

Paul Oslington, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*. Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 640, \$160.

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When approaching a handbook, one is used to finding a robust effort to present key elements and the state of a discipline. Yet, the combination of the two disciplines cited in title—Christianity and economics—was surprising to me. Reading the book reinforced my initial intuition. A central difference is Oslington’s approach: Rather than facing a traditional discipline, it reflects on the emergence of economics and religion as a new interdisciplinary field. The novelty, as Oslington mentions, lies in bringing together disciplinary discussions and, in my opinion, some interdisciplinary views regarding economics and religion. Across thirty-three chapters contributed by leading experts from both disciplines, the book focuses on the intellectual issues at stake when Christian theology and economics meet.

The topic is complex and highly relevant to contemporary discussions. Its appeal includes the struggle for a more integrated

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view of human interactions, which many social sciences have been exploring, and the issues of current policymaking—for instance, the design of policies and laws in diverse cultural frameworks, collaboration between state and church in areas such as education, and the role of religious institutions in society. Those interested in these areas will find an important bibliographical reference in this handbook. Understanding human behavior in one of its essential aspects can also contribute to understanding other areas and types of institutions.

The book comprises five parts. Part 1 provides a historical overview of the interactions between economics and Christianity. Given that economics, or what used to be known as political economy, has existed as a discipline only since the nineteenth century, this historical perspective focuses more on key economic ideas within the Christian tradition. There are chapters dedicated to Italian and French developments in this area. Chapters from outside Europe and the United States are completely absent. For instance, the interactions between economic concepts and practices and Christianity are rich and run deep in current Latin American societies, where European conquerors met indigenous peoples.

Part 2 contains eight chapters about how diverse modern Christian traditions have approached economics. It is interesting to see how these traditions, which have the same root, have studied, interpreted, and practiced economic relations differently. Part 3 tackles intensely debated questions that lie at the boundaries of religion and economics. These include issues related to the environment, international aid, development, and capitalism. Part 4 includes chapters on the economic analysis of religion: religious labor markets, the regulation of churches, and a behavioral approach to religion. Part 5 offers interdisciplinary exchanges on

some key economic topics, including economic justice, happiness, gender, and poverty.

From its first pages the *Handbook* introduces the reader to the central economic issues of Christianity: loving our neighbors, tending to our poor. Gratitude and mercy appear as fundamental elements of human economic relations. Providence and trust recall economic attention as they are embedded in the way Christians develop social interactions. Mercy, for instance, remains a mystery for economics, but it is a necessary, concrete answer to today's economic challenges.

This book offers a systematic exploration of the boundaries of positive and normative economics and even invites discussions necessary to policy, decision-making, and interdisciplinary issues. The discussions of epistemological issues are, in my opinion, most valuable and needed for a true interdisciplinary exercise.

I would like to offer a few additional words on two chapters. Chapter 4, "Economics and Theology in Italy since the Eighteenth Century," by Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni, presents the tradition of Civil Economy, contemporaneous to Adam Smith's political economy. It regards civil life as based on *philia*. The authors discuss the works of Antonio Genovesi and Giacinto Dragonetti, outstanding representatives of the Italian Catholic tradition of social thought. Essential elements of Civil Economy are reciprocity and public faith, concepts close to today's public trust. Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* draws from this current of thought in its appeal to fraternity and an economic order oriented toward the common good. I welcomed the opportunity to read about these works, especially as those key concepts gain interest in various disciplines.

Chapter 24, "Spiritual Capital," by Theodore Roosevelt Malloch, explores this concept in relation to the better-known social and human capitals and discusses briefly its relation with economic development and culture. The author defines spiritual capital as "the fund of beliefs, examples and commitments that are transmitted from generation to generation through a religious tradition, and which attach people to the transcendental source of human happiness" (463). Though brief, this chapter brings forth the interdisciplinary issue of relationality in economics: relations and their content as an economic factor. There is much to discuss regarding spiritual capital, but the invitation that this chapter and book provide is timely.

I enjoyed very much reading this diverse and forward-thinking book. The chapters, however, are heterogeneous in terms of their depth and interdisciplinary effort. In addition, the book does not provide an interdisciplinary synthesis, either a chapter or conclusion, leaving that instead to the reader. I see these deficiencies as symptoms of the state of this new field. Only six of the thirty-three chapters had coauthors, and in all cases the coauthors were from the same discipline. I would have liked to see a chapter coauthored by an economist and a theologian. Interdisciplinary work thrives in cooperation, but it is hard and complex. Hence, it is a formidable challenge. I congratulate Oxford University Press for embracing this topic and the editor for facing it with such valuable work.