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The turning point came for me during freshman year of high school, when my older brother introduced me to daily, extended, systematic reading of the Bible.

We grew up in a conservative, sectarian Lutheran tradition that was quite sure it had the true, objective reading of the Scriptures. Everyone else was injecting their subjective bias. Our tradition took a strong view of the connection between revelation/faith/redemption, on the one hand, and science/knowledge/creation/the-practice-of-one's-professional-life, on the other. In sum, there was virtually no connection. It's a rather medieval view, sometimes called a nature-grace distinction or a Christ-and-culture-in-paradox view. "Jesus' kingdom is not of this world," and you mustn't expect it to have much to say about this world's work. Just be an ethical individual.

As I read the Bible I gradually became skeptical of that nature-grace distinction. God has made and loves human culture and the physical world; they will not be abandoned to decay, and if they experience fires of judgment these are fires of purification, not annihilation. How could I be a follower and lover and worshiper of this God without wanting to participate in God's aims for his creation?

As one might expect, the Bible is not silent about those aims. Christianity comes with its own basic social theory baked in; when you convert, this is part of what you convert *to*. Wherever in the world there is division and cliquishness, God's people re-enact what they learn in The Lord's Supper. Wherever there is ethnic or racial suspicion, God's people re-enact Pentecost. Wherever there is flippant disregard for the earth, God's people re-enact the respect of Eden. When there are incentives toward self-centeredness, God's people re-enact incarnation. When there is bragging and selfishness and aggression, God's people re-enact beatitudes. When there is bewilderment and fear, God's people breathe out a blessing and offer the Spirit of Peace. And the value of all of these responses is presented as baked into the creation's structure, not as peculiar truths that only apply to believers.

And, of course, the Bible is also not silent about epistemology—the standards by which one considers truth claims to be credible. Scripture is full of narratives and poetry and direct teaching about the relationship

between revelation and observation, the effects of sin upon one's preferences and ability to know, the extent to which worldviews overlap such that there is agreement about truth across a variety of starting points

Just how deep and wide does this theistic social/epistemological theory reach? That became my question in college—at a thoroughly secular institution, following my large, urban public high school experience, with very little relevant material to read. I stumbled across Francis Schaeffer's *The God Who is There/He is There and He is not Silent*, and Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, at about the same time that a friend gave me a copy of Gary North's *Introduction to Christian Economics*. Even at that tender age I could see that North's libertarian Reconstructionism wasn't what I was looking for, but at least he was trying. So were Schaeffer and Sider, from different angles, though I didn't end up quite in their shadow either. The fact that they were all self-consciously working from the basis of a coherent worldview, and coming to conclusions not only about ethics and policy but also about economic analysis, cracked open a door for me.

I began to peer into the room on the other side. My senior economics seminar syllabus included Lindbeck's *The Political Economy of the New Left* and Galbraith's *New Industrial State*. Friedman released *Free to Choose*. My history of economic thought course put the positivism of the neoclassical tradition into its cultural context. Everywhere I looked I could see that an economist doing modern analysis is working out of some bigger, external tradition that influences her work. "Neoclassical" ideas had appeared and receded throughout history; their current resurgence was related to the worldview of British Utilitarianism, and where that utilitarianism had not flourished neoclassical analysis also had some difficulty gaining traction. The current vogue for econometrics and symbolic representation of abstractions as a way of doing epistemology—making truth claims—had emerged after a nudge from von Neumann and Morgenstern; behavioral economics was just beginning to peep out from the excursions of psychologists into economic theory; people were hinting the things that are now becoming neuroeconomics. None of these influences from traditions external to "economics" sought to replace mainstream economics with an utterly different approach; they instead had the effect of refining and sifting, of redirecting the mainstream. The big, good influences on the profession seemed often to come from somewhere outside.

So why not from theology and biblical studies? What light could they shed, if taken seriously? One might trivialize the conversation by saying something like “there’s no theistic way to minimize the sum of squared regression errors.” But I could see from my undergraduate econometrics course and my summer research job that, when you actually do empirical analysis, you are making hundreds of small decisions which, if not exactly subjective, are certainly traditioned, informed and influenced by one’s first principles.

So what was this odd little tribe of American economists—people who seemed to believe that their current analysis was the positive, objective path to truth? Did they know their own history? It reminded me of my religious childhood. Here, I thought, was a profession to which I might be able to contribute something, and contribute it *as a Christian*.

That has been my project, in one way or another, during the forty years since I declared my undergrad economics major. I’m not expecting that there is always a different way in which Christian economists should do their work, though sometimes there might be, and sometimes the ore they mine may prove valuable to economists of any worldview. I also realize that the chain of logic between revelation and analysis is long and subject to ideological contamination; the whole enterprise is something to be discussed only in calm tones of deep humility. The project can easily go off the tracks into eccentric and absurd conclusions, and even in the best case it leads to many difficult questions. People have good reason to resist it. A friend recently opined in a private email that projects like this have not “added anything novel, arresting, or revealing, nothing very penetrating, nor very insightful.” But I still think it’s a worthwhile venture, though the number doing it is vanishingly small.

What reading to recommend? Modesty prevents me from mentioning a book that tries to live out this agenda, *The Uses and Misuses of Data and Models*, by W. James Bradley and Kurt C. Schaefer, available wherever fine treatises are sold. I understand it’s been used as a text at UW–Madison, and it anticipated the BITTS movement by about a decade, so maybe this is not all *that* lacking in novelty or insight. I’d also suggest that people read the Bible more carefully, systematically, professionally, and in a way somewhat segregated from devotional reading. We all tend toward eisegesis, so you’ll want some assistance, something to jar you out of the circularity of finding in Scripture the things you expected to find. I’d suggest a solid, scholarly commentary with which you may be likely

to disagree, perhaps *Hermeneia* or *International Critical Commentary* or *New International Commentary* or *Searching the Scriptures* or *True to our native land*.



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For a Christian wishing to understand economics, *The Wealth of Nations* may seem to be one of the most obvious choices. I have found that its essentially ethical arguments are understood more if it is read alongside Adam Smith’s earlier book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. While *WoN* is essentially a careful analysis of ways in which economic value is created within markets and through the careful design of institutions, *TMS* attempts to explain how our behavior is shaped by our consciousness of how other people will interpret our actions. It is an immensely hopeful book, presuming human perfectibility. I find it almost impossible to believe—even in the context of the activities of Edinburgh’s Whig *literati*, many of whom were ordained ministers preaching a Christianised Stoicism, which was entirely consistent with *TMS*—that Smith could have been a faithful Christian any more than his ebullient friend, David Hume.

I have found that understanding individual decision-making in a social context is of great value to Christians studying economics. Akerlof’s *Market for Lemons* paper continues to fascinate me. It was the first (essentially microeconomic) paper in which I encountered ideas about how we might think of institutions as a response to the limitations of human behavior. Many of the questions which Akerlof has explored throughout his career are very similar to the ones which Smith explored two centuries beforehand. Society might have changed, but people have not.

Akerlof’s paper presaged advances in behavioral economics, such as the early work of Kahneman and Tversky as captured in *Judgment Under Heuristics*, arguments around self-management as put forward in Schelling’s *Micromotives and Macrobehavior* and *Choice and Consequence*, and Ainslie’s theories of the divided self in *Picoeconomics*, which itself drew heavily on Herrnstein’s arguments for hyperbolic discounting and time-inconsistent choices in *The Matching Law*. But I would cite another book, Elster’s *Ulysses and the Sirens*, as being especially influential in shaping my understanding of where there might be interesting problems