

LONERGAN – CONSULTATION

Topic: “All You Who Labor...”: Theology, Work, and Economy
 Convener: Nicholas Olkovich, St. Mark’s College
 Moderator: Jonathan R. Heaps, St. Edward’s University
 Presenters: Neil Ormerod, Sydney College of Divinity
 Erica Siu-Mui Lee, Regis College, University of Toronto
 Joseph C. Mudd, Gonzaga University

In his paper, “The Law of the Cross in an Ecologically Unsustainable Economy,” Neil Ormerod reflects upon the unprecedented dangers of the global climate crisis. Echoing recent, sobering research regarding the state of environmental degradation, Ormerod argues that the current cycle of decline lurches the planet ever closer towards ecological disaster. In the face of this crisis, he resources Bernard Lonergan’s writings on the law of the cross, the divinely enacted redemptive path for overcoming decline and restoring humanity on the path of genuine progress. Faced with the prospect of unprecedented suffering, Ormerod seeks insight into the moment of redemptive suffering that Christians and others are called to enact in response to the present decline. Drawing on Lonergan’s notion of a scale of values, as well as Robert Doran’s expansion of this work, the paper offers possible responses at the personal, cultural, and social levels of value and the timeframes in which they operate.

In her paper, “Accounting and Business Ethics in a Digital Age: Lonergan’s Notions of Bias, Conversion, and Scale of Values as Anthropological Presuppositions,” Erica Siu-Mui Lee draws insights from her previous work as a Senior Tax Manager with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in Hong Kong. Using her professional experience and familiarity with the unique challenges facing contemporary accounting, she analyzes the ethical frameworks of global accounting bodies, as well as multinational assurance and tax services networks, including The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants and PwC. Her paper articulates how Bernard Lonergan’s notions of bias, conversion, and the scale of values can serve as anthropological presuppositions in accounting and business ethics. In particular, she suggests how Lonergan’s scale of values can positively contribute to the potential development of a normative pattern of value for business ethics in a digital age, which always requires immediate responses, sharply reducing decision-making time.

The paper, “A Sacramental Economy: General Bias, Economic Conversion, and the Sacramentality of Labor,” by Joseph C. Mudd analyzes the challenges confronting the global economy, especially resurgent nationalism, from the perspective of Bernard Lonergan’s analysis of general bias and the longer cycle of decline, as well as his economic theory of circulation analysis. Mudd then turns to the sacramental economy as an analogy for reorienting economic discourse in terms of the sacramentality of labor, gift, and gratuitousness. Building upon recent research addressing the relationship of neoliberal capitalism and idolatry of the market, Mudd proposes a notion of economic conversion that seeks to understand market economics adequately while promoting a culture of gift and gratuitousness that undergirds human living together. The paper concludes with a constructive elaboration on what Lonergan called “healing and creating in history” in terms of a “sacramental” economy.

The conversation that followed addressed a variety of themes shared by all three papers, including the notion of the common good, bias in business, and the overlap between contemporary political and financial crises. Audience members connected many of the themes in the presentations to the economic challenges currently facing institutions of higher education, especially as responses to these difficulties often overlook the concerns of contingent faculty and staff. The discussion highlighted the need for diverse representation and democratic practice in all business organizations, as well as the importance of attentiveness to those marginalized by fiscal decision-making. Attendees placed special emphasis on the importance of shared governance, greater transparency, and advertence to questions of value transcending the exchange of goods and services. The presenters highlighted Lonergan's distinction between the realms of common sense and theory, arguing that divergent frameworks for understanding the goals of economics and education have loaded discourse to prioritize profit at the expense of individual and collective growth in authenticity. The session concluded with a brief memorial for the late Robert Doran, whose work continues to enrich Lonergan scholarship and its contributions to conversations concerning economic justice, societal development, and the reversal of cultural decline.

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