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Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Toward an Economy of Care (Book Review)

Tracy Miller
Dordt College

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ing the language and concepts of that tradition; by building on the insights and formulations of that tradition; by seeking to reform, correct, and reformulate crucial or less crucial elements of that tradition. The reformational tradition has been developed in the context of the broader, Western tradition that has its roots in Greek and Roman culture and has developed today in North America and Europe. Specifically, the reformational tradition has been an admirable effort to counteract the synthesis of the gospel with Greek thought with a more wholistic formulation of the gospel. In the reformational tradition, its worldview formulations, theology, philosophy, anthropology, social, political, and educational philosophy have all been developed in the context of and in interaction with the Western tradition. Van Der Walt presents the fruit of this rich and biblically rooted tradition.

Van Der Walt believes he is presenting a worldview approach that moves beyond contextualizing approaches (33). Yet contextualization has a strong affinity with the idea of reformation, that is, the ongoing attempt of the Christian community to faithfully embody the gospel in a specific context. The reformational tradition is one such tradition that has sought to faithfully embody the gospel in the context of a Western culture that has been permeated by rationalism, individualism, secularism, and dualism. How does this worldview approach move beyond contextualizing approaches? Is Van Der Walt offering the reformational tradition as an a contextual, a traditional formulation of the gospel that needs to be adapted to the African context?

I agree with Van Der Walt that our tradition has riches that can serve Christians in Africa, especially since missionaries have transported the very dualistic worldview of the West that the reformational tradition has staunchly opposed. Yet I believe Van Der Walt's project must be more modest than he himself sometimes appears to say. We need to offer to the African church the riches of the reformational worldview that clearly bears the marks of its Western origins as one biblically faithful attempt to oppose the dualism and spiritualism of synthetic thought as it has developed in the West. However, the African church will need to wrestle with the gospel in light of

this tradition in its own context addressing the problems and needs of African culture.

The reformational worldview has not addressed itself to many problems that have arisen in Africa. While Africa has been affected by Western modernity and secularism, an earlier primal worldview that stands in opposition to Western secularism remains powerful. Therefore, Africa provides an entirely different context than Europe and North America. An example of the kind of problem that has never been addressed by a reformational worldview is the spiritual powers. Jan Boer gives a fine example in his article "Opening the Reformed World to the Powers" (*Perspectives*, February 1994). In relation to experiences with the powers in Africa he writes, "My Dutch Reformed World hardly equipped me to understand Benjamin's problem" (16). He calls us to move the goal posts of our Reformed worldview and enlarge our tent (18). This change calls for putting the gospel in an African context that can still benefit tremendously, I believe, from our reformational worldview as it has developed in the west.

This appears to be different from Van Der Walt's concern. Perhaps this difference can be seen in a statement made on the last page of Van Der Walt's book. "I therefore have limited myself to a *Christian* worldview for Africa—I am not able to propound an *African Christian* worldview" (603). One gets the impression from this sentence, indeed the whole paragraph, that Van Der Walt is operating with an older idea of indigenization that sees the need for adapting a Western formulation of the gospel that is normative—"Christian worldview"—to another context—"African Christian worldview". If I am reading Van Der Walt rightly at this point, I have grave concerns that this study will be experienced by Africans as one more imperialistic attempt to impose a Western formulation of the gospel or worldview as normative.

B. J. Van Der Walt is to be commended for this ambitious and timely undertaking. I sincerely hope this book finds wide circulation and readership in Africa. I do believe that our reformational worldview has much to offer the church throughout the world. But it needs to be contextualized in response to the various needs of the African culture.

Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Toward an Economy of Care by Bob Goudzwaard and Harry de Lange (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995). 165 pages, paperback, \$14.99. Reviewed by Tracy Miller, Associate Professor of Economics.

How is it that in a society as wealthy as ours we experience unprecedented scarcity, rising poverty, rising disease, and less and less time for community and

cultural activities? How can we be experiencing rising unemployment when so much necessary work isn't getting done. By describing six paradoxes that are

currently unfolding, the authors of this book suggest that something is fundamentally wrong with the economies of modern, industrialized nations.

This book restates a number of themes that have appeared in other writings by Bob Goudzwaard, such as concerns about widespread idolatry toward progress, materialism, and the growing gap between rich and poor. The perceptive critique of western culture is evident in this book as in his other works and as such is worth reading carefully.

The unique contribution of this book is that it attempts to provide a comprehensive critique of modern society combined with some specific recommendations for reform. In making specific recommendations for changes in attitudes, relationships, business practices, and government policy, the authors open themselves up to criticism for weaknesses of their specific recommendations. Compared to other things I have read or heard from Goudzwaard, I find this book to be more helpful because of the specifics provided. At the same time, some of those recommendations also reveal weaknesses in Goudzwaard and de Langes' understanding or articulation of the problems of modern society.

The book begins by discussing poverty, noting that in spite of 40 years of efforts at economic development, the number of people in the world who cannot afford adequate diets has grown (8). Next, the authors emphasize the seriousness of environmental problems, informing readers about ozone depletion, global warming, acid rain, declining biodiversity, and toxic waste, among other things. These and other contemporary economic problems result from "critical structural flaws eroding the foundation of our societal order" which "present-day economic theory and practice are incapable of addressing" (38). This book provides an excellent discussion of the philosophical foundations of the economic crisis facing western culture. The authors devote most of the second chapter to discussing how ideas from the enlightenment, including utilitarianism, have influenced both economic theory and practice. Both our culture and economic theory have assumed that the goal of a good society is to produce as much goods and services for as little work as possible. In accord with the modern scientific worldview, our culture says that if the economy provides a positive return on capital, such a return proves the social desirability of a particular project. It views labor as the means toward achieving the goal of a rising material standard of living, rather than as valuable in itself.

In contrast to the prevailing view, the authors suggest that caring for human needs and the environment should be a priority over growth. Changing priorities from growth toward caring for human needs and the environment requires more than just changes in attitude; it requires fundamental changes in our economic system. The market economy as it is presently structured rewards growth in production through adoption of labor-saving technology, while penalizing firms that seek to maximize employment opportunities or care for the environment.

We need to renew our economic order, beginning with reordering economic ends so that basic needs take priority over luxury items. Things that are viewed as means in our economic system, such as employment, should instead be viewed as ends. This change may require that we accept a lower standard of living in order to better care for the environment, provide employment for everyone, and meet the needs of the poor—the "economics of enough" (90).

Some fairly specific recommendations for change are spelled out in the last chapter as part of a twelve-step program for economic recovery. Some of the more interesting recommendations include renewing the world monetary system, having governments identify and grant corporations the right to the title of "responsible company" if they treat workers and the environment well, changing the way social security is financed, changing agricultural policies to encourage stewardship instead of maximum production as part of an innovative approach to environmental policy, and using a measure of economic growth other than GNP that gives more weight to the well-being of the poorest groups and accounts for the social costs of production. One of the things that makes this book worth reading is the many perceptive critical observations about the nature of our modern economic system and practices. Quoting from *The Human Condition* by Hannah Arendt, the authors note that three essential conditions for humans to live as real people are social life, relationship with the earth, and a relationship with time (103). Unfortunately, these three basic conditions are increasingly viewed as restrictions that interfere with our desire for a rising material standard of living. The critical problems of today form mirror images: poverty is rooted in our "inability to deal with wealth," and environmental problems mirror the "deeper problem that we do not wish to accept *ourselves* in our earthly and creaturely condition" (104).

To clarify further the kind of reform they envision, the authors discuss small scale examples of how

communities, firms, and other organizations are seeking to implement an economy of care. The Kibbutz in Israel as well as some cooperative businesses in the Netherlands provide examples where care for each other and the environment, rather than obtaining a rising standard of living, has become the priority. They also discuss examples of labor unions that have expressed a willingness to accept wage freezes in order to promote better environmental stewardship and more jobs, as well as communities that have purchased local manufacturing facilities in order to preserve jobs (108-9). These and other illustrations challenge us to consider specific ways that we could be involved in reforming our economy.

For all its good qualities, this book suffers from several weaknesses. One is the tendency of the authors to accept the most alarming scenarios concerning global environmental problems, to blame most of the problems of less-developed countries on exploitation by the developed countries, and in general to accept the prevailing views of media and government elites. In their attempts to criticize our growth-oriented society, they present an oversimplified and misleading view of the relation between technology, unemployment, and the environment. Some of the resulting recommendations for reform, particularly their view that production needs to be more labor intensive, are liable to do far more harm than good if they become the basis for economic policy.

Although much of the criticism of utilitarianism as a philosophy and neoclassical economics is valid, the authors seem to miss or downplay some important insights from neoclassical economics and economic history that would qualify some of their recommendations. One thing they emphasize repeatedly is the need for more labor intensive production. The implication seems to be that investment in labor-saving technology causes unemployment, environmental degradation, and reduced quality of work.

Technology doesn't cause unemployment in the long run. Economic logic suggests that if employment declines in the manufacturing sector of the

economy because of rising worker productivity, employment would increase in another sector as the reduced cost of manufactured goods would enable consumers to spend more on something else. This is evident in historical trends of rising employment in services as manufacturing employment declines. The effect of technology on the quality of work and the environment can be positive as well. Information technology can reduce waste and make jobs more interesting.

The criticism of the market is also misdirected. The authors claim that from the point of view of the market, culture, nature, and human health have no value (83). They also suggest that markets have too short a time horizon and do not adequately account for the value of future consumption. This is not true, though it may be correct to say that these things are undervalued in Western societies. Markets merely reflect the underlying values of market participants. If market participants place a high value on culture, then they will not sacrifice their culture for something else that they value less. The same is true of nature, human health, and the needs of future generations. If current generations place a high value on the well-being of future generations, they will consume less and save more money, lowering interest rates and increasing the market value of investments, including investments in environmental conservation that are expected to yield high future benefits.

Most of the weaknesses of this book reflect either exaggeration of a problem about which there is legitimate cause for concern, misdiagnosis of the relation between current problems and economic policy, or the way in which the authors use terms like market economy. The essential point of the book that our economic system needs to be reoriented still rings true, though I might disagree with some of the details of their specific proposals. One doesn't have to accept all the authors' recommendations to find this book a challenging and thought-provoking call for reform of modern society.

Christianity and Economics in the Post-Cold War Era: The Oxford Declaration and Beyond, Herbert Schlossberg, Vinay Samuel, and Ronald J. Sider, eds. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994). 186 pages, paperback, \$10.99. Reviewed by Tracy Miller, Associate Professor of Economics.

Is it possible for evangelical Christians to agree about the implications of Christian faith for economic policy in the contemporary world? Is trying to agree useful? What exactly does a Christian worldview imply about the nature of economic justice, the nature of work, and our relationship to the environ-

ment? These and other questions are addressed by this volume of essays that arose as part of the ongoing Oxford Conference on Christian Faith and Economics.

The introductory essay by Ron Sider describes the context in which the Oxford Declaration was drafted.