Beyond this we must admit that Jesus is Lord over all the physical world, and hence the economy. To know Christ is to place ourselves in a position of obedience to [his] rightful authority.” As Christian economists we should “adopt the perspective of Christ” insofar as we are enabled to do so as enlightened by the Spirit of God. The Church is important as the interpreter of Scripture, the body which develops and passes on “tradition,” and the source of legitimate teaching authority. It is difficult to take issue with any of this though important questions remain unanswered: How do we find “the perspective of Christ”? What constitutes “legitimate teaching authority”? Can we appeal to the non-Christian and avoid “introducing[] falsity” at the same time?

But McKee’s purpose in presenting these theological foundations is not to lay the groundwork for logical inferences. Rather, one who accepts these beliefs should adopt a certain “orientation of mind” which affects the way he or she approaches any field of knowledge. Such an orientation includes:

1. the recognition that all knowledge is partial if it is not connected, in some way, with the “divine dimension of all reality”;
2. the pursuit of truth coupled with the acceptance of limitations on all human knowledge;
3. the pursuit of a more integrative approach to social science, “capable of synthesizing at a fundamental level.”

These Christian attitudes should stand in opposition to the fashionable values of secular humanism and the methodology of logical positivism.

In Part 2 (“Christian Economic Thought”) McKee sketches some basic principles of Christian social thought from which he derives certain economic rights: the right to “the material requisites of physical and mental health,” the right to property, the right to work, the right “to engage in enterprise for personal benefit” and the right to choose as a consumer. Included in this part are informative and thought-provoking discussions of the just price, just wage, and inflation. He also includes in this section a discussion of the use of Scripture in which he emphasizes the problems of moving directly from particular Scriptural texts to economic applications without the aid of some mediating philosophical perspective.

Part 3 (“Economic Science and the Christian Mind”) contains a strong criticism of the methodology of mainstream economics. He is particularly concerned with the influence which positivism has had on economics, especially in purging the discipline of its moral purpose. Economics should be organized with
the explicit “aim of improving individual and social welfare,” thus restoring a moral purpose. Yet the Christian economist should not seek “to confer a specifically Christian character on [economic science.]” This, he argues, “would give a special character to a social science manifestly concerned with pluralist societies and engaged in by specialists of many backgrounds.” The explicit introduction of Christian values would be appropriate for a Christian audience, but:

On the other hand, given the necessity of linking up with non-Christian, pluralist societies and an economics profession reflecting them, a prudential case imposes itself for halting at insistence on the introduction and specification of values (this at least, since otherwise Christian principles cannot even connect up with economic analysis), and not normally introducing some exclusive version (p. 129).

This endorsement of a “third way” (namely, social economics) between the extremes of value-free positivism and a specifically Christian approach to economics is interesting and somewhat puzzling in light of his own agenda which is to present an “unadulterated Christian approach” to the discipline, and in light of his contention that knowledge is necessarily incomplete if it leaves God out of the picture. McKee wants the Christian economist to contribute to a social economics which is value-guided, but not explicitly Christian. If taken seriously this would, it seems to me, negate the sort of work which he, himself, has undertaken.

Take the example of inflation. McKee acknowledges that structural reforms are themselves insufficient to address the problem: “. . . without moral change in the behavior of participants no corrective policies for grave inflation are going to work within the framework of a free society” (p. 112). And mere education is not enough: what we need is “to change the heart, not merely the mind.” And even “humanistic values” are insufficient since “what they cannot supply is the motivation and grace stimulating Christians toward ideal conduct . . . ” (p. 118).

Where does this leave us? McKee is quite correct in urging Christians to work for the recovery of a moral purpose for the discipline of economics. He may also be correct that social economics provides an “obvious congenial environment” for (at least a part of) this endeavor. But what pluralist-social economics will not provide is an environment where the distinctly Christian virtues are taught and the means of grace are made readily available, such that we are motivated and stimulated toward self-sacrificial conduct. Neither will it provide the environment for the sort of distinctively Christian work which he has produced. Only a Christian community can provide such an environment: where Christians address Christians (indeed, where conservative Catholic Christians speak unapologetically and in the tradition of conservative Catholic Christians) and Christian economists think and write as Christian economists. Work of this sort has a narrower appeal, to be sure. But to this reviewer, the benefits are well worth the cost.