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## *Christian Faith & Economic Justice: Toward a Canadian Perspective.*

Edited by Cranford Pratt and Roger Hutchison. Burlington, Ontario: Trinity Press, 1988, ISBN 1-55011-060-8.

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*Christian Faith & Economic Justice* is organized around six essays—some of which were originally presented as public lectures at Toronto's Bloor Street United Church—on current developments in two areas of Canadian public policy: (1) employment, technology, and social policy, and (2) Canada's international economic relations, especially with the developing nations. Most of the essayists are economists, including Gerald Helleiner and the late Jack Weldon. The editors—a theologian and a political scientist—have added a set of five methodological reflections on the issues concerning "the relationship of scholarly social science research and basic religious convictions to conclusions regarding complex issues of public policy" (p. ix) raised by the essayists.

The conscious effort on the part of the editors to treat methodological issues is essential to the success of this book, for two reasons. First, the editors' reflections provide unity to what would otherwise be a rather disparate set of essays. For example, two of the authors write from theological perspectives significantly influenced by liberation theology; another writes from the perspective of the surplus tradition often (although perhaps not accurately) described as characteristic of classical political economy; two other authors write from the perspective of mainstream Canadian social science; and another writes from a labor union perspective. Hence, there are significant differences among the essayists not only in the issues they focus upon, but also in their theological outlook, in the way in which they relate theology to social science, in the social perspectives they bring to the issues they treat, and in the level of analysis at which they write. By summarizing, comparing, and evaluating the essays in their editorial reflections, the editors push the reader to look beyond the obvious differences among the essays to the more basic methodological positions concerning the relation of social science and faith that the essays represent. Without such editorial help, the book would have little unity and little hope of being read.

Second, the editorial reflections are significant because the editors refrain from asserting the superiority of one methodological position over another, but rather seek to provide a comparative framework within which the various positions can engage one another openly.

Our aim is not to defend or attack a particular approach, but to emphasize the need for ethical clarity within each theological orientation. Such clarity would, in our view, increase the possibility that persons with different orientations might agree about what to do even if they have different reasons for doing it (p. 4).

The comparative approach adopted by the editors is quite useful because, by establishing the level of analysis in a particular piece, examining the mode of reasoning appropriate to that level, and creatively investigating the possible similarities among the essays, it helps the reader to treat the various essays as part of a common dialogue, rather than a debate between unreconcilable participants. The ability of the editors to create a context within which the social and theological perspective behind these disparate essays can be evaluated, compared, and treated as a part of a single conversation is to be commended.

The first section of the book, containing essays by Arthur Cordell (advisor to the Science Council of Canada), Bernard Daly (Assistant General Secretary of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops), and Jack Weldon (who before his recent death was professor of economics at McGill), provides a good example of the way in which the editors work with the apparent disparity among the essayists. Cordell and Daly write from quite different perspectives on the implications of technological innovation for Canadian society, while Weldon provides a framework for the interpretation of Canadian employment policy from the perspective of the surplus tradition of Smith and Marx (which he describes as "the mainstream of economics"—contemporary economics, he says, is "a kind of dead sea" (p. 59)). Cordell is cautiously optimistic regarding the benefits of information technology for all Canadians. Daly believes that the benefits will fall largely upon those who develop and employ technological capital unless society as a whole takes responsibility for technological decisions. Cordell fears that backward-looking thinking could shackle the development of social policies that will facilitate the transition to a computer society, in the same manner that the early twentieth-century Canadian law requiring an individual to walk in front of an automobile carrying a lantern so as not to scare passing horses shackled the transition to the automo-

bile society. Daly fears that the process of transition will ignore the interests of workers and others adversely affected by the new technology. Cordell recognizes that there will be losers in the move to a computer society, but believes that the establishment of a smooth process of transition is the key requirement for social policy. Daly, on the other hand, believes that the re-orientation of social policy in favor of the interests of those adversely affected is the key requirement for social policy. Weldon does not even focus on the relation of technology and employment, concentrating his discussion instead on the social requirement for a full employment policy ("the first axiom for political economy in the Canadian federation" (p. 64)), and the necessity of establishing a process within which governments could creatively pursue such a policy.

Can such apparently different essays be seen as a part of a single conversation? That is the question Roger Hutchison addresses in his reflection on the essays by Cordell, Daly, and Weldon. Through an examination of the assumptions behind the essays and an investigation of the differences among the questions the authors ask, Hutchison shows that, if the right questions are asked of each the authors, they can be brought into dialogue. For example, Daly's concern that decisions regarding the employment of technology be politicized—in order to ensure that the interests of those affected by the new technology are protected—can be reconciled (albeit not without a lot of hard work) with Cordell's concern that political decisions enhance rather than restrain the development of that technology. And if we recognize (1) that Daly's theological critique of the ideology of technique does not directly issue forth in policy directives, and (2) that "it is possible to place brackets around [Daly's] level of discussion and to ask whether there are policies for dealing with unemployment which might be accepted by representatives of different ideologies" (p. 82), then it is possible to draw Weldon into the dialogue. Weldon's concern is that social policy focus upon developing a process through which employment proposals acceptable to different ideological positions can be identified. The underlying message behind Hutchison's reflection on the three essays is made clear in his essay which concludes the book: we need a framework for dialogue

which does not in itself predetermine the outcome of the debate. That is, a framework is required which does not simply presuppose a particular definition of the problem, a particular analysis of the situation in which the churches find themselves, or a particular understanding of the mind of Jesus (p. 81).

The second set of essays presents a somewhat more unified outlook on Canada's international economic relations. Nevertheless, in order to bring Mihevc and Gerald Helleiner together into a common dialogue, editor Cranford Pratt's methodological reflection carefully distinguishes between the interpretation of "self-reliance" currently in vogue in Canadian church pronouncements on international trade—an insular perspective advocating that Canada substantially disassociate herself from international trade (GATT-Fly, an inter-church coalition, is a prominent example of this)—and the interpretation of that term offered by Mihevc in his essay on development ethics. Mihevc draws upon the work of Denis Goulet to extract the implications of a development ethic oriented toward promoting cultural autonomy and participation by those affected by economic decisions in the decision-making process. Pratt argues that Mihevc's notion of self-reliance is not dependent upon economic self-sufficiency, and, therefore, could be rendered compatible with the extensive international trade relations which Helleiner calls for.

The book closes with a concluding reflection by each of the editors. I have already quoted from Hutchison's essay, which, as the quotation indicates, summarizes the argument for the kind of comparative ethical framework undergirding this book. Hutchison is convinced that the development of a framework within which economic issues can be discussed by Christians without prior agreement on, for example, the Biblical foundations for social action or the ethical nature of capitalism, is essential not only for continuing the dialogue within the Canadian churches, but also for the churches' engagement with the rest of Canadian society. Pratt's concluding essay echoes the same basic theme, but is particularly noteworthy because of his rather brave (in light of the audience to which he speaks) disassociation from liberation theology.

There is here so much buoyant optimism and deep commitment that it seems mean-spirited to suggest nevertheless that embracing a preferential option for the poor will no more lead to a consensus over a Christian social ethic than would an effort to deduce such an ethic from the teachings of Jesus (p. 168).

Because solidarity with the movements of protest in developing countries is not a substitute for "the hard task of deciding which sociopolitical movements do in fact advance economic and social justice and which do not" (p. 168), and may lead many to embrace "too swiftly and too uncritically . . . radical secular critiques of contemporary society" (p. 168), Pratt