

from neo-liberal arguments based on utilitarianism and libertarianism, through Rawls's concept of primary goods to Sen's human capabilities; i.e. freedom to participate in the benefits of a purposeful life which will include access to living wages, education and healthcare as well as a decent physical environment. The language of capability and freedom chimes in well with a Christian anthropology which sets up the final section of Atherton's argument.

Crucially, this includes the concept of *a bias of inclusivity*; i.e. not a replacement of the current late-capitalist economic model (as Atherton points out, how else are three billion people to be lifted out of poverty, referring to China and India with populations over one billion people who have managed to reduce their inequality indices), but a "bending" of the structures to follow what he calls a "pro-poor, pro-environment" trajectory. This bias for inclusivity requires a church that is flexible, inclusive and networked—a performative Christianity that taps into the potential of churches and other communities at the local level to engage in creating inclusive local neighbourhoods as well as interfaith co-operation to deal with issues of global poverty in an exercise of true *oikonomia*. This section reveals blueprints of ideas and methodologies for creating a reconnected or empowered church, one that is no longer marginalized. This thinking is then subsumed into a magisterial final chapter, "Engaging Marginalisation by Reconnecting Economics, Ethics and Religion," which reflects on what a "reformulated tradition of Christian Political Economy" might look like. This project essentially relies on the reconnecting of economics to ethics (or, in Sen's terminology, reconnecting "engineering" to "ethical" economics) via an interdisciplinary Christian political economy which gathers what Rawls's calls "overlapping consensus" into a Christian economic anthropology including feminist economics, the concept of altruism within economics, and Cobb and Daly's views of persons-in-community, amongst others. The Christian perspective would include the insights of Hicks, Gill, and Hollenbach, as well as from Islamic banking and what Atherton calls the persistent hetero-critical tradition of Maurice, Headlam, Demant, Jenkins *et al.*

Overall this book is an ambitious and stimulating attempt to bring together in a performative way current economic thinking with theological and political discourses as to what constitutes human flourishing. Its analysis is rigorous and empirically based. Criticism could include an over-reliance on Sen, an over-estimation of local churches to be performative in the way he is proposing, and under-estimation of the power of dominant economic discourses to possibly co-opt religious ethics for their own purposes. His view that there is "no alternative to the freemarket model" will not endear him to those seeking a more radical confrontation with the Gospel tradition. But his dialogic, interdisciplinary approach is robustly argued and clearly delineated—we at least now have a choice as to how to engage with marginalization.

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Andrew Britton and Peter Sedgwick, *Economic Theory and Christian Belief*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2003. 308 pp. Pbk. £35.00. ISBN 3-03910-015-7.

Considering the significance of the economy to life and society in modernity and after it, Christian engagement with the principles and theories of economics has been distinctly sparse. The treatment of the subject by theologians has tended either to subordinate any

distinctively Christian content and method to a fundamental acceptance of the economists' outlook, or it has evinced a naïve romanticism which trivializes the serious and inescapable problematics that economists seek to elucidate. As for serious engagement in theology by economists: it has not been entirely absent but it has entailed so much preliminary clearing up of basic misunderstandings about the nature of the discipline that substantive dialogue has not advanced very far.

It is much to be hoped that this book will establish the ground for serious and mutual work to proceed. Here, an economist who is a Christian, and a theologian with a long-standing interest in the workings of the economy have come together to examine the nature of two very different discourses, to map some of the difficulties of dialogue and to begin an exploration of potential points of convergence. That their conclusions are largely tentative and preliminary is understandable, but the accusation that theology and economics never engage with each other in ways that both groups of practitioners can recognize can no longer hold water.

Any dialogic venture has to choose between rival structural approaches and here the layout follows the themes of a basic economics textbook, looking in turn at preference and choice, production and growth, supply and demand of labour, capital, the market and so on. In each section, a short discussion of the topic from the point of view of an economist is followed by a similar essay by the theologian and a very brief attempt to identify points of congruence and difficulty. If this implies that theology is sometimes put on the back foot, reacting to concepts and themes defined by economics, that may be both a reflection of the terms of modernity (in which theology, rather than economics, has to make the case for being heard in the public square) and also of the authors' shared premise that there is a common, material reality which both disciplines must address, and that it is theology which needs to be reminded of this. As they say, "Christian belief is not just story telling...it is also a description of the real world" (270).

In the final chapters the fruits of the conversation are explored more explicitly. While recognizing that one cannot short-circuit the careful construction of a case, there is much suggestive material here that deserves fuller and more sustained treatment. For example, the authors' short excursion into the significance of mathematical truths for both an economist's and a theologian's understanding of the world leaves a tantalizing possibility that here might lie substantial, though very attenuated, foundations upon which a renewed natural theology might be constructed. Again, there is much to ponder upon in the understanding that economists have a subtle and useful conception of how trust and belief work in human societies. Economies work well when people not only accept the predictable but have confidence in things that are uncertain. There are implications here for an understanding of truth, since it is clearly important that something is not only the case but is trusted to be the case even in the face of alternatives. There is little in the book about the connection between the way the market works and the prevalence of "spin" in public life, but these insights from economics perhaps suggest that Christians should consider a more nuanced understanding of public truth-telling than the crude dichotomy of condemnation on the one hand or ecclesial spin-meisters on the other.

Despite the book's virtues, one could wish that some of the more technical sections (economic and theological) were a little less prosaic in style and that sometimes the authors would engage rather more strenuously with each other. Although the basic structure serves its purpose well, chapters sometimes read as if the two authors had prepared their sections in their respective studies and spent too little time together thrashing out the implications of their theses.

Perhaps it is best, though, to approach the book as a kind of prolegomenon to the revitalization of an important area of Christian ethics (understanding Christian ethics to lie somewhere between systematic theology and pastoral practice). One would certainly expect it to be a core text for any future exploratory engagement with economics by theologians. Whether the growing interest among economists in ethics and the nature of faith will lead them to this book, I am not qualified to judge.

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Steve Bruce, *Politics & Religion*. Cambridge: Polity, 2003. xiii + 292 pp. Pbk. £15.99. ISBN 0-7456-2820-6.

If I tried to start a conversation in my local pub on the explicit subject of the sociology of politics and religion they would probably throw me out—yet they speak of little else (oh alright, sometimes it's football). But like most conversations in pubs, these exchanges usually take place at the level of misinformation and opinion and, if they ever do reach a conclusion, it is almost always highly suspect. Now it is most unlikely that my drinking buddies would ever read this book, but if they did the standard of their bar-room rhetoric would probably improve enormously. For it contains a great number of case-studies, which both clarify our understanding of specific situations and also provide the raw material for a rigorous analysis of the interaction of religion and politics. Bruce's reach is enormous, ranging from the Ottoman Empire to Ian Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, from the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 to post-September 11. He is able to expound the great world religions and the New Religious Movements with equal clarity and, in a subject area where passionate commitment is assumed, he probably achieves his intention of maintaining religious neutrality. However, space and method demand a concise treatment of complex material and this detachment may draw objections from some. His argument is developed around five themes: Empire, Nation, Party, Protest, and Control, each of which is given its own chapter and, once introduced, a particular context tends to recur in subsequent discussion. This is unsurprising given such a "Russian doll" treatment and because of the far-reaching implications of such entities as the British Empire or Islam. It provides an (eventually) satisfying development of both understanding and analysis.

The latter is present throughout the text but is focused on particularly in the extensive final chapter. Here, Bruce explores the thesis that religion does have an influence on politics, and having demonstrated this he examines the ways in which different understandings of divine nature, the divisiveness of religion, the tension between right thought and right action, and the relative importance of individual and community may produce different kinds of political culture and hence varied social outcomes. He summarizes the differences between the scientific method and the methodology of the social sciences with a pithy quote, "Chemists do not have to argue with their chemicals. They can pursue their explanation without the subject matter talking back." And as a good social scientist he does not exclude the ways in which other forces shape specific situations. He is also careful to avoid making too close a link between a specific religious idea and any one political action. Thus he ably demonstrates the development of a self-reflective approach and enhances the twin claims that religion should be treated less subjectively in the study of politics and that sociologists of religion should pay more attention to political science.