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**ECONOMIC THOUGHTS AND WORLDVIEWS:
CONSTRUCTING PERSPECTIVES**

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SUMMARY

The purpose of this article is to give an orientation on how a Christian scholar should address the question of the predominant economic theory today, which is based on a worldview radically opposed to the biblical worldview developed by the SDA church and which subtends all act, position and behaviour of the SDA believer. After presenting different philosophical presuppositions including the one dealing with the question of Man, society and the world, I present the biblical worldview, and try to understand and point out what should be the orientation in research for a Christian economist today.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of “homoeconomicus”, the rational man whose decisions are made up according to marginal use expected from taken actions, a concept which is so dear to economists, is attributed to Adam Smith. This researcher, whose works have constituted the pillar of the classic theory, is presented as the champion of ultra liberalism. His famous book “the wealth of nations”¹ is the one which revealed him to the world and made him the advocate of rational “selfishness” and absolute *laisser-faire*.

From A. Smith’s approach, “the concept of homoeconomicus as rational agent with no affective and moral dimensions” was therefore developed during decencies. The economic theories are based upon the analysis of the economic agent behaviour - the homoeconomicus. - However, a critical analysis of neoclassic and classic economic thought fundamentals and particularly the study of human behaviour reveals very well the existence of “moral inspiration» and of cooperative, shared aims, normative and compassionate behaviours which are perfectly rational and which guide agents’ choices.

It is therefore possible to find the ethical-philosophical roots of economics. It is convenient to indicate here that Adam Smith was first of all a philosopher and a university moral philosophy lecturer. His book “Theories of moral sentiments”² seems to be in direct opposition against the apparent egocentrism displayed by “the Wealth of nations”. This one deals with the economic agent decisions power making and human relations approach in which moral and affective dimensions are significant factors for the individual’s choices.

In the biography of the Nobel price Sen Amartya, Marc Saint Upery underlines that “the Smith market praise was linked to a concern of exchanges and production effectiveness within a very specific historical context of mercantilist and feudal society, but that Smith never thought to expand it to all social life spheres.”³ In fact, Smith declares elsewhere that “man should consider himself not as separated and detached from all, but as a world citizen, a member of nature’s vast community in the interest of that great community; he should anytime be ready to sacrifice his personal little interest”⁴.

¹ Adam Smith, “*Recherche sur la natures des causes de la richesse des nations*”, French trad., Paris, 1843, nouvelle edition, PUF, 1995.

² Adam Smith, “*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*”, Printed for A. Millar, in the Strand; and A. Kincaid and J. Bell in Edinburgh, MDCCLIX London, 1759.

³ Armatya Sen, “*L’Economie est une Science Sociale*”, Edition La Decouvert, *Collection Poche*, Paris 2003.

⁴ Adam Smith, “*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*”, op. cit.

But the most promoted book was not “The theory of moral sentiments”, but “The wealth of nations” whose analytical orientation served as foundation for the entire economical approach. This choice can be interpreted as the will of the scientific community to try to orient the way of thinking and behavior of socioeconomic in a direction that seemed to be more in harmony with the dominant world view of our society and with the socio-politico-economical context of that society.

Elements brought forth by Adam Smith which could have added dynamism to scientific economical research, and this towards another direction, are only used in the academic sphere; and nevertheless, Adam Smith is continually presented as the defender of an egocentric and individualist ultra liberalism.

Today, while economic science seems confronted with an identity crisis, and the ultra liberal approach seems not to provide adequate answers to the many world economic problems, the orientation given by the orthodoxy seems questioned. This situation points out the way of teaching this discipline. Today, we are facing a wide consensus or an orthodoxy which presents the way of thinking, teaching and experiencing economics as an unique thought, an unique way, based on the globalization and an ultra liberalism. However, the history of economic thought shows that there is a diversity of approaches which can achieve some results according to the goal given to economics.

The purpose of this study is to search for biblical fundamentals as to economical analysis and try to determine the pertinence in contemporary nations’ economical context and to see opportunities given in the teachings of a new approach that could better satisfy the Christian world view. Four sections will be presented, with a conclusion.

In the first section we will present the goals and the origin of the economical thought. By doing so, we will point out the necessity of keeping some objectivity and some reserve in teaching economics. Each concept and thought should be considered as an alternative approach among others and not as the unique path for the success of world economy. **The second section** will present the biblical approach of economy. This approach can be put in a parallel with the different approaches which are taught in our schools. From a Christian perspective, the unselfish and altruistic approach of the economic agent, not willing to maximize by all means his profits upon others, seems to be more in harmony with the teachings of the Bible as to gifts, accumulation of wealth, share, etc.. These concepts require that we wait a little more as we integrate the contemporary economic analysis. What effect would it have in our contemporary society with such an approach based on Bible vision of the economic sphere and socioeconomic relations? These questions will be considered **in a third section**. **The conclusion** will consider the possibility to teach today such an orientation taking into account the way our society has already grown during so long.

II. The goal of economics : From the origins of contemporary thoughts

While the history of Economic Thoughts seems to essentially attribute the genesis of attempt to formulate the economic thoughts to Greek and Roman authors, an objective and long run study shows that through the Jewish economy, the Bible gives a number of indications on how to experience economic and social relations within the Jewish society.

However, the definition of economics as it prevails today seems to find its origin in the development of classical economic thought from the middle of the 18th century, which finds itself, its foundation in the Roman world view of society. But this latter is based on the stoicism which is materialistic and individualistic. « Le regne de la propriété illimitée et sans contrôle fut imposé par Rome à l'ensemble du monde méditerranéen »⁵. The search for an unlimited wealth at individual and national levels is, according to the prevailing current of economic thought, from the 18th Century until now, the main cause of human actions.

Although a lot of attempts have tried to define Economics as a way that try to limit the individualistic and selfish roles as its object,⁶ a definition given by Lionel Robbins which defines Economic Science as the « study of human behavior as relation between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses » becomes a canonical definition used in most of university manuals. So the economic science as taught today in most of the universities is a product of the prevailing current which points out an ultra liberalism approach.

II.1 / The Greek view of political economics: Plato and Aristotle

The Greek philosopher Aristotle, who lived from 384 to 323 before Christ, has made a very big contribution to the analysis of politics and the organization of life inside the city. This analysis turns around an equilibrium view of interrelation between people inside the city. It was taking into account two types of relations: one between human being and the other one between men and the State.

In a first stage of his analysis, at the contrary of Plato, Aristotle defends the private properties for more efficiency, because according to him, « It exists in man two most dominant motives of solicitude and love. They are the sentiment of propriety and exclusive affection »⁷. So, a society based on principles of private ownership gives several advantages: 1) This is a factor of peace, because, possession and division of goods would be implemented by precise rules giving the opportunity to everybody to know its possibilities and limitations. But in a society where goods belong to the community and where we have the rule of community of goods, according to Plato's principles, he says that « the owner of goods in commune or in division, will be in frequent opposition and fights, more often than the citizens who have separated interests.»⁸

2) Because the sense of privacy is predominant for men, he considers that « to share somebody's life, to put everything together is for human being a difficult enterprise, among others. »⁹

3) To possess goods is legitimated and give pleasure and satisfaction. Therefore, the owner has the possibility to share his goods with friends, what is also a source a pleasure and joy. He writes: « To be kind and helpful to friends, visitors and companions is the highest pleasure, which can be only experienced if one has private goods »¹⁰ Finally, he recognizes that « the equality of properties between citizens is a factor which prevents internal fights ». However, this factor is not the most important, while arguments against « egalitarian programs » constitute essential elements.

⁵ Henri Denis, « *Histoire de la Pensée Economique* », p.65

⁶ Voir a ce sujet, John Stuart Mill, « Sur la définition de l'économie politique ; et sur la méthode d'investigation qui lui est propre », translated in French by Christian Leblond, Paris Edition Michel Houdiard, 2003.

⁷ Henri Denis, « . *Histoire de la Pensée économique*, PUF Paris juin 1999 p. 39

⁸ Idem. p. 38

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Henri Denis, « *Histoire de la Pensée Economique*, PUF, Paris, juin 1999 », p.38

In a second stage of his analysis, he develops the idea that the search for unlimited wealth is not legitimated. So, « he strictly condemns trade and financial activities to citizens. »¹¹ He recognizes two types of trading activities (or according to the word used by himself) or chrematistics inside the city. This is trade of goods which are necessary to satisfy needs. This sort of trade is legitimate and is normal. This is an economical activity. On the other hand, the chrematistic consisting in realizing commercial activities for accumulation of wealth as the only end is to be proscribed, because, this is a source of corruption. Those chrematistic activities are three. These are « external trade, loan with interest and work in order to receive a salary. The later is the fact to sell his work for a salary »¹² In the same idea, monopole and the profession of trader are considered by Aristotle as an activity which corrupts human beings. Also, he considers the profession of businessman as being against nature and the men who choose that profession need to be « removed from true men ».

But the external trade that he proscribes seems to be recognized and accepted by the Bible. However the Bible doesn't condemn wealth at all, as Aristotle did. A lot of men close to GOD as Abraham, the king Solomon, Job, had important wealth. This wealth in all these cases had come from GOD himself. Moreover, the Bible makes a list of the value of the wealth that those men had. "From the time that men began to live in cities, trade, in some shape, must have been carried on to supply the town-dwellers with commodities from foreign as well as native sources, for we find that Abraham was rich, not only in cattle, but in silver, gold and gold and silver plate and ornaments."¹³ External trade was a source of enrichment. "Among trading nations mentioned in Scripture, Egypt holds in very early times a prominent position. The internal trade of the Jews, as well as the external one, was much promoted by the festivals, which brought large numbers of people to Jerusalem."¹⁴

As far as loan with interest is concerned, Aristotle has the same view as that of the Bible, which proscribes usury. On this point, Exodus says: « If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. »¹⁵ However, this declaration concerns particularly the Jewish society. "the law strictly forbade any interest to be taken for a loan to any poor person, and at first, as it seems, even in the case of a foreigner; but this prohibition was afterward limited to Hebrews only, from whom, of whatever rank, not only was no usury on any pretence to be exacted, but relief to the poor by way of loan was enjoined, and excuses for evading this duty were forbidden."¹⁶

With the increase of external trade, there has been a change in the practice. « The practice of exacting usury or interest on loans, and of surety ship in the commercial sense, grew up »¹⁷. The people forgot God's recommendation on that issue, and with Nehemiah, the law has been reinstated. "Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them... Restore, I pray you, to them, even

¹¹ Idem, p. 41

¹² Ibid., p.50

¹³ Smith's Bible Dictionary

¹⁴ Idem

¹⁵ Exodus 22:25

¹⁶ Smith's Bible Dictionary

¹⁷ Easton's Bible Dictionary

this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive yards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them”¹⁸.

On a third hand, despite of the plea for private properties, Aristotle however defends the idea of the role of cohesion that the State should play. The State should have a part of the lands in order to assure a free consuming for poor people, during festive periods or public meals. This is necessary in States well organized in order to reward citizens who are working at different stages for the Government.

Whereas the main idea of private property defended by Aristotle is in harmony with liberal thoughts, Aristotle remains moderated in his analysis and is in disagreement with the liberal economists on several essential points, like unlimited wealth, the intervention of State in the economical life, and loan without interest.

However, if some of Aristotle analysis seem to go in the same line with Bible, namely on the loan without interest and unlimited wealth, we cannot say that he has a biblical view of life in the City. The conception he has concerning the world, relies on a vision of an immutable humanity, having an immutable nature, through time. Because human being has natural and animalistic instincts, he is governed by the same natural needs « that we find in the animals, vegetal and unanimated worlds »¹⁹. At the opposite of Plato, he had not any spiritual vision of men as foundation of his analysis.

II.2 / Materialism, individualism and relativism of Romans thought: foundation of modernism and postmodernism of contemporary thought

After the victory of Rome on the Greeks, violence and injustice became more and more developed in the Roman society. As a consequence of that, a period of anarchy has prevailed during 33 years, from 235 to 268. The exacerbated interventionism of the emperors didn't solve the economical problem of the empire. The landowner had to pay too much taxes and the agriculture legislation was too much rigid. These situations have lead to big concentrations of the land amongst few proprietors. These concentrations have declined the As consequence, the productivity dropped down “because of the deficiency of masters and the carelessness of workers”²⁰, mainly because the technical foundations, which could have led to the agricultural growth, were not developed by too much generalization of the slave system.

Moreover, the internal fight within the western part of the empire between barbarous tribes after the death of Theodore I in 395, led to the falling apart of the Roman Empire and the continual deterioration of the political system, which began with the lost of freedom by Greek cities. Therefore, that context was not favorable to the development of a political philosophy as it were during the Greek cultural domination. The main ideas, which have influenced the leading thoughts in the roman society, were developed at the last century of Greek civilization with epicurean and stoical thesis.

Epicure (341-270) lifted up the idea that each person can individually “walk” towards wisdom without the help of the city. The spread of such ideas shall indicate the beginning of “the progressive vanishing

¹⁸ Nehemiah 5 :7 and 11.

¹⁹ Henri Denis, « Histoire de la Pensée Economique, PUF, Paris, juin 1999 », p.50

²⁰ Idem p. 60

of the Greek political ideal”²¹. He built his approach on the perception of a materialist world, made of material atoms, whose different combinations make sensitive bodies that are for him the only reality. Through that materialistic and atheistic position, the author conceives the human happiness only in the satisfaction of pleasures, like other animals, particularly the pleasures of the body, which are the only ones which remain essential²². The basics of the contemporaneous individualist and materialist theory were then laid. Henry Denis points out the passage from a worldview to another with the decline of the Greek society whose vision was spiritualist against this materialist worldview. The author underlines the beginning of the Greek city disappearance “in which the Greek saw the true human realization, as a spiritual one” ... To this historical movement, he underlines, corresponds a fundamental materialist and individualist philosophy.”²³ This philosophy belongs to both epicurean and stoical, the two main components of roman society thoughts streams.

Moreover, another strong idea developed by the roman philosophy with Cicero, has as base the “supremacy of human raison”, concept on which is laid the contemporaneous relativist approach and which dominates in our post modernist society, and which leads to the individual atheistic position. Henry Denis underlines the fact that “the great intellectual building of this world was the elaboration of private rights system in family relationships and in relations resulting from the roman laws on contracts and propriety”²⁴

II.3 / Economic liberalism and its consequences on inequalities

Despite of the fact that different economists as, among others, Sismondi (1773-1842), Proudhon (1808-1864), Marx and Engels have tried to propose new concepts and a new economic thought, called socialism which develops « critical analysis of capitalism which sustains either reformists policies either policies trying to cut with capitalism”²⁵, this former, reinforced by the liberal thoughts has imposed itself. However, as underlined by Lecaillon Jean-Didier, “the study of socialism confirms the predominant influence of the conception it is made of Men and the society²⁶....Considering the facts, if the French socialism has underlined the spiritual and social emptiness lead by the Revolution and the scientific economical theories, it didn’t succeed in questioning the philosophical foundation of the social system.”²⁷. Further, with the collapse of socialist models applied in some countries, capitalism and liberalism seem to be the unique model and a one way view to think about and experience economy today.

II.3.1 / Definition of capitalism and liberalism and two hard hypotheses

Capitalism and liberalism are two aspects of a same economic doctrine which is the “classical scientific economy” which predominates today. According to its philosophical presupposition, classical scientific

²¹ Idem p. 61

²² Henri Denis, « Histoire de la Pensee Economique, PUF, Paris, juin 1999 », p.61

²³ Henri Denis, « Histoire de la Pensée Economique, PUF, Paris, juin 1999 », p. 62

²⁴ Henri Denis, « Histoire de la Pensee Economique, PUF, Paris, juin 1999 », P.64

²⁵ Janine Bremond, Marie Martine Salort “Dictionnaire des Grands Economistes », Edition Liris, Paris, Aout 1992.

²⁶ We can talk about the commune “worldview”.

²⁷ Jean-Didier Lecaillon, Jean-Marie Lepage et Christian Ottavj, « Economie Contemporaine : Analyse et Diagnostic », Edition De Boeck Universite, Collection Pre-misse, Belgique, 2001. p. 11, 12

economy has created a way to think about economy which has given rise to an economical system called capitalism. If it is difficult to define the capitalism system, there are nevertheless, two major ideas which characterized it. 1) The private appropriation of the means of production. Any individuals is free to have in one's possession means of production, which is called capital, than he can use in the production process in order to increased it without limits. In the early 60's, Robert, L. Heilbroner was already writing that in reality, "the capital equipment of the society is owned by a minority of individuals, called capitalists"²⁸. The problem is more crucial today, as we are in a period where the capital becomes more and more concentrated in few hands encouraged by the idea of globalization of the world economy for more efficiency, economy of scale and increase of benefit and wealth. 2) The second idea which characterizes capitalism is based on the role of the free market in achieving the best results. The market can realize the best allocation of resources and the best level of distribution in the economy, between agents. As a matter of fact, the governments should not intervene, because their intervention will create disequilibria forces and discourage the capitalists (private initiative), and can provoke worst effects at the end. This second aspect which is also called the "laissez-faire", has been so emphasized today in the modern economies, that to talk about capitalism generally, it is used the term "liberalism" or sometimes, depending on the context, "ultra-liberalism".

Different current of thought have promoted capitalist model and liberalism. The most known are mercantilism, "physiocratics", classical/neo-classical (monetarism/neo-monetarism), and Keynesianism models.

- The Mercantilism is a theoretical approach which, in the 16th century, for the first time has presented an analysis of society with economical instruments, concept and an economical view of society. Its main idea is that the "State can increase its strength, by giving the opportunity to the citizens to become wealthy"²⁹. The idea behind this position is the desire of the merchants of this period to become richer. They don't think that all the citizens should become rich, and their proposition is not in favor of the State and the Princes anymore. They are thinking about "enriching the class of merchants"³⁰. So the doctrine has evolved from "the conception of the State as supreme finality to the conception of richness as supreme value"³¹. In that context, trade is the best way to achieve this finality.

- The Physiocracy which started with a critical analysis of mercantilism points out that the wealth in an economy doesn't come neither from trade nor from industry, but from agriculture. The conception of the value of wealth does not change here, but the way to achieve it makes the difference.

- The Classical Economy. It has been lead by Adam Smith and David Ricardo has improved its formulation and extended it. According to a summarization made by Christopher Huhne³², this economic thought "explains the advantages of a market where the 'invisible hand' guided producers to specialize in skills at which they excelled and to maximize their benefit and the social benefit by free exchange". Generally speaking, classical, neo-classical, monetarism and neo-monetarism have some few differences in some assumptions on the way to build an economic model with mathematical instruments (neo-classical) and the way money affects the equilibrium in the economy (monetarism). But their main theoretical backgrounds are quite the same.

²⁸ Robert, L. Heilbroner, « The making of Economic Society », Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975, p.275

²⁹ Henri Denis, « *Histoire de la Pensée Economique* », PUF, Paris, juin 1999 », p.104.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Christopher Huhne, « *Real World Economics : essays on imperfect markets and fallible governments* », The MacMillan Press, London, 1990., p.9

- Keynesianism supports also the capitalistic doctrine, but is more conservative on the role of the State. The latter should intervene into the economic circuits in order to help to achieve equilibrium in the economy and to assure a best distribution of wealth between the different agents. Christopher Huhne explains “that prices would not always change to ensure that a market cleared. Unemployment could result from lack of spending power in the economy, caused by falls in wages: the idea of a circular flow of income from earner to spender and back to earner sired the sophisticated computer models which today attempt to represent the reality of our economic system.”³³

But, capitalism and liberalism are best represented by what we call “classical scientific economy”, which is the global thinking of economy today, despite of little variances that we can find from one doctrine to another.

II.3.2 / A third hard hypothesis for capitalism and liberalism: Economic rationality

The contemporaneous methodological approach lays on the individualist worldview, which finds its origin in the roman thought. This thought which is founded among others, on the hypothesis of individualistic rationality, tries to demonstrate 1) that the individual should determine himself his well being level, since each individual has his own identity, his needs, and his own will. By that, 2) each individual could determine his own preferences and values system. Beyond these attributes 3) the individual should face many other constraints than his time and limited resources. Moreover, 4) there are other individuals who face the same constraints and consequently are rivals. Didier Lecaillon summarizes very well that approach. Based on all these data, he writes, “the methodological individualism finally explains the social and economical phenomenon only through actions and reactions and interactions between individuals who belong to that society...Economists study groups behaviors, but also individual preferences and values, institutions, codes of conduct, from individual behavior”³⁴

Moreover, it is understood, according to the individual rationality hypothesis that each individual seeks to optimize his own interests. The same author underlines that, if it is very easy to agree on the fact that each individual has “projects” and consequently makes the choice of necessary ways to realize them. This behavior is only intentional. However, the contemporaneous economist go further beyond this simple intentional behavior by presupposing “that each individual has a coherent behavior towards his own choices. It means that each individual is supposed to know the alternatives before him.”³⁵ He has also the capacity of classifying them by order of importance for him. Once that classification is realized, he can also “choose among alternatives before him those he prefers most”³⁶

II.3.3/ Negative consequences

It appears through these three hypotheses, elements of an individualist and egocentric science, where men became rivals between themselves and opponents against one another. Consequently the individual cannot make mistakes. All his choices can only contribute to the optimization of his well being. The

³³ Idem, p. 9-10.

³⁴ Jean-Didier Lecaillon, Jean-Marie Lepage et Christian Ottavj, « Economie Contemporaine : Analyse et Diagnostic », Edition De Boeck Universite, Collection Premsse, Belgique, 2001. P. 19.

³⁵ Idem, p. 22.

³⁶ ibid

optimization of all the behaviors within a society should lead to a generalization of optimum behaviors and then lead to an increase of national wealth.

Finally, in this context, the society lays the ground for unequal situations, treatments and behaviors, since individuals can have neither the same reactions capacity to situations and choices nor the same optimization of capacities. The reality shows numerous the societies of today. These inequalities increase dramatically between individuals as well as between nations.

In the large parts of the world population, people are becoming poorer. The middle class in most of the countries has decreased and the number of poor has increased. At the same time the number of rich persons has decreased but few rich people are becoming richer and richer.

Another consequence of that approach and to that behavior is the exaggerated use of the planet resources. As a result there is “a massive destruction of earth ecosystem and the accelerate decrease of these resources”³⁷

In the introduction of Armatya Sen’s book entitled “Economy is a moral science” St Upery underlines the the issue of economic rationality of individuals , Sen makes quite a significant observation to the limit of this thesis according to which “the idea of preference rationality coincides with the internal formal coherence of individuals... or with the maximization of the individual selfish interest there are compassionated, normative, cooperative, stick together behaviors...etc that are perfectly rational”³⁸. According to Sen, “not only the homoeconomicus as rational agent without affection and moral dimensions is not realistic at all, but it is not always effective, from economical point of view”³⁹

III. The biblical vision of economical relations

The contemporary approaches seem to come from the theoretical foundations laid whether by the Greek cities political life, or by roman approach favoring juridical aspect of human rights in the city and of interpersonal relationships.

However, a normative approach as well as an objective research helps to understand that the origins of a formulated economical organization go back to remote ages beyond Greek and Roman times. In fact, biblical texts present an approach of social, land, and economical issues precise and appropriate enough to inspire the contemporary economical analysis, and hence to set forth the obvious moral character of the economic science.

Today, many approaches seek to demonstrate that the economic science, instead of being a mere science, is mostly a moral science. The most well known author here is Amartya Sen (Nobel Price).

³⁷ Jean-Paul Marechal : « L’Ethique Economique de la Bible », in L’Economie Politique, N 27, trimestriel, Juillet 2005. p. 66

³⁸ d’Armatya Sen, intitule « L’Economie est une Science Morale », Paris, La Decouverte, 2003. p. 17.

³⁹ Idem.

Contrary to the liberal and ultraliberal approaches that dominate the modern economic thought and which promotes the development of selfish behavior and competition between individual economic agents, the biblical approach raises up the question of social relations within a perspective of participation and solidarity. It develops an approach in which the emphasis is on the moral and emotional conduct of individuals. Far away from the optimization behavior of individualistic interests of modern economic science, and from the quest for unlimited accumulation of wealth, advocated by the liberal economy, Jean-Paul Marechal underlines that the Bible warns against « the accumulation of wealth and consequently against the resulting phenomenon of inequality. »⁴⁰ The Bible warns also against « the exploitation of men and nature »⁴¹. The very way we found in Isaiah 5: 8: « Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there is no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth! ». In the biblical approach, of Old Testament where biblical declarations are many and explicit, a precise legislation is given to prevent the unequal and selfish behaviors. According to Marechal, « this legislation took shape on the temporal pyramid of Shabbat »⁴², and gave concrete expression through a certain number of recommendations relating to work, land ownership, debts and soil rest »⁴³. These recommendations had weekly regularity (weekly Shabbat), as well as on years, seven years and 50 years.

III.1 / Weekly Sabbath

Concerning the weekly Sabbath, 7th day of the Jewish law, the specific and explicit request to remind it is found in Exodus 20: 8-11: « Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it ». It is really a time to stop working recommended by God during which all economical activities must stop. This recommendation repeated many times became an institution which would lead men 1) to set his limits, namely God, first, then the neighbor and not him and his interests, first. This principle is reminded by Jesus in the New Testament when he says: « Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself »⁴⁴. 2) It should teach him the level of headedness against the accumulation of wealth. 3) Finally, the stop of all economical activity in 24 hours, in order to consecrate totally to God, should teach individuals that the increase of wealth is not necessarily the result of a continual and interrupted activity, but rather in the obedience to all God recommendations, and in the quest for a relationship of confidence in Him from whom comes all wealth.

The above declarations of Old Testament contains these ideas which remind the individual the fundamentals, the reason and the meaning of these activities, which could be founded in God as well as their expression, their explanation and justification in God, for Himself and for the neighbor.

⁴⁰ Jean-Paul Maréchal : « L'Éthique Économique de la Bible », in L'Économie Politique, N 27, trimestriel, Juillet 2005. p. 71.

⁴¹ Idem.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Matthew 22 :37-39

III.2 / The seventh year Sabbath

The seventh year Sabbath advised the chosen people to leave the six years cultivated pieces of land rest during one year. 1) Besides the principle of having confidence in Him, God 2) reminded this people to restraint in the accumulation of wealth. Moreover 3) it had to help the people to take care of the needy. The recommendation we find in the book of exodus is the following: « And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy olive yard. Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed. And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect. » Exodus 23: 10-13a.

The Easton's Bible Dictionary underlines in fact the object of this obligation which benefited the poor: "Whatever grew of itself during that year was not for the owner of the land, but for the poor and the stranger and the beasts of the field. All debts, except those of foreigners, were to be remitted »⁴⁵

The American Tract Society Dictionary underlines other principles that this practice should teach: "Was to be celebrated among the Jews once every seven years; the land was to rest, and be left without culture, Ex 23:10,11; Le 25:1-7. God appointed the observance of the Sabbatical year, to preserve the remembrance of the creation of the world, to enforce the acknowledgment of his sovereign authority over all things, particularly over the land of Canaan, which he had given to the Hebrews, and to inculcate humanity on his people, by commanding that they should resign to servants, to the poor, to strangers and to brutes, the produce of the fields, of their vineyards, and of their gardens."⁴⁶

The measures taken in favor of the needy ones are not limited to the recommendation to leave pieces of land fallow. The obligation of the people committed him to strong national solidarity unknown in other societies and which is far away from the contemporary thesis as far as economic and social relatives are concerned. In fact, to that practice, God added a specific management of debts founded on the principle of remitting one's debts as well as the loan without interest.

III.3 / A particular management for debt

III.3.1 / The remittance principle

Talking about remittance, Deuteronomy 15: 1-5 made a recommendation by which every seventh year the people were to remit debts to the debtor. The practical application modes were formulated as follow: « At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth unto his neighbor shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, or of his brother, because it is called the Lord's release. Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the Lord thy God blesseth thee, as he promised

⁴⁵ Easton's Bible Dictionary.

⁴⁶ American Tract Society Dictionary

thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow »⁴⁷. The objectives of these practices, even though they were not directly made for foreigner, were that not native or foreign indigent could leave without assistance. He had to be assisted: « For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land »⁴⁸. In Deuteronomy 15: 9 and 10 preventive measures were taken against those who will be tempted to escape from the binding character of these regulations: « Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand, and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cries unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. »

Moreover, through all these declarations God connected the promises of prosperity and success attached to the obedience to all the laws prescribe by God, related to the support to the poor and to the Sabbath rest every week: « Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success »⁴⁹. Moreover, the same promises are made to God's chosen people who received the following recommendation : « And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store »⁵⁰.

The question of equality and support of other is also largely considered in the New Testament. Paul for instance makes this following recommendation to the Corinthians: « ... Praying us with much in treaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality »⁵¹.

III.3.2 / Loan without interest

Concerning interest, connected to loans, the biblical approach is different from the orthodox approach. First, loan is intended to support those who are in need. But the objective of this financial practice is not to get rich or to simply earn an income. The loan is made in the context of relations of compassion and

⁴⁷ Deuteronomy 15 : 1-6

⁴⁸ Idem 15 : 11

⁴⁹ Joshua 1 : 7,8.

⁵⁰ Deuteronom 28 : 1-5.

⁵¹ 2 Corinthiens 8 : 4, 13-15.

solidarity. The Bible recommends the loan without interest: « If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury»⁵². The idea developed here is contrary to the one which was developed through centuries on loan issues. The loan interest is a remuneration connected to the loss from having over one's personal money to another individual. In fact, it is a kind of rent of the loaned money. The best utilization of that money would permit the money owner to get an income and an additional wealth. The economical orthodoxy perfectly legitimates and explains the good foundations of the interest rate procedure.

The meaning given to the economical activity and to interpersonal economic and social relations is not the same in the logic of economic analysis and in the biblical logic. The first has as target the maximization of profit and individual wealth, while the second tends « to put the economics to the service of human bloom »⁵³, to develop the sense of solidarity, ethics and moral in such a way that within the society, each individual seeks the interest and the well being of the other, towards the general welfare. Paul, in fact, presents this logic very clearly when he recommends Christians that « Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others »⁵⁴.

J-P Marechal makes quite a good analysis of the logic and the goal that underline the biblical approach of economic and social relations between individuals, when he declares that in this approach what is pointed out is that « economic life is in dissociable from the salvation plan, in which it should be able to be integrated in order to find moral rules, but also, in which it should contribute, helping to mould a fairest and more humane world, a world more conform to the divine plan»⁵⁵.

IV. The biblical approach : pertinence for the modern world (a comparison with the orthodoxy)

As we said above, the predominant economic though based its approach on a methodological individualism which consists in explaining economical and social phenomena only from an individualistic perspective relying on actions, reactions and interactions between individuals which compose the society... The economists work from individual behaviors studying the preferences and the values of individuals. According to these hypotheses, each individual try to optimize his own interest. What is the biblical position on these hypotheses and thesis on which are founding the predominant economic thought and the world economic model?

IV.1 / The classical scientific economy hypothesis of economic rationality and the biblical view

The table below shows the biblical view on human being choices, values and self-interest, comparing to the economic hypothesis of the scientific classical economy.

Table1 : Biblical view on the presupposed foundation

Presupposed foundation	of	Biblical view on these presupposed foundation
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⁵² Exodus 22 : 25

⁵³ Jean-Paul Marechal : « *L'Ethique Economique de la Bible* », in *L'Economie Politique*, N 27, trimestriel, Juillet 2005. p. 79

⁵⁴ Philippiens 2 : 4.

⁵⁵ Idem.

Economics thoughts	
1-The individual has the best information to determine himself his well being level	- A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps ⁵⁶ -And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain ⁵⁷ .
2- Each individual could determine his own preferences and values system.	-And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left ⁵⁸ . -Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success ⁵⁹ . -Observe les commandements de l'Éternel, ton Dieu, en marchant dans ses voies, et en gardant ses lois, ses ordonnances, ses jugements et ses préceptes, selon ce qui est écrit dans la loi de Moïse, afin que tu réussisses dans tout ce que tu feras et partout où tu te tourneras ⁶⁰ .
3-Each individual try to optimize his interests	"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" ⁶¹
4-Individual is supposed to know the different situation that he has to confront	- There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand ⁶² . -Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way ⁶³ .
5- Each individual has "projects" and consequently makes the choice of necessary ways to realize them.	- The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord ⁶⁴
6- He has also the capacity of classifying them by order of importance for him.	"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." ⁶⁵ .
7-He can't make error, en consequently, all the choices that he makes contribute to optimize his welfare.	-The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? ⁶⁶ -Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually ⁶⁷ . -Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts ⁶⁸ . -The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity ⁶⁹ .

If it is true that each individual has projects and can make choices of the ways and means necessary to achieve their objectives, if it's also true that he has the ability to realize a classification by order according to the importance of each choice, according the biblical perspective if the human being wants to succeed and get the best results, it is a good option to submit any choice and any desire to God

⁵⁶ Proverbs 16:9

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 3:20

⁵⁸ Isaiah 30:20.

⁵⁹ Joshua 1:7,8

⁶⁰ 1 Kings 2 :3

⁶¹ Philippians 2 : 4

⁶² Proverbes 19:21

⁶³ Proverbes 20:24

⁶⁴ Proverbs 16:1

⁶⁵ 1 Corinthetaiens 10 : 31

⁶⁶ Jeremiah 17:9

⁶⁷ Genesis 6:5

⁶⁸ Proverbs 21:2

⁶⁹ Psalms 94:11

principles. He is not perfect. So, making choice in order to satisfy his desire, according to his liberty, and his natural instinct or nature won't lead to an optimum result, but rather, in failure, according to different biblical texts in the second column of the table. So, while considering the biblical view and the reality, we can say that the assertion made by scientific classical economy (see the first column of the table 1), and on which are relying their models, are false.

Furthermore, the Bible teaches to human being how to use the liberty he has to make choice: first of all, he has to do everything for the glory of GOD, according to this declaration of Paul: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."⁷⁰ Secondly, he won't ever make a choice considering only his own interest, like the modern approach says. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"⁷¹. That means that he won't make choice without considering if his action or decision has negative externalities on others. Jesus was saying that "what you want somebody does for you, do it for him first". According to economic theory, if everyone acts according to his own interest, only for his satisfaction, there will be equilibrium on the markets.

IV.2 / The two other main theses of scientific classical economy and the Biblical view

IV.2.1 / The private appropriation of the means of production

It can be used by everybody to increase his richness, lead to the best level of production for the economy and produces more wealth inside the society.

We have seen in section II that the Bible is not against private appropriation. But it contains a number of rules that people had to apply for several reasons: 1) it was to avoid sub-accumulation; 2) To develop a sense of solidarity and to feel concerned with the situation of others. This helped to prevent selfishness an indifferent behavior, what we widely find in our contemporary society. 3) The poor could be fed. In this type of organization it could not be found poor who could be too poor. It was taking into consideration human dignity. 4) The wealthy person, by applying theses rules was experiencing at the same time satisfaction and happiness. The Bible says that the happiness comes from the fact to take care of the others, to help and to give. But in our society, Men have put other foundation than what had been put by the Whom has created Men and Who knows as a matter of fact, what is necessary for his health and his happiness. J.D. Rockefeller, Jr. said, giving is the secret of a healthy life. Not necessarily money, but whatever a man has of encouragement and sympathy and understanding. Otherwise, Jesus was saying that "there is more happiness in giving, than in receiving".

These rules had to establish a more egalitarian society. Is the idea of an fair society pertinent for the economic world of today? The communism which wanted to develop such a value has failed. We have less than 80% of the world population leaving with less than 20% of the world wealth and less than 20% of this population accumulating more than 80% of this wealth.

Different questions arise when considering the question of distribution in the society:

1) Is it possible to think about a different distribution of this richness between the populations? What can motivate it today? Is it just altruism, faith and obedience to God, faith and interest (looking for

⁷⁰ 1 Corinthiens 10 : 31

⁷¹ Philipians 2 : 4

blessings), or the potential results (increase of global wealth). What can prevent it from happening? Is it selfishness, or ignorance, or fears (fear of uncertainty, of crises, of dispossession and poverty for the wealthy people)?

2) How could this distribution operate? Is it by an increase of the salaries, by the participation of the employees in the capital of the firms, or by a free distribution of wealth as it was experienced in the biblical time? What could be the implications for the markets equilibrium, inflation rate and employment level.

3) What could be the results for the real economy? Will it lead to an individual enrichment of the donor, a global increase in consumption or saving, of production and investment, a global increase in world wealth, in international trade?

4) What could be the result in the financial economy? How could the financial market evaluate?

According to the bible, by applying the rules of equality, the owner was becoming richer, because God has promised to bless him. He said: «And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.»⁷² Elsewhere, He declares: “...Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the Lord thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow”⁷³; and again, “...because that for this thing (obedience) the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto”⁷⁴. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary underlines that the national obedience of the people was to be rewarded by extraordinary and universal prosperity.⁷⁵

As a Christian researcher what should be our attitude. Is there space to try to introduce these biblical rules in further research, trying to integrate them in a model, and maybe the other different types of distributions, so as to see how the economy could operate and react, at national and international levels. Or should we accept by faith these results? It can be accepted at an individual and personal level. But it can be a benefit for our society to have a presentation of this biblical economical orientation according to a more “intelligent design”. We need to understand if the prosperity that the Bible is talking about comes like a gift from God in response of obedience, or if exists in the universe, a natural law who leads to such a result, when somebody has a compassionate attitude towards others and apply Bible recommendations in that field.

Considering the percentage of repartition how it appears nowadays, we can make some speculation by saying that 80% of the world wealth, holding by 80% of the world population, will lead consequently to an increase of global demand implying an increase in the global production. This speculation could be continued at different levels showing a better perspective at an individual and global level.

⁷² Deuteronomie 28 : 1-6.

⁷³ Idem 15: 5, 6b

⁷⁴ Idem 10b

⁷⁵ Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary, op. cit.

IV.2.2 / The role of free market

This third idea which characterizes capitalism is based on the role of the free market in achieving the best allocation of resources and the best economic results. The free market is not incompatible with the Bible; however, according to the Bible it doesn't operate under the same law and the same conditions. Here also, it is important to take into consideration the rules given by God and that have already been considered towards poor, loan without interest and treatment towards others.

IV.3 / The Bible and Socialism

Despite of the fact that this point requires more investigation, we can however make this observation: When we consider the orientation of socialist approaches which, generally speaking “look for the fairest economic organization, the most favorable to human development, the less hard for the weak people”⁷⁶, we have the temptation to say that socialism is on the same line as that of the Bible. But here also, we need to be careful. By studying socialism we can see that it “confirms the predominant influence of the conception it is made of Men and society” by capitalism....the socialism “didn't succeed in questioning the philosophical foundation of the social system.”⁷⁷. It doesn't have the biblical worldview based on God and redemption. It even doesn't accept the idea of God. The objectives that it looks for need to be achieved far away from the idea of God. However, more attention needs to be accorded to its hypothesis.

⁷⁶ Janine Bremond, Marie Martine Salort “Dictionnaire des Grands Economistes », Edition Liris, Paris, Aout 1992, P. 41.

⁷⁷ Jean-Didier Lecaillon, Jean-Marie Lepage et Christian Ottavj, op. cit. P. 11, 12

Conclusion

As a Christian economist, we need to understand that as it has been underlined by a famous economist Lecaillon Jean-Didier, “behind any economic system, there is a certain conception of human being, of the world, of the society; in that condition, we need to take into account the hypothesis that this (the conception) could influence the other (the economic system)⁷⁸. We understand now why the first book written by Adam Smith (the *Theory of moral Sentiments*) did not keep the attention of the economic world so much. The worldview included in that book was not in harmony with the economic worldview that the society was comfortable with and wanted to promote. One orthodoxy had to be presented and imposed to the society. The *Theory of moral Sentiments* was a book which pointed more the fact that human being has the natural ability to take into account the condition of his counterpart. At the beginning of the book he says, “How selfish so ever man may be, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner...”⁷⁹. So, we need to understand 1) that behind the logic and scientific method, there are men. And this later has his limitations, his weakness and is subject to errors. Consequently, there are large potentialities for errors in solving scientific problems. 2) The second principle in the scientific method is adoption of hypotheses; that means causes (or elements which should explain facts or phenomena, presented in advance, that we try to demonstrate). So we can say that there is a large part of subjectivity, because the researcher tries to demonstrate presuppositions, data, and sensitive perceptions. They can be influence when they elaborate a theory. In the scientific world, a paradigm generally speaking concentrate all scientific efforts in one given direction, and by so doing enable to make great progress in précised knowledge. But this operates by putting away from the investigation some phenomena. Copernicus and Galileo history shows that the tandem theory-paradigm can, for a period more or less important, orientate the choice of observed phenomena and more blind the scientists’ eyes. 3) It is important to underline as Pierre Thuiller (epistemologist and historian) did it, that, the data the scientists use to observe, search and experiment, don’t speak. They have to be interpreted. He says that in the interpretation, the ideology can at anytime intervene. Science is a « human construction ». The orientation of research according to the current of thought is a constant temptation at any level. It is necessary to be aware permanently. So we need to take some distance in order to consider any theory that we are teaching according to the biblical perspective, when it exists.

This study shows that there is a big field of investigation to try to understand how God’s recommendations and the results which occur can operate. Yet by waiting for a clear vision of what could be biblical economical perspectives for our society in this 21st Century, we need to be very careful, because at anytime we teach economy, we are presenting a philosophical approach on society, men and the world. It is very important to know it very well and to confront it to our biblical worldview which is better valuable than the other worldviews. Further studies will help to go deeper in the approach made by A. Smith in the “*Theory of moral sentiments*” in one hand, and on the other hand, will help to integrate biblical worldview in economic models.

⁷⁸ Jean-Didier Lecaillon, Jean-Marie Le Page, Christian Ottavj, op. cit., p.12.

⁷⁹ Adam Smith, “*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*”, Printed for A. Millar, in the Strand; and A. Kincaid and J. Bell in Edinburgh, MDCCLIX London, 1759

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