

Systematic Theology

How are work and economics relevant to teaching about:

1. Creation and the image of God?

At a biblical, theological level, the conversation focused on the under-developed verbs central to human anthropology in the opening chapters of Genesis (especially 2:15, to “till and keep” the earth). This rediscovery what might be called a more active theological anthropology corresponds to the theological traditions tendency toward Platonism, the bias of the mind over the hands. Questions were also raised about the bearing that this might have related to substance dualism and the more common affirmation of more “holistic” accounts of humanity.

While little was made of the doctrine of creation, Colin Gunton’s work was mentioned. He argues that many of the West’s problems today stem from theology’s “failed doctrine of creation” (and the corresponding, and highly problematic, bifurcation between creation and redemption).

The conversation was never able to advance to the question of classroom or curricular integration.

2. The fall and sin?

On this subject, there was a little more tension and disagreement among the group. It was generally affirmed that in a *postlapsarian* world, work itself is more difficult (Gen 3; “toil”).

Although the connection seemed more tangential than explicit, our conversation here focused on how “socialism” and “laissez fair capitalism” are both based on a false anthropology, and the claim that capitalism and Adam Smith’s idea of self-interest were nonetheless the preferred biblical system of political and economic organization. Others disagreed, suggesting that the tradition (following Augustine) has over-emphasized the sinfulness of sex and has not given enough attention to the corrupting power of money.

Another tried to tie the conversation back to its pedagogical origins, suggesting that these are all examples that there is no perfect system. Throughout our conversation, we were again unable to move the conversation to the question of classroom or curricular integration, with one exception. Bruce Fields suggested the importance of virtue/character education (“godliness”). “People who govern themselves do not invite as much external government, but people who are less governed invite more external constraint.” Deception, greed, accountability were all mentioned, but others could easily be raised. This also brought to the surface the issue of ethics, which is an easy point of contact that presumably interpenetrates theology and economics/work at every level, but the topic was not pursued further.

3. Redemption and ecclesiology?

While there were some general statements like, “If we’re redeemed, we have an opportunity to behave better,” the conversation primarily focused on a “tension” between economics and the gospel, physical and spiritual. Everyone wanted to affirm both, most recognized a “tension,” and several wanted to affirm a “priority.” The nature of conjunction itself, however, was less than clear (and thus the nature of the unity, tension, or priority). As one person phrased the question, is conjunction a “conjunction by addition” (e.g. apples *and* oranges) or “conjunction by integration” (e.g. hands *and* feet)? (Christological) Lordship was proposed as one integrative answer. The point of a “failed doctrine of creation” was again mentioned in this context.

The question was also raised whether the church as the community of the redeemed is better positioned than any politico-economic system for the promotion of human flourishing.

What might follow from any of this generally, or specifically in the classroom and in curriculum, was once again not raised.

The following topics were not discussed: (4) Consummation and eschatology? and (5) History of doctrine?