

# CALCULATED FUTURES

THEOLOGY, ETHICS, AND ECONOMICS



D. STEPHEN LONG  
AND NANCY RUTH FOX  
WITH TRIPP YORK

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Theology, Ethics, and Economics

D. Stephen Long  
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## INTRODUCTION

Many of us watched in 1989 when the Berlin wall fell, and with it the cold war ended. It could have heralded the dawn of a new day in which old, tired arguments between the so-called political left and right were likewise dismantled. That did not happen. Some on the political right quickly proclaimed victory, even viewing that day as apocalyptic. We had come to the “end of history” where western style liberalism was now our only future. “We are all capitalists now,” suggested Michael Novak, “even the pope.” Some theologians who had once been committed to a socialist vision now changed course, heralding globalization as the new form Christian mission must take if we are truly concerned for the poor and committed to social justice. Even those on the left were affected by these changes. Latin American liberation theology with its commitment to dependency theory changed its tune. But the tired conversation between the political left and the right and its ecclesial counterparts, the “progressives” and “traditionalists,” remains unabated, with only a few new variations.



The “progressives” turned their focus from economic structures to questions of sex and gender. “Progressive” Christianity seems preoccupied with securing rights to abortion and sexual expression as the issues of “social justice” before us. Little nuance occurs in these arguments, and little self-criticism exists that would begin to ask why it is that these issues are central to late-modern, late-capitalist western European citizens in a way that they are not to the rest of the world, especially to global Christianity. The “leftist” or progressive Christian movement continues to support “liberation” from tyranny and to overuse terms like hegemonic and empire until they become clichés. Of course, this movement often also seeks to liberate us from every kind of doctrinal or moral accountability the church traditionally taught. For this reason, no one should fear this movement. It will not sustain itself within the life of the church. There can be no leftist Christian vision when there is nothing left of the Christian vision.

Yet little comfort can be found among those on the right who originally reacted against the dominance of the leftist or progressive Christian vision among the Protestant Church’s hierarchy. If the ‘Christian leftist vision’ has refused self-criticism and adopted a liberal bourgeois agenda embracing promiscuity under the guise of “social justice,” the “Christian neoconservative vision” has done no better. Its embrace of the corporation and free-market economics before and after 1989 proved to be as failed a historical project as the uncritical acceptance of the socialist and communist vision by the left. Convinced that the materialism of communism represented the true threat to faith, it looked the other way when confronted with the overturning of Christian tradition in free market economics. We now know the result: Enron, Tyco, Worldcom, Arthur Andersen. . . . The ties among these corporate fiascos, their devastating consequences on peoples’ lives, and the church should cause us to take stock and ask what went wrong, but no such self-searching seems to take place on the Christian right. These are all just exceptions to the otherwise easy compatibility between Christianity and global

capitalism. The Christian right consistently ignores the “logic” to the global, free market that runs as counter to the Christian gospel as the “logic” of materialism on the political left. Both end in nihilism and both are species of that programmatic atheism that defines western secularity, even when it still allows space for God as a private, consumer option. The church has uncritically invited this logic of the free market into its own house through the thoroughgoing utilitarianism of the “church growth movement” and the uncritical adoption of management theory through a preoccupation with “leadership.” We treat people like consumers, speak about “target audiences of the unchurched” and sell the gospel through means that cannot be differentiated from how any other commodity is sold in the marketplace.

#### A DIFFERENT THEOLOGICAL ECONOMICS: THE CHURCH AS TRANSNATIONAL

Is a different kind of theological economics possible, one that will not get mired in these tired debates? Rather than rehearsing the well-known and predictable arguments among these two aging movements, Christians can find a different kind of argument about theological economics by beginning with the orthodox confession that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic; for this simple confession contains in seed an intriguing and inescapable vision of a theological economics. Central to Jesus’ mission is the gathering of the twelve and establishing them, through the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, as a new global political reality, which we know as the church. This community is constituted through Christ’s body, which is raised and now mediated to the church through Word and sacrament. It participates in his glorious reign through his Ascension. As the body of Christ in the world, the church is a transnational, global community whose allegiance takes priority over all other allegiances—especially those of the nation-state and the corporation. This allegiance requires a faithful, disciplined life in both our politics and economics. It assumes at the very least a

commitment to refuse to kill other Christians in the name of the nation-state or the free market. And it requires a disciplined use of economic resources such that communal forms of sharing will take precedence over individual rights to hold private property, as Acts 2 and 4 teach us. This disciplined economic life will also require a reaffirmation of disciplined sexual activity, for much of the conversation about sexuality today is really a veiled discussion of economics. If we are free to exchange bodily fluids without any communal accountability, then we will preserve the freedom to exchange other commodities based on our preferences alone.<sup>1</sup> This does not, of course, tell us exactly how exchanges should take place. Nor does it call us to withdraw from every form of the modern corporation. Even if that were possible, which it is not, it would not be proper. Every corporation is not equal to Enron, Worldcom and Tyco. In fact, I hope to provide evidence of other kinds of corporations that are much more fitting with the Christian life in the essays that follow. I want to think reasonably and practically about what faithful exchanges look like within the orthodox confession that we believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

To think of economics within the confession of the catholic church is not to replace the market or economics with the church or theology. Obviously, the church cannot accomplish, and should not try to, all that the market does. It cannot efficiently collect garbage, recycle, provide clean water nor provide many of the basic goods that make daily life possible. To argue that the church is an alternative economy to the capitalist one is to use the term *economy* analogically. The divine economy and the market economy do not use the term identically, nor do they use it equivocally. This creates confusion, as the dialogue in this work between the economist Nancy Fox and myself, as a theologian, demonstrates. It also creates confusion among theologians.

In her *Economy of Grace*, Kathryn Tanner rightly argues against thinking that Christianity might be “thrown entirely on its own

resources to generate, apart from the workings of the present system, a viable economic alternative” (Tanner, 2005, 88). She writes,

With nothing to gain from attention to the capitalist system it hopes to escape, theological economy might limit its purview to the Bible or to church practices, and model its self-reliant, small-scale communities on, say, the subsistence agrarian economies of ancient Israel or on the desert monasteries of the early church, withdrawn from a world in which hope has been lost. Pretending to self-sufficiency, an alternative theological economy might in this way cut itself off from any sophisticated economic analysis of the realities of today’s world – a sophisticated analysis of the real problems and potentials for change in the economic situation we now face, as the best academic disciplines of the day describe them. (Tanner, 2005, 88)

Tanner’s concern seems to be fourfold. First, this version of a theological economy will be sectarian and limit its development only to the Bible or church practices. Second, in so doing, it will be self-deceived by pretending that these sources alone can generate a theological economics without attention to real everyday economic exchanges. We will not be able to recognize the true conditions of our daily existence. Third, such a strategy is a counsel of despair that withdraws from the world for it views capitalism as so thoroughly ungodly it loses hope that it offers us anything with which to work. It invites Christians to flee to the desert. Fourth, this counsel of despair neglects the difficult task of a charitable and generous engagement with the best rationality present in the social sciences.

I agree with her, and if I do not always take this into account in the following work it is because I do not think it is possible to create some desert space where we can withdraw and create an economic alternative based solely on some pure Christianity.

This is no threat anyone should fear. If anyone were tempted to think that a sectarian Christian economy could be produced

separate from the real, everyday economic exchanges that already constitute our lives, he would be mistaken. Christians should cultivate a distinct way of life, and movements such as the New Monasticism emerging in some quarters of the church are intriguing and ought to be encouraged (Byasse, 2005). Nevertheless, they are no flight to the desert; no such place exists.

Although it is impossible to think or act in some alternative Christian economy separate from the everyday exchanges global capitalism makes possible, it is possible to think or act in those everyday exchanges and not recognize they always bring with them theological convictions. This is the real sectarian option—to think some pure social and economic space exists for analysis free from theology. Theology and social analysis are always already linked. When we are doing theology we are already doing political and economic analysis. When economists are doing economics they are also doing theology. The question is which theology is being done, not if it is being done. Everything is theological.<sup>2</sup>

That everything is theological does not mean God should be used to legitimate or explain everything else. I once taught theology at a Catholic university where nearly all my students had gone through a Catholic secondary education. They now found themselves, once again, in a mandatory theology course, and many of them did not want to be there. I began an opening lecture on the Trinity one semester when a clearly agitated business major threw up his hand and blurted, “How is this course going to help me market a taco?” It was just the right question; for it gave an opportunity to explain the ancient sacred wisdom that the knowledge of God is an end in itself; it is never to be used for something else. It should not be politicized; it cannot, and should not, be turned into some paradigm that must demonstrate its usefulness in some political sphere. We worship God because it is true and good to do so, not because it is useful. As St. Augustine rightly taught us, God is to be enjoyed, not used. Every other created thing is to be used to assist us in that enjoyment. We cannot think about a Christian politics or economics without recog-

nizing this claim. The doctrine of the Trinity is not useful for politics; it is true. To use God for political or economic ends is to take God's name in vain. That everything is theological then means something different from this; it means that everything which is creature, by virtue of being creature, bears some sign, some mark, some relation to the Creator, and theologians must narrate all those creatures within the divine economy. The market is not an atheological reality; it is a creature. As such it bears theological significance.

#### BUYING THE FUTURE: WHAT CREDIT IS THAT TO YOU?

That economics is theological can be shown in the very language we use to speak about it—debt, gift, redemption, credit, fiduciary, exchange. How do these terms relate to the divine economy? Which “economy” renders them intelligible? Whether we should use these terms within the divine economy at all is a matter of debate and an important one. It begins the process of thinking about economics within the divine economy. For instance, Oliver O'Donovan finds the term *exchange* to be inappropriate as does Kathryn Tanner the language of debt and obligation.

O'Donovan writes, “‘Exchange’ imports the idea of closure to a transaction, restoring the parties to the independence of the status quo ante, each strengthened by the return of value in a different form” (O'Donovan, 2005, 246). He reads the term exchange primarily in the context of a contract and denies the possibility of its usefulness in terms of the language of gift. He rightly cautions against any such contractual use of exchange in theology, “The concept of exchange is not fundamental to community. It is a device, abstract and formal, created together with the institution of trade, the market. To trade is to effect an exchange of goods between two otherwise equal and unrelated agents” (O'Donovan, 2005, 246).

O'Donovan places the term *communication* (from *koinonia*) as a theological term more basic than exchange. He quotes Althusius who defines communication as goods held in common such as “things,

services, and common rights (*iura*), by which the numerous and various needs of each and every symbioate are supplied, the self-sufficiency and mutuality of life and human society are achieved, and social life is established and conserved.” To communicate is to give anything “meaning” and thus has as its “paradigm object” the word (O’Donovan, 2005, 250). O’Donovan’s replacement of the term exchange with communication helps us avoid thinking of exchanges in terms of contracts that mediate between strangers, who then remain distant from one another rather than being in communion with each other. His counsel is wise, although I’m not convinced that the terms themselves —*exchange* versus *communion*—can bear alone the significance he seems to give them. Exchange is a translation of *mutare*, which can also mean mutuality and reciprocity. Althusius assumes such in his definition when he explains communication as “mutuality of life.”

Kathryn Tanner also expresses concerns with contractual language being written into the divine economy, but for a different reason. O’Donovan does so for the purposes of “communion;” Tanner does so for the sake of a disinterested grace. She writes, “Notions of debt, contractual obligation, loan, even stewardship should be written out of the Christian story about God’s relations to the world and our relations with God and one another, in light of an understanding of grace that is incompatible with them” (Tanner, 2005, 56). This is because grace is disinterested. For Tanner, the gift of grace “comes with no strings attached,” for “giving is completely disinterested without self-concern, solely for the well-being or pleasure of others” (Tanner, 2005, 57).

Inasmuch as terms such as debt and obligation imply a restricted economy where everything is reduced to a contractual relation, we should also heed Tanner’s counsel. Yet most of us have contracts with our employers, for which we are grateful, and it is appropriate to ask why. We also have loans and debts that make possible college educations, homes and many other necessities of everyday life. Indeed others don’t have access to these things and that is an

injustice we should seek to remedy. Nevertheless, this should not prevent us from being thankful for them or hoping and working for the time when others do have them. These things for which we are grateful are indeed based on mutual obligations that allow us to communicate with others. In fact, the gifts we give our spouses, children, friends, and others do have certain expectations and obligations; they are forms of ‘communication’ that implicate our lives together into a common life of mutual sharing and obligation. We do not give ourselves to one another solely for the sake of the well-being or pleasure of the other such that we would intentionally sacrifice our own well-being or pleasure for the sake of the other. Martyrdom should always come as an unintended “gift.”

Tanner’s doctrine of a disinterested grace has ecclesial and liturgical significance as well as economic. She writes “in praise of open communion” (Tanner, 2004, 473–85). The debate over “open communion” in Protestant churches is, like our debates over sex, a debate about economics. A theological defense that separates the Eucharist from baptism and views the Eucharist primarily as a form of hospitality that is open to all without the prerequisite of baptismal vows fits well with a notion of disinterested grace. But is it any more plausible in everyday church life than an economy of grace is possible given the actual exchanges within which we must live everyday? Take away those vows, take away the “exodus” that initiates the Christian life by journeying out into the desert, and the sustaining presence of the Eucharist will be given a new significance that ruptures our practice with that which went before. It will no longer make sense in terms of the story of Israel where the Eucharist is a calling grounded in a covenant with mutual obligations. If grace is disinterested, no such mutual obligation is possible.

O’Donovan and Tanner instruct us on being careful as to the economic language we use in doing theology. They also show us that it matters for how we think about the politics of the church’s life. We also find resources for thinking about the analogical relationship between the divine economy and market economics outside of



Christian theology. They can be found in contemporary philosophical discussions on metaphysics. For instance, Philip Goodchild suggests, “There is but a single ontological problem: ‘What is money?’” (Goodchild, 2005, 130). This “single ontological problem” emerges from his recognition of an “extraordinary paradox,” which is, “the practice of critique is informed by ontology, while ontology is informed by the practice of critique. And the persistent question emerges: can the Real, even within capitalism, be exhausted by practice, by what happens, by temporal and social relations” (Goodchild, 2005, 129). Any analysis of money only indebted to assessing temporal, social relations neglects this ontological question. Money is much more than what it is at any moment.

Money is a financial instrument. In his basic introduction to neoliberal economics, Charles Wheelan identifies “four simple” uses for financial instruments. First they raise capital by allowing us to borrow money; they make possible “credit” (Wheelan, 2002, 120). We borrow money we do not have today in hope and anticipation of what we will have in the future. Second, money “stores, protects and makes profitable use of excess capital.” It does this by establishing a “rental rate” for capital –  $r$  – the rate of interest (Wheelan, 2002, 121). Third, money functions as insurance against risk by futures buying (Wheelan, 2002, 123). Finally, money also makes possible “speculation” through futures buying. It can be used to insure risk or to take risk.<sup>3</sup> Money buys a possible future through making credit, interest, insurance and speculation possible.

Because money is credit, interest, insurance and speculation, it is not something “real” to which we can point. Money is virtuality. Therefore it will require a different kind of analysis than a Marxist praxis based critique. It will require one that opens up to questions of metaphysics, religion and theology in a way Marxism can never adequately entertain. Financial instruments trust in a future that might be, in a future that is not yet, but is only promised. They are forms of belief. In buying credit, I am buying a future.<sup>4</sup> I am making an eschatological gesture. For this reason Goodchild makes the important and

somewhat startling claim, “if credit may lead to creation, then, in a reversal of ideology critique, *what we are may be determined more fundamentally by what we believe than what we do*” (Goodchild, 2005, 143) If Goodchild is correct, then belief matters more than we assume in contemporary theology. It too is a matter of credit; it imagines a future we do not yet know and through that imagination opens up the possibility not so much of buying a potential future as a pure essence and making it real, but participating in one that we take on credit God has prepared, and is preparing, for us.

That financial instruments are forms of belief in a future—in credit and interest—should not surprise theologians. Jesus also taught this and this teaching has been received throughout the tradition in anticipation of the future he inaugurated but did not yet complete.

In Christian theology Jesus is the future, he is the anticipation of an end given in the middle whose risen body funds an economy both present and future. As William Cavanaugh has argued, the body of Christ given to us through the Eucharist mediates an account of being where each “fraction” of the Eucharistic element is the fullness of Christ’s body (Cavanaugh, 1999, 190). This too is a form of credit; Jesus is the object of belief in both a real presence and, through his absence, an imagined future. For this reason we can never have a secure ecclesial politics of identity for Jesus always stands over and against the church, which gathers in hope and trust that he will come even when he is not here. He stands as a funding source for what is present and yet at the same time he is absent. As Rowan Williams notes, the fact that our churches are signs devoid of Christ prevents any fetishization of his presence. The empty tomb tradition “is, theologically speaking, part of the church’s resource in resisting the temptation to ‘absorb’ Jesus into itself, and thus part of what its confession of the divinity of Jesus amounts to in spiritual and political practice” (Williams, 1999, 192). This spiritual and political practice poses a question that always stands in judgment over and against us—“what credit is that to you?”

The fact that our churches are empty tombs devoid of Jesus' presence should not alarm us. Instead it produces a desire that avoids fetishization for the desire flourishes in the absence of any specific 'commodity.' On the one hand this desire cannot be satisfied, Jesus is not here. But on the other, the absence of Jesus as object does not produce violence because the One for whom we wait appears in Word and sacrament. Even while absent; his material body is now inexhaustible.

#### THEOLOGICAL ECONOMICS AS HOLINESS

Rather than engaging in debates over whether Christianity should be in service to capitalism or socialism, theological economics would benefit by remembering that most of the church's economic analysis took place within the context of the call to holiness. This is no retreat from social and political matters, this call is what made these issues social and why the church must address them. Jesus' material presence sanctifies the world by fulfilling the Law, but his absence makes space for an ongoing performance of his completion of the Law that completes it yet more. Sometimes he fulfills the Law by diminishing its letter for the sake of its spirit. He plucks grain and heals on the Sabbath. Sometimes he fulfills it by strengthening its letter for the sake of its spirit. He strengthens the prohibition against divorce, against taking another's life and against loaning money at interest. He receives the teaching of Moses and brings it to completion by disclosing its spirit; for Jesus is the Torah of God, the Word made flesh or the Eternal Wisdom made manifest in human form. His very Person fulfills the Law, uniting what is bodily and composite with divine simplicity. His body itself is the physical letter of the Law united with true Spirit. For this reason, the more we hear and obey the letter the more we find it "porous," opening us to its mysterious spirit whether it comes to us through allegory, anagogy or tropology. The letter and the spirit of the Law are not

to be reduced to each other; their distinct natures remain. But in the Person of Christ they are One. The letter of the Law then does not close us within an immanence of being, but opens us up to its mystery. It gives the letter an inexhaustible depth making it always contemporary. Jesus is always fulfilling the Law, showing us new dimensions to it and mediating new practices for us to embody and for which we wait. Each reception of Jesus' completion of the Law completes it yet more. This is the church's mission, its task is to sanctify God's creation.

Jesus strengthens the prohibition against certain forms of credit and interest by telling us:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:32-36, NRSV)

Jesus raises the metaphysical question of credit and interest and poses a question of his own—"what credit is that to you?"<sup>5</sup> His response to this metaphysical question is complex. He correlates taking interest on money with ontology, ethics and theology. Loans and the expectations we have of them signify what we will be, as well as how our being relates to the good and to the Blessed Trinity. Jesus does not teach a disinterested ethic here. This is not proto-kantianism. We should lend such that we expect a "reward." But nor is this Adam Smith's butcher, brewer and baker who looks only to her own interest and thereby serves the common good through

unintended consequences. Interest for Jesus is a much more complex matter than that. The Trinity is not some Stoic providence that ensures harmony out of conflict. This is not the credit that imagines a blessed future. Of course we have a self-interest, a *conatus essendi* that is a necessary feature of theology, ethics and ontology. This desire to be requires living out of credit for none of us can sustain his or her own life. Projects of an immanent sustainability often entail reproductive regulations and forced relocations that make Malthus look moderate. Instead of such an immanent and inevitably violent sustainability, we are to lend without expectation of return from those to whom we lend, but lend with an expectation of return from God. Why? Because this is how God sanctifies the creation.

This is a mission Christians share with Jews and Muslims, albeit with significant differences in practice, which requires each of us to examine seriously the exchanges involved in lending and borrowing. Meir Tamari reminds us that the reason for the interest prohibition in the Torah is because, “in the words of the *Sefer Hachinuch*, [God] wanted to purify the Jew so that he should go beyond the normal actions” (Tamari, 1991, 106). We glimpse this same quest for holiness in the past and future enactments of Jesus’ twist to the ontological problem “what is money?” He does not resolve the problem for all places and all times, but turns the question against us, “what credit is that to you?” Does your credit have place for God as the One who rewards? Does it go beyond what is expected of “sinners”?

How can this be something more than pious nonsense? What kind of reward are we to expect from God? Is this another version of “cartoon Platonism” where we forego rewards here for the sake of a univocal yet intensified reward in the hereafter? It can only avoid this if we understand the mediation of God’s reward ecclesio-logically. This too is part of Jesus’ teaching on money. After the rich young ruler is turned away, Jesus’ disciples ask him whether anyone can be saved. Peter reminds him that they left everything to follow

him. Jesus does not respond that self-sacrifice is its own reward. He does not tell Peter that in giving a gift without any possible return he has given the only possible gift. Instead he says, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life" (Lk. 18: 29-30). That is not cartoon Platonism; it is a promissory note, a kind of credit that exceeds the credit capitalism promises. It is the credit out of which the church must live even when it only glimpses its existence in the Blessed Sacrament.

For this to be more than pious nonsense, we must imagine transnational religious identities where "economic interest" exceeds individual preferences grounded in freedom as self-assertion. We do not need to invent this economy *de novo*. Instead, we find resources for it in the Christian tradition and in a similar sensibility in both Islam and Judaism as they have received the teaching from Moses, the prophet and Jesus on money. For despite our differences, we share a similar task, which is to sanctify rather than instrumentalize the world. This similar task now stands against a western secular program that postulates a different mediation of being than do our religious traditions. This other ontology arrives with something like Jeremy Bentham's "Defense of Usury," where he wrote, "no man of ripe years, and of sound mind, ought out of lovingkindness to him, to be hindered from making such a bargain, in the way of obtaining money, as, acting with his eyes open, he deems conducive to his interest" (Bentham, 1952, 163). This is a way of being that only knows interest. The difference between the secular rise of modern ethics after Bentham, and Christian (as well as Islamic and Jewish) reflection on economics prior to Bentham, involves a complete break in how one thinks about money. Make no mistake, capitalism can never have an understanding of liberty that is something other than Bentham's. To embrace capitalism is to embrace this liberal ontology and for that reason Christianity can never finally embrace

capitalism. That Christianity can never embrace capitalism is readily found throughout the tradition when it receives Jesus' teaching on credit and interest.

How might we move the conversation about theology and economics beyond the tired shibboleths of the Christian 'left' and 'right?' We can begin by being attentive to the language we use in our everyday economic exchanges and relating it to the language we use in Christian doctrine. Placing that language within the context of the church's common (and therefore social) pursuit of holiness will also prove illuminating.

I do not write for economists, but for people in the church; some of whom are economists, many of whom own or work in business every day. I want to remind them of the church's traditional teachings on economics and see what bearing they have on everyday life. The point is to consider what a faithful form of "exchange" would envision. I am a theologian and not an economist and therefore I confess that I have no idea how to build a global economic system. I have no expectation that my work will somehow lead to the overthrow of the IMF or the WTO; and I certainly do not seek the implementation of some theocratic regime that will once again refuse to lend money at interest through a coercive will to power. Although I do think Christians should be attentive to the alternative forms of banking Islam is producing, my concerns are more modest. How might we help the faithful embody the virtues of the Christian life and avoid its vices? What difference do our doctrines make for how we think through the first principles of economic exchange? Such questions may have revolutionary or reformist implications, but overthrowing, legitimating, or reforming a global economic system is not my primary concern. This does not mean indifference to the plight of those who unjustly suffer under various economic regimes; justice is one of the virtues we must embody.

The following essays are an effort to address two questions in an attempt to develop a *Christian* vision of a common economic life. (1) How can we best embody the Christian virtues and avoid deadly

vices given the economy within which we must live? (2) What difference do our Christian doctrines make for how we should think about economic exchanges?

My life has been greatly enriched by persons who do embody economic practices out of the mainstream like Reba Place and The Church of the Servant King; both seek first to be faithful and, yet, operate businesses that remain fiscally viable. I do not think they fled to the desert, but they certainly produced interesting communal businesses that appear to challenge Smithian orthodoxy in favor of a more Christian orthodoxy. I do not think that the onus has to be on them to justify how they are not sectarian because they operate outside the orthodox wisdom of the science of economics. I think we can learn as much from such communities as we can by engaging with the best in the academic discipline of economics, but surely this is not an either-or. We can do both.

I do not think the development of a Christian vision can take place in isolation from other religious traditions or secular politics. This is why the first two essays in this collection occur between a Jewish economist and myself as a theologian. “Prophets and Profits” and “The Facts about Values,” are an attempt at a serious engagement between the disciplines of theology and economics. These two essays developed out of work that Nancy Fox, associate professor of economics at Saint Joseph’s University, and I did together. We had the delightful task of teaching an interdisciplinary honors course in theology and economics. This was not a course in business ethics, because it did not assume compatibility between theology and economics; this was precisely what was explored—the logic of both disciplines. How can theology and economics be brought into conversation? Where are the commonalties? Where are the differences? Are the differences incommensurable? What role should the church’s social teachings have in economics? Does the market intrude into ecclesial life? The irony that a Methodist theologian and a Jewish economist should be called upon at a Jesuit Catholic institution to teach primarily Italian and Irish Catholic students