

Economic Compulsion and Christian Ethics
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Albino Barerra

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SUMMARY

Modern economic theory encourages market intervention to ameliorate problems of a technical nature (such as pollution) but assumes that human costs (such as losing one's job to outsourcing) are intrinsic to economic progress. The author defends free market economics while indicating how many *de facto* influences force the smallest economic actors into economic choices they would otherwise not make ("economic compulsion"). The author develops a well constructed theological account of economic security which perhaps pays insufficient attention to eschatological themes.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Moderne ökonomische Theorien empfehlen die Intervention des Marktes, um technische Probleme (wie Umweltverschmutzung) zu verbessern, geht aber gleichzeitig davon aus, dass menschliche Kosten (wie Arbeitslosigkeit durch Outsourcing) ökonomischem Fortschritt inhärent sind. Der Autor verteidigt die Wirtschaft des freien Marktes, weist aber auch darauf hin, wie viele faktische Einflüsse die kleinsten ökonomischen Akteure zu ökonomischen Entscheidungen zwingen, die sie eigentlich nicht treffen würden („ökonomischer Zwang“). Der Autor entwickelt eine gut aufgebaute theologische Darstellung ökonomischer Sicherheit, die eventuell eschatologischen Themen zu wenig Aufmerksamkeit schenkt.

RÉSUMÉ

Les théories économiques modernes encouragent une politique d'intervention sur le marché pour tenter de résoudre des problèmes d'ordre technique (comme celui de la pollution), mais tient pour acquis que les coûts humains (comme la perte d'un emploi et de ses moyens de ressources) engendrés par le progrès économique sont inévitables. L'auteur défend une économie de libre échange tout en relevant que de nombreux facteurs forcent les acteurs économiques les plus petits à faire des choix qu'ils ne feraient pas dans d'autres conditions. Il élabore une approche théologique bien construite de la sécurité économique, mais sans peut-être toutefois prêter suffisamment attention aux perspectives eschatologiques.

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Working at the boundary of Catholic moral theology, economic theory, and policy studies, in this book Albino Barerra (Providence College, Rhode Island) both locates and responds to an inbuilt injustice of modern economic theory. Liberal political governance has been encouraged by economic theory to intervene in the market to ameliorate problems of a technical nature (such as pollution) but to assume that negative effects in people's lives (such

as losing one's job to outsourcing) are intrinsic to economic progress. He suggests that the common good is enhanced if we think of human labour as a resource to be economically maximized, but strongly supports remunerative mechanisms in free market economies.

The book's first part explains in some detail how economic theory conceives itself, and the reasons why capitalist principles correctly assume that, in general free market transactions are creative of the overall good. In a basic sense Smith's invisible hand proves a useful economic assumption. The market is not intrinsically coercive. That said, however, many *de facto* influences force people into economic choices they would otherwise not make ("economic compulsion"). The burdens of market economies fall disproportionately on its smallest actors for three reasons: 1) natural variability in personal ability means some have less to "sell" on a free market, 2) there are wide fluctuations in what society is willing to "buy" at any given time, and 3) variations of individual life histories often render critical goods unavailable (such as a college education) at times when much hangs on these being secured. The result is that for the poor, "entry costs" and "operating costs" are barriers, not just the cost of business as they are for larger actors.

This regressive burden yields three basic questions for Christian ethics: "How do we adapt the biblical vision of economic security to our own postindustrial era of global economic integration? ... How do we separate trivial from consequential pecuniary externalities? How do we recognize and measure when negative market ripple effects are so severe as to constitute economic compulsion? ... How do we mitigate the severity of economic compulsion?" (175).

These questions rest on a terse and thoughtful theological account of economic security as a divine blessing which humans are to validate and promote with their economic activity. The account is grounded in the Old Testament's concern with the land, which Barerra suggests Israel understood as a *de facto* gift of economic security. The provisions in the Law for the just use of the land demonstrate Israel's belief that they were called to ameliorate the chance and contingencies of others' economic lives as a response of gratitude for this gift. Perhaps the most original (and controversial) twist to this argument is the interpretation that the Law also aimed to uphold families as independent social units, from which Barerra derives a duty of personal effort and the aim of individual economic independence. These lines are also traced through the New Testament.

Barerra finds in the patristic writers a discovery of the importance of the plenitude of creation. If creation is intrinsically limited, then some are necessarily poor: but because creation is good and sufficient, poverty is solely a human fault. This insight grounded the unanimous patristic espousal of almsgiving. Again Barerra puts a modern, capitalist twist on the biblical and patristic prohibition of idleness by emphasizing the claim (of Clement) that one aim of work is "to avoid being an

unnecessary burden on others" (98).

The questions being raised in this study, and its account of economic justice and restoration are thorough and informative. There is, however, one important lacuna, marked by Barerra's confession that the New Testament's eschatological statements about wealth are beyond the scope of his study. The effect is to drive a wedge between Jesus and Paul, and to side with Paul interpreted as having taught by example that "private property is essential to personal enterprise" (91). In order to maintain his emphasis on personal initiative, he is keen to stress that Paul never gave up work. In so doing he conflates the necessity and virtue of work in Christian thought with the necessity to own and produce of modern capitalism. With modern economic theory, he is unable to see where something so economically useless as worship might be relevant to economic life. Christian theology which foregoes eschatology leaves its opponent, unfettered market liberalization, untouched. Christian theology cannot properly engage economic questions if it makes economic security a duty. Only Christians who seek first the kingdom beyond wealth are prepared to take the economic risk of going against the criterion of economic efficiency for the benefit of others' security. As Barerra is well aware (cf. 210, in the very informative case study of agricultural subsidies, which he opposes), even when our economic policies are destructive of others' livelihoods, it is very difficult to persuade anyone to risk their own wealth to change the system.

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***The Church and Deaf People:
A Study of Identity, Communication and
Relationships with Special Reference to the
Ecclesiology of Jürgen Moltmann***

Roger Hitching, forward by Jürgen Moltmann

Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003, xxii + 235pp., £19.99, pb,
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SUMMARY

This book discusses deaf people as a cultural and language minority group understood to be facing the problems of institutionalized discrimination. Hitching takes the theology of Moltmann, with its focus on liberation, to best facilitate the church's response to the problem so construed. It also develops an account of how the deaf may be understood as having more direct access to God. The reviewer questions the adequacy of a unifacted construal of the problem of the deaf in terms of liberation, and the presumption of the superiority of unmediated access to God.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses Buch diskutiert taube Menschen als seine kulturelle und sprachliche Minderheit, die mit den Problemen institutionalisierter Diskriminierung konfrontiert ist. Hitching

nimmt die Theologie Moltmanns mit ihrer Betonung der Befreiung als beste Möglichkeit der Kirche, auf das derart aufgeworfene Problem zu antworten. Es wird darüber hinaus dargelegt, wie taube Menschen als Menschen mit einem direkteren Zugang zu Gott verstanden werden können. Der Rezensent stellt die Angemessenheit einer einseitigen Konstruktion des Problems tauber Menschen im Hinblick auf Befreiung ebenso in Frage wie die Vermutung der Überlegenheit unmittelbaren Zugangs zu Gott.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage a pour sujet les personnes sourdes et les considère comme une minorité ayant sa culture et son langage propres et qui se trouve confrontée aux problèmes engendrés par une discrimination institutionnalisée. Hitching part de la théologie de Moltmann qui met l'accent sur le thème de la libération, pour mieux stimuler l'Église à s'attaquer à ce problème. Il s'efforce aussi de montrer que l'on peut considérer que les sourds ont un accès plus direct à Dieu. L'auteur de la recension conteste qu'il soit adéquat de concevoir le problème des sourds en fonction du thème de la libération de manière aussi unilatérale et met en doute l'hypothèse de la supériorité d'un accès immédiat.

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This book would be more accurately entitled *The Church and Deaf Culture*. Hitching discusses deaf people as a cultural and language minority group understood to be facing the problems of institutionalized discrimination. This yields the problem that "Society and the church, in dealing with difference inappropriately, have deprived Deaf people of their dignity" (7), most notably by treating the deaf as needing care rather than as full participants in church life.

Hitching takes the theology of Moltmann to provide the best resources for addressing the problem so construed, though one often gets the sense that this is a pragmatic rather than theological judgement. Witness claims like, "A belief system that emphasises the centrality of eschatological hope in a person's understanding of their being will produce optimistic attitudes...and may therefore act in the interests of deaf people as a powerful liberating tool" (52).

Though refusing to define the essence of deafness, Hitching offers the functional claim that the deaf are somehow closer to truth because their language is less conceptual than spoken language. They 1) have a self-understanding based less on abstract conceptualizations and more on relational experience, 2) can, but not necessarily must, convert their experiences and discourse into propositions in order to make logical sense of them, 3) have a distinctive inner life because "our real identity lies in inner speech", and 4) have a greater sense of immediacy in their encounters with others. In sum, deaf people find the existentialist focus on involvement with God and others more readily achievable in comparison with "the more propositional or abstract understandings that hearing people primarily use" (68).