafting of new lectionaries, the cultivation of bold liturgists (and preachers) who will read parts that are otherwise only "recommended" (by means of the ominous parentheses) or that are left out (censored?) altogether, and alternative practices such as *lectio continua* or targeted preaching or teaching that attends explicitly and extensively to the troublesome (to us and our pocketbooks!) texts about money and possessions found in Holy Scripture. If the church is suffering from a problem that is caused (at least in part) by the lectionary, it seems easy enough to fix the issues with the liturgical instrument—assuming the preacher or teacher in question is bold enough and brave enough to do so. We need far more of those types of leaders these days. For too long, they have been in far too short supply.

This last remark circles back to Brueggemann's accusation of intentional misreading on the part of the church. The question at this point is a direct one: How have we who are tasked with the theological and thought- (and practice-) leadership of the church been not only participants in such misreading but willing purveyors of it? In *The Old Testament Is Dying*, I wondered if the lack of Old Testament preaching (among other things) was not only a sign of its decline but a direct contributor to the same.[39] Similar worries obtain in the case of Brueggemann's dataset. The lack of preaching, teaching, and even hearing the many biblical texts about money and possessions is, in this light, not only evidence of misreading Scripture but also (and perhaps more fundamentally and problematically) proof of a systemic underlearning of Scripture—one that allows Christians, especially of the more well-off sort, to blissfully spiritualize, bifurcate, and dualize what the Bible insists is irreducibly material, unified, one. Even more troubling, insofar as faithful action is a primary way that Christians manifest their proper acquisition of the language of Scripture—namely, by putting it into practice—any and all failures to perform the Bible's covenantal economics is a sign of inadequate language learning, proof that Christians have, in fact, *not* learned the language of faith but are fluent in another mother tongue instead: the language of a rapacious, consumeristic, and militaristic economy. The situation is dire, the stakes are high, the task is urgent.

The concrete suggestion I would offer in closing is one that underlies much of Brueggemann's argument in *Money and Possessions*, but also in much of his entire published corpus. It is simply this: *that Israel and the church are to be different.*[40] They and we are to manifest a different kind of economics, an alternative economy, a way of relating to money and possessions that will, at least as presently construed, be utterly alien to Wall Street and Main Street alike.[41] The church must practice a different and better way. Otherwise, the *ekklesia* will disappear and end up as one and the same with the world that it was (and is!) called out from.[42]

Practicing a different and better way is, of course, far easier said than done. How can a church practice better economic relations? Beyond a "Good Samaritan" fund, a soup kitchen, or clothing drives—none of which should be downplayed in importance (not at all!)—what other things could a church do to manifest "another way" with money and possessions? It's difficult to imagine the majority of churches getting into the business of low- or no-interest loans to the needy, for example, though that isn't a bad idea, especially for the more affluent of congregations. But barring that or countless other specific ideas that could be entertained and enacted, I suspect a primary way that the church will practice an alternative economics is through its people: the people who make up the church and who go off to work on Monday at various businesses of various sorts; who control, to greater or lesser degrees, money and possessions of their own and vis-à-vis others; and who are impacted—in no small measure—by their preachers. They are impacted *negatively* by preachers who misread or underread so as to misinform and malform their flocks with regard to the urgent materiality of biblical faith. But they are impacted *positively* by bold preachers who are not afraid to say what needs to be said.

Well, that last part may not be true. I suspect that even bold preachers are deathly afraid to say what needs to be said, but, despite real risk, these types of leaders will not cower in fear before Almighty Dollar. They will not refuse to say what must be said just to keep the tithers placated and coming back and the income coming in.[43] Bold preachers will not succumb to their lesser selves—as tempting and lucrative as that may be. They know the truth of Paul's words as it pertains to their own people: "How can they call on someone they don't have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven't heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10:14; CEB). Let those with ears to hear, listen—and then *proclaim*.

For clergy, that is, the test may well be how indebted (!) we are to Mammon such that we avoid saying what the Bible says repeatedly and clearly for fear of some sort of (economic) reprisal by the congregation (or community). For laity, the test may not be only about how well they heed the call to an alternative economics uttered from an emboldened pulpit, but also about how well they reshape their businesses and consumptive practices accordingly.[44] Either way, on either side, we have to admit that, of late, in the present-day either-or struggle between God and Mammon, God is losing. Perhaps Brueggemann's *Money and Possessions* can make a difference.

Notes

1 Walter Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions* (Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016). In his preface, Brueggemann attributes the title of the book to "the sober Presbyterian series in which the book is placed," adding that if it had been published elsewhere, it might have been better titled *Follow the Money* or *It's the Economy, Stupid* (xix).

2 For a good portion (though not all!) of the published work, see the bibliographies included in Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal, eds., *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 321-40; Walter Brueggemann with Carolyn Sharp, *Living Countertestimony: Conversations with Walter Brueggemann* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 165-99; and Walter Brueggemann, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms*, ed. Brent A. Strawn (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 177-88.

3 Richard Horsley, "Foreword," in Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, xi-xvii (xi).

4 See Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001 [original: 1978]); idem, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), idem, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

5 E.g., many will be most familiar with Brueggemann's commentaries: *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982); "The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The*

New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 1: *General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus*, ed. Leander E. Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 677-981; *Deuteronomy* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentary; Nashville: Abingdon, 2001); *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1990); *Isaiah* (2 vols.; Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998); *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and, with William H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalms* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

6 I will never forget how Brueggemann once told me over a meal that the most important book he read on the Bible was José Miranda's, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974). Brueggemann cites this volume in *Money and Possessions*, 74-75.

7 The second item is also lauded by Horsley, "Foreword," xi.

8 Cf. Horsley, "Foreword," xi: "Who other than Walter Brueggemann could undertake a survey of attitudes toward money and possessions in the books of the Bible as a whole?"

9 Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, xix.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.: "At times I have been almost overwhelmed by the richness of the material."

13 Ibid.

14 For some of Brueggemann's "cadences," see Brent A. Strawn, "On Walter Brueggemann: (A Personal) Testimony, (Three) Dispute(s), (and On) Advocacy," in *Imagination, Ideology and Inspiration: Echoes of Brueggemann in a New Generation*, eds. Jonathan Kaplan and Robert Williamson, Jr.; Hebrew Bible Monographs 72 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 9-47.

15 Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, xx.

16 See, e.g., Brueggemann's treatment of Exod 21:20-21 which is explicitly offered so as to "not romanticize the significance of the Sinai regulations" (ibid., 28).

17 See, e.g., ibid., 28-29 where Brueggemann adjudicates amidst Exod 22:21-24; 22:25-27; and 21:20-21 (see previous note) and concludes that "the testimony of the absolute prohibition [i.e., against coveting] stands. It is, I propose, the core confession of Israel concerning money and possessions that are to be kept in the orbit of neighborliness intended by YHWH."

18 Ibid., xx; see also 35-54.

19 Ibid., xx.

20 Ibid., 1-13.

21 Ibid., 2-3.

22 Ibid., 3.

23 Ibid., 9.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 10.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 12-13.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., xix: "If I have offered a fair exhibit of these texts, then the reader can continue the i of making judgments about the meaning and relative importance of each text….It is of course true that otherinterpreters m well select different texts or make different interpretive moves about them."

30 Ibid., 8.

31 Ibid., 51.

32 Ibid., 62.

33 See, e.g., ibid., 270 and *passim*; the citations proper are taken from Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, former CEO of Nestlé, and concern precisely the sale of water (see ibid., 277 and n. 17).

34 To be sure, I did (as other readers will) find things to quibble with here and there. So, despite his excellent points about how coveting (Hebrew *hmd*) includes both desire and seizure, I am not yet entirely convinced that the interior affect state should be downplayed so as to trump up the external action. Both may well be involved, perhaps even in most instances of *hmd*, but the inclusion of additional verbiage which often makes clear the act of seizing and taking suggests that *hmd* itself may, at least at times, be less than an external action and mostly concern interiority. This is hardly a lightening of the load; if accurate, it suggests that not only are external acts like stealing forbidden, but interior affect states that lead to such activity are also prohibited—a stunning kind of commandment if ever there was one,

but a situation that should be familiar to readers of the Sermon on the Mount. Similarly, on ibid., 174, Brueggemann states that the prophetic concern with "justice and righteousness" (Hebrew *mišpāṭ* and *ṣĕdāqāh*) is a "tag phrase… for economic covenantalism." Perhaps so, or to some degree (at a minimum), but I understand this phrase to be about still yet more—though certainly not less. In my judgment, *mišpāṭ* alone, especially in certain prophetic contexts, suffices to index economic covenantalism with *ṣĕdāqāh* evoking much that would fall in the realm of worship, religiosity, and piety. I do not mean to bifurcate these matters as I think the force of the prophetic word-pairing is precisely to keep together what modern Christians—on both ends of the ideological spectrum—have been prone to separate. Such a holistic interpretation is also what Brueggemann is after, especially in his strong emphasis on the non-dualistic nature of biblical materiality when it comes to God and money and possessions; hence, my nuance here may be truly slight and ultimately moot.

35 Ibid., xxi (my emphasis).

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Brent A. Strawn, *The Old Testament Is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), esp. 48-56.

39 Ibid., 56-58.

40 See Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions*, *passim*, but, as two examples, see 6: "remembering God is not an intellectual act; it is a practical act of managing money and possessions differently"; and 9: "It is this force of contradiction at the heart of the Bible that makes our study so demanding and difficult and which for the same reasons makes it urgently important."

41 See, e.g., ibid., 48 on the how the practical effect (if not also intent) of a law like that found in Deut 24:10-13, 17 "is to make collateral so inconvenient that it is not demanded in the first place."

42 Cf. Brueggemann's remarks on Israel's potential disappearance into Canaan's predatory economic practice (ibid., 40, 42).

43 Cf. ibid., 10: "As any serious church leader knows, the one and only thing that is off-limits for comment or critique is the money system and its military support that undergird the illusionary well-being of our society." Note also 12: "the Bible is inimical to the sentiment heard by so many courageous preachers, 'Stick to religion and stay away from politics and economics.'"

44 Ibid., xxi: "The recovery of the economic dimension of the gospel… will require a rearticulation of much that passes in our society for serious Christian faith." This, too, is no easy task and one notes, in recent studies, attention being paid to how the church has failed businesspeople exactly at the point of helping them live their faith in the marketplace. See, inter alia, Joleen M. Forrest, "Do, Love, and Walk: A Study for Faith and Leadership" (D.Min.; Candler School of Theology, 2017) with literature (online at: http://pitts.emory.edu/files/dmin/Forrest_2017DMinProject.pdf; accessed 11/10/17).