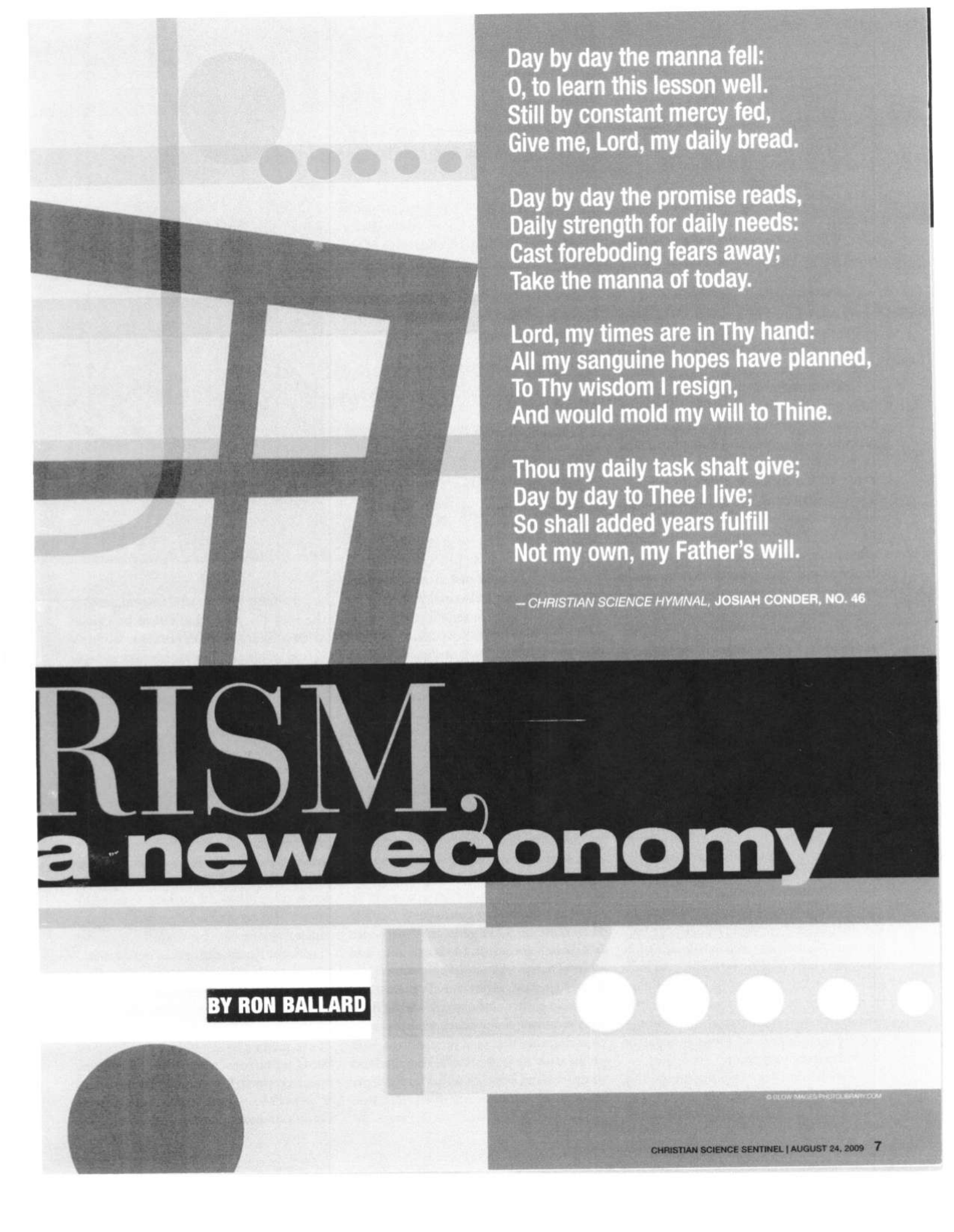




YOU, : CONSUMER and

COVER STORY

The spiritual thinker's role



Day by day the manna fell:
O, to learn this lesson well.
Still by constant mercy fed,
Give me, Lord, my daily bread.

Day by day the promise reads,
Daily strength for daily needs:
Cast foreboding fears away;
Take the manna of today.

Lord, my times are in Thy hand:
All my sanguine hopes have planned,
To Thy wisdom I resign,
And would mold my will to Thine.

Thou my daily task shalt give;
Day by day to Thee I live;
So shall added years fulfill
Not my own, my Father's will.

— CHRISTIAN SCIENCE HYMNAL, JOSIAH CONDER, NO. 46

RISIM, a new economy

BY RON BALLARD

© GLOW IMAGES PHOTO LIBRARY.COM

E

ven as the world continues to dig out of the latest series of economic challenges, attention turns to what a *new economy* will look like.

Many suggest that simply returning to what characterized the economy before the global recession is not desirable because some elements within that economy are deeply flawed and are the cause of the malaise in the first place. This has spawned intense discussion among economic pundits. Some look for a new economy to emphasize healthcare, education, and renewable energy—all endeavors that suggest a focus on what can be done for the common good, rather than just what can be gained individually. But whichever direction this new economy is to take, there is widespread recognition that a rebound will be led by consumers.

Are consumers just anonymous entities that buy things—any things? Actually, you could say there is a spiritual value system behind consumerism. By and large, people consume what they perceive to be desirable and advantageous to them. Therefore, it might be fair to conclude that just as much attention needs to be given to values and spiritual principles as is given to what projects and programs will emerge victorious.

In looking at the various reasons we are facing this economic challenge, recurrent themes speak to attitudes such as greed, lack of self-restraint, and lack of love for the common good. The suggestion here is that it would make little difference to reconstruct an economy merely with a revised focus if negative attitudes were to remain.

Gratefully, we, as consumers and spiritual thinkers, can do something about these underlying impediments to

sustainability and progress. While we may not be able to set economic policy or make top-level decisions about failing businesses, we can take account of what's behind what we consume and the effect that buying has on the people and the world around us.

To spiritualize this process, we could consider what has been called the divine economy. Economy in one sense of the word means management of resources. The divine economy looks to how God, divine Spirit, manages the resources Spirit creates. To understand how that works involves some appreciation of the nature of God. Mary Baker Eddy offered several helpful observations in her landmark book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*.

In one passage, she wrote of the nature of God as Love, "Love is impartial and universal in its adaptation and bestowals" (p. 13). If that's the case, then God as Love must consider the welfare of all of creation in what it bestows. That model might suggest to each person, as a reflection of this Love, that it is not enough to look just at what satisfies oneself. One must also look at how one's purchases and choices affect the world and its people as a whole. Much of what we consume is interconnected; actions rarely exist in isolation.

What we choose to invest in requires that we consider the impact in an even greater context. And there are plenty of examples of people who are doing just that—making practical choices at the mall or local shop that support the welfare of others and promote their self-sufficiency by purchasing products that are produced by humane labor practices.

Another of Mary Baker Eddy's observations explores the spiritual significance of the Bible passage in Genesis about God giving resources to His creation: "God gives the lesser idea of Himself for a link to the greater, and in return, the higher always protects the lower" (p. 518). From this divine action, we could gather at the very least the need to have respect for what we consume, realizing that the natural resources God gives, such as water, food, and the land to grow it on, provide a link to a deeper spiritual understanding of all life—and of Life itself.



In fact, if we were to realize that the very purpose of creation perceived spiritually is to give expression to God's being, we might develop an exceedingly healthy respect for these resources as spiritual ideas instead of merely material objects. Appreciating the spiritual significance of resources, could be the avenue through which we successfully counteract impulses that lead to waste, greed, and self-indulgence.

This may also promote a responsibility for not only planning for the survival of resources, but ensuring that they multiply and flourish, fulfilling that charge in the Bible to "replenish the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Such respect would correct the imbalance of consumption by certain societies at the expense of others.

Some years ago, there was an emphasis in the environmental movement on "living lightly." (It's no secret that this way of thinking has reemerged today.) At the heart of this emphasis was the encouragement to simplify our lifestyles, being more conscious of how our living affected others. I remember thinking that if we were to expand that emphasis to include our core attitudes and thoughts,



**As spiritual thinkers,
we can do something about
underlying impediments
to sustainability and progress.**



we might get at the heart of what could truly shape our economy.

“Living lightly” then might emphasize the mental state that uplifts the culture around us rather than weighs it down. No matter what our strategy is in altering our consumer practices, the deeper issue is the values and spirituality we bring to the management of our lives.

Jesus spoke to this when his disciples were criticized by the Pharisees for their eating habits. He took things to a spiritual level and pointed out that it is not what one takes in that defiles but what one gives out (see Matt. 15:10–20). When we apply that observation to restructuring the economy, it’s helpful to make sure that what we “give out” in terms of our attitudes and values replenishes, rather than defiles. Practices such as self-immolation, unselfed love, goodness, justice, and respect need to reign within us if we are to see outward signs of growth in the economy.

When I first started out after my college years, earning my own way, I found these guiding spiritual principles very useful in making decisions. Whether it was choosing a career, a place to live, or

a mode of transportation, I first asked myself the question, “What can I do that will be a service to God and will bless others as well as me?” Interestingly, in each choice I ended up doing what initially appeared to be something I could not afford! My first living arrangements came down to the choice between a studio or a one-bedroom apartment. I chose the one bedroom because I reasoned it would be a resource that might bless others; friends could come by if they needed a place to stay. At the time, I could only afford the smaller studio, but as soon as I made that choice on the basis of what would best bless others and serve God’s purpose, my income expanded to meet that expense.

When I decided on a career, I made a choice between something that was very lucrative and starting up a Christian Science healing practice that would directly bless others. All those around me counseled that I wait until I was established financially before I embarked on the latter adventure. But I didn’t; my prayers led me to choose what I felt would be the greatest service to God, and from that day forward my financial needs were met.

Today, I’m taking the same tack in considering how I might share what I have, a kind of divesting of what has served me well but now might be of use to someone else. While one approach to doing this might be to downsize and hold a garage sale, and modest actions like this can be useful to the community, devoting myself to praying for others continues to be the best way I can give.

A natural desire to give stems from a comment that Jesus made regarding the management of spiritual resources, “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matt. 10:8). It’s been proven to me that, in the divine economy, resources aren’t scarce; they’re infinite. That means that true resources operate unspent.

You can share what you have with the understanding that the very nature of giving ensures that what you give out is replenished. To give an analogy, I see the process like a water faucet. The only way that more water can come out of a faucet is by turning it on and letting the flow begin.

While our economy today is usually characterized in negative terms, there is another way of seeing it. What has taken shape as instability can be seen as a call to rethink and retool our practices, and our thoughts, so that we can move to a healthier state of management. The most powerful antidote is to take into account the role spiritual principles play in all of this. The consumer has the tools to lead the way through example, living the values that promote love and respect for the common good and embracing the motive of being of service to our Maker. **css**

Ron Ballard is a Christian Science practitioner and teacher from Ashland, Oregon.

FOR MORE ON THIS TOPIC

To hear Ron Ballard speak on this topic, tune in to Sentinel Radio during the week of August 22–28, 2009. For a listing of broadcast locations and times, go to www.sentinelradio.com. To purchase a download of this radio program, #934, on or after August 22, go to www.sentinelradio.com and click on Audio Download Store.