
Adam Smith's 'Great Mischief': Thomas Chalmers' Rebuttal of Free Trade in Christianity

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‘I fear that Dr Adam Smith has done great mischief by an unfortunate generalization he has fallen into upon this matter.’ So Thomas Chalmers contended before a Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1832. ‘He seems to think that the articles of christian and common instruction should be left to the mere operation of demand and supply, in the same way as articles of ordinary merchandise are, not adverting to the great distinction between the two.’¹ Coming from such a devotee of *laissez-faire* economics, a vocal opponent of state-controlled poor relief, who earned Marx’s mock-reverence as the ‘arch-Parson’,² such public criticism of Adam Smith might seem strange indeed.

Yet upon closer examination of Chalmers and his context, the surprise lessens. Born in rural Fife, Scotland in 1780 to pious parents, Chalmers was reared in the experimental Calvinism of the ‘Popular Party’, an Evangelical remnant surviving the long eighteenth-century winter of moralistic Moderatism. But the winter overtook him, to the grief of his parents. In 1807 he entered the ministry in the Church of Scotland, a Moderate parson throwing a sop to his clerical duties while giving himself through the week to his real passion – mathematics at St. Andrews. But after several deaths of close relatives and a protracted, serious illness confining him to bed, a spiritual thaw came on. By 1812, he was openly preaching a clear, Cross-centered evangelical message.

¹ Thomas Chalmers and James Doyle, *Evidence Given by the Rev. Thomas Chalmers, D.D. and the Right Rev. James Doyle, D.D. before a Select Committee of the House of Commons on the State of Ireland* (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1832).

² Karl Marx, *Capital* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), Vol. 1, p. 617.

The Evangelical wing of the Kirk took notice of this gifted clerical convert, and his star rose quickly. Chalmers' own personal thaw was in fact an epitome of a broader, Evangelical springtime within the Established Church, and he was destined to take a leading role at the crest of this reawakening. Throughout his career, he advocated a revitalized national Establishment in the face of the growing secularism; the dissolution of traditional, Christian community; the rise of dysfunctional, bureaucratic poor relief; and worst of all, the cancerous spread of irreligion among the working classes at the floor of the social order. As he saw it, the industrial cities of Britain were succumbing to a process of moral desertification, lapsing into islands of practical heathenism within an otherwise Christian land. New wind was filling the Church's sails. But the Establishment needed development and direction – not a dismantling.

Yet other winds of change were blowing as well. Already one western nation, the young United States, had embraced disestablishment. Not only were the more free-thinking British openly questioning national Churches, but by the 1830s, a growing number of Evangelical Dissenters had added their voice. The state should exit the business of religion. That Adam Smith lent his weight to the side of disestablishment and published these ideas in his seminal *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 – the very year of America's declared independence – is quite striking. This was the future; but not as Chalmers saw it.

Contemporary scholarship has, since the mid-twentieth century, explored what has been called 'economic imperialism', which is the extension of economic analysis to social behaviour not conventionally addressed by economists. Economics has always been a human science; so the move to the economics of religious behaviour should be no leap. But some have pointed out that this 'new' exploration is not nearly that new. Adam Smith had actually broached this discourse centuries before, as his treatment of a religious 'marketplace' *vis-à-vis* Establishments attests.³ Several scholars, consequently, have explored his critique of Establishments,⁴ with a smaller subset of scholars treating Smith and Chalmers comparatively. Wilson

³ Gary M. Anderson, 'Mr Smith and the Preachers: the economics of religion in *The Wealth of Nations*', *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 96:5 (1988), pp. 1066-88; Laurence R. Iannaccone, 'The consequences of religious market structure: Adam Smith and the economics of religion', *Rationality and Society*, Vol. 3:2 (1991), pp. 156-177.

⁴ Nathan Rosenberg, 'Some institutional aspects of *The Wealth of Nations*', *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 18:6 (1960), pp. 557-70; Charles Leathers and J. Patrick Raines, 'Adam Smith on competitive religious markets', *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 24:2 (1992), pp. 499-513; Robert B. Ekelund, Jr., Robert F. Hébert, and Robert D. Tollison,

and Dixon, while passing over discussions of Establishments, nevertheless showed Chalmers' politico-economic affinity with Smith over man's 'irreducibly social' and thus moral 'self', notwithstanding the economically beneficial outcome of each individual following his own personal interests in the marketplace.⁵ Waterman construed his advocacy for Establishments in political-economic terms. Competition in religion will not adequately ensure the moralization of the lower classes, which is indispensable to raise them socio-economically. Because religion moralizes, therefore religion must be subsidized.⁶ Waterman modifies Stewart Brown's 'godly commonwealth' thesis by asserting that Chalmers was 'a moral paternalist but an economic individualist.'⁷

Yet none have probed with any depth Chalmers' public rejoinder to the late father of classical economics, a historical moment of at least some note given the prominence of these two Scottish figures straddling the early and late modern periods. This article aims to address this subject. In the following pages, I will outline Smith's advocacy of a religious free market, or conversely, his qualms with state interference in the free exchange of religious goods and services by way of state-endowed Church Establishments, followed by Thomas Chalmers' critique of that argument as an otherwise hardy advocate of free market principles. In the latter, I will show how Chalmers' critique actually reveals nuances within orthodox views of human nature in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Calvinist Scotland, and how Chalmers' position in other ways held much in common with Smith's and with Enlightenment ideals generally.⁸

'Adam Smith on religion and market structure', *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 37:4 (2005), pp. 647-660.

⁵ David Wilson and William Dixon, 'The irreducibly social self in classical economy: Adam Smith and Thomas Chalmers meet G. H. Mead', *History of Economics Review*, Vol. 40 (2004), pp. 121-136.

⁶ Anthony M. C. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798-1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 217-252.

⁷ Brown argued that Chalmers viewed the free market as based on natural principles. But the well-being of society could not rise to true harmony, peace, and prosperity by nature alone. Christianity could take the mass of individuals acting on instinct and fuse them together. A renewed establishment could restore the old 'communal ideal' of pre-Industrial, rural Scotland. Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 31-32, 111-112.

⁸ While it is beyond the scope of the present article, I would further suggest that Chalmers' argumentation for Establishments was historically unprecedented for the sheer extent of his theorizing; for his novel, retrospective interpretations; and for his fresh, contemporary recasting of a Church Establishment as a 'Great Home Mission' in a secularizing Christendom.

I. Smith's Liberal Critique of Establishments

For starters, Smith approaches the question of Church Establishments strictly from within the framework of political economy. It is a question of whether the state ought to subsidize the Church, and if so, how? Smith orients the reader by distinguishing the regular expenses of the sovereign or commonwealth: the national defence, public works and institutions, and last, the education of the people.⁹ Of the latter, there are those educational institutions for the youth and those for citizens of all ages. He treats Church Establishments under that final subdivision. The religious instruction of all is 'chiefly' that form of instruction that Adam Smith had in mind as public instruction for all the citizens, young and old. That it is of a national concern is a given. 'This is a species of instruction of which the object is not so much to render the people good citizens in this world, as to prepare them for another and a better world in a life to come.'¹⁰ And as with any service of general benefit to the commonwealth, its ministrations should be financed – all things being equal.

But all things are not equal. Smith argues that state-endowed Establishments in general are not the most efficient way to secure the religious instruction of a nation and that, conversely, leaving religious instruction to the law of supply and demand, as with most other services in the marketplace, is optimal. Ministers in an endowed Establishment, their positions being completely secure and independent, are greatly exposed to the temptations of laxity and self-indulgence. Voluntary ministers on the other hand, operating outside the system, depend on willing hearers for their support and so are prompted to greater 'exertion, zeal, and industry'. Further, because clergy of the Establishment are beholden to secular power, they readily gravitate to higher society and so lose touch with the common man, unlike their Voluntary counterparts. But the greatest threat of all is that these churchmen may always avail themselves of their privileged, political status when opportunity calls and even sway the state to repress, or even persecute, those whom they judge their enemies.¹¹

In narrating the rise of Church Establishments, Smith argued that the state first allied itself with the Church – or rather, that particular sect of Christianity then in the ascendant – out of political expedience.¹²

⁹ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (2 vols., London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776), Vol. 2, pp. 328-330.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 374.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 375.

¹² Ibid., p. 379.

Whatever gains a state would hope to obtain by such an alliance, yet it must reckon with the real threat that an Established Church poses, as these disparate churches are thereby forged into a combined interest possessing a power to rival that of the state.¹³ One sovereign domain then effectively dwells within or alongside another. Can any commonwealth afford to tolerate, much less sanction and endow such an institution? And that institution only becomes the more ominous when it is but an arm of a larger transnational institution, as it was under Roman papacy during the Middle Ages.¹⁴

If, however, the state had merely left all alone, maintaining a strict policy of *laissez faire* in the religious marketplace, competition among religious sects would have flourished, retarding ecclesiastical combination and encouraging diversity. In the vacuum of monopoly, further and further religious subdivision would occur, pushing onward towards the far end of the total autonomy of local congregations. The resulting plethora of such smaller associations and congregational denominations of one would yield several wholesome results, viewed from the state's perspective. First, *laissez faire* would promote greater peace and order in the commonwealth. While this policy would give ample room for the interests of each sect and would in fact encourage a healthy 'hunger' (unlike Establishments that breed fat and lazy churchmen), free market competition would have the tendency to curb all fanatic zeal.¹⁵ The most hot-tempered enthusiasts would quickly realize that giving rein to their partisan passions would easily jeopardize their peaceful coexistence in this liberal civil society. One must live and let live. Enlightenment moderation, then, is the sure trophy of religious *laissez faire*, since it dampens the wildfire of many social disorders. One cannot help but see, in back of all this, the general European weariness to the wars of religion.¹⁶

Second, small sects arising from the common people tend to idealize and foster a wholesome morality in class-stratified societies.¹⁷ Unlike the morally 'loose system' preferred by higher society, the lower classes prefer the 'strict or austere' system.¹⁸ Precisely because the poor have little margin

¹³ Ibid., pp. 386-387.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 390-391.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 380.

¹⁶ Smith explicitly laments that independency did not prevail through the English Civil War, while he commends the American colonies and especially Pennsylvania. See Smith, *Wealth*, Vol. 2, p. 381.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 381-384.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 381.

of error to give themselves over to improvident vices, their peers tend to stigmatize those who violate their conservative norms. Religious sects historically have drawn primarily from the common people, precisely because they have embraced this more creditable 'austere' morality.¹⁹ These sects especially appeal in the cities since membership entails moral accountability, which offers a kind of check on the temptations of urban anonymity. The sect offers a mechanism to preserve and protect one's reputation by participation in its spiritual regimen, upon pain of excommunication.²⁰ Yet there is a downside, says Smith. Such discipline tends to produce excessive rigour and unsocial behaviour. The state may easily counteract these excesses by promoting the study of science and philosophy among the common people.²¹ 'Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition.'²² The state should also subsidize popular amusements, which 'would easily dissipate ... that melancholy and gloomy humour which is almost always the nurse of popular superstition and enthusiasm.'²³

Last, the religious free market's subdivisions and multiplications would tend to neutralize religious players politically.²⁴ Smith does not state this so baldly, but it is obviously implied. In the monopoly of an Establishment, they are a force to be reckoned with.²⁵ Only the state's power of the sword can check this combined interest, especially as it wields a spiritual and thus a transcendent power over the minds and consciences of the people.²⁶ Under religious *laissez faire*, however, they are rather tame, if not impotent.

All this being said, while the ideal arrangement would be for the government to enact and ensure perfect toleration of all sects in the absence of an Established Church, this may not always be attainable. The next best scenario would be for the state to co-exist with an Establishment, and more, to neutralize its baneful effects and influence it to secure the best interests of the commonwealth.²⁷ Outright force is quite counter-productive; milder measures are best, such as persuasion and incentivization through

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 383.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 383-384.

²¹ Ibid., p. 384.

²² Ibid., p. 385.

²³ Ibid., p. 385.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 381.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 385.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 386-387.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 389.

preferments. Not surprisingly, Smith admires the Erastian form of Church government exemplified by the Church of England:

This system of church government was from the beginning favourable to peace and good order, and to submission to the civil sovereign. It has never, accordingly, been the occasion of any tumult or civil commotion in any country in which it has once been established. The Church of England in particular has always valued herself, with great reason, upon the unexceptionable loyalty of her principles. Under such a government the clergy naturally endeavour to recommend themselves to the sovereign, to the court, and to the nobility and gentry of the country, by whose influence they chiefly expect to obtain preferment.²⁸

In Smith's estimation, such clerical dependence on the court breeds deference to their superiors – a thing to be desired in a stratified society – and tends to encourage their pursuit of and proficiency in the arts and sciences. Yet this system has frequently also bred clerical sycophancy, as well as indifference to care for the lower ranks of society, whom they have largely been charged to pastor.²⁹

Presbyterian Establishments, however, are better yet.³⁰ Their unique system has surpassed others in the learning and morals of their clergy, such that Smith could claim, 'There is scarce perhaps to be found anywhere in Europe a more learned, decent, independent, and respectable set of men than the greater part of the presbyterian clergy of Holland, Geneva, Switzerland, and Scotland.'³¹ Because the benefices of these Church Establishments are comparatively lower and less varied, there is less incentive for clerical ambition and more incentive to identify with the common people and gain their allegiance by a more austere morality:

In his own conduct, therefore, he is obliged to follow that system of morals which the common people respect the most. He gains their esteem and affection by that plan of life which his own interest and situation would

²⁸ Ibid., p. 400.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 400-401.

³⁰ Only, Smith qualifies his praise to those 'presbyterian churches, where the rights of patronage are thoroughly established'. Ibid., p. 403. The Reformers and many of their heirs disputed the propriety of patronage, which was ultimately imposed upon the Church of Scotland in 1712. While Chalmers himself for some time proposed the reform of the patronage system, he ultimately came to oppose it altogether and broke with the Established Church in 1843 over it as the lever of the state's encroachment on the spiritual prerogatives of the Church. Brown, *Godly Commonwealth*, pp. 211-349.

³¹ Smith, *Wealth*, Vol. 2, p. 403.

lead him to follow. The common people look upon him with that kindness with which we naturally regard one who approaches somewhat to our own condition, but who, we think, ought to be in a higher. Their kindness naturally provokes his kindness. He becomes careful to instruct them, and attentive to assist and relieve them. He does not even despise the prejudices of people who are disposed to be so favourable to him, and never treats them with those contemptuous and arrogant airs which we so often meet with in the proud dignitaries of opulent and well-endowed churches. The presbyterian clergy, accordingly, have more influence over the minds of the common people than perhaps the clergy of any other established church. It is accordingly in presbyterian countries only that we ever find the common people converted, without persecution, completely, and almost to a man, to the established church.³²

These Presbyterian Establishments, further, are preferable inasmuch as their more generally modest benefices make university chairs desirable objects for clerical ambition, thus encouraging learning among the clergy. But in England, the greater disparity of benefices and the relatively modest fiscal advantage of university chairs mean that the more academically promising clergy will pass over the universities for well-endowed benefices.³³ And the lesser the revenue dedicated to the Church, the more allocated to civil uses.³⁴ But again, it must be remembered that this is but a hat-tip, since the optimal arrangement is a religious free market with no government interference.

II. Chalmers' Evangelical Defence of Establishments

Chalmers first overtly challenges Smith in his published appendix to his 1817 sermon, 'On the Death of the Princess Charlotte of Wales'.³⁵ In the sermon itself, Chalmers chastised Britain's upper classes for neglecting the vast, unchurched masses swelling at the bottom of society, and urgently appealed for greater ecclesiastical provision and pastoral care. As his well-heeled and elite hearers sat comfortably in church on this day of national mourning – many of them being infrequent church-attenders to begin with – countless numbers of the poor were displaced,

³² Ibid., pp. 403-404.

³³ Ibid., pp. 404-405.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 406-407.

³⁵ Thomas Chalmers, *A Sermon Delivered in the Tron Church, Glasgow, on Wednesday, Nov. 19th, 1817, the Day of the Funeral of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte of Wales* (Glasgow: John Smith and Son, 1817).

priced-out,³⁶ unsought, and wholly forgotten from the Kirk of their fathers. Only by a greatly increased supply of churches, and more focused pastoral activity among these degraded districts, would the Gospel transform the hearts, the lives, and consequently the social fabric of the underclass. This would prove to be a most worthy investment in the moral character and thus in the stability of the commonwealth, while to dismiss it would threaten catastrophic revolution. If nothing is done to bring 'this enormous physical strength under the control of Christian and humanized principle, the day may yet come when it may lift against the authorities of the land its brawny vigour, and discharge upon them all the turbulence of its rude and volcanic energy.'³⁷

But in the appendix, Chalmers names names. That is, he further specifies that an endowed national Establishment is necessary for an abundant and general supply of religious instruction, directly contradicting Adam Smith's arguments above in the *Wealth of Nations*. He hardly disputes that the best policy for all temporal commodities, the conventional 'marketplace', is to leave all to the pure operation of supply and demand. But it is not at all so with spiritual 'commodities', since, unlike temporal ones, the native demand is neither adequate nor universal. The *laissez faire* principle cannot alone achieve the thorough religious instruction and care of a nation.³⁸

In support of his argument, he points to Scotland's historic success in public education. Its parochial school system had yielded far superior results to that of England, which operates on the *laissez faire* principle, leaving the teachers and the taught altogether to private, market forces. It is with secular as it is with religious education: the native demand lags behind it. Without outside intervention, sizable segments of the population would be bereft of both academic and spiritual provision.³⁹ Further, in Scotland, where in recent years the population of the cities had far outstripped the Establishment's provision for the people, Dissenters, who operated on the law of supply and demand, had quite failed to remedy the defect.⁴⁰ Yet perhaps

³⁶ This alludes to the standard practice of the day of charging worshipers a fee to rent a seat in the church during services. As a means of guaranteeing the maintenance of the ministry and the upkeep of the property, Chalmers had no objection to it. Only, he strenuously fought the practice of pricing the church seats beyond the reach of the poor in the parish and letting others secure them from all quarters, whether they lived in the parish or not.

³⁷ Chalmers, *Princess Charlotte*, p. 31.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39. In this vein, Chalmers also contends that the American voluntary-religious experiment had proven a failure in supplying the whole of its population. Some

surprisingly, Chalmers advocated for the uninhibited and energetic activity of Dissenters. Partly, they served as a much-needed supplement to the efforts of Evangelical churchmen who were hindered from much of their parochial labours through civil maladministration; partly as a goad to the Establishment's complacency and corruption, alarming the 'bigots of an establishment'; and partly as a stimulant to the 'zeal, and diligence, and piety' of the best ministers of the Church. And so we see in this critique of Smith's religious *laissez faire* some significant concession, even an endorsement of a kind of religious competition. There ought to be a favoured Church, civilly endowed; but absolute ecclesiastical monopolies are ruinous.⁴¹

From this seminal piece in 1817, Chalmers wrote and spoke many times in favor of Church Establishments throughout his career, sometimes explicitly referencing Smith and at other times simply countering his sentiments as well as those of the religious Voluntaries who from 1829 and forward mounted a frontal assault on state-established Churches. While Smith made his appeal from a politico-economic perspective and the Voluntaries from an ethico-religious one, both streams converged with force in the cause of total Disestablishment, and consequently, of Chalmers' vision of the Church as a great Home Mission and the guardian of the nation's best and highest interests.⁴² In the following pages, we will expand on this original argument and flesh out this dimension of his master-scheme for the 'Christian good of Scotland', and specifically with Smith in the background.

In 1819, two years after this seminal publication contra Smith, Chalmers published two important works where he elaborated on the subject of a national provision for the religious and educational needs of Scotland's working classes, among other kindred subjects. These were

contemporary voices would surely dispute such claims, arguing instead that the American experiment vindicated the Smithian religious free market ideal. See Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, 'How the upstart sects won America, 1776–1850', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 28:1 (1989), pp. 27–44; Laurence R. Iannaccone, 'Introduction to the Economics of Religion', *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. 36:3 (1998), pp. 1465–1495; Iannaccone, 'Religious Market Structure', pp. 156–177.

⁴¹ Chalmers, *Princess Charlotte*, pp. 42–43.

⁴² Stewart Brown draws a direct line from the Enlightenment and the nineteenth-century Voluntaries: 'Scottish Vountaryism, moreover, could draw intellectual support from the civic thought of the Scottish Enlightenment, with its emphasis on radical individualism, historical progress and political economy, and its questioning of traditional authority.' Brown, 'Religion and the Rise of Liberalism: the first Disestablishment campaign in Scotland, 1829–1843', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 48:4 (1997), p. 687.

A Consideration of the System of Parochial Schools in Scotland and the first instalment of his eventual three-volume politico-economic magnum opus, *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*.⁴³ It should also be noted that Chalmers published these two works just three months after assuming the charge of the newly created St. John's parish in Glasgow, adjacent to his prior Tron parish. Chalmers had longed to be free of many burdensome administrative duties devolved on city clergy in those days that stymied his ability to fulfil his ministerial and pastoral responsibilities. Further, in his appeal to the town council to have a new parish created, he also sought to have it wholly released from its obligatory participation in its bureaucratic system of poor relief, by which it contributed all its benevolent collections for redistribution to needy individuals throughout Glasgow – a kind of embryonic 'welfare system'. St. John's would instead be autonomous in the management of its own poor through deacons who would involve themselves personally with their needy parishioners. Such a social experiment would demonstrate, as Chalmers saw it, that the old model of local, voluntary poor relief of old rural Scotland was feasible in her modern, industrialized cities. *The Christian and Civic Economy* in particular aimed to expound what he sought experimentally to validate in St. John's, Glasgow. In these earlier public works, Chalmers further justifies his advocacy for Church Establishments by stressing a particular view of human nature. Human nature – at least as he articulates it in this discourse – is dull, shortsighted, and weak; then worse, it is altogether morally depraved. And yet, qualifying these first two negative appraisals, human nature retains a certain goodness that is susceptible to betterment.

(a) Human Nature as Weak

First, his 'soft' pessimism falls well within the range of conventional Enlightenment views of human nature as imperfect and weak, especially with respect to its motivation for 'secular' education. Adam Smith as we have seen had no qualms speaking of the infirmity of man's character. We are all susceptible to folly and harmful influences. So also Chalmers. Wholly unendowed schools – what today we might call 'public'⁴⁴ – are

⁴³ Thomas Chalmers, *Considerations on the System of Parochial Schools in Scotland and on the Advantage of Establishing Them in Large Towns* (Glasgow: James Hedderwick, 1819); *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, Vol. 1 (Glasgow: Printed by J. Starke, for Chalmers & Collins, 1821). The latter volume and the following two formed a three-volume set which was later incorporated in 1834 in his *Collected Works*, and was renamed *The Christian and Economic Polity of a Nation*.

⁴⁴ In the United Kingdom; 'private' in the United States.

powerless to attract the uneducated public, since they have no firsthand experience of education or its benefits. Further, their virtues are abstract to them, holding out promises of good much further down the road, which the daily needs and wants of physical nature easily crowd out. The problem is a demand-side problem. Unlike the immediate appetite for the needs and wants of the body, the demand for popular education lags. Leave human nature to its own impulses, and its physical needs will be supplied – indeed, ‘a national establishment of bakers, or butchers, or tailors, or shoemakers is altogether superfluous’, if not ridiculous.⁴⁵ But leaving the ‘moral and intellectual wants of our nature’ to the mercies of pure market forces would only end in a barbarous ‘night of ignorance’.⁴⁶

The opposite system of education – fully endowed and free for all – also highlights the infirmities of nature with respect to the higher pursuits of the mind. Whereas a system of totally unsubsidized schools will fail to elicit a demand worthy of the supply, a system that is absolutely free will prove just as ineffective. ‘What is gotten for no value, is rated at no value.’⁴⁷ Nature’s appetite for education must be cultivated to see the value of the investment of the effort it entails, and some premium – that is, some attainable price – will tend to arouse a proper demand. This ‘medium system’, that which was instituted and developed by the Scottish Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, met the people ‘half-way’. Access to quality education was offered to all classes throughout the entirety of the land, but at some price that would secure the buy-in both of parents and students. This system presumes the sluggishness and shortsightedness of human nature regarding secular education, and yet that, under the right paternal regime, it can be effectively stimulated.⁴⁸

But Chalmers’ soft pessimism also applied to the demand of the working classes for spiritual as well as general education. The sad reality is that, while there is always sufficient demand for temporal goods – indeed, there is no defect in human nature whatsoever for those – yet ‘the spontaneous demand of human beings for religion, is far short of the

⁴⁵ Chalmers, *Considerations*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9. Many years later Chalmers spoke of establishing a system of education that aimed to ‘inure’ a population the payment of a portion of their children’s fees, ‘which would have the effect of transmitting the interest in education from father to son, and so make it a fixture’. Thomas Chalmers, *Churches and Schools for the Working Classes* (Edinburgh: John D. Love, 1846), p. 8.

actual interest which they have in it.⁴⁹ The better habits of diligent church attendance among the old Scottish peasantry had almost completely disappeared in the early nineteenth century. Lapsed demand stood in need of reviving; only an infusion of energy from beyond, by an army of selfless, spiritual workers, could stimulate the old social custom of devotion to the ‘outward and ordinary means of grace’.⁵⁰ Simply erecting a church building in a district was no sufficient guarantee to summon a neighbouring population to enter its doors – except, of course, for the few who already had a predisposition for these things. Only by an aggressive mission to the houses and hearts of the people could that dormant, that stagnant religious demand be roused.

(b) Human Nature as Depraved

But when Chalmers views human nature with respect to spiritual or religious interests, we often encounter a distinctly harder pessimism. Within months of Chalmers’ first open critique of Smith’s religious free market principle in November 1817, he delivered a message in his Thursday series of noon lectures entitled ‘The Duty and Means of Christianizing Our Home Population’.⁵¹ Citing as his text the words of Mark 16:15, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature’, he opened with the following assertion, ‘Christianity proceeds upon the native indisposition of the human heart to its truths and its lessons.’⁵² There is certainly overlap with the preceding soft pessimism, but his discourse soon moves from ‘spiritual lethargy’ to being ‘fast asleep in ... worldliness’.⁵³ Indeed, humanity is but a ‘dead mass’⁵⁴ requiring a wholly foreign principle to be brought to bear upon it if there is to be any hope of spiritual life. This demand is not just feeble; it is dead.

Mission for Chalmers does not simply supply the heathen with the Gospel. It seeks first to implant an exogenous ‘taste’, to create a non-existing demand for ‘the pearl of great price’.⁵⁵ The apostles originally went

⁴⁹ Chalmers, *Christian and Civic Economy*, Vol. 1, p. 89.

⁵⁰ Westminster Assembly of Divines, ‘The Shorter Catechism’, in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646; repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1995), p. 311.

⁵¹ Thomas Chalmers, ‘The Duty and Means of Christianizing Our Home Population’, in *Sermons Preached in St. John’s Church, Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1823), pp. 381-404.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 382

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 383-384, 386.

out at the expense of converts on the home front in order to evangelize the ignorant, indifferent, and hostile 'without money and without price'. And missions has ever since throughout the long history of the Church operated on the principle 'freely ye have received: freely give.' This is not the system of the religious free market, without any outside interference. Rather, it is a system heavily subsidized and energized by the spiritually enlightened to create religious markets *de novo*. And the final clincher for Chalmers in contending for national religious Establishments against Adam Smith is that mission fields are not just foreign, they are also domestic. There was at that time, Chalmers claimed, a vast irreligious Scottish population spreading like gangrene their very doorstep. It will not do wait for a demand from these domestic 'heathen'.⁵⁶ No, the supply must be aggressively 'obtruded' upon them, in the hopes that God will supernaturally intervene to awaken a hunger in the 'outcast' population.⁵⁷ The operative principle, then, is not attraction but aggression and permeation.⁵⁸

The depravity of the population is so deep and stubborn, that a national endowment for the Church also is but a partial solution. There must be a vigorous, coordinated, and sustained endeavour by the ministers and elders of the Church, city by city, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, right down to the particular roads, streets, lanes, and alleys. Every household must be reached, and that systematically:

For the accomplishment of this, there must not only be a going forth on the vast and untrodden spaces that are without; there must be a filling up of the numerous and peopled vacancies that are within – a busy, internal locomotion, that might circulate, and disperse, and branch off to the right and to the left, among the many thousand families which are at hand: And thoroughly to pervade these families; to make good a lodgment in the midst of them, for the nearer or the more frequent ministrations of Christianity than before; to have gained welcome for the Gospel testimony into their houses, and, in return, to have drawn any of them forth to attendance on the place of Sabbath and of solemn services – this, also, is to act upon our text, this is to do the part, and to render one of the best achievements of a missionary.⁵⁹

Money is necessary. But missionaries are vital.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 387.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 384, 386.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 388, 398, 400.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 388.

Chalmers more exhaustively treats the subject in his systematic blueprint for a new Christian social order, *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*. Here too he oscillates between a soft and a hard pessimism. Again, we recall that Smith found Establishments superfluous at best, if not a nuisance to the commonwealth, based on the contention that religious goods would optimally reach the religious consumer in the same way as temporal goods on the *laissez faire* plan. By leaving all free and unfettered to pursue their own interests, and without the incubus of a government-subsidized Establishment, the religious marketplace will thrive. Chalmers hardly disputed Smith's economic doctrine; but Smith ruinously misapplied it by confounding things that differed:

The sensation of hunger is a sufficient guarantee for there being as many bakers in a country, as it is good and necessary for the country to have, without any national establishment of bakers

But the case is widely different, when the appetite for any good, is short of the degree in which that good is useful or necessary; and, above all, when just in proportion to our want of it, is the decay of our appetite towards it. Now this is, generally speaking, the case with religious instruction. The less we have of it, the less we desire to have of it. It is not with the aliment of the soul, as it is with the aliment of the body. The latter will be sought after; the former must be offered to a people, whose spiritual appetite is in a state of dormancy, and with whom it is just as necessary to create a hunger, as it is to minister a positive supply. In these circumstances, it were vain to wait for any original movement on the part of the receivers. It must be made on the part of the dispensers.⁶⁰

The mass of the working classes were 'torpid ... and lethargic', sinking into a 'bulky sediment' alienated from the old devotions of its forebears.⁶¹ There is no hope for the recovery of such a population from its 'practical heathenism' but by a subsidized, concerted, and aggressive home mission.⁶²

In essence, Chalmers' argument for a national Establishment is the old missionary argument. The unevangelized heathen neither know nor desire the Gospel. They are wholly 'alienated' from the outward ordinances

⁶⁰ Chalmers, *Christian and Civic Economy*, Vol. 1, pp. 89-90. While he did not directly invoke Smith in this passage, one of Smith's most frequently cited doctrines in his *Wealth of Nations* is suggestive here: 'It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.' Smith, *Wealth*, Vol. 1, p. 7.

⁶¹ Chalmers, *Christian and Civic Economy*, Vol. 1, p. 116.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 239.

of Christianity and, indeed, from God.⁶³ Consequently, missionaries must go out to evangelize them, not to wait for them to seek what to them is wholly unknown and undesired.

Nature does not go forth in search of Christianity, but Christianity goes forth to knock at the door of nature, and, if possible, awaken her out of her sluggishness. This was the way of it at its first promulgation. It is the way of it in every missionary enterprise. And seeing, that the disinclination of the human heart to entertain the overtures of the gospel, forms a mightier obstacle to its reception among men, than all the oceans and continents which missionaries have to traverse, there ought to be a series of aggressive measures in behalf of Christianity, carried on from one age to another, in every clime and country of Christendom. To wait till the people shall stir so effectually, as that places of worship shall be built by them, and the maintenance of teachers shall be provided by them, and that, abundantly enough for all the moral and spiritual necessities of our nation, is very like a reversal of the principle on which Christianity was first introduced amongst us, and on which, we apprehend, Christianity must still be upheld amongst us. We, therefore, hold it to be wise, in every Christian government, to meet the people with a ready-made apparatus of Christian education.⁶⁴

A religious Establishment, then, is but a mode of Christian mission, peculiar to a formally Christian nation and well suited for 'overcoming [the] evil tendency of our nature'.⁶⁵ Its *raison d'être* is, 'instead of only holding forth its signals to those of them who are awake, it knocks at the doors of those who are most profoundly asleep, and, with a force far more effective than if it were physical, drags them out to a willing attendance upon its ministrations.' Such was the urgency of the problem and the perceived solution ready at hand, that his discourse could take on martial, epic themes. Nothing else would do to check and reverse 'this woful degeneracy ... but an actual search and entry upon the territory of wickedness.'⁶⁶

More than twenty years later, we find Chalmers making the same basic case, including his stock illustrations of butchers and bakers:

If you were the dispenser of physical good things, such as bread, butcher's-meat, and other things of the same nature, – there would be no necessity

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 102, 107, 128.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 93-4; cf. p. 103.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 84.

for setting up the aggressive principle, – the attractive principle would be sufficient to insure a demand for them; but I say you are the dispenser of that which has no charm for man, who is morally and spiritually dead, and therefore, you must go forth to him with the benefits of which you are the dispenser; and this is missionary work at a small distance. Don't think that it is necessary that you should travel thousands of miles, or that you have immense oceans to traverse, before you can engage in a missionary work. There are wretched creatures in many parts of this town, who are at as great a moral distance from the gospel, and from all its lessons, as if they had been born and lived all their days in the wilds of Tartary. Now, this is what I call a Home Mission, which essentially requires all which constitutes the virtue of self-denial in the missionary work.⁶⁷

This was the fulcrum by which he refuted religious free market. Smith failed to grapple with the self-contradictory, weak, and especially the radically depraved dimensions of man's nature.

(c) Human Nature as Responsive

Finally and perhaps even paradoxically, Chalmers entertained a view of human nature that was from another angle more sanguine, if not quite optimistic. While firmly committed to the Augustinianism of the Scottish Kirk and its bleak outlook on man's fallenness, Divine Providence had clearly maintained something good in the constitution of even the most profligate of sinners, so as to make it meaningfully good in some sense and susceptible of improvement when shown goodness by others. To be sure, as a committed Evangelical, Chalmers' ultimate hope for mankind lay outside the sphere of nature. Christianity is a supernatural religion, with a supernatural Christ on a supernatural errand, sending a supernatural Spirit to regenerate those hopelessly dead in sins. And yet in the economy of God, sinners are by divine restraint and preservation capable of what earlier theologians called *justitia civilis* – civil righteousness.⁶⁸ *In foro Dei*, men lack any spiritual good to make them pleasing to God, nor

⁶⁷ Chalmers, *Churches and Schools*, p. 6.

⁶⁸ The concept of *justitia civilis* had long been a mediating doctrine within Reformed theology; see Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus: Scott & Bascom, Printers, 1852), pp. 32, 479; Johannes Althusius, *Politica: An Abridged Translation of Politics Methodically Set Forth and Illustrated with Sacred and Profane Examples*, ed. and trans. Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1964), p. 147; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (3 vols., Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1992), Vol. 1, p. 669; Vol. 2, p. 4.

are they inclined at all to seek Him in any truly meaningful way. But *in foro humanae*, all men partake of virtues to varying degrees that benefit themselves and others.⁶⁹ And more, goodwill begets goodwill among men, and even moral improvement – however much such reform falls woefully short of a state of salvation by faith in Christ crucified.

It is this qualifier that prevents Chalmers' aggressive territorial model from proving a complete exercise in futility. In fact, men's inveterate depravity notwithstanding, a religious Establishment presents a most hopeful means of recovering the heathen masses. It works not by diffuse, unchanneled might, but by division and subdivision of labour. The Established Church can subdue the fearsome leviathan by the combined conquest of 'littles'.⁷⁰ But whence the force of the 'little', the isolated parish itself? Each parish, stitched into a great patchwork blanketing the nation, operates on the principle of 'locality': 'binding one church with one minister to one locality'.⁷¹ This portentous 'juxtaposition' ideally begins with a neighbourhood church building, one within easy walking distance of all the residents.⁷² Its very notable presence may impress itself on their attention and contribute to the reviving of the habit of church attendance. It is their church. And the formal tie of a minister to that particular district, and thus with one another would 'go to revive a feeling, which is now nearly obliterated in towns, whereby the house which a man occupies, should be connected, in his mind, with the parish in which it is situated, and an ecclesiastical relationship be recognized with the clergyman of the parish.'⁷³ Consequently, 'in the very first steps of this approximation, there is an encouragement for going onward.'⁷⁴

Yet this potent localism, this juxtaposition of a designated church building, a dedicated pastor, and delineated neighbourhood, will still prove abortive on Chalmers' more pessimist construction of human nature. At best, the demand is sluggish and dormant. This, says Chalmers, is precisely why the 'aggressive principle' must complement that of locality. The resident pastor must not just preach every Sabbath, but descend from his pulpit the week following to visit the parishioners. He must systematically go from 'house to house', visiting each and every one who will give him

⁶⁹ Compare ch. 6.2-4, 'Of The Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof', and ch. 16.7, 'Of Good Works', in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1995), pp. 38-40, 72-3.

⁷⁰ Chalmers, *Christian and Civic Economy*, Vol. 1, pp. 73, 91, 406.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 98, 112.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

⁷⁴ Chalmers, 'Duty and Means', p. 389.

the courtesy of their attention and seizing every lawful opportunity for doing them good. He cannot wait to attract them, for one may sooner raise the dead. But he must go and ply them personally with himself as the appointed Gospel messenger in that locality. Even short of gaining actual conversions,⁷⁵ he will undoubtedly find that human nature 'cannot withstand' such moral suasion:

It is a particularly wrong imagination, that in cities there is an insolent defiance among the labouring classes, which no assiduities of service or of good-will on the part of their clergyman can possibly overcome. Let him but try what their temperament is in this matter, and he will find it in every way as courteous and inviting, as among the most primitive of our Scottish peasantry. Let him be but alert to every call of threatening disease among his people, and the ready attendant upon every death-bed – let him ply not his fatiguing, but his easy and most practicable rounds of visitation in the midst of them – let him be zealous for their best interests, and not in the spirit of a fawning obsequiousness, but in that of a manly, intelligent, and honest friendship, let him stand forth as the guardian of the poor, the guide and the counsellor of their children; it is positively not in human nature to withstand the charm and the power which lie in such unwearied ministrations – and if visibly prompted by the affinity that there is in the man's heart for his fellows of the species, there will, by a law of the human constitution, be an affinity in theirs towards him, which they cannot stifle, though they would; and they will have no wish to stifle it.⁷⁶

Again, there is more to the story regarding human nature. This inability of men ultimately to resist such a personal campaign of goodwill points to some latent goodness yet buried within the depraved population. For all the opprobrium Chalmers could heap on the depraved working classes, he clearly saw much potential in them, more than enough to encourage spiritual labourers to carve out a 'territorial vineyard' in their midst. In fact, Chalmers was actually refuting those sceptics who assumed the poor in their city slums were past reclamation, that their nature had fundamentally deteriorated too far. Not so. Human nature is fundamentally the same in the slums as anywhere else. For this very reason, Chalmers explicitly argued for the 'Advantage and Possibility of Assimilating a Town to a Country Parish'.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Chalmers, *Christian and Civic Economy*, Vol. 1, p. 69.

⁷⁶ Chalmers, 'Duty and Means', pp. 396-7.

⁷⁷ Chalmers, *Christian and Civic Economy*, Vol. 1, p. 3.

One might even reckon Chalmers' 'law of the human constitution' by which human hearts are 'charmed' by true benevolence into better behaviour (such as regular church-going) as adumbrating principles of the nascent discipline of sociology and eventually social work.⁷⁸ One has but to be a student of human nature in this social sense to see there is an 'omnipotence of Christian charity' that may prevail over the unregenerate short of conversion.⁷⁹ Know how people tick, then ply them in love – personally and habitually. If this be manipulation, then it is sacred manipulation in the spirit of the apostle: 'Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.'⁸⁰

Chalmers' optimism for urban parish mission was anything but quixotic; as he saw it, it was wholly vindicated by experimental proofs in the field. But there is also something of a mysterious, counter-intuitive law that beckons the adventurous to try and experience for themselves. This mission calls for paternal self-surrender in the interests of reclaiming 'abandoned' souls. There may well be a loss of ease, of comfort, or even of a sense of dignity for the urban missionary in condescending to those of humbler circumstances. But it will invariably win and ennoble them:

The readiest way of finding access to a man's heart, is to go into his house, and there to perform the deed of kindness, or to acquit ourselves of the wonted and the looked for acknowledgment. By putting ourselves under the roof a poor neighbour, we in a manner put ourselves under his protection – we render him for the time our superior – we throw our reception on his generosity, and we may be assured that it is a confidence which will almost never fail us. If Christianity be the errand on which the movement is made, it will open the door of every family; and even the profane and the profligate will come to recognise the worth of that principle, which prompts the unwearied assiduity of such services. By every circuit which is made amongst them, there is attained a higher vantage ground of moral and spiritual influence; and, in spite of all that has been said of the ferocity of a city population, in such rounds

⁷⁸ Mary T. Furgol, 'Thomas Chalmers' Poor Relief Theories and Their Implementation in the Early Nineteenth Century' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1987), p. 10; Joel T. Majonis, 'T. Chalmers, C. S. Loch and M. E. Richmond's development of increasingly secular, interpersonal, and purposeful helping models', *Currents: New Scholarship in the Human Services*, Vol. 3:1 (2004), accessed 7 February 2006, http://fsw.ucalgary.ca/currents_prod_v1/articles/majonis_v3_n1.htm

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

⁸⁰ 2 Cor. 12:16.

of visitation there is none of it to be met with, even among the lowest receptacles of human worthlessness.⁸¹

The practitioner knows his trade well and all its little tricks; so too the parish missionary. But these secrets not only harness efficiency; they ‘allure’ the missionary himself and spread a kind of a romantic ‘charm’ over the whole affair.⁸² And this because, surprisingly enough, human nature is universally susceptible to moral influence.

III. A Moderate Evangelical?

It is this nuanced conception of human nature that is back of Chalmers’ critique of Smith’s anti-Establishment views. For whatever reason, Chalmers did not so much as hint that Smith was lacking in his Calvinist orthodoxy. But it is rather evident that by comparison, Smith could have only really sympathized with the first and third dimensions of Chalmers’ portrayal of human nature. Humans are foolish and susceptible to negative influences, even ‘intractably slothful and prone to indolence’,⁸³ yet they are hearty enough to swim when thrown from the arms of an Establishment into the deep end of the religious marketplace. Smith was unarguably a theological Moderate, expressing Enlightenment’s comparatively greater optimism in humanity and reason. His optimal religion was ‘a pure and rational’ one, ‘free from every mixture of absurdity, imposture, or fanaticism’.⁸⁴ Chalmers on the other hand was an ex-Moderate, who ‘now preached the faith he once destroyed’.⁸⁵

Yet is fair to say that those aspects of Moderatism that were less objectionable to Evangelicals lived on in Chalmers.⁸⁶ He was big on education and learning, a man of science, and an aesthete who could appreciate contemporary tastes. He not infrequently scolded those in his

⁸¹ Chalmers, *Christian and Civic Economy*, Vol. 1, pp. 29-30.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 55, 57.

⁸³ Rosenberg, ‘Institutional Aspects’, p. 557.

⁸⁴ Smith, *Wealth*, Vol. 2, p. 380.

⁸⁵ W. M. Hetherington, *Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs. Coutts* (Edinburgh: J. Maclaren & J. Menzies, 1867), p. 123.

⁸⁶ Contemporary scholarship tends to view the Evangelical-Moderate binary in the Church of Scotland as more of a spectrum. Friedhelm Voges applies this to Chalmers: ‘Moderate and Evangelical thinking in the later eighteenth century: difference and shared attitudes’, *Records of the Scottish History Society*, Vol. 22:2 (1985), pp. 141-57. McIntosh also demonstrates that the Popular Party of the eighteenth century – the precursors to the nineteenth century Evangelicals – were ‘complex’ if not ‘diverse’. John R. McIntosh, ‘The Popular Party in the Church of Scotland, 1740–1800’ (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1989), pp. 458-69.

own ranks whom he deemed too 'enthusiastic', pietistic, or doctrinaire, while contending for higher, catholic and missionary interests.⁸⁷ We see this Moderate-Evangelicalism throughout his critique of Smith on Establishments. Both men were highly concerned with political economy for the sake of the commonwealth and saw religion as highly conducive to its preservation and betterment. Chalmers was a soul-winning Evangelical, but he kept up a keen (though secondary) interest in the welfare of the outer man and thus of the social order. Both Chalmers and Smith approached the question of Establishments in a somewhat pragmatic manner, seeking to prove their worth at least partially on the basis of political and economic expedience.⁸⁸ Though Chalmers saw higher, more noble reasons for Establishments given the 'eternal weight of glory', he felt no compunction in persuading others on the basis of the happy byproducts accruing to civil society. And similarly, like Smith, Chalmers suggested particular policies that would be conducive to a most efficient and wholesome religious Establishment as well as others that should disincentivize and otherwise suppress common abuses.⁸⁹

Then we see Chalmers' unique Establishment-rebrand as exhibiting theodicy, the function of a vigorous Christian apologetic in a sceptical age. On the one hand, human nature is spiritually bankrupt and self-destructive. But divine Providence – a construct that Moderates readily invoked – ensured that humanity's pursuit of self-interest would effect a happy 'backfire' into economic blessing through the free exchange of goods and services.

⁸⁷ John Roxborough contends that while Chalmers could not be blamed for the later nineteenth-century theological decline culminating in the Declaratory Act, nevertheless his Calvinism was admittedly a modified one, even *vis-à-vis* his more decidedly old school colleagues like William Cunningham: Thomas Chalmers, *Enthusiast for Mission: The Christian Good of Scotland and the Rise of the Missionary Movement* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1999), pp. 38-65, 228-242.

⁸⁸ Frederick G. Whelan, 'Church Establishments, liberty & competition in religion', *Polity*, Vol. 23:2 (1990), pp. 155-85. Whelan also points out how Hume – strangely enough – likewise contributed a 'humanitarian' argument for Church Establishments. Naturally, his argument was eminently pragmatic, since he thought an Establishment was necessary to curb the extremes of unenlightened, religious 'fanatics'. But some contend that Smith's views of religion – and consequently its role in civil society – were wholly pragmatic, merely of interest in its social and political utility. See Gordon Graham, 'Religion and Spirituality: Smith versus Rousseau', *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 12:24 (2018), pp. 83-93.

⁸⁹ Rosenberg, 'Institutional Aspects', pp. 557-70; Charles G. Leathers and J. Patrick Raines, 'Adam Smith on religion and market structure: the search for consistency', *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 40:2 (2008): pp. 345-363; Thomas Chalmers, *Lectures on the Establishment and Extension of National Churches; Delivered in London, from April Twenty-Fifth to May Twelfth, 1838* (Glasgow: Wm. Collins, 1838), pp. 53-54.

Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' demonstrated that Reason superintends men's baser and even sordid instincts for the overall benefit of society.⁹⁰ Wisdom and goodness shine forth in this governance of evil. Chalmers could not agree more. Only, he turned the dial further back towards the old Augustinianism, and curiously enough, even further forward past Smith, stressing the relatively greater involvement of Providence in maintaining nature and restraining even greater evil, thus making 'the wrath of man to praise him'.⁹¹ For Chalmers, religious Establishments at once answer the concerns of orthodoxy, the instincts of missions, and on the other side, the legitimate questions of a new generation.

There was also Chalmers' relatively more enlightened views on religious toleration. To be sure, Chalmers was certainly very jealous of Scotland's Church Establishment as a mighty force for good. He could denounce the modern iconoclasts with a certain ferocity as betrayers who 'break down the carved work' of the Lord's house 'with axes and hammers'.⁹² But he was an outspoken supporter of toleration, not so very different from that which Smith espoused. He actually formulated his Establishmentarianism in such a way as not only to give Dissenters a due place in civil society, but to reckon them as indispensable comrades-in-arms in the conversion of the home heathen and to welcome them as goads to stimulate the Kirk to live up to her best ideals. His advocacy for Establishments was vigorous. But it was not cast in precisely the same mould as his venerated fathers, Knox, Melville, and Rutherford. Theirs was a different day. The Reformation Establishment and its parish system was the law of the land, reflecting what Smith would deem a 'monopoly',⁹³ with far less room for dissent. Chalmers' Establishment on the other hand was

⁹⁰ Peter Harrison, 'Adam Smith, Natural Theology, and the Natural Sciences', in *Adam Smith as Theologian*, ed. Paul Oslington (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 77-91.

⁹¹ 'Would not men, when thus released from the magical chain of their own interest, which bound them together into a fair and seeming compact of principle, like dogs of rapine, let loose upon their prey, overleap the barrier which formerly restrained them? Does not this prove, that selfishness, after all, is the grand principle on which the brotherhood of the human race is made to hang together; and that he who can make the wrath of man to praise him, has also upon the selfishness of man, caused a most beauteous order of wide and useful intercourse to be suspended?' Thomas Chalmers, *The Application of Christianity to the Commercial and Ordinary Affairs of Life In a Series of Discourses* (Glasgow: Chalmers & Collins, 1820), p. 76.

⁹² Chalmers, *Establishment and Extension*, p. 13.

⁹³ Lisa Hill, 'The hidden theology of Adam Smith', *European Journal for the History of Economic Thought*, Vol. 8:1 (2001), p. 5; Ekelund, et al., 'Market Structure', pp. 647, 658-59; Leathers & Raines, 'Religious Markets', pp. 503-4; Whelan, 'Church Establishments', pp. 174-77.

much more of a 'Great Home Mission' and each parish a Gospel outpost to regain the lost.⁹⁴ This distinction should not be pressed too far, since Chalmers saw his generation in the Church of Scotland as inheriting a national, missionary mandate from her original architects. But that he quite glossed over the more austere features of his own Church's confessional commitments in state-Church relations⁹⁵ is enough to show that Chalmers' Establishment was very much a variation on a theme, repositioned to counteract a fast eroding Christendom.

Chalmers also was deeply concerned about the welfare of the common, working people, socially, economically, and especially spiritually. He was jealous that their social betters should not forget them. And Smith, for all his advocacy of the free market and government non-intervention, nevertheless feared the displacement of the labouring classes as well. As was previously mentioned, Smith believed that the Presbyterian system was the best form of Church Establishment – as a second best, of course, to no Establishment at all. His reason was because the ministers of such an Establishment were best suited to ingratiate themselves with the common people, effectively to moralize them, and so to furnish to the commonwealth a healthy, politically cooperative working class. On this point, Chalmers and Smith both arguably owe more to the Reformation fathers than to the Enlightenment.

But these similarities notwithstanding, on Original Sin, Chalmers painted with a very black brush. Man is not in need of a little help; he desperately needs a full-on rescue operation. Smith's picture of humanity is too rosy at best, however much he acknowledges her baser impulses.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Chalmers makes a passing contrast between himself and the old 'law of residence' espoused by Calderwood: 'The days were when not only had the inhabitants of the royalty the exclusive occupation of their own churches, but when it was the invariable habit for the residents of each separate parish to attend the proper and peculiar church of that parish. It appears, indeed, from Calderwood and others, that the violation of this order on the part of any of the inhabitants inferred ecclesiastical censures. We do not advocate this compulsory restriction of the people to their own parish church. It is the reverse policy of what is tantamount to their compulsory exclusion from it that we complain of.' Thomas Chalmers, *On the Evils Which the Established Church in Edinburgh Has Already Suffered and Suffers Still in Virtue of the Seat-Letting Being in the Hands of the Magistrates* (Edinburgh: John Anderson, Jr., 1835), p. 11.

⁹⁵ See ch. 23.3, 'Of the Civil Magistrate', in *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1995), pp. 100-101.

⁹⁶ Gordon Graham, 'Adam Smith and Religion', in *Adam Smith: His Life, Thought, and Legacy*, ed. Ryan Patrick Hanley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), pp. 305-20. Graham speaks of Adam Smith's religious views as 'theology lite', and differing very little from the 'thin deism' of his friend, David Hume. On the other side, while stopping

A religious free market of course fits with such a bland humanity, especially as mankind gradually matures, civilizes, and sheds its need for inferior trappings.⁹⁷ But things are much more dire, said Chalmers. Hence, religious Establishments. If sinners will be reborn, they must come under the preaching of the Gospel, God's prime method for effecting this great change. The Visible Church is the forum, the supernatural 'work-house of the grace of God', as Samuel Rutherford put it.⁹⁸ But the sinners must get there first, and the chief impediment is their own heart. The Establishment, with its aggressive, territorial ministry, parish by parish, bridges that gap. It is engineered to 'compel them to come in',⁹⁹ and is a mighty force first and foremost for this highest of ends, whatever collateral benefits it may have on the social order.¹⁰⁰ This, as Chalmers saw it, ennobled its expediency and rendered Smith's plan a 'great mischief' to the best interests of the commonwealth and the imperishable souls within it. Should a nation and its government instead 'abandon all care [and] interest, when the desire, on the part of our species, is but rare, and feeble, and inoperative', the result will be most fearful:

In this state of things, we fear, that Christian cultivation would only be found, in rare and occasional spots over the face of extended territories; and instead of that uniform distribution of the word and ordinances, which it is the tendency of an establishment to secure, do we conceive that in every empire of Christendom, would there be dreary, unprovided blanks, where no regular supply of instruction was to be had, and where there was no desire after it, on the part of an untaught and neglected population.¹⁰¹

short of describing Smith as a pure Augustinian with respect to Original Sin, Waterman concludes that he veers quite close: Anthony M. C. Waterman, 'On Economics, Theology, and Religion', *Journal of Economics, Theology and Religion*, Vol. 1:1 (2021), pp. 13-24. See also Benjamin M. Friedman, 'Economics: a moral inquiry with religious origins', *American Economic Review*, Vol. 101:3 (2011), pp. 166-70; David Fergusson, 'Adam Smith on Ethics and Religion', *Humanities and Culture*, Vol. 2 (2020), pp. 53-72; R. H. Coase, 'Adam Smith's View of Man', *Journal of Law and Economics*, Vol. 19:3 (1976), pp. 529-46; Peter Harrison, 'Adam Smith, Natural Theology, and the Natural Sciences', in *Adam Smith as Theologian*, ed. Paul Oslington (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 77-91.

⁹⁷ Jerry Evensky, 'Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy: the role of religion and its relationship to philosophy and ethics in the evolution of society', *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 30:1 (1998), pp. 17-42.

⁹⁸ Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened* (Edinburgh, 1655), p. 79.

⁹⁹ Only, compulsion by winsome missionary persuasion, not coercion by force of law.

¹⁰⁰ Henry Reay Sefton, 'Chalmers and the Church: Theology and Mission', in *The Practical and the Pious: Essays on Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847)*, ed. A. C. Cheyne (Edinburgh: Saint Andrews Press, 1988), pp. 166-173.

¹⁰¹ Chalmers, *Works* (25 vols., Glasgow: William Collins, 1836-1842), Vol. 14, p. 106.

This, then, was the 'chief ground' upon which he pleaded for a religious Establishment.¹⁰²

And more, the Establishment was not just a dam to prevent such a catastrophe, but a reservoir – indeed, an irrigation system.¹⁰³ It is a most hopeful machine precisely because God has preserved a conscience and a sympathy even among sinners, often making the hardest to be receptive to genuine and diligent care. Establishments capitalize not on the higher morality of the new creature, but the lower morality of 'sinners' who do good to their friends.¹⁰⁴ Or, as Chalmers confidently claimed, 'For, by a law of our nature, if we have love in our heart, no human being can fail to show the love of gratitude back again.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Chalmers, *Christian and Civic Economy*, Vol. 1, p. 91.

¹⁰³ Chalmers, *Establishment and Extension*, pp. 9-13, 71.

¹⁰⁴ Luke 6:33.

¹⁰⁵ Chalmers, *Churches and Schools*, p. 4.