

Clive and Cara Beed, (2006) *Alternatives to Economics. Christian Socio-Economic Perspectives*, University Press of America, ISBN 978-0-7618-3398-7, pp.415, £31.95

Husband and wife team, Clive and Cara Beed, now retired Australian academics, are perhaps the most prolific and tenacious writers in Christian economics over the past 20 years, at least if measured by the number of articles published in refereed academic journals, both secular and theological. This book collects together in revised form a selection of 12 such articles, mainly recent, from a wide range of heterodox journals in economics including the *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, the *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics* and the *Journal of Socio-Economics*, as well as Christian outlets such as the *Evangelical Quarterly* and the *Christian Scholars' Review*. The opening and concluding chapters of the book present new material that maps out a helpful overview and summary of the Beeds' approach.

There are two key ideas that drive their agenda. First, they argue that Judeo-Christian thought provides tools of analysis both for understanding the socio-economic world and for generating policy proposals. Second, and perhaps more controversially, it is claimed that secular social science has inherent deficiencies that entail it should be treated as subordinate to the use of Christian socio-economic theory. This is not quite a complete rejection of mainstream economics, despite its inherent limitations and failures, but rather the insistence that Christian analysis takes precedence as it perceives truth and reality with greater clarity. Since human behaviour can only be adequately understood in relation to God's normative purposes, the authors insist that secular economics is inevitably unproductive. For example, unemployment is not ultimately to be explained by the models provided in Labour Economics' textbooks but rather it is a consequence of the social disorder arising from the corporate organisation of work in modern society in a form that is inconsistent with the Judeo-Christian framework.

With respect to the derivation of the Christian model, it is the details of the Bible, rightly interpreted, that constitute the chief source of God's intentions and principles for human socio-economic activity. In formulating their normative principles, the Beeds are sympathetic to both Catholic social thought and the Protestant evangelical tradition, while admitting that the two are not always compatible with one another, and draw upon these together with their own biblical exegesis to generate Christian socio-economic theory. Some of their major policy conclusions include the rejection of the joint stock company in favour of employee ownership and management, the use of employment mechanisms rather than welfare to prevent inequitable tendencies arising in the distribution of wealth, and the subordination of wealth creation to distribution. Unusually, the Beeds have a chapter on Islamic thought and find a high degree of compatibility between Christian and Islamic normative economic principles.

There is no doubt that Beed and Beed succeed in providing a robust presentation and consistent defence of their Christian alternative to conventional economics. They have read expansively and the book is a great resource in terms of its discussion of much important contemporary literature in Christian economics. However, I do have some reservations about the agenda. The highly negative

treatment of mainstream economics, their preoccupation with economic methodology and the undeveloped nature of the Christian alternatives are all characteristics that remind me of (some of) my early experiences with Christian economics as a student in the 1980s. Despite the Beeds' prodigious efforts, it is still not clear that much genuine progress has been made on the Christian socio-economic policy agenda since those days.

Ian Smith

Andy Hartropp (2007) *What is Economic Justice? Biblical and Secular Perspectives Contrasted*, Paternoster Theological Monographs, ISBN 978-1-84227-434-7, pp. 222, £19.99.

This monograph is based on Andy Hartropp's PhD in Christian ethics, supervised by Michael Banner at King's College, London. As such it is primarily theological and philosophical rather than economic in flavour (though it should be noted that the author also has a PhD in Economics). His starting point is the observation that extant Christian accounts of the nature of economic justice have two deficiencies: they are both insufficiently biblical and also fail to engage adequately with alternative theories of justice. The ambitious aim of the book is to provide a comprehensive scriptural treatment of the topic and to challenge competing conceptions in the light of this biblical framework.

The first half of the monograph considers the biblical material in great depth and detail and argues convincingly for a model of justice founded on God's righteousness. Hartropp identifies four primary characteristics of justice: (1) appropriate treatment for individual actors according to God's moral norms; (2) attention to the economic deprivations of the needy; (3) a concern with the quality of relationships and; (4) participation in God's blessing for all. While it is difficult to disagree with these justice criteria, they inevitably remain rather abstract. Additionally, the question is left open as to how the criteria might trade-off against each other in the event of conflict in a particular case.

Chapter 4 engages with six alternative treatments of justice, three secular and three Christian. On the secular side, Hartropp outlines and critiques the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill, the contractarian approach of John Rawls and the libertarianism of Robert Nozick. On the Christian side, he considers the contributions of Roman Catholic social teaching over the past century, the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, and the liberation theology of Juan Luis Segundo. For those who are short on time to read as widely as they might wish, this chapter provides an accessible and useful primer on the contributions of these authors to the justice debate.

Throughout the book the discussion is mainly theoretical rather than applied so there are neither detailed case studies nor much in the way of specific policy proposals. The closest we get to this is the fifth chapter where some of the implications of a biblical view of economic justice are addressed. There are three main examples. Commutative scriptural justice, that is justice in production and exchange, is argued to rule out monopolists squeezing suppliers on price. Also, it should normally imply that full time workers are paid a wage sufficient to provide for their households. With

respect to distributive justice, Hartropp suggests that there should be some upper bound to income inequality though he declines to be prescriptive in specifying this limit.

A few comments are in order. The text is strikingly well-written, erudite, informative, accurate and thoroughly documented (including 584 footnotes). Its strengths lie in skilful scriptural exegesis, the careful construction of a biblical theology of justice and thoughtful interaction with leading thinkers. In future work, Christian economists will doubtless be interested to see more practical applications of the preferred model of justice as a test of its fruitfulness.

In terms of further development of the theological argument, Hartropp is admittedly rather brief on the implications of eschatology for economic justice, a weakness in much Christian ethical reflection. In his book, *Surprised by Hope*, Tom Wright makes the point that current actions have eternal significance (1Corinthians 15:58) and the implications of this insight are, I think, worth pursuing by Christian economists.

Ian Smith