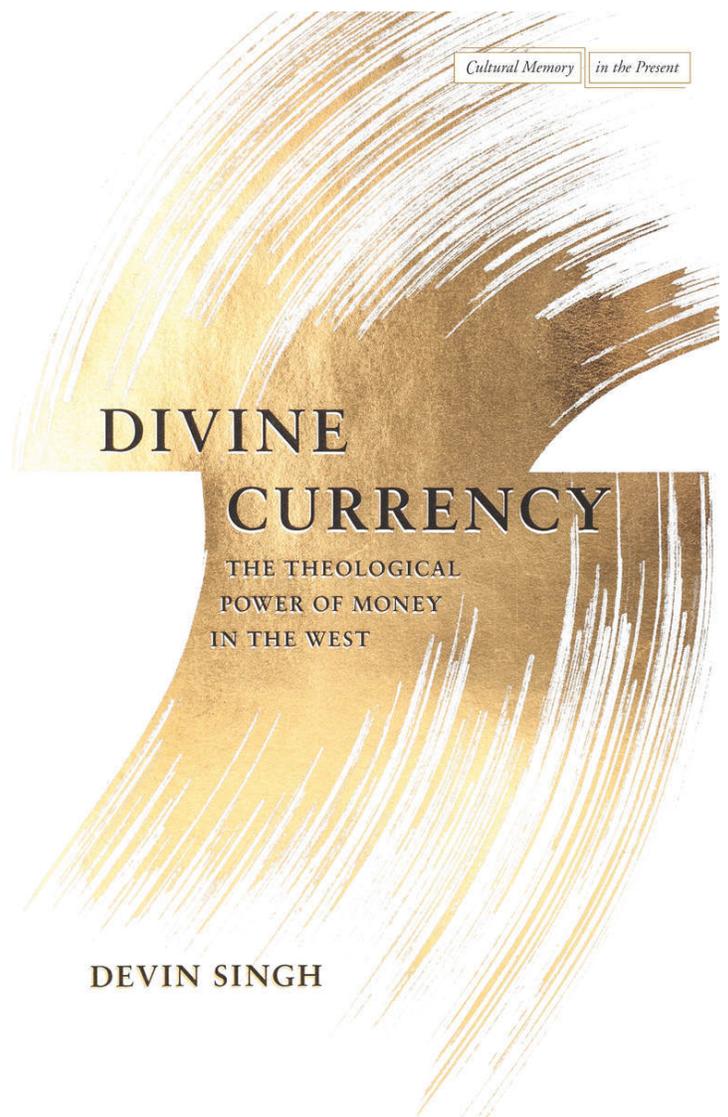


# New Directions in the Anthropology of Christianity Review Forum, no. 4

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## Forum Introduction

Kyle Byron, University of Toronto

Our previous review forums have focused on books and articles that self-consciously contribute to the anthropology of Christianity—Matthew Tomlinson’s *Ritual Textuality: Pattern and Motion in Performance*, the special issue of *Current Anthropology*, “The Anthropology of Christianity: Unity Diversity, New Directions,” and Sonja Luehrmann’s *Praying with the Senses: Contemporary Orthodox Christian Spirituality in Practice*. For our fourth forum, we wanted to invite a group of scholars to engage a text that speaks to key problems in the anthropology of Christianity without being constrained by it; put optimistically, we wanted to create a less disciplined opportunity to think in the spaces between the anthropology of Christianity, economic anthropology, and political theology (and also to question the production and maintenance of these distinct spaces). With this goal in mind, we are excited to publish this review forum on Devin Singh’s *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West*.

*Divine Currency* explores the resonances between Christian theology and money in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Singh’s argument, however, is much broader, scaling outward to reflect on the relationship between religion and the economy, as well as the relationship between ancient sovereignty and modern governmentality. While each contributor engages these central arguments, they also draw new connections, follow loose threads, and fold ethnographic insights into the text. In her contribution, Anna-Riikka Kauppinen reflects on the ways that Singh’s writing—the metaphors, imagery, turns of phrase—frames the “and” of religion and economy, suggesting that Singh helps us develop an analytic language for describing the spheres of religion and economy as not simply related, but as a zone of indistinction, to borrow Giorgio Agamben’s phrase. Scott MacLochlainn focuses on features of money seemingly beyond the grasp of the sovereign, namely, its potentiality and fungibility. How, MacLochlainn asks, does the concept of money as abstracted exchange-value relate to the dynamic between materiality and immateriality at play in Christian theology and subjectivity? In his contribution, Bill Maurer attempts to anthropologize Singh’s argument, exploring the concept of ransom, not as a theopolitical category, but as an actual practice that configures dynamics of gender, kinship, and inheritance. Daromir Rudnykyj draws our attention to the metaphorical “tails” of the coin—the operations of the market. If money is a technology of sovereign power, as Singh argues, then how should we understand practices of exchange? And what can these practices teach us about the potential non-modernity of economic governance? Finally, the forum concludes with a response from Singh, who offers his own reflections on the comments and critiques of the contributors.

Of course, these soundbites are not intended to adequately capture each author’s contribution. Rather, they are meant to demonstrate the wide variety of ways that *Divine Currency* might matter for the anthropology of Christianity, and to gesture toward the value of engagement across the various disciplines, fields, and sub-fields represented here. At best, we hope that this forum contributes to this engagement in some small way. And, if nothing else, we are honored to have provided an opportunity for our contributors to, as Maurer writes, “get weird.”

We would like to thank Anna-Riikka Kauppinen, Scott MacLochlainn, Bill Maurer, Daromir Rudnykyj, and Devin Singh for their generous participation.

## God's Calculative Experiments: Divine Economic Agency in Early Christianity and Anthropological Theory

Anna-Riikka Kauppinen, University of Cambridge

“Look at the dollar. It's the only currency that is stable, that never goes down. The dollar says, boldly, 'In God we trust'. Any money that is so boldly for God, God doesn't allow it to go down,” said Sophia, who I had just met in the head office of a Ghanaian group of companies where she worked as the Communications manager. Holding a crumpled one-dollar note in her hands, a note I had seen many Ghanaian Christians carry in their pocket or purse, she told me to look at the note carefully to understand the power of the words imprinted on it. It was early 2019, a moment when the local currency, Ghanaian cedi, was, again, experiencing a drop in value against the dollar. While Sophia was framing the dollar as God's currency, her comment raised the silent question of whether the cedi, which featured images of Ghanaian politicians and the signature of the present governor of Bank of Ghana, was deficient in terms of divine address. What, exactly, was the efficacy of the words, 'In God we Trust', printed on the American dollar?

I could vividly recall the encounter with Sophia when reading Devin Singh's *Divine Currency. The Theological Power of Money in the West*, which is a stimulating journey into the intricate ways in which Christian thought articulated with the expansion of monetary economy in late antiquity. Building on the foundation established by Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault on the Christian origins of Western ideas of political sovereignty, Singh offers a 'theological genealogy of economy in the West' (p. 7) through exegesis of key Christian texts of the time. Excavating the works of the likes of Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and especially Eusebius of Caesarea, *Divine Currency* traces how doctrines such as God's sovereignty and conquest over Satan through Christ was formulated in relation to numismatic language. The Christian thinkers of late antiquity appear as acute observers of the Greco-Roman empire that was rapidly changing along with the emergence of money as a new technology of rule. Drawing in particular on the ancient concepts of *oikonomia*, money as a transgressive medium, and money-lending and debt bondage, Singh presents a compelling narrative of how God comes to be conceptualised as an 'economic administrator' and Christ as 'God's currency', the 'coin' that was 'minted' by God himself. These idioms, which Singh calls 'theopolitical' given that they are 'zones of indistinction' between economic, political and theological spheres (p. 11-12), become key constituents of patristic theological discourse.

The six main chapters stage a rich array of instantiations of the emergence of Christian orthodoxy in integral relationship to such zones of indistinction, in which theological writing seamlessly fuses economic, political, and religious imagery. At the centre is the emergence of God as an 'economist', the administrator of resources whose planning directs the course of history on Earth. In Chapters one and two, the concept of *oikonomia* serves as the early conceptual framing for God's calculative management of resources, with money as the novel kind of resource. Eusebius's writings take the centre stage here. For him, God is the head of the divine economy whose power generates the stability that Rome achieves under the Christian Emperor Constantine. These circumstances create the conditions of possibility for Christ's incarnation, in which new monetary practices such as taxation play a key role. In the early theologians' accounts, Augustus' tax census that set Mary and Joseph on the way to Bethlehem

is part of the divine plan. God literally ‘moves the soul’ of Augustus (‘p. 48), so that he ‘unwittingly would assist the coming of the Only-begotten one’, in the words of Chrysostom. Subsequent chapters give further evidence on the presence of *calculative practice*, which ‘does not invalidate grace’ (p. 63) but rather becomes key constitutive of God’s agency. God calculates as he mandates resource transfer between rich and the poor, operates through Emperor Constantine’s acts of grace and mercy (chapter 3), and entrusts the ‘good of the cosmos’ to the Son, who becomes what Eusebius describes as ‘faithful keeper of a deposit’ (p. 75). These economic idioms are crucial in establishing a distinction and division of labour between the Father and the Son, which is necessary given the other competing theological traditions, such as Gnosticism (p. 76). With respect to these and many other rich instantiations, Singh has gathered a superb bibliographic resource in footnotes that contains alternative readings of the same texts, that are particularly useful for future studies.

At the centre of Singh’s project is to unravel the genealogical origins of the power of money in the West, which has expanded to other territories through colonial conquest. On the other hand, his objective is to understand the emergence of Christian doctrine at a time of major economic and political change in the Roman empire. More broadly, *Divine Currency* is an example of the kind of hermeneutics of interpretation that skilfully navigates the middle ground between historical materialism and idealism as ideal type modes of analysis (cf Ricoeur 1970: 32-33). An intriguing conceptual tension in Singh’s analysis concerns the unfolding of history through material and technological change vis-à-vis theological visions of the nature of the cosmos. From the onset, Singh states that his project diverges from the kind of theological writing that establishes a sharp distinction between the divine economy of ‘gift and gratuity’ represented in binary opposition to money (p. 10). The shortcoming of this type of analysis is to miss the important ways in which monetary expansion shaped the very concepts of theology. In Latour’s terms (1993), to acknowledge this convergence does not ‘pollute’ theology as a disciplinary endeavour, but rather, gives clues to further empirical investigations on the ways in which the modern technocratic talk about the economy emerged in integral relationship to theological discourse. This makes the familiar, Weberian point that unfolding of history is not unidirectional, namely, from material changes to changes in ideas and ideologies, or vice versa – rather, as Singh puts it, “If money lends its logic to the structuring of theology, God-talk repays by offering its prestige and sacred power to the world of exchange” (p.2).

At the same time, the kind of Weberian hermeneutics that *Divine Currency* advances does evoke further questions. Singh attributes major explanatory power to the technologies and objects of monetary economy, most intriguingly, coinage and the practice of minting. In Chapter 3, titled “The Emperor’s Righteous Money,” we learn of the ‘sacral aura’ of money in antiquity, where it emerged as a religious medium. According to Singh, Eusebius drew precisely on this existing transgressive potential of money in recounting the story of Constantine minting coins that pictured an image of himself praying. To directly quote Eusebius here, for its brilliance: “The great strength of the divinely inspired faith fixed in his soul might be deduced by considering also the fact that he had his own portrait so depicted on the gold coinage that he appeared to look upwards in the manner of one reaching out to God in prayer. Impressions of this type were circulated throughout the entire Roman world” (*Life of Constantine* 4.15.1-2, cit. in Singh 2018: 88-89). For Singh, excavating these kind of passages speaks direct language of the ways in which theologians of the time drew on monetary idioms, and recognised its power in legitimising rule.

The question goes, to what extent does the development of such concrete practices such as coinage and minting yield material power? *Divine Currency* lucidly demonstrates the linkage between these technological changes and the language of theology. However, I suggest that the other side of the equation, namely, 'God-talk repays by offering its prestige and sacred power to the world of exchange', may be about *more than* legitimising power in the empire. After all, as Singh's material makes clear, Eusebius admired Constantine for how 'seriously' he seemed to take his Christian faith, to the extent that he interpreted Constantine's prayerful image minted on the coins as a sign of extraordinary, 'divinely inspired faith'. For Eusebius, this act seems to be less about legitimising power, than about expressing faith, and perhaps, addressing God directly. God is clearly *an agent* here, the kind of agent whose presence and cause Constantine desires to advance, which makes Eusebius conclude that the Roman empire is ultimately God's instrument for advancing the Kingdom. The great merit in Singh's book is to offer precisely this kind of material that lends itself to interpretation, which raises broader question on the unfolding of potentially new 'theopolitical economies' of our time, in which the divine is made to appear as an agent of history.

Another horizontal dimension in *Divine Currency* is the exceptionally rich array of human and non-human characters who move at various levels of analysis. On one hand, the theologians of late antiquity appear as the 'key witnesses'. However, the most vivid characters in the story are God, and remarkably, Satan, while Christ himself appears as the currency that God creates as his precious 'coin' that ultimately defeats the power of Satan. Gregory of Nyssa's ransom theory, controversial as it was in late antiquity, depicts God and Satan engaged in a game of debt and trickery, which Singh connects with ancient idiom of money-lending and debt bondage (Ch 5-6). Christ is construed as a ransom that God hands over to Satan in order to free humanity of its sins inflicted since the Fall, but Satan is consequently 'ensnared' and taken over by the unforeseen value of Christ as God's coin, which makes Satan indebted, and thus subject, to God. Here, the generative role of the Devil in the emergence of theopolitical economies is particularly intriguing. The Devil is construed as an agent of history, too, which is crucial to the ways in which God emerges as the chief economist in early Christian thought. One is reminded of classics such as June C. Nash's (1993) *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us*, Michael Taussig's (1980) *Devil and Commodity Fetishism*, Birgit Meyer's (1999) *Translating the Devil*, which illuminate the foundational image of the Devil in shaping theological and economic discourse in post-colonial settings. What thus makes Singh's text particularly valuable for both the anthropology of Christianity and economic anthropology is the illustration of the multiplicity of generative forces that matter in shaping discourse of social change.

I have a few comments to make in relation to Singh's inspiring example to ask novel questions on the precise, concrete ways in which Christian theological concepts mutually articulate with economic discourse. This work is currently well on the way in the anthropology of Christianity. Anthropologists have investigated the emergence of Charismatic Christian political economies (Haynes 2017) and economic imaginaries (Meyer 2007; De Witte 2012), evangelical financial ethics (Zaloom 2016), and Christian activism and humanitarian efforts (Bornstein 2004; Elisha 2011; Schertz 2013), while others have looked at the complex 'developmental roles' that Charismatic Christian churches in particular have adopted following the post-1990s currents of economic privatisation (Freeman & al. 2012; Deacon 2012). As a comparative body of work, anthropologists working in Islamic settings have pioneered inquiry into the kind of assemblages

of religious and economic ethics that shape modern sites of capitalist production and the very concept of economics (e.g Pitluck 2008; Retsikas 2017; Rudnyckj 2010, 2018; Sloane-White 2017). Connecting this rich empirical work with Singh's notion of theopolitical economy, that we can expect to hear a lot more about in the future, one avenue to consider is the kind of analytical language that captures the mutual constitution of religion and economy in social change. While Singh carefully avoids the dead-end question of 'which comes first', some of his phrasing suggests that religion and economy are, still, ontologically separate entities. This is indexed through phrasing such as 'analogous structural relations *between* theological discourse and the economy proper' (p. 4, emphasis mine), 'intermeshing' (p. 18), and 'horizon of union *between* money and theology' (p. 18, emphasis mine). While it may indeed important to preserve the sense 'Christ does not equal money', as he reminds us in the beginning, the question goes, is there a way to develop the kind of analytical language that considers religion and economy as 'one'? What would be the merit of developing that sort of language in the first place?

I suggest that *Divine Currency* already contains much potential for developing an approach that does not assume ontologically separate spheres, given its several gems of interpretation. Consider, for instance, the following (p. 175): "Satan transacts with God, receiving the lent sum of value (Christ), but suddenly finds himself in bonds of obligation with God, snared on a christological financial fishhook." *Christological financial fishhook*. This is precisely the kind of vivid image that presents religion and economy as not simply 'related', or even 'meshed', but much more profoundly constituting the same object or action. Also, the very notion of theopolitical economy challenges post-Enlightenment separation of spheres, which includes the tendency to conceive of academic vocation as consisting of distinct areas of expertise (e.g anthropology of religion as indexing a different sort of expertise to economic anthropology). The history of anthropology also gives some clues, including Malinowski's (2001) *Coral Gardens* in which the concept of magic links ritual practice with imageries of agricultural growth. The point being that Singh's mode of writing gives a variety of ideas on how to develop this type of language, which future empirical research can build on.

The final question, what does this genealogical work do in terms theorising trajectories of theopolitical transformation at the level of popular economies? When reading *Divine Currency*, the anthropological imagination pictures the intellectuals of antiquity in interaction with the wider society, which is at the heart of Singh's argument. The theologians Singh engages with were intellectuals, but also, one can presume they had friends, they were sons, nephews, affines, and perhaps in some cases, lovers and partners. Were there potentially distinctive kind of 'theologies on the ground' (Haynes 2018) that Christian intellectuals in different times engaged with, as they developed their corpus that subsequently becomes canonised as academically recognised theology? Were there distinctive kind of popular theologies of the nature of God, Christ, and especially the Devil, that articulated with the official work of 'doing theology'? How can we ultimately democratise the practice of doing theology as we seek to understand the historical unfolding of novel type of theopolitical economies?

As my friend Sophie reminded me, to understand why the American dollar 'never goes down' requires careful genealogical work on the mysterious ways in which monetary circuits operate beyond supply and demand. *Divine Currency* offers a rich source of inspiration to continue investigations into these urgent questions of our time. What holds and fixes value is a

matter of power, knowledge, and the agency of various human and non-human others, that calls for constant future ethnographic attention.

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## Money, Materiality, and Fungible Selves

Scott MacLochlainn, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Devin Singh's book, *Divine Currency*, describes a remarkably generative space for thinking through the influence, cross-pollination, and otherwise mutual interloping of Christian and economic thought. While situated within a very particular history of Christian thought, including the likes of Gregory of Nyssa and Irenaeus, it is how a late-antiquity Christianity speaks to contemporary modes of economic governance that is Singh's concern. What, he asks, are the theological dimensions of money and ("Western") economic power? His explicit interest here is not in describing the reaches of a Christian and economic intersection, but rather in locating how the alchemy between the two gave rise to a particular ideological space of governance and sovereignty—and the discrepancies between the two. To that end, the 4<sup>th</sup> century Christian thinker, Eusebius of Caesura, is an important figure in the book, seeking, as he did, as Singh describes, to merge Christian and sovereign (Constantine the Great's) authority over economic practice. In sketching the parameters of how the economy is predicated on forms of divine control, oversight, engagement and disengagement, which in turn enacts and secures sovereign power, Singh returns throughout the book to both Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault as important theoretical points of departure and arrival.

In this brief response, however, it is not so much Singh's arguments related to governance and sovereignty I wish to engage, but rather the question of money—notably, that of money's *potentiality* and *fungibility*. Interestingly, while money is foregrounded, notably in the second half of the book, it is as a representational force, with its inscribed links to governmentality and sovereignty. There is, I would argue, more to the matter of money here than Singh describes—reaching beyond the confines of sovereign power and governmentality, something important to the book's argument—something much more Christian.

But first, a note on the relationship between Christianity and Economy that runs throughout Singh's argument. The unsettled division, dialectic, or perhaps feedback loop of materiality and immateriality—so central in theology and Christian experience, is an important conceptual space for Singh, as he sets about describing how a divine "presence" was seen to be at play in earthly endeavors, notably those of an economic character. The inherent fluidity between the transcendent and immanent, and the material and immaterial in Christianity, is as Singh shows, hugely productive in fusing the divine and economic together—often through language and imagery. While maintaining the separation between the two totems of "Christian" and "Economic," in order to capture the ideological movement between the two, terms such as "invocation," "resonance," "tropes," "valences," and "signals" permeate the book. The Incarnation, for example, as Singh delicately describes, itself slips between metaphor and conceptual truth in understanding God's will and participation in earthly economic pursuits. Such differentiation between God and Son, transcendence and immanence, heaven and earth, are fertile territory for Christian theologians to configure the space of *Oikonomia*.

It is still at play. Is heaven the great human resources department in the sky, God the state, and was Jesus a corporate CEO? Or was he an instantiation and circulation of God's power and governance, that is, God's currency? Beyond the potency of Christian and economic tropes, there is another point here, and one that is at the heart of *Divine Currency*. Contemporary economic forms, diffused among state bureaucracies, private corporations, consumers and

citizens, are not only held together by ideologies that money is at the nexus of. Instead, the forms of distributed power that we see in the very mundane spaces of management and delegation and state-backed futures, are inherent and emergent in Christian thought, and as Singh notes have been “conveyed to Western modernity” (195). This forcefulness of metaphor and analogy is seen by Singh to likewise imbue money “as a sign and representation instituted by sovereign power” (17). Noting that the relation between theology and money is one “...exceeding analogy and involving historical relations and moments of coemergence” (17) we see Singh describing throughout *Divine Currency* that money’s ability as metaphor—to be enacted as a circulating ground upon which sovereignty and governance can be made and enforced—is what enables it to be an “instrument of rule.”

I just want to highlight another mode in which money binds that of economy and of Christianity, as noted, that of potentiality and fungibility, concepts that are worth exploring within the framework of *Divine Currency*. If not directly suggestive of the forms of sovereignty and governance that Singh argues fuses Christianity and money, I would argue they are essential to both, individually and together. As Singh describes, money and coinage became elemental to how the state aggregated and circulated its power. As he writes, “Money is communicative and proclamatory, declaring the nature and values of the sovereign. It draws upon the imperial image, sharing in and augmenting its authority” (93). In this space, we have the materiality of money coexisting with its symbolic force, not only of economic value, but of state control itself. But outside of the sovereign, in its potentiality in exchange-value, as a concept, it retains a potency.

This potency of money, moving beyond that of representation, is a crucial one within contemporary Christian spaces. In my own work, on how the modern corporate form fuses with religious ones in the Philippines, how religious communities enact themselves as transnational corporations, and how business corporations articulate themselves as religious subjects, money is often dangerous, simultaneously enabling and threatening the fulfilment of a Christian ethic. Singh is not wrong in that money is shapeshifting in its metaphorical force and attached to forms of rule, but I would suggest it is far more pervasive, and occupies a fault-line in Christian experience. We find it in the most prosaic of Christian spaces.

*Money Unseen. One of the most common acts of Christian worship—that of offerings, allows us to understand a particular valence of money—one that we see in the book, but not fully articulated. Take Catholic mass in Mindoro, in the Philippines, in my own research. So recurrent is the act of church offering as to solidify itself as an ethnographic present. During the giving of communion, six volunteers, nearly always older women, each take a green crushed velvet purse on a wooden stick and begin to move along the pews. As the choir sings, and music plays through the speakers, the women begin to move along the pews, fluidly, but willing to pointedly shake the purses in people’s faces if needs be. If these purses keep the collected money concealed, so too do the hands of congregants, clutched hard to keep secret how much they are offering. Or in a born again evangelical service down the street, hands of congregants similarly clasped, but this time walking up to the front to place the money in boxes. The darkness of the purses and boxes, and the closed hands in giving, lead to the counting of the offerings in private after everyone has left. Those same women gather around a small table, away from clergy and congregants, and other eyes, and with small pencils and scraps of torn notebook paper, whispering to themselves, take count of the money. They then enter the sum totals and date into a large, formal accounting*

*ledger, and then place the money and ledger away in an office for safe keeping, locking the door on their way out.*

The act of offering, so public and collective, is a surprisingly concealed affair. The forms of privacy and anonymity amidst this giving, often explained in ostensibly superficial terms of courtesy and decorum—to not speak of money and wealth—belies, it would seem, a more thorough reckoning of the power of money in Christianity that is taking place every Sunday in every church. Money has that charged quality, required for Christianity to organizationally sustain itself (with all its attendant administrative and bureaucratic forms)—to keep the lights on as it were. But it also risks desire of accumulation, dangerous in its very potential.

Contemporary forms of money, fully stripped of use-value, and purified in exchange-value, is forever potentialized, existing as an always yet-to-be-actualized. Moreover, its inherent fungibility—its interchangeability, its ability to replace and be replaced, constitutes money's essence. The potentiality and fungibility of money mirrors and intersects with much of Christian subjectivity. Even outside of the specificities of theology (one is always tempted to align the transformative aspect of money with the transubstantiation), we see future-oriented transformation, conversion, and transmutation articulated daily in Christian experience. But money is also evidence, not of economic potential, or indeed Weber's famous Protestant ethic, but of corruption in accumulation, of illicit motivations, of insincerity of faith.

That money is "a tactic of sovereignty, an established system of abstract accounting" as Singh notes, "with attendant symbols and tokens, one that ties spaces of economic production and exchange to channels of indebtedness to and commerce with governing powers" (12/13) is undoubtedly true. But the forms of indebtedness and obligation that money enacts is far wider than that, both securing and threatening Christians and their future. We need not look to the extravagances of a prosperity gospel and the white suits, pinky signet rings, and botoxed foreheads of televangelists to see how money and Christianity co-exist in constant and uneasy ways.

In anthropology, money has gained much attention (For example, important in establishing a current anthropology of money has been Graeber 2001, Guyer 2004, Maurer 2005, Munn 1986, Parry & Bloch 1989, and ethnographically engaging Christian forms of money, Keane 2007). It comes as no surprise that reciprocity and exchange, fetish and objectification, magic and im/materiality have loomed large in anthropological engagements with money. To that end, anthropology has had no qualms, indeed would be the first to explore how people see economy and money suffused with divine purpose and control. As Singh describes, notably in relation to Foucault, the concept of shepherding and pastoral practice, in which the divine is both present and extricated, allows for particular types of material and immaterial practices to be likewise imbued with divine and earthly forms of sovereignty. Money is a prime example of just that.

Overall, Singh does an admirable job in gesturing to some foundational spaces in which the contemporary economic subject arose. Without forcing the discussion of Christianity and economy into a reductive space of markets, rationality and divine agency, Singh instead sketches a space that urges us to rethink the very nature of management, administration, and organization in both Christian and economic spaces. The most potent contribution that Singh makes in this book, however, is not that particular economic practices, or indeed the role sovereignty and governance (and surveillance) play in contemporary economic spaces are

tethered to a Christian logos. Rather it is to show how “economy,” as concept and practice is a strange, mercurial sponge of meaning—made and remade by the invocations of image and word, gods and spirits, filled with obligation and as well as grace.

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## Family Values from Divine Ransom to Debt Refusal: Comment on Devin Singh's *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West*

Bill Maurer, University of California, Irvine

Devin Singh's fascinating book traces the intertwining of early Christian arguments about salvation and the era's emerging monetary economies. He zooms in on the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, the period of Roman imperial expansion under the banner of Christianity and the attendant religio-political arguments undergirding the extension of state administration to new populations. In the moral management of these new subjects Singh finds precursors to 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century neoliberal governmentality. The early Christian doctrines linking salvation, conquest, and governance through economic relations, or "economic exchange, payment, and debt obligation as a method of ameliorating evil and as a solution to opposition and power struggle," provides "a founding template" for governmental rule and for the "centrality of money as a modern tool of sovereignty and conquest" (p. 136).

The argument is bold and broad. Others will likely criticize it for its breathtaking expansiveness, tracing a genealogy from neoliberal governmentality as described by Michel Foucault to 4<sup>th</sup> century theological arguments among a handful of patrician writers. I find much more interesting its specificity. For Singh is not saying that contemporary governmentality or governance through economic management is infused with some vague Christian ethos or informed by generalized Christian principles of divine grace (the invisible hand or whatnot). Rather he is arguing quite narrowly that the doctrines of salvation being worked out during the period of Christian expansion had a specific relationship to governance through monetary payments of various sorts. For most anthropologists who study money, Singh's argument that money is a "tactic of sovereignty" (p.20) or that the ancient economy was "embedded" in social and political relations a la Karl Polanyi will not be news. What captivated me, however, is Singh's attention to a set of monetary transactions, grouped up under the term "ransom," animating these early Christian thinkers and pointing toward resonances with contemporary configurations of money, politics—and family, which is not made explicit in his account and about which, more below.

Singh convincingly shows that early church fathers' soteriology was explicitly monetary in nature. Where later medieval thinkers focused on Christ's "suffering and death" and an "economy of penance and pain," these 4<sup>th</sup> century writers "focused instead on a narrative of divine payment to and eventual deception of Satan, who had enslaved humanity" (p. 134). The "coin of God"—Christ—was the compensatory payment in this redemptive exchange. Understanding salvation as payment, in particular a ransom payment, further stitched together ideas about debt slavery and conquest with Christian governance, and provided a template for managing "outsiders" (p. 135). Conquest extended economic relations of empire which, because trade awakened the least dangerous of the human passions, fostered peace (a precursor to Montesquieu's *doux commerce*, p. 133). At the same time imperial rule brought new subjects into a relationship of debt with the emperor, himself an extension of Christ, and continual relations of repayment of their debt to the empire for their life. And if Christ paid with *his* life to redeem humanity, conquerors could give alms to save—and subordinate—both the poor and conquered and in so doing also save themselves. One of Singh's thinkers, Eusebius, could thus

claim that the incarnation was divinely timed to coincide with Roman imperial consolidation and expansion insofar as conquest brought “unity, stability, and peace brought through economic exchange” (p. 149) and Constantine provided “a concrete model of theopolitical redeemer by literally purchasing the lives of captured enemy combatants” (p.149-150).

Ransom was the core metaphor for explaining this religious economy. Singh focuses on the Cappadocian figure of Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory’s ransom theory brings in elements of duplicity and deceit while elevating human free will. Gregory’s argument runs basically thus (and I am going to caricature it in the interest of moving my own argument along): humans are easily distracted by their desires. They want nice things and their desire knows no bounds. Satan takes advantage of this by luring humans with “what is unreal” (Gregory writes, quoted by Singh, p. 153), that is, by appearances, and by excess. Gregory uses the analogy of a fish attracted to bait on the hook: the devil dresses up bondage with a juicy fleshy worm. The fish, of its own free will, goes for the bait and is hooked on the line. The free will part is important for otherwise humanity’s bondage is unjust: we need the freedom to *choose* a beauty whether true or deceptive. Because humanity freely chose the devil’s deception, humanity’s bondage is therefore just. Gregory invokes the concept of just slavery, for humanity chose its enslavement by its pursuit of pleasure. (This will be important in conquests that bring in new bonded persons but do so “justly.”)

The problem is that God cannot now redeem humanity through a forceful, tyrannical act, otherwise God would be a tyrant, and Satan would “cry foul” (p. 154). Monetary payment comes to the rescue: compensation balances the scales, so to speak, in repaying the debt. God intercedes to pay back the bondage debt incurred by humanity, in the coin of Christ. In making of Christ a currency Gregory draws on the Greek notions of money as “the chief instrument for the gratification of [vicely] desires” (Plato, quoted by Singh on p. 152). There is a principle of proportionality here. God tricks the devil the same way the latter tricked humanity: by dressing up his coin, his own snare, in flesh, the flesh of Christ. Now, the son of God is clearly worth more than the souls of all mankind. But this is in accord with the law of financial interest and prevailing ideas about the just repayment of the debt slave’s loan. Singh thus shows that the fishhook story is “thoroughly permeated with the logic of moneylending and debt slavery” (p. 160).

Bear with me, dear reader, because this is going to get weird, fast. At this point, I could have decided to delve into Singh’s engagement with Giorgio Agamben or Michel Foucault—who loom large here—or gone further into the writing of the church father he draws on. But instead I decided I wanted to know more about *actual* money payments in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and specifically, in Cappadocia, the scene of most of Singh’s writers. What were people actually doing with money in this time and place? What kinds of payments did they make, ransom-like or otherwise, in their everyday lives, not only in the scene of conquest? What kind of coins did they use, or did they use something else? My anthropological training led me to search for things like marriage payments because they are a site for the suturing of political, moral and economic relations (Collier 1988). I had no idea where even to start. So I looked up Gregory of Nyssa for some biographical clues. And discovered his elder sister, Macrina the Younger.

Disclaimer: Early Christian theology is not in my wheelhouse. Roman Anatolia is not my geographic area of expertise. The 4<sup>th</sup> century CE? Before reading this book, all I knew about it was Constantine, and what I knew about Constantine was... Constantine. But, for what it’s worth, what follows is my attempt to anthropologize Gregory of Nyssa’s period and place in order to

provide some clues about family values animating the idea of ransom and its lineage in neoliberalism today.

Gregory and Macrina were from a well-off family. They had several land holdings and estates. We know that her mother “was paying taxes to three governors, since her property was scattered throughout that number of provinces.”<sup>1</sup> Gregory credits his sister with his own education, and wrote *The Life of Macrina* to recount her spiritual teachings and her death. Macrina had been betrothed to a man who died before they could wed. Never really wanting to marry anyway, Macrina devoted herself to her mother and to God. She remained a virgin. She guided her mother toward “the immaterial, more perfect life.” When her brother Basil returned from schooling full of arrogance, Macrina brought him over to her asceticism; he renounced his ways and adopted a life of manual labor.

Gregory writes:

Since any reason for living a more materialistic way of life was now taken away, Macrina persuaded her mother to give up their accustomed way of life, their rather ostentatious life-style and the services she had previously been accustomed to receive from her maids, and she also persuaded her to put herself on an equal footing with the many in spirit and to share a common life with all her maids, making them sisters and equals instead of slaves and servants.

This meant that “every difference of rank [was] eliminated from their lives,” and they lived, in their property now held in common with their former servants, now rendered “sisters,” a life of “holy conduct ... that ... exceeds the power of words to describe it. For just as souls are freed from their bodies by death and at the same time liberated from the cares of this life, so was their existence separated from these things, removed from all of life's vanity and fashioned in harmonious imitation of the life of the angels.”

“Wow!” I thought to myself, “Gregory’s sister basically took down the aristocratic lineage! She put all the property into some kind of common trust or something for a whole community of ascetic women.” In other words, she refused the relationships of debt incumbent on any monetary transaction, or on any kinship ties, as well.

What the hell??

So then I needed to know more about aristocratic women, property, and virginity in this place and period. Jerome, another 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century figure, helped me on my way with his Letter 23 to Eustochium, on marriage and virginity. For Jerome, marriage is the fallen state, virginity the natural state, yet marriage is necessary to provide more virgins. Jerome also makes a near-monetary analogy along the way: “I praise wedlock, I praise marriage, but it is because they give me virgins. I gather the rose from the thorns, the gold from the earth, the pearl from the shell” (Letter 23: 20).<sup>2</sup> With virginity’s gold one can repay a ransom for humanity’s sins.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the Life of Macrina are taken from the online version available at [https://monasticmatrix.osu.edu/sites/monasticmatrix.osu.edu/files/cartularium/primary\\_texts/mm-S12095-corrigan-lifeofmacr.html](https://monasticmatrix.osu.edu/sites/monasticmatrix.osu.edu/files/cartularium/primary_texts/mm-S12095-corrigan-lifeofmacr.html), last accessed February 15, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> From <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/jerome-marriage.asp>, last accessed February 15, 2020.

It turns out that during the 4<sup>th</sup> century there was a rush of aristocratic women to the “fad” of virgin asceticism (Yarbrough 1976: 161). Why? Historian Anne Yarbrough summarizes: there had been “society of idle and wealthy women living in a ghetto peopled by children, servants, and sycophants. The frustrated productivity of these aristocratic women sought outlets in what has been described as ‘competitive salon culture’” (Yarbrough 1976:153, citing Hopkins 1965). One way out of salon culture was to adopt Christian asceticism. Those aristocratic women choosing asceticism thereby also rejected familial responsibilities, and refused the relationships of credit and debt that extend from such responsibilities, too. Hence, for Macrina, the placing of property in common, with former maidservants, beyond the reach of inheritance forever, as well as the vow of chastity, taking her out of the system of (re)production for any future lineage. Yarbrough recounts how other aristocratic women (not in Cappadocia but in elsewhere in the empire) sold off all their property (Yarbrough 1976:156). Such actions were a “scandal” because they “threatened the financial basis of” the entire aristocratic class: Roman aristocrats were landed aristocrats. The only way they accumulated wealth was through inheritance, marriage payments, and government offices (Ibid., see Hopkins 1965).

So in these competitive salons aristocratic women were also jockeying for status in a world of bounded, not limitless, wealth. Indeed those salons were not a frivolous affair but necessary as women sought to gain advantage for their sons and daughters because their status later in life would have been determined by the inheritances these women were able to leave them. The picture that emerges is one of a rather unstable hierarchy of rank in which one could rise and fall by virtue of one’s competitive engagement with other high-ranking people. Virginity, and the removal of aristocratic property from the inheritance equation, was a truly radical break with the prevailing order.

Or so it might seem. Historians of the Roman family note that the ideology of the “once-married matron” emerged right as the property relations supporting it were eroding (Clark 1995: 357) and that the “antifamilialism” of church fathers served rather to “bolster the power of ecclesiastical leaders” (Ibid., p. 358; see also Dixon 1992).

Yarbrough points out that asceticism afforded women of aristocratic lineage with something they’d heretofore lacked: freedom. “The rise of asceticism provided the aristocratic woman with an increasingly acceptable alternative to marriage” (p. 162). Running off into the desert or establishing a monastery provided women with agency, access to knowledge, and their own life. At the expense of the lineage and the aristocratic class itself. (Interestingly, like Singh, Yarbrough tied her account to present-day theoretical concerns by comparing this period of asceticism with 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritans).

Macrina’s asceticism and virginity would seem to have taken the bait off the hook, so to speak, permitting a renunciation of the obligations that Christ’s redemption entails while simultaneously being its own form of payment for the sins of humanity. Humanity’s sin was born in fleshy temptation. Virgin ascetics take that off the table, refusing the further extension (in progeny) of that debt relation and standing in the place of Christ the redeemer. I am suggesting that Macrina’s “sinless innocence” (Singh, p. 134) and that of others of her gender and class who elected asceticism also provided a “saving transaction” (Singh, p. 135). At the same time, that asceticism depended on one’s prior aristocratic privilege: not everyone could set up a monastery, and those maidservants would not have been able to run off into the desert on their own without being released from their patronesses’ bondage. As with ransom-as-redemption,

aristocratic women's asceticism "valorizes payment as it celebrates divine kindness [while] it endorses the power dynamics of debt slavery and economic conquest" (Singh, p. 135). Common property takes one out of debt slavery—but one still needs the lands of the estate in order to have one's monastic life (unless one chooses running off with "wild monks in the desert" (Yarbrough 1976:160), I suppose).

But wait, there's more! Not content to limit my speculation to actual monetary transactions in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE and having discovered aristocratic women's competitive salon culture and the corresponding escape through virgin asceticism, I wanted to know more about those fish on the hook. Literally. Learning that Gregory of Nyssa was from a landholding aristocratic family made me want to know: what did they eat? I was thinking along the lines of James Scott's (2017) account of early states, *Against the Grain*, the role of cereal agriculture in establishing political hierarchies and forms of dominance, and the longstanding historical tension between landholding aristocrats and seafarers (as discussed by many authors including Hann and Hart 1998). My inner archaeological anthropologist kicked in. Again, I caution you that this is, as the historians might say, "not my period, not my area," but it turns out that evidence I was able to find suggests—not surprisingly—that the diet of 4<sup>th</sup> century Cappadocians was probably grain- and goat-heavy. These were agro-pastoralists. Pollen analysis for the period from 300-670 shows rye, wheat, barley as well as grape, olive and chestnut (England et al. 2008: 1238). An archaeological survey of animal use in the much later 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century Cappadocia found tons of ruminant bones (almost 3000 sheep and goat bones) but only 3 fish bones (Crabtree and Campana 2014: 160-161). But even better, during the Roman period, we learn that fishermen occupied low social status, and fish itself had "an ambiguous place in ancient cultural constructs about food," simultaneously a luxury item for the wealthy (fresh fish) and a common food (if salted) (Marzano 2018: 445). I can imagine those competitive salon feasts, with aristocratic women trying to impress one another with the fresh fish on top of their heaping serving plates of other delicacies. Marzano writes, "On a feast day, not any kind of preserved fish would do, but fresh fish does not require such a qualifier: if it is fresh, it is worthy of the feast" (p. 446). No wonder then that the fish on the hook served as an apt metaphor for humanity led astray by deceptive luxuries of the flesh that ensnare one in debt. And no wonder, too, Macrina and other aristocratic women's desire to escape such bondage.

Ransom, I am arguing, figured in a dynamic and unstable configuration of social power that was about imperial conquest, as Singh relates, as well as dynamics of gender, kinship and family bound up with concerns over inheritance and certain women's efforts to escape it while thereby leading other aristocrats toward Christianity.

What of the ties to contemporary neoliberalism? In her compelling analysis, Melinda Cooper discusses how the flourishing of non-normative lifestyles and family forms in the 1960s and 1970s was curtailed by the political economic conjuncture of asset appreciation and the roll back of the Keynesian welfare state. If the 1960s allowed alternative social and family arrangements momentarily to blossom, the neoliberal project injected economic precarity and made people more dependent on kith and kin. Non-normativity could be "domesticated, and made profitable," she writes, through the combined disciplining of rising private home values and the demands to provide for one's kin on one's own, without the assistance of the state, through the only major means of wealth-generation available to the working and middle classes—inheritance (Cooper 2017:315). Cooper shows how the neoconservative focus on

“traditional family values” therefore went hand in glove with neoliberalism, and how the reassertion of specific forms of Christian virtue underwrote this alliance.

And what means of escape in our period, then? It would seem that the contemporary analogue to running off into the desert, and providing a light toward actual salvation, would involve the recognition of the debtor as a political identity and the collective refusal of that debt (see, for example, the work of the Debt Collective, [debtcollective.org](http://debtcollective.org), and Appel, Whitley and Kline 2019). For refusing redemption leverages debt to undermine sovereign authority, revealing it as even more vulnerable than, well, than a worm on a hook.

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## Early Christianity, Market Reason, and the Problem of Freedom

Daromir Rudnykyj, University of Victoria

*Divine Currency* is a sophisticated book that makes an important intervention in the burgeoning interdisciplinary scholarship into the articulation of religious piety and economic reason. Devin Singh's central argument is ground-breaking: he contends that the relatively new technology of money, the conceptual issues that it raised, and the theoretical architecture through which Greek and Roman thinkers came to understand it provided an essential framework for early Christian theology. As Singh puts it, money "became a critical structuring principle in theological thought" (3). This is an argument that is sure to incite reaction by certain scholars of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, who have long sought to maintain a distinct separation between the sacred, supposedly immaterial world of religious piety, and the profane, material worlds of economic action.

However, in making his provocative claim Singh does not seek to resuscitate a crude Marxism that would see ideas as a mere reflection of material conditions. Rather his argument is more along the lines of a Foucaultian archaeology insofar as it seeks to uncover how discourses form within an episteme (Foucault 1972). Singh argues that the emergence of monetary technology and discourses about it became a kind of template for how early Christian theologians, most notably Gregory of Nyssa and Eusebius of Caesarea, conceptualized the relationships between money, God, Jesus Christ, and Christians. Just as the incarnate Christ bore the "stamp" of God, early Christian thinkers saw a link between "imperial coinage and the stamp of God on human coins" (55). Furthermore, these thinkers likened God to an economist, which Singh characterizes as a "steward who oversees the management of creation and redemption" (55). As Singh notes "emerging conceptions of the managerial God carry overtones of the very real governance of goods and resources" (55).

Critical in making this articulation is the polyvalent notion of *oikonomia*, the progenitor of our contemporary concept of economy. Singh builds on Foucault's insights regarding *oikonomia*, which were subsequently explored by Giorgio Agamben (28). According to Foucault, *oikonomia*, which in ancient Greece originally referred toward parental regulation (*nomos*) over the household (*oikos*), was later reframed as economy to conceptualize the government of the state and the management of its population. As Foucault wrote, "To govern a state will thus mean the application of economy...at the level of the state as a whole, that is to say, exercising supervision and control over its inhabitants, wealth, and the conduct of all and each, as attentive as that of a father's over his household and goods" (2007 [1978], 95).

Whereas Foucault saw the resignification of economy as a distinctly modern phenomenon that, in part, enabled the emergence of liberal government, Singh pushes this transformation much deeper into history, arguing that it is evident in the way in which early Christian thinkers referred to the "stewardship and oversight of material resources and even money...aimed toward gain and betterment" (28). Thus, we find Eusebius deploying the concept to refer to "God's management and steering of the world toward its good for divine glory," a process overseen by the son who manages a "vast cosmic economy" (69). Singh's extension of economy into early Christianity is suggestive and raises questions both regarding the historical transformation of *oikonomia* into economy and the modernity of governmentality. These are addressed further below.

Singh's account is generative for anthropologists of Christianity as well as those interested in how religious logics are entwined with economic reason. *Divine Currency* differs in critical and illuminating ways from Max Weber's conceptualization of the relationship between Christianity and money. Weber saw ascetic Protestantism as providing the conditions of possibility for the emergence of what he called the "spirit of capitalism," which he defined as the duty of the individual to increase her or his wealth through work in a calling. The central problem for Weber was how, for many in Europe and North America, human life became dominated by the making of money. Rather than working to live, the Protestant ethic precipitated a way of life in which one lived to work. Weber viewed this as a corruption of the "natural" order in which earning was generated by necessity without an interest in the accumulation of profit. Weber evocatively alludes to the political implications of the emergence of the spirit of capitalism by asking, "Is it not possible that [English] commercial superiority and their adaptation to free political institutions are connected in some way with [their] record of piety?" (Weber 1990 [1920], 45). This question anticipates Foucault's subsequent formulation of governmentality, insofar as it suggests how market freedom and political freedom entail both self-discipline and self-government. Nevertheless, as Singh asserts, the problem that Weber sets out to solve is primarily an economic, not political, one (11): how did the pursuit of profit become an activity endowed with the halo of moral sanction?

In contrast, Singh's object is the articulation between money and religion focuses explicitly on money as a political technology. Focusing on a period of time that long precedes the emergence of liberalism and the techniques of self-regulation on which it depends, his problem is on the way money is mobilized in projects of sovereign power. Thus, he argues that Christian thinkers witnessed how money became a critical tool of sovereign power in imperial Rome and then likened these techniques to how God brought order to creation through "providence as well as through the Son and his incarnation" (55). The theorization of sovereignty evident in Christian theology was borrowed, in Singh's telling, from the theorization of money. It is useful here to recall that, in his widely cited lecture on governmentality, Foucault argued "we should not see things as the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a society of discipline and then of a society of discipline by a society, say, of government. In fact we have a triangle: sovereignty, discipline, and governmental management, which has population as its main target and apparatuses of security as its essential mechanism" (Foucault 2007 [1978], 108). Singh's work focuses mainly on one leg of this triangle, that of sovereignty, and particularly how the technology of money was deployed in enabling that leg. Indeed, this is one of the most generative aspects of Singh's work: it illustrates how money was (and still is) a profoundly effective form of sovereign power.

In working through this analysis, *Divine Currency* raises a critical question regarding the modernity of governmentality. Those working with a Foucaultian analytics have generally operated under the presumption that governmentality is a distinctly modern form of political power and coincides, as my invocation of Weber's evocative question above suggests, with the emergence of liberalism. A critical feature of governmentality is that it offers insight into on how market freedom and political freedom are predicated on a self-governing subject. However, Singh's analysis is directed toward explicitly illiberal contexts.

Singh argues that what he terms the "monetary economy," by which he means "the systems of relations and corresponding institutions, practices, and legal frameworks that enable

exchange with monetary standards, accounts, and tokens” (13), was a critical means of conceptualizing sovereign power. In so doing, Singh suggests that governmentality is not a characteristically modern form of power, but (following his argument regarding the relationship between *oikonomia* and economy I discussed above) can be extended to any context in which “political governance” is achieved through “economic logic” (29). Indeed, the efficacy of money as a political technology would seem to be that it marries sovereign power, discipline, and governmentality.

Nevertheless, money is not only a tool for the extension and solidification of sovereign power, but also works to enable producers and consumers to exercise choice in a market. As Keith Hart memorably argued, a coin marries the signs of both the state (the image of the sovereign or “heads”) and the market (tokens of exchange or “tails”) (Hart 1986). Thus, state-issued coins simultaneously sanction both the power of the sovereign and the sovereignty of the market. A quick glance at a US dime will graphically illustrate this today. However, the problem of economic governance in early Christianity as described by Singh is not the coordination of freely acting producers and consumers in a market, as it would be for liberalism, rather it is ensuring the obedience of a multitude of dispersed subjects to the sovereign.

Singh’s account raises critical questions about how the monetary economy of Christendom actually operated in practice. To what extent were the markets in which money circulated free? What kind of interventions did sovereign power make in markets and how did these change over time? Karl Polanyi famously classified economic exchange into three general forms: reciprocity (or gifting), redistribution, and that of the market (Polanyi 1944). The political economic logic of Christianity generally is represented as operating according to reciprocity and redistribution. Techniques evident, for example, in Peter Brown’s excellent book *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, which details how the redistributive practices of the early church and the production of the poor as a category for intervention created the conditions of possibility for the growth and expansion of Christendom (Brown 2002). As Singh himself suggests, Christian sovereignty was, in part, achieved through the notion that God sacrificed his only Son as a salvific gift to redeem humanity from its state of persistent sin (38).

Nonetheless, Singh also draws attention to the subterranean logic of the market that undergirds Christian theology. For example, Singh finds that Gregory of Nyssa’s account of God’s interactions with the devil “operates in a more properly economic sense of an exchange of goods based upon an agreed upon set of terms. Clear value calculation comes into play and an immediate swap takes place” (160). The suggestion, thus, is that the conditions of possibility for the triumph of the market that occurs with the advent of liberal government in modernity (and has only accelerated since) were laid long before—in the deep mists of early Christian theology. As Hart has argued, the value money is derived in no small part from the state’s ability to compel the payment of tax in its chosen currency. Yet, money also derives its value from the desire from one’s consociates to obtain it through non-violent trade in a market. Singh does an excellent job illustrating how money serves sovereign power (Hart’s state), but one also wonders about the other side of the proverbial coin: the operations of market power as a means of acting on the actions of self-regulating subjects.

This is a thoughtful, well-researched book that makes the provocative contention that the germ of liberalism’s attachment to market logics is evident centuries before the Enlightenment. Singh argues that many of the characteristics of market reason are present in

some examples from early Christian theology. These include calculation in monetary terms, spot exchange, and economic government. The main ingredient that seems to be missing is market freedom, a value that it would take centuries to become pervasive and, indeed, one with which the Church has yet to fully reconcile today. The text raises the question of whether governmentality and its related deployment of economy are particular to liberalism or can they be extended to non-modern contexts as well?

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## Etchings on the Divine Coin: The Textures of Theological Money

Devin Singh, Dartmouth College

I am thrilled and gratified both to have my work read and seriously engaged by scholars whose own work I've long admired and to have my study seen as relevant and useful to this subfield of anthropology. In addition to reaching scholars of religion and theology, I wrote *Divine Currency* expressly with the hope of opening dialogue with those in other fields. Having learned so much from economic anthropology, it means so much to me that my discoveries might also be found useful by those working in the field. Each response is attentive, thoughtful, and nuanced, and each has furthered my own thinking on these matters.

Anna-Riikka Kauppinen's rich analysis considers, among other things, the potentiality of local response to, interpretation, and redeployment of currencies amidst their complex location within political systems of power, theological regimes of meaning, and other coded cultural norms and practices. Sophia's telling remarks about the dollar are a reflection on the power dynamics of the global financial system with its hierarchy of national currencies. They also highlight the role of faith and trust in a sovereign monetary space, and the attendant cultural markings to money that render it workable in particular exchanges. Kauppinen opens up the perspective "from below," as an important counterpoint to the "top down" narrative of money as a sign of sovereignty that I presented. Beyond a tale of state institutions, she asks about the agency of God and Satan, for instance, and the important local networks of relations influencing the elite theology that I consider. How might this contribute to a framework that takes seriously Sophia's faith as an agent in money's function?

Important social histories have been and are currently being written that might help us retrieve more of the life worlds of these thinkers as well as popular and heterodox beliefs and practices that shaped their views. The battle over Satan is just one such interesting and noteworthy site for consideration (see Kotsko 2016). A number of (what would be termed) heterodox movements grouped loosely under "Gnosticism" celebrated Satan as a liberative figure aiding humanity's escape from the toils of earthly economy (Forsyth 1987). Precisely at stake in such narrative struggles were questions of who was exchanging with whom and to what ends. Was Satan the bondsman or the liberator, and was Christ a necessary or offensive payment? Some of these views have been retrieved as counter-imperial readings in an effort to "democratize" theology after the manner Kauppinen calls for, although much more remains to be done to address theopolitical economy, specifically.

Kauppinen's call for a language and set of conceptual tools to think religion and economy as "one" is provocative and promising. As she notes, I attempted to straddle a line of recognizing religion and economics as distinct sets of discourses and fields of inquiry while arguing for their mutual shaping, overlap, resonance, and homology. The challenge of course is mapping to what extent the blurring-in-distinction of these discursive fields corresponds to practices and institutions in the world, let alone to an ontology. As a theorist of the modern, part of my attraction to the ancient world is the productive disruption we receive when considering epistemes where categories such as religion, economy, and politics are—or at least appear to us as—less distinct. I support the charge to explore what thinking these together and even as a unity might reveal, and how continually undercutting the modern reification of distinct spheres may help us to see our contexts afresh.

Scott MacLochlainn also draws attention to the cultural components of money, its microhistories, and its fungibility, in distinction from its more disciplinary role as a tactic of sovereignty and governance. His wonderfully engaging and textured account of the many valences to money, as recounted in the Mindoro mass, presents a number of important themes for consideration. The gendered nature of the stewards or holy accountants is fascinating, particular when the financial trust invested in them is juxtaposed to the apparent mistrust exhibited in prohibitions against female leadership in other spiritual capacities.

I'm also reminded of the figure of the matron in early Christian thought, the woman of the house who exercises economic prudence and becomes a model for what it means to prioritize the kingdom of God (Luke 15:8-10), or of the famed "widow's mite," a modest tithe that was reckoned by Jesus as far outweighing the greater offerings from boastful givers (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4). Some theologians have "feminized" the position of Christ as steward of the Father's kingdom due to the subordinately faithful position Jesus displays to God (e.g., Barth 1956, 201-203). The women of Mindoro, in line with the women of scripture cited, thus become Christological-financial exemplars, displaying a Christlike accounting. Is the mass at Mindoro performing a longstanding transcript positing women as ideal stewards and as exemplifying Christlike stewardship or *oikonomia*?

There is also so much to say about the dynamic of secrecy versus openness, the public displays and the cloaked giving and accounting. Such dynamics may reflect or resonate with the "open secret" of the gospel message or the public enigma of the incarnation, the mystery of God revealed, which shows forth the divine redemptive economy only for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. The mode and manner of giving is therefore also a symbol of faith and participation in this divine economy.

MacLochlainn draws attention to money's fungibility, its capacity for conversion and interchangeability. This is a feature I downplay in reaction to neoclassical economics' overemphasis on money's neutrality. If money is endlessly convertible, its form, we are told, doesn't matter that much and it is just a means of exchange. This is the commodity theory of money, the theory that anything can be money and that such convertibility simply evolves out of economic necessity and inventiveness. This interpretation denudes money of its social and political embeddedness and impact.

I also found myself resisting this direction in reaction to a line of theological fascination with money's seemingly endless semiotic capacities. Influenced by the heyday of poststructuralist and deconstructive preoccupation with the "endless chain of signifiers," some theologians have neglected money's materiality and political role, fetishizing its function as a stand-in for whatever buffet options of spiritualized referents were on hand for celebration or critique: idolatry, the demonic, greed, or God. It has never been clear to me what this kind of theologizing gets us, other than moments of aesthetic appreciation for clever, creative, or evocative correspondences.

Of course, these are not at all the directions that MacLochlainn takes money's fungibility, and economic anthropology has contributed much to the discussion of money's discrete cultural forms and their significance. Thus, a qualified understanding of fungibility, where it is not taken to mean endless convertibility or to turn attention away from the specific forms money takes, is admissible and an important additional angle to include here. Not everything can be money, and the specific forms money has taken matter politically, culturally, and, now, theologically.

Bill Maurer's truly lovely reflection on the themes of the book and his refreshingly original inquiry into domestic economies in Late Antiquity add important angles to this conversation. He unearths a fascinating and central dynamic tying together gender roles, sexuality, reproduction, and debt in intricate ways. Maurer's reflection reveals how acts around indebtedness and divestment are fully gendered and fall unevenly among gender positions and levels of social power and agency. The imagination around debt itself is also highly gendered and displays this logic across a variety of historical moments and cultural contexts. Considering the gendered logic of debt may shed light on its actual deployment along gendered lines and the forms of social reproduction that debt assumes, seeks to cultivate, or disrupt.

Speculation around some of the earliest understandings and explanations of interest tie it to agricultural contexts, where either crop yields or the birth of livestock provide grounds for the metaphorical reproduction of money (e.g. Hudson 2000). Etymologically, the terms for interest in a number of languages in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean world are synonymous with or have linkages to terms for offspring. And, of course, Aristotle's (*Politics* I, 8-10) famous denouncement of usury assumed as its basis the "unnaturalness" of monetary reproduction as contrasted with natural reproduction (Meikle 1995). The link was there for Aristotle to make, given the Greek term for interest, *tokos*, which could also designate progeny.

In making a claim about the unnaturalness of monetary reproduction through interest bearing debt, Aristotle also of course lays down strictures around what counts as legitimate, sanctioned, and licit forms of reproduction. This intrinsic cultural logic of reproduction within debt, with its imported gender roles and assumptions about productive forms of social formation, helps explain the types of disruptions Maurer highlights, drawing on Elizabeth Clark and others. It shows why an option against reproductivity and a decision to resist such defined roles might also be an option against the transmission of debt-bearing or -generating capital.

Maurer's reflections also link up with a noteworthy dynamic in the early church, one which Peter Brown's (2012; esp. ch. 4) work has highlighted: calls to virginity and calls to radical material divestment often ran in parallel as marks of extreme devotion or doubled up as twin impulses for the faithful. For many early Christian ascetics, virginity and celibacy were deeply bound up with lives of almsgiving and financial simplicity. The call toward radical divestment of material resources was recognized as being as challenging as the call toward celibacy; many were called, few were chosen. To give up one's capital paralleled and intersected with giving up one's legacy through an heir. Certainly, we can think these two elements as separate and they don't need to travel together. But that they so often did signals again something about the gendered logic around the reproduction of money, whether through interest bearing debt or through forms of investment and transmission of wealth (see Grau 2004).

Daromir Rudnyckij offers a penetrating and exemplary analysis of my argument from the standpoint of a more orthodox reading of Foucault, helpfully putting pressure on my revisionist tendencies. I tried to resist a strong periodization that posits sovereignty as correlating to the ancient world and governmentality marking the modern. I realize that many interpret Foucault along these lines, and he does clearly offer these periodizations at times in his lectures. But I do also see evidence for another reading, one where the dynamics of sovereignty are still discernible in the modern state, and one where *something like* governmentality and biopolitics were present in earlier moments. This is partly Agamben's move, although I also tried to resist his ontologization and projection of these terms across history, attending instead to actual

historical practices. To what extent we mark these ancient practices as actually governmentality depends on what we deem as essential to the definition. But certainly we find impulses toward the “care of the living” and aims to nurture life productively being taken on by authoritative institutions, initially in the church and eventually in the Christian empire.

My intent in retrieving the financial and administrative sense that persists in Christian talk of *oikonomia* was to try to sketch out how impulses toward pastoral care and economic stewardship elide and overlap in such contexts. It strikes me that the prefigurings that Foucault sees in early pastoral arts of governance run alongside and continually intersect with more “brass tacks” and “worldly” concerns about the right use of organizational funds, being efficient with resources, ensuring a return, and the like. These eventually inflect state administrative discourse as well, beginning with Constantine. And through the language of caring for the poor and vulnerable—a new public discourse vaunted by the bishops—the empire takes on a burden to oversee the *content* of life and not just administer the “right to kill or let live” of classical sovereignty (Foucault 1978, Part 5).

Another dualism that Rudnykyj invokes that I tried to resist was that of state versus market, and the attendant dressings of freedom, choice, and agency that comprise modern market ideology. By analyzing sovereignty in the ancient world my intent was not to suggest a dichotomy of ancient statism and modern freedom, but rather to highlight the potential persistence of sovereignty in modern economy. My concern with readings such as Keith Hart’s about the two sides of the coin is that they risk perpetuating the state-market dichotomy, an illusion that has been shown to be essential for neoclassical and neoliberal economics but that doesn’t hold up under analysis. Rudnykyj asks about my silence on matters of the market and freedom. While I clearly did not include micro-level practices and experiences within lived economies (and we certainly need these accounts for a richer analysis), my attention to the state and sovereign power meant to suggest that such dynamics extend into the market. Turtles or not, when it comes to market exchanges using money and debt instruments, it is sovereignty “all the way down.”

Not that sovereignty is all there is such that human decisions are meaningless or insignificant; but claims to market freedom and personal agency in such contexts need to be read in concert with discipline, surveillance, and norms, which continually link back to the state and forms of policing, legality, coercion, and violence. Money is one such profound interface between state and market, as well as, correlatively, between sovereignty and governmentality. The Finnish social theorist Tero Auvinen (2010) makes a compelling case for this in his work. I believe these are important dynamics that are consistently observable since the advent of complex civilizations in the ancient Near East. But, yes, their specific deployments on the ground at certain moments matter and should be highlighted and described, as Rudnykyj eloquently recalls.

Rudnykyj’s reflections on the apparent novelty of modern market freedom got me thinking about possible ancient antecedents or analogues. Of course, Foucault discerned what he took to be a liberality within ancient pastoral oversight that prefigured modern liberal governance: on one hand, though the pastor must attend to each member of the flock to ensure discipline and oversight, the results (spiritual growth) were out of his hands and up to God; on the other, for liberal theorists, the stewards of the economy (whether the sovereign or bureaucratic administrators) must do whatever they can to foster market activity and to

stimulate productive forces, but they cannot and must not attempt to control the outcomes—such growth must be left up to immanent market forces.

To this resonance we should add Elettra Stimilli's (2017) remarkable recent inquiry into the theological precedents for what she claims is an irrational and anti-utilitarian ethic at the heart of capitalism: the self-referential, endless drive for profit for profit's sake. She identifies a detachment from works particularly in Pauline reflections on the Christian relation between law and grace. This distance stems from the Christian assertion that one is freed from the law yet called to a faithful obedience to God, and yet one that must ultimately be rendered ineffective. One is called to works that cannot save, and one's power is perfected in weakness and failure.

She speculates that this created a fracture and disjunction between means and ends that enables the eventual capitalist subject to be committed to the work of entrepreneurship not for its success but for its own sake. Profit is the gauge not so much of achievement of the work in terms of outcomes but of faithful performance of the work itself. This is why the capitalist drive for profit is anti-utilitarian: it is never about proper use, having enough, or means rationally ordered toward ends; it is endlessly cyclical and self-reinforcing, even as the freed Christian subject was called to works of faith that could not gain or accomplish anything but were necessary works of faithfulness nonetheless.

To these important reflections on peculiar early Christian twists on freedom, we should add the paradoxical Christian language of freedom in Christ and obligation or even enslavement to God. I suggest this promotes a duality where notions of freedom and agency coexist with surveillance, discipline, and indebtedness in ways that might relate to the eventual modern market subject. For this ostensibly free liberal subject exercises agency in a complicated network of obligation that includes state and corporate coercion and oversight. The seeds of this may be present from these early moments, or, in the least serve as a screen for early modern thinkers to work out and project their ideals of a liberated *homo economicus* working for market salvation, a faithfulness one is called to for its own sake, regardless of consequences.

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