

Flourishing Faith: A Baptist Primer on Work, Economics, and Civic Stewardship

Chad Brand

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Reviewed by: Micah Watson

Properly understood, the Christian worldview has never been confined to stereotypically “religious” topics. For if the biblical teachings about God’s world and human nature are true, then we would expect these truths to have profound implications for every area of human endeavor and interest, including art, science, economics, and politics. Loving the Lord God with our minds means, to some degree, thinking deeply about these topics and applying our knowledge to our actions.

Dr. Chad Brand, professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Associate Dean at Boyce College, and Southern Baptist pastor, has written *Flourishing Faith* to provide pastors, students, and other Christian laypeople with an introductory primer to Christian thinking about economics, wealth, work, and politics. Appearing in a series of books devoted to this topic, Dr. Brand writes from a Baptist or “Free Church” perspective, though many of his arguments are grounded in the broadly evangelical Christian tradition.

The strategy of the book is as straightforward as the topics of money, politics, and religion are controversial. Dr. Brand sets out to provide sound biblical and theological grounding for such crucial and pervasive aspects of our lives as work, wealth, politics, and faith. His means for this goal include scriptural exegesis of key passages, historical examples drawn from the Roman Empire and American history, and timely pop culture references. Dr. Brand begins with two chapters explaining the biblical grounding for the dignity of work, defends a proper understanding of wealth in chapter three, and outlines his approach to political theology in chapter four.

In chapter five Dr. Brand employs the lessons he has drawn by applying them to various contemporary misuses of power, primarily by the Obama administration. Chapter six returns to a more

theoretical emphasis, surveying various historical approaches to economics, and chapter seven concludes the book with an overview of Baptist approaches to economic flourishing and an endorsement of a free-market approach as being most consistent with Christian principles.

This book has many strengths. It addresses a crucial need within the Church, as it encourages Christians to take their faith seriously by applying it to the everyday concerns and subjects that comprise so much of our lives. Dr. Brand clearly cares a great deal about these issues, as well as the church, and his enthusiasm for Christian thinking is admirable and contagious. Dr. Brand also weaves in several helpful allusions and examples to buttress his primary reliance on scripture.

Moreover, Dr. Brand has gone to great pains to make this book accessible to non-specialists. Economics and politics can be intimidating subjects, and the book recognizes the intricacy of the various topics and their intertwining, but does so in a very welcoming and friendly way. Each chapter includes suggestions for further reading as well as discussion questions.

Alas, any book ambitious enough to address these topics will also garner some disagreement—hopefully constructive!—and this book is no exception. The trait of accessibility is a strength as well as a potential weakness. If one of the purposes of the book is to equip pastors and laypeople to apply the arguments and facts within, then citations pointing readers to the sources Dr. Brand relies on would further that purpose. For example, Dr. Brand contradicts some economic claims made by fellow Baptists Ron Sider and Craig Blomberg, telling us he has done the math and their claims do not work (120). But without seeing the math, or knowing where to find it, readers will be at a loss when confronted by advocates of the Sider/Blomberg approach. Important as it is to avoid lengthy footnotes and academic jargon, the inclusion of citation notes would make this book a more useful tool for its intended audience.

On a more substantive note, it is a worthy project to expound on the biblical foundations and timeless principles that underlay a

sound approach to economics and politics. Criticizing the particular peccadillos of today's politicians is also commendable. Doing both in the same slim tome, however, is particularly difficult. Given how easy it can be for some to dismiss genuine Christian thinking about politics as a mere cover for partisan politics, Dr. Brand's repeated, and reasonable, criticism of the Obama administration risks undermining the receptivity of his books early foundational chapters. To his credit, he acknowledges that both parties violate the approach he articulates and endorses, but the examples on offer are decidedly one-sided.

These reservations aside, *Flourishing Faith* is a welcome addition for the thinking Christian looking for an introduction to a biblical approach to work, wealth, economics, and politics.

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Such policies have never worked to promote human flourishing in all of history and cannot work because they deny the foundational principles of morality and economics. In the second half of the chapter, Brand turns his attention to the Christian era. He explains the problems that early Christians faced living in the Roman world. Despite the early obstacles, the religion flourished, eventually becoming intertwined with the state. At this point, the author aims to tell the story of the problems this led to for both church and state. While it is difficult to compress a thousand-plus years of history 20 Chad Brand, *Flourishing Faith: A Baptist Primer on Work, Economics, and Civic Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Christian Library, 2012), 27–44. 21 Wenham, *Genesis* 1:15, 27. 22 Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 5–10. Discussion of the "image of God" can be found in John S. Hammett, "Human Nature," in this volume. 23 Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 11–111. 24 Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 4. 25 Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis* 1:1:26, *The New Am*