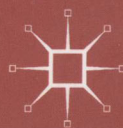


*New Approaches to Religion and Power*

Interreligious Solidarity for Just Relations

# **TRANSCENDING GREEDY MONEY**

Ulrich Duchrow and  
Franz J. Hinkelammert



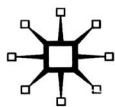
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TRANSCENDING GREEDY MONEY

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# Transcending Greedy Money

## NEW APPROACHES TO RELIGION AND POWER

**Series editor: Joerg Rieger**

While the relationship of religion and power is a perennial topic, it only continues to grow in importance and scope in our increasingly globalized and diverse world. Religion, on a global scale, has openly joined power struggles, often in support of the powers that be. But at the same time, religion has made major contributions to resistance movements. In this context, current methods in the study of religion and theology have created a deeper awareness of the issue of power: Critical theory, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, feminist theory, critical race theory, and working class studies are contributing to a new quality of study in the field. This series is a place for both studies of particular problems in the relation of religion and power as well as for more general interpretations of this relation. It undergirds the growing recognition that religion can no longer be studied without the study of power.

*Series editor:*

Joerg Rieger is Wendland-Cook Professor of Constructive Theology in the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University.

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*Transcending Greedy Money: Interreligious Solidarity for Just Relations*

Ulrich Duchrow and Franz J. Hinkelammert

## Foreword

Today we are faced with life-killing civilization, manifested in economic injustice, ecological destruction, the threat of Empire, and the escalation of religious conflicts. This compels us to urgently explore the possibility of life-giving civilization which affirms relationships, co-existence, harmony with creation, and solidarity with those who struggle for justice.

World Council of Churches/Council for World Mission, Jangseong,  
Jeollanam-do, Korea, 2007<sup>1</sup>

**T**his quotation shows the depth of the change needed today. The reason is evident: humanity and the earth are in danger. Normally, people identify the dominant economic system as the root of this danger. At first glance this is true. Yet we do not need only a change of economic structures. These are embedded in all other dimensions of western civilization, including science, technology, philosophy, sociology, psychology, neurology, anthropology, spirituality—and theology as the self-reflection of religion(s). Western civilization in the form of “modernity” has deep historic roots. Therefore, when analyzing the present and taking action in order to make the needed change in the culture, we must address at least these dimensions, including their historical fabric.

Most initiatives struggling for change concentrate on one of the aspects. This book wants to contribute to understanding the interconnections among them, particularly among religions/spiritualities, psychology, and the political economy. We regard the original religions of the “Axial Age,” Ancient Israel prophecy and Torah, Buddhism, the Jesus movement, and the early messianic church, as well as Islam, as important sources for change. They already address structural, psychological, and spiritual problems linked to a new economy that is becoming the base for modernity. A central issue today is the way money, linked to private property, dominates all spheres of life. How can we overcome this, and particularly the spirituality of money? In an earlier book we concentrated on the history and systematic role of property.<sup>2</sup> In another one, written by a team that

included psychologists, we added the psychological dimension.<sup>3</sup> Here we add the religious dimension in historical and systematic perspective in order to show the holistic character of the crisis of the dominant civilization today and to search for ways to move toward a new culture of life in just relationships. This issue is of great importance for

- Initiating critical thinking and acting by redefining the meaning of “subject”
- Understanding and transforming the power structures in the political economy
- Healing the destructive psychological effects of the prevailing system
- Unmasking the perversion of religion and spirituality for power purposes and building solidarity for just relationships through interreligious alliances.

Worldwide there are many initiatives within civil society struggling for a new culture of life. The purpose of this book is to strengthen these efforts through sharpening the analysis, understanding the interconnectedness of all these efforts for a new culture of life in solidarity, providing sources of spiritual empowerment in the struggle, and suggesting ways of taking action to move toward a comprehensive cultural revolution. This, we hope, can contribute to people becoming human, personally and collectively, as well as to overcoming the dominant, deeply inhuman civilization of our day.

We thank Patricia Davie for translating part 2 from the German, and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation for financing this. A special thanks goes to Elaine Griffith for her selfless work and professional capacity to correct our limited English and give it a mother tongue style, which she also did for our previous book, *Property for People, Not for Profit*. This book came about through interdisciplinary and interreligious seminars at Heidelberg University. We very much thank our participating colleagues, Karl-Heinz Brodbeck, Lutz Drescher, Franz-Johannes Litsch, and Ton Veerkamp from Germany; Pantelis Kalaitzidis, Stylianos Tsompanidis, and Petros Vassiliadis from Greece; Farid Esack from South Africa; and Seong-Won Park from South Korea for their valuable contributions. We also have learned from Christian-Buddhist and Christian-Muslim dialogues that engage structural greed, which were competently organized by Martin Sinaga of the Lutheran World Federation and Shanta Premawardhana of the World Council of Churches (WCC). We also thank Rogate Mshana of the World Council of Churches for giving us the opportunity to participate in the program of Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE). Peace for Life, coordinated by Carmencita Karagdag from the Philippines, provided the particular framework for interreligious

solidarity against imperial oppression. We hope that the readers will recognize the shared reflection in our various engagements to make another world possible.

Heidelberg and San José, Costa Rica, March 24, 2012, day of the martyrdom of Archbishop Óscar Romero

ULRICH DUCHROW AND FRANZ J. HINKELAMMERT



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## Introduction

Modernity, the destructive climax of which we are experiencing today, has deep roots in history. This can be observed particularly in the fields of political economy, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy. Starting in the eighth century BCE, the growing division of labor led to the spread of new forms of exchange, built on money and private property, particularly in the Ancient Near East and Greece, but also throughout Asia. Politically this new economy merged with imperial structures and behaviors. Linked to this we can see a loss of solidarity in the affected societies as well as a shift in human self-understanding and praxis toward greed and egocentrism. This type of civilization is taken up again in intensified forms in western modernity. The capitalist market has become more and more globalized, served by more and more violent global empires. Individualism becomes the mark of this period.

It is hermeneutically crucial to see the continuity between ancient and modern civilizations. In our interpretation, the religions of the Axial Age (beginning in the eighth century BCE) emerged in direct confrontation with the new political economy and anthropology. This means that, in spite of all the differences in details, their message and spirituality have a direct relation to our own context. This is why, in the first part, we present a sociohistorical analysis of antiquity, laying the ground for modernity as the context to which religions and philosophies are responding. In chapter 1 we first analyze the implications of an emerging new economy built on money and private property. This comes about in the context of an increasing division of labor that leads to more and more exchange of goods and services. To facilitate this exchange, money takes on a central role as the “one in the many,” that is, people agree to use or acknowledge the use of money as the accounting unit for the exchange of different goods. As it also defines property rights, the calculating individual comes to the fore, stimulating greed, which becomes institutionalized in the form of interest. This in turn leads to the social split between creditors and debtors who, if not able to service their debt, lose their land and fall into debt slavery. This leads to a growing gap between rich and poor that causes harsh suffering for the latter. Politically this development links up with the structures

of empire, which request tribute from the subjected peoples and thereby increase the suffering of the people. The linkage of the money-property-economy with slavery and imperial structures finds its first climax in the Hellenistic and Roman empires. Culturally the solidarity relationships of the tribal societies are dismantled, and systemic egotism wins the day. All these developments are reinforced in modernity because individualist competition and greed are made positive motors of the economy and culture.

In chapter 2 we turn to the psychological effects of the money-property economy. Normally this aspect is forgotten when researchers or movements look for alternatives to the dominant system. However, when it comes to the implementation of the alternatives, this neglect turns out to create major difficulties. How do we explain that, although the present system works against the interests of the vast majority of the world's population, only a minority resists and works actively for alternatives? And what does it mean that, after nearly all the revolutions that have taken place, the result is only an exchange of elites, and is neither a new equality and nor more humane relationships among people. So it is most important not merely to work for more just structures in society but also for transformed persons. The psychological and spiritual dimensions must be given the same weight as the structural ones. We look at these from the perspective of relational psychology. It has been demonstrated that from infancy we become subjects only through intersubjective relations. These create basic benign and malign psychological patterns within us that are reinforced by subsequent social, economic, and political positive and negative experiences. Consequently it is important to understand that these patterns find different expressions in the different social classes. Therefore, healing and mobilizing people from the lower-, middle- and upper classes will call for different therapies and strategies. This is why we deal specifically with the psychological problems of every class. Here the losers in the system turn out to be the most important protagonists of change. In this context the middle classes pose a particular problem because the majority of their members lose out in neoliberalism but, in an illusionary consciousness, they side with the elites. It is a big question for the future of humanity how this can change.

In chapter 3 we first try to clarify our understanding of the Axial Age. It is very interesting to see that this concept, once coined by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers in idealistic terms, is experiencing a renaissance. Several recent books have dealt with it. Our particular thesis is that the religions and philosophies of that age, since the eighth century BCE, are precisely a response to the development of the new money-property economy, causing change not just in economic, social, and political structures but at the same time within the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of persons, thus creating a new comprehensive culture. We see proof of this in the fact that the new perspectives in religion or philosophy can be observed not only

in one country or region, but everywhere the new economy spreads—in such different regions as Israel, Greece, India, China, Persia, and later in Arabia. So we have to analyze the developments in each of these regions in order to understand not only the common but also the particular features of the religious and philosophical responses. This again becomes the basis for our question concerning their relevance for today, because the global crisis, created by the climax of the money culture, calls for a global answer. It is therefore of utmost importance to find out what, and how, the world religions emerging during the Axial Age might contribute to a new life-enhancing culture that can overcome the death-bound western civilization.

Historically the first protest against the new economy and its social consequences comes from the Ancient Israel prophets calling for justice. The next stage saw the development of the Torah as a legal instrument as well as a new relational understanding of the human being as being made in the image of God. The Jesus movement and the early Christian church also built on this foundation. We also show how the Apostle Paul discovered how law, originally designed for enhancing life, can be turned into an instrument of death when hijacked by greed—an extremely important insight for the understanding of capital accumulation as a death-bringing law in modernity.

Chapter 4 describes how the Buddha in India concentrated on prevailing over greed, aggression, and the illusionary consciousness in order to overcome the suffering of the people. It is not by accident that today outstanding Buddhist economists belong to the most lucid critiques of capitalism and designers of a new personal and collective alternative.

In Islam we see a second wave of renewing the spirituality of the Axial Age, now in the context of merchant Arabia (chapter 5). Here the particular emphasis is on overcoming the taking of interest as the institutionalizing of greed and on promoting justice by sharing wealth. The oneness of God prohibits making money an idol, and God's graciousness requires sharing with the poor. Islamic banks have developed on this basis, and constitute an interesting approach when it comes to devising financial alternatives today.

Finally we take a look at the ambivalence of classical Greek philosophy (chapter 6). On the one hand, it brought fundamental insights into the nature and consequences of the money economy from Socrates to Aristotle. Particularly the latter presented pivotal reflections on the dangerous illusions created by money and on ethical and political ways to protect society from their destructive effects. On the other hand, this philosophy, especially in its Platonic version, also laid the foundation for reducing reality to what fits into mathematical models and also for authoritarian political structures (with a male bias)—prefiguring western modernity.

A critical analysis of modernity is presented in part 2. After an introduction, analyzing the legitimization narratives of modernity by John Locke,

David Hume, and Adam Smith, we describe the basic characteristics of modernity (chapter 7): subjecting the whole of life to functional mechanisms geared toward the accumulation of capital. The foundational invention for this “efficient” thinking is double bookkeeping, calculating everything according to the profit obtained after balancing input and output. This leads to the reductionist rationality of means-end calculation, which turns out to become irrational and totalitarian (chapter 8). It leaves out the reproductive rationality that puts life and the sustenance of life at the center of critical thinking. This explains why modernity with its science, technology, economy, and politics has ended up in crisis, putting at risk the survival of humanity on earth. Here we come to the core of our thesis that western civilization is death-bound and why this so.

In chapter 9 we ask how—in the face of globalization as the climax of the “irrationality of the rationalized”—the repressed subject is returning and the common good can again become the yardstick for economy. The common good is not understood in the Thomistic way against the background of a natural law. In our understanding the requirements of the common good are discovered through the experience of the system’s self-destructive tendencies, that is, in the midst of the respective struggles of the people. These struggles are decisive for becoming human and move toward liberation (chapter 10). Modernity as a whole can be understood from the perspective of the quest for humanization and emancipation. However, bourgeois society has betrayed this longing by reducing the human being to an owner of property using science, technology, economy, and politics as means to a single end: capital accumulation. The symbol of this is the fact that the French Revolution executed the leaders of the emancipation of workers, women, and slaves. Therefore we need to criticize the myth of modernity through critical thinking and the development of an ethic of emancipation. We use the slogan of young people, protesting in front of Zurich banks in the 1980s: “Do as God does, become a human being.” This we link with Karl Marx’s “categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which the human is a degraded, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being.” When, on the basis of God’s becoming human, “the human is the highest being for humankind,” as Marx went on to say, then all religions find a reference point that can even be shared with unbelieving humanists. This leads to the question of justice. Justice is about safeguarding the natural cycle of human life. This is why we speak of “life in just relations” as the key concept for a new culture of life overcoming the ambivalence of modernity.

Part 3 deals with a realistic vision and practice of this new culture as well as the question of how religions can contribute to both. We see a good chance for the vision of a new life-enhancing culture convincing majorities

(chapter 11). Even western sciences, starting with physics a century ago, are starting to abandon the Cartesian dualistic paradigm and adopt relational approaches. This is particularly true of brain research, biology, and psychology. There are even the beginnings of a relational political economy. We report on networks of solidarity economy, common good enterprises, and cooperatives. Life in dignity is the guiding metaphor. A crucial factor is the rediscovery of commons. This implies the vision of a new money and property order, guided by public interest. A concept that embraces all of this is the democratization of economy as the basis for real political democracy; the latter has to complement its traditional representative character by direct and participatory democratic elements to become an integral democracy. As Enrique Dussel says, "It has as its foundational content the imperative to produce, reproduce and develop human life within a community."<sup>1</sup> The hope for a new vision is grounded on social movements as the historical subject of the necessary changes. Engaging in them is also the key for individual persons from all classes becoming human in solidarity and shaking off the fetters of fetishism. Finally, it is here where the faiths of the Axial Age as well as nonwestern cultures can experience a genuine revival in contributing to the vision of a new culture of life in just relationships. This indeed is already happening. We offer a host of examples, including the special contribution of ecofeminism.

Chapter 12 deals with the transformation strategy and practice for the implementation of the new vision. We suggest a multiple approach that combines the withdrawal of energy from the dominant system with ways to nurture social and ecological life. The former implies the demystification of the system, defiance, and resistance. The latter deals with postcapitalist alternatives at the local-regional level as well as struggles toward the reappropriation of stolen resources at all levels, aiming at the transformation of economic macrosystems. State institutions have to be subjected to the criteria of social, economic, ecological, and cultural human rights from the start and not only as a sideline. In order to build up the countervailing power necessary to implement this multiple strategy, divisions in the labor, women's, social, ecological, and peace movements must be overcome and broad alliances formed. We see the arousal of the broad population in Arab countries and Israel as well as in some European countries as hopeful signs of the times. To some extent, thanks to the persistent work of the social and labor movements, there have been already basic changes in the economy and politics after the disaster of neoliberal policies in some Latin American countries. But consumers also have to contribute to change. After all, they are the ones who are keeping the accumulation machine running by satisfying their desires for transcendence through the surrogates of capitalism. This brings us back to the necessity of simultaneous personal and collective

transformation. Here, too, we see signs of hope in an emerging new grand narrative of a culture of life.

Finally, we raise the question again of the role of religion in the process of implementing the new vision (chapter 13). We see the critique of religion as a necessary presupposition if we want to make a credible contribution to bringing about the life-enhancing culture. Why? Religion in history has been shown to be deeply ambivalent itself. It has such tremendous power over people's hearts and minds that the powers-that-be have always successfully co-opted religion in order to use it for their own legitimacy and support. Unless religion sees through this mechanism and overcomes it, it has no power and operates as opium, as observed by Marx. There is an antidote against the abuse of religion in the original religious traditions themselves. It is the criterion that God elected the poor, the marginalized, and the excluded. With that yardstick, all religions, particularly those of the Axial Age, can be tested to see whether they live their authentic faith or represent a perversion in the service of the powerful. We show how—in all faith communities addressed in this book—there are growing minorities who are recovering the original liberating character of their religions. They practice it in cooperation with the old and new social movements. This is a sign of hope in times of growing dangers for humanity and the earth. A new Axial Age is not only necessary, but it might become possible—not bringing paradise, but stopping hell on earth.



## PART 1

### *Foundations for a Relational Culture of Life in the Axial Age*

*Resisting Death-Bringing Ancient and Modern Civilizations*