

Teaching Well is a comprehensive resource for Christian teachers to think Christianly about their vocation and to encourage and enable their students to ‘take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Corinthians 10:5). I heartily commend this volume of thought-provoking essays from such gifted and experienced educators.

Dr Glenn N Davies, Anglican Archbishop of Sydney

I am pleased to see a flourishing of discussion about rigorous and authentic Christian education. The editors seek to follow in a tradition that refuses to put Christianity alongside education and insists that the gospel needs to be integral.

Ken Dickens, CEO, Christian Education National, Australia

If the next generation of Christians is to take steps of faithfulness in the entire range of cultural life to embody Christ’s Lordship, Christian education must be a priority. This book is a welcome contribution. A fine set of scholars and practitioners bring the gospel to bear on a wide span of educational subjects.

*Dr Mike Goheen, Professor of Missiology,
Calvin Theological Seminary, USA*

If you have ever found yourself asking the question where is the body of literature to support Christian educators in their task you will find *Teaching Well* to be a significant part of the answer. In this collection, experienced practitioners and leading academics in the field of Christian education offer insights on an impressive range of critical themes from the formation of a Christian mind to the transformation of the curriculum.

*Dr Beth Green, Director,
National Centre for Christian Education,
Liverpool Hope University, UK*

The appeal of this stimulating collection is its relevance to such a wide range of nagging challenges facing Christian educators in the twenty-first century. The expertise, sincerity, shared passion and unity of spirit of the many contributors have resulted in this insightful, biblically-grounded and practical resource with the potential to transform Christian education into true ministry.

*Dr Don Roy, Conjoint Senior Lecturer,
Avondale College of Higher Education, NSW*

Teaching Well explores issues of fundamental importance in Christian Education and does so in ways which greatly extend the current boundaries of discussion. The contributors bring a level of analysis and insight that is quite extraordinary.

John Lambert, AM, Former President, NSW Board of Studies

In recent years an important discussion has gathered pace surrounding questions about the nature and dynamics of a genuinely Christian education. *Teaching Well* is a very significant contribution to that discussion from an impressive array of men and women engaged in teaching as well as thinking about the task from the perspective of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Sound biblical and theological principles are brought to bear, together with solid cultural analysis.

*Dr Mark D Thompson, Principal,
Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia*

The book gives suggestions to teachers to help them clarify their own perspectives on Christian education and to encourage them to make their particular contribution to transforming the lives of students.

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Teaching Well

Insights for educators in Christian Schools

Edited by Ken Goodlet and John Collier

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This book is dedicated to Don Harwin and Bob Stock
who have contributed so much to the thinking behind it
and to the cause of Christian Education



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28 Economics

Gordon Menzies

Not all matters are equally closely related to central issues of Christian belief or unbelief. Mathematics is more remote than political science, political science than ethics and ethics than theology. Within each of these disciplines, likewise, there are degrees of proximity to central issues.

*Arthur F Holmes*¹

My main interest in Economics arises from the way in which it combines the Humanities and Mathematics. I like the way that in the midst of the chaotic behaviour in human society there are constraints. Economics seeks to capture the things that are important to people and bring them up against the inevitable financial and other limitations. Out of this tension come interesting economic models.

What is the sort of Economics that is generally taught today?

It is what is called economic rationalism in Australia and free market liberalism in Europe and the United States – it has various other names elsewhere. It is about the way people as individuals deal with constraints, largely financial. One of the assumptions is that people are motivated by financial rewards. It does not provide economic models that incorporate selfless behaviour. Some economists say that such thinking is irrelevant because there is no such thing as selfless behaviour; it is enlightened self-interest. Some others say that there is some

‘good’ motivation, but the tendency is to various forms of selfishness, so the economic rationalist model is still appropriate.

As a Christian, what is your view of Economics?

Do you follow an economic rationalist model?

No. I address the economic rationalist model in two ways. *First*, although selfishness is a reality in society and in individuals – and in my own life it is a strong force – it is not an accurate model to think of all the people as selfish all of the time. With regard to selfishness, all people are on a continuum with self-orientation on one end and God-orientation on the other. For those who do not recognise God there is such a thing as common grace, the good motivations that we recognise as such in people with many different beliefs or non-beliefs. It is too cynical to explain unselfish behaviour as enlightened self-interest.

Two interesting Bible references in this regard are Ephesians 4: 28: ‘Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.’ I take this to imply that a Christian has need-meeting – rather than financial gain – as a possible motivation for hard work. This flies in the face of a standard economic explanation for people working hard. The other passage is Matthew 7: 11: ‘If you, then, being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!’ I take this as an affirmation of common grace – that is, evil people love their children.

Second, I’ve been very influenced by the ideas of Arthur F Holmes in his book *All Truth is God’s Truth*.² He argues that different areas of study are impacted differently by Christian truth. For theology, it matters a lot whether or not you are a Christian; in Maths, it makes little difference.

I wish every Christian educator could read Holmes’s book and carefully consider whether their discipline can be placed on this



Diagram 1

continuum. Because all truth is God's truth, Holmes would say, we can enjoy mathematical truth, and share it with our non-Christian friends (or complain about it if we hate Maths! – complaining or rejoicing both assume a shared understanding). If a Christian perspective on Mathematics appears artificial, and gives the impression that only a Christian can understand the field properly, then this might bring Christian education into disrepute. On the other hand, if someone is studying psychology, a Christian worldview makes a difference. For example, the relationship between human flourishing and suffering is different according to the worldview one has. This is even more the case in theology, where I would think that just about every theological truth needs a Christian worldview to understand it properly. My own subject, Economics, seems to be somewhere in the middle of the continuum. Whether you are a Christian or not, rising interest rates probably mean extra unemployment eventually. However, a Christian economist looking at the issue of whether society should be more equal might well be influenced by their theological position.

How can space be made for a plurality of responses in the Economics classroom?

One starts with an economic model, shows how it is useful, and then challenges it on when it might not be useful. This gets the student thinking about their own perspectives.

The first example of how this works is demonstrated in the classic supply and demand diagram. By applying this model to a common-place good like apples, students can see how a market can coordinate consumption and production.

In diagram 2 on page 356, a shift north-west in supply (for example, due to a bad weather event hurting agricultural supply) will increase price and reduce quantity (moving from a to b). The increase in price is the market's way of dealing with the shortage. Price is used as a rationing mechanism rather than Soviet-style queues. Most students are likely to agree that this economic model is useful. But is it always? What if, instead of apples, we substitute child prostitution? Applying the same economic model, we can relatively easily reach an equilibrium price for the service of a child prostitute. Are we, then, happy with

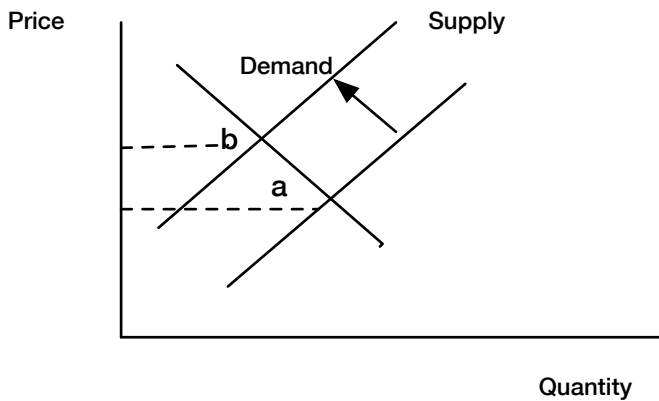


Diagram 2

this economic model? This, for many students, not only Christians, is a challenge to the adequacy of this economic model and, with it, a challenge to the nature of an economic rationalist view of Economics. Perhaps there are some things a free market is not good for. This can lead to a discussion of what goods a free market is not appropriate for. The tools of Economics need to be critiqued by a higher standard of truth. As a Christian, I want this higher critique of truth to come into the classroom.

The second example is the cap and trade system for carbon emissions. Governments can issue 'rights to pollute' in a 'cap and trade' system and these rights are traded. The price equilibrium is the price those companies who gain the greatest financial benefit from polluting are willing to buy them at, while guaranteeing the total amount of pollution (the 'cap') is optimal. I go through the compelling logic for tradable rights to pollute, and most students have sympathy with the policy.

I then propose issuing tradable rights to commit domestic violence in a 'cap and trade' system. This would need careful handling and might not be appropriate in a high school classroom, so the teacher could pick another illustration. I assure students, for argument's sake, that it reduces the total incidence of domestic violence, and it ensures that the holders of the rights are those who most enjoy hurting others. The proposal passes the 'consequentialist' test implicit in mainstream economics. In consequentialism, the morality of an act is determined by the consequences of the act and nothing else. 'Do you support this?' I

ask. I make my disdain for this proposal clear, but the analogy is never lost on students. When students object to this, I ask: ‘Why?’ They often answer that it legitimises violence – in just the same way that a radical environmentalist would say that a cap-and-trade scheme legitimises carbon emissions. It inevitably raises the issue of doing something because it is right, not because it works.

I believe *reductio ad absurdum* is a powerful teaching device. Furthermore, making students see the implications of their beliefs has an additional educational advantage that it is a student-centred pedagogy. They are following *their own views* (i.e. cap and trade systems that reduce the total amount of the undesirable thing must be good) right to their logical conclusion.

The discussion on rights to domestic violence has a high degree of student engagement.

A third example is slavery and related modern equivalents. In class, I show a brief excerpt from a contemporary movie, ‘Amazing Grace’, about the campaign to abolish the slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The main character, William Wilberforce, proposes a bill to abolish the slave trade. In response, the opposition puts forward a consequentialist argument. Students watch the following part of the movie.

(Wilberforce stands)

Wilberforce: It is with a heavy heart that I bring to the attention of this house a trade that degrades men to the level of brutes, and insults the highest quality of our common nature. *(pauses)*

I am speaking of ... the slave trade.

(Yelling, booing, shouting, waving etc.)

I know that many of my honourable friends have interests in the Indies. Others have investments in plantations in _____. And I believe them to be men of humanity. I believe you all to be men of humanity. And the wretchedness of any one ...

(Wilberforce is drowned out by the noise, shouting etc. Opposition Member stands up)

Speaker: Order! Order!!!!

Lord Tartelin: I can hardly believe my ears!

Gallery: We can hardly believe your mouth! (Laughter)

Lord Tartelin: It seems my young friend opposite has a long term strategy to destroy the very nation that spawned him. (*Wilberforce sits*)

When I was in Virginia, losing my fingers in battle with the Americans, he was busy appeasing them! (*Cheers and yelling*)

He would have us hand over the riches of the Indies to the bloody French! (*Noise, shouting*)

If we didn't have slaves, then we wouldn't have any plantations. And with no plantations, how would we fill the coffers of the King? And does my honourable friend really believe that if we left off the trade the French wouldn't immediately step into our place and reap the rewards?

In the discussion afterwards, I draw parallels to current debates on child labour in the third world. If one is only concerned about consequences, it is easy to make a case for allowing, or encouraging, it.

'Empathy for the poor and powerless': Can it have a place in a rigorous economic framework?

Many human goals, in both education and life, such as influencing, engaging, motivating, equipping, challenging, supporting, encouraging and inspiring others, involve empathy and emotion. These are normally viewed with scepticism in academia, not without reason. Empathy can so easily sour into sentimentality, and emotion can usurp careful analysis. But harnessed effectively, it can be a powerful aid to understanding, living and acting.

Educationally, emotion is a very powerful thing for the teacher. The integration of emotion and intellect is a good path to reason. We have tended to emphasise the intellect – and there is value in distancing ourselves from some 'gut reactions'. But educationalists who can encourage enough emotion to get engagement from a class without them 'losing their heads' have a powerful tool at their disposal.

An example of exploring empathy with students is an International Economics assignment I set, with two options. For both options, students had to live as cheaply as they could for one week, and record their experiences. Then they chose to either do the World Vision 40 hour

famine (though they didn't have to raise money), or to design a best-response plan if someone asks them for money on the street. In both cases, they had to connect everyday experience to theory. The 'famine' students wrote an essay on world poverty, and the 'street people' students wrote an essay on one aspect of international aid: debt forgiveness.

I chose these tasks because I wanted the students to explore empathy with poor people. The advantage of 'outsourcing' the form of deprivation – that is, doing a recognised activity rather than running a famine myself – is that World Vision has famine guidelines based on many years of experience. For those unable to go without food, the second activity about street people still requires them to think about something 'close to home'. While I couldn't ask them to spend a night on the street or begging for money, I did invite a homeless-youth welfare officer to talk with the students.

Many students in my classes who chose to do the 40 hour famine believe that it helped them to empathise with *and therefore understand* the poor and marginalised in the world. Of those, some went on to connect their experience to the likely success of various positive initiatives, and to formal economic theory. Other students felt their famine experience was sufficiently different to those in the third world that it did not change their attitude to the poor. But I believe my goals were achieved in these cases too – they would have had to think carefully about the experience of poverty to make the judgment that it could not be compared.

Here are some of my students' reflections on how their experiences connect to economic theory: *First*, 'I think the experience helped complement my textbook understanding of poverty by exposing me to the practical hardships of living in deprivation.' *Second*, 'Half the stuff we see for sale has a completely marginal effect on our lives yet GDP growth is often defined by it (Look at how share markets react to retail sales figures). I feel this is one of the pitfalls of Western society.' *Third*, 'I was, however, able to gain insight into the concept of poverty going beyond merely material issues, with the combination of the hunger strike and limited budget impacting severely on my capabilities [reference to Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's work] including productivity to learn and leading to in many cases, social exclusion due to my inability to partake in usual activities with friends.' *Fourth*, '[Our substantial

material well-being can be measured]... in terms of a stock of assets such as a house, clothes and technology, and considerable flows of income.’ And *fifth*, ‘Having a cap on total expenditure created an environment based on opportunity cost. Often, in choosing one alternative, another had to be forgone – the law of opportunity cost. The manner in which we approached the experiment and the reactions of those involved [a group assignment] indicate that certain economic principles may be incorporated in the issue of global poverty and starvation. The economic principle of unlimited wants and scarcity of resources was brought up in the experiment as was the law of opportunity cost.’

This exercise harnesses emotion and helps students to imagine their lives divested of the privileges we take for granted in a twenty-first century developed economy. In doing so, they build an inductive bridge towards seeing the economic milieu of marginalised people in context, rather than in abstract. They journal their experiences and connect them to abstract theory. When students can identify with poor people through a teacher-guided experience they are motivated to learn about poverty, and this suggests policies for its alleviation, in a qualitatively different manner.

What is a key to making Economics engaging and equipping?

A key is to demonstrate that there is a human dimension to Economics, and by relating to students’ experiences. Students often find it hard to identify with a discussion on interest rates, for example. But by applying it to their own or their families’ experiences, its relevance can become apparent. For instance, there might be a parent who owns a business who is able to flesh out some economic issue like interest rates. Or there might be a discussion on the ever-popular issue of pollution.

Sometimes high-profile events outside their experience, such as the sinking of a people-smuggling ship, can engage them. I asked my students to tell me the costs and benefits of border controls, and I wrote these up on the board. Then, when they had finished, I commented to them that they had included the costs of running naval operations, but not the human costs of lost lives from human trafficking. I asked a student to read the following: ‘SIEV IX (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel IX) went down with alarming speed. The hull split and the women

and children below deck were sucked under. Few had life jackets but even they stood little chance. Those who jumped into the sea were surrounded by fuel flooding from the boat which choked them if they opened their mouths. Sundous found herself in the sea with her three little girls. But in the chaos, her beautiful daughters, Emaan, Zahra and Fatima, disappeared under the water. [The excerpt goes on to describe another family's unsuccessful fight for survival]. When the student had finished, the whole mood of the room had changed, as a colleague of mine (who was present as part of a peer review project) noted. That mother could have been me! The human costs had found a space alongside the economic ones, forging a more human economics, a very different cost/benefit economic model that takes in international and human cost factors.

What sort of learner are you seeking to produce in Economics?

I would like them to be curious, to understand things from others' points of view. If the students are open to Christian ideas, I'd like them to get the idea that in all fields of knowledge, Jesus is Lord of their thinking. Wherever the students are coming from, I'd like them to understand that people are not all the same, that people will think and should be respected in spite of thinking differently.

How do I want Christian students to understand Economics?

In a sinful world, we want to discourage students (Christian or otherwise) from looking at things through rose-coloured glasses – life and society are overflowing with examples of the kind of selfishness and financial preoccupation that economic models assume. So, if Christian values – *agape* love or stewardship concerns for the environment – are *not* prevalent in a society, then Christians need to think in terms of 'making virtue pay' in order to pursue good outcomes in society – being as 'shrewd as snakes but as innocent as doves' (Matthew 10:16).

But neither do educators want to 'miss' important examples of common grace. The enormous sacrifices that occur in crises, including war and natural disasters, should make us wary of economic models where people only care about themselves and their families. Common grace shifts in motivation – individual or societal – matter in the real

world, even if they are slow-moving or infrequent. Opportunities for altruistic behaviour exist from time to time, and Christians should be quick to see the good motivations of others. But even more fundamentally, the Christian community is – or ought to be – infused with the hope of the gospel. This hope includes the possibility of different motives, and positive changes in society. The offering of this hope to others deserves its proper place as a complement to Christian education that deals with any common ground arising from common grace.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Arthur F Holmes, *All Truth is God's Truth*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1977.
- 2 Holmes, *ibid.*