

Capitalism?

I received a comment which due to its length I can't post. It was commenting on the recent interview "Managing Mammon" (which I haven't posted here yet - but you can hear on AFR!). The listener went into much more detail, but his basic comment was "is it possible for a Christian to be a capitalist?" He referred to an on-going conversation with a friend, who argues that "true Christianity" should be about creating non-capitalistic communities, like the Amish and as seen in the Book of Acts. I believe his friend errs. The scriptures and our Tradition nowhere call for the creation of separatist, utopian communities. Christ specifically says, "render unto Caesar", acknowledging the authority of secular leaders and earthly structures. Our Tradition prays for emperors and kings and Presidents. No church father I know of calls for laity leaving society - in fact we are called to be 'salt' to our culture - or to create earthly utopias. What we are called to do is to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind [nous]". Orthodox Tradition acknowledges that while for some this may best be accomplished in a monastic environment, it is not only accomplished there. In fact St John Chrysostom specifically says in one of his homilies that the family - as the 'little Church' - is as good a place to work out one's salvation as anywhere! He - and he rails against materialism in his book translated in English as "On Wealth and Poverty" - does not call for the formation of utopian communities. So what about "capitalism"? My take is that rampant capitalism CAN be an obstacle to serious spiritual life, and that spiritual virtues like dispassion, detachment and discernment - and struggle against materialism - must be employed. But the rich have always existed and always will and the role of the wealthy is to use his "talents" to the glory of God, not necessarily to "sell everything", or to create governments which redistribute wealth. The rich young ruler's problem was attachment to his wealth, not the wealth itself. Thanks for the comment!!