

## RESURRECTION AND ECONOMICS

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### 1. Introduction to the Doctrine of Resurrection

Resurrection is the key and distinctive Christian doctrine. It is only in the light of the resurrection that a theology of creation and a theology of salvation make sense. Moral order must therefore also be informed by resurrection<sup>2</sup>, and if economics aspires to be more than merely a quasi-scientific description of a certain category of human interaction, and so to have a moral dimension, then resurrection, for a Christian, must also inform economic theory. What will be attempted in this paper, then, is a biblically based theological reflection aimed at uncovering what it is that economics might consist of in a Christian account of reality, and in particular, reality in the light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The theological doctrine of the resurrection is rooted in the historical event of Christ raised on the third day (Matt. 28:6), and proclaimed by the church (Acts 4:1-12). In the power of Christ's resurrection his people will in like manner be raised (John 5:24; Rom. 6:5; II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:4-7; Phil. 3:20-21). In a striking metaphor, Paul likens this to a seed, apparently dead, which is sown and brings forth new life (I Cor. 15:37). This metaphor illustrates the contrast between Adam, the first man, and the last Adam, Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:45-47), thus serving as a reminder that the newness of the original creation is completed<sup>3</sup> in the new creation to come (II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:5), which is signalled by Christ's resurrection. The doctrines of creation and resurrection are tightly bound together.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the 2005 Study Group Meeting of the Association of Christian Economists at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, and arises out of Andrew Henley's recent article, 'Doing Economics as a Christian', based on a paper he presented at the 2004 ACE conference in Cambridge. Henley discusses four theological principles, articulated in a general way by George Marsden as being useful tools for Christian academics in their attempts to integrate their faith and their work, in relation to economics. He then adds a fifth, being the theological principle of 'resurrection'. This paper seeks to develop Henley's suggestion. See: A. Henley, 'Doing Economics as a Christian - Constructive engagement or prophetic detachment?', *Journal of the Association of Christian Economists* 34 (2004) pp. 16-26. I am grateful to participants for their suggestions and comments.

<sup>2</sup> For the most influential text on this theme, see: O. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and moral order - An outline for evangelical ethics (Second Edition)* (Leicester: Apollos, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> The word 'completed' is unsatisfactory here, since it must convey the sense of radical newness as well as a connection with what has gone before. Ted Peters, in providing an exegesis of Paul's analogy of the seed at I Cor. 15:36-38, puts it this way: 'Paul wishes to affirm continuity and discontinuity between the present and future realities. Resurrection is not exactly creation out of nothing, but creation of something out of something else. A dead seed is sown, but what is harvested is new life.', T. Peters, *Science, Theology and Ethics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 307. To express the concept of resurrection using a single other word is, perhaps, impossible.

<sup>4</sup> For two examples of theological arguments along these lines, see: D. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: a Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3* (London: SCM Press, 1959) (especially

Although Paul's letters provide some general ethical guidance connected to life as an individual in the risen Christ (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10), it is in a fuller exegesis of the whole of scripture that light can be shed on the nature of the resurrection life under the kingship of God, understood both in communal and individual terms. In seeking specifically to engage resurrection with economics, two themes are proposed as being worthy of attention.

## 2. Scarcity and Abundance

As has often been recognised, the modern discipline of economics is closely associated with scarcity, and therefore with the complex interplay between production, consumption and distribution. It is the science of cake producing and cake dividing, where the cake is strictly limited in size. The work done by economics can, therefore, take on the appearance of being redemptive in nature, as is recognised by Jon Gunnemann: 'If scarcity is seen as *the* fundamental human problem, with all human social energies aimed at its solution, then economic activity has a salvific dimension, and economics a priestly role: produce abundance, distribute it broadly, and human discord and misery will cease.'<sup>5</sup>

For the theologian, such a reliance upon human will-power and ingenuity is troubling, since it leaves little place for divine action or providence. It remains true, however, that the theme of 'abundance' must have some place within a theological consideration of economics. This assertion is based upon the claim that true abundance is, in biblical terms, always understood as a strong sign that God's creation is as God means it to be. Abundance is, as it were, the 'proper' state of creation, being a prominent characteristic of the pre-Fall state of affairs, which represents in theological terms the concept of the earth as obedient to God's purposes. This is seen both in the fruitful multiplication set out in Genesis 1, and, more specifically, in the contrast between, on the one hand, the way in which Adam could eat freely in the garden of Eden and, on the other hand, the toil which came after the Fall. Of note also is the abundance of the restoration after the Flood, representative of divine presence, forgiveness and blessing.

It is, however, at the moment of 'exodus', that the people of God are defined and given their self-identity. The exodus from Egypt is widely, almost universally, attested to in scripture, serving as corporate historical memory (Exod. 13:17-14:31; Judg. 2:12, 6:8; II Kings 17:7, 21:15; Neh. 9:9-12; Ps. 105:37-38, 106:8-12; Ezek. 20:10), the rationale behind social legislation (Lev. 19:36, 23:42-43; Deut. 5:15, 15:12-15, 16:12, 24:17-22; Josh. 5:4-7), and as a foundational paradigm of the collective social hope (Josh. 3:7; Ps. 74:13a, 78:13; Isa. 11:11-16, 43:16-17, 51:10, 63:12; Jer. 31:31-32; Dan. 9:15-19; Hag. 2:5). Although the

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p. 14); J. Moltmann, 'The Liberating Feast', in J-B Metz & J. Moltmann, *Faith and the Future - Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995) pp. 100-108, especially p. 105, where he observes that: 'The liberating feast of the resurrection of Christ points back to the creative mystery of God.'

<sup>5</sup> J.P. Gunnemann, 'Thinking Theologically about the Economic', in eds L.S. Cahill and J.F. Children, *Christian Ethics - Problems and Prospects* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1996) p. 317.

parting of the waters is often taken as the symbolic moment of exodus, arguably of greater importance is the giving of the manna from heaven in the wilderness. Under this reading, Exodus 16:4-35 therefore must form the heart of the theological account of the organisation and cohesion of society, including the economic dimension, as seen in the way in which the Sabbath laws and, indeed, the whole Law, are written back into the narrative (Exod. 16:22-34).

The central feature of this aspect of the exodus account is a picture of true and divinely provided abundance. Sufficient bread was provided such that all could be filled (Exod. 16:8,12), and each person was to gather as much as could be eaten on that very day (Exod. 16:16). The ability to gather, or the effort put into the gathering, did not affect the resulting situation, in which 'those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage' (Exod. 16:18). There was also no possibility of hoarding any surplus, since it grew foul or melted (Exod. 16:19-21).

The exodus tradition is taken up in the New Testament (Acts 13:17; Heb. 8:9; Jude 1:5), as part of the attempt to identify the distinctive newness of God's act in Christ within the context of a continuing relationship with his people. This is done most strongly in John 6, which is based upon the manna account. The continuity is brought out in the provision of food which prevents hunger (Exod. 16:12; John 6:35) and the murmurings of the crowd (Exod. 16:2; John 6:41), while the contrast of the old with the new is seen in the resurrection and eternal life which Jesus brings (John 6:49-51). This is to happen through eucharistic participation, which incorporates the individual into Christ's risen body (John 6:56).<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the features of social living within the manna narrative are implicitly drawn into a proper understanding of eucharistic participation within the body of Christ, conceived of as a social reality. This is made clear by Paul's sharp injunctions to the church in Corinth, who are perverting the Eucharist, since 'one is hungry and another is drunk' (I Cor. 11:21). The ideal, in contrast, is one of true abundance in bread, an abundance sullied neither by need, nor excess, selfishness or greed. This characteristic of both the manna account and the Eucharist takes the form of an echo of the material abundance seen in the pre-Fall creation, and reflects the nature of the tangible reality of Jesus's bodily resurrection, as observed by Rowan Williams when he writes: 'The risen Jesus is set free from all the constraints and limits which keep men and women at a distance from God and from each other.'<sup>7</sup>

The reason why the earthly Jesus is so often associated with a material abundance, in the great catches of fish, the feeding miracles, and the account of the wedding at Cana, thus becomes clear. It is the abundance of God's presence that is being signalled, and this is reflected in much of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God. It can be argued that the true abundance of God's kingdom is the interpretative key to the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32 and parallels), the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-15), and the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27). That a tangible abundance is one of the key themes of the kingdom parables will have, here, to be asserted rather than

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<sup>6</sup> The connection between the manna in the wilderness and the Eucharist of the new covenant is seen also in I Cor. 10.

<sup>7</sup> R. Williams, *Open to Judgement - Sermons and Addresses* (London: DL&T, 1994) p. 67.

argued for at length, but the evidence is strong, and supports the view that both God's original creation and the resurrection life in God's redeemed creation are marked by abundance.

In order to see that the abundance of the kingdom of God is rather different in feel to the abundance fabricated through human industry, it is helpful to reflect upon the tangible thing that is nearly always with us in true abundance, namely the air that we breathe. The abundance of air is not a result of deliberate policy or of a state of mind willed into being. It is, if you like, a tangible state of affairs which is given, rather than produced. The fact that breathable air is there, exactly where we need it, with more than enough for anyone and everyone to have what they want, means that it cannot be bought and sold. Air cannot, therefore, be measured in monetary terms. There is no possibility of fixing a price for air and selling it to someone else; there is no market in air. The moment the abundance of air is removed, perhaps on top of Mount Everest or in smog-affected Mexico City, then a cylinder of oxygen has a price. Money re-enters the picture. Notice, however, that the air is always valuable; we need it to breathe and to live. Its abundance does not reduce its value, but it does remove any chance of attaching a price to it.

Notice also that, with the true abundance of air, there is no chance of a monopoly, no chance of what we might call economic power. Anyone and everyone can have as much air as they need. In an important sense, everyone is made tangibly equal by a situation of abundance, even if they do not actually breathe the same amount of it. Furthermore, notice that the abundance of air means that we do not need to worry about having enough. In fact, we do not normally worry about air at all; we do not even think consciously about it. Our breathing, and so our use of air, is almost always an entirely instinctive thing. It is only on those thankfully rare occasions when air is scarce, perhaps under a capsized canoe, or in a smoke-filled room, that we find ourselves thinking consciously about how we might best get by, by controlling our breathing.

It is also possible to claim that abundance abolishes thievery. The very thought of stealing air if it is truly abundant is quite obviously laughable. More interesting, perhaps, is the thought that waste and decay are also meaningless concepts when it comes to our use of air. Our relationship with the ever-abundant air that we breathe is such that we use just what we need, with no waste involved. The air around us does not decay and diminish; if it did, the abundance would be compromised. Greed, also, is abolished by abundance. If there is more than enough air for everyone to have what they need, then there is no point in being greedy to store up a surplus, nor in being greedy to boast of having more than someone else. Either activity would be ridiculous. In this observation lies also the difference between abundance and excess, which can therefore be seen to be quite distinct and different, one from the other.<sup>8</sup> More worrying is the thought that abundance might destroy generosity. How, one might ask, is it possible to be generous to someone with respect to something which is present in abundance. It is in fact a dual problem, because not only does the giver have more than enough, so no sacrifice is involved, but also the recipient has no apparent need of generosity.

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<sup>8</sup> It might be suggested that the New Testament teaching on denial, with regard to possessions, cuts against the approach taken in this paper, but the distinction between abundance and excess provides a way of dissolving this particular difficulty, as the account of Mary and Martha illustrates well (John 12:1-8 and parallels).

It can be argued, however, that the act of giving in a situation of abundance is in reality a purer form of generosity than any other, since it brings no feelings of the need for reciprocation. It is a much more spontaneous and uncalculated thing; the beauty is in the generosity of the gesture rather than the price of the thing.

A claim that the presence of the air which we breathe is loosely analogous to the abundance of the kingdom of God can be supported by reference to the biblical teaching on money, on equality, on worry, on thievery and decay, and on greed and generosity, much of which appears in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), and which resonates powerfully with the reality of abundant air. The exegetical key to this whole section of teaching is, it can be argued, the petition, 'Give us this day the bread of the morrow' (Matt. 6:11), being the bread of the kingdom of God, the heavenly manna, to be enjoyed at the final consummation of all things (Rev. 2:17).<sup>9</sup>

The thought experiment on air has one final useful twist within it. The reality is that the abundance of the air which humans breathe arises out of a symbiotic relationship between human beings and plants. Humans breathe air, and make use of the oxygen within it, replacing it with carbon dioxide. Simultaneously, plants use the carbon dioxide in air, in the process of photosynthesis, producing oxygen as a result. The whole relationship is characterised by abundance, and a symbiotic, unconscious and instinctive balance of production and consumption. The suggestion being made here is that the abundance of the kingdom of God is like the abundance of air, and that every kind of 'thing' in the resurrection life will be treated rather as we treat air in the here and now.<sup>10</sup> This symbiotic, unconscious and instinctive balance of production and consumption resonates strongly with the image presented by the garden of Eden, a place in which abundance was tied closely to the requirement to *tend* what was there, but *without toil*, and gives a picture of the resurrection life in which we will experience no struggle or guilt in our use of the abundant things around us.

### 3. Choice and Beauty

If economics is a response to scarcity, the concept of choice will be key. Indeed, much of economics is based on choice theory. At the heart of any theory of economics there should, therefore, be a robust theory of individual agency and a clear model of rational action. A theory of self-determined and reasoned human thought which leads to action, or, for short, a theory of rationality, must, in turn, connect in some way with the notions of 'choice' and 'decision'.<sup>11</sup> The possible interpretations as to the *content* of such a theory of rationality will

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<sup>9</sup> See R. Brown, 'The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer', in *New Testament Essays* (New York: Paulist Press, 1965).

<sup>10</sup> In formal terms, an 'abundant' item is like a public good, having high average unit value but zero marginal unit cost.

<sup>11</sup> There might be scope for criticising the very concept of rational choice, although it is hard to disagree with Peter Earl when he states that if decision makers act purely erratically, that is, without any reasoned thought, then the outcome is 'nihilistic in its implications for economics as a predictive discipline.'; see: P. Earl, *Lifestyle Economics* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986), p. 137.

be seen to depend, at least in part, upon the extent to which these two potentially separate notions of choice and decision overlap and are connected to one another.<sup>12</sup>

While ‘choice’ is the preferred term within economic theory, the concept of ‘decision’ is rich with theological meaning. In the face of God’s call and provision a *decision* for either faith or idolatry is expressed and revealed. Idolatry, which is sin, can be followed by a *decision* for repentance, which can only be understood with reference to God’s grace and mercy. These moments of divine providence and mercy, and the human response of faith and repentance, form the essence of salvation history, as set out in the biblical witness, which finds its culmination and fulfilment in the risen Jesus Christ, in whom is seen divine grace exemplified. This pattern is then represented in the liturgical life of the church, notably in the *decision* made at baptism, which flows into a life of Christian discipleship.

The key difference between the conventional neo-classical model of ‘choice’ and the outline of ‘decision’ just given is to do with morality. For morality to exist, it must be possible to speak of a mistake, or a wrong decision. The freedom of the will, and a genuine agency on the part of human beings, is therefore implied.<sup>13</sup> Conventional economics, using the revealed preference theory, states simply that preference is always revealed in the choices that are made. A person following a strict diet, when faced with a stick of celery and a cake, may instinctively, or after internal wrestling, choose the cake. Conventional economics must assume that this choice is in fact optimal. The framework is amoral. In contrast, a moral framework would allow for a mistake, for regret after the event, and for a resolution to try harder next time. The moral framework allows for personal freedom, but a freedom that is earthed in some sense of absolute and final good.<sup>14</sup>

The Exodus account includes the foundational decision on the part of God’s people to turn away to idolatry, as represented by the episode of the golden calf (Exod. 32:1-6).<sup>15</sup> The most striking aspect within the narrative connects to the misapplication of the gold, used

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<sup>12</sup> It is convenient to employ these two terms in a distinctive manner, so as to open up the complexities involved. An alternative would be to explore different ways of talking about ‘choice’, for an example of which see R. Williams, ‘Making moral decisions’, in ed. R. Gill, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), pp. 3-15 (see especially pp. 3-5). However, the difference between ‘choice’ and ‘decision’ is not merely semantic, the latter term suggesting something more substantial.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Davidson expresses this point as follows: ‘It is only where intention and belief are present that the concept of a mistake can be applied.’ D. Davidson, *Problems of Rationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 116.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Danner comments that ‘economic acts are both *moral and economic*. They are economic in that they are necessary means for persons to act and survive. At the same time that acts are moral or immoral insofar as they relate to dealing justly with other people and in using material things as means to their ultimate good and purpose.’ P.L. Danner, *The Economic Person - Acting and Analyzing* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> It is generally held that these six verses form a unity, and belong to the ‘basic source’ that provides the heart of this part of Exodus; see: J.I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC, 3; Dallas: Word Books, 1987), p. 418, for a summary of the different scholarly views. The episode is also attested to at Deut. 9:16, Neh. 9:18 and Acts 7:41.

previously for jewellery, and the ugliness of the need to ‘snatch off’ or ‘tear away’ these earrings.<sup>16</sup> The significant thing about the golden calf thus becomes its lack of beauty, arising out of the improper and painful gathering of the gold, and its change of use, away from objects designed to beautify, and towards an object designed to replace God. The very idea of a golden calf, a confusion of inert and living forms, contributes to the ugliness. The idolatrous decision is a decision against beauty, while the decision for God is the opposite. The *beauty* of God must therefore be stressed, and theologically this is reflected, for example, in the goodness (in the sense of beauty rather than moral rectitude) of creation, in the beauty of the triune form of God<sup>17</sup>, and in the beauty of the risen Christ’s wounds.

The two connected parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl beyond price (Matt. 13:44-46) illustrate a proper and righteous response to beauty, in contrast to the episode of the golden calf. Resurrection life under the kingship of God, as the people of God, is to be compared to something of such beauty that it is worth everything. The treasure is hidden, and then covered up, both of which details are significant. It is not that the joys of life in the kingdom are known only to those who possess that life<sup>18</sup>, but that the joys of that life are found in a beauty which is, strictly speaking, ‘useless’ and buried. The pearl is perfectly formed, and thus perfect in beauty, not merely a particularly valuable item. Any value it may have cannot be quantified. If the merchant is to part with all that he has, any possibility of further trade or negotiation over prices has gone. He has no means left for subsequent selling and buying, and no means to start again as a merchant. The decision made in the kingdom of God, in the resurrection life, is for priceless beauty, and not instrumental value.<sup>19</sup>

The very idea that something could be priceless is impossible within conventional economics, in which everything is scalable and tradable, and in which utility can be maximised. Nevertheless, goal-seeking clearly is a major part of human living. It is less clear if the economists’ insistence that this truth can be equated to a strategy of utility maximisation should be allowed to stand. In this regard, it is possible to explore the implications of replacing the quest for utility with an alternative quest for beauty.

An initial question arises as to the objectivity of beauty. There is an aspect of beauty which is only in the eye of the beholder, but it remains true that real, objective beauty can be identified. For this to be the case, beauty must find its essence in a universally pleasing

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<sup>16</sup> See Durham, *Exodus*, p. 419, for details of the use of the imperative form here, and the sense of the command that Aaron issued.

<sup>17</sup> Faced with the mystery of the Holy Trinity, it is far better solely to proclaim God’s beauty rather than construct speculative theories of sociality within God’s being. It is then the common human response to beauty that acts as the socialising influence.

<sup>18</sup> Against Donald Hagner, who asserts precisely this point; see: D.A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC, 33A; Dallas: Word Books, 1993), p. 397.

<sup>19</sup> On this point, Maureen Junker-Kenny writes: ‘Only a Christology that can express the experience of super-abundance, of a one-sided offering by God, will be able to support the increasingly ‘counter-cultural’ conviction that there are things that are priceless.’ M. Junker-Kenny, ‘Valuing the Priceless: Christian Convictions in Public Debate as a critical resource and as ‘Delaying Veto’ (J. Habermas)’, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18, 1 (2005), pp. 43-56 (p. 55).

shape, form or proportion.<sup>20</sup> This objectivity allows for morality. If there truly is beauty, described with reference ultimately to God, then there is scope for a decision either *for* or *against* that beauty. If the properly moral decision is always for God and for beauty, is this any different to the instrumental model, with beauty as the personal objective? Is not beauty the new utility? A direct substitution is not possible, for three reasons.

The first reason is that the apprehension of beauty is not only personal. The beautiful thing must always have an impact upon the wider situation. Beauty is not just for one person, nor is it 'consumed' by one person at a time. In enjoying the beautiful thing, an individual does not either require or preclude any other individual from enjoying that thing. In that sense, beauty is always received through a gracious act, an undeserved and merciful act. This is not to deny that beauty can be sought or striven for. This appears to be possible, but always within a context of the whole society or community.

The second reason is that the instrumental model of rationality fails. The requirement that objectives are pre-known cannot work with the objective of beauty. This is because beauty is discovered as part of a creative act. It is impossible to have a fixed objective which involves a thing of a particular measure of beauty. Rather, in the conception, design and execution of the creative act, beauty is revealed in a surprising and unexpected manner, a gracious and merciful manner. The economics of beauty therefore includes two elements. The first is an instrumental element, which is the desire for beauty, and the use of whatever means possible to achieve that beauty. The second is a creative element, which is seen in the unexpected revelation of beauty, and it is this aspect that undermines the adequacy of the standard model of rationality in economics.

The third reason is that the 'proportion' which lies at the heart of beauty cannot be made compatible with the constant urge to maximise. The instrumental rationality model, as applied by conventional economics, has only as its objective the increase of utility. There is no sense of 'enough', and a constant restlessness.<sup>21</sup> Beauty must, in contrast, be restful and satisfying in a complete sense. It is complete in itself every time an instance of it arises, and yields a feeling of completeness also. Contemplation of a beautiful new-born baby is not experienced as part of a restless accumulation of units of beauty, with no end. Instead, it is a complete experience.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For a biblical celebration of the absolute nature of beauty see the Song of Solomon.

<sup>21</sup> On this point, Andrew Kamarck writes: 'Conventional economics never spells out the full implications of the assumption that the desires of modern man are illimitable. What kind of society does this imply? The theory depicts people as being forever unsatisfied, driven by desires that will never be fulfilled. People are supposed to seek but not find, to achieve yet always lose.' A.M. Kamarck, *Economics as a Social Science - An Approach to Nonautistic Theory* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> This connects to the observation made by Plato, that although it is a good thing that music results in pleasure, if pleasure is made the main reason for making music both the music and the people hearing it will become corrupted, and the beauty lost. For a fuller explanation of this point, and how it was developed also by Aristotle and Aquinas, see: K.L. Flannery, 'Marriage, Mental Handicap, and Sexuality', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 17, 3 (2004), pp. 11-26 (p. 16).

#### 4. Conclusion - Role Economics

The theological doctrine of the resurrection, it has been argued here, has particular impact upon economics through the two themes of abundance and beauty. A theology of economics which takes the doctrine of the resurrection seriously must, therefore, be rooted in the economics of the abundance and beauty of the risen life in God's kingdom, where true abundance and true beauty provide the context within which order is established, and within which human beings find their fulfilment in a creative manner. This is in marked contrast to the approach taken within conventional economics, which views society as strictly aggregative, emerging as a product of the interactions of myriad individuals, and which assumes an instrumental model of rationality, under which individuals survey the available set of means, or possible actions, and optimise their behaviour by selecting the course of action that will best achieve their pre-stated aim of maximising utility.<sup>23</sup>

A proposal therefore suggests itself, under the heading 'Role Economics'.<sup>24</sup> Such a proposal would, in concrete terms, attach a certain real and prior value to the community or society itself, rather than merely seeing it as a product of a multitude of individual choices. The challenge is to envisage and describe a model of individuals in society which allows for real moral human agency, together with a deep sense of collectivity. A useful resource in this regard will be the role theories developed by sociologists, which grapple with exactly this question.<sup>25</sup> For the individual, a proper recognition must be given to the idea that life is about both finding and creating, and then taking up, one's right place (or role) within a community, through decisions made *for* beauty.

In supporting the general approach suggested by Role Economics, phenomena such as 'lifestyle advertising', 'rites of passage', and 'vocational calling' can be pointed to, none of which are easily explained by conventional economics. If, in contrast, Role Economics was better able to explain such characteristics of human living, there would be reason for hoping that its predictive powers might outperform those of the neo-classical theory in a more general sense. Role Economics can never be the economics of true abundance; no economic theory in this world can aspire to that. It does, however, let some of the light shed by the abundance and beauty of the kingdom of God fall upon this world of scarcity and pain which

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<sup>23</sup> It would, of course, be possible to base a theological approach to economics upon the doctrine of the Fall, and to appeal therefore to the Old Testament teaching on, for example, jubilee. This paper deliberately takes the alternative line of exploring the characteristics of the resurrection life in God's kingdom, and then facing the challenge of projecting 'the kingdom' back into the fallen world. If, as argued for in this paper, the manna in the wilderness account can be taken as the basis for 'resurrection economics', it is highly significant that the seizing of the promised land, which brought with it the need for various economic provisions, was associated with the *end* of the heavenly manna (Josh. 5:11-12). The economics of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah are not to be confused with the economics of the risen life in God's kingdom to come.

<sup>24</sup> I first gave this name, which as far as I am aware is original, a public airing at the Association of Christian Economists' annual conference in Cambridge, on 4th July 2003.

<sup>25</sup> See S. Raffel, 'Revisiting Role Theory: Roles and the Problem of the Self', *Sociological Research Online* 4, 2 (1999), for a recent review of this field, <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/4/2/raffel.html>.

we inhabit.

Put another way, it envisages economic theory as being true to the deep theological reality of the abundance of the kingdom of God, and the theological reality that human beings are created so as to find their fulfilment in that kingdom through their decisions for the beauty that God makes possible. It does so because it reflects better than any other general theory of economics the way in which true abundance would be experienced by human beings. To be in the *right* role - a role somehow crafted out of the interface between the individual and their society - is to experience life as analogous, in an imperfect and partial way, to Adam's tending of the abundance of the beautiful garden of Eden, and as analogous, likewise in an imperfect and partial way, to the lack of struggle or guilt found in the abundance and beauty of God's kingdom, promised and foreshadowed in the risen Christ.<sup>26</sup>

It would be a mistake to think that humanity can bring in the abundance and perfect beauty of God's kingdom by itself. Role Economics is proposed simply as a way of projecting the reality of that beauty and abundance, always in an imperfect and partial way, into the world we occupy now, and thus as a device for engaging in theological ethics within the realm of economics.

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<sup>26</sup> The difference between the original creation and the new creation in Christ is contained in the positive value of the flow of history between the two, represented by and summed up in the beauty of the glorious wounds in the risen Jesus's hands, feet and side.