against the tide because it has made its own contribution to the definition of the discipline of social ethics.

Beverly Harrison Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985). Harrison teaches social ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. She is very influential in feminist and professional ethics circles. Her reputation was built partly on the papers collected in this book.

Ronald H. Preston Church & Society in the Late Twentieth Century: The Economic & Political Task (London: SCM Press, 1982). Preston is Professor Emeritus of Social and Pastoral Theology at the Univ. of Manchester. This book includes a particularly good survey of what used to be called 'social theology' in England over the last 150 years.


Given the sometimes testy relationship between economists and Christian social ethicists, manifested particularly in the great debate surrounding the recent letter on our economy from the U.S. Catholic Bishops, it is refreshing to see an ethicist (Pemberton) and an economist (Finn) working closely together. Perhaps most is a start on smoothing the dialogue between these disciplines that are both so important in advising Christian men and women on their responsibilities in the world.

Pemberton/Finn address their work to economically successful Christians, calling them to become "justice seekers" and "committed disciples" by organizing in small groups within, across, and beyond local congregations in order to apply pressure for structural reform within society. They combine work in theology, history, and political economy to discern a Christian economic ethic, use this as the basis for criticizing existing economic structures in the U.S., and offer very practical guidelines for structuring small groups so that they become effective change agents within society.

"Economic life in the United States needs fundamental change." (157) The most troubling aspect confronting us is the 46 million Americans who are "locked out of career employment and locked into menial, dead-end jobs or into sheer joblessness,"(7) and who face a "minimal standard of living and significant deprivation."(9) The count here represents all those who were below 125% of the official poverty line for 1982. The fundamental explanation for this high number is a "patterned increase in unemployment" which represents "the most significant weakness of our economic system."(106-07) We are beset today by stiffer (generally foreign) competition
than known earlier in our economic development, which limits our ability to maintain needed social welfare programs and results particularly in the relocation of plants away from the U.S. to "nations with undemocratic, authoritarian, often military, govern-
ments that are aligned with the local wealthy class and that re-
cognize little responsibility to lower-income people." (98) A growing shortage of physical resources, as well as social limits (after Fred Hirsch), constrain the potential for economic growth to solve our problems.

P/F discuss at length the roots of our current dilemmas. These lie in a faulty ideological underpinning of liberalism, which can be traced through the American constitution and Adam Smith to John Locke. Locke helped shift political economy away from a biblical rooting to a "new soil of sensate pleasure and possessive individ-
ualism," (67) which thereby "legitimated the unlimited seeking af-
fter wealth required for capitalism (and which was the major bar-
rrier to the acceptance of capitalism by the Christian churches)."
(70) No longer was wealth accumulation suspect; no longer was there a sense of "just entitlement" for the poor. The heightened sense of individual freedom, expressed principally through market transactions, has meant very little to the poor and to those workers who lack any assurance of maintaining a meaningful job.

Confronting all this is a Christian economic ethic which com-
pells committed Christians to "exert reformative structural power
to alter our economic life in the United States in accord with
more fully human values." (13) The New Testament especially calls for all of us to be stewards and for a few (like St. Paul) to be forgoers. Beyond providing for family "necessities, reasonable comforts, cultural enrichment values, and savings for future con-
tingencies," (35) economically successful stewards are to set aside a "surplus" fund to be used for assisting others. The poor and disadvantaged of society have a "just entitlement" to "what it
takes to live a full life," (124) an entitlement that must "be respected regardless of the benefits the rich may have to forgo.
(192) In the historical development of this ethic Aquinas and Calvin are more helpful than Luther.

To work towards this ethic in the U.S. today P/F call for chan-
ges similar to those advocated by American post-Keynesians and radicals. The existence of sin and modern oligopolistic realities means that "the market choices of consumers with money to spend
may not be the best basis on which to determine what the economy
should produce." (128) Market prices often are not just prices; it is wrong, for example, to suggest a pollution tax in place of the current system of standards (161f). Competition, which supposedly protects us by preventing any one firm from abusing the consumer's interests, is "less prevalent than the theory of free markets
would indicate." (188)

Social welfare programs should be expanded rather than con-
tracted. The fundamental entitlement to sufficient resources to
live a meaningful life assumes "appropriate effort by the needy person." "Able-bodied men and women have no right to reject decent jobs and live off the community out of sloth."(147) Firms should be more accountable to their workers, and thus the need for a more thorough-going democracy. "Communal accountability is both the means to justice and the essence of justice."(177)

Most critiques of this genre stop at this point. P/F go further in promoting the practical steps necessary to effect the needed changes, describing certain socio-psychological realities that give rise to social change—the most important of which is the notion of "operative norms" (those values that are held so strongly that they affect behavior). Justice seeking Christians should gather in small groups, working initially to reform the operative norms of those within the group, and then to change the operative norms of those beyond the group, from the local congregation to the entire society.

It should be no surprise that P/F criticize strongly the work of mainstream economics. The positive-normative distinction is problematic. The bed-rock assumption of scarcity biases the profession to treat all expressed market desires as similar, whereas the Christian knows that desires for basic necessities are more important than desires for (e.g.) ever-larger stereo speakers. "Scarcity as physical poverty is often understated by economists. Scarcity as the excess of wants over available goods is important but not important enough to make it the starting point of our study of economics."(125) Were justice to prevail—that is, were there an appropriate redistribution of world wealth and a realignment of the world's production systems, then there are sufficient resources in the world "to go around."(125)

The mainstream affection for the market accords too much emphasis to individual as opposed to communal decision-making. To accept individual assessments of need misreads the thoroughly social construction of our perceived needs. The excessive concern for efficiency is to accept only individual assessments of costs and benefits. "In short, to argue in favor of the market is to argue in favor of individual justice, but only individual justice."(160)

Is this work the needed synthesis between Christian ethics and economics that will help bring together these disciplines in service to the Church? Is this a work I could recommend with enthusiasm to the economically successful Christians to whom it is addressed, confident it would help them understand both economic reality and their responsibility for it? In both cases I have strong reservations. The book reads clearly and well, and the very practical discussion about forming groups to affect change is quite useful. But the argumentation comes down way too firmly in the institutional/post-Keynesian camp for one more persuaded by a mainstream reading of reality (as I am).
There are a number of points where I might quibble with their arguments. I am yet to be convinced, for example, that my Christian confession compels me to jettison the "practical" usefulness of the positive-normative distinction (which is, after all, its primary purpose: to seek to be as objective as we can--whether ultimate objectivity is possible or not--so that scholars from different value traditions can compare their pictures of reality). Nor is it clear to me how justice demands subsidizing in one way or another (e.g. forcing consumers to pay higher prices due to import restrictions) inefficient firms, as opposed to helping workers become more mobile and protecting them more effectively during periods of unemployment (e.g. continued health insurance). Rather than make a number of comments I have sought to present their arguments clearly above so that readers can quibble or affirm as they will.

I would like to address one of their arguments, however, that portends rather scary implications to me. P/F claim that severe scarcity would not constrain the world economy if only we all were to act justly. I wish this were true, but I simply do not believe it. The practical import of the argument is that nations should expend far more time and effort seeking to achieve redistribution and revised production structures, and (as a result) far less time and effort in maintaining incentives for entrepreneurial activity and economic growth. Either there is a subtle presumption here that economic growth simply will take care of itself in the midst of the presumed justice-related moves; or (and I have a hard time imagining they could argue this) that there are enough resources presently available to assure each of the world's citizens the standard of reasonable comfort and meaningful work ("what it takes to live a full life") they hold out. But if either of these presumptions is wrong, and I believe both of them are, then particularly the poor of the world could suffer great harm from the advice they offer.

I have read the cited article by Douglas Mews [CHRISTIANITY & CRISIS 40:307-16 (Nov. 10, 1980)] which provides a theological underpinning to their argument. But I cannot grasp the justification for his argument that we have sufficient resources now (if only righteousness prevailed); over against the argument, which I do accept, that were the societies of the world to know more of God's righteousness in economic relations and processes, that the world could attain with more haste and less contention the desired standard of economic comfort and personal wholeness (what Old Testament writers refer to as shalom)--a state of being, unfortunately, I do not see us attaining fully short of Christ's return in glory.

In the interests of the poor in the Third World and at home I am far more comfortable with what I understand to be the balanced attempt to achieve justice in distribution and production, while at the same time maintaining as best we can incentives for economic growth, that has marked work in the mainstream tradition of the
discipline. I do not consider such advice to be a panglossian justification for the status quo, by any means; a great deal of work needs to be done to assure both more distributional justice and more incentives for growth.

I have not found this work the synthesis between Christian social ethics and economics that I long for. I do commend and thank them for the effort however. We need far more examples of this type of undertaking, so that the community of Christian economists can compare and refine approaches; and consequently (and most importantly) so that Christian men and women in the churches of the land are offered the needed understanding of economic reality to enable them to be more effective disciples. The goal of informing the Church is one that Christian economists should be more active in pursuing, and not leave the terrain only to the ethicists (and then too often complain about the advice being offered).