

Political-Economic Activity to the Honour of God: the Foundation

by Dr. John Boersema.

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reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder.

Opinions among Christians about politics and economics vary strongly. But what is striking though is that most Christians appear to hold the view that these matters belong strictly to the private sphere - unrelated to one's Christian confession. But the Christian faith is not a private affair. The Bible, besides showing the way of salvation, provides us with principles which must govern the whole of life, including the way we think about politics and the economy. Dr. John Boersema, Professor of Business and Economics at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario, shows clearly that the Biblical worldview offers a sound *approach* to economics and politics. In our fallen world, there is no utopian Christian alternative economic system. Christians should search for "specific solutions to specific problems which best move us towards biblical goals."

Boersema's point of departure for Christian economic thought is the cultural mandate and the principle of stewardship. As God's image bearers and stewards we are called to develop the world and enable man to honor God. Other Biblical principles are the application of the Ten Commandments. For example, the first one forbids us to put our ultimate confidence in wealth, profits or growth in the GDP. And Boersema comments that it should make Christians cautious about unquestioningly accepting the secular economic goal of economic growth. The principle of neighbor love is crucial to our economic thinking. Concern must be shown for the poor, the marginalized, and the scourge of unemployment. Another important principle is justice. Distributive justice does not require an equal distribution of good and income. Boersema stresses equality of opportunity and personal responsibility for one's actions. Therefore, a major Christian political economic goal is to help the weak and, where possible, provide

opportunities for people to help themselves. Boersema prefers the free market. He argues for a limited role for the government. Individual responsibility should have priority. He notes that in Canada's current unemployment problem "governments - through high taxation (particularly payroll taxes), income support with inadequate incentives, high minimum wages, and costly regulation-may themselves have contributed to the problem."

Boersema's research for his cautiously written, carefully researched, and tightly argued book is based on his study of the economic policies of the GPV or Gereformeerd Politiek Verbond, one of Holland's small confessional Christian political parties. (Recently, this party, primarily composed of members of the [Liberated] Reformed Churches, has formally united with the RPF- the Reformatorische Politieke Federatie- under the name of Christen Unie - [Christian Union].) Boersema notes that although the GPV economic model has many worthwhile ideas we may take to heart, it seems unlikely that it can provide a ready blueprint for Christian inspired structural changes in other countries.

Although the book can be used as an educational resource for Christian college and university students, it is written for a general audience. Boersema has the rare talent to make "political-economic activity" understandable for the "layman." He forces his readers to think about this theme in a way that extends beyond efficiency and other purely practical matters. He lets the light of eternity shine upon a subject that even Christians have secularized. Highly recommended!