

Money, Power, and Cultural Transformation: A Christian Theology of Stewardship and Societal Change

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Introduction

The question of how societies are transformed has occupied theologians, philosophers, and political theorists for centuries. Dr. C. Peter Wagner (2006), in *The Great Transfer of Wealth*, proposes that societal change historically occurs through three primary mechanisms: philanthropy, violent revolutions, and political tyranny. While each pathway demonstrates the capacity to reshape cultures, Wagner emphasizes philanthropy as the most constructive and Biblically consistent means. Central to his argument is the assertion that money functions as “portable power,” capable of influencing institutions, values, and social structures when stewarded wisely. This claim invites us to a deeper theological reflection within the broader Christian intellectual tradition. Drawing upon Abraham Kuyper’s doctrine of sphere sovereignty, Francis Schaeffer’s worldview analysis, Rousas John Rushdoony’s emphasis on biblical law, and insights from Enlightenment-era Christian thought, this short essay argues that the strategic and ethical use of wealth is a legitimate and necessary means by which the Church participates in cultural transformation under the lordship of Christ.

Pathways of Societal Change

Dr. Wagner’s (2006) tripartite framework provides a useful starting point for analyzing historical patterns of societal transformation. Violent revolutions, such as the French and Bolshevik revolutions, demonstrate the capacity for rapid structural change but often result in instability, oppression, and unintended consequences (Arendt, 1963). Similarly, political tyranny enforces transformation through centralized authority and coercion, frequently undermining human dignity and freedom. Both these pathways reveal that power can indeed reshape society, yet they also expose the moral dangers of power divorced from virtue.

In contrast, Christian philanthropy offers a non-coercive and constructive avenue for change. Rooted in voluntary action and moral vision, Christian philanthropy enables individuals and communities to address societal needs in the context of the redemptive values of the Gospel. Dr. Wagner (2006) contends that the Church has often underestimated this pathway by failing to recognize the transformative potential of large-scale financial stewardship. By reframing wealth as a tool for Kingdom purposes, believers can participate in shaping culture, contrasted to the modern cultural Marxism that resorts to violence or political domination.

Money as “Portable Power” and Biblical Stewardship

Dr. Wagner’s concept of money as “portable power” aligns closely with Biblical teaching on stewardship. Scripture consistently affirms that all resources ultimately belong to God and are

entrusted to humanity for responsible management (Psalm 24:1, English Standard Version). The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) illustrates that faithful stewardship involves not only preservation but also multiplication for the master’s purposes. Wealth, therefore, is not morally neutral in its use; it becomes an extension of the steward’s values and priorities. Wealth is a moral and ethical amplifier that when used in the context of Gospel action can be a transformational force for good. Conversely, when wealth is used in ways not rooted in Biblical morals and ethics it can be a force for corruption.

From a covenantal perspective, the use of wealth is tied to God’s redemptive purposes in history. In the Abrahamic covenant, material blessing is linked to a broader mission: “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3, ESV). This establishes a pattern in which financial resources are not ends in themselves but a means through which God’s blessing flows to others. Consequently, the accumulation and deployment of wealth must be evaluated considering its contribution to covenantal faithfulness and the advancement of God’s Kingdom.

Kuyper and Sphere Sovereignty

Abraham Kuyper’s doctrine of sphere sovereignty (7 Mountains/Structural Functionalism) provides a crucial framework for understanding how wealth can influence society without collapsing into coercion or statism. Kuyper (1880/1998) argued that God has ordained distinct spheres of lived human experience, i.e. family, church, government, education, economy, arts, and media with each of the spheres being accountable directly to Him. No single sphere is authorized to dominate the others, and each must operate according to its own God-given principles.

Within this framework, financial resources enable believers to participate meaningfully across multiple spheres of cultural influence. For example, funding educational institutions allows Christians to shape intellectual formation, while investing in businesses can model ethical economic practices. Kuyper’s famous assertion that Christ claims every square inch of creation underscores the comprehensive scope of Christian engagement (Kuyper, 1880/1998). Wealth, therefore, becomes a practical means by which believers can affirm Christ’s lordship in every domain of life.

Importantly, Kuyper’s vision resists both secular privatization of faith and theocratic overreach. Instead, it encourages a pluralistic yet principled engagement in which Christians influence the culture through philosophical persuasion, the service of others, moral beauty, and excellence. Philanthropy, in this context, functions as a bridge between Gospel conviction and social action.

Schaeffer and the Power of Worldview

Francis Schaeffer (1976) further develops the relationship between ideas and cultural transformation by arguing that worldview shapes societal structures. According to Schaeffer, cultural decline is often the result of abandoning a Biblical worldview in favor of relativism or secular humanism. As a culture moves away from Biblical values, Schaeffer contends that social institutions that guide culture will inevitably devolve as secularism and humanism manifest in

cultural institutions, laws, and artistic expression. One only must examine the modern American culture of social media vanity, trashy movies, ugly art, and pop music to see this dynamic at work.

This insight highlights the strategic importance of Christians investing in cultural institutions. Financial resources enable the establishment and sustainability of schools, media platforms, and artistic endeavors that articulate and embody a Christian worldview. Without such investment, the Church risks ceding cultural influence to competing ideologies that lead a people away from God and His providential care over a nation.

Schaeffer's analysis also underscores the long-term nature of cultural transformation. While political action may produce immediate results, the shaping of worldview occurs over generations and is inherently incremental. Therefore, the wise use of wealth requires patience, foresight, and a commitment to enduring impact rather than short-term gains. This type of thinking is a radical departure from the current Christian ethos towards wealth and its use.

Rushdoony and the Moral Order

Rousas John Rushdoony (1973) contributes to this discussion by emphasizing the centrality of Biblical law in shaping a just society. While his Reconstructionist framework remains controversial, his insistence that all areas of life fall under God's authority reinforces the moral dimension of economic activity. Wealth is not merely a private possession but a covenantal trust that must be used in accordance with divine standards.

Rushdoony's position challenges the assumption that markets alone can produce justice. While economic systems can efficiently allocate resources, they require moral guidance to ensure that outcomes align with ethical principles. The responsible use of wealth, therefore, involves both generosity and discernment, ensuring that personal and institutional financial decisions reflect Biblical values.

Enlightenment Thought and Christian Influence

The Enlightenment era, often characterized as a movement toward secularization, was significantly shaped by Christian intellectual contributions. Thinkers such as John Locke drew on Biblical concepts of human dignity and natural law in developing theories of government and property rights (Locke, 1689/1988). Locke's emphasis on individual rights provided a moral foundation for democratic societies and economic freedom to evolve. Locke was very influential in shaping the ethos of the American Revolution.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/2000) later observed that voluntary associations of social circles played a vital role in sustaining and promoting American democracy. These social associations exemplified a form of philanthropy that addressed social needs without reliance on centralized authority. This tradition aligns closely with Dr. Wagner's vision of societal transformation through voluntary, faith-driven action.

At the same time, Enlightenment thought introduced tensions between reason and God's revealed truth in the Scripture, sometimes leading to the marginalization of religious authority. The Church's task, therefore, is not to reject Enlightenment contributions outright but to critically engage them, affirming what aligns with Biblical truth while challenging what does not.

Secular Perspectives on Wealth and Power

Secular thinkers also recognize the transformative potential of wealth. Milton Friedman (1962) argued that economic freedom is essential for political freedom, emphasizing the importance of decentralized power. Contemporary philanthropy, exemplified by large-scale global initiatives, demonstrates how strategic giving can address complex social issues.

However, secular approaches often lack a unified moral framework, resulting in fragmented or inconsistent goals. Without a transcendent sense of justice and accountability, philanthropy may become driven by the humanistic motivations of socialism and Marxism rather than objective truth. The Christian tradition addresses this gap by grounding the use of wealth in the character of God, the mission of the Church and the teachings of Scripture.

Eschatology and Cultural Engagement

A crucial theological dimension that is often overlooked in discussions of cultural transformation is eschatology. One's view of the future shapes one's engagement in the present. A postmillennial perspective, for example, emphasizes the progressive expansion of Christ's kingdom in history, providing strong motivation for cultural investment and long-term societal transformation. In this eschatological view, the faithful stewardship of resources contributes to the gradual renewal of society under Christ's lordship.

Even within other eschatological frameworks, the call to faithful stewardship remains central. The Church is commanded to occupy until Christ returns (Luke 19:13), engaging in works of justice, mercy, and truth. The use of wealth, therefore, becomes an expression of hope because it is a tangible demonstration of God's redemptive purposes for individuals and people groups.

The Church's Responsibility

The Church is uniquely positioned to integrate moral vision with practical action. By recognizing money as "portable power," believers can intentionally invest in initiatives that promote human flourishing and reflect God's Kingdom values. This includes supporting Christian education, alleviating poverty in our cities, advancing ethical business practices through Christian associations, and fostering cultural excellence through engagement in the 7 Mountains.

At the same time, Scripture warns of the dangers associated with the misuse of wealth. The love of money can lead to corruption and spiritual ruin (1 Timothy 6:10, ESV). Therefore, the Church must cultivate a theology and practice of stewardship that prioritizes faithfulness to godly principles over wealth accumulation. Wealth must be used and maintained with a velocity of use in the context of Gospel mission and cultural change for it to be insulated from greed. Wealth is not an end but a means; it is a tool for serving God and loving our neighbor.

Conclusion

Dr. C. Peter Wagner's assertion that societies change through philanthropy, violent revolutions, or political tyranny provides a compelling framework for understanding historical and contemporary dynamics. Among these pathways, philanthropy emerges as the most ethically and theologically viable option when grounded in a Biblical worldview. By viewing money as "portable power," the Church can recognize the strategic importance of financial stewardship in shaping culture.

Lastly, considering Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, Schaeffer's worldview analysis, Rushdoony's emphasis on moral order, and insights from Enlightenment thought, this essay promotes that the wise use of wealth is an essential component of Christian cultural engagement. When guided by covenantal faithfulness and eschatological hope, Christian philanthropy becomes a powerful instrument for advancing God's kingdom and promoting sustainable goodness in society.

Ultimately, the question is not whether wealth will shape culture, but how. For the Church, the answer lies in faithful stewardship as we use every resource entrusted by God to reflect His justice, mercy, and truth in the world. The alternative is socialism and its centralized control and command mechanisms of the state.

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