

“Private Property and Christian Charity”

Fall 2023 Carolinas Regional Convivium at Davenant House

Landrum, SC

10/20-21/23

Call for Papers

“The general property of man in animals, in the soil, and in the productions of the soil, is the immediate gift of the bountiful Creator of all. ‘God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them. And God blessed them; and God said unto them, be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.’”

So writes American Founder James Wilson in his essay “On the History of Property.” Private property seems to derive in some way from the dominion mandate, God’s summons to Adam and Eve to subdue and enrich the earth. Yet how does this *general* property, belonging to the whole human race, become *private* property—apportioned (very unequally) among individuals? How indeed could such a thing be legitimate, if private property rights are used to excuse some of God’s image-bearers from access to the fruits of the earth needed to sustain them?

Throughout the centuries, Christians have wrestled with this question, drawing upon Scripture’s rich and complex teaching on property, which seems to both celebrate it and warn against it, to approve of profound inequalities and call for broad distribution. Some have gone so far as to argue that among Christians, all property should be common. And yet Christian nations and law codes throughout the centuries have consistently endorsed and confirmed private property relations, while also establishing institutions and norms to guard against too much exploitation of the weak by the strong, the poor by the rich.

Today, property law is at risk of breaking free from the Christian milieu that long nurtured it. Runaway notions of intellectual property have contributed to the emergence of super-powerful corporations and permanent asymmetries of power. It is hard to make sense of the confusing new terrain of digital property within received notions of ownership and use, a problem AI is likely to intensify further. Crushing burdens of both public and private debt have raised urgent questions surrounding the justice and feasibility of debt forgiveness. All the while, ordinary Christians still urgently need catechesis in what it means to use their wealth and property in the service of Christian charity—not merely in “charitable giving,” but in all their spending, saving, and investing.

At the Fall 2023 Carolinas Regional Convivium, our third on the broad theme of “theology and law,” we invite you to join us in investigating the relationship between private property and Christian love—in the ethical, political, and legal spheres.

Location: Davenant House, 419 Glenolden Dr., Landrum, SC 29356

Schedule: 6:00 PM Friday October 20 through 4:30 PM Saturday October 21.

Cost:

- Friday night: \$20 (includes dinner)
- Saturday: \$39 (includes lunch)
- Friday-Saturday (includes dinner, breakfast, lunch, and lodging): \$119
- Friday-Saturday student discount (includes dinner, breakfast, lunch, and lodging): \$69

Keynote speaker: [Adam J. MacLeod](#) (J.D., University of Notre Dame Law School) is Professor of Law at St. Mary's University in Texas. He is also a Research Fellow of the Center for Religion, Culture, and Democracy. He has been a visiting fellow in the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University and remains a faculty member in the James Madison Program's summer graduate seminar on the Moral Foundations of Law. He teaches courses concerning property, intellectual property, jurisprudence, and private rights theory, and speaks in academic and public venues about private rights and private ordering.

Keynote Lecture Title: "Property is Preparation for the Kingdom of God"

Call for Papers

We welcome submissions of proposals for paper presentations or guided discussions on topics related to the theme of the Convivium. The conference is intentionally interdisciplinary and we would love to hear from professional attorneys, pastors, scholars, or graduate students. Papers should generally aim to be 35-40 minutes in length. Suggested avenues of inquiry include:

- What does the Bible teach about private property? How can we make sense of its diverse and sometimes seemingly contradictory prescriptions on the subject?
- How has the Christian tradition historically expounded the relationship between the principles of private ownership and common use? Does our modern market economy represent a healthy application of these principles, or does it pose particularly temptations or obstacles to a Christian notion of property?
- Is our current regime of private property law intelligible, or is it increasingly beset by contradictions? How might we bring Christian wisdom to bear on controverted contemporary questions like the nature and limits of intellectual property, or appropriate structures of digital ownership?

- Is “private property” the best or only way to conceptualize property relations, or do we need a more diversified toolkit that makes use of older concepts like communal property, family property, use vs. ownership, etc.?

(The above are meant to be suggestive of possible avenues to explore, not exhaustive)

If you are interested in presenting a paper or leading a discussion, please submit your 200-300-word abstract to Brad Littlejohn (b.littlejohn@davenantinstitute.org) by September 9th.