

Editorial | *A Legacy of Stewardship*

Earlier this year former Calvin College professor and librarian Lester DeKoster passed away at the age of ninety-three. DeKoster authored books on a wide variety of subjects focused on economics and liberty, including *Communism and Christian Faith* (Eerdmans, 1962) and *Light for the City: Calvin's Preaching, Source of Life and Liberty* (Eerdmans, 2004).

DeKoster's many works of service included a decade-long term as the editor of *The Banner*, the Christian Reformed Church's denominational magazine, as well as the launch of a publishing imprint in 1979. It was in the course of this latter endeavor that DeKoster, along with a long-time church elder and friend Gerard Berghoef, wrote persuasively about the central importance that stewardship takes in the Christian life. In their text, *The Deacon's Handbook: A Manual of Stewardship* (Christian's Library Press, 1980), Berghoef and DeKoster describe the critical role the diaconate plays in meeting the material needs of the members of the Christian community, describing the deacon as "the executive agent for good stewardship in the Church." In contrasting Christian charity with the government-run welfare state, Berghoef and DeKoster show the unique perspective that the office-bearer of the church, by focusing on both spiritual as well as material needs, can bring to addressing the problems of poverty.

Central to this view of Christian stewardship is the concept of work, which Berghoef and DeKoster call "the fundamental form of stewardship." In a moving section that destroys the Marxist phantasmagoria of alienation, Berghoef and DeKoster write of work, the forms of which are "countless," as a "maturing of the soul," which,

liberates the believer from undue concern over the monotony of the assembly line, the threat of technology, or the reduction of the worker to but an easily replaceable cog in the industrial machine. One's job may be done by another. But each doer is himself unique, and what carries over beyond life and time is not the work but the worker. What doing the job does for each of us is not repeated in anyone else. What the exercise of will, of tenacity, of courage, of foresight, of triumph over temptations to get by, does for you is uniquely your own. One worker may replace another on the assembly line, but what each worker carries away from meeting the challenge of doing the day's shift will ever be his own. The lasting and creative consequence of daily work happens to the worker. God so arranges that civilization grows out of the same effort that develops the soul.

But this kind of perspective is only possible within the context of a world-and-life view that affirms an anthropology consisting of both material and spiritual realities, body and soul.

It is in this same spirit of stewardship, embracing all aspects of the human person and human life, that a massive new work has recently appeared, the *NIV Stewardship Study Bible*. The inaugural editor of the *Journal of Markets & Morality*, Dr. Stephen J. Grabill, took a leading role as general editor in developing this rich and worthy resource. Brett Elder, executive director of the Stewardship Council, the organization that produced the study Bible, served as its executive editor. This comprehensive study Bible draws “from the work of over three hundred authors spanning two millennia from a broad array of Christian traditions” and thereby illustrates that there is “profound agreement on the basic points of Biblical stewardship among authors—whether they be classical or contemporary—who uphold the central tenets of orthodox Christian doctrine.” This work promises to be the cornerstone of a rediscovery of the Christian concept of stewardship, both within the context of church education programs as well as in the halls of higher learning. Seminaries or divinity schools that turn out graduates to become leaders and office-bearers in the church, but do not provide them with a firm grounding in the biblical concept of stewardship, will be found to have in no small measure squandered their own stewardship responsibilities.

This year we also mourn the loss of another remarkable person, Karen Laub-Novak, an artist of worldwide renown and longtime friend of the Acton Institute. Her work focuses on, in her words, “Our attempt to find ourselves. Our struggles with hope and despair. Our moments of love and separation, sexuality, isolation, suffering, death. I am constantly excited and frustrated by tensions between verbal and non-verbal, mind and emotions, intellect and body, silence and communication, privacy and community. This is what I and my paintings are all about.” Speaking of her marriage to the eminent scholar of liberty Michael Novak, she

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said, “I was told once that I couldn’t be a professional painter and married too. I was told the demands of each were mutually exclusive. In many ways I have found these two complex vocations to be mutually beneficial.”

It is on this idea of art as a vocation, a specifically Christian calling, that the controversy in this issue of the journal is intended to focus attention. Art and aesthetics are receiving increasing attention amidst contemporary efforts at cultural engagement in the evangelical world in North America, which is at the same time increasingly becoming aware of long-standing traditions both within and without the Christian faith. Christian ideas about art as a vocation can serve as a kind of index for views about the way in which the church relates to the broader world, including the state, the public square, and the cultural institutions of civil society.

If, as the economist Tyler Cowen argues in his book, *In Praise of Commercial Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2000), the market economy is an effective and powerful means for the production and dissemination of works of aesthetic merit, it falls to social institutions to encourage both the supply and the demand of art. If the market, rather than the government, is to support the arts, the church surely has a critical role to play in cultivating such support.

With these concerns in view, we ask two worthy scholars to weigh in on the question, “How should Christians be stewards of art?” Nathan Jacobs, himself a practicing artist and an academic at the beginning of a promising career, is a professor of theology at Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois. Jacobs argues that the question of stewardship immediately raises questions about value, meaning, and reality that must be addressed. In the course of his answer to the controversy question, Jacobs articulates a realist position that holds to the grounding of art relative to an objective order, in which “artwork is the outward manifestation of the inward perfections of an artist.”

Dr. Calvin Seerveld, professor emeritus of aesthetics at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Canada, is Jacobs’ dialogue partner and has published widely on art and the Christian faith. Seerveld challenges us to consider art from an eschatological perspective and contends that “artist and patron who understand what the LORD God requires of us (Micah 6:8) will be generous stewards of artwork which makes Jesus Christ’s call to repentance and offer of grace to forgive known allusively in imaginative deed to those who never darken the insides of art museums or churches.”

In the unique matrix of vocation that made up their lives, Lester DeKoster and Karen Laub-Novak have each left this world with a legacy of faithful stewardship, and it is to such that this issue of the *Journal of Markets & Morality* is dedicated.

—Jordan J. Ballor, Ph.D. cand.