

The ultimate test of a book is whether it should be granted shelf space in one's library. *The Economics of Sin* should be considered a work produced more at the beginning of a field of thought than in the middle or at the end. There is much unexplored territory. Cameron is a Marco Polo who has traveled afar and now recounts the amazing things he has seen on his journey. Before we begin our own journey, we want to know what he knows, both to warn us away from preventable mistakes or shortcomings, as well as to help us formulate our own conjectures and compare them to what others have done. *The Economics of Sin* performs a great service that reflects the amount of time and care that went into preparing it. It easily passes the library shelf space test. ■

Lifting Up the Poor: A Dialogue on Religion, Poverty and Welfare Reform

Mary Jo Bane and Lawrence M. Mead. 2003. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press. Pew Forum Dialogues on Religion and Public Life. ISBN: 0-8157-0791-6. \$16.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Sarah Hamersma, University of Florida.

Lifting Up the Poor presents a poverty policy dialogue quite unlike most of those I have heard before. The authors squarely address each other's concerns, avoid statistical wrangling, and are appropriately honest and humble about the risks associated with their positions. This dialogue brings together two important policy figures from different Christian traditions to discuss the interaction of their faith with their poverty concerns and policy recommendations. Within about 150 pages, Mary Jo Bane and Lawrence M. Mead introduce their perspectives on poverty policy, reply to each other, and then conclude with their final thoughts on the issues.

Bane and Mead are well-suited to this dialogue, as both are experienced in academic policy analysis and national-level political advising and policy implementation. Bane, a Roman Catholic and professor of public policy and management at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, is perhaps best known for her resignation from the Clinton administration upon the president's decision to sign the welfare reform bill in 1996. Mead, a Protestant and professor of politics at New York University, has been influential in challenging the notion of "entitlements" and promoting responsibility and citizenship. While the authors were clearly chosen to represent Christian perspectives on the "left" and the "right" (respectively), neither of them subscribes to easy, party-line answers to the complicated problem of poverty.

Mary Jo Bane sees a preference for the poor in the ministry of Jesus

and the social teachings of the Catholic church, leading her to conclude that society should be generous rather than judgmental toward the poor. She points out the barriers faced by many of the poor, including racial discrimination and immigration issues. She also emphasizes Amartya Sen's concept of "capability" rather than income as a measure of well-being. Bane holds up the Food Stamp program as an example of a program that works well: it provides benefits without behavioral requirements (thus withholding judgment) but these benefits are low enough, and there are enough barriers in the process of obtaining them, that abuses are not rampant.¹ She advocates similar entitlements to shelter and health care. Because of her commitment to the notions of community and responsibility, she also supports both the Earned Income Tax Credit (the EITC, which subsidizes poor workers) and work requirements for cash assistance. While she is clear that only those who are able to work should be subject to such requirements, she cites the success of work requirements in giving some of the poor an appropriate (and even appreciated) nudge toward taking their proper roles as productive members of their communities.

Lawrence Mead uses the Bible, particularly Jesus' teaching, as the foundation for three important poverty policy priorities: sustenance, community, and autonomy. The priority of sustenance is evident in Jesus' care for people in distress, including the poor. Jesus emphasized community by befriending the marginalized, whether they were poor beggars or despised rich tax collectors. Jesus also recognized autonomy when he emphasized listeners' responsibility to actively respond to him in faith and obedience.

Mead then evaluates different policy strategies with respect to these priorities, with the premise that poverty among the working-age population is caused in large part by behaviors that the poor sometimes need assistance in changing. He finds that the strategy of "entitlement" supports sustenance, but is damaging to autonomy and community because it amounts to a "redistribution of responsibility" that creates dependency and class hostilities. He also rejects the strategy of imposing "self-reliance" because, while reflecting the priority of autonomy, it does not provide sustenance or community. Instead, Mead advocates a strategy of "reciprocity," in which the (able-bodied) poor are given responsibilities to fulfill in exchange for benefits. He argues that this "paternalism" is good for community and autonomy, since it integrates the poor into the workforce and, more generally, into the behavioral norms of society. He admits that there is some risk of neglecting sustenance; however, he emphasizes that work requirements would only be imposed on those capable of working, and that he would support a generous support system for those unable to work. Mead supports Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) work requirements, the EITC, and limited job-specific training programs.

He also supports the Food Stamp program, but is torn regarding whether or not it should include work requirements.²

Although Bane and Mead appear to interpret Christian teaching differently, there are only a few strong disagreements that make it all the way to the end of the dialogue. First, they maintain a theological difference as to whether the gospel promotes “reciprocity.” Bane argues that the gospel is not one of “requirements” while Mead emphasizes the responsibility of the hearer to respond in obedience to Jesus’ teaching. They also understand sources of poverty differently; for example, Mead does not see race as a distinctive issue in understanding poverty, while Bane does. More generally, Mead believes that external barriers have a limited role in explaining the kind of poverty that exists in the United States, while Bane maintains that they are very important. Beyond these major issues, their lesser disagreements are described well in Bane’s comment that they “tend to err on different sides in situations of uncertainty.”

Much more notable than these disagreements are the substantial issues on which Bane and Mead agree. Both support the need for ambitious national antipoverty policy. In fact, Mead offers specific criticism of “antigovernment conservatism” for neglecting society’s responsibility to the poor. Bane and Mead also share the conviction that it is good for people to work, and poverty policy should be designed accordingly. They also agree that those who are unable to work should be aided without the demands of reciprocity. Their specific policy recommendations are remarkably similar, from the EITC to Food Stamps. Finally, Bane and Mead agree on the importance of revealing and understanding the assumptions that underlie policy priorities (whether Christian or not), and in their dialogue they hope to provide an example of how this can be done.

Why do Bane and Mead agree so much on policy issues while maintaining different theological approaches? They (and I) conclude that much of their agreement results from their mutual respect for facts; specifically, they have seen (and performed) analyses of specific programs and know whether these programs were successful. For instance, Bane does not offer enthusiastic support for reviving past government job training programs despite her belief that removing barriers is a fundamental role of poverty policy. While she supports continued efforts at job training, she knows that past programs have seldom worked well. Similarly, both Bane and Mead support work requirements partly on theological grounds (where they maintain some nuances of disagreement), but more fully on practical grounds. Welfare recipients entered the workforce in droves after the 1996 welfare reform, sometimes indicating appreciation for the “push.”

Perhaps because of the focus on concrete government policy, Bane and Mead’s discussion spends little time dealing with the abstract issue

of translating the church's responsibilities (based on biblical or Church teaching) into government responsibilities. The responsibilities of *believers* to the poor are outlined more clearly in Scripture than those of a secular government in which believers participate, but this is a side issue in the book. Mead makes a fascinating suggestion that I continue to think about: because Christians are caring for the poor partly through their government, it may be appropriate to consider part of our tax dollars to be a "tithe." However, this leads me to ask: is the Church then imposing a tithe on non-Christians to aid in fulfilling the Church's responsibility? These are fairly theoretical issues, and I think they may be less prominent in the book for that reason.

This book will be valuable for Christian economists considering the influence of faith on our understanding of good poverty policy. The book's focus on policy will also interest the larger academy. The book does not consider the influence of faith on economic analysis; both authors (while not economists) hold mainstream empirical studies in high regard for helping understand the effects of policy.³ The book also does not consider larger conceptual issues of a Christian understanding of wealth or economic systems. In fact, Mead discusses reasons "theologians aren't heard" in the modern poverty debate, one of which is that they tend to focus on questions remote from policymaking like "Is wealth good or bad?" or "How does the Church relate to capitalism?"⁴

The foreword to *Lifting Up the Poor* suggests that this dialogue is not intended to "impress a particular viewpoint on readers," but I found that the authors' level of agreement on many issues convinced me that there are fundamental poverty issues on which Christians can and should agree. Bane and Mead achieved the editor's hope that their efforts to take each other's ideas seriously would "move us down the path toward the truth and become a model for political dialogue in our country."

Endnotes

1. Bane cites the statistic that the maximum monthly Food Stamp benefit for a family of four was \$465 in 2002, and she states (and assumes the reader agrees) that this is quite low. I think this is a debatable point. In 2001–2002, the average family of four in the United States spent only \$375/month on "food at home" (i.e. groceries) according to the Consumer Expenditure Survey (see www.bls.gov for details). However, the average family of four also spent an additional \$266/month eating out, for which Food Stamps cannot be used.
2. I found Mead's position to be more detailed in exposition than Bane's position. Along with a more systematic writing style, Mead writes a total of 94 pages of the book compared to Bane's 67 pages. Bane's writing

covers a broader set of issues in a more conceptual style, reflecting her broader understanding of the problem of poverty.

3. Mead does, however, criticize some of the empirical approaches for presupposing that exogenous variables, such as race, have direct effects on poverty-related outcomes.
4. Incidentally, another dialogue in this series that may interest Christian economists is Blank and McGurn (2004).

Reference

Blank, Rebecca M. and William McGurn. 2004. *Is the Market Moral? A Dialogue on Religion, Economics, and Justice.* Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution. ■

A New Protestant Labor Ethic at Work

Ken Estey. 2002. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press. ISBN: 0-8298-1439-6. \$14.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by Todd Steen and Steve VanderVeen, Hope College (MI).

As stated in the preface, the goal of this book is “to propose a labor ethic that places the accent on the ‘protest’ in Protestantism.” A major theme of the book is a critique of the idea of “covenantal ethics” that has been proposed by various scholars such as Max DePree, Alexander Hill, Laura Nash and others. As part of his assessment, the author criticizes the development of employee participation plans in the workplace. The author asserts that conflict is a more useful idea in the relation between labor and capital than that of covenant. In order to make his case, the author reviews the history of the Saturn company, the idea of covenant in the Bible, historical conflicts between labor and capital, and the development of labor unions in the United States. The author concludes by presenting strategies for labor to improve its well being and bring about structural change in the economic system.

The power of a worldview is very evident in this book. The dividing line between good and evil in Estey’s worldview runs between labor and capital, with very little positive to be said about management, corporations, and capitalism in the entire book. Taking a classical view of management exemplified by theorists such as Fredrick Taylor, and going against almost a century of management theory since Taylor, the author seems to think that the only things that labor is or should be interested in are the material gains from work. Estey states that his labor ethic of protest and conflict is “unapologetic about promoting the material interests of workers. It does not strive for ethical neutrality or moral objectivity” (p. 121). He views