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NON-AGENDA

With the view of causing an increase to take place in the mass of national wealth, or with a view to increase of the means either of subsistence or enjoyment, without some special reason, the general rule is, that nothing ought to be done or attempted by government. The motto, or watchword of government, on these occasions, ought to be — Be quiet...Whatever measures, therefore, cannot be justified as exceptions to that rule, may be considered as *non-agenda* on the part of government.

—*Jeremy Bentham* (c.1801)

Should We Listen to the Churches When They Speak on Economic Issues?

Anthony Waterman

Economists are often derided for having two hands. I am sorry to say that I need sixteen hands in order to answer the question I have been given today. Even when I admit that some can be doubled up, I still have eight. I have no wish to bore you with taxonomy. But I must begin with a little rough-and-ready analysis.

When Christian churches 'speak' on economic issues, their utterance may be either 'strong' or 'weak'. I mean by 'strong' an imperative statement by chief pastors or other authorized spokesmen, supposed to be based upon the teaching authority of the church, and addressed to all in a position to do something about it. I mean by 'weak' simply the expression of opinion by authorised spokesmen, or the offer of advice, or a call to 'dialogue'. Even a 'weak' statement, to be attended to at all, must rest upon authority of some kind. But not the high and mighty *magisterium* invoked by the Bishops of Rome in promulgating the 'social encyclicals'. Rather the merely human authority possessed by any who speak on behalf of some significant interest group, profession or non-government organization in modern society.

The putative authority possessed by the Christian churches — whether strong or weak — may be used either to instruct or exhort the world at large, and especially those with power in their respective societies; or to instruct only such of the faithful as acknowledge and defer to that authority. We see an example of the former in the words used by Pope Pius XI to describe the achievement of his great

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predecessor forty years before in *Rerum Novarum*: ' … the eyes of all, as often in the past, turned towards the Chair of Peter, that sacred repository of all truth … whereupon the venerable Pontiff taught mankind new methods of dealing with social problems' (Pius XI, 1931:3). We are to suppose that the Catholic Church — or at any rate the Church of Rome as proxy — has privileged access to certain important truths, and a duty to mediate these to all. In the latter case, prelates of the Roman church and of other hierarchical churches may use the teaching authority more narrowly and circumspectly, in a merely pastoral way, to instruct or advise the laity in its task of being the Church in the world.

The teaching authority of the Church may be either 'Christian' or 'ecumenical'. By the former, I mean based upon the unique revelation of God in Christ, of which the Church claims to be sole witness. By the latter, I mean based upon that knowledge of right conduct that Christians share, not only with other religious believers, but also with all 'men of goodwill'. According to the so-called 'Natural Law' tradition of ethics, all humans are endowed with reason and conscience, and by means of these alone can generally know what they ought, and what they ought not, to do. Both in the Church of Rome and in many traditional protestant churches, a well-developed understanding of Natural Law has been used to supplement strictly Christian moral teaching. [But in case of conflict, the latter trumps Natural Law. For example, the influential eighteenth-century Anglican divine, William Paley, concluded from Natural Law that it is wrong for humans to kill and eat other animals. But he excused the practice because Holy Scripture teaches us that God made all other creatures for our use.]

When churches use the teaching authority — whether Christian or ecumenical, whether in a 'strong' or in a 'weak' sense — to speak on economic issues, they may do so either to propose remedies for particular causes of discontent, or to lay down general principles of economic order. In the latter case, some specific problem or malfunction may be represented as a violation of those general principles. There is an obvious difference, I believe, between calling for the average national unemployment rate to be reduced from more than seven per cent to less than 4 per cent (which is what the Roman Catholic bishops of America proposed in their famous Pastoral Letter on the U.S. Economy of the mid-1980s), and declaring that persistently high unemployment undermines human dignity and freedom and therefore ought to be remedied so far as may be possible.

Four dichotomies produce sixteen logical possibilities, but some we may group and others ignore. For the most part, in this lecture, I shall be unconcerned with weak statements of Christian social doctrine: not because I think they are unimportant — far from it — but because they are relatively uncontroversial. And among the varieties of strong statement I shall suggest that we focus our attention less on the purely pastoral cases (those in which chief pastors instruct or advise their own faithful) and more on the more contentious declarations addressed to all and sundry.

Before doing so however, we must attend to two other preliminaries. In the first place, the significance of any Christian utterance on economic issues is crucially affected by whether it takes place in a 'free' or an 'un-free' society. By a

'free' society I mean one in which all, or most, are at liberty to express their opinions on public matters, in public, without fear of molestation or reprisal. We sometimes associate this with 'democracy' but that is a mistake. The kind of society I have in mind is that sought by eighteenth-century Whigs on both sides of the Atlantic; one in which a long-established framework of law and custom protects us from tyranny of the executive on the one hand, and from tyranny of the mob on the other. As we have seen repeatedly all over the world in the past century, democracy all too often destroys that framework and delivers us, bound and gagged, into the hands of one or both of these tyrants. In countries like Australia, Canada, Britain and the United States we are singularly fortunate in having preserved the ancient 'liberties of Englishmen' through more than two hundred years of revolution and consequent despotism. But about 80 per cent of the world's population now lives under dictatorship. I think you will agree that it makes a large difference to what happens when the churches 'speak on economic issues' whether they 'speak' in highly-favoured countries like Australia on the one hand, or in some more typical state such as Cuba, Iraq, Bangladesh, Myanmar or Venezuela on the other.

In free countries, the other important consideration is whether society may better be regarded as 'Christian' or as 'secular'. By a Christian society I mean one in which the constitution of law and governance has been deliberately formed by Christian belief, and in which most of its members — whether Christian or not — accept the norms of Christianity in public affairs. This was certainly the case in Canada until fairly recently. When the Attorney General introduced the Lord's Day bill of 1906 in the Canadian House of Commons he declared that 'Christianity is part of the law of the British Empire': not a single voice was raised to question him. Though that doctrine was struck down by the Imperial Privy Council in 1925, the idea persisted until the 1960s that Canada was and ought to be 'Christian'. In Britain to this day the national churches are 'by law established', the sovereign is crowned in a Christian ritual which goes back to the eighth century, and bishops sit in the House of Lords. Yet millions of Britons, Australians and Canadians are no longer Christian, and many never have been. And some Christians in these countries believe that their societies ought now to be 'secular'. By a 'secular' society I mean one in which there is no public recognition of any set of religious beliefs, in which the state is strictly neutral with respect to religious matters, and in which all are free to profess any religion that doesn't frighten the horses. It is obvious that in reality a continuum exists from a perfectly secular society at one extreme, to a perfectly 'sacral' society at the other, with countries like Canada and Australia still somewhere in the middle, but getting more secular as immigration from non-Christian countries compels them to be pluralistic. We can make the concepts operational by defining a degree of secularity as the proportion of expected real national income, which a society refuses to sacrifice for the sake of religious principle. In a perfectly secular society, the degree of secularity is unity; in a perfectly sacral society — whether of Christian, Muslim or any other religion — it is zero. The United States is an

obvious example of a highly secular society; Iran and Poland perhaps, of relatively sacral societies.

We are now in a position to take a closer look at some of these possibilities. I shall begin with the most controversial of all cases: a 'strong' utterance, addressed to all, based on a uniquely Christian teaching authority, and concerned with a specific economic issue or with a specific set of such issues. Let us assume that the utterance is delivered in a free society, formerly Christian but now appreciably secular.

Strong Utterance

As an example of a strong utterance consider a Canadian document, *Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis*, (EREC, 1983) issued by the Episcopal Commission for Social Affairs of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The Church of Rome has never hesitated to claim a privileged epistemological status for its social doctrine. In his famous encyclical of 1891 that inaugurated the tradition of 'social encyclicals', Pope Leo XIII addressed the problem of working-class poverty 'with confidence, and in the exercise of the rights which manifestly appertain unto Us, for no practical solution of this problem will be found apart from the intervention of Religion and the Church' (Carlen, 1981-II:115:16). The Canadian bishops based their *Reflections* on 'two fundamental Gospel principles': the '*preferential option for the poor'* and the '*priority of labour principle*' neither of which can be known — if at all — save on the authority of the church and its sacred scriptures. They proceeded from these principles to five policy recommendations, any of which would illustrate my argument. Consider the first: 'Unemployment rather than inflation, should be recognized as the number one problem to be tackled in overcoming the present crisis' (EREC, 1983:2).

It is not clear which of the two Gospel principles lies behind this. Suppose it be the first. Define *the preferential option for the poor* to mean that marginal changes in the economic welfare of a class should be valued more highly the lower the relative income of its members. Assume:

(a) the poor are hurt by unemployment more than by inflation and that this is not so — or if so to a lesser extent — of the rich;
(b) unemployment and inflation are causally independent; or if not, are related in such a way that a reduction in the one will not be accompanied by so great an increase in the other that the poor will be worse off on balance;
(c) it lies within the power of those to whom the bishops address their recommendations to effect significant, and more than transitory, changes in the national rates of unemployment and inflation.

Then the first recommendation follows.

Now suppose instead that the recommendations were based on the second Gospel principle. Define *the priority of labour principle* to mean that employment

is to be maximized without regard either to private profit or the total production of goods and services, even when the effect of an increase in employment upon either or both is negative. Assume:

(d) individuals will be willing to work for any real wage, no matter how small; or, the depressing effect upon real wages of increasing labour-intensity can be offset by the right kind of technical progress;
(e) it lies within the power of those to whom the bishops addressed their recommendations to maintain or increase employment in face of falling profits in the private sector;
(f) any adverse side-effects of the use of that power (say from nationalization, autarky, rationing and the direction of labour) will be more than compensated by the benefits of maximizing employment.

Then once again, the first recommendation follows.

Now many, especially those on the political Left, might be willing to accept some or all of these assumptions. What is at issue however is not their truth or falsehood but rather the method by which such truth or falsehood could be discovered. The six assumptions are judgments about the facts of the case: the nature of the Canadian economy in the early 1980s and the preferences of the Canadian public. Even if the two Gospel principles, as I have explicated them, were valid inferences from the (putatively) infallible truths of Christianity — and some Christians might find this problematic — the same could hardly be said of the assumptions. It is one thing for the churches to claim superior insight into what *ought* to be: quite another to pretend to special knowledge of what actually *is*.

It might be objected at this point that I have distorted or caricatured the two Gospel principles in trying to make them intelligible. Perhaps I have. But the point is first, that they do have to be made intelligible in some way, so as to serve as normative principles in designing public policy; secondly, that when that has been done further knowledge, of a positive kind, is required to proceed from the principles to the policy measures.

Christians have sometimes claimed that because all knowledge is of God, scientific knowledge, no less than theological knowledge, is the peculiar property of the church. Christian economists are occasionally to be found, especially of the Neo-Calvinist tradition, who believe that a 'Christian' or 'Biblical' economics might be constructed that would differ in its analytical techniques and empirical findings from any 'secular' variety. But as with all dreams of an 'alternative' or 'heterodox' economics, this would seem to be futile. For if such a 'Christian' economics were ever to appear, and if it out-performed 'secular' economics in predictive and explanatory power, the whole profession would jump on the bandwagon, we should all make use of the new behavioural assumptions, and the redundant adjective 'Christian' would disappear.

At least since *Quadragesimo Anno*, the Church of Rome — and many other Christian bodies — have acknowledged that the church may not use her authority

'in matters of technique for which she is neither suitably equipped nor endowed by office' but only in 'things that are connected with the moral law'; for 'economics and moral science employ each its own principles in its own sphere' (Carlen, 1981, III, 209:41-42). But if scientific knowledge of economic processes is indeed autonomous with respect to religious belief, the bishops are wholly in the hands of the experts when it comes to implementing their Gospel principles. This is where the difficulty arises. For scientific knowledge (unlike theological knowledge let us suppose) is of its nature tentative, provisional, fallible and corrigible. There is never complete agreement in any branch of science and the difficulty is acute in economics. As Milton Friedman (1970:234) has justly observed, 'the basic differences among economists are empirical, not theoretical'. We simply cannot measure accurately enough to be quite sure that any of those six empirical assumptions are tenable. By asserting that 'unemployment rather than inflation be recognized as the number one problem to be tackled' the bishops implicitly took sides with some economists against others.

Does that matter? I think it does. In the first place, the bishops risk making themselves and their church look foolish or irrelevant if it turns out that they used their sacred office to recommend disastrous economic policies. Far more serious than this, however, is an objection raised by a distinguished Anglican authority, Archbishop William Temple in his famous book on *Christianity and Social Order* (Temple 1942).

Temple was keenly aware of the necessity of sound economic analysis in the construction of Christian social teaching, and he submitted the draft of his book to R. H. Tawney and Maynard Keynes before publication. Keynes went out of his way to reassure Temple as to the 'right of the Church to interfere in what is essentially a branch of ethics' (Keynes, 1941). Yet Temple (1942:24) himself insisted that 'it is of crucial importance that the Church acting corporately should not commit itself to any particular policy'. In part, of course, this is for reasons I have already indicated: 'a Christian has no more reliable judgment than an atheist' with respect to 'the actual relations of cause and effect in the political and economic world', and since almost every policy turns out to be less successful than expected 'the Church must not be involved in its failure' (*ibid*). Far more important than these, however, is the need to preserve justice and charity within the community of faith: 'for even though a large majority of Christians hold a particular view, the dissentient minority may well be equally loyal to Christ and equally entitled to be recognized as loyal members of his Church' (*ibid*). For the church to use its *magisterium* in support of a specific policy is to risk implicit excommunication of the faithful who dissent on scientific grounds.

I conclude from this that when the churches speak on economic issues in such a way as to invoke their teaching authority in support of specific remedies for specific problems, not only should we not 'listen' to them: so far as it may be consistent with charity and good manners, those of us who are Christian should advise our chief pastors that they ought never to use their authority in this way.

The argument applies with equal force to strong utterances on specific issues, addressed to all and based on *Natural Law*. It also applies, I think, to strong

utterances on specific issues of either kind addressed *only to the faithful*, though in this case much depends upon just how 'Christian' the society in which the churches 'speak'. In a perfectly sacral, Christian society, in which church and state are one and in which all acknowledge the teaching office of the hierarchy, there is no difference between a merely pastoral communication and one addressed to all. But in a free and highly secular society in which Christians are thin on the ground, the psychological effect of a strong utterance with respect to specific issues may be different. Faithful clerics and their congregations who feel part of an embattled minority may feel more pressure to go along with official statements even when privately they may disagree. In general, therefore, it is my opinion that strong utterances that deal with specific issues are a misuse of the teaching authority.

Strong Utterances Asserting General Principles

What about strong utterances that assert only *general principles*? This is more complicated, and like all good economists we must answer 'yes and no'.

When the World Council of Churches (2000) calls for 'new financial institutions and systems that include the concerns and participation of developing countries in determining the direction of international financial institutions and trade regimes', and asserts 'the need for binding codes of conducts (*sic*) for transnational corporations, and financial and investment institutions, to ensure they are held accountable and responsible for the social and ecological consequences of their operations', we can recognize this as a statement of general principles by an authoritative Christian body, even though the temptation is strong to dismiss it as empty verbiage.

However, if we try seriously to make sense of it we run into difficulty. Just what should we recognize as 'developing countries'; how can each of these be supposed to speak with a single voice; what political structure should we need in order to permit the 'concerns and participation' of these anthropomorphic abstractions to 'determine' the 'direction of international financial institutions and trade regimes'; how can any individual or corporate body know enough about 'the social and ecological consequences of their operations' to be held 'accountable and responsible for them'? Suppose we could find useful answers to each of these questions. We should then encounter what I believe are two fundamental objections to much Christian — and also indeed non-Christian — social theory since the late nineteenth century. I shall label these respectively as 'panopticism' (a vile word that I have coined with obvious allusion to Benthamite horrors) and 'organicism', a term of art in the history of political thought. Admirably lucid illustrations of each are found in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* of Pope John-Paul II (1991).

Globalisation of the economy, said the Pope (or his drafting committee), 'ought to be accompanied by effective international agencies that will oversee and direct the economy to the common good' (Pope John-Paul II, 1991:para 58). This is *panopticism*: the 'Fatal Conceit' that some individual, or group of (specially

trained, talented) individuals, can see all that there is to see of social reality — or at any rate enough of what there is to be seen — and so can 'plan' or otherwise impose 'reason' on the expected pattern of events.

Quite apart from the obvious epistemological objections first advanced by Butler and Hume, and reiterated in our own time by Hayek, I think we must reject panopticism on Christian theological grounds. Human reason is weak and limited; even before the Fall it was counted a sin for Man to put himself on an equal footing with God; and we need not accept Calvin's doctrine of post-lapsarian total depravity to agree with him that to assume a God's-eye view of the human condition is inexcusable arrogance. Earlier in the encyclical we read that there must be a 'coherent vision of the common good'; and that 'the state has the duty of watching over the common good and of ensuring that every sector of social life, not excluding the economic one, contributes to achieving that good. . .' (Pope John-Paul II, 1991:paras 47 and 11). We have more panopticism here, but also a good example of *organicism*: a view of human society as a single body, the viability of which depends upon a single control centre, or 'head', ruling all subordinate 'members' in the collective interest.

Such a view of human society may have had some use in a tribal culture, such as we read of in the Old Testament, in which women, children and slaves were politically invisible and the interest of each free, adult male subsumed under that of his patriarch or chief. It may even have had some more than merely ideological use in seventeenth-century France, in which Louis XIV could declare, *'l'état c'est moi'*. But it is quite out of place, I suggest, in the modern industrialized world in which it is no longer possible to envisage society as a single 'Body Politick' benignly governed in all things by a paternal sovereign prince. [And I need hardly remind an audience of economists that such a conception is radically incompatible with the way we ourselves view society: as a contingent set of relations among vast numbers of individuals, seeking their own goals with little regard if any to those of others, guided by market signals and impersonal rules, and largely ignorant of the 'spontaneous order' that emerges as the unintended consequence of their private acts.] Now that the boundaries that once defined usefully recognizable human societies — the family, the clan, the manor, the parish, the city, the kingdom — are dissolving before our eyes, there can be no analytical work for organicism at any level of aggregation.

I therefore conclude that when the churches speak on economic issues by the proclamation of general principles, we should not listen if those principles are based — as they all too often are in both protestant and papal doctrine — upon panoptic and organicist assumptions. But fortunately there is more to be said.

It is not the business of the church, William Temple maintained, to call for grand, over-arching schemes for the reconstruction of society.

'There is no such thing as a Christian social idea, to which we should conform our actual society as closely as possible. We may notice, incidentally, about any such ideals from Plato's *Republic* onwards, that no one really wants to live in the ideal state as depicted by anyone else' (Temple 1942:51-2).

The kind of 'general principles' the church must lay down, Temple believed, are of a more humdrum kind. The Church might say, for example, 'No; I cannot tell you what is the remedy; but I can tell you that a society of which unemployment . . . is a chronic feature is a diseased society, and that if you are not doing all you can to find and administer a remedy, you are guilty before God' (p. 48). In a Christian society such as Britain still was in 1942, an Archbishop of Canterbury can say that to a Prime Minister, even an unbelieving Prime Minister, and be listened to with deference and respect.

But what about Australia or Canada (let alone the USA) in the twenty-first century? Here too, I think, there is scope for the churches, speaking through their authorized chief pastors or governing bodies, to call attention to general principles with respect to economic issues. This is because even in a completely secular society most men and women of conscience will acknowledge certain ethical norms to which they believe that society ought to conform. Whether these come from a half-remembered Christianity or from Natural Law or from both, we need not inquire. No society can survive indefinitely without such norms, hence if the churches remind us of the lip-service we pay to them, and rebuke us for ignoring them in practice, they perform a valuable service. At risk of exaggerating their social importance we can liken them to the Old Testament prophets, denouncing oppression and other injustice, and calling Israel to repentance for neglect of its covenant with Jahveh.

What is virtue in a free society may be glorious heroism in an un-free one. There are all too many countries today in which to proclaim principles of justice and equity in economic relations is to invite the fate of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, gunned down by a hired assassin whilst celebrating mass in a hospital chapel. Perhaps in cases like this, what is actually said is less important than the fact that anything is said at all. I for one would excuse almost any economic nonsense on the lips of a Christian martyr for freedom and justice.

'Weak' Utterances

Much of the churches' speaking on economic issues in our more fortunate parts of the world has been of the 'weak' kind over the past decade or two. Even the Church of Rome has been less assertive than it used to be. Bodies such as the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council produce 'position papers' on economic issues that reassert traditional papal doctrine but at one remove from the teaching authority of the hierarchy. The World Council of Churches (1993) has issued 'study documents' such as *Christian Faith and the World Economy Today,* which contain many strong claims but which, it must be assumed, are intended to be discussed rather than obeyed.

The National Council of Churches in Australia makes various submissions to government on economic and social questions, often in the form of testimony to a parliamentary committee. Its 'Social Justice Network' advises the Council on economic policy questions; and though many eyebrows in this audience would be raised by some of the analysis in its *Covenant for Employment* of September 1999,

the document appeared as a position paper, not as an official statement of doctrine. Sometimes the participation of the churches in public policy is solicited by government. During the mid-1970s, when the Government of Canada was seriously considering a Guaranteed Annual Income policy, it explicitly invited churches and other non-government organizations to express an opinion on the matter. I was chairman of a national committee charged with preparing the response of the Anglican Church of Canada.

What does it mean, in cases like this, to think of the churches 'speaking' on 'economic issues'; in what sense may we 'listen'; and how valuable is it all anyway? In my opinion, it is through various 'weak' utterances, rather than through 'strong', confrontational statements of an archaic and impractical 'social teaching', that the churches can make their most important contributions to economic policy discussion in free countries, whether Christian or secular.

An important feature of such 'weak' utterances of course, is that they are often made by individuals who are not constrained (in that particular instance) by their obligation to speak officially in the name of Christ and all the faithful. In all such cases, no doubt, there is a sense in which the churches are just one more element in an heterogeneous set of interest and advocacy groups, private educational foundations and charitable organizations: like the Chamber of Commerce, Greenpeace and the Australian Council for Overseas Aid. But in three respects, I believe, those speaking as members of Christian churches may have a better claim to be listened to. They never (well, hardly ever) try to get advantages for their particular organization or its members at the expenses of others. Unlike Greenpeace say, or some political parties, they are not united by any agreement about a proper set of remedies for various social disorders. And unlike all other organizations that claim to speak on behalf of others, they *are* united by a vision of the human condition that treats all merely human diagnoses with a radical scepticism born of faith in the transcendent. This last is crucial.

Consider a public lecture on globalisation recently delivered to the Christian Association of Business Executives by Rowan Williams, the present Archbishop of Canterbury. The Archbishop is Primate of All England and fully authorized to speak for the Church both in parliament and beyond. But on an occasion like this he speaks simply as a godly and learned pastor, not laying down the law but venturing an opinion, with great modesty, as 'a moderately literate follower of the moral debates of our day around the theme of a global market'.

It soon becomes apparent that the Archbishop has a more powerful analytical mind, and a better grasp of economic reality, than any of his predecessors on the throne of St Augustine since John Bird Sumner. He notes at the outset that the effects of capital mobility upon its recipients are not fully reversible. What we now call 'hysteresis' or 'path-dependency' means that a loss of investment capital to some more profitable part of the world 'doesn't simply leave an economy where it was before. Earlier forms of economic activity may have become unsustainable; demographic patterns will have altered' (Williams 2001:2). We are already at the intellectual level of David Hume's essay 'Of Money'. Much of what follows is an implicit critique of what we usually call 'comparative statics'.

To be sure, whenever the world changes free markets will produce a new equilibrium that is the best we can hope for in all the circumstances, and which may well be superior to our starting point. But how long does it take to get to that equilibrium? What happens to the institutional framework of social arrangements as new patterns of production and employment emerge? What lasting social costs may result from the transition and who has to bear those costs?

Economic theory is not very good at answering questions like that (though some progress has lately been made in relating institutional development to transactions costs). Nor is it at all good at analysing the way in which the operation of the market itself may undermine those moral qualities in individuals that *homo economicus* abstracts from: what Adam Smith called 'justice', and which also includes the ability both to trust and to be trustworthy, without which market society, and indeed any society whatsoever, must fall apart.

Perceiving all this with a clarity that sometimes eludes many of our professional colleagues, the Archbishop — who wants to speak as a Christian moralist — takes aim at the mythology in which so much economic discourse is embedded. He quotes Sergii Bulgakov, writing in Russia on the eve of the Bolshevik revolution: 'In classical liberal economics — including for these purposes, Marxism — economic instinct or egoism is laid down as the foundation of life itself' (Williams 2001:7). By treating this scientifically useful abstraction as though it had objective existence we deceive both ourselves and others. 'If religious understanding is significantly about declaring where mythology has replaced faith by ascribing life to things that have no life, in the scriptural phrase' says Rowan Williams, 'some demythologising of the market is a sensible religious task' (p. 9).

What the churches have to say to us 'when they speak on economic issues', in other words, is far more important, far more truly radical, than any mere advocacy however well-meaning, however well-informed. It is simply that *there are really no such things as 'economic issues' at all*.

Though for purposes of preliminary analysis and explanation we economists quite properly create an imaginary world of Rational Economic Men and explore its properties, we must never forget — and we must never allow those who pay for our services to forget — that the real world is populated by living, breathing, loving, suffering, and dying men and women, not to mention their children. There is no realm of the purely 'economic' that we can cut off from the rest of human existence and operate upon.

It is in this kind of 'speaking', I suggest, authoritative but not authoritarian, that the churches have a unique contribution to make to the discussion of public policy in a free society. If the churches 'speak' to us in that way, we should not only 'listen': we should also learn.

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