

THEOLOGY AND ECONOMY

*The glory of God is every creature fully alive, and therefore we live to give God glory by loving the world and everything in it. The particular, historical context for interpreting what this means for us today is an economic one. . . . Our self-definition must be economic: who we are should be understood in terms of how much we consume of the planet's bounty, both in terms of its health and of justice to other inhabitants. . . . Love without economics is empty rhetoric. . . . The question is not how each of us can win salvation, but how all of us can give God glory by living together as God's creatures. (Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant*, Fortress, 2001, p. 128)*

The subtitle of McFague's book is *Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Her work in this area comes as an urgent challenge for U.S. Christians, for our country is just 4% of the world's population, but we consume 40% of the world's resources. We must ask ourselves, What kind of faith or spirituality do we practice in such a world? In fact, Americans as a whole need to be asking ourselves, What kind of humanity do we affirm in such a world?

The author explains how neo-classical or neo-liberal economic theory or ideology has not only accepted but promoted such a worldview, and she proposes a very different perspective that she calls ecological economics.

The worldview of neo-classical economics has two main faults: its individualistic anthropology and its isolation of the economy from the planet's well-being. (P. 94)
Ecological economics is a human enterprise that seeks to maximize the optimal functioning of the planet's gifts and services for all. (P. 100) Whereas neo-classical economics begins with human desire, the desire to amass wealth, ecological economics begins with human need, the need for a productive and permanent dwelling in which to live. *Ecological economics begins with sustainability as the preeminent and irreplaceable sine qua non. . . . Contemporary economics does not recognize the Great Economy, the household of planet Earth, as the overall reality within which all other functions--and economics--must fit. (P. 105)*

As we imagine ourselves living in the global village, we become aware of new house rules. . . . In lay language the ecological model claims that housemates must abide by three main rules: take only your share, clean up after yourselves, and keep the house in good repair for future occupants. . . . My share or your share is what we need for a decent life: food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education. (P. 122)

1. How can we affirm, practice, and promote an economic model that takes into account the well-being of the whole human family, future generations, and all the other inhabitants of the planet?
2. What are the necessary changes in our own lifestyle, in our communities, and at the national level that we should commit ourselves to pursue?
3. What organizations and movements in our churches and in the wider society can we learn from and support?