

# DOING ECONOMICS AS A CHRISTIAN – CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT OR PROPHETIC DETACHMENT?

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## 1. Introduction

It is now twenty years since the British Association of Christian Economists was established with the aim of promoting discussion and research on economics from a distinctively Christian perspective. The immodest purpose of this review is to take stock of the dialogue that has taken place over the last two decades about what it is that Christian economists should be doing, and to pose some hard questions about how it is that they should seek to introduce a Christian-faith perspective into the subject.

Christians who are economists are challenged just as much as Christians in any other profession by the scriptural injunction to act as “salt and light” in the world (Mt 5:13-16). Our profession is certainly in need of some savour and illumination. We stand as a bridge between the world of economics, dominated as it is by the descriptive neoclassical paradigm of the instrumentally rational *homo economicus*, and onward dynamic of the Kingdom of God. We are engaged in the prophetic task of challenging a world in which the misuse of resources leads to degradation of the planet, in which the misallocation of resources results from rent-seeking and inappropriate use of economic power, and in which the misdistribution of resources leads to inequalities of both wealth and opportunity on a local and a global scale. We are just as much ambassadors for the gospel as those called to any other vocation, and the challenge we face is draw out the sharp distinction between God’s economy and the messy, compromised secular world in which we live.

We are practitioners of a subject that is, with some justification, criticised for its isolationism and its pretensions towards a form of intellectual hegemony. And yet it is often pointed out to us that as Christian economists, we are engaged in a series of continually developing conversations with theologians, Biblical scholars, ethicists, commercial practitioners and business experts, politicians and policy makers. These are conversations from which we can learn much and from which we should hone our listening skills. They are essential to our calling.

We are also practitioners of a subject which is also, again with some justification, criticised for its pursuit of technical (mathematical) elegance at the expense of prescriptive power. We have to be as good with economic technique as the next economist. However much of what economists do is concerned with the task of seeking to explain the world in which we live “warts and all”. But as Christians and economists we need to step beyond the task of description into the difficult terrain of prescription. If

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we have nothing to prescribe then we ultimately have nothing to offer to the fractured society of which we are a part.

## 2. Economics and Christian scholarship

In the 1988 J. David Richardson published what turned out to be a rather controversial article in the *Christian Scholars Review*.<sup>2</sup> This essay was entitled “Frontiers in Economics and Christian Scholarship” and it attempted to outline an agenda for Christian economists. Why Richardson’s words turned out to be controversial for so many Christian economists was because he came to the firmly argued conclusion that the key aim of a Christian economist should be simply to do good economics. Donald Hay (2001) describes this as the “subversive” approach to being a Christian economist. Richardson felt that there was plenty that was good in mainstream economics and plenty with which Christian economists could engage to do good economics for the glory of God’s Kingdom. Richardson challenges the Christian economist to engage with the world of secular economics, in order to be equipped to use and understand the tools of modern economic analysis. In effect he poses the question of whether the Christian economist can effectively engage with the subject from a position of amateurish detachment. Perhaps too often Christian economists merely manage the occasional half-hearted sally into enemy territory. Richardson quotes Charles Malik (1980): “Evangelicals cannot continue living on the periphery of responsible intellectual existence” (p. 34). So should the aim of the Christian economist be to do good “mainstream” economics and in doing so perhaps bend the mainstream towards more acceptable lines of economic inquiry (as Richardson concludes)? Or is there a case for a distinctively Christian scholarship which rejects the economic mainstream?

One of the most persuasive statements of the case for Christian engagement in the academic mainstream (written from the perspective of an academic historian) is contained in George M. Marsden’s (1997) volume *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. Marsden’s central argument is that, for the scholar whose intellectual life is informed by his or her faith, the exclusion of an explicit faith perspective amounts to a form of intellectual dualism. Marsden puts it succinctly by posing the following question:

“Is there any compelling reason why they (i.e. Christian scholars) should be expected to turn away from concerns about faith and learning as a condition for recognition of academic excellence?” (p. 11-12).

For Marsden the answer to this question is a resounding “no”. If we can have Marxist economics, or feminist economics, or post-modern economics, or neo-liberal economics, or Buddhist economics, or Islamic economics (to name but a few) why does Christian economics have to remain so firmly in the ghetto?

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<sup>2</sup> The article has been reprinted in the Bulletin of the Association of Christian Economists (US), No. 23 (Spring 1994), with a lengthy new introduction, and in ACE (UK) Journal, No. 6, 1988)

In fact there may be more common ground between the Richardson “constructive engagement” approach and the Marsden “Christian distinctive” approach as might at first seem to be the case. Both want to see Christian academics engaged with the academic mainstream. Both affirm that Christian academics must fulfil the “salt and light” role in their subject areas. And both propose that Christian academics abide by the “rules of the academic game”, seeking to apply scholarly rigour and integrity alongside fairness and Christian charity. But can we achieve all this without sinking into a state of what Marsden terms “Christian schizophrenia”? Often it seems as if we are in danger of floundering – the rhetoric of much Christian (and secular) economics is to judge neoclassical economics for its methodological shortcomings and then to proceed to argue about the practicalities of economic policy as if those shortcomings did not exist (or at least matter).

### **3. Issues with which Christian economists must grapple**

If we can identify and address the factors that push us backwards and forwards between “constructive engagement” and “Christian distinctive”, then we may make some progress towards settling at a considered and reasoned position. So in this section I want to set out some of the central questions that arise in any discussion of what it means to do economics as a practicing Christian.

The first question is very familiar: is mainstream economics of any use? We have spent a lot of time over the years chasing this issue round. For some of us the neoclassical project is so irredeemably beyond the pale that Christian economics has to be an exercise in “reconstruction”. For others mainstream economics provides a rigorous and rational system of thought that can provide sensible explanations for human behaviour, in the context of the selfishness (sinfulness) of much human motivation. John Tiemstra (1994) neatly summarises the Christian critique of mainstream economics as having two dimensions: the ethical critique and the methodological critique. In a nutshell the ethical critique says that what is normal and good in neoclassical economics is not consistent with Christian social ethics. The fundamental theorems of welfare economics may lead economists to the reasoned position that the individual pursuit of self-interest leads to the optimum social outcome. But Christian teaching points to a yet higher way which interposes God’s standards of behaviour onto the anthropocentric analysis of a fallen world. The methodological critique highlights the flaws inherent in the positivist basis to neoclassical economics. Christian economists have been exploring for a long time the limitations of mainstream economic methodology. They all have concerns, albeit to differing degrees, with the problematic nature of the methodological individualism that is behind the subject. They worry that by building models in the representative utility-maximising agent approach that they help to perpetuate a description of human nature which, while so obviously realistic in many instances and contexts, is fundamentally at odds with the ideal presented to us in the person of Jesus Christ. It is way beyond the scope of this present essay to reproduce the detail of this critique. Of course the methodological basis to neoclassical economics is suspect. But there is a sense in which we often find ourselves raking over the lukewarm embers of debate from which many of

our secular economist colleagues have moved on. Secular economists understate the issues just as well as we do – but they seem to spend less time worrying about them. We know and understand the limitations of our subject matter – rather like democracy it may be a lousy system but it is better than all the alternatives.

The second question asks whether there is an argument for silence; or as Donald Hay (2001) puts it – is there a case for doing nothing in response to the problems of doing mainstream economics? There may be a strong case for arguing that Christians should engage with the mainstream, and seek to do “good” mainstream economics. This is the essence of Richardson’s case. I will deal with this in further detail in due course. It suffices at present to summarise the argument by saying that Christian economists can demonstrate (to non-Christian readers and colleagues) Christian integrity in the way they handle the tools of our trade. As Richardson argues professional economics is worth doing as a disciple of Jesus and worth doing well. In practice this means that when we do economics we will not always explicitly identify ourselves as Christians. Does this amount to silence? I would suggest not. There are however other potential arguments for silence. One would be that a Christian economics is only applicable to a genuinely Christian society. We cannot impose Christian values on secular society so we should not seek to devise a Christian economic system for a modern multi-cultural, pluralist society. But how can we argue that we are responding affirmatively to the Christian “cultural mandate” if we leave the fallen non-Christian world to its own devices? A further argument for silence is one that follows from dissatisfaction with the alternative position of engagement. Paul Heyne (1990) starts from the proposition that Christian economists are “chasing an illusion” because there is no “single Christian vision on the economic order”, and so Christian economists should “leave their theology at home” when trying to do economics and make public “Christian” pronouncement on economic policy. Webb (1994) summarises Heyne’s position as follows:

“We should be good economists and offer sound policy advice: we should also be good Christians, and live in obedience to the New Testament’s radical demands. But attempts to mix the two will not bring us to the sought after unity; they will only lead to bad economics and watered-down Christianity.” (p. 50).

There is something in this. Far too often I seem to find myself reading simplistic or just plain bad economic analysis from Christian writers who want to engage in Christian analysis of contemporary socio-economic issues. To be specific it is all too common to find Christians arguing the case for some form of policy intervention with no clear analysis on what market failure they are (implicitly) proposing to correct, and whether there is case on grounds of economic efficiency for intervention (i.e. do the benefits of intervention outweigh the costs, intended and unintended, of regulation). It is also all too common to find Christians making a case for the control of the apparent abuse of economic power, with no clear analysis of the source of that market power (I have mind much of what has been recently written on the issue of globalisation).

Atherton (1992) reaches a similar conclusion to Heyne. He finds that Christians have adopted the entire spectrum of opinion on the value of the market economy, from radical critique through to moral support. But all, in Atherton's mind, fail to understand the complexities of the way in which markets work, and their wider social implications. Furthermore all these Christian perspective seek to place Christian values over the market, rather than seeking to engage the values of free markets with Christian social ethics, to promote discussion and propose what Hay (2001) terms "the search for interim solutions". If engagement with the "mainstream" is then to be the challenge that we face, then a third question that arises is in what form should this engagement take place? I shall discuss this in the next section.

#### **4. What sort of engagement?**

Much of the writing on Christian economics from members of this Association and from our brothers and sisters in the North American ACE has been concerned with trying to find a distinctively Christian way of doing economics. For some this is an exercise in Christian "reconstruction" or in developing the economic agenda of reformed theology. For others it is an exercise in developing Christian "middle axioms" or "derivative social principles". In consequence Christian economists have struggled, assisted considerably by guidance from theologians and Bible scholars, with the hermeneutical issues of how to apply Christian teaching and biblical material to modern society. Heyne (1994) is distinctly pessimistic about either of these exercises. Firstly, he does not feel that anyone has yet described a Christian ethics which is useful in economic policy making. This is point reinforced by Webb (1994) who demonstrates very persuasively just how problematic is the development of a Christian economic ethic, in the context of widespread disagreement amongst economists about both theology and economic methodology. Secondly, Heyne argues that any attempt to derive and apply a Christian ethical framework pollutes the democratic discussion of public policy, because Western societies are not explicitly Christian. Religion may influence the values that lie behind policy choices but should not influence the explicit arguments marshalled in favour or against. Thirdly (and perhaps this specifically applies to the "reconstruction" project) in Heyne's view the persistent determination to develop and apply a Christian ethical economics obscures the force of this Gospel. This is a powerful statement and deserves a moment of consideration. The Christian gospel is the message of God's grace to fallen humankind – the fulfilment of the laws of the Pentateuch through forgiveness bought for us through Christ's sufficient sacrifice. Are Christian economists denying the efficacy of that Gospel if they argue for the construction of a society based on principles derived from the Old Testament?

For a third group the way forward is an exercise in Christian "infiltration". Richardson's position is perhaps the clearest statement on this third approach, and it is that position that has been least discussed (at least explicitly) but, I would suggest, most practiced by the members of this Association. Richardson (1994) offers three reasons for the Christian to do mainstream economics. The first reason is to act as a "sign" of the gospel. Economics and economists by stereotype are covetous, competitive, merciless and restless. The discipline needs Christians within it to model Christian virtues, in the

manner for example set out in Rm: 12:9-21. Marsden (1997) takes up a similar theme in his more general exploration of the relationship between Christians and the academy. He notes that mainstream academic culture and Christian virtues may often be at odds. And so:

“(t)he spiritual virtues of Christian scholars ought to be reflected in both their teaching and other scholarship. The ‘fruit of the Spirit’, according to Scripture, ‘is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.’ These traits ought to mark the lives and the works of Christian scholars. People are seldom convinced simply by arguments, although arguments can be important. Most often in academia people are convinced by a combination of intellect and character.”(p. 107)

Our engagement through research and writing with other academics can be a powerful means of converting the potential vices of academia into virtues. So while, for example, it might be difficult to bring Christian social ethics explicitly into play in a technical discussion on the small sample properties of unit root tests, Christian values can strongly inform the *way* in which that discussion is conducted.

Richardson’s second reason is to do with the “substance” of the subject matter. Economics addresses a huge range of issues which concern issues of great importance to Christians. Richardson’s list of possible subjects is long and detailed. Donald Hay (2001) in developing this theme commends in particular Ben Cooper’s (1999) paper in the ACE Journal on modelling the futility of economic growth in the spirit of Ecclesiastes 1:3. We should be surprised that Christian economists are unlikely to be found working on developing Becker’s economic theory of marriage, but may be prominent amongst those undertake critical analysis of the worsening trend in economic inequality on both sides of the Atlantic over the last quarter century.

The third reason is “style”. This is of course closely linked to the first reason. What I think Richardson has in mind here is no so much the way in which we behave professionally but the quality of the work that we should aim to produce. In short economics produced by Christian economists needs to be economics of high quality, to witness to our non-Christian colleagues that “we love the Lord with our scholarly minds...and not just with our emotions” (1994, p. 13). A useful Biblical analogy is perhaps in the calling forward of skilled craftspeople to contribute to the construction of the tabernacle in Ex. 35:30ff. God through His Spirit provides skill and intellect (35:31) and alongside human motivation (36:2) the task is enjoined. Note also the economy of blessing here – Moses is so overwhelmed with contributions of resources that he has to restrain the people (36: 6)!

## **5. The implications of Christian epistemology**

For the Christian economist the provision of scholarly intellect is a gift from God and is enabled through the work of God the Holy Spirit. This possibility leads on to considerations of the Biblical perspective on issues of knowledge and truth. For the

Christian scholar, be they at work in English literature, economics or engineering, research is ultimately an excursion in revelation. For the economist, this introduces a profound distinction between the Christian's perspective on the subject and its secular nature in mainstream published form. The Bible teaches us that God is the source of all truth and truth is absolute. However, just as God chooses to reveal His nature and purposes to us, our faith in a God of revelation implies that the world and the natural order is intelligible (or at least partly intelligible). Consequently, as Donald Hay (1989) explains, our attitude to learning and discovery is mediated by our faith. Faith alters our attitude to learning – it opens us to the possibility that knowledge may be given to use rather than achieved independently through our own wits. Christian revelation depends principally on the “living and active” *logos* – the truth of God as incarnate through His Son and revealed through His scripture. Yet God has created humankind in His own image with the capacity for reason. The Christian faith is reasonable – as the Scholastics, and most notably Thomas Aquinas, have emphasised, faith has a rational basis:

(For Aquinas) “reason has the role of building upon what is known by revelation, exploring what its implications might be. In this case theology is a *scientia* – a rational discipline, using rational methods to build upon and extend what is known by revelation.” (Alister McGrath, 2001, p. 179).

In the same vein Beed and Beed (1996) point out that human reason requires a metaphysical content. Both the application and interpretation of scripture and the application of God-given human intellect are subject to human fallibility. Even more so reason applied in the absence of a Christian religious viewpoint is prone to the contamination of sin.

The consequence of this thread of argument is that secular economics may not necessarily be wrong; it may just be incomplete or unreliable, because it proceeds in ignorance of the importance of God's normative intentions for human like, intentions that have both spiritual and material dimensions. Yet there is no reason to suppose that the subjection of economic analysis to divine revelation must, for the Christian economist, limit or constrain the bounds of academic enquiry:

“(W)e could say that revelation decisively advances or extends debate, extends rather than limits the range of ambiguity and conflict in language, It poses fresh questions rather than answering old ones.” (Rowan Williams, 2000, p. 135)

Archbishop Williams goes on to develop the important point that we are not passive actors in this process of revelation, patiently waiting for a divine “lifting of the view” of ignorance. Rather than asking the question “is this revelation?” in response to some new insight, the appropriate response is to enquire “if we live like this, has revelation occurred?” This is important because it means that economics undertaken by Christians may be revelatory regardless of whether it is prefaced by the quasi-authoritative “thus says the Lord”.

So, in summary, as Christians and economists we recognise that our cognitive powers are a gift from God, and in this we are set apart as God's creatures made in His image. So our goal is to seek to make sense of the economic world in the strength of intellect that God supplies. Of course this is easier said than done! I have already touched on Bruce Webb's (1994) eloquent exposition of the seriousness of the challenge. As Webb concludes the existing "statements" on Christian economics (such as the 1990 Oxford Declaration) acquire acceptance because they lack specificity (Hay, 1991). As noted by Skillen (1990) they allow words to serve an equivocal purpose – to be interpreted in different ways by different people. We should not be surprised by this because, as Webb points out, Christian economists disagree about both theology and about economics, and have no objective or neutral grounds for settling these differences. So we should not expect to find any sudden outbreak of agreement, at least this side of the second coming! What we can do is continue to work hard to discern God's purposes, to listen carefully to each with a spirit of open-mindedness, and to proceed in the full knowledge that whatever we do is subject to the limitations of human fallibility.

## **6. Constructive engagement and prophetic challenge**

The title of this paper poses a choice – in fact, of course, there is no choice. Economists who are Christians are called to be engaged in both activities. We need to do both good economics and speak prophetically into the gap between the world of secular, naturalistic economics and the principles of the kingdom of God. There may be considerable intellectual merit in pressing on with the task of constructing a distinctive Christian economic paradigm, but we need to be realistic about such a project. It is extremely unlikely to result in a mainstream paradigm-shift, not least because the potential mainstream audience is unlikely to have the opportunity to pay much attention. Furthermore the theological and economic disagreements that need to be overcome are considerable. So how should an alternative strategy of constructive engagement proceed?

Here I want to return to the excellent work of George Marsden (1997). Marsden identifies four theological principles (in the broadest sense) through which a positive contribution can be made in the wider, secular academic world. I want to add a fifth to his list. I will discuss each and try to tailor each to the context of the study of economics. So in what follows I draw heavily on the penultimate chapter of his book.

The first is the principle of creation. This has proved foundational for Christian economists. Creation ordinance leads on to important consideration of principles such as stewardship and the role of work (Hay, 1989; Henley, 2001). However in the mainstream of academia that which Marsden terms "methodological atheism" is pervasive, and not just within the physical sciences. Christians recognise of crucial importance that humankind and its societies and cultures are more than just the outcome of natural processes. Consequently a creation-perspective must lead inevitably back to methodological questions, since it explicitly confronts the prevailing naturalistic, post-Enlightenment first principles of economics. But let's not throw the rationalist baby out with the methodological bathwater here. The neoclassical theory of individual choice at its essence says that individuals make consistent choices (note nothing about selfishness

or materialism). Perhaps we behave consistently (some of the time) because we were created by a consistent God. Altruism, to take an important example, is quite capable of conforming to a model of consistent behaviour. But for the Christian, altruism is not a cultural construct but a behavioural norm provided by God to humanity. Neoclassical choice theory is quite capable of coping with altruism, and, to the extent to which it has been extended into the area of the dynamics of choice, it can handle trust too – another God-given behavioural norm. So, Christian microeconomists can lead the way by providing a compelling intellectual rationale for such moral norms. We can model the positive consequences of altruism and trust. As Marsden suggests, most academics hold moral convictions. There is no reason to believe economists are any different<sup>3</sup>, but they have no way of holding such convictions in a manner consistent with intellectual commitment to an “objective”, positive economics.

The second principle is that of incarnation. The central Christian belief that God has intervened in human history in redemptive power through the incarnation of his Son demonstrates that there is no separation between the supernatural and natural realms. Individual agents have spiritual as well as material motivations for actions and choices. Christians therefore reject the unwritten rule in most physical and social science that there is no bridge between empirical truths (facts, data...) and what Marsden terms the “wider metaphysical realities”. There may be a time and a place for methodological secularisation (the setting aside of the metaphysical). If we are required to undergo brain surgery we need to know that the surgeon has a technical mastery of his subject rather than faith in God (we can still of course pray for God’s grace in the exercise of that skill). Similarly if we want to trust a bunch of economists to set the right interest rate for the economy, we need to know that they have a good technical understanding of economic forecasting. This “setting aside” is not the same as a total (once and for all) denial of metaphysical reality. The parameters of the forecasting equations reflect contingent historical truth (empirical regularities) – these exist but in the broader context of timeless metaphysical truths. The economics of the material world are the economics of constrained resources and flawed choices - the economy of the spiritual realm is one of unlimited spiritual blessing and divine choice. The revelation of the character of God through the incarnation of his Son ought to change our “sensibilities” towards others. We can bring Christian character, in unconstrained amounts, into the darker recesses of the world of economic analysis. Of course Christian character is manifest in our wider culture – not least because of God’s common grace at work through the influence of two millennia of Christian thought on Western society. This is something for celebration and thanksgiving.

The third principle closely follows on from the bridge between the supernatural and natural order, since it refers to operation of the Holy Spirit. Christian scholarship must be marked by a healthy sense of the limits of human knowledge. The continuing

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<sup>3</sup> For example, it remains something of a puzzle why so many economists hold firmly to the intellectual view that free market systems work better than economies based on considerable state intervention, and yet appear to support political parties standing on electoral platforms of market intervention.

work of the Holy Spirit is the means through which God reveals wisdom to the world. But as Marsden points out, we must not confuse “the belief *that* the Holy Spirit is working in history and in our lives with the ability to tell precisely *how* the Spirit works” (p. 95, original italics). What does this mean in practice? God doesn’t necessarily need Christian economists publishing papers on Christian economics in the mainstream journals to achieve his purposes in the economic sphere. The Holy Spirit has been seen to work through Christian-faith inspired literature, such as C.S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia* or J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, despite any explicit statement of the Gospel. Christian economists need to hold in balance a confidence that the Holy Spirit can operate through their professional work with a sense of humility that valuable economics, within the limitations of human fallibility, is being conducted in the mainstream.

The fourth of Marsden’s principles is that of the human condition. Perhaps this offers the most fertile academic ground for economists. Naturalistic social science proceeds with no external point of reference. A Christian perspective introduces a divine source of moral authority, and specifically a frame of reference for understanding human behaviour in that context. Human sinfulness is pervasive, damaging the image of God in His creation. This perspective stands in contrast to the naturalistic perspective in that it puts humankind in its proper context in the socio-economic world. Men and women are not masters of the economic world, nor indeed are they able to aspire to be masters of it. By contrast they are the reason, more often than not, for its failures. Secular economics exalts the individual agent (whether that is as an individual economic actor, a firm, a community or an economy as a whole). Yet it is often pointed out that the dismal science has arguably a better perspective than other disciplines since it recognises human self-centredness, and in its practical application it focuses on the sources of market failure, and the extent to which these mar the ability to achieve “first-best” outcomes. Marsden refers to the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who points to the capacity of humankind to turn virtue into vice. This resonates strongly for economists: economic growth leads to environment degradation; technological progress generates damaging technological spin-offs that cannot be unlearned; material progress creates positional goods which result in distributional conflict etc. Furthermore the development and application of game theory to economics points to way in which individually-motivated behaviour leads to socially suboptimal outcomes (the virtue of looking after a sub-group is at the expense of the whole). The economics of the fallen material world stand in stark contrast to the “new economy” of the Kingdom. Consequently Christian economists can participate in the world of economic policy formulation with far fewer illusions about the possibilities for social and economic betterment, and a far less sanguine perspective on the efficacy of solely economic solutions.

The additional principle that I want to add to Marsden’s list is that of resurrection. If humankind has a capacity to turn virtue into vice then the Resurrection reveals to us that God is able to restore the rift between man and God. The resurrection of Jesus is proof of this. What does this mean for economics? The Resurrection firstly confirms to us the Lordship of Christ. This is not just a lordship of the spiritual, but a lordship of every aspect of human life – not least intellectual life. It hardly needs saying that for the Christian economist intellectual endeavour is to be pursued under the authority of Jesus.

As John Stott points out, it is sadly the case that the intellectual realm is often the last stronghold to capitulate (Stott 1992). But the principle of resurrection should inform not just the mind of the economist, but the goal to which economic analysis is applied. In short economics does not have to be a “dismal science” – its ideas and their application can and should seek to bring restoration to the affairs of humankind. Here we may take inspiration from the Old Testament Jubilee principle – the idea that the regular cancellation of debts would serve to rescue those who had lost economic opportunity and choice. The kind of economic problems that should and do attract the Christian are those where there is opportunity to make a difference to the lives of the less advantaged and the economically disenfranchised.

For the majority of us the majority of time will be spent doing quality (and hopefully Holy Spirit-inspired) economic analysis firmly in the mainstream. There is a time and a place for challenging and distinctively Christian analyses of economic methodology and socio-economic principles. For the remainder of the time we must seek to develop a prophetic ministry within the halls of the mainstream of our subject. We have a gracious God whose power is sufficient to ensure that we can exert pressure on the tiller of the oil tanker. Sometimes God uses his prophets to turn the ship round completely.

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