Integration and Differentiation: Economics at Christian Colleges

Economists in the profession at large may be forgiven for thinking of Christian economists as "stealth" economists—they teach and write but are virtually invisible on the profession's radar screen. This paper aims to shed light on exactly what economists at Christian colleges are and should be doing, and to assess the factors which both inhibit and encourage their work. It should serve to remove some of the stealth, at least among Christian economists, surrounding the work of their colleagues at Christian colleges.

What kind of college is "Christian"? Fortunately, this paper need not settle the issue so much as make specific choices to keep its scope within reasonable bounds. I focus on schools committed to integrating faith and learning over students' entire academic experience, however imperfect may be the achievement of this goal. These are the schools which present Christian economists with challenges and opportunities most distinct from those at secular schools. What "integration" of faith and learning means, ideally and in practice, is important and contentious enough to merit separate consideration later in this paper. Thus I do not consider colleges which may be "church-related" in certain ways but do not view themselves as engaged in distinctively Christian education. (An example is Linfield College (OR) which advertises itself as "related" to the American Baptist Churches but does not require a Christian faith commitment on the part of faculty, students, administrators, or trustees.) I also exclude schools which maintain their Christian character through certain key departments—say, by requiring students to take theology or Bible courses, or by requiring that faculty in philosophy and theology be Christians—but which do not require Christian faculty in other departments. (Many Catholic colleges and universities fall into this category.) In effect, this paper will focus on the 85 Protestant liberal arts colleges which comprise the Christian College Coalition. (A handful of other colleges outside the Coalition—Catholic and Protestant—have similar aims.) While the schools of the Coalition exhibit considerable variance in some aspects of their educational philosophies, and in quality, their common claim is that they self-
What place has economics in the revived Christian higher education movement?

Consciously provide education which is distinctly Christian.\(^1\) For these institutions, the presence of Christian economists on the faculty is more than a happy coincidence, and reflects the educational philosophy which is the subject of this paper.

Protestant higher education has a long and checkered history in North America. These days it is only dimly-remembered that well into the 19th century most undergraduate institutions were church-related and distinctly Christian in their behavioral expectations of students and in the moral philosophy they espoused. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, a number of factors converged (including the strength of the German research university ideal, the secularization of society in general, and the fundamentalist controversies) which rapidly secularized the vast majority of schools. Many analysts point to the Carnegie Foundation’s 1906 decision to fund pensions for professors if schools met certain curricular criteria and severed all denominational ties as the death knell of Christian higher education as it had hitherto been known in the U.S.\(^2\) Yet in a result that will not surprise students of markets, the very secularization of the academy opened up a niche for schools willing to carry the banner of Christian higher education into the 20th century. Thus the period from the late 1800s through the early 1900s saw many schools sprout, including many of today’s best-known Christian colleges. Since World War II these schools have grown in reputation, size, and in all the dimensions by which quality is typically measured, especially faculty credentials.\(^3\) As a group they have not defined themselves primarily as centers for religious instruction, or worse, religious indoctrination, but have instead insisted that good liberal arts instruction proceeds best in tandem with, and informed by, Christian faith.\(^4\)

It is reasonable, then, to ask what place economics has in the life of the revived Christian higher education movement. The thesis put forward in this paper is that at Christian colleges economists do in fact have a unique and important calling to serve students, fellow Christian economists, and the wider church, but that these opportunities have been seized only imperfectly. The first section of the paper sketches a vision of what Christian economists can and should do at Christian colleges. The second section evaluates the extent to which Christian economists have put that vision into practice, and assesses some of the factors which have hindered the development of economics as an integral part of Christian higher education. In the final section I assess options for the future.

I. What should economists at Christian colleges do?

Christian economists, even more than non-Christian ones, should be clear about the importance of our discipline: its pursuit is required by God’s very command to humans at creation, to fill the earth and have dominion over it. Economics is part of humanity’s creative response to the creator in whose image we are made. Thus there can be no question about having economics in the college curriculum. But it is helpful at the outset to sketch out an ideal for what can be achieved by economists at Christian colleges. While it is the chronic fate of ideals that they are unreachable, I shall argue that the goals I identify are coherent and feasible.

Christian colleges as liberal arts colleges. First, economists at Christian colleges should do what economists do at any liberal arts college: train undergraduates in economics in a broad way, emphasizing not just technical theory but the larger relations among economic theory, policy, history, and institutions. Christian colleges share as much as any college in the overall aim of liberal education to equip students to think critically and communicate clearly, and there’s much that economists can do in this regard. In wrestling with economics, students can emerge liberally educated whether or not they continue formally to study economics.
This vision for liberal learning by undergraduates is entrenched and popular in the U.S., despite the ongoing debate about the "core" curriculum required of all students and the place of western history and civilization in that core. This vision, in essence, is generalist: students choose one major discipline but the bulk of their program consists either of electives they themselves choose from a wide variety of disciplines, or of a core curriculum dictated for students to engage them in a wide range of studies. In either event, students emerge at graduation with well-honed analytic and writing skills, ready to work in a vast array of fields not necessarily related to their major.5

This vision of liberal arts learning by undergraduates is teaching-intensive. Now, as all economists know, teaching is not high on the agenda of the typical graduate program in economics, nor is teaching undergraduates universally held in high esteem. And as all assistant professors know, and full professors will remember, there is in fact a lot of learning that needs to take place before the freshly-graduated Ph.D. matures as an effective, engaging instructor of undergraduates. Since teaching is hard work and unarguably cuts into time for research, the only justification for it must be that it is intrinsically worthwhile, which, of course, it is. It is worth noting, too, that the liberal arts, for all their merit in preparing students for life, also serve the economics profession well. Kasper (1991) provides evidence that these graduates, both in the 1980s and before, formed a disproportionate share of graduate students in the "top" programs.

Overall, that these aims of educating students in economics for its own sake, preparing some students for graduate work, and in general using the discipline of economics as a vehicle for liberal learning, are held in common by Christian and non-Christian colleges, is to be commended.

The Christian side of Christian colleges. The second task of economists at Christian colleges is to do what they cannot do at secular liberal arts schools: openly integrate their faith with learning in economics. The notion of "faith-learning integration" is central to the mission of Christian colleges but is often dimly understood by those, Christians and non-Christians alike, outside them. One common misperception is that it consists of teaching "Christian economics," whatever that means. Some take this to mean that economics classes indoctrinate students along stereotypical fundamentalist lines ("Christ, country, and capitalism"), attempting to instill affection for Pat Robertson's international finance conspiracy theories or Larry Burkett's dim view of debt. (Perversely, I have met parents who fear this is happening to their children—and parents deeply concerned that their children are not being taught such views!)

The fact is that integration is a vast and challenging project not adequately captured by facile blurs. It links the study of economics to broad theological and spiritual concerns, so that students develop a self-conscious stance, as Christians, toward schools of economic thought, their own economic behavior, and toward applying economic analysis to contemporary policy issues. With respect to neoclassical economics, the integration of faith and learning means that students are encouraged, no matter how comfortable they and their instructors are with this individualistic and rationalistic paradigm, to be critically aware of its shortcomings and its strengths in light of Biblical teaching about humanity. Conceived of in this manner, integration is foundational and general and is consistent with many different Christian approaches to economics: whatever one's own views about the merits of neoclassical economics, radical economics, or Austrian economics, one can encourage students to study economics as a means of promoting stewardship.

Ideally, integration proceeds in two ways. First, students may directly study various strands of Christian teaching on economics and economic issues in courses...
dedicated to that purpose. The equally important second avenue for integration is for it to occur in all courses. I consider each in turn.  

Direct study of Christian perspectives. At Gordon, economics majors take a course called “Christian Teaching on the Economy” which covers Catholic social teaching, various Christian criticisms and defenses of neoclassical economics, and various Christian writings on economic topics. This may be thought of as the “history of ideas” side of integration because it connects students to thinking in the wide Christian community of the past and present, and, in effect, to church history. It is in dedicated courses such as these that undergraduates can explore issues of considerable interest to Christians but which do not fit easily, if at all, into the standard sub-fields and courses of study within economics. Some professors fear that dedicating specific courses to Christian themes suggests, in effect, that integration need not occur anywhere else. In my view, however, the risk of not adequately covering these topics (in the absence of such courses) is far greater than the risk of signalling to students that “Christian thinking” occurs only in a few select courses.

Many subjects recur frequently in Christian scholarship in economics. I will highlight three around which dedicated courses can be built. The first is in the area of comparative systems. The post-WWII tension between capitalist and socialist economic systems induced a flood of Christian defenses of the market system, as well as a few Christian defenses of socialism. Tiemstra (1993) has suggested that this is no longer a fruitful field for Christian economists to plow, and he’s undoubtedly right if the contrast is to be made solely between market systems and socialism. But the question of what kind of market system is best is now more important than ever, and, in fact, underlies many of the most contentious public policy debates in the U.S. today (such as health insurance and Nafta). While this topic can be studied without being Christian, it is equally clear that being Christian may influence where one comes down on numerous public policy issues; therefore it is appropriate for Christian students to consider how various alternative systems accord with Christian values and notions of justice. Properly framed, comparative systems should be with Christian colleges for a long time.

A second recurring subject, not unrelated to the first, is that of the moral consequences of capitalism. This has been a topic of concern since at least the time of Adam Smith, but the recent spate of market-oriented reforms have made it more salient than ever. Lasch (1991) argues that market systems and the individualism they unleash erode communities both physically (as market vicissitudes leave no job or town secure) and morally (by reifying the wants and whims of the individual). Etzioni (1988) likewise argues in favor of a renewed “communitarian” spirit to counter the forces of rampant individualism, which he identifies with capitalism. Some Christians echo these views (Gay 1992, Goudzwaard 1979), although others (including Neuhaus 1992, Novak 1982) counter that markets in fact have salutary moral effects. Whatever one’s view of this debate, it is important that Christian undergraduates to be introduced to it.

Finally, there is the ongoing debate among Christian economists about methodology. Christian undergraduates are quite capable of understanding the nuances of difference between say, Becker’s ultra-positivistic approach to economic life (that rational individualistic choice-theoretic models can explain all social behavior) and another (that standard neoclassical assumptions are useful approximations to the way people behave in many, but not all, contexts). They are quite capable of understanding how different theological premises yield different outcomes regarding methodology. All in all, students deserve a chance to study the full range of Christian economists’ views on these and other...
matters.

Integration in all courses. The second avenue for integration is that of attempting in all courses to alert students to the theological issues at stake, and the implications for Christians. Consider the following examples. In a course on economic development, students can consider not only the economics of official development assistance but can assess its merits in light of Biblical criteria of justice, stewardship, and service. Students can analyze the question of how Christians can best promote development, given what is known about the economics of market systems, liberalization, and the world economy. In statistics courses, students can learn not only about probability density functions but can be encouraged to think about the meaning of the notions of “probability” and “uncertainty” in light of God’s omniscience and sovereignty. Econometrics students can consider the extent to which standard regression analysis, say, adequately captures the key determinants of human behavior. In international economics, students can consider the consequences for the poor of various trade policy regimes, and evaluate the various policies’ differential effects at home and abroad.

As a modest amount of theological erudition is a prerequisite for this form of integration, it is generally hard for economists to accomplish. Our graduate training is not only not in theology, but occurs at secular universities in a discipline which prides itself on setting aside the normative in favor of the positive. It is also hard because, while in the first type of integration it is not necessary to take sides to discuss Christian views on economics, that’s precisely what needs doing in this case. It requires choices about exactly which economics we wish to integrate with Christianity and exactly which theological perspective we wish to bring to economics. For example, in international trade, while exploring how the U.S.’ poor fare under the Multi-fibre Arrangement, some kind of economic model of textile and apparel markets and the welfare consequences of trade restrictions must be employed. Thus, in practice, this kind of integration requires Christian professors to take a stand toward the dominant paradigm in our profession, neoclassical marginalist economics. Likewise, this kind of integration requires theological choices. To continue the trade example, in evaluating whether or not the U.S. should continue the MFA restrictions or the GSP, some kind of theological criteria must be at work, however implicitly. This is inescapable. Even to argue, for instance, that the U.S. as a secular democracy has no moral obligation to the poor in the rest of the world, for instance, is to take a particular theological view of the Old Testament’s claim that God is the judge of all the nations.

All in all, it should be clear by now that the aim of integrating faith and learning is easier to invoke than achieve. When it occurs it can provide some of the best undergraduate teaching experiences an instructor could ever hope to have. Few things can beat a seminar with economics majors, for instance, at which Ron Sider’s Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger is held up to both critical economic and theological analysis, and in which the interplay between theological and economic themes can be examined in detail. Integration may be hard for economists to do well, especially right after graduate school, but as an intellectual project it is coherent and valuable. Furthermore, Christian college students are ideally suited, of all U.S. undergraduates, to engage in it: their “core” Bible and theology courses prepare them to do exactly this. Finally, beyond preparing students for lives of service and Christian reflection, integration offers the chance for Christian graduate students to have their scholarship oriented, from the very beginning, by knowledge of Christian thinking.

Christian Scholarship in Economics. It is well known that the teaching demands at liberal arts colleges preclude faculty from devoting much time to research, and certainly far less time than is possible at research universities. It’s helpful to think
Across the Coalition it is fair to wonder how much economics instruction is taking place when there are so few professors of economics and so few students.

of non-teaching time as having an income effect on research—it makes possible more research of all kinds. What’s potentially significant about Christian colleges, however, is the substitution effect. While economists at Christian colleges are not required to do research which is explicitly faith-related, the incentive structure of the typical Christian college is set up to reward it. In effect the price of this research relative to all other kinds of research is lower than at other schools. Quite sensibly, faith-related research is rewarded for its help in buttressing the college’s teaching and faith-learning integration goals. It is often also rewarded for its own sake, such scholarship being understood in and of itself to constitute one of the key missions of the institution. Thus it seems reasonable to expect Christian colleges to generate a substantial amount of research in the area of integrating faith and economics.

To sum up: excellent undergraduate instruction, the integration of faith and learning, and Christian scholarship in economics constitute the three key tasks for economists at Christian colleges. Overall these three goals form an ambitious but coherent agenda. Properly functioning, the work of these economists should bear vital fruit in the lives of individual students, the life of the church, and in the broader communities in which Christian college graduates will live.

II. What are economists doing at Christian colleges?

Despite the progress in Christian higher education in the past two generations, on the economics front the contrast between what could be occurring at Christian schools and what is occurring can only be described as bleak.

First, the good news. Virtually all the Coalition schools offer at least one principles-level economics course, and often one each in micro and macro. Some schools which do not offer economics as a major require students to take at least one course in economics as part of their general education or “core” sequence. Clearly, schools in the Coalition are not hostile to economics as a discipline in the sense of having principal objections to it. Furthermore, some Coalition economics departments are firmly-established and deeply-woven into the life of their institutions.

The bad news is that across the Coalition economics generally has a low profile, existing only tenuously at many schools. Only 30 of the Coalition’s 85 schools offer an economics major. The modal number of full-time economics faculty at Coalition schools is zero: well over half of the Coalition’s schools do not have a full-time economics position. In fact, only 17 schools have 2 or more full time economics faculty and a mere 6 schools have 3 or more such faculty. There are fewer than 60 full-time economics faculty across the entire Coalition. Particularly galling is the fact that even in schools which offer the economics major the share of economics majors in all bachelor’s degree recipients is low—in the range of 0.8%-1.0%. Only a handful of schools offer a single regularly-scheduled course in the area of Christian views on economics and the economy. To round out this picture, of the nearly 8,000 economics Ph.D.s granted in the U.S. over 1981-1990, 25 were awarded to graduates of Coalition schools. Only 14 Coalition colleges had at least one graduate earn an economics Ph.D. in this period. Without deprecating the value of the education provided by any Coalition college, it is fair to wonder how much economics instruction is taking place when there are so few professors of economics and so few students.

The situation is brighter in scholarship, although this a matter notoriously difficult to quantify. On the one hand it appears that the substitution effect mentioned above has been dominated by the income effect: teaching has squeezed out research, even research encouraged by the institution. Published scholarship in Christianity and economics by faculty members at Christian colleges has been slender, as is
documented by three recent comprehensive bibliographies on that topic (Richardson 1988, Tiemstra 1993, Waterman 1988). Of the hundreds of authors cited, only 14 are on the faculties of Coalition colleges. That's a high proportion of all Coalition economics faculty, and is a tribute to their diligence in the face of severe constraints, all the more so since, unarguably, some of this scholarship has been of very high quality. On balance, however, it is clear that faculty at Christian schools in practice generate but a small part of the work in the area of Christianity and economics.

To sum up: economics at the typical Christian college is a neglected subject only loosely tied (on the evidence of its graduates) to the professional mainstream. Faith-learning integration in economics is not buttressed by dedicated courses in the curriculum, although it may be occurring with varying degrees of success across the economics curriculum (such as it is). Work by faculty at Christian colleges, while important, is not dominating the field of scholarship in Christianity and economics. I conclude that economists at Christian colleges have a long way to go before reaching the ideals sketched out earlier.

The situation of economics within Christian liberal arts colleges stands in sharp contrast to its position in the nation's top liberal arts colleges and universities. There, from the mid-1970s through the 1980s a rising tide of interest in economics swelled the ranks of majors and faculty alike; on many campuses (including Harvard and Williams) economics was the most popular undergraduate major in the 1980s. In the sample of leading liberal arts colleges analyzed by Kasper (1991), economics majors represented 10-11% of all graduates during the 1980s, while the average number of faculty in economics was higher than 10. These faculty, moreover, while engaged in enough teaching to reduce the volume of their research compared to faculty at top tier universities, publish regularly enough in refereed journals to indicate an ongoing participation in the wider profession's life. More broadly, looking at the share of economics majors among all bachelor's degree recipients nationally, economics is not as popular as it is at the leading institutions, but at 2.3% of all graduates it is still far larger than in the Coalition.

It may seem unfair to compare relatively poorly-endowed Coalition schools with the nation's top colleges and universities. Of course we would expect the latter to shine in terms of resources, size and quality of faculty, and, ultimately, the quality of the student body, with all that entails for a school's ability to offer economics and excite students to study it. Yet it is reasonable to ask exactly why the contrast is so great. Are Christian college students so weak in analytical capabilities that economics is beyond them? Are Christian college students so different from students at secular schools that they have nothing like the interest in economics evidenced by the latter?

Surprisingly, perhaps, the available evidence indicates that students at Christian colleges are in many key respects not different from students who choose to go to other schools. UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute takes an annual survey of entering freshmen nationwide, and it is striking how similar is the demographic background of Christian college students compared to all other students. Some demographic differences exist, of course. For instance, in the 1990 survey, 55% of the entering freshmen at Christian colleges had fathers with at least a college degree, and 43.2% had mothers who were at least college graduates; the corresponding figures for freshmen nationally are only 40.6% and 32.7%, respectively. The most pointed differences are that a greater percentages of the entering Christian college students come from homes in which their parents live with one another (82.8% vs. 71.2%), and identify themselves as "born again Christians" (89.1% vs. 29.3%), whatever that implies about how the students have been raised. Thus in terms of family background, at least, it is hard to see how these factors would influence Christian college students'
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willingness to study economics compared to students at other schools.

What, then, accounts for economics’ lowly status at Christian liberal arts colleges? First I consider why so few Coalition schools offer the economics major. This is a consequence, I suspect, of the small size of many Coalition schools combined with the typical school’s financial constraints. Most Coalition schools are dependent nearly entirely on tuition, rather than endowment, for income. One important implication of being tuition-driven is that, since colleges generally have high fixed costs and exhibit significant economies of scale in the production of education, small Christian schools should be far less likely to have economics than large schools. That’s because, all else being equal, the small school is far more likely to fund a Bible and Theology Department (central to its mission), a Business Department (to recruit students for the most popular of all undergraduate majors and thus buttress enrollment), and even a Psychology Department (again, to tap the most popular social science first) before it funds economics. With increasing size, as tuition provides more-or-less constant marginal revenue while average costs fall, the school may feel free to add economics. The data support this reasoning. As the appendix documents, the average undergraduate enrollment at Coalition schools without economics is 959, far smaller than the 1,438 at schools with economics. Overall, economics is not helped by the fact that half of the Coalition’s schools have undergraduate enrollments below 1,000.

The second and more interesting question is why, even at the Coalition schools which do offer economics, it is far less commonly selected than at the best liberal arts colleges and, indeed, at all other degree-granting institutions. I suggest that four factors have been at work: the level of the average Coalition students’ analytic capabilities, competition from the undergraduate business major as a substitute for economics, gender effects, and the relationship between economics and the core aims of the institution and the students it attracts. These factors are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. However, between them they take us most of the way toward explaining the low of economics, and towards suggesting means to improve it. I consider each in turn below.

Economists thinking about the Coalition’s lack of economics programs will have wondered immediately if the analytical rigors of economics take it out of the reach of the typical Christian college undergraduate. To put it bluntly, it’s rational for a college not to offer economics if students cannot handle it or would perceive it to be too difficult. This is undoubtedly a factor in some places. The average math SAT score for Coalition freshmen is 490, the average verbal SAT score 467, well below the scores at the upper-level liberal arts colleges where economics is popular and average math and verbal scores range well into the 600s. It is also true that the Coalition schools which offer economics have statistically significantly higher average SAT scores, both verbal and math, than the Coalition schools which do not (see the appendix). This, too, suggests that greater aptitude on the part of the student body promotes the study of economics. Thus a rise in the share of Coalition students with math SATs greater than 500 may cause a more than proportionate rise in the share of economics majors. (It may also be the case that the presence of economics sends a signal which attracts better students.)

The second factor is competition from the business major. It is telling that every Coalition school offers some kind of undergraduate business, accounting, marketing and/or management major; no Coalition school offers only economics. These programs tend to be large and popular. Students perceive business and (especially) accounting to be safe, marketable degrees. Without passing judgment on the suitability of business as an undergraduate field of study, there can be no question that the presence of business reduces the number of economics majors.
It is probably true that for some students at secular institutions which do not offer business, the study of economics is a proxy for business; what would be the size of the economics major at, say, Amherst if there was a competing business major? And yet competition from business majors cannot be the whole story. Nationally, business majors represented 23% of all bachelor’s degree recipients in 1989 and 1990 without squeezing out economics majors (who comprise, as we saw earlier, 2.3% of all bachelor’s degree recipients) to nearly the extent that has occurred at Christian schools. Furthermore, according to the survey cited earlier, freshmen arrive at Christian colleges already more predisposed to major in social sciences than their counterparts at secular schools (12.0% vs. 9.6%), and less predisposed to major in business (16.7% at Christian schools vs. 21.1% at secular schools). Finally, for some students the joint study of economics and business proves attractive; in the colleges which offer both majors, double majors are not uncommon and many business students take numerous economics electives. For all these reasons it is too facile to peg the standing of economics as a discipline in Christian colleges entirely on the existence of business programs.

Third, economics at many Christian colleges has a gender problem. Nationally, the students who choose to major in economics are overwhelmingly male: 68% and 69% in 1989 and 1990, respectively (U.S. Department of Education 1992). The reasons for this basic tendency are not the focus of this paper. However, on Coalition campuses the tendency for economics to be chosen disproportionately by men collides with the fact that well over 50% of the students are women. A numerical example of the possible consequences is instructive. Consider a Coalition school with 62% women—not uncommon. If all else was equal, this school might expect to see economics chosen as a major at the same rate as occurs nationally, 2.3%. But as men (nationally) choose economics 3.32% of the time, while women (nationally) choose economics 1.38% of the time, if this school’s students simply follow suit, economics majors will make up just over 2.1% of its graduates, roughly a 9% fall compared to what we would expect if gender and choice of major were independent. Although I have no data on the gender of Christian college economics majors, it is possible that this factor has been more pronounced at Christian colleges than the national figures suggest.

Finally, there’s the question of the extent to which economics fits each institution’s perception of its mission and the aims of the undergraduates attracted by that mission. Since Coalition schools on the whole are not well-endowed and rely on tuition for the bulk of their income, disciplines not manifestly integral to the institution’s mission will be subject to special scrutiny. Perversely, for economics, the very openness of Coalition schools to academically weak students, driven both by financial need on the schools’ part and a genuine egalitarian desire to serve such students, reduces demand for economics.

Apart from each school’s choice of what to offer, however, there is evidence that Christian colleges attract students who have different motivations for college, and different motivations for work and service after college, than their counterparts at secular schools, which may influence their willingness to study economics. (This contrasts to the situation with their general demographic background, which we saw earlier was similar for Christian and non-Christian college students.) From the CIRP data cited earlier we learn that compared to college students nationally, significantly smaller proportions of Christian college students have the aims of “getting a better job,” “making more money,” and “preparing for graduate school.” As healthy as these student attitudes may be, they suggest that Coalition students might not be as concerned about the strong analytic training economics provides, or the signalling it provides to prospective employers, as students at other schools. Also, looking beyond college to their overall aims in life, Coalition students exhibit a substantially higher concern for
by size of undergraduate enrollment.

14 Wheaton comes the closest to offering only economics, but even there students have the option of an "economics-business" major.

15 The actual figures are as follows (% of Christian college sample rating the factor as very important followed by % of non-Christian college sample): "getting a better job:" 64 vs. 78; "making more money:" 44 vs. 73; "preparing for graduate school:" 44 vs. 53; "helping others indifferently:" 74 vs. 62; "making a contribution to society:" 77 vs. 68; ("participating in service:" 29 vs. 14).

16 The claim about the importance of evangelical schools in educating the evangelical leadership is in Hunter (1991, p. 223) and the claim that even Christian higher education secularizes is discussed at length in Hunter (1987, pp. 171-178).

17 To get a sense of the situation in this regard: of the 35 "top national liberal arts colleges" in U.S. News and World Report's now famous annual college rankings (October 4, 1993), only 8 had graduate programs with enrollments larger than 10% of the undergraduate student body; only 3 had graduate enrollment at or larger than 20% of the undergraduate student body.

18 Again, of the 35 top-rated colleges in U.S. News and World Report's survey, 60% have undergraduate enrollments in the range of 1,500 to 2,500; only 1 is under 1,000 students in size.

REFERENCES


Making Higher Education Christian
Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Education Research and Improvement, NCES 92-097.

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### APPENDIX

**Summary Statistics on Christian College Coalition Schools**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Schools With Economics Major</th>
<th>Schools Without Economics Major</th>
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<tr>
<td>Math SAT(^1) (mean)</td>
<td>496.5</td>
<td>481.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbal SAT(^1) (mean)</td>
<td>473.1</td>
<td>458.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>%Women(^2)</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>55.3</td>
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<td>Undergraduate enrollment(^3) (mean)</td>
<td>1,438</td>
<td>959</td>
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<td>Economics majors as share of all bachelors degree recipients(^4)</td>
<td>0.84%</td>
<td><em>not applicable</em></td>
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**Notes and Sources**

1. Based on data from those Coalition schools reporting SAT scores (21 schools with economics, 25 without). Scores are for entering freshmen in 1989, taken from Barron’s (1991); scores are weighted by fall 1992 FTE enrollment. The difference in means between schools with and without economics is statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

2. Weighted by fall 1992 FTE enrollment, based on full sample of 82 Coalition schools.

3. 1992 full time equivalent (FTE) size of the undergraduate student body. Source: Christian College Coalition communication with author.

4. Source: author’s survey of schools offering economics; n = 22 out of a population of 30. The reported sample proportion is the weighted average of each school’s proportion of economics majors among all bachelors degree recipients, over 1991-92 and 1992-93.
Christian economists must understand competitive market processes... But they must never worship or idolize the free market.

Frank Hahn calls the “benchmark,” the underlying theory or synthesis, as a general theory of human behavior nearly all of my adult life. Nonetheless, I fully agree with Smith that neoclassical economics is the main professional basis with which to do the work of Christ. Following Brock and the book of Daniel, if neoclassical theory does represent the powers that be (specifically, finance, in my experience and observation over the years), we must serve authority with that mainstream economics.

But where is the room for an “opposition economics,” a balance of power in economic ideas and ideology that is the very lifeblood of political economy? Regardless of where you sit in the Richardson-Tiemstra debate within ACE, do you not feel, as I have felt most of my professional life, that reactions against mainstream economics seem to carry the spirit of Christ more than the mainstream does? As C. Everett Koop commented while surgeon general of the United States, a predominantly black, evangelical church in Philadelphia was more spirit filled in his early days as a doctor than the mainstream churches of his white brethren. There is a parallel message here for ACE.

For those on the Tiemstra side of that debate, the lessons from Keynes and Marx are clear. You must begin from complete knowledge of and competence in mainstream economics, as Marx did with Smith and Ricardo and as Keynes did as a Marshallian, if not Walrasian, neoclassical.

I do not believe that mainstream economics is evil. But I do believe that some mainstream practitioners are evil. So are some Keynesians, Ricardians, Marxists and institutionalists. Economics can be used for good purposes and for evil purposes. I am surprised this topic is not raised in any of the papers because I do not believe one can be a Christian economist and not confront more than the sin of our profession that Elzinga does confront. We must also identify and root out evil. Now, there is an interesting project for ACE to develop a consensus on.

With respect to Brock’s comment on economists who reach high positions, I largely agree on what character traits got them there. But I might add, of those I have known, I cannot think of many that did not largely reject economic theory on their way up the ladder, often rejection with a vengeance and animosity toward most of what had been taught—and believed—at an early age. Evidently leaders, and especially those who have authority over the lives of others, are more than economic men, more than profit maximizers. They are also stewards, servants of God and other men, fathers of the next generation and so on.

Thus, Christian economists must walk two tightropes. They must understand competitive market processes, the good, the bad and the ugly. But they must never worship or idolize the free market. Second, they must respect neoclassical economics as any other authority, even if they do not embrace it or fully submit to its way of viewing life from the perspective of pure finance. They must respect mainstream wisdom even if their life’s goal is to develop a contemporary opposition economics.

Being Busy Versus American “Busyness”

I think the “busy-ness” Elzinga speaks of in his own life is an American disease. It is a Washington disease, and takes the form of endless meetings, telephone conversations, and “doing” lunch. In academia it takes the form of publish or perish. Billy Graham has been a critic of American busyness because he knows that godly truths cannot be found under such intensely dynamic and competitive lives. But the same is true for Christian economists seeking economic truths that are worthy of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, that will be durable in the age, and that will serve man because they are godly economic truths arrived at in godly ways.

It is humorous but also sad to read Elzinga’s confession of rare nights spent dining with his wife, and there is no humor in his comment about the long
hours of academic life. “Husbands, love your wives,” we are commanded in the Bible. We cannot lead the balanced life that our religion stresses if we are full of American busyness. I do not intend this as an exhortation of Elzinga and many others in this room, for we are all subject to a prisoner’s dilemma here. The publish or perish market sets our degree of busyness, and we have no individual control over it, at least until tenure. By then we are addicted.

Imagine a world in which all those American universities and colleges founded under truly religious authority returned to the fold. Elzinga asks us to envision a world in which authors do not submit their articles with names attached. I ask you to imagine a godly academy in which only true advancements in knowledge are published. For some years (more than many would care to admit), even the AER would not publish a single article because economic knowledge in the eyes of God would be the criterion for publication.

Is the purpose of secular Western economic education to predict economic behavior in the positivist sense, or conform behavior to the theory so that it will predict well, or control perfectly, to put it in a less gentle way?

Communist man and Western economic man may be ideological polar opposites, but both are totalitarian images of man if the role of economic education is to make man over in the image not of Christ but of a utility-maximizing, opportunity cost calculating being. The economists who have made themselves over into economic man are some of the most efficient time managers I know, but are also the most miserable of men, likely targets for divorce or the nuthouse, but brother are they busy at the margin. They seldom rise to positions of high leadership or true authority over the lives of others.

Has the opportunity cost concept so pervaded our economic, business and popular culture as busy Americans that it is a fundamental cause of moral relativism: “free to choose”? There is no opportunity cost calculation in believing and serving Jesus Christ. In a sense you can only serve Him by burning all other bridges, not evaluating your options as rational economic man. (Will it be Buddha, Mohammed, Confucious or Jesus? Elvis?) And if opportunity cost is causing the decline of the West, then it is an evil that must be rooted out at any personal cost to the believer in Christ.

Everything I have read about true leaders in business, politics and other of life’s arenas (and it has been the focus of all my study in recent years) leads me to reject the notion of economic man as the path to wisdom and success, material and otherwise. Reagan was not a busy person, yet he was a great leader in many respects: he was organized to a definite purpose, an inch wide and a mile deep, as David Stockman used to say. Opportunity cost is one important principle that will help most leaders, but this or any other economic concept appears rather small in light of all the correct dictums Brock cites as the pathway to success: a natural (Christian) selection of the good, the competent, the tactful.

The Salutory Effects of Markets in the Discovery of One’s Own Humanity and That of Others

John Stuart Mill reminds us that “if you are not selfish or hard-hearted already, Political Economy will not make you so” (1867 inaugural address as rector of St. Andrews University). But I am equally persuaded by Stigler’s observation that the practice of economics makes you conservative. I have been a social conservative all my life, before it was fashionable, but I am not in general an economic conservative. Like Hillary, I was a Goldwater guy in 1964, but like Laffer and Wanniski I cried when JFK died.

Every economist should be required to serve two years in the free market after getting his Ph.D. He would learn that the invisible hand theorem was not about optimizing efficiency at the margin but...
about sustaining life. I was never taught and never believed that the quality of mercy could be felt so powerfully through the free market as it was for me when I was a starving consultant, fresh off Capitol Hill as Republican Staff Director of the House Budget Committee. I’d like to think that I earned some of those early assignments, but my friends in essence fed and clothed me through some tough times.

James Lake, a prominent GOP political operative in Washington, was shown mercy by the opposing political party after leaving the Nixon cabinet and receiving not a single consulting job through Republican circles for months after his departure. The Democrats hired him.

The quality of mercy is not strained through the free market, but is not only strained in economic textbooks—it isn’t even mentioned! There can be, of course, unequal exchange in the market. I have never suffered the illusion of some consultants that you need not serve your client as you serve your boss. But, some of the most creative, productive, and character building human experiences I have had were spawned in a free market setting, not a bureaucracy or salaried position.

Christian economists can do a better job of integrating the old fashioned meaning of the invisible hand theorem in resource allocation with Christian faith and classroom economics. Has it ever occurred to you that Washington, DC is not so much the setting of macroeconomic policies anymore as a general equilibrium coordinator of markets, and that what are viewed as all the special interest deviations from a benchmark of perfectly competitive free markets are in the main efforts to set viable prices—prices that sustain life from period to period, Ramsey prices in the modern parlance, competitive prices that enable economic reproduction in the classical or physiocratic sense?

**Conclusion**

What is the role of Christianity in an economist’s life if subject integration is not in the main possible, if there is a real danger of totalitarianism at present in the use of and absolutist belief in economics? If American arrogance, self-importance and fear of falling from the top of the Western world is too often masquerading as American busyness?

I believe the role of Christianity in an economist’s head, heart and soul is to build courage to do and say what is right, not just what is politically correct or comfortable. In 1977 I published an article that generated a lot of interest through the Cambridge School of Economics, but it left me in complete and abject depression. The fundamental truth I had discovered was an empty one without Christ in my heart. While I still maintain that capitalism has become more intensely competitive over the course of organizational and institutional development, I do so now knowing that only the Holy Bible is absolute truth. I do so now knowing that I can live with my imperfect nature and overcome my enemies in the pursuit of economic truths as a believer.

I have been unable to write economic theory again until I found Christ in my heart. And now, I shall begin writing as never before. The courage to do so comes from being a Christian, not an economist. I hope that on the day I die, my struggle to walk with Jesus may have produced more courageous thinking and writing in economics than I have found amongst my secular brethren.

For today, we can all applaud the courage in the Brock, Smith and Elzinga papers. Each in his own way has said things that are not easy to say as an economist, but there are some godly truths in each one.

**Brian J. Hall**

**Comments on Smith**

Stephen Smith has produced a very interesting and meticulously researched paper on the key issues involved in teaching economics at Christian Colleges. After reading the paper, I felt that I had a pretty good understanding of what it is
like to teach economics at a Christian College. This was especially helpful to me since I have never attended or taught at a Christian College. This latter fact should be considered a caveat to all of my comments. Nevertheless, I am a Christian and an economist and perhaps my position as an "outsider" enables me to comment on the paper from a different vantage point.

To me, the most striking fact documented in this paper is how unpopular economics is at Christian Colleges. Among Christian Colleges that have economics as a major (only 35 percent), less than one percent of all students major in economics. It is admittedly hard to sort out supply and demand here—"the modal number of full-time economics faculty at [Christian Colleges] is zero." But if one believes that it is important for students, Christians and non-Christians, to have a good understanding of economics (and I do), the equilibrium is not a happy one.

Stephen Smith provides what I view is a fairly convincing list of explanations for why economics has such a low profile in Christian Colleges. Let me discuss a few of those reasons, with an eye toward how I believe these factors might be overcome.

First, the mathematical ability/background of the typical student at Christian Colleges is not very high, the average SAT score being just under 500. While it is true that a very strong mathematical background is necessary for students to become economists (i.e. to get through graduate school and earn a Ph.D. in economics), I do not believe that one needs to excel in math in order to understand economics (taught properly) at the undergraduate level. And a strong math background is certainly not necessary for one to take economics at the introductory level.

I have some experience to back up this claim. I help run the introductory economics course at Harvard, which is a two-semester course covering both micro and macro economics. It is perennially the most popular course in the college. (Truth in advertising: it was popular long before I became involved). This year, we have more than 950 students. Since there are approximately 1,600 students that enter each year, this implies that, in steady state, more than half of all Harvard undergraduates take at least one full-year course in economics.

While the high academic ability of Harvard students makes our job easier, teachers of the economics principles course at Harvard face the same relative problem; some students have relatively much greater mathematical ability (and background) than others. This is one of the reasons that we stress intuition and real-world applicability in the principles course. It seems unnecessary to scare off the students who are not particularly good at math, and the mathematically gifted can always take more advanced courses. Our main goal is to enable students to understand and critically examine the economic issues they read about in the newspaper everyday, not, for example, to teach students the technicalities of economic theory (although we have to do some of the latter in order to achieve the former). For example, it is more important in the long run that students understand intuitively what deadweight loss is than to be able to show graphically the triangle that represents deadweight loss (although, again, a graphical presentation may help achieve this goal.)

A strong case can be made that undergraduate courses in economics should not stress abstract principles and mathematically difficult problem solving techniques. An even stronger case can be made in this regard for a college's economics principles course. The 490 average math SAT score at Christian Colleges implies (if the mean is close to the median) that almost half of the students have a math SAT score above 500. These students are capable of learning how to understand supply and demand, marginal analysis, comparative advantage, sunk costs, the connection between money growth and inflation, and the many other foundational issues in mainstream economics.

A second issue identified by Smith for the unpopularity of economics at Christian Colleges is the competition of business
If the study of business is like learning how to navigate a ship, the study of economics is learning what the ocean is like.

...stated convictions" to provide students with a "solid, Christian liberal arts education [by] top quality faculty members [who] teach students how to think, not what to think...." It seems to me that it will be very hard for Christian Colleges to meet this challenge without a much stronger commitment to teaching economics. If I were to admit how important I think it is for Christian students to improve their understanding of economics, I would almost certainly be accused of being an economics evangelist. So I will simply repeat what is the crux of Smith's argument:

If we do not articulate [the importance of understanding economics] widely within the Christian community, we ourselves share the blame if young people do not demand to study economics in college. Much if not all of the writing on economic issues that circulates among churches is written by social ethicists, theologians, relief and development workers, and missionaries—everyone, that is, except economists. Economists should be at the front of the line, advancing the notion in popular outlets that economics is important for Christians, and stirring up Christian young people's interest in serious study of economics.

I recommend Stephen Smith's paper to anyone interested in learning about the issues and challenges involved in teaching economics at Christian Colleges. I also think that the Deans of Christian Colleges would greatly benefit from reading this well-argued paper. ■