

Formation: A Symposium on Living as a Christian in Economics

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In the Fall 2017 issue, *Faith & Economics* published the symposium “Translations: A Symposium on Readings for Christians in Economics.” It consisted of essays by economists late in their careers who have made a sustained contribution to the project of connecting the Christian intellectual and cultural tradition to the work of economists. They reflected on the readings and other influences that were foundational to their work.

For this issue, *F&E* has commissioned a complementary group of essays by Christian economists who are still (roughly) in the first half of their careers. The participants were asked to participate in the same project of addressing the connections between the Christian tradition and their work as economists: What things have been influential and helpful to them? What potentially worthwhile things have been missing? How would they want the conversation about economics and the Christian tradition to be shaped? What are emerging fruitful areas for further work? What would be most helpful to them and their peers as Christian scholars? What conversations would they like to see initiated among Christian economists?

Both symposia are pastorally strategic. They are pastoral in giving us thoughtful scholars’ insights and advice about the art of forming a professional life with meaning. And they are strategic by, cumulatively, helping the community of like-minded economists chart a course of effective service to the profession and the culture at large.



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I appreciate this opportunity to reflect on how the conversation about economics and the Christian tradition might be shaped in the future. It’s humbling to consider how much literature, and how many life-

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times of reflection, this conversation now encompasses. I will begin with some observations about how the conversation has been shaped so far, as I understand it. By way of background, I teach economics at Gordon College, a Christian liberal arts college, and I also did my undergraduate studies there. I'm an applied microeconomist by training. My research interests are in behavioral economics and environmental economics, with an emphasis on welfare issues.

First, the conversation seems to be shaped by at least three distinct motivations or purposes. A first, longstanding purpose has been called "integrative scholarship." Scholars with training in theology and economics can create new scholarly understanding at the intersection of these fields. I have found Mary Hirschfeld's (2011) insights about these conversations to be very helpful. Despite their high barriers to entry, conversations serving scholarly purposes seem well-developed and active. Personally, I have found material from these conversations to be helpful for teaching. At many Christian colleges and universities, including my own, faculty members are expected to bring students along on a faith integration journey. A book that I have found extremely helpful in this regard is Victor Claar and Robin Klay's (2007) *Economics in Christian Perspective*. To further facilitate and enrich faith integration curricula, perhaps pedagogical conversations could be promoted within *Faith & Economics*, or at an ASSA session of ACE. I can find only one example of a *Faith & Economics* article that is focused on pedagogy (which is O'Neill, 2003). Comparing teaching experiences, and perhaps even thinking about assessment (!), could be fruitful both for practical reasons and for identifying difficult issues that could benefit from further integrative scholarship.

A second purpose for the conversation is economics pedagogy. Often, the desired audience is other Christians who are not trained as economists. For example, writing about integrative scholarship on unemployment, Bruce Webb (2006) concludes that, "Christian economists have responded to what they believe to be fallacious claims, misunderstandings, or simplistic solutions of other Christians." (p. 54). I have also found Klay and Gryzen (1995) and McMullen (2012) to be helpful examples of outreach to non-economist Christians. Pedagogical goals can also be approached more academically. Dean (1997) is a prime example of a Christian economist interpreting her field for Christian students of economics and economists in other fields.

Christian economists' outreach to non-economist Christians could potentially be expanded or made more systematic. Personally, I feel called to make deeper connections with colleagues in other disciplines and to engage with economic questions raised by my church and pastor. When it comes to engaging with Christian brothers and sisters who may have inaccurate understandings of economic issues, my intuition is that relationships are the best path to mutual understanding. We should take seriously their concerns and embody a spirit of mutual learning. Conferences that draw together economists and practitioners could also play a useful role. A rich network of Christian economists in economic development has already brought two such conferences to fruition with high praise. The first conference followed the ASSA conference in Washington, DC in 2003, and the second, *The Economics of Global Poverty*, followed the ASSA conference in Boston in 2015 (Mason et al., 2008). A different expansion of the conversation with Christian pastors could take the form of an organization similar to BioLogos. "BioLogos invites the church and the world to see the harmony between science and biblical faith as we present an evolutionary understanding of God's creation" (BioLogos, 2018). One could imagine a parallel statement about inviting people to see the harmony between economic reasoning and helping people meet their material needs. "EcoLogos" does have a nice ring to it.

A third purpose for the conversation seems to be personal reflection and "faith seeking understanding." It is the reflective tones of mature Christians—such as the writings of the late Paul Heyne, John Mason, and Lisa Klein Surdyk—that most resonate with my desire to contribute, somehow, to this conversation.

Thinking of how the conversation should be shaped in the future, it seems natural for all three purposes—integrative scholarship, pedagogy or outreach, and personal reflection—to continue unfolding. And of course, these purposes are not mutually exclusive. As an early-career scholar pondering the possibilities, it is helpful to learn how different individuals have taken different approaches in their careers or at different points in their careers. I am also grateful that within its first two decades of existence, the Association of Christian Economists had already come to a common understanding that there is no one "correct" way to approach scholarly life as a Christian economist (Webb, 1994; Mason et al., 2008).

A second observation is that the conversation about economics and

Christianity is inherently relational. Although the conversation often takes a written form, it seems to always have been molded by personal interactions. In the Fall 2017 issue of *Faith & Economics*, in which senior economists reflect on their formative experiences in Christian economic thought, one common theme is the importance of personal connections with other Christian economists. This has been true for me as well. I had the privilege of being a student of John Mason, Stephen Smith, and Bruce Webb, and more recently to work alongside Stephen and Douglas Puffert. One can learn much about the pattern of a person's thoughts by sharing a meal or talking about a new journal article or news story in the hallway. I also attended the Economics of Global Poverty Conference mentioned above. The hard work of conference organizers Chris Barrett and Stephen Smith produced an inspired (and inspiring) gathering with a high level of discourse and scholarship. That conference also showed the benefits of focusing the conversation on a particular field of economics. Perhaps ACE could develop an easier method for finding members by field to facilitate this (in the present directory, a manual search is required). I trust that ACE events at the ASSA meetings will continue to play a relationship-deepening role for many of us. And informal meetups of ACE members at smaller conferences also seems worthwhile.

I appreciate the multi-purpose and relational nature of the conversation between Christians in economics. And, thankfully, there is no sense in which the conversation will ever be "done." Yet, the conversation seems mature enough, thanks to the work of previous generations of scholars, that I am eager to see how far we could reach if we drew others in. One form of winsome connection with the broader academy is careful and creative traditional scholarship, like Rebecca Blank's (2002) "Can equity and efficiency complement each other?" I see many potential benefits from expanding this form of engagement. I hope that the ASSA sessions sponsored by ACE continue to attract non-members as well. An even more ambitious way to expand the conversation could be to create a forum where the analysis of economic issues is more explicitly tied to normative schools of thought (e.g., Catholic Social Teaching or Jewish Social Teaching) in a way that is accessible for mainstream economists. This idea owes in part to something Dave Richardson wrote on the twenty-fifth anniversary of ACE: "In retrospect I think we also missed some great opportunities: to better engage Jews and Muslims, especially, in serious faith-based economics . . ." (Mason et al., 2008, p. 4). Perhaps

this looks like a special issue of *Faith & Economics* or something else. I suspect that many people who might be interested in such a conversation don't know that it already exists among Christians.

Finally, I was asked to consider what might be emerging fruitful areas for further work. While disclosing my own bias, I'll note that the impact and implications of behavioral economics seem to be under-discussed in the conversation to date. Green (2003) explores time inconsistency as a self-control problem. Other topics where insights from behavioral economics could potentially be developed from a Christian perspective include fairness, altruism, belief formation, and subjective well-being. The "imperialist" expansion of economics has also greatly shaped the field in recent decades, and it would be interesting to hear reflections about this from the perspective of Christian scholars both within and outside of economics. It could also be useful to consider what venues Christian economists have for learning about and discussing normative issues related to the latest subfields and techniques—genoeconomics, neuroeconomics, "big data," and machine learning come to mind as current examples.

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Economic Scholarship and Contemporary Religious Vitality

In this essay, I will discuss the need for a particular type of economic research on religion. Research in this area has seen exciting developments in recent years. Scholars in economics (as well as fields like sociology and political science) have used recently-developed empirical tools, and recently-created datasets, to answer long-standing questions and to pose new questions no one has thought to ask before. Those interested in learning about this recent work could start with a review by Syria Iyer (2017) and an older but still very worthwhile review by Laurence Iannaccone (1998). Those reviews make clear that it is an exciting time to be a quantitative social scientist working on questions related to religion.

But will it stay this way? It appears to me that we may be living through a sea-change era for religion. I wish that more people agreed with me about this and that more people did work trying to understand the causes and consequences of these changes.

The sea change I see is a decline in religious activity in the United States. Not everyone is interested in talking about, or acknowledging, that such a decline is occurring. I can understand why. First, when your career depends upon getting (often secular) scholars to pay attention to your work on religion, your first worry might be convincing your audience that religion matters. Talking about religion’s steep decline is an awkward way to get that conversation going. Second, my own (unscien-

tific) impression is that some people who work in this area would consider religion's decline to be bad news, and rather than study bad news with no obvious solution, it might seem more worthwhile to study some other aspect of religion, or to try to rationalize the decline as something else.

I am sympathetic to these concerns. Given the state of the profession, I do not recommend this area as a main avocation for young economists needing tenure, and I take no pleasure in being a prophet of doom. But ignoring this phenomenon will not make it go away. Even since some early signs of rising secularization (such as the large increase in those reporting no religious affiliation in surveys in the 1990s), more evidence has accumulated. Certainly, the role of the nonaffiliated has not gone away. A recent report showed that, for the first time in history, the unaffiliated make up largest group of American voters, with more “adherents” than any other religious tradition (Ingram, 2016).

But there are other ways to illustrate this change, such as in Figure 1, which shows the fraction of people in the General Social Survey who report never attending religious services from 2000 on—well after the rise of the nonaffiliated began. This figure shows that even in the last decade there have been changes in religious practice. The changes are big. About one fourth of people now say they *never* attend religious services—not even once a year or less than once a year (which are both options people can choose in this survey). Indeed, some recent scholarship has suggested that the longstanding idea of American Exceptionalism—the endurance of faith in America even as it declined in other developed countries—may be coming to an end (Voas & Chaves, 2016).

Another argument one used to hear (not so much anymore) is that this decline is a mainline protestant thing, or perhaps an organized religion thing. Figure 2 here plots the fraction of people who say they never pray. Again, the figure shows a very large—and very recent—increase. These figures and this evidence are not cherry picked. Today, when one looks at the future of spirituality, most arrows point downwards.

Is this the end (or at least the beginning of the end) for faith in America? I do not think anyone knows. As Niels Bohr is often credited with saying, “prediction is very difficult, especially about the future.” I do not think Figures 1 and 2 necessarily predict a long irreversible decline for faith in America or other developed countries. But I would invite other economically-minded scholars to think hard about it. The rapidly changing role of religion in America (and other nations) could have enormous

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consequences. We need scholarship to help us understand the forces driving this change and whether there is anything that could be done to affect this change.

Most recent economic work on religiosity focuses on historic institutions, or the role of religion in developing societies. These are fantastically interesting areas of work. I always enjoy seeing exciting new work in these areas. I am not trying to put down anyone else's research agenda. But, may I ask, where are the scholars who want to discuss the large changes in religion that are happening right now? In particular, where are the economists?

This is a topic for economists. I typically shun the use of market metaphors to describe religion. But undoubtedly religious groups face limited resources, and as those resources become more limited, they will force groups to make some tough decisions. These are decisions that are inherently economic.

Here are a few examples of what I am thinking about:

As the number of adherents shrinks, I think many religious groups have become less antagonistic towards each other and more willing to work together to combat secularism. (Hungerman, 2011, provides some evidence of this.) Will this trend continue if secularization continues?

Here is another example: A number of studies have shown that high levels of educational attainment may lead to lower religion. If we reach a plateau in educational attainment, will this slow the growth of secularization?

Or this: In the past decade the US government (and some other countries as well) has begun to subsidize religious education. I and my coauthors Kevin Rinz and Jay Frymark have shown that, in some communities in the United States, churches running voucher-accepting schools now get more money from vouchers—that is, the government—than anywhere else. If I had predicted this twenty years ago, you would have said I was crazy. As congregations face fewer and fewer donors, will the availability of funds through vouchers or other venues lead to a reorganization of the religious landscape?

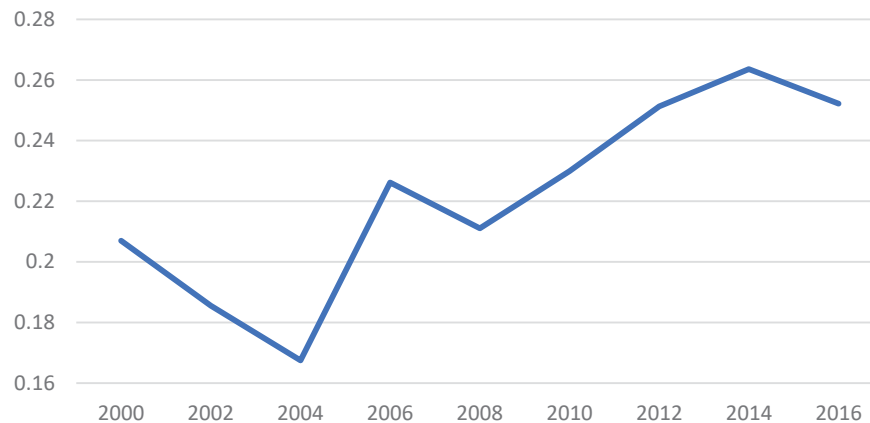
I give these questions as examples of issues for which I think economists have the right tools for doing good work. Many scholars much more famous than I have predicted a coming secularization. But today it is not so much a matter of prediction as it is documentation—we are living in a long-foretold moment in which these changes are beginning to

occur. The time for scholarship on the fate of modern religion in the US and other developed societies is now.

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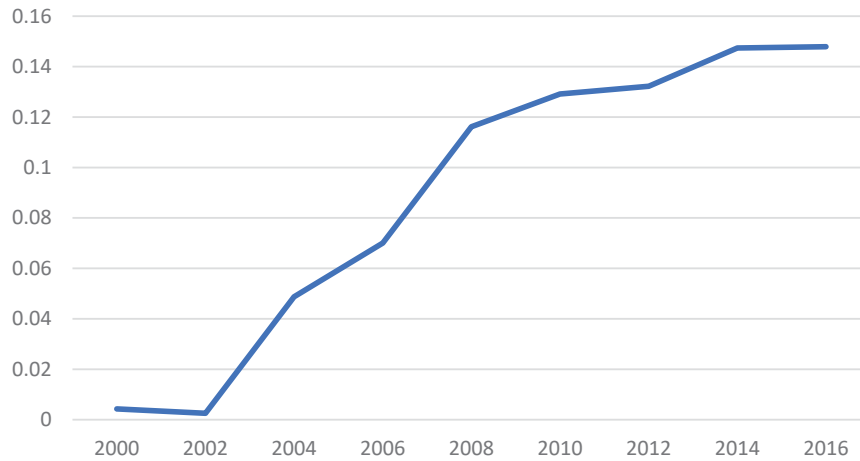
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Figure 1
Fraction of Americans Never Attending Religious Services



Source: General Social Survey

Figure 2
Fraction of Americans Who Never Pray



Source: General Social Survey



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On Being a Visible Christian Economist

My identity as a “Christian scholar” or “Christian professor” has enjoyed significant affirmation over the years, through both institutions and individuals who have invested in me and for which I am incredibly grateful. I had opportunities as an undergraduate at Calvin College (advised by Kurt Schaefer) and as a participant in the Pew Younger Scholars program (under Dave Richardson) to have frequent interactions with Christian professors who affirmed my academic pursuits from the beginning. The notion of glorifying God through research and teaching was brought home to me early and often, and while there are always those times of feeling my activities are too far removed from practical “gospel work,” I can always pick up my copy of *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* and remember why I do what I do. I highly

recommend that book to any young scholars who sometimes feel they are turning into “intellectuals” and to whom that sounds—as it did to me—like an unholy or dangerous thing. (I met Mark Noll after reading it and told him his book was, to me, right out of “Killing Me Softly With His Song”—he was “strumming my pain with his finders, singing my life with his words.”)

It’s probably notable that the reason I actually met Mark Noll was because of the great work of the Christian Study Center of Gainesville, a para-university organization in which I was very involved when at my first job as a faculty member at University of Florida. The Center provided a home base of academic connection for students and faculty ready to “explore the intellectual and cultural resources of the Christian tradition” in light of our university work. We organized panels, guest speakers, short courses, and film screenings, in collaboration with university departments whenever possible. I presented my thoughts on “Why Economists and People of Faith Need Each Other” and contributed to a panel focused on different disciplinary understandings of justice (alongside an historian and a philosopher). The Center was the place where I found “my people.” The study center movement more broadly has provided wonderful programming and resources for thinking about the life of a Christian academic, and I would love to see other Christian economists get connected with centers near them. (There are now over 25 centers across the country.¹)

That said, I think my identity as a “Christian *economist*” in particular is still very much a work in progress. Framed positively, I see growth in that identity even in very recent years, long after I had felt secure as a Christian academic more generally. While I have always been connected with ACE, I have also always been aware that it is a specific subgroup of Christian economists who find themselves connecting with ACE regularly. In other words, I think we have a sample selection issue. This means that, at ACE events, I am likely to be connected most often with people whose jobs differ from mine in at least one of two important ways. First, compared to a general gathering of economists, I have the impression that ACE represents more institutions that place teaching responsibilities above research responsibilities. (In fact, I’d like to note an excellent, well-attended session put together partly by ACE people at the Southern Economic Association meetings last year focused on the pedagogy of teaching undergraduate econometric methods.) Second, compared with

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a general gathering of economists, my colleagues in ACE are more likely to be in Christian institutions where there is an expectation that faith informs work, and thus the research that is done may bridge into theology or philosophy in a more explicit way than mine would. I do not think either of these is problematic, but merely that the nature of professional conversations is less likely to veer toward the work I do, happily situated in a secular research university. Role models for my specific kind of work—especially females—are relatively rare in the (visible) world of Christian economists.

A primary role that ACE has played has for me has been one of encouragement and fellowship. I am always excited to connect with my friends at ACE, and there is a very real brotherhood/sisterhood there. As I consider where it might extend its reach, I wonder if ACE could find a way to better establish and maintain professional connections with economists across a broader range of institutions, including secular ones. While there are certainly economists out there whose Christianity is purposely hidden, there may be ways to find others who might identify as Christians but haven't thought about themselves as a "Christian economist" *per se*. (I've learned of several through an engagement strategy I'll describe more in a minute.) We really need those people represented in ACE to help with that always-important discussion about what our identity means and how it plays out in our work. Our recent practice of using one of our ACE sessions at ASSA to contribute to a topic of broad AEA interest is a great start to building connections outside our established group.

In particular, when it comes to younger economists, I think there is mentoring that could and should be done by members of ACE. Given the difficulty of identifying new Christian economists in the pipeline, when we know of a young Christian scholar, we should be connecting with them intentionally and consistently. When a Christian graduate student attends the ACE luncheon, for instance, is there someone who will check in with them a few months down the line and ask how their research is going, or how we could be praying for their job search? How do we develop those norms without it being awkward? Perhaps there are some ways to maintain a loose connection (e.g., a quarterly email providing links to some things ACE people are working on) so that an occasional check-in doesn't come out of nowhere. We might look to other professional economist affinity groups for ideas on how they stay connected with busy graduate students and assistant professors.²

Along with being a place for young Christian economists to find some connections and encouragement, what might it look like for ACE to commit to forms of hospitality and partnership that connect us more with our economist colleagues outside “the fold”? There may be opportunities for organizing panels or presentations, conferences or collaborations. My experience is that developing a distinctive Christian identity becomes much more concrete when one is in a variety of conversations on topics of shared concern with non-Christians. We may learn more about who we are in these outside conversations than our inside ones.

I have had a new kind of engagement in recent years that I did not expect would play a role in my deepening as a Christian economist, but has turned out to be invaluable. It is . . . Facebook.

Now, people use social media in a lot of ways, but I will just share a few things about my experience that have always stopped me from “shutting it off” when I get on a Luddite kick. (Please note: My preferred classroom environment involves a chalkboard, where a bonus is one of those document cameras that acts like an overhead projector but you don’t need to make transparencies ahead of time.) What is it that is happening on Facebook that is growing me as a Christian economist? I can divide it into two key elements: The nature of the content I engage and the network of people with whom I engage.

I always tell a new friend to be ready for content on my Facebook feed that is about one-third theology, one-third economics and policy, and one-third funny things my kids say. (They are *really* funny.) On a typical day, I read and share an article—with brief commentary or a pulled-out quote—in hopes of starting a conversation. Once in a while, I share a thought directly (without an article), reflecting on some things I’ve been thinking about. People know that if they provide a comment, they are part of an engaged conversation among people who are almost always thoughtful and respectful. I think of myself in a hosting role—Christian hospitality if you will—for conversational potlucks. I also participate in interesting conversations hosted by friends who have a similar approach to curating meaningful discussion and learning from each other.

What might the day’s topic be? It could be a new federal tax reform. It could be the future of evangelicalism. It could be abortion (yes, I go there). It could be American polarization. It could be the role of Christians in policy advocacy. It could be about community and culture.

In some sense, this variety of topics might not seem particularly con-

nected to my development as a Christian economist as such, but this is where the network of people pulls things together. I have long been concerned about the challenges in my efforts to (a) explain economics helpfully to non-economists in the Church and (b) explain the Church helpfully to economists outside the church. In the context of Facebook, I can engage in both kinds of conversation regularly—and these conversations happen in the presence of *both* types of people! If I want to convey concerns about an economic policy with potentially bad unintended consequences—perhaps one strongly supported by my Christian friends—I can initiate a conversation that pushes these fellow Christians to think twice about it. As the conversation develops, I can try to address their questions about the economics of it, and then other economists (not just Christians) are likely to chime in as well. I find that I can function as a bridge in some conversations between people who wouldn't otherwise interact, and who have things to learn from each other about faith and about economics.

So how did this network form? A key element is including only people I actually know. This is particularly important when I am helping cultivate a challenging conversation among people who don't all know each other; I can help smooth rough edges or clarify ambiguities because I know who the people actually are.³ My approach leads to slow but high-quality growth in the network with whom I interact. I have had not one, not two, but *three* people send friend requests specifically because they are also Christian economists and had seen my posts through mutual friends.⁴ I have also had the chance to directly or indirectly identify other Christian economists through these online connections—sometimes once-removed, on a friend's thread—whom I've never seen at an ACE function.

In light of my very positive experience, I hope that we Christian economists might think about online conversations as an emerging tool for both connecting with each other and better serving our Christian friends and economist friends (and that small but wonderful intersection of the two). As an added bonus, I feel I have become more and more secure in my identity as a Christian economist as I have put myself in a position to articulate that identity in many conversations in recent years. I have purposely avoided most “subgroup” interactions on Facebook in favor of conversations that my whole list of friends will see. It can undoubtedly be more comfortable to speak in jargon (economic or theological) with

my own tribe (economic or theological), but I like the accountability that comes with knowing that many others could be listening to that conversation. I want to take seriously the call to be without reproach.

A conversation topic that I keep coming back to these days is the connection between economic research and responsible dissemination and policy making, particularly as it pertains to controversial issues. This is an example of an area where I hope Christian economists can contribute. My pathway to pushing this issue forward has been evolving in small steps. Initially, I became familiar with some excellent empirical work being done by a Baylor professor, Scott Cunningham, whom I have gotten to know over the years. (He presented in one of last year's ACE sessions at ASSA, though remotely.) His work is impeccable and also controversial and highly publicized, so it was perfect for me to bring to the classroom for my applied econometric methods class with Ph.D. students in Public Administration.⁵ My students and I continued to talk about the paper after class and realized there was just a lot more to hash out that was not specific to Scott's paper. For instance, if your research has a clear result with policy implications, what are your responsibilities when it comes to disseminating that research, and how should you connect with the media and policymakers, particularly around controversial issues? I organized an informal discussion a couple of weeks later, and my students and I discussed these questions, along with some recent controversy about a new opioid paper by Jennifer Doleac and Anita Mukherjee. The conversation was so enjoyable and productive that I posted about it on Facebook. The first person to respond to it was a close colleague of mine—our Ph.D. director in fact—who wanted to know when we'd be doing this again so she could join us. Many other economist colleagues near and far expressed their interest in such conversations in the comments.

Now, that could have been the end of it, but I realized that there was an opportunity to push this forward, and social media would again help me. I decided to try to organize a panel discussion at the APPAM annual meetings and used Facebook for open recruiting, tagging a few people I thought might be interested in participating based on their responses to the earlier post. Within a couple of days, I had a set of four panelists—in different subfields, in different kinds of departments and institutions, of varying seniority!—who were excited to be part of a moderated discussion. I had additional volunteers who saw the call a bit later and have agreed to be backups (or to help seed the audience!), and some who

were interested but not attending those particular meetings. On the spur of the moment, with days before the deadline, I organized an identical session for the AEA meetings, with only one person overlapping (one of those Christian economists I met on Facebook, actually!). That panel will include Cunningham and Doleac, who were part of the inspiration for the discussion. While I don't know yet whether either session will be accepted, I feel like this is the kind of activity that a Christian economist can do as part of the larger profession: Help bring us back to some fundamental questions—including ethical ones—and perhaps help all of us learn to better articulate what it is we hope we are doing as economists.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://studycentersonline.org/membership/member-study-centers/>
- 2 I'm thinking particularly of organizations like CSWEP that pay particular attention to mentoring women through the pipeline, or other groups that gather and support underrepresented minorities, via racial or LGBT groups.
- 3 While choosing "Facebook friends" who are actually my friends—or at least colleagues—seems natural to me, my impression is that those even a little bit younger than I do not use these networks in the same way.
- 4 These are the rare cases where I was happy to add people to my network even though I had not yet met all of them in person.
- 5 Scott was even kind enough to Skype in and talk to my class about it (which I barely managed technologically, but it was worth it). ■



Steven McMullen
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Christian economists often find themselves in an odd position. For many of us, our Christian convictions are at the heart of our motivation for studying and understanding the economy. When we make economic policy, there are lives and communities at stake and serious questions of justice on the line. At the same time, however, we are trained to be scholars of the world as it is, dispassionately exploring and explaining complex phenomena. For many economists, it is not easy to see how being a Christian should make a difference in a person's practice

of economics. Ours is a profession that rightly prizes a high standard of scientific objectivity, and most of the ways that a person's faith commitments could alter the practice of economics seem to violate that standard. Nor is it immediately obvious that faith should make a difference, when the mainstream of the discipline is already focused on poverty, development, education, health, and improving peoples' standard of living.

There are many ways of resolving these questions, and one of the best places to start exploring these different ways is to read the back issues of this journal. I have been fortunate enough to receive a kind of guided tour, having accepted my first academic post at Calvin College and my second at Hope College, both Christian liberal arts colleges staffed with excellent and thoughtful economists. These colleagues, friends, and mentors have challenged me to seriously explore the different ways that Christians have thought about the practice of economics. One decade into my career, I am now convinced that being a Christian can and should make a difference for economists. Even if, most of the time, work by Christian economists operates according to the standards of our guild, there are a couple of places where Christians have unique marching orders and a comparative advantage over our colleagues. In particular, Christian economists should be able to do a better job, as a group, doing a kind of explicitly ethical interdisciplinary work, both in the classroom and in research.

There are likely a number of complicated reasons why economists avoid explicitly writing about ethics in our work, but my instinct is that it has its root in two facts about our position as intellectuals. First, we are working in a context of radical disagreement about ultimate things. As a society, we have deep disagreements about the nature of humanity, justice, and progress, not to mention God. In this environment, it is often easier to be precise and methodical in your work if you avoid these areas of big disagreement, focusing instead on those things that are easily bounded and measurable. This is what economists do really well. We studiously avoid the big ethical questions and write instead about minimal proximate goals that can garner wide agreement, such as pareto optimality. The second reason we avoid work that is explicitly ethical is that doing so requires that we do some very difficult interdisciplinary work. It requires that we read philosophy, theology, perhaps even some sociology. This is no small task, when the language of all of these fields is so specialized. The result of these two barriers—I will call them plu-

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ralism and specialization—is that economists let the philosophers do all of the heavy lifting when it comes time to define economic justice or business ethics.

While I do not have great hope that economists, as a guild, will turn back the clock and return to the days when our field was integrated with political philosophy, I do think that Christian economists could be in a unique position to overcome both of these barriers. First, consider the problem of specialization. While the language of economics is very different than the language of philosophy or theology, many Christians are already somewhat bilingual. Our common commitment to theology in the Church means that we share a partial language with other Christian academics, even if our disciplines are still far apart. Moreover, we have a built-in motivation to study and understand the work of theologians and Bible scholars because they can help us understand our own tradition and faith. Christian economists are, thus, already naturally invested in interdisciplinary work. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that among the ranks of ACE members, there are scholars with degrees in economics and also a background in theology or biblical interpretation. Many others have spent a good part of their careers delving into theology, ethics, and biblical studies.

Second, Christian economists are also probably better equipped to avoid being paralyzed by ethical pluralism. While there is a great amount of disagreement among Christians, we do share a long tradition of ethical reflection. We have centuries of work that we can draw upon, pulling us into distinctly Christian ways of thinking about markets, trade, wealth, and poverty. Among all the sources of disagreement about secondary matters in economics, Christians have a common agreement about ultimate matters of metaphysics, anthropology, and justice. Barrera (2014) makes this case in more detail, highlighting the common theological ground that allows Christian economists to address some important looming ethical questions about our economic system. Rather than avoiding these topics, Christian economists often have, and should, highlight them.

It is often the case that our training as economists, and our Christian theology, will both be relevant, if not explicit, when discussing questions of economic justice. If more in our discipline were more thoroughly read in Catholic social teaching, as well as MacIntyre, Nozick, Sandel, Rawls, and Hayek, we would be better equipped to contribute broadly to current debates about minimum wage laws, health care reform, inequality,

automation, and the many other conversations where economic expertise is essential.

To conclude, therefore, let me paint a picture of what I am proposing. Most economics research is focused and technical in nature, and need not include interactions with philosophers or theologians. At least some part of our work, however, should be devoted to contributing to the larger ethical questions facing us in our economic life. I have tried to do this kind of interdisciplinary work with animal and environmental ethics, and I have found that a number of basic ethical questions are better approached with an understanding of both philosophy and economics. I know this is true in many other areas of inquiry, and I look forward to seeing my colleagues dig into these opportunities.

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For this symposium, *Faith and Economics* asked a fairly wide range of questions to economists in the earlier stages of their career. I chose to focus on two of them: “What things have been influential and helpful?” and “What potentially worthwhile things have been missing?” I am focusing on these two particular questions because I think that some of what I have found to be particularly influential and helpful are lacking to a degree within our community—namely intentional Christian mentorship within the community of Christian economists and purposeful two-way communication between Christian economists and the larger Christian community.

Mentorship from senior Christian economists has been one of the most significant factors in my own development as an economist and academic. However, *intentional* mentorship is missing more broadly in the community of Christian economists, and there are some possibly simple ways that we can begin to engender this kind of intentional mentorship within our community. Secondly, I find the popular writings such as those

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of Bruce Wydick for outlets such as *Christianity Today* to be incredibly useful tools for communicating relevant information from my field of work to interested individuals in my church community. I find people to be incredibly receptive and grateful for this information as they desire to use their resources (both monetary and non-monetary) wisely. We are uniquely positioned to assist individuals in this effort, as economics speaks to a wide range of topics and issues relevant to the larger Christian community. However, our efforts at engaging the broader Christian community in conversation are limited and narrow. If we were to more purposefully pursue this relationship, we, as Christian economists, could better use our skills and gifts to vocationally serve the kingdom of God.

1 Intentional Christian Mentorship in Economics

I was a fairly new Christian when I began the Master's program at the Dyson School (then, the department of Applied Economics and Management) at Cornell University and was still very much working to understand the relationship between my vocation and my new faith (an ongoing journey). I will forever be grateful that my thesis advisor was a faithful Christian who was also a highly respected development economist. As someone who both spoke and wrote openly about the intersection of his faith and research on understanding the causes and consequences of poverty, my advisor from the very beginning modeled what it means to serve God's kingdom as an economist. Based on this experience, I would without hesitation name mentorship from senior Christian academics as one of the most valuable factors influencing my development as an economist and academic.

As a Christian advisor with a Christian student, my advisor was able to offer and counsel prayer as I muddled my way through graduate school. More than that, he still models and intentionally teaches what good academic citizenship looks like when collaborating on research, teaching and mentoring, providing peer reviews, and participating in seminars and conferences. Finally, as he enjoys wide respect and success at a university that prides itself on its history of separation from religious affiliations, my advisor also provides a counter example to the story I had been told prior to entering academia (and am often still told) that if I am open about my Christian faith, I will lose the respect of my colleagues and may even be met by hostility.

I feel blessed that I attended graduate school at a department with such a visible Christian economist. Had I attended a different university (or even a different department) I do not know how difficult it might have been to find Christian mentorship in my vocation at such an early stage of my career. The Association of Christian Economists (ACE) is clearly attractive for Christian economists and provides an obvious forum for fostering connections between Christian economics students and faculty, as well as between senior and junior faculty. It was at the ACE annual luncheon at the American Economic Association (AEA) meetings and an ACE-affiliated conference (Conference on the Economics of Global Poverty in 2015) that I first met other senior Christian economists who graciously offered their own counsel and friendship.

The kind of accessibility and friendship fostered by ACE is unfortunately limited by the fact that it only meets once a year at the AEA annual meetings. The AEA meetings are costly to attend, and as I progress in the tenure process, I find it more valuable professionally to attend smaller field-specific conferences, such as the Northeast Universities Development Conference, the Midwest International Economic Development Conference, and the like. As much as I want to be an active part of the Christian economist community, even finding myself wanting to attend the AEA meetings solely to attend the ACE events, it is hard to justify the cost and time of attending the meetings for ACE alone. I would love to see ACE's presence extend to other regional or field-specific conferences. While I do not expect that ACE could sponsor formal events at all these conferences, it seems feasible that the organization could advertise informal gatherings for ACE members and those interested in this community, possibly having a current ACE member acting as a point of contact. This could be an effective way of enhancing the accessibility of this community (for both for faculty and students) while also being a way of strengthening connections among Christian economists living in the same geographic region and/or working in the same field.

Intentional mentorship within the community of Christian economists is something that is currently lacking but has the potential to be quite valuable. Again, ACE is an obvious forum for fostering intentional Christian mentorship in economics. A potential model of intentional mentorship is the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CWSEP). CSWEP has numerous avenues of intentional mentorship available to female economists. For example, at the AEA

meetings, CSWEP holds mentoring breakfasts where they group junior and mid-career economists based on common fields of interests. CSWEP also holds CeMENT workshops for doctoral and non-doctoral programs which provide more focused mentorship on research, publishing, tenure, grant writing, work/life balance, and similar topics. It may be possible for ACE to provide similar avenues (albeit on a smaller scale) of intentional mentorship within the community of Christian economists. For example, rather than focus on doctoral and non-doctoral programs, we could instead foster mentoring relationships focused on those teaching at Christian universities versus other public or private universities. This would be a valuable addition to ACE's activities at the AEA annual meetings.

2 Economics Within the Broader Christian Community

Economics offers a rigorous set of tools to analyze how we allocate resources to achieve societal goals. In my view, one of the primary responsibilities, if not *the* primary responsibility, of economists is to provide an evidence base for policy. As a Christian economist, I further believe that this is an important part of serving the kingdom of God within my vocation. While economists are not always effective at communicating to those outside of our own discipline, there is nonetheless purposeful effort to communicate the findings of our discipline to policy makers and practitioners. Recently I have wondered if we, as Christian economists, should be more specifically purposeful in communicating this evidence base to the larger Christian community—to churches, non-profits, parachurch organizations, and others.

As a development economist, I am frequently asked by other Christians in my community about the most effective ways to fight poverty in the world. People in the church desire to know what charities and programs are the most effective recipients for their time, their money, and/or their voice. There are so many mixed messages regarding what type of development initiatives are helpful and/or harmful, and it can be difficult to decipher which of these messages are well-supported and which are not. In responding to these requests, I frequently point them to some of Bruce Wydick's writings for *Christianity Today*. For example, in his article, "Cost-Effective Compassion: The 10 Most Popular Strategies for Helping the Poor," Wydick (2012) discusses common antipoverty programs and the evidence we have on their long-term effectiveness. Im-

portantly, in this article Bruce is not only able to summarize the evidence but also distinguish between good and bad evidence. Offering that kind of discernment may be just as helpful as providing answers to the questions at hand.

While it is helpful to be able to point people to these writings, there is more work in many other areas to be done. While caring for the needs of the poor is clearly commanded in Scripture, Christian stewardship does not end there. On a broader scale, most Christians desire to wisely manage the resources provided by God to serve his kingdom to help the poor (both domestically and globally), to be good stewards of the environment, to invest in our society's children in ways that allow them to flourish, and so forth. As economists we have the ability to not only summarize the evidence base of our discipline, but also to distinguish between high- and low-quality evidence and interpret that evidence for other people. Moreover, as *Christian* economists, we may enjoy a unique position to earn the trust of the larger Christian community (a group that can be at times suspicious of academia) to do this work faithfully.

In light of this, I wonder if we could regularly produce articles similar to Bruce Wydick's *Christianity Today* writings but touching on topics across the economics discipline. Annually or bi-annually, we could produce a collection of articles summarizing recent evidence in a particular field of economics such as development, education, environment and resources, migration, trade, and the like. For example, one year we could produce a volume summarizing recent evidence in education economics on topics relevant to Christians, and in a future volume we could do the same in development economics. We could then periodically produce articles updating these summaries as a field evolves and new evidence becomes available. *Faith and Economics* is one potential outlet for these articles. We could also target outlets for popular Christian media such as *Christianity Today*. Even posting these kinds of articles online might provide an education resource for those interested.

I am incredibly grateful for the community of Christian economists. I am grateful that there is an organization like ACE which helps us to foster and build a community that includes both our faith and our vocations. What I have described above are some of my thoughts on ways we can potentially deepen this community and serve the larger Christian community in our vocations. I am sure there are numerous other ways we can endeavor to accomplish these goals. I hope that this symposium and that

written by senior economists in the fall can help to foster conversations on how we can better serve each other as well as incorporate the mission of our faith into that of our work.

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Telos, Instrumental Rationality, and Modern Economics

During my graduate studies, I used to think about economics and finance, my field of specialty, exclusively along the lines of the traditional fact-value distinction, and assumed that they existed independently of any ethical considerations because of their technical aim. Back in those days, I didn't realize that positive statements also require a community of scholars to agree ex-ante on a set of standards (like efficiency or falsifiability . . .) that are necessary to define what a fact is, which means that even our statements about facts have value content. Positive economics is no exception and also relies on normative premises. For example, Schultz (2001) shows that Pareto efficiency requires a set of moral restrictions and conventions that make the coordination of agents occur, and the internalization of externalities possible. The more I considered the neoclassical paradigm, the more I wished I could be given a more realistic alternative representation of the world that would better account for actual human beings, and that would help me understand how they form their preferences, how they interact with each other, how they make decisions, and how they are transformed by their actions. I was first attracted to the behavioral finance literature, which explains many puzzles and relies on exciting advances in neurosciences and psychology. However, I also felt it sometimes didn't pay a fair tribute both to human reason and free will.

Then, a providential encounter with Andrew Yuengert at a conference opened new perspectives and gave me clues to grasp what I was

missing. Yuengert (2004, 2012) provides a comprehensive account of rational choice theory and also helps us better think about the relationship between ethics and economics. This alternative account addresses human choices with the framework provided by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas centered on the inherent morality of human acts, understood as the result of deliberate choices under the guidance of reason. Human beings pursue proximate ends (for example, for an economist, it could be finding an estimator with better asymptotic properties), which make it possible to achieve ultimate ends (reducing unemployment, fighting poverty, or simply increasing knowledge), which contribute to “happiness” (*eudemonia*). Therefore, any proximate end is actually part of a much broader context and is connected to a set of ultimate ends that serve both as a justification and also as a moral imperative, if we accept the premise that people should seek to achieve the ends they identified.

That framework can be applied to the economic agents we consider in our models, and the economist can also use it to ponder their own decisions. The positivist tradition generally sees economic ends (like estimating a regression) as proximate. However, the Thomistic framework makes it clear that proximate means can only be justified by the ultimate ends they contribute to promote. Thus, the technical dimension of our disciplines does not relieve us from the responsibility that comes from the ultimate ends served by our research. Moreover, a substantial tradition in philosophy has shown that in the absence of prudence, a technique will give too much attention to the “how” at the expense of the “why,” with the risk of attributing to proximate ends a universal value.

This technical mindset leads to a worldview in which the “sole criterion of truth is efficiency and utility” (Benedict XVI, 2009); in our fields, this temptation can manifest itself in the building of a narrative of economic development and human life that focuses only on the narrow lens of self-interest, wealth maximization, financial engineering, and profitable investments, viewed for their own sake and as the only criteria for action. Moreover, this dangerous confusion between means and ends makes human life unintelligible (MacIntyre, 1988), because it makes us forget that the key to human development is “a mind capable of thinking in technological terms and grasping the fully human meaning of the human activities within the context of the holistic meaning of the individual’s being” (Benedict XVI, 2009). This is also why experts so badly need

the virtue of prudence, which helps them deliberate on their goals and the appropriate means to achieve them.

These readings helped me in many ways: I started to greatly appreciate the fact that the Thomistic account of human decisions is comprehensive and so rich. For example, ultimate ends are not given ex-ante, but they are discovered progressively during the course of life, as the person grows and matures through life in community; life itself is not reduced to the solving of an optimization problem, with a known and well-behaved utility function and constraints that are given ex-ante. On a personal level, it helped motivate me to do the kind of research I wanted to do; it sensitized me to the fact that our models need to be complemented with prudential judgment and placed in the context of a comprehensive human life. Yuengert (2012) also makes the strong point that it gives us a reference account with which we can evaluate any model, identify what is lacking in it, and therefore assess its degree of realism.

Interestingly, some recent studies have also tried to give a humanistic foundation to economics. Their rationale bears some resemblance with what was presented above. For example, Beaudreau (2012) relies on Maslow's pyramid of human needs to define a lexicographic ordering of different types of needs, which he calls identities. The successive satisfaction of these identities constitutes the process of "self-actualization," through which the individual gets closer to his "idealized self." This kind of approach makes it possible to think about the formation of the self, some idealized identities coming from natural reason, others from social conventions. The author explains that his model can be used to explain several documented puzzles, like the disconnection between the level of development of a country and the average level of satisfaction of its members (Easterlin, 1974), or the fact that firms do not always maximize profits—in particular when they are run by visionaries, who are often very concerned by the fulfillment of higher order identities (in particular, those in relation to cognition or esteem). This example gives us a foretaste of how the Thomistic account itself could enrich several literatures (neuroeconomics, behavioral economics, happiness economics, or corporate finance).

As mentioned earlier, during my studies, I was drawn to one of these related subfields, namely behavioral finance. I enjoyed the fact it relies on the premise that a higher degree of realism in models will lead to better empirical predictions. I also enjoyed the fact that researchers in

that area try to incorporate the psychological and sociological dimensions of human life in their studies, and I certainly felt comforted by surveys showing that only a small fraction of the population behaves in accordance with expected utility theory. At first, I focused on the limited cognitive abilities of human beings, which can lead them to make mistakes, or forego relevant pieces of information when they receive a huge number of signals and suffer from limited attention. Simon (1971) summarized it well: “A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.” The limited cognitive abilities of market participants have been used to explain phenomena like market underreaction to firm announcements or the disclosure timing for bad news (e.g., Dellavigna & Pollet, 2009). Another strand in that literature focuses on the strategies used by individuals to cope with a high level of uncertainty (about themselves or the external environment). It shows that human beings often rely on simple heuristics to make decisions (for example, the $1/n$ rule investigated in Benartzi & Thaler, 2001) instead of utility maximization.

The classical tradition could certainly bring some highly valuable insights to this literature, especially when it comes to the interaction between emotions and reason, and the role of free will. Indeed, behavioral economics does acknowledge a role for emotions in human decisions. In that literature, emotions and passions are often linked to the functioning of some older part of the human brain or the actions of hormones. For example, some studies have established correlations between the level of cortisol and testosterone and risk-taking behaviors or trading performances (Cueva et al., 2015); in other words, emotions are viewed as non-purely rational. However, what is generally missing is the interaction between emotions and reason. This is where the classical account of human behavior is very rich and makes it possible to consider all sorts of interactions from alignment to opposition, depending on the presence or absence of virtues, those habitual dispositions to do the good which play a key role in the building of character. This spectrum of possibilities is absent from the literature. Considering the virtues would open lots of interesting questions, like thinking about the connection between the presence or absence of virtues in a community or society and its degree of prosperity, or the interaction between virtues and the building of social capital.

As a concluding remark, as we are entering in a new area of industrial transformations, with the spectacular development of artificial in-

telligence, the question of the nature of the human person is likely becoming more and more central. The joint influence of consumerism and the deepening of the technical paradigm may worsen the confusion between means and ends and accelerate the process of commodification of everything, with the inclusion of human beings themselves (Hadjadj, 2017). The Thomistic account can greatly help us remember the inherent morality of human acts and the central role of prudence in any modeling exercise; the fact that good incentives and constraints are often very useful but not necessarily sufficient, needing to be complemented with character; and the meaning of a human life grasped in its fullness, within a narrative that makes it look like a beautiful quest.

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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

last are first (Matthew 20:16), workers are paid the same despite different contributions (Matthew 20:1–16), the smallest seed grows into the tallest tree (Matthew 13:31–32), and small children best understand the deepest truths (Matthew 18:1–5). Of course, the epitome of God’s upside-down Kingdom is the heart of the Biblical story. The Son of God does not come conquering with a sword (John 18:36). He enters the world as a baby, born to a common family in a forgotten corner of the world’s greatest empire. He lives, teaches, heals, and dies. He finally turns upside the one thing everyone believes you cannot change; he comes back to life. Christ’s Kingdom is clearly odd and different.

If Christ’s kingdom is different, we should be different. As Paul says in Philippians 2:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We should take that same approach: following Christ through incarnation, self-sacrifice, and then, only then, true success. It seems like we are supposed to be on mission.

So Christian economists should be different, participating in incarnation and mission. It is easy to contrast the Kingdom of God with the worst parts of the world of the academy: status obsession, strategic manipulation of people, sexism, and personal value attached to lines on a CV. Contrasting God’s Kingdom with those options does not require much of an essay, though living out that different way is challenging. As Chesterton (1910) says, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.” In any case, plenty of non-Christian economists would agree with that critique, but even the best form economics as practiced in a secular versus Christian manner differ. The ideal of economics exalts scientific pursuit of knowledge, a modernist idea of progress, a preference for positive over norma-

tive statements, and a priority on results relevant to powerful people who guide government and business. None of these features are necessarily bad; they give economics its particular viewpoint and, in many ways, provide the foundation for its usefulness. They are qualitatively different, though, from the focus of the Kingdom of God.

In my experience, I have found the example of God's alternative Kingdom outside of academia in the life of the local church. When I was in graduate school, I was fortunate to stumble upon and attend the Church of the Saviour, a collection of tiny ecumenical churches that had decided that Jesus meant what he said. They set up shop in neighborhoods where God was already at work but where there were also lots of poverty, drugs, and crime. They lived for decades in the same place, committing in small groups to lives of intense prayer, accountability, and mission together. They gave themselves, along with their time and wealth, to help people find jobs, housing, and God. I met Gordon Cosby, the founder of the church, once. In one of the most powerful pictures of God's long-run, humble, incarnational mission, he was living his final days in a small apartment above a residential medical facility for homeless folks he helped build. This is but one example. I have been fortunate to continually meet people on mission: feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, healing the sick, and visiting the imprisoned (Matthew 25:31–46).

3 Stumbling onto Economics as Mission

My first attempt at “economics as mission” was not particularly successful. I entered graduate school convinced that God was calling me to work on international development with the US government or an international organization. These organizations refer to international travel as going “on mission.” I “went on mission” on a trans-Atlantic business class flight and stayed in the nicest hotels in the capital city of a sub-Saharan African country. Somehow, “on mission” had a different meaning.¹

Fortunately for me, portions of the mainstream economics profession were becoming more incarnational, though they would not call it that. Economists were running around Western Kenya giving people school supplies (Glewwe et al., 2004), bed nets (Cohen & Dupas, 2010) and de-worming pills (Miguel & Kremer, 2004). My eventual dissertation advisor was spending much of his life figuring out how to get mini-buses

to crash less often (Habyarimana & Jack, 2011). This new cadre of development economists were getting out of their offices and hotel conference rooms, spending time with regular people, and giving up the ivory tower conveniences to get dirty, at least for short periods of time. I learned that these *randomistas* were the intellectual descendants of fieldwork specialists in development economics. I distinctly remember hearing a story of Jean Dreze spending a sabbatical year failing to make a living as a subsistence farmer. This approach seemed a lot more like incarnation, a lot more like mission. Most of its adherents were not Christians and probably would not want to be included in the same sentence as missionaries, but I walked down that path, trusting it was God's mission.

Finding mentors and peers attracted to this same mission was fundamental for me. A watershed moment for me was discovering a book published after an Association of Christian Economists (ACE) conference discussing how Christian academics and Christian practitioners might collaborate in fighting poverty (Dean et al., 2005). Until then, I had no idea any other Christians were walking on this same path. At the time, merely knowing these people existed was encouraging. Since then, I have been blessed to meet most of the people who wrote chapters for that book. Some interactions occurred organically through the job market, working at a Reformed college and a Catholic university, and meeting colleagues at similar institutions. The most important piece of this puzzle, though, was probably a workshop on the Economics of Global Poverty, supported by ACE and Calvin College and led by Chris Barrett from Cornell. It introduced me to a peer group of other young Christian economists who had stumbled on the same calling about economics, faith, and poverty. There were other people trying to do the same thing! And there was a set of mentors who, out there all along, had been trying to do economics as mission for many years and wanted to share their support and guidance. Support from these peers and mentors made all the difference in moving along the path I am on.

4 Moving beyond Stumbling

I would be excited to see an incarnational form of economics come together more fully. First, we Christians have some work to do to catch up and become leaders in this type of economics. My first academic examples were not Christians, and in some ways the anti-intellectual bent of

the evangelical church I call home (Noll, 1995) has led it to sit behind the curve in thinking about cooperation with the academy. Encouraging examples do exist. Teaching-focused faculty at Christian colleges often exemplify an ideal of integrating faith and serving others better than those of us focused on research. Christians were involved with the beginning of the randomized control trial movement (e.g., Glewwe et al., 2004), and recent work (e.g., Wydick et al., 2013) has explicitly brought attention to Christian organizations doing anti-poverty work. My own employer, the Lab for Economic Opportunities at the University of Notre Dame, measures the impact of domestic anti-poverty interventions and began as a partnership with Catholic Charities but, case in point, has only existed since 2012. Perhaps it is just my own blindness, but examples from research outside the study of poverty seem even less common. Many people will need to work many years to make these exceptions a clear characteristic of Christians doing economics.

Perhaps more ambitiously, I wonder what the institutional framework is for training the next generation of Christian economists who can succeed in a very challenging academic environment and ground their pursuit of economics in faith. I wonder how they will find each other when they start out scattered across many undergraduate schools. I am tremendously grateful that I had the opportunity at the end of graduate school to participate in ACE's one-time experiment with the Economics of Global Poverty Workshop. I wonder how many more people could have this experience. In the field of ecology, the Au Sable Institute in Michigan has managed to institutionalize something similar, bringing together scattered Christian professors and students each summer at field sites where they integrate high quality, technical, scientific training with faith. I wonder if an analogous structure could survive and thrive in economics. I wonder whether this would help us have a better understanding and practice of mission.

Endnotes

- 1 There are better and worse ways to navigate the aid bureaucracy. Many people, Christians and otherwise, do good work in that context. I was fortunate to meet some people who could do it better than me.

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