

Book Review
Bert Wheeler

Political-Economic Activity to the Honour of God

John Boersema. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada: Premier Publishing, 1999.

My initial reaction to reviewing another book on the integration of biblical principles and economics was mixed at best. Even though I teach at a Christian university that requires integration in all teaching, it had

been several years since I had read a book attempting to weld contemporary economic or political thought and scriptural truth. Most of the works in my library (and there are several), while no doubt are honest attempts at biblical integration, end up supporting one end or the other of the political spectrum. I like the ones with which I agree and tend to discount those whose political perspective tends in the “wrong” direction. However, I was quickly won over by the content and spirit of Boersema’s book. This book is a must-read for all Christian economists and is highly recommended to others who desire to learn more about how economics and the Word of God interrelate. If you are interested in how one goes about biblical integration, this book is for you.

Boersema’s book is one of the best attempts at biblical integration and economics I’ve ever read. His primary purpose “is to set out the Christian foundations necessary for developing specific practical Christian solutions/responses to the political economic problems of the day, e.g. unemployment, inflation, the national debt” (p. 17). This is a noble and ambitious task indeed. It is a task

at which he does achieve some degree of success. “This book ... is intended merely to be a contribution towards articulating an approach to developing specific practical solutions/responses to the economic problems of the day” (p. 19). I am not in complete agreement on all of the specifics that Boersema recommends, but his methodology is refreshing and enlightening. And, of course, we all are familiar with the many jokes on the opinions of economists and how we never can seem to agree on anything!

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the book is the methodology Boersema employed in reaching his conclusions. He conducted extensive research in the Netherlands with members of the Gerformeerd Politiek Verbond (GPV)–Reformed Political Alliance. The political process in the Netherlands is more fragmented than that with which we are familiar in the United States or Canada. Since the early 1960s the GPV has held one or two seats in the lower house of the national parliament. In the political arena in the Netherlands the party controls approximately one to two percent of the elected seats. Members of the GPV have been

espousing specific Christian perspectives on Dutch politics for nearly 40 years. It is this wealth of experience on which Boersema draws. However, GPV policies are not the foundation for the Christian principles delineated in the book. Boersema draws the foundation from the Bible.

“There are no easy Christian answers to the problems of the day; the Bible does not deal with such issues as unemployment and inflation directly. Rather, the Christian must develop an approach to dealing with these issues in which relevant Christian objectives and principles are first spelled out. ... [T]he principles derived are helpful in dealing with current issues and ... occasionally become quite practical ...” (p. 18). Time and space constraints prohibit a full description of Boersema’s model. Perhaps a brief summary of his methodology will whet your appetite for *Political-Economic Activity to the Honour of God*. Boersema begins with the cultural mandate and stewardship. However, the cultural mandate is a “point of departure” (p. 33). Neither the cultural mandate nor stewardship gives practical suggestions on what to do. These concepts do not provide the detail necessary to establish a

Christian perspective on political economy. We must find other biblical principles to drive our analysis. Principles utilized by Boersema include: sin, neighbor love, justice, and personal responsibility. From these, and other principles, Boersema develops goals consistent with the stipulated principles. “[T]he development of ‘principles’ is not enough, not an end in itself (except perhaps for philosophers and theologians); economists and politicians must apply them in resolving practical issues” (pp. 44-45). He postulates full employment as the most important goal. Boersema has an extended discussion of the proper role of government in an economic system. His primary conclusion is “... the Christian should favour the market as a starting point for economic decision-making—a conditional preference” (p. 157). Boersema’s position is well thought out and is far from free-market rhetoric. His solutions are practical while leaving room for sincere Christians to disagree on matters of application.

Boersema is well-read. He includes previous major works dealing with biblical integration and economics. The book provides copious endnotes

indicating he not only is aware of the scholarship, but has also read and learned from those who have preceded him. In fact, Dr. Richard C. Chewning or works edited by Chewning are referenced no less than 40 times in the book. If you are more familiar with extant literature in the field of biblical integration in economics, this book is an excellent refresher and adds to the literature because of the extensive research performed on the Dutch situation. If you are only beginning to explore the interrelationship of the Bible and political economy, Boersema’s book is an excellent place to begin. This book is a must-read for all Christian economists and is highly recommended for anyone interested in an excellent example of biblical integration.

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