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As I reflect on the things that have been influential and helpful to me in my career thus far, at the top of that list are fellow Christian academics and economists. My first tenure-track job was at a public university, and that opportunity provided a wonderful framework for my career. It offered excellent resources and teaching reductions to jumpstart my research.

In my first year, through my church, I completed a correspondence course through the Chalmers Center at Covenant College on rethinking poverty. The course preceded the publication of Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett's book *When Helping Hurts*, but the ideas in that seminal work on dignity-centered poverty alleviation programs were evident in the design and readings of their course. The course challenged me to rethink poverty and policy directed at it in light of my Christian belief and worldview. Prior to this course, I halfheartedly considered how my Christian faith might intersect with my economic studies, but with this course the proverbial scales fell from my eyes. While the greatest impact was a shift in my thinking on what economic development should strive for, I distinctly remember one week's work which included readings on domestic poverty programs. This particular reading had a complete disregard for economic principles—such basics as people respond to incentives, and scarcity abounds. It was one of the first times I saw the opportunity to articulate the meshing of my Christian worldview and my economics training. Because of my economic education, I was able to articulate my concerns with the ideas in the reading; after, I received several emails from classmates who appreciated the economic argument. I was encouraged to continue to wrestle with these ideas, recognizing the value of economic reasoning even in submission to gospel principles.

When I learned of an opening a few years later at a nearby university, I switched from the public to a private Christian university. Working with economists who wrestle with these same questions—how should our faith shape our economics, and not the other way around—was life-giving. I was amazed at the thought that I could speak openly of my faith and trust in Jesus in the classroom or in my office. A colleague likes to say that at the Christian university we have more academic freedom, because we don't have to edit the most essential parts of our being in our interactions. I do not assume that each student walking through my door is a Christian, but I do not have to speak only in vague terms about the source of my comfort and joy.

Working at a private Christian university in the buckle of the Bible belt, I realize that my circumstances will not match with many others. The things that are most influential and helpful to me as I consider economics and my faith are my colleagues who are willing and able to wrestle with the way that our lives and our vocations should be impacted by the gospel. I am thankful for colleagues who do not avoid difficult conversations. While we do not agree on all issues, we foster dialogue that pushes each to consider economic ideas through the viewfinder of the Christian faith. Because of our commitment to this individually, such things carry over in the classroom. When discussing policy in the classroom, we can gently challenge and redirect arguments and comments that create the “other” in ways that are not healthy.

Furthermore, my contacts through the Association of Christian Economists are valuable. Fostering these friendships at one or two conferences each year, it takes time to build the type of camaraderie I admire among more senior members of the organization. However, as I enter mid-career, I see the fruit of steady interaction and fellowship.

While my job offers some, there do not seem to be many opportunities for younger ACE researchers to network with one another. For those of us at Christian universities, we have the built-in network through our colleagues and their contacts, but it can be difficult to build relationships across schools without an existing connection. In recent years, there is an increase in informal gatherings of ACE members at major research conferences. (I think specifically of those arranged by John Rush at the Southern Economic Association meetings.)

We should be careful that “Christian economics” does not become clearly identifiable with a particular economic school of thought. We can

hold varying views of the economic system and government's role in it, and yet all remain true to gospel-centered truth. I am concerned when I hear that those outside of economics, and those outside of Christianity, assume that all Christians must be libertarians, for example. That simply is not true.

Christian economists must endeavor to practice gospel traits—to listen to others, to engage with those who disagree, and above all to be motivated by love, seeing dignity in all. This does not mean that all who speak are correct, or that all economic ideas are equally valid. It behooves the Christian economist, though, to be set apart from the angry, vitriolic shouting matches that have taken over the public sphere.

Much like Fikkert and Corbett's book radically altered the way that many think about short-term missions and long-term economic development, there is an opportunity to apply Biblical principles to other aspects of economics. Some of my work focuses on the way that religion moderates decision-making, particularly in charitable giving. This work, with Jeremy Thornton, was motivated by unsatisfactory analysis in existing work. Much of the work by secular economists hesitates to consider religion more generally, and Christianity specifically. The research often views any religious identity or behavior as a curious trait in some individuals. Christian economists' familiarity with theology and Biblical principles allow us to develop deeper understanding of the way that religious beliefs impact behavior.

The main thing that would be helpful to young and mid-career Christian economists is an extension of networking for Christian scholars. While we can continue with some of the events already in place, it may take more senior scholars creating the space and inviting young scholars to meals to promote those interactions. When I reflect on conversations about Christianity and economics, they nearly always take place during informal gatherings.

Given the current political climate in the United States, Christian economists ought to be engaged with the conversation. While many of us must turn off the relentless news cycle to maintain peace of mind, it is essential to remain aware of the current policy issues. Moreover, the ongoing work of sanctification requires a posture of critical evaluation—does the worldview we proclaim match with that of the gospel, or has our focus on worldly wealth and power clouded our discernment? It is through a relational network of Christian scholars that we can pro-

vide this accountability to one another. As Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

Specific to our profession, given the grind of the early academic life, we should remind each other that our hope is not of this world, and our truest identity is not that of tenured professor, but beloved children of the King.



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Incarnation and Mission in Economics

1 Economics as Mission

Y*ou people* need to understand, this is *missionary* work.” As best I can remember, these words are a direct quotation from a social worker who personally experienced homelessness and whose life work is to help vulnerable people move out of homelessness. With some justification, she was not happy with a white, male, over-educated academic from the Midwest who wanted to talk about how to design a randomized control trial studying her life’s work.

Ultimately, I think she is right. What she does is a mission, a calling from God. Every day, she revisits a trap from which she escaped. She follows the example of Christ to go where she has no obligation to go. Implied in her statement is also something challenging to me; it implies that what I do, what economists do, what “you people” do, is entirely separated from mission into a different category. Over a long conversation with her that mostly involved listening, I think we made some progress. We as economists are in a better place than she thought we were. But she’s also more than a little right. We economists, and Christian economists in particular, have some distance to travel toward taking her incarnational approach and living our economics as mission.

2 Christian Economists Should Be on an Incarnational Mission

Christ’s picture of perfection, the Kingdom of God, is an upside-down kingdom different from the kingdom of this world. In this kingdom, the