

The Concept of Common Wealth



By Anna Von Reitz

The concept of common wealth has its roots buried deep in pre-history. It is essentially the concept of sharing resources, and especially sharing community resources with the poor and the needy, so as to preserve family and community relationships.

By the time we encounter Biblical-Era Hebrew culture, the concept of common wealth is well-developed and defined. The Hebrews are religiously bound to observe basic patterns of giving:

A tenth of all received is given back as a tithe to the Levites. The Levites in turn are charged with sharing of the offerings and "temple bread".

Every seventh year, the Shemitah requires the release of both credit and debt, so that a reshuffling of obligations and redistribution of wealth takes place. Every seven times seven years, an even more profound shuffling of resources and debt forgiveness takes place when the Jubilee allows everyone who has lost land or home from debt or misfortune is allowed to reclaim it.

Farmers, like Boaz, are commanded to allow gleaners in their fields and to leave the wheat and other grains and crops on the edges of their fields standing so that the poor can harvest them for food.

These are all expressions of the principle of common wealth. Individuals give to a common pot for the benefit of something or someone beyond themselves, or, alternatively, if they need to, share in the benefit of the "common wealth".

The early Christian Communities took these antecedents to even greater heights, demanding that new converts give up all that they had to the group and let the Elders decide how best to use and distribute it for the benefit of all.

This kind of voluntary sacrifice can be readily recognized in the tenants of some forms of utopian socialism, and echoes of it -- though not the pure aims -- remain in many apologies of communism.

One of my school friends once quipped that, "Communism is Christianity absent the element of Free Will."

In pre-Christian Britain the various tribal societies that inhabited the island -- at least those that occupied set territories -- also practiced forms of tithing and ritual sacrifices of material and food stocks for the good of the group. After Christianity arrived, the old concepts of common wealth mingled with the new idealistic vision of common wealth to produce Monastic society and "village commons".

Essentially, the Church or the local Lord, donated portions of land--- often poor land or swampy land or high ground difficult for cultivation -- for "the common wealth". These portions were then used as common grazing land or cultivated by the poor or by lay brothers of the local monasteries and churches, to produce food for the poor and forage for their animals. In some cases, orchards were planted or herb gardens to make medicines for the community.

In all cases these "common grounds" that were then deemed to belong to communities rather than kings or clerics, required care-taking by individuals or groups of individuals who donated their time and skills, labor and materials, to develop and use the "Commons".

This is also how the tradition of using Commons land for the location of public buildings and facilities-- whether the Pauper's graveyard, or a courthouse, or the docks on a river-- came from. The entire idea that we now have of "public lands" and "public facilities" and "public programs" flows naturally and in a straight line from Ancient Israel to downtown Mainstreet,USA, via the vector of Christianity.

Utopianism, Socialism, and Communism all have there socio-economic roots sunk into this same bedrock concept of common wealth. In the 19th and 20th centuries, and especially in English-speaking countries, this whole tradition continued to be recognized in the form of political Commonwealths that contributed to the British Empire as a whole.

It is from the concept of "common wealth" that the entire tradition underlying the current welfare system springs and from which the American "brother's keeper" laws derive.

Like so much else in life, the concept of Common Wealth is justified in our minds and hearts as an expression of a truth--- that the land does not belong to us, and that, instead, we belong to the land.

Our dominion over the land is brief and the stewardship we hold is sacred, but we return to dust and the land holds us forever.

It is our common destiny, our common wealth, our common land--- and in our hearts as naturally as falling down or sun shining, it is our common love for the land that gives rise to our understanding of the needs, sanctity, and rights of other men and women. We all spring from the same source: the soil, the land, the country where we live and where we die and where we are buried or our ashes are scattered.

It is this great commonality that drives the principles of common wealth, whether gleaners in the fields competing with the crows, or kings upon the hill. It is built into our pattern, our ten fingers and toes, the bend of our knee, the arch of our throat.

I have been accused of many things in my life. For some reason, leftists see me as a violent conservative, and conservatives see me as a raving liberal, and the Centrists, for their part, kick me straight out of the political number line entirely.

The truth is that I don't fit in anywhere in the political spectrum of men, because politics are inevitably linked to concepts of self-interest and of that, I have little or none. Our Father has blessed me to have all that I want or need, whether I scrape by or have wealth to stagger the imagination.

No, rather, what makes my politics is Nature, the facts of life, the turning of the seasons, the tree that becomes my winter fire, the day that becomes night. I am forever too close to the ground to lose sight of it. Lovingly, my feet touch it, satin silt or gritty sand or the deep garden loam of my childhood, it's the song of the Earth I hear and heed. It's the Earth that I am and that I need.

Perhaps this sounds childish, unworthy of my intellect, education, and breed. Surely, I should espouse some high flung philosophy, some extreme or arcane or violent political leaning and commitment to some well-defined agenda.

If I do have such a calling, then let it be this--- that I recognize the common wealth. I know what it is. I know what it springs from, eternal and righteous. I grant it to my fellows as they grant it to me, and I have no other desire than to see peace and plenty and freedom and an end to disease.

There's my politics and my political party. May it come to power. And long may it reign supreme.

See this article and over 500 others on Anna's website here:www.annavonreitz.com
To support this work look for the PayPal button on this website.