

Is There Value-Added in Christian Scholarship? The Case of Unemployment

Bruce G. Webb

Professor of Economics, Gordon College

Abstract: *While some Christian economists have promoted a distinctively Christian, integrative approach to the discipline, others have criticized this work for not saying anything that could not be said by a secular economist, and hence adding no value to existing economic knowledge. Using a broader view of value-added that takes into account the author's intentions and audience, I examine the integrative writings of four Christian economists on unemployment. By placing economic ideas and policies in a theological context, these authors add value by promoting Christian social responsibility and addressing (alleged) theological or economic errors in other Christian writings. JEL Codes: A13, E12, E24, J64.*

A number of economists in the Evangelical and Reformed-Kuyperian traditions have urged Christian economists to do “distinctively Christian” integrative work that connects their Christian faith with the discipline of economics. While there is no consensus on the form that such integrative work should take—some calling for the complete rejection of mainstream-neoclassical economics and its replacement by a new paradigm built on Christian assumptions,¹ others endorsing the adoption of one of the existing non-mainstream approaches such as post-Keynesian/Institutionalist economics,² still others seeking the integration of neoclassical (positive) economics with Christian norms³—the common thread is the belief that Christianity has something distinctive and valuable to offer, and that Christian economists ought to devote themselves to this integrative project.

Critics have questioned the value of existing attempts to link Christianity and economics and have urged Christian economists to specialize based on their comparative advantage, which lies in “doing economics,” rather than the ethics, theology, or philosophy required in integrative work. Richardson (1994) worries that too many Christian economists have “...shift[ed] our attention from our professional calling to unskilled and unschooled

Author's Note: *I thank P. J. Hill and two anonymous referees for helpful comments on this paper. An earlier version was presented at the 2002 conference on “Christianity and Economics: Integrating Faith and Learning in Economic Scholarship” at Baylor University.*

introspections about our methods, our ethics, our controversies, and our intellectual history” (p. 14). He asks: “Haven’t we collectively sold our professional birthright for a mess of amateur pottage?” (p. 14). Richardson argues that integrative work requires “professional skills that are completely different than those of the economist, skills from philosophy, theology, Biblical studies, and the history and philosophy of science,” skills which few professional economists have acquired to the level that would gain the respect of the scholars trained in these fields.

Heyne (1999), another critic, is skeptical of the claim “that Christian economists must construct their economics on a conscious religious commitment” (p. 148). According to Heyne, Calvinist critics of neoclassical economics “might not have discovered the deficiencies of the neoclassical paradigm without their Calvinist grounding; but...make their case against neoclassical economics on grounds that non-Calvinists can largely understand and appreciate” (p. 149).

Finally, Ian Steedman (1999) argues that attempts to combine economics and theology to forge a “normative social theory” have said nothing “*that could not equally and happily be said by many non-religious people...*” (emphasis in original). Steedman’s contention is that the Christian integrative scholarship fails to offer any “value-added” beyond the secular literature, since the arguments could just as well have been made by non-Christians or by Christians using purely secular and conventional language and arguments. At best, attempts at integration of Christian faith and economics give a “theological context” to “factual, normative, and policy judgements that...are often made without the benefit of any such context” (p. 173).

This paper seeks to shed light on the question of whether there is value-added in integrative Christian scholarship⁴ in economics by examining selected contributions of Christian economists, which address the problem of unemployment. I use as my standard of value-added work that advances or extends our knowledge, proposes new policies, *and/or* provides a theological context for existing theories, facts or policy claims. On the basis of this standard, I conclude that while much of what is said in this literature could, indeed, be “equally and happily [said] by many non-religious people,” there remains a discernible value-added that is distinctively Christian, especially if one focuses on the intentions and audiences of the authors. The value-added does not lie principally in advancing or extending our knowledge, or in proposing new policies. Instead, it exists in more modest, yet still important, forms such as providing a theological context for existing theories, facts, and policy claims. Providing a

“theological context” adds value insofar as it convinces Christians of their individual and collective moral responsibility to address the problem of unemployment when they would otherwise be inclined to ignore the issue. In addition, there is value in responding to positive or normative claims made by Christian economists, theologians and ethicists that, in the author’s view, are theoretically, factually or theologically incorrect. Christian integrative work (I contend) should focus more explicitly on these modest, but important and attainable, aims.

I. Four Christian Perspectives on Unemployment

I will focus on selected published works written by Christian economists that deal substantively with unemployment either as a stand-alone topic or as part of a more comprehensive work, and explicitly addresses the topic, at least in part, from a Christian perspective. These works include: Esmond Birnie (1996), Douglas Vickers (1976, 1982), Bruce Wilkinson (1991), and Daniel Finn (1996). In the section below, I briefly summarize these writings, noting elements that are in some manner distinctively Christian and those that are similar or identical to non-integrative writings by the same authors or others. It should be noted that an exhaustive review of integrative Christian scholarship on unemployment is beyond the scope of this paper.⁵

Esmond Birnie

Birnie (1996) begins his article, “Unemployment: A Christian Response,” with a summary of reasons why high unemployment is unacceptable to Christians and non-Christians alike. These reasons include the costs borne by individuals and families (increased poverty, ill health, both physical and psychological), the costs to society (lost output), and “possible political instability and criminality” (pp. 9, 10). His treatment of the costs of unemployment is entirely consistent with mainstream accounts found in the scholarly literature and textbooks which emphasize the economic costs to the unemployed and to society.⁶

Beyond these points of agreement, Birnie claims that, “Christians have specific and compelling reasons, deriving from extensive Biblical teaching on work, to wish to see large scale unemployment reduced” (p. 9). His theologically grounded case against unemployment begins with the doctrine of work in the creation account of Genesis, which “establishes that productive activity is essential to our humanity” and that “men and women were made for work” (p. 12). Responding to what he sees as an “anti-wealth creation bias in the Church” he emphasizes that wealth

creation has biblical warrant in the “cultural mandate” of Genesis 1. Failure to acknowledge the biblical warrant for and the importance of wealth creation has hindered the Church’s response to the problem of unemployment.

Concerned that some Christians have accepted uncritically certain popular fallacies or “scare stories” about the causes of unemployment, Birnie addresses the commonly held beliefs that unemployment is caused by technological change and the loss of jobs to low-wage Third World countries. While acknowledging that technology may cause unemployment among unskilled workers, to accept the claim that technology causes aggregate unemployment is to embrace the “lump of labour fallacy,” which is “the belief that there is only a fixed amount of work waiting to be done so that any machine which reduces the need for human labour to do a particular job also reduces the total number of people in work” (p. 19). Furthermore, the unemployment rate appears to be unrelated to the rate of productivity growth (and hence the rate of technological change).

As to the belief that high western unemployment is due to the loss of jobs to low-wage, Third World countries, he notes that imports from low wage countries amount to a rather small percentage of GDP in the United States and the OECD countries and that such trade can create jobs as Third World countries buy western exports. Failure to recognize this is to embrace once again the lump of labour fallacy. Yet, while not necessarily affecting the overall level of unemployment, competition with the Third World could have an effect on the demand for unskilled workers (p. 21). Birnie expresses concern about the consequences of industrialized countries blocking imports from the Third World, policies which he describes as immoral because “[they] would be like knocking away the ladder to prosperity before these countries could climb any higher” (p. 21). Christians should recognize the societal benefits of trade and technology, while responding with compassion to those harmed by these changes (p. 22).

Birnie contrasts the European (EU) model of labor markets—with relatively high minimum wages and unemployment compensation, a greater percentage of workers as union members, and greater regulation of working conditions and hours—with the U.S. model—with less generous benefits, less government regulation, less powerful labor unions, and more mobile workers, both geographically and occupationally. Birnie attributes greater job creation and lower unemployment rates in the United States to the greater flexibility of the U.S. model, though these results come at the cost of increased poverty and the loss of health care benefits. While

noting that attempts to forge a “third way” between the U.S. and European models have not been successful (e.g. in Sweden and Japan), he says that “with some difficulty and a bit of experimentation it might be possible to move towards anti-unemployment policies which increased the flexibility of labour markets without also increasing poverty” (p. 26). For example, he suggests combining reductions in minimum wages and limiting unemployment benefits with income supplements paid to low income working families. He notes that the OECD’s *Jobs Study* (1994) had sixty recommendations for reducing unemployment, which sought to enhance flexibility while retaining compassionate social welfare policies.⁷

Birnie also suggests how churches might respond to the problem of unemployment. He calls for educating church members and leaders about the problem of unemployment and the biblical endorsement of wealth creation, matching skills within the local church with the needs for local community development, and for support of “imaginative attempts to deal with unemployment” such as a “community employment scheme” funded by the government for the long-term unemployed. Pay for these jobs, which would involve “socially beneficial services which would otherwise not be provided,” would be higher than the rate paid for unemployment compensation (p. 28).

Although his article is entitled, “Unemployment: A Christian Response,” it contains much that could be found in non-Christian sources. For example, similar criticisms of the “lump of labor fallacy” and the effect of technology on unemployment can be found in *The Economist* (1995a, b). A similar, though more complex treatment, of technology and unemployment can be found in Blanchard (2000). The same source contains a thorough contrast between U.S. and EU labor markets. None of these discussions draw on Christian sources or ideas.

Birnie does draw distinctively Christian arguments from the doctrine of work that complement the case against unemployment which focuses on costs and imposed hardship, but it is doubtful that these additions are a prerequisite to the development of a Christian case against long-term unemployment. It has long been recognized that long-term unemployment causes hardship and suffering to which Christians are obliged to respond. For example, former Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple (1942) after describing unemployment as “the most hideous of our social evils” and the suffering attributable to cyclical unemployment as “fearful” (pp. 33, 34) argued that, “The suffering caused by existing evils makes a claim upon our sympathy which the Christian heart and conscience cannot ignore” (p. 32). While the biblical doctrine of work establishes a

clear obligation for each person to engage in some form of work (paid or unpaid), it is not essential to the Christian case against unemployment. Still, placing the discussion of unemployment in this theological context makes Christians aware that the economy must create sufficient jobs so that each person is able to fulfill his or her obligation. Birnie correctly addresses this by making a convincing biblical case for wealth creation.

Douglas Vickers

Douglas Vickers presents his views on unemployment in two books (Vickers 1976, 1982) which address a wide range of economic principles and policies from a Christian perspective. Well known for his post-Keynesian views, Vickers blames the economic system itself for creating unemployment and is highly critical of economic theories which assume that the economy will achieve full employment automatically without the need for macroeconomic policy. In the post-Keynesian view, market economies are inherently unstable and lack a reliable mechanism for self-correction and thus need the assistance of monetary and fiscal policy to achieve full employment equilibrium. Vickers (1982) rejects Say's law on simple empirical grounds: "...the facts belied the theory.... Say's Law simply did not hold in fact. Supply did not create its own demand at all conceivable levels of employment" (p. 60). He refers to "the transparently fallacious proposition that the money values, or the money incomes, earned from producing goods would automatically be spent by the income earners on purchasing goods" (p. 55). Saving can be harmful since "There is *no automatic mechanism* in a purely private enterprise system which will *guarantee* that savings will...*necessarily* flow into investment" (p. 21, emphasis in original). Since there is no automatic mechanism for self-correction, macroeconomic policy is necessary to restore and maintain full employment.

The post-Keynesian arguments summarized above from Vickers' integrative work can be found in substantially similar form in his own non-integrative work and in the writings of other expositors of post-Keynesian economics. For example, Sheila Dow (1985) describes the post-Keynesian critique of mainstream macroeconomic theory, which rules out the possibility of "*persistent* involuntary unemployment" (p. 73, emphasis in original). Similar to Vickers, Dow stresses that simple observation makes clear that such unemployment *has* existed, most obviously in the Great Depression of the 1930s, and any theory that "assumes away" what has obviously been the case must be rejected.

From Vickers' own non-integrative writings we read in his money

and banking text (1985): "...the neoclassical theory is an equilibrium theory that finds it difficult to conceive logically of unemployment at all. Employment will automatically be full employment at the level at which the labor market equilibrates" (p. 94). Regarding Say's Law, automatic full employment, and the impossibility of a general overproduction of goods, he writes:

[Keynes] saw that the history of the times perversely refused to reflect the tidy logic of the [classical] theory. The solaces of automatic harmony and coherence did not exist. Men were involuntarily unemployed. The facts too clearly belied the theory. Distress abounded. What was needed was a system of thought that overthrew the inner core of logic contained in Say's Law. Supply, it had to be seen, did not necessarily produce its own demand (p. 314).

This account of Say's Law is the same as that given in his integrative work.

Vickers (1982) makes one distinctive argument concerning unemployment on Christian theological grounds, that Christians should reject economic theories which assume automatic harmony and full-employment equilibrium. Christians should expect that the pervasive effects of human sin will produce unemployment and disequilibrium as the normal state of affairs, because "sin ... points to economic dislocation and disequilibrium" (p. 4) and "Sin ... implies always and everywhere the inversion of God's ordained order" (p. 132). Elsewhere he states: "Surely ... it should have been observed that the very essence of Christian dogma, the fact that sin is abroad in the world and in the hearts of men, would give the lie to an easy reliance on the harmony postulates" (p. 23). Thus, the Christian doctrine of human sin, properly understood, should rule out certain economic theories from the outset, quite apart from theoretical arguments and empirical evidence.

Bruce Wilkinson

Wilkinson (1991), who identifies himself as a Keynesian, seeks to offer another distinctive biblical perspective on unemployment. In responding to the question of why unemployment is wrong, Wilkinson summarizes the U.S. Catholic Bishops' position on the harm of unemployment, which include "the waste of human and societal resources.... Individual and family health and stability are damaged. Human dignity is lost as people are essentially informed by the economic system that they are of no use. Lawlessness increases and creative effort is thwarted" (p. 62). After setting

forth “the biblical standard... That man has an obligation to work,” he goes on to say that, “This also implies that there must be an opportunity for him to work...” (p. 66).

A significant portion of Wilkinson’s paper is devoted to the derivation of sixteen biblical principles which he deems relevant to a Christian response to the problem of unemployment. These principles include the human obligation to work and as God’s stewards to use our resources to care for the poor and needy; warnings against concentrations of power and wealth; the norm of justice which should govern human relationships; the role of the state; and the first responsibility to help the needy, including the unemployed, resting with individuals, families, and the Church.

Unique, if not compelling, is his biblically-based critique of “increasing concentrations of power” which allowed the “merger movement” and which led to the loss of jobs in the early 1980s. His concerns about concentrations of wealth and power are supported by the biblical account of the Jubilee Year as well as passages from Isaiah and Micah where, “This principle of avoiding the concentration of power is perhaps best expressed in a way meaningful to us today...” (p. 69).⁸

Also distinctive is his argument that individuals, families, churches, and community groups, as well as the government, are responsible for job creation and for assisting the unemployed (p. 72). He describes, by way of example, how the Mennonite Central Committee in Edmonton, Canada worked with the local and federal government to administer a program to hire and train persons receiving unemployment benefits.

Daniel Finn

Daniel Finn (1996) focuses on the relationship between international trade and unemployment in the context of a broad analysis of the ethical and economic arguments for and against international trade. The economic arguments contained in his book place Finn squarely in the neoclassical-mainstream. Uniquely, Finn has a foot in two camps: mainstream economics and Christian social ethics. In the book he responds to three employment-related arguments that have been made against international trade. The “Level 1” argument claims that workers in advanced industrial economies will lose jobs to Third World workers and experience falling wages and benefits, as production is shifted to low-wage Third World countries. He responds to this by pointing out that all workers are not the same with respect to productivity, as is often assumed implicitly by those who make this low-wage argument. Low-skill-low-wage jobs might indeed be lost to developing countries, but these will be replaced by additional high-skill-

high-wage jobs.

A somewhat more sophisticated argument (“Level 2”) claims that First World workers will still suffer harm “on average” because the welfare gains to skilled workers will be insufficient to offset the losses to unskilled workers, a result based on the Stolper-Samuelson theorem. This argument he attributes to Daly and Cobb (1989) among others. In his response Finn notes that argument is still based on an oversimplified model with only two types of labor, low and high-skilled and that it fails to acknowledge the dynamic gains from trade.

A more sophisticated (“Level 3”) argument focuses on multinational firms which quickly move capital from high-wage to low-wage countries. While recognizing that capital is increasingly mobile, Finn argues that wage differentials are hardly the only, and might not be the most important considerations of multinational firms contemplating the movement of capital. Other factors such as political stability and the economic climate must be considered as well.

Finn next turns to the empirical evidence, citing the OECD *Jobs Study* (1994) which identifies five influences on U.S. job growth between 1972 and 1985. The study found that overall economic growth was the most important factor (creating 26.7 million jobs), while changes in international trade caused a loss of 0.8 million jobs. Yet the study found that of the four countries studied (United States, Germany, Japan, and Canada) only the United States lost jobs on account of trade. While the loss of roughly 800,000 jobs is not trivial, Finn notes that it represents only 0.7 percent of U.S. jobs. Finally, he notes that capital outflows from OECD countries go mainly to other industrialized countries rather than the Third World. For example, in 1993, an amount equal to only 2.5 percent of total domestic investment flowed from OECD countries to the Third World. Finn concludes: “We face serious employment problems in the industrialized world, but trade has played a minor role in them” (p. 227).

Finn’s theoretical and empirical arguments are thoroughly mainstream and are in no sense distinctively Christian. What is distinctive is that Finn places these arguments in a Christian theological and moral context. He does this because Christian ethics must be combined with an understanding of how the economy actually works. He writes: “The problem for Christian ethics, then, is a complicated one. On the one hand it relies heavily on [economic] science for understanding how the world works. On the other, the well-informed layperson must be realistically aware of the competing explanations...and must adjudicate them on not only ethical but scientific grounds as well” (p. 77).

Motives and Audiences

If there is value-added in these Christian writings on unemployment it is not to be found in the economic analysis of unemployment or in the policy proposals. On these topics it is indeed true that what they have to say could just as easily be said by an economist of another faith or no faith. But this does not exhaust all possibilities.

Consideration of value-added should begin with a recognition of the rhetorical character of integrative scholarship: that is, the use of language to persuade others “to accept the better argument and reject the worse” (McCloskey 1985, p. xviii). Indeed, McCloskey argues that this is the goal of all scholarship. For example, mainstream scholarship in economics is intended to persuade other professional economists, or perhaps a subset of economists who are part of an on-going conversation about a narrow sub-field of the discipline. A certain common language, tentatively accepted knowledge, and agreed upon methods of argumentation are assumed. Scholarly value-added consists in using accepted language and methods (or perhaps extending them) to extend the range of the conversation by enlarging the body of tentatively accepted knowledge.

The integrative scholarship examined in this paper is also written in order to persuade others, but in this case the intended audience consists of other Christians who will be persuaded, in part, by arguments that are biblically and theologically grounded. In the next section I look more closely at each author’s intended audience and purpose.

II. Christian Social Responsibility

Some of these writings can be placed in the long-standing tradition of Christian social ethics, which is grounded in the belief that Christians have responsibilities and obligations to promote social justice. The well-known work of Archbishop William Temple (1942) serves as a model here. According to Temple, because unemployment causes human suffering, “which makes a claim upon our sympathy which the Christian hear and conscience cannot ignore” (p. 17), Christians have a moral responsibility to act so as to alleviate this suffering. It is the Church’s responsibility to provide moral principles to identify social evils and motivate its members to act, but it should not endorse particular policies since it lacks the expertise to do so. Temple, of course, had in mind the established Church of England, but much of his argument can be applied beyond this Communion. Christians must be educated about their proper role as citizens (voters), decision makers, family members, and members of a local church. Here distinctively Christian language is both warranted

and expected though this does not require the exclusive use of distinctive theological language and arguments.

It is in this spirit that editor Richard Chewning (1991), writing in the preface to the volume that contains the Wilkinson article, claims that it is our Christian duty “to positively influence the course of public justice” (p. 8). A necessary step is that “Christians must try to discern in God’s Word those principles that have application where public justice is to be maintained” (p. 8). Individual authors were asked “to search for several biblical principles...that address the basics of their specific policy area and to integrate those principles into their work” (p. 9). The Wilkinson paper, then, should be seen as an attempt to begin a conversation on Christian responsibility for responding to the problem of unemployment. The intended audience includes Christian economists, who feel “inadequate to wade off into sophisticated theological debates,” theologians who “know too little economics,” and any (presumably evangelical) Christian, who is not convinced of his or her responsibility to influence public policy. Finn’s work can also be placed in the genre of Christian social ethics, though his intended audience is broader than Wilkinson’s.

In addition to influencing public policy, Wilkinson and Birnie also argue that Christians have a responsibility to act as individuals and through the local church to address the problem of unemployment. Such arguments are properly theological and suggest ways of supplementing traditional macroeconomic policies with local action that are seldom if ever discussed in the economics literature.

III. Good Intentions Are Not Enough

A second aim of these writings is to convince well-meaning Christians that good intentions are not enough. According to Birnie, “for a truly Christian approach it is necessary to combine a careful knowledge of the Bible together with an appreciation of what is actually taking place in the contemporary world” (p. 16). The “knowledge of the Bible” gives us the ethical framework for addressing the problem of unemployment, which must be combined with careful economic thinking. Yet he notes that Christians have “a tendency to opt for simplistic and unrealistic solutions to various social and political problems” (p. 9). This concern is a Christian version of Blinder’s (1987) call for combining “hard heads and soft hearts.”

This is similar to Blinder’s claim that economic policy made by politicians suffers from “a systematic tendency for good economics to make bad politics” (p. 3), stemming from “public ignorance of simple

economics, unthinking attachment to myths and slogans, and interest-group politics...” (p. 3). One could easily substitute the word “Christians” for “politicians.” Blinder attributes this to what he calls “Murphy’s Law of Economic Policy” which states that: “Economists have the least influence on policy where they know the most and are most agreed; they have the most influence on policy where they know the least and disagree most vehemently” (p. 1). An important reason for Murphy’s Law is that economists are poor communicators. Though economists often are in considerable agreement on what sort of policy should be implemented, they fail to win over the public because they often fail to make their case in language that is accessible and understandable to the average citizen.

While Finn notes that, “when public policy discussions address issues of employment, moral questions deeply important to Christian faith are involved” (p. 195), nonetheless, “moral conviction alone is not sufficient to sort through the issues” (p. 195). Disputes about trade and employment are often the result of “differences in theoretical presumptions,” which necessitates an understanding of these presumptions.

IV. Setting the Record Straight: Truth Over Error

A third aim of this integrative work is to “set the record straight” by criticizing what the author believes to be unsupportable economic claims or arguments, or theological errors. For example, Douglas Vickers writes to Christian economists and other Christians who want to gain a Christian perspective on economics, but especially to those in the Reformed tradition whom he thinks have been led astray by other Christian authors. In this sense his purpose is rhetorical—to convince Christians that belief in “automatic harmony” in the economic system is incompatible with sound economics, the empirical record, and with a proper theological understanding of human sin. This theme is found repeatedly in Vickers’ writings and much of his integrative work (e.g. Vickers 1982) is directed toward these ends. He makes this clear in the introduction to *A Christian Approach to Economics and the Cultural Condition* where he writes:

...it will be argued at some length that any such assumption of automatic harmonies in the economic system do not accord with the explanatory data of the Scriptures to which appeal is to be made. That is so because economic systems and arrangements are shot through with forces of disequilibrium, change, kaleidic variation, and worrying disturbances, rather than characterized by equilibrium, harmony, and generalized benefit.... It will be

acknowledged that sin is abroad in the world and in the hearts of men and that it points to economic dislocation and disequilibrium (p. 4).

He later laments: "It is a pity that in some of their most articulate economic criticism at this time some spokesmen for the Christian church have remained wedded to the intellectually empty and ethically defective assumptions of automatic harmonies" (p. 23).

Sometimes the purpose is to refute the positive economic claims or take issue with the policy proposals made by other Christians: economists, theologians and social ethicists. Birnie⁹ and Finn exemplify this type of Christian writing.¹⁰ Birnie is concerned that some Christians have accepted uncritically certain fallacious arguments about the causes of unemployment such as the so-called "lump of labor" fallacy and the belief that unemployment is the result of low wages in the Third World. While he does not cite specific examples of Christians who have embraced this fallacy, such examples are not difficult to find. Theologian J. Philip Wogaman (1986) asks if "we are close to saturation so far as our employment needs are concerned in industry, and that it is time to explore other areas of community enrichment more seriously?" (p. 104). His answer is evidently "yes" given his call for public support of cultural institutions such as theaters and orchestras. Another example of this fallacy can be found in the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1986) statement on the U.S. economy in which the Bishops urge "experimentation with alternative approaches" to combating unemployment including job sharing and a reduced work week, "limiting or abolishing compulsory overtime," discouraging "the overuse of part-time workers." Examples of the "low wages" argument can be found in the Bishops statement (1986) in which they cite the "very low wages in many nations" as a cause of unemployment, and in Hollenbach (1984) who attributes some U.S. unemployment to "the exporting of jobs to countries with lower wage demand" (p. 113).

A final example is Finn who cites an article by theologian John B. Cobb, Jr. (1992) that espouses the "Level 1" argument against trade, and the "Level 2" argument he attributes to Daly and Cobb (1989). Finn's chapter on trade and employment is largely devoted to refuting the arguments of Daly and Cobb.

To summarize, Birnie, Finn, and Vickers believe some that Christians have accepted uncritically fallacious economic or theological arguments. The value added consists in responding defensively to the alleged fallacies and in making Christians aware of the complexity of economic issues and what, in the author's view,¹¹ careful economic analysis has to say. Such

writings will of necessity be written at a level that can be understood by non-economists and will place the economics in a theological context.

V. Conclusions

In this paper I have used the writings on unemployment of four Christian economists as a case study to shed light on the question of value-added in Christian scholarship in economics. The writings examined contain no new insights on the causes of unemployment nor do they offer alternatives to traditional macroeconomic policies. For the most part, they contain little that is new from an ethical or theological perspective. The economic arguments can, and have, been made without reference to the Christian faith in works of non-Christian authors and in other writings of the Christian authors themselves. But this does not rule out all value-added.

Integrative works should be evaluated with reference to the author's intended purpose and audience. Christian economists have responded to what they believe to be fallacious claims, misunderstandings, or simplistic solutions of other Christians. Simplistic responses to unemployment will fail to remedy the problem and might produce harmful, unintended consequences. They have also offered suggestions for action by local churches. When judged in this light, there is discernible, if limited value-added.

Endnotes

- 1 See Hoksbergen (1994).
- 2 See Tiemstra (1993).
- 3 See Mason and Schaefer (1990).
- 4 J. David Richardson (see Webb 1998) defines "scholarship" as professional work which has the primary aim of influencing other professional scholars. Integrative writing which seeks to influence non-scholars (e.g. policy makers or the public) is excluded under Richardson's definition. I take a broader view of scholarship in this paper, recognizing that not all scholarship pushes the frontiers of the discipline.
- 5 For a sample of other Christian perspectives on unemployment see Crook (1997), Hay (1989), Henley (1997), National Conference of Catholic Bishops (1986), John Paul II (1981), Wogaman (1986).
- 6 For a representative textbook account of the costs of unemployment, see Hall and Lieberman (2003). An often cited reference is Brenner (1976).

- 7 It is thus surprising to read later his “gloomy conclusion” that “none of the secular experts, neither the political conservatives nor the socialists, neither the business community nor the trade unions, really know what to do about unemployment” (p. 27). Yet this rather pessimistic conclusion leads him to suggest that Churches could play a role in addressing the problem of unemployment (see below).
- 8 “Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land” (Isaiah 5:8). “Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil upon their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. They covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance” (Micah 2:1–2).
- 9 It is noteworthy that Birnie’s article was published in *ACE Journal* (UK), which, one might presume, is read only by Christian economists. It seems unlikely that professional economists would need to be reminded of the fallacious arguments he seeks to rebut. He notes, however, that the article was based on a report to the Board of Social Witness of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, which would have given his ideas a broader audience. It is important that authors seek publishing venues that will reach their intended audience: economists or non-economists, Christians or non-Christians, theologians/ethicists or the broad laity.
- 10 Secular economists, in a similar vein, have criticized faulty economic reasoning. See, e.g., Krugman (1996) and Blinder (1987).
- 11 Evaluation of the economic or theological arguments presented by these authors is beyond the scope of this paper.

References

- Birnie, Esmond.** 1996. “Unemployment: A Christian Response.” *ACE Journal* (UK). 21, pp. 9–32.
- Blanchard, Olivier.** 2000. *Macroeconomics*, 2nd edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Blinder, Alan.** 1987. *Hard Heads, Soft Hearts: Tough-Minded Economics for a Just Society*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Brenner, Harvey.** 1976. “Estimating the Social Costs of National Economic Policy: Implications for Mental and Physical Health, and Criminal Aggression.” Joint Economic Committee, U.S. Congress. October.
- Britton, Andrew.** 1996. “Full Employment as a Policy Aim.” *ACE Journal* (UK). 21, pp. 1–8.

- Chewning, Richard C.**, ed. 1991. *Biblical Principles and Public Policy: The Practice*. Colorado Springs: NavPress.
- Cobb, John B., Jr.** 1992. "Against Free Trade." *Theology and Public Policy*. 4:2.
- Crook, Andrew.** 1997. "Tackling Unemployment at a City Level." *ACE Journal* (UK). 24, pp. 1–17.
- Daly, Herman E. and John B. Cobb, Jr.** 1989. *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Dow, Sheila C.** 1985. *Macroeconomic Thought: A Methodological Approach*. New York: Basil Blackwell.
- The Economist.** 1995a. "A World Without Jobs?" Vol. 334, Issue 7901 (February 11), pp. 21–23.
- _____. 1995b. "One Lump or Two?" Vol. 337, Issue 7942 (November 25), pp. 67–68.
- Finn, Daniel.** 1996. *Just Trading: On the Ethics and Economics of International Trade*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Hall, Robert E. and Marc Lieberman.** 2003. *Economics: Principles and Applications*, updated 2nd edition. Mason, OH: Thomson/South-Western.
- Hay, Donald.** 1989. *Economics Today: A Christian Critique*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Henley, Andrew.** 1997. "Current Issues in the Economics of Work: A Christian Perspective." *ACE Journal* (UK). 23, pp. 11–25.
- Heyne, Paul.** 1999. "If the Trumpet Does Not Sound a Clear Call..." in James M. Dean and A. M. C. Waterman, eds., *Religion and Economics: Normative Social Theory*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Hoksbergen, Roland.** 1994. "Is There a Christian Economics?: Some Thoughts in Light of the Rise of Postmodernism." *Christian Scholar's Review*. XXIV:2.
- Hollenbach, S. J., David.** 1984. "Unemployment and Jobs: A Theological and Ethical Perspective," in John W. Houck and Oliver F. Williamson, eds., *Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America.
- Krugman, Paul.** 1996. *Pop Internationalism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mason, John D. and Kurt C. Schaefer.** 1990. "The Bible, the State, and the Economy: A Framework for Analysis." *Christian Scholar's Review*. XX:1.
- McCloskey, Donald N.** 1985. *The Rhetoric of Economics*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- National Conference of Catholic Bishops.** 1986. *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference.

- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.** 1994. *The OECD Jobs Study: Facts, Analysis, Strategies*. Paris: OECD.
- John Paul II.** 1981. *Laborem Exercens*.
- Richardson, J. David.** 1994. "What Should (Christian) Economists Do? ...Economics!" *ACE Bulletin*. (Spring).
- Steedman, Ian.** 1999. "On Doing the Impossible" in James M. Dean and A. M. C. Waterman, eds., *Religion and Economics: Normative Social Theory*. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Temple, William.** 1942. *Christianity and Social Order*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Tiemstra, John P.** 1993. "Christianity and Economics: A Review of the Literature." *Christian Scholar's Review*. XXII:3.
- _____, et al. 1990. *Reforming Economics: Calvinist Studies on Methods and Institutions*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellon Press.
- Vickers, Douglas.** 1997. *Economics and Ethics: An Introduction to Theory, Institutions, and Policy*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- _____. 1982. *A Christian Approach to Economics and the Cultural Condition*. Smithtown, NY: Exposition Press.
- _____. 1976. *Economics and Man*. Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press.
- _____. 1985. *Money, Banking, and the Macroeconomy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Webb, Bruce G.** 1998. "A Conversation with J. David Richardson." *ACE Bulletin*. 31 (Spring), pp. 24–32.
- Wilkinson, Bruce.** 1991. "Biblical Principles and Unemployment," in Richard C. Chewning, ed., *Biblical Principles and Public Policy: The Practice*. Colorado Springs: NavPress.
- Wogaman, J. Philip.** 1986. *Economics and Ethics: A Christian Inquiry*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. ■