



**Looking through the lens of the market, we may see only winners and losers in a game of global wealth. But through the lens of Roger Varland's camera we begin to see wealth and poverty with "eyes of the heart."**

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# With Eyes of the Heart

BY ROGER M. VARLAND

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W ealth to me usually means Donald Trump and Bill Gates. But add the adjective “global” and all of a sudden it’s about me. My middle-class trappings, stuff, and opportunities put me near the top of the world’s economic pyramid.

I often wonder, “Why me, and not the family whose mud and stick house I visit in Kenya?” Why do I have all the graduate education I want when so many in the world would love to be able just to graduate from high school?

We live on a planet “groaning in labor pains,” the Apostle Paul writes (Romans 8:19-23). From Albania to Zimbabwe it “waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” as wealth and poverty slug it out in battles of food, education, and health.

Though money cannot solve everything, our fat wallets and 401Ks represent a potential to make a difference. No matter how I try to get around Jesus, he always tells me stewardship is a priority. We have been given much and it must be passed on.

So I am a troubled soul. I have seen enough of the world to have felt the plight of the have-nots, but in the same day I retreat to comforts that only a first-worlder can experience.

The images in this essay capture moments that have made me more aware of wealth and its attendant power in our world. The photograph *I Dream of Shoes* (on the cover and p. 52) reminds me that people around the world have their own ideas of the symbols of wealth. In America they are the five-thousand-square-foot house, the biggest SUV, and the Ivy League. For these Kenyan schoolgirls, shoes are a near pinnacle achievement. And we try to figure out where to store all of ours.



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## **SINAI COKE**

This soft drink display happens to be on the road to Mt. Sinai, but it could be just about anywhere in the world. It is hard to escape the multi-billion-dollar, multi-national corporations that reach into the far corners of the globe. This is quite attractive to the stock market where the pursuit of wealth creates a game that often allows profit to trump local concerns.



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### **BURDEN BEARER**

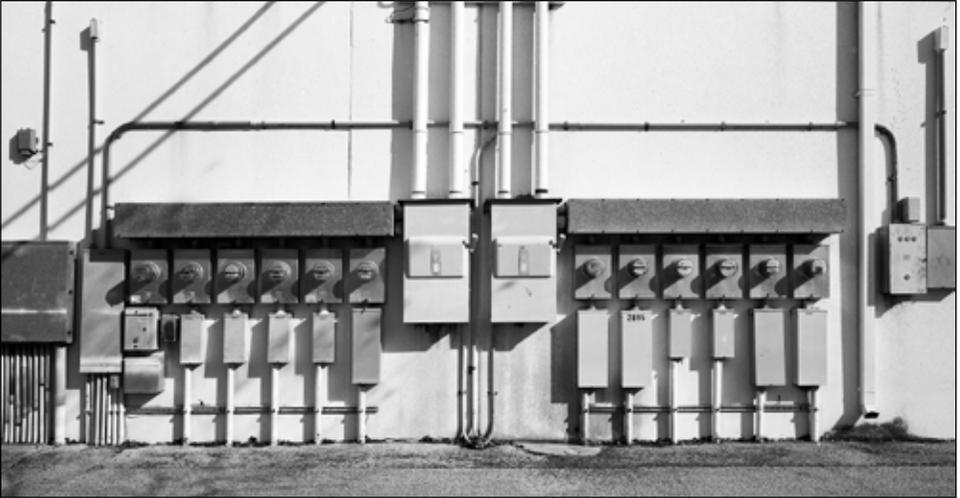
Though many people, like this woman in Kenya, still make a living with hard manual labor, it is one of the first things to disappear with the acquisition of wealth. We seek out easier work and pay someone else to do the grunting. In America more and more of us are disconnected from the manual labor—from the sewing of our clothes to the picking of our vegetables—that sustains our lifestyle.



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## **STONEBREAKERS**

In a bit of Tom Sawyer irony, my students ended up paying for the opportunity to pound rocks into gravel using hammers. While studying in Guatemala, we spent two days helping an NGO build a primary school. As in many places around the world, a number of local communities in Guatemala lack the resources and leadership to build schools. Those of us from lands of milk and honey may read about such places, but until we are there with hammer in hand, their need does not sink in far enough to make a significant difference in the way we live. Exposure to the needs of the world is the best way to grasp the potential and responsibility of our wealth.



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### **POWER IS WEALTH**

We have a fairly serious energy addiction. Beyond our increasing dependence on oil and fossil fuels, we are totally dependent on electricity. How would we live without it? We expect to be able to plug in wherever and whenever and rarely flinch at the cost. Forget about all our conveniences. What if everyone in the world could just have enough electricity for lights?



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**KEYS**

We often talk about key decisions and key moments. Wealth is a set of keys that has the power to unlock the suffering of so many people. May those of us who have the keys go hunting for the locks that they fit.

## MEET THE ARTIST

Roger Varland is Associate Professor of History and Art at Spring Arbor University in Spring Arbor, Michigan, where he teaches courses in photography, art history, and the school's CORE program. Two years in Kenya and a semester in China have shaped his photography and classroom perspective. He and his wife Deborah, also on the faculty, have taken students on fifteen cross-cultural study tours to countries including Kenya, Uganda, Egypt, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.

When not photographing other cultures, Mr. Varland explores the American cultural landscape as a student of the New Topographers. Like them, he captures unsentimental images of the landscape and everyday moments filled with meaning. His photograph "Night Money" won the Exceptional Merit Award at the 2007 Statewide Fine Arts Competition at the Ella Sharp Museum in Jackson, Michigan.

Mr. Varland's photographs have been featured in juried exhibitions such as "The Faces of Christ" gallery on the Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA) Web site ([www.civa.org](http://www.civa.org)).



*Roger Varland*