

Review article – Susan Jones

Theology and “Real World” Business Economics

Christianity and the New Spirit of Capitalism

By Kathryn Tanner

Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 2019. 219 pp. Hardcover £25.00. ISBN 978-0-300-21903-6.

Aquinas and the Market

By Mary L. Hirschfeld

Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2018. 217pp. Hardcover £28.76. ISBN 978-0-67-498404.

Is academic theology relevant to Christians who work in business or commerce? In this article, I will argue that it is highly relevant with reference to two books, published in recent months, which consider the uneasy relationship between the Christian faith and today’s capitalist economies. The authors of these books are both academic theologians in the USA: Kathryn Tanner (an Episcopalian) is a systematic theologian at Yale Divinity School, and Roman Catholic Mary Hirschfeld is an economist-turned-moral theologian at Villanova University in Pennsylvania. My own interest in the subject matter stems from my personal and professional background – as a Christian since I was an Oxford PPE student (at Jesus College, where the celebrated Christian economist, Donald Hay, was my tutor), followed by a thirteen-year City career in corporate finance, then twenty years spent in independent schools as a teacher of

economics and headteacher, and my recent (post-retirement) Masters degree in systematic and philosophical theology. This article reflects on the contribution made by the arguments advanced in these two new books to the cause of ethical

practice in business, and to human flourishing in general.

The first thing to say is that both books, while they are addressed towards abstract concepts like “capitalism” and the “economy,” are certainly relevant to those who work in business. As Richard Higginson and Kina Robertshaw have previously indicated, Christian in business can advance the kingdom of God in various ways, of which one is “embodying Christian values – expressed in the highest standards of business ethics which flow from Christian faith.”¹ Having a strong belief in the authority of Scripture, my view is that theology should be the source of those standards of business ethics, following the method outlined by Donald Hay,² which can be summarised in the following diagram:

T → DSP → R

The letter T symbolises the Christian *tradition* of interpreting Scripture

