

The Law of Moses included a bankruptcy provision. It was called the Year of Jubilee.

The word, “jubilee” is not to be confused with jubilation – “jubilation” stems from Latin and refers to joy or emotional ecstasy. “Jubilee” stems from Hebrew, and is about function more than emotion.

Functionally, the Year of Jubilee worked like this: God owned the Promised Land, the people did not. They were God’s tenants. As tenants, each family managed a fair share of the land.

When a family would go through a tough time, it could “sell” its land, but the sale was not a transfer in what we would call, fee simple. Instead, the transfer was temporary. Because during the Year of Jubilee, all land reverted to its original tenant family.

The Year of Jubilee also resolved personal debt. A person over-extended might sell himself to resolve his debt. He became, in essence, a slave to the lender. In the Year of Jubilee, all such slaves were set free.

When Isaiah refers to the Acceptable Year of the Lord, he means the Year of Jubilee. The year of liberation.

The people had been exiled to Babylon to satisfy a metaphoric debt to God. Through their exile, or Babylonian servitude, they satisfied God, and now God through Isaiah proclaims liberation. The year of Jubilee.

Centuries later, Jesus quoted Isaiah, “the Acceptable Year of the Lord,” at a time when Israel was occupied by the Romans. Declaring, in essence, “your debt has been resolved in Christ.” These days, Wall Street is being occupied.

These occupiers have ill-defined goals. You cannot find a concise list of goals or demands that all of the occupiers agree upon. It doesn’t exist. There are lists, but they are inconsistent and the demands are often ambiguous.

On one of these lists, I saw a demand that I am particularly fond of: lower the retirement age to 55!

There is one demand most of the occupiers agree upon: forgive student debt.

Debt hamstring young people, often for decades. Robert Applebaum is the poster child for this Occupier demand. Applebaum is a 38 year-old lawyer who graduated with \$68,000 in debt. Fresh out of law school, he worked as a low-paying Assistant District

Attorney. Knowing he would not be able to repay his student loan on an ADA salary, he obtained a legal deferral. With accrued interest, he now owes over \$88,000.

Forgive the debt, say the occupiers. Free Applebaum to live his life.

A few years ago, a similar idea was floated to help poor African nations, an idea I personally like: forgive third-world debt. They even called it the Jubilee Debt Campaign.

And why not? These countries spend much of their budgets on debt service, leaving little for development: infrastructure: roads and water.

But if you forgive Kenya, what will you do with Greece, or Italy or Portugal?

Maybe there is a compromise solution: forgive half of debt. Surely Appelbaum could afford to pay half his loans back. Surely fewer homeowners would face foreclosure if half their debt were forgiven.

But this is Garden of Eden thinking, and we don't live in the Garden of Eden. Newton put it best, for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. For each debt you forgive, someone else loses.

When Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy, a 90 year-old friend of mine, lost substantial retirement income.

You see, it is not just nameless business and evil bankers who live on the opposite side of things – big corporations and banks are owned, yes, by the one percent, but also by middle America: through retirement plans, IRAs, mutual funds, and so on.

On the other hand, the Occupy Movement has struck a chord with people. The movement reminds me of the 1976 movie, *Network*, with its tag line, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore."

Being mad as hell, appealing as it is, is not the same thing as facilitating valuable, just, and lasting change. As Scripture says, the anger of humans does not achieve the righteousness of God.

I happen to think the Occupy Movement is myopic. The protestors can see only the immediate action desired, but not its equal and opposite reaction.

A prophet does not know the future. He is not a gypsy gazing into a crystal ball. Rather, what makes a prophet unique is that he can feel the heart of God.

Most of us relate to God in linear fashion. We look to God for answers, guidance, solace, affirmation, and even discipline. Up, down.

The prophet approaches God in geometric fashion. He is interested knowing what God wants. Indeed, God feels what you feel, God holds your heart in his hands. But the prophet holds God's heart in his hands.

This unique characteristic is called prophetic sympathy. Prophetic sympathy enables the prophet to sense both the immanent nature of God, and the transcendent. Both the forest and the trees. Life through a microscope and life through a telescope.

If the Occupy Movement fails, it will be because it is immanent only, and not transcendent. Its finger is on the pulse of humanity, it feels suffering and pain caused by disparity and the failings of our system. That pain and suffering is very real; unemployment and underemployment are very real; the all-important middle class is shrinking.

But to actually accomplish something other than anarchy, the movement will have to become transcendent.

It will have to stand back, look at the current system, and identify systemic change that is not just fanciful, but equitable.

True leadership requires both abilities, the ability of the prophet towards the heart of God, the immanent and transcendent natures.

John the Baptist was just such a leader. He stood at water's edge, beckoning each individual into a baptism of renewal, but he also spoke to the entire nation of Israel, urging the whole people to return to God.

But wait, says the Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan. Berrigan who reminds us of Advent Hope, that it lies within ourselves. We do not have to wait for someone specially gifted like John before we can find hope or resolve problems. You offer that hope, for Scripture promises that you will have both immanent and transcendent abilities:

I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall have dreams.

The Christian is called to Christian leadership through prayer, through hope, through innovation, and grace. The job of the Christian, and the job of the Church, is prophetic – it is to bear the heart of God in our hands, for indeed, this world of ours is hurting – in so many ways, not just economic.

God's promise is Jubilee – Liberation – Freedom.

The only question is, will you wait for hope to land on earth like a spacecraft from another planet, or will you roll-up your sleeves and do something?