Values, Economics, and Catholic Social Thought: Interviews with Catholic Economists

Volume 1: North America

Edited by Quentin Wodon
July 2021

CREDO

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This report is a joint product of the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO) and the volunteer-led Global Catholic Education project. The idea of a series of interviews of Catholic economists came from discussions under the Service committee of CREDO, with particular thanks to Clara Jace and Joseph Kaboswski for supporting the idea. The report is co-sponsored by the Lumen Christi Institute at the University of Chicago, with special thanks to Michael Le Chevallier. The editor is also grateful to Jo Marie Griesgraber for taking the time to read all the interviews and suggestion corrections, and to the 15 Catholic economists who graciously provided their time for the interviews included in this volume. The volume features economists working in North America. A second volume is being prepared with interviews of economists working in other regions of the world. The editor works with an international development agency, but this report was produced on his volunteer time and should not be seen in any way as representing the views of his employer, its Executive Directors, or the countries they represent. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this report are solely those of the authors of the individual interviews and may also not represent the views of the Global Catholic Education project, CREDO, or the Lumen Christi Institute.

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INTRODUCTION: INTERVIEWS WITH CATHOLIC ECONOMISTS FROM NORTH AMERICA

Quentin Wodon

This report is a joint product of the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO) and the volunteer-led Global Catholic Education project. The report is co-sponsored by the Lumen Christi Institute at the University of Chicago which played an important role for the creation of CREDO in 2013. Indeed, the idea of founding CREDO emerged from discussions at conferences on Economics and Catholic Social Thought sponsored by the Institute.

As shown in Box 1, the first goal of CREDO is to foster a community of Catholic scholars interested in the conversation between the Catholic faith and economic research as it applies to the economy, the Church, and broader society. Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. It is therefore hoped that the interviews of Catholic economics working in North America in this volume will contribute to CREDO's objectives. A second volume is in preparation with interviews of Catholic economists working in other parts of the world.

The title for this series of interviews is "Values, Economics, and Catholic Social Thought." This is also the title of a new series of working papers that CREDO, the Global Catholic Education project, and the Lumen Christi Institute will be piloting in coming months. Historically, many of the "founding fathers" of economics were also philosophers. This meant that a discussion of values was often explicitly integrated in economic reasoning. Today, as the level of technicality of economics has increased substantially, this is less the case, or at least less explicitly so. However, as economics fundamentally deals with the allocation of scarce resources, the issue of the values and trade-offs that inform allocations cannot be avoided. For Catholic economists in particular, Catholic Social Thought could serve as a resource when considering issues related to values in economic research or teaching.

Box 1: CREDO's Mission and Activities

CREDO is an international society of hundreds of research economists who are interested in the conversation between the Catholic faith and economic research as it applies to the economy, the Church, and broader society.

Mission: The five-fold goals of CREDO are: (1) To foster a community of Catholic scholars interested in this conversation; (2) To promote the dissemination of economic knowledge and findings into the public discourse of the broader segments of the Church leadership and laity; (3) To foster awareness and reflection on the principles of Catholic social thought and their relationship to the normative evaluation of the economy; (4) To help mentor young Catholic research economists or others interested in these areas; and (5) To act as an available resource for competent, non-ideological, non-partisan economic expertise for Church leaders and organizations engaged in social and economic issues.

Activities: Through our current activities, CREDO pursues these goals in several ways. We play a leadership role in conferences, sponsored regularly by the Lumen Christi Institute, that bring together Church leadership, leading research economists, and other relevant scholars to discuss a wide variety of topics. We annually sponsor a Mass with the local bishop and a breakfast afterward at the ASSA meetings. We also have a regular newsletter with contributions from economists, Church leaders, and other relevant thinkers. Finally, we nominate and elect an Advisory Panel, a resource of economists with expertise in frontier research whose names are publicly available for Church leaders and institutions needing advice on matters related to economic research or economic policy.

Source: CREDO website.

In practice, when economists self-identify as Catholic, does this affect their research and teaching? And if this is the case, what advice do interviewees have for their fellow Catholic economists as well as graduate students? This series of interviews was launched to find out.

The volume consists of 15 interviews with economists working at universities in North America (one interviewee was based in a university and now works at the World Bank). The interviews were structured on the following core set of questions:

1. You are a Professor of Economics. Could you tell us a bit about the University?
2. What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?
3. Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?
4. Do your values affect your research? In what way? And what are some challenges you face?
5. Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?
6. What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?
7. Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?
8. Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

The interviewees work at different types of universities, ranging from major research universities to smaller colleges. The collection includes interviews of economists working at both Catholic and other universities (on Catholic universities in the US, see the Directory of Catholic Colleges & Universities in the United States 2021). This is important because most Catholic economists do not work at Catholic universities.

Rather than attempting to summarize the interviews in this introduction, it seems best to simply highlight some of the key messages of the interviewees as outline in excerpts from the interviews. Two excerpts from each of the 15 interviews are provided below, with the interviews listed by last name alphabetical order.

We hope that this collection will make a useful contribution to understanding the richness and diversity of experiences of Catholic economists in North America. We also hope that it will provide you with useful lessons, inspire you in your own work, and strengthen your own commitment to promoting a conversation between the Catholic faith and economic research as it applies to the economy, the Church, and broader society.

Peter Arcidiacono, Professor of Economics at Duke University

"Knowing that there are others out there who share your values makes a big difference when operating in highly secular environments. Second, it serves a bridge between theology and economics, working towards a fuller understanding of each."

"At least once a year, when self-absorption rears its ugly head, I read The Hiding Place. It brings me to tears every time. It models for me how to live the Christian life and the accompanying unconditional love."

Alessandro Barattieri, Associate Professor of International Economics at UQAM

"According to an author I deeply esteem, Fr. Luigi Giussani, educating is introducing to the totality of reality, and the experience of education is in essence a "communication of ourselves, of our way to relate and look at reality." Sharing my values, therefore, simply means incarnate them as I live and work."

"One way in which this shapes my research is that my papers often start with questions that are from the "real" world and relevant for policy… One challenge I face sometimes is when I see the economics profession discounting too much the relevance of the research questions, to put nearly all the emphasis on the innovations in the execution of the papers."

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Ademar Bechtold, Professor of Economics at Notre Dame of Maryland University

"Yes, my values affected my research in very important ways. I made an implicit commitment to focus my life on teaching, selfishly expecting to make my contribution to humanity through the work of my students, as they make decisions to transform the world into a better place for everyone in the future."

"I am passionate about education as a tool to grow economies and improve the standard of living around the world. Millions of good ideas that could solve major problems and challenges facing the world today may be lost forever when children cannot go to school."

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Carola Binder, Assistant Professor of Economics at Haverford College

"I feel incredibly blessed to be an economist at a liberal arts college where I have a huge amount of independence and flexibility. Being an economist and being Catholic go well together! Catholics have a long intellectual tradition of thinking about things like truth, beauty, goodness, and justice."

"I talked with my students about the criticism that I have received on my own work, and how I deal with criticism and rejections in a healthy way, trying to learn from them but not feeling diminished."

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Charles Clark, Professor of Economics at St. John's University

"At one time I told Sr. Margaret John Kelly that I was thinking of doing a MA in Theology. She said we have plenty of theologians, but we do not have enough people who do what you do. St. Paul wrote about many gifts and one spirit. Concentrate first on developing the gifts that are unique to you. Then say yes when you are asked to share those gifts."

"[For an intervention of] the Holy See Permanent Mission to the United Nations, … I was nervous. I heard the Chair announce "We will now hear from the representative of the Holy Spirit" (instead of Holy See, what the Vatican is called at the United Nations). Not surprisingly the mistake drew a lot of laughter. When it died down, I thanked the chair for the promotion, and proceeded to read."

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Maria Marta Ferreyra, Senior Economist at the World Bank

"Education is the only hope that most people in the world have for social mobility. The day laborer in rural Mexico, the street vendor in Colombia, and the maid in Chile all have one thing in common – they desperately want something better for their children and firmly believe that education is the only way out of poverty."

"Being a Catholic economist is hard because we have a high calling and strive to do things for Jesus. But it is also easy because obeying one Master relieves us from the anxiety of having to obey many other masters."

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Bernhard Gunter, Assistant Professor of Economics at American University

"Overall, I don't think that being a Catholic economist is easier or harder than being a Protestant economist, a Muslim economist, or even an atheist economist. On the other hand,

being a good, honest, fair person is more difficult than being a person who does not care."

"I have always been passionate about fairness and justice. When I was about six years old, I went to my aunt asking her for a kitchen knife and a cutting board. Obviously, she asked me for what. My explanation was that one of their two cats had caught a mouse. I needed the knife to cut the already dead mouse in two to make sure that both cats got their fair share of the "jointly owned" mouse!"

—

Clara Jace, Lecturer in Economics at the Catholic University of America

"The "facts" of economics don't speak for themselves any more than the data "speaks for itself." We use our values to identify and adjudicate between costs and benefits. Toward this end, I ask students to write reflection papers each week where they work through their own analysis of the tradeoffs."

"More than often, the good that we value can have many different, even unpredictable forms. One of the best things about research has been such surprises, learning about interesting and new ways to manifest the values that many of us hold in common."

—

Joseph Kaboski, Professor of Economics at the University of Notre Dame

"We need to foster the dissemination of non-ideological and legitimate economic knowledge within Church conversations of the economy. At the same time, we need to help baptize the secular discipline of economics with Catholic values. Most economists, even practicing Catholics, don't have an appreciation of Catholic social doctrine."

"The Catholic faith is both difficult and "a light yolk" at the same time. I think living a faithful life as an economist is probably no more or less difficult than any other profession."

—

Malcolm Kass, Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Dallas

"The "facts" of economics don't speak for themselves any more than the data "speaks for itself." We use our values to identify and adjudicate between costs and benefits. Toward this end, I ask students to write reflection papers each week where they work through their own analysis of the tradeoffs."

"More than often, the good that we value can have many different, even unpredictable forms. One of the best things about research has been such surprises, learning about interesting and new ways to manifest the values that many of us hold in common."

—

Camila Morales, Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Texas at Dallas

"My research is largely motivated by my own lived experience. I moved to the US with my family when I was a teenager. I spoke little to no English and attended school in one of the poorest counties in the Metro Atlanta area. So, I enjoy working on topics that can help divulge a better understanding of the experiences of immigrant children and young adults."

"Being a light in the classroom works. Students notice your joy, they notice your kind disposition towards them, they notice when professors care and when they do not, and they respond to that."

—

Doug Norton, Assistant Teaching Professor at Florida State University

"In the classroom, I can share my values in teaching. For example, in health economics we talk about "quality adjusted life years" or "value of a statistical life". How those quality adjustments are done, or the value of a life is determined, often leads to moral conversations."

"For new graduates my suggestion is two-fold: sample and backward induct. Most people don't know what they want to do. The best way to figure that out is to sample different paths through coursework, undergraduate research, jobs, internships, volunteering, etc. Once you think you know, talk to someone who works in that area to help backward induct. Where you want to be in the future should help determine the kinds of investments you need to make now."

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Eric Scorsone, Associate Professor of Economics at Michigan State University

"I think, especially in working for a public university, one must be careful and balanced in presenting or teaching about one's values. I have never felt pressure not to teach my own values, but rather I hold myself accountable to teach a fair and balance view of public policy issues from a plurality of views."

"My values impact the type of research I work on and how I teach. I am interested in doing work on issues that impact local communities and in particular marginalized communities. I am very drawn to the teaching of Pope Francis and wish to emulate the kinds of issues he emphasizes… I reach out and work with local public officials in communities where economic and social distress is widespread."

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Leonard Wantchekon, Professor of Economics at Princeton University

"The area I grew up in had three main characteristics that have helped shape my future career and research agenda. First, my community had a Catholic school built in it in 1895, and so education has always been highly valued. Second, my community was a multi-cultural place made up of migrants …, which made it a relatively open-minded village. Third, I was lucky to derive high aspirations and ambitions from my uncle and from my parents that drove me … to engage in political activism."

"I have always been passionate about history and its role in our current lives… Benin has an incredibly fascinating history of the 'Amazons' – also called the 'female warriors'… They comprised of around one-third of the whole army... We are in the process of … creat[ing] a museum dedicated to them."

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Robert Whaples, Professor of Economics at Wake Forest University

"I believe that all scholars' values affect their research. How could they not? They guide every decision we make. Economics is all about weighing costs and benefits in making decisions. Moral values are about what we consider to be costs and what we consider to be benefits."

"Unfortunately, the Western World -- and especially academia in these countries -- has become increasingly hostile toward religion in all its forms. Fortunately, the economics profession doesn't seem to share this hostility. Do good work and you will succeed. So, the welcome mat is out and there are innumerable research topics where you can do good and do well at the same time."

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About the Global Catholic Education Project

Global Catholic Education is a volunteer-led project to contribute to Catholic education and integral human development globally with a range of resources. The website went live symbolically on Thanksgiving Day in November 2020 to give thanks for the many blessings we have received. Catholic schools serve 62 million children in pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools globally. In addition, more than 6.7 million students are enrolled at the post-secondary level (data for 2019). The Church also provides many other services to children and families, including in healthcare, social protection, and humanitarian assistance. Our aim is to serve Catholic schools and universities, as well as other organizations contributing to integral human development, with an emphasis on responding to the aspirations of the poor and vulnerable. If you would like to contribute to the project, please contact us through the website at www.GlobalCatholicEducation.org.

INTERVIEW WITH PETER ARCIDIACONO, PROFESSOR AT DUKE UNIVERSITY

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

April 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "Knowing that there are others out there who share your values makes a big difference when operating in highly secular environments. Second, it serves a bridge between theology and economics, working towards a fuller understanding of each."
- "At least once a year, when self-absorption rears its ugly head, I read The Hiding Place. It brings me to tears every time. It models for me how to live the Christian life and the accompanying unconditional love."

You are a Professor of Economics at Duke University. Could you tell us a bit about the university?

I received my PhD in economics in 1999 and I have been at Duke ever since. When I first arrived, there were 23 tenure-track faculty. We've just about doubled in size. The university is secular with a loose tie to the Methodist church. The Duke Catholic Center is first-rate though Duke as a whole is not particularly supportive of religion, especially on issues that go against the progressive culture.

What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

Much of my research centers on higher education, especially choice of major and affirmative action. I also have research in applied econometrics that has spilled out of the work on higher education. But my interests are broad: from teen sex to peer effects in the NBA. I got into working on affirmative action in part because there were so many strong feelings on the topic but little understanding of its actual effects. Part of that little understanding is the result of many not wanting to touch something associated with those strong feelings. But that was actually a draw for me… at least before I knew better!

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Peter Arcidiacono, a Professor of Economics at Duke University, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?

I try to love my students and model treating people with dignity. My first lecture in intermediate micro leads with economics as a great model of fallen man, where self-interest is the primary driving force. There are opportunities when students are struggling with life to say what helps me. I have a set of Bible verses that are particularly useful for anxiety. But unless I am sure they are Christian, I also provide other non-Christian examples of ways to deal with the anxieties of life.

Do your values affect your research? If so, in what way? And what are some challenges you face?

Yes. Being Catholic leads you to see the world in a different light, which also results in ideas that might be foreign to others. The challenge is to be honest about your work no matter what results you get; to not compromise on the truth. This is becoming increasingly difficult as research in some of the subareas of economics where I work is increasingly geared towards particular agendas rather than the discovery of truth and getting the 'wrong' answer is associated with bad intent.

You have been involved with CREDO for some time. What has CREDO achieved, and what needs to be done to strengthen the association and increase its impact?

When I think of CREDO, I think of two things. First, knowing that there are others out there who share your values makes a big difference when operating in highly secular environments. Second, it serves as a bridge between theology and economics, working towards a fuller understanding of each.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

I would say both. My faith life makes my life better, including my job. The more I can keep my eyes on Jesus the more I can keep my job in perspective. But it is getting harder. Some just see you as ignorant. Colleges in general—and elite private universities in particular—are moving more from tolerating those who are religious to low levels of hostility. What is hard is standing up for what you believe to be true when it contradicts the narrative of the university. I have a fantastic job and until recently would have loved for my kids to pursue a similar path. Now I am not as sure about that.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

Get support and keep some balance in your life. One of my undergrad professors advised me that getting a PhD was a marathon, not a sprint. But in order to have that balance, it is important that you keep the spiritual component as a priority. This is best done in community. I am forever grateful to the Catholic small groups I was a part of in graduate school. I am sure that they saved my marriage and kept me (reasonably) sane.

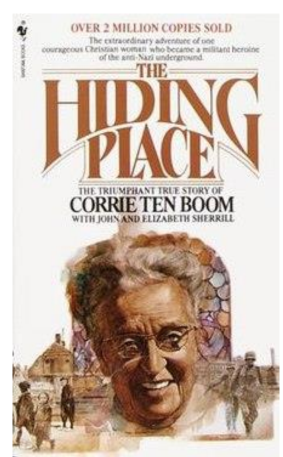
Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I was an undergraduate at Willamette University, a small liberal arts college in Salem, Oregon. My future wife and I did a mission trip to help build houses in Mexico. When I was there I realized that the people I was interacting with were much happier and more at peace than I was. Making money became less important, to be replaced by quality of life. And the professors at the Willamette had a high quality of life. I played tennis, racquetball, and golf with the faculty there and dreamed of returning there as a professor.

God had other plans. I generally joke that God doesn't trust me with choices. I was admitted to one graduate school, University of Wisconsin, despite also applying to much lower ranked programs. It was the year John Rust let many students in… there were 53 in my first-year class of which 17 got PhDs. But somehow I muddled through. Since I had viewed a liberal arts job as what I would like to do, working at a university was a priority on the job market. I received one academic offer—from Duke---and that came in the second round. Things just sort of worked out from there.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

At least once a year, when self-absorption rears its ugly head, I read The Hiding Place. It brings me to tears every time. It models for me how to live the Christian life and the accompanying unconditional love.



I am also passionate about my lovely wife and my five boys.

INTERVIEW WITH ALESSANDRO BARATTIERI, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL (UQAM)

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

July 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "According to an author I deeply esteem, Fr. Luigi Giussani, educating is introducing to the totality of reality, and the experience of education is in essence a *"communication of ourselves, of our way to relate and look at reality."* Sharing my values, therefore, simply means incarnate them as I live and work.*"*
- One way in which this shapes my research is that my papers often start with questions that are from the "real" world and relevant for policy… One challenge I face sometimes is when I see the economics profession discounting too much the relevance of the research questions, to put nearly all the emphasis on the innovations in the execution of the papers."

You are an Associate Professor of International Economics at École des sciences de la Gestion of UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal). Could you tell us a bit about the University?

The University where I work was founded in the 1970s with a strong vocation to be a university that would be democratic and accessible to all. It has been a long path to the present reality of a "dynamic, open, creative university with an international outreach." It certainly remains an accessible university and definitely it is not a confessional one. Last, but not least, UQAM is a francophone university, where most of the courses are taught in French (a language that I happily learned!).

What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

My research interests include international economics (trade and macro), macroeconomics and finance. I teach courses in international finance, trade and globalization, and currencies and financial markets.

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Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Alessandro Barattieri, an Associate Professor of International Economics at UQAM, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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When I arrived at Boston College for my PhD, the professors that I found most interesting were working in these fields, so I followed them for my specialization. I have to say, however, that I was always very interested in the global dimension of economic phenomena, and I always loved travelling and learning about new cultures and countries.

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?

According to an author I deeply esteem, Fr. Luigi Giussani, educating is introducing to the totality of reality, and the experience of education is in essence a *"communication of ourselves, of our way to relate and look at reality."* Sharing my values, therefore, simply means incarnate them as I live and work. Let me give you a concrete example. Teaching during the pandemic required to change a lot, innovate, and be creative. I did all of that not because I was obliged to, but because I wanted to really enjoy the experience of teaching in those new circumstances. The end result was that I did enjoy a lot teaching during the pandemic (some new features of my courses will remain also when we will be back to teach in person), and my students appreciated my courses enormously.

Photo: Fr. Luigi Giussani.

Do your values affect your research? If so, in what way? And what are some challenges you face?

One value I certainly have is to try to contribute to the society and the world I live in. One way in which this shapes my research is that my papers often start with questions that are from the "real" world and relevant for policy. Examples include: What determines the global trade imbalances? What are the effects of protectionism? What happens if banks become too interconnected? One challenge I face sometimes is when I see the economics profession discounting too much the relevance of the research questions, to put nearly all the emphasis on the innovations in the execution of the papers.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

I always loved this quote from Benedict's *Deus Caritas Est*: *"Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction".* Ever since I had this encounter in my life, a gratitude for the discovery of the deep preference of God in my life has been growing in me. Recognizing to be object of an infinite love makes everything easier: even being an economist!

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

My advice here would not be an epsilon different for a Catholic or a non-Catholic student: be sure you are really interested in economics, because serious PhD programs are challenging. If you then enroll in one such program, when things gets tough, do not forget your interest of the beginning.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I picked economics starting a joint management and economics program out of interest (I had enrolled in that program to study business). I followed the suggestion of one of my early mentors in Italy to pursue a PhD in economics in the US, which was probably the key turning point in my path. I then went through the fascinating process of the job market and ended up working in a great department (Econ at UQAM), and living in an amazing city (Montreal).

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I love sports (tennis especially) and travelling, but I guess the thing I am most fond of is learning. I also deeply value friendship, so now that I am in Italy (after nearly 3 years) I am spending my vacation time on trains to go visit friends in our beautiful cities.

INTERVIEW WITH ADEMAR BECHTOLD, PROFESSOR AT NOTRE DAME OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

May 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "Yes, my values affected my research in very important ways. I made an implicit commitment to focus my life on teaching, selfishly expecting to make my contribution to humanity through the work of my students, as they make decisions to transform the world into a better place for everyone in the future."
- "I am passionate about education as a tool to grow economies and improve the standard of living around the world. Millions of good ideas that could solve major problems and challenges facing the world today may be lost forever when children cannot go to school."

You are a Professor of Economics at Notre Dame of Maryland University. Could you tell us a bit about the university?

The College of Notre Dame of Maryland, established in 1895 on a beautiful campus located just north of Baltimore City, in Maryland, was the first Catholic College in the United States to award a four-year baccalaureate degree for women. On its 116th anniversary, the College of Notre Dame became Notre Dame of Maryland University. Today the University offers undergraduate and graduate programs for both women and men in four schools - the School of Education, School of Nursing, School of Pharmacy, and School of Arts, Science, and Business. Rooted in Catholic Intellectual traditions, the Notre Dame University "challenges women and men to strive for intellectual and professional excellence, build inclusive communities, engage in service to others, and promote social responsibility." The Women's College still focuses first and foremost on providing high-quality education for women, as envisioned by the SSNDs more than a century ago. A small institution with a big heart, Notre Dame has always focused on providing quality education centered on liberal arts and Catholic traditions to students that would not be able to get it otherwise.

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What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

My research interest is on international trade and its effects on the welfare of societies in developing countries. Growing up in a poor farm community in Brazil, I saw firsthand many people working very hard, long hours every day, producing commodities for export without being able to generate enough income to break the cycle of poverty. It was not hard work that elevated people out of poverty, I learned; it was the value society placed on the product of that work. Since that time, I became interested in examining how trade, trade policies, and changing trade patterns affect the market structures and the value-added to commodities produced and exported mainly by developing countries.

As a professor in a relatively small university, I have the opportunity to teach in various economics fields, including international economics, macroeconomics theory and policy, econometrics, and others. There are pros and cons of teaching classes in multiple fields, but the rewards far outpace the costs as they all promote knowledge and allow for the exchange of ideas and personal/professional experiences that help everyone to build a more complex understanding of the world around us.

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?

Yes, Notre Dame is a place where I can share my values and teach economics with humanity in mind. The choices I make every day, some easy, some difficult, some seemingly inconsequential, others indispensable, are always guided by integrity, respect, service, and excellence. Notre Dame is a community that shares those same core values. One example is the Honor Code: Bound by the Notre Dame Honor Code, students, faculty, and staff work together to create a collaborative learning environment centered on intellectual honesty and academic integrity.

What seems to work? The focus on liberal education has stood the test of time, promoting intellectual ability through humanistic and scientific inquiry. Notre Dame's students strive to interpret information using quantitative and qualitative methods, communicate ideas effectively, appreciate diversity, and better understand human nature and societies.

In a world where everyone can shovel anything to the Internet, well-rounded education and strong critical thinking skills are essential for interpreting complex ideas and expressing informed opinions. Notre Dame strives to provide expanded ways for students to learn how to think (create knowledge), to practice how to do (develop skills), and to use their education to create a better world (apply values).

The Catholic intellectual tradition adds a value-based dimension for evaluating alternatives to address specific social-economic issues, considering other cultures' experiences, the marginalized and the poor. The small class environment provides opportunities to offer a rigorous curriculum in a collaborative environment where each student brings their unique set of experiences and insights to enrich the learning of all.

What needs more work? In my view, one way Catholic Institutions like Notre Dame could do a better job is by offering more opportunities for students from developing countries to study in the U.S. and take back their knowledge to influence their communities' future. Also, by providing more opportunities for our students to experience life in other countries and use their experiences to improve our communities' living standards. In this increasingly interdependent world, the ability to examine issues from the perspectives of different cultures, political, economic, legal, and ethical systems can foster better understanding, peace, and human development.

Do your values affect your research? In what way? And what are some challenges you face?

Yes, my values affected my research in very important ways. On the one hand, it affected my choice of international trade and its intersection with poverty and regional economic development as a focus of research. On the other hand, it affected my choice of working at a small university, focusing on teaching and creating opportunities for different populations, knowing that it would limit my time and resources for research. When I accepted a position at Notre Dame many years ago, I made an implicit commitment to focus my life on teaching, selfishly expecting to make my contribution to humanity through the work of my students, as they make decisions to transform the world into a better place for everyone in the future.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

I would advise the students to build a research plan that fits the world they want to live in after their graduation. Catholic intellectual tradition is based on the idea that truth animates faith and that faith is a catalyst for inquiry, which is essential for acquiring wisdom to build "just" societies.

Today we all have access to more information than I could ever dream of during my college years. I would tell my students to use information wisely to make informed choices in the pursuit of truth. I would encourage them to build knowledgeware that can inspire new generations to challenge some of the values and assumptions made by my generation on "what is" and "what ought to be" to keep the world on a sustainable path.

Also, I would advise my students to think globally. We live in a global world, and no one country will be able to continuously improve itself while bringing other countries down. I would show them how their research and ideas can inspire business leaders and politicians to develop a global mindset and help everyone embrace the world as the beautiful, diverse, and complex place it is. I would encourage my students to travel abroad to learn the ways people in other countries think before judging them for not thinking like them.

Lastly, I would advise them to embrace change. Making the world a better place implies changing it. Albert Einstein once wrote: "The world, as we have created, is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking." We all need to accept the fact that we will need to change our thinking before we can change the world.

Of course, it is important to build realistic expectations focusing on assessable goals, develop a good working relationship with the advisor, follow a healthy work-life balance, building a research network, etc..., but, I would like to think that those are discussions the student will have at the beginning of a Ph.D. program in any school.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position? What was your personal journey?

I was born in a rural community in Brazil and attended a one-room elementary school where students from all grades meet at the same time with the same teacher in the same room. Of course, many extraordinary things happened along the way for a student from that school to earn a Ph.D. from a University in the United States, but none was more important than the values instilled in me by my family.

My life's journey has been a journey of discovery, hard work, and many lessons learned during moments of great joys and moments of great sorrow. While working my way through College, I became a member of a Rotaract Club (youth branch of Rotary) where I learned many important skills, engaged in community service, and developed invaluable friendships that lasted until today. A few years after finishing College, I received a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship for a year of study at the University at Buffalo, New York. After completing a year of study I went back to Brazil, but later accepted an invitation from my advisor to return to the U.S. and work on a Ph.D. program. Since then, my work has focused on economic education with a focus on improving the living standards of less privileged populations.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I spend as much time as I can with my family. My wife Silvana and I have two children. Leander (25) graduated from the University of Delaware and Raphael (22) is graduating with a Master's degree from Johns Hopkins and on the way to start a Ph.D. program at the University of Washington in the fall.

I like to travel and experience other countries and cultures. Learning from the experiences of others in their communities and observing different ways people deal with issues and opportunities, I refresh my own perspectives on what I want to accomplish in life's journey.

I am passionate about education as a tool to grow economies and improve the standard of living around the world. Millions of good ideas that could solve major problems and challenges facing the world today may be lost forever when children cannot go to school. An informed society, I believe, is better prepared to make wise decisions to improve the allocation of scarce resources and to create a more prosperous and "just" world.

Photo: Taking 15 students for a study tour in Brazil.

INTERVIEW WITH CAROLA BINDER, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT HAVERFORD COLLEGE

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

April 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "I feel incredibly blessed to be an economist at a liberal arts college where I have a huge amount of independence and flexibility. Being an economist and being Catholic go well together! Catholics have a long intellectual tradition of thinking about things like truth, beauty, goodness, and justice."
- "I talked with my students about the criticism that I have received on my own work, and how I deal with criticism and rejections in a healthy way, trying to learn from them but not feeling diminished."

You are an Assistant Professor of Economics at Haverford College. Could you tell us a little bit about the College?

Haverford is an undergraduate liberal arts college in the Philadelphia suburbs. We have around 1300 students. Haverford began as a college for Quaker men in 1833, and became co-ed in the 1970s. Bryn Mawr College, Haverford's sister school about a mile down the road, remains a women's college. Haverford, Bryn Mawr, and Swarthmore together form the Tri-College Consortium (Tri-Co) and students can take classes across the three campuses.

Haverford's Quaker roots influence campus life in a variety of ways. For example, the College has a pretty unique Honor Code and Honor Council system, and in our faculty meetings, we make most types of decisions by consensus. Haverford has a beautiful arboretum campus with faculty housing on campus. I am lucky to live in a peaceful little neighborhood right in the center of campus. It is a really idyllic setting, and my four kids have so many great places to play and explore. There is a community garden area where my family manages a 60 by 20-foot plot of land. Another unique part of Haverford is that all students in all majors write a senior thesis. In economics, this entails a year-long research project. Haverford and Bryn Mawr have a small Newman club that I help with.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Carola Binder, an Assistant Professor of Economics at Haverford College, talks about her teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

Visit us at www.GlobalCatholicEducation.org.

What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

I am a macroeconomist, mostly working on central banking and expectations. I have done a lot of research with surveys of consumers and professional forecasters. Lately I am especially interested in political pressures on central banks. I also do some economic history work, for example on inflation expectations during the Korean War era. I am a member of the CEPR research network on central bank communication and an associate editor of the Journal of Money, Credit, and Banking. I teach the senior thesis course, a junior research seminar on the Federal Reserve, an advanced macro elective, and sometimes an intro course.

I chose macroeconomics and economic history as fields in graduate school because of the really great classes I took from Christina Romer, David Romer, Yuriy Gorodnichenko, and Barry Eichengreen at Berkeley. I started graduate school in 2010, when the U.S. economy was still at the zero lower bound and recovering slowly from the Great Recession, so monetary policy seemed like such an important area to research. My interest in central bank communication is somewhat more recent. The Fed and other central banks have, for the past decade, been making more of an effort to communicate with the general public. I want to understand how and whether they are able to shape household expectations and sentiment (and whether this should even be their goal).

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?

Haverford is a very social justice-oriented campus. In the fall of 2020, for example, Haverford students went on strike for 14 days related to issues of racial justice. Justice is frequently discussed at Haverford and in higher education more broadly. But in the Catholic tradition (and also following Aristotle), it is prudence that is first among the virtues, the Charioteer of the Virtues, for it “disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it… it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure” (Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)).

I think that it is very hard to teach virtues directly. You can’t simply tell someone how to be prudent. A virtue is “an habitual and firm disposition to do the good” (CCC). The human virtues of prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice, as “habitual perfections of intellect and will,” require education and much practice to cultivate (CCC). I think I can best help students to be virtuous by giving them small opportunities to practice virtue in their scholarship, and by setting an example in my own behavior and disposition.

For example, it is very helpful that my colleagues, Richard Ball and Norm Medeiros, have started Project TIER (Teaching Integrity in Empirical Research), and we implement Project TIER standards in the junior and senior research seminars so that work is transparent and replicable. I also talk with my students about my own experiences presenting in seminars, serving as a discussant, and serving as a referee, and tell them my tips for being kind and helpful to other researchers. For example, I recently served as a discussant for a paper with a pretty substantial flaw. I talked about this experience with my students and explained how I tried to be constructive and honest without being “too harsh.” (Without using the words prudence and temperance, I gave them an example.) I also talked with my students about the criticism that I have received on my own work, and how I deal with criticism and rejections in a healthy way, trying to learn from them but not feeling diminished as a person (to demonstrate fortitude).

Since I live on campus, I hope that I am able to share other values by example. I am constantly walking around campus with my kids and taking them to the campus playground. Pre-Covid, we had a tradition of celebrating Valentine’s Day and our anniversary by having a family dinner in the dining hall. I hope that students see the beauty of family life (even when my kids are not on their best behavior) and the value of small acts of service. I try to be generous and approachable with students, and to keep up a cheerful disposition and avoid gossiping and complaining. This, really, is justice: “habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor” (CCC).

Do your values affect your research? If so, in what way? And what are some challenges you face?

Yes, in the sense that I choose research projects that I think will be meaningful and I try to work with good people, ultimately because I want to serve God and do His will. I put relatively low priority on trying to publish in the top five journals. What is a meaningful research project? In the pastoral letter “Economic Justice for All” (1986), the U.S. Catholic Bishops say that “The economy is a human reality: men and women working together to develop and care for the whole of God's creation. All this work must serve the material and spiritual well-being of people.” They also write that “Every economic decision and institution must be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person.” Research that can contribute at least a little to a better understanding of economic decisions or institutions and how they affect God’s creation has the possibility of promoting human dignity.

I try to almost always accept referee requests, even though this has become quite time consuming, and to respond to graduate students and other scholars seeking data or advice. The challenge is finding time to do everything that I would like to do.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

I guess you could ask whether being Catholic is hard, whether being an economist is hard, and whether it is hard to combine the two. As Catholics, we face challenges, but know that God will strengthen us and give us the grace of the Sacraments: “Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith, knowing that your fellow believers throughout the world undergo the same sufferings. The God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory through Christ Jesus will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you after you have suffered a little” (1 Peter 5:8-10).

Any career has its challenges, of course, but I feel incredibly blessed to be an economist at a liberal arts college where I have a huge amount of independence and flexibility. I think that being an economist and being Catholic go well together! Catholics have a long intellectual tradition of thinking about things like truth, beauty, goodness, and justice. We can look to St. Thomas Aquinas as a model of scholarship. We have Catholic social teaching to guide and inspire us.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

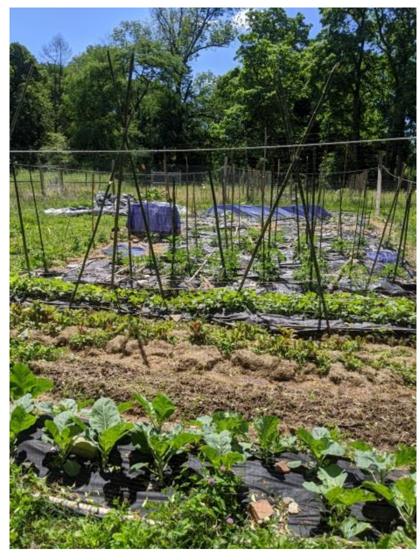
This probably seems like strange advice, but I would suggest reading about and contemplating the Little Way of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Her Little Way is about doing the smallest actions with great love. She shows that you do not need to make great achievements to be holy. She died of tuberculosis at age 24--the age of many Ph.D. students!-- and became a saint and doctor of the Church through her simple life of holiness. It is possible to pursue a Ph.D. in Economics and try to follow the Little Way, but there will be a lot of pressure along the way to pursue very different ways. Pursue a Ph.D. if it will help you along the way to holiness. You should think, pray, and discern about this. But also discern about your broader vocation, for example to marriage or the religious life. That is the more important discernment, which you should not set aside while pursuing a Ph.D.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I grew up in Kentucky, and always loved math. I studied math at Georgia Tech, graduating with my bachelor’s in 2010. Then I began my Ph.D. in economics at Berkeley. I didn’t really understand what it meant to be an economist-- I just thought I’d like a “more applied” form of math. Luckily, I liked economics a lot! I met my husband Joe at the Newman Center in Berkeley, and we got married and had our first baby when I was in grad school. I applied for all kinds of jobs all over the country, and we ended up choosing Haverford for a variety of reasons. Joe is a chemist, so we thought he would have a good chance of finding a job in the Philadelphia area. After we moved, he indeed found a job at Dow.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I am homeschooling my kids, and this past year, I taught my oldest daughter how to read! It is so amazing to see a child go through all of the stages of gaining literacy. Now she will spend hours on the couch reading to herself or to her siblings, and it is just so satisfying. I have always loved fiction, so it has been so fun to read to my kids. We go to the library at least twice a week and really can’t keep enough books around. I am also enjoying learning some ballet along with the kids using videos on YouTube.



Photos: Plot of land (above) and family adventures (below).

INTERVIEW WITH MARIA MARTA FERREYRA, SENIOR ECONOMIST AT THE WORLD BANK

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

April 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "Education is the only hope that most people in the world have for social mobility. The day laborer in rural Mexico, the street vendor in Colombia, and the maid in Chile all have one thing in common – they desperately want something better for their children and firmly believe that education is the only way out of poverty."
- "Being a Catholic economist is hard because we have a high calling and strive to do things for Jesus. But it is also easy because obeying one Master relieves us from the anxiety of having to obey many other masters."

You used to teach economics at the university and now work at the World Bank. Could you briefly explain your current job?

I am a senior economist at the Office of the Chief Economist for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), which produces reports and analytical materials on topics of interest to the region. My main responsibility is to lead studies for the office. I have led three studies pertaining to LAC: on higher education, on cities and productivity, and on short-cycle higher education programs (akin to associate's degrees in the U.S.). Since studies are conducted in teams, I provide both intellectual and managerial leadership to my studies.

What has been your main area of research? Why did you choose this field within economics?

My main area of research has been Economics of Education. As a faculty member before coming to the World Bank, I studied K-12 education in the U.S. – vouchers, charter schools, and public school accountability. At the World Bank I have studied higher education in LAC.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Maria Marta Ferreyra, a Senior Economist at the World Bank, talks about her work and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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There was a certain serendipity to my choice of this field. I started graduate school with an interest in macroeconomics and international finance, but at the time there were no faculty members with that kind of expertise in my graduate program. Thinking that I would go back to Argentina (my home country), and given that Argentina's macroeconomy was stable at the time (which has, in fact, been the exception over the last five decades), I chose applied micro instead. I took Industrial Organization classes and also I worked as a Research Assistant on a project on K-12 Catholic schools, for which I hand-collected data on openings and closings of Catholic schools over the last several decades. That project got me thinking about what would happen if there were private school vouchers – would new Catholic schools open? Would Catholic school enrollment grow? And that's how I started doing research on Economics of Education.

The field is tremendously important because education is the only hope that most people in the world have for social mobility. The day laborer in rural Mexico, the street vendor in Colombia, and the maid in Chile all have one thing in common – they desperately want something better for their children and firmly believe that education is the only way out of poverty.

Are you able to share your values in your professional life? What seemed to work and what does not?

I try to exemplify my values in my professional life and, once a certain trust and friendship are established with the other, I can directly share my faith-informed views. I have found that trust and friendship are key to the other's receptiveness of those views.

Do your values affect your research? If so, in what way? And what are some challenges you faced or still face today?

My values affect my research in several ways. First, they are the very inspiration of my work. I do this work because I ache at the suffering experienced by so many of our brothers and sisters around the world, particularly in the developing world. I very much want to contribute to alleviating that suffering –that systemic lack of opportunities- through my work. Second, my values determine how I do my work – offering it up every morning, doing it to the best of my abilities, and imposing similar standards on those who work for me. Doing my work as well as possible allows me to find the truth of the matter – not the first and easy findings, but those which have been carefully probed and vetted. Third, I believe that the truths we find in this way help us be free – it is impossible to change or improve anything when you do not start from a truthful, honest view of reality. Truth, in fact, is an overarching theme – the truth that allows us to see the economic reality at hand but also that which allows us to see ourselves and others as we are, with our virtues and shortcomings – which is critical when working with others.

Perhaps the greatest challenges are twofold. The first relates to the work itself, when colleagues, coauthors or assistants do not operate under the same standards. The second has to do with the recipients of the knowledge – those who are supposed to make decisions based on it and either take offense at the findings or do not want to act accordingly. I have found that respectful but honest, assertive communication are key to handling both challenges. My job is to deliver the findings as clearly and charitably as possible; the other is free to accept it or not.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

It is hard because we have a high calling and strive to do things for Jesus. Doing our work well, pursuing and communicating the truth, and working with others requires virtue, which is inherently hard. It is also hard because we want to do these things well but not be attached to them – neither to the preoccupation nor to honor (or dishonor) that they may engender. This takes a constant, daily effort. But it is also easy because obeying one Master relieves us from the anxiety of having to obey many other masters.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

It is the same advice I would have for anybody contemplating a PhD: make sure you really want and need this degree for whatever it is that you want to do. Graduate school is hard and your professional life will be hard too, because nobody gives easy jobs to PhD graduates. Without that very strong desire and need for the degree you will simply not make it. I would also encourage that person to think about the opportunity cost in terms of personal life – the PhD and your early career will take a lot of you precisely at the time in your life when you might want to get married or start a family.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

After receiving my PhD, I worked as a faculty member at a top research institution. Although I enjoyed the academic life, I always desired to work closer to the field. Not getting tenure opened the door for that path and, when the offer for my current position at the World Bank arrived, it seemed to have many of the elements I desired. I have been very happy at the Bank for many reasons, one of them being the meaning that this work carries for me. While academia was not my long-term career, it did prepare me very well for my current work. My journey was thus not linear nor the one I would have chosen, but it was providential.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I can think of three stories. I grew up in a mid-sized city in Argentina, and it was common to have children knock on our door every day begging for food. One day I saw a boy who must have been my age – 9 or 10 years old – pushing a cart full of cardboard, which he would likely sell for a few pesos. I thought about the difference in our circumstances – I, going to school every day; he, pushing the cart every day. I so badly wanted to do something for him – and that's why, as time went on, I chose this field.

More recently, a few years ago, I visited Guatemala to present a World Bank study. I had a few free hours my last day there, and was incredibly fortunate to be able to join staff from Food for the Poor as they visited several projects in Guatemala City. We visited an orphanage, run by a nun that tends to malnourished children. My heart ached, once again, at the sight of those poor, precious children. And yet, despite the pain, there was also the profound happiness of knowing that my past journey and my current job had taken me precisely to that point -a point that burst with meaning and that invited me to help in any way I could.

Photo: Feeding center of Food for the Poor in Guatemala.

My last story comes from helping found a high school (Saint Jerome Institute in Washington, DC). Here in the DC area, my daughters have attended a wonderful K-8 Catholic school with a classical curriculum oriented towards the good, the true, and the beautiful. Concerned that the school only went up to 8th grade, a small group of parents (6 or 7 of us) came together to found the high school. That was a dream coming true! For somebody who wanted to be closer to the field, there could not have been a better project. I had done research on charter school entry –in DC, no less- and on Catholic schools, so I had a useful perspective on things and many contacts in the charter community. I felt our Econ training was so helpful –to bargain on a lease contract, to read the fine print of the contract, to think about demand or how to set tuition, to consider teacher compensation, to think about incentives for the board and the headmaster, and so forth. Despite many challenges and frustrations, this was a terrific project. The school is now in its second year and my older daughter will start high school there in the Fall.

Photo: students at Saint Jerome Institute.

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLES CLARK, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AT ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

May 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "At one time I told Sr. Margaret John Kelly that I was thinking of doing a MA in Theology. She said we have plenty of theologians, but we do not have enough people who do what you do. St. Paul wrote about many gifts and one spirit. Concentrate first on developing the gifts that are unique to you. Then say yes when you are asked to share those gifts."
- "[For an intervention of] the Holy See Permanent Mission to the United Nations, … I was nervous. I heard the Chair announce "We will now hear from the representative of the Holy Spirit" (instead of Holy See, what the Vatican is called at the United Nations). Not surprisingly the mistake drew a lot of laughter. When it died down, I thanked the chair for the promotion, and proceeded to read."

You are a Professor of Economics at St. John's University. Could you tell us a bit about the University?

St John's University is a Catholic University founded by the Vincentian community in 1870. Like many Catholic schools founded at this time, its mission was to educate the children of immigrants and the underserved. With over 30 percent of our undergraduate students being Pell eligible (which is rare for private institutions of higher education in the 21st century), St. John's has remained faithful to this mission for 150 years.

The Vincentian mission is very clear: follow the example of St. Vincent de Paul and serve the poor. What is most unique about St. Vincent is his emphasis on organization, effectiveness and agency. It is not charity for the sake of the giver, but instead takes a developmental approach. Vincent would be a good patron saint of business schools. Since all poverty is exclusion, our focus needs to be inclusion. Our primary campus is in Queens, New York (the most diverse county in America) and we have campuses in Manhattan, Staten Island and Rome (and we also run a program in Limerick Ireland).

Box 1: Interview Series

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Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Charles Clark, Professor of Economics at St. John's University, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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When I came to St John's (1984) almost all the students were commuters from the New York City area. In the 1990s, St. John's built dorms and now we attract students from all over the country and from abroad (the last time I saw the data we had students from over 100 countries). I had a student from East Timor a few years ago, a country which is younger than myself.

I teach in the Tobin College of Business. I am currently the Chair of the Department of Economics and Finance and Professor of Economics, Senior Fellow for the Vincentian Center for Church and Society, and Research Fellow for the Center for Global Business Stewardship. I have previously served as Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs. .

What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

In 1979/80, I was an undergraduate student at Fordham University preparing for law school when one of my professors talked me into attending a guest lecture by John Kenneth Galbraith. Ten minutes into the lecture I decided I was going to become an economist. If not for Galbraith's legendary wit I would be a practicing lawyer. Scary how close we come to disasters! For a short while at Fordham my goal was to double major in Philosophy and Theology (I told one of my Jesuit instructors I had a double major in Philosophy and Unemployment, and he responded that I could not do such a double major because unemployment was a prerequisite for the philosophy major). I switched to economics because it was recommended for anyone interested in taking the LSATs and because the philosophers I found most interesting were discussing economic issues (Rawls' Theory of Justice was all the rage at the time).

After hearing Galbraith, I purchased a copy of *The Affluent Society* at Penn Station Book Shop and read it straight through that night. I read all the Galbraith's books I could find at used books shops and eventually picked up and read Robert Heilbroner's *The Worldly Philosophers*, which is an introduction to the history of economic thought. After Fordham, I did an MA and PhD at the New School for Social Research, writing my dissertation under Heilbroner's supervision on the influence of natural law philosophy on economic theory. (My dissertation has no reference to Aquinas or the classical Natural Law tradition, and only looked at what might be called the Protestant Natural Law tradition).

I chose the history to economics as my main field because I feel it is the best way to understand how economists think. Economists who do not understand the history of their discipline may master techniques, but they may not creatively think about economic issues, for they may lack the ability to understand the importance of historical and social context in social life. Luckily for me, the history of economic thought is also the best preparation for anyone who is interested in a dialogue between Catholic social thought (CST) and economics because the history of economics is also a history of philosophy, and a deep understanding of philosophy is needed for a meaningful appreciation of CST.

At the beginning of my career, my research was in the field of the history of economics, but in the mid-1990s I started to do a lot of applied economics work: on the Irish Economy; on alternative social welfare policies; on alternative ways to measure progress and on CST and the economy. My main teaching responsibilities have been the History of Economic Thought, Economic History, and Industrial Economics for the MBA program and Economic Development.

You have published on CST and are integrating this in your teaching. Which part of your work do you believe has had the most impact and why? Which parts may have had less impact, and again why?

All social theory starts with three questions (what Joseph Schumpeter called the "vision"): what it means to be human (philosophical anthropology)?; what is society?; And what is the good humans pursue? How these three questions are answered greatly determines how an economic theory is going to explain economic activity as well as the policies it will recommend. In many of my classes I usually present a range of theoretical approaches (based on different visions) and often use CST, which has very specific answers to these questions, to offer a contrast (students may find then links to some of their Theology courses). Especially in Freshman courses, I have always tried to show connections between what we do in an economics class with what our students study in their required philosophy and theology classes.

Furthermore, all economics is based on values and value judgements. CST offers a value perspective based on the inherent dignity of each person. I contrast that with the utilitarian and Kantian perspectives they get in the required Philosophy of the Human Person course. As CST is not an alternative economic theory, and does not have a set economic policy agenda, it allows for a discussion disconnected from existing policies or ideologies. However, it is not neutral, and students often have strong feelings (pro and con) about the Catholic Church. I teach economic development in an MA program which is explicitly based on CST and I use a lot of Catholic Relief Services material to help connect theory and practice.

CST has many similarities with the Capabilities Approach developed by Sen and Nussbaum which is the foundation of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda at the United Nations. For the past decade, UN reports and speeches have increasingly adopted the language and sometimes even the meaning of CST. We see this with the adoption of multidimensional poverty index and integral human development as the goal rather than just increasing GDP.

I do not bring CST into my Industrial Economics class which is a project based/applied course for the MBA program. Both my undergraduate courses and the MA in development are part of larger programs that I can draw connections with to bring CST into the dialogue. The MBA program does not have such connections.

You have advised US Bishops and worked for the Holy See at the UN. How do you personally assess those activities? What has worked best, and what may not have worked as well from your point of view?

I started working for the Institutional Catholic Church with the Vincentian Center for Church and Society at St John's and the Justice Commission of the Conference of Religious of Ireland in the 1990s, working on social policy and poverty policy issues. I provided expert economic analysis and analyzed official government reports. In Ireland there seemed to be a great reluctance from the native academic economists to engage in policy issues, so I got asked to look at a wide range of issues. When the Holy See Permanent Mission to the United Nations had to down-size their staff for budget reasons, the Vincentian Center, under Sr. Margaret John Kelly's leadership, offered St John's professors with expertise in the various issues they needed help with.

Since the mid-2000s I have been covering economic and social policy issues as well as the Statistical Commission at the United Nations. Mostly I attend meetings, write reports, and draft interventions. Occasionally I have been requested to attend individual meetings. (When France was preparing for the 2011 G7 meeting they were hosting, they asked to meet with the Mission to discuss how to enter in a dialogue with the Islamic world, specifically on Islamic banking. I was asked to attend the meeting, and I gave them a history of usury and how the West agreed with the Islamic perspective back in the Middle Ages, and after the financial crisis of 2008 it might be useful to look again at the Christian and Islamic critique of Usury).

Occasionally I have also been asked to be a delegate to a special meeting (such as for the High-Level Meetings on the Financial Crisis in 2009) and on two occasions I was asked to speak on behalf of the Mission.

The Holy See plays an important role behind the scenes and it presents a consistent voice for the poor. During the build-up to the Sustainable Development Goals the Holy See was (among other groups) a consistent voice for keeping poverty alleviation as a central focus, which was being pushed down the list of priorities by the rising concern over climate change. Even before Pope Francis' leadership, the Holy See consistently argued that poverty and the destruction of the environment are connected and not separate issues.

I was on the International Justice and Peace Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) for 3 years. My role was mostly to answer economic questions, most often on the free trade agreements then being discussed. The committee would get high level briefings from government officials, NGOs, and Catholic groups around the world so that they would get official government arguments as well as hear from Church workers to get a boots-on-the-ground perspective. Meetings would start with a discussion of an Ebola outbreak, with each successive topic being more depressing than the one before so that when we broke for Mass you really felt the need for prayer. I have also done some work with CRS (my favorite USA-based Catholic group) and a few other Catholic NGOs over the years.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

In many ways I was lucky in that I was already tenured before I came across CST and began engaging its ramifications for understanding the economy at an academic level. It was also fortunate that I was at a Catholic university which still maintained its Catholic mission. So I have never worried about job security. But I think young academics often worry too much about being outside the mainstream.

First let's assume that a Catholic economist is one who has fully embraced the basics of the Catholic faith and intellectual tradition. Certainly this will make being an economist more challenging because the philosophical anthropology of CST completely rejects the philosophical anthropology of many versions of economics, especially mainstream neoclassical economic theory and Austrian economics (which for some reason has become popular among conservative Catholics). Catholics can never accept the premise that people do and should only act in their own material self-interest.

However, even Adam Smith would reject the narrow perspective of neoclassical economics (just read his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*). Yes people often do try to act in their own self-interest, and some even disregard how their actions will negatively affect others and Catholics have a word for this – Sin. We are all sinners, so we shouldn't be surprised by this. The Church is a hospital for sinners. But the extreme selfishness that neoclassical theory requires for some consistency is only found in sociopaths. When Adam Smith wrote about self-interest, he is close to what we would call prudence. He completely rejected actions that achieved material gain at someone else's expense.

Furthermore, a Catholic understanding of the human person emphasizes our social nature, and thus rejects methodological individualism as the best way to understand human actions. Historical and social context are critically important to understand social actions, yet neoclassical economics requires the exclusion of social and historical context. The Catholic economist is going to be an outsider. They will not fit neatly on the left or the right. They should openly engage both the left and right. I do not think you can understand John Paul II without a very good working knowledge of Marx's philosophy and economics, and the openness to learn from Marx as John Paul II did. John Paul II is critically important for understanding CST. Similarly, to fully engage Francis you need to engage liberation theology. CST is inherently dialogical, and to understand it you have to engage both sides of the dialogue.

Also, to be a Catholic economist means that you do not have to solve every problem and answer every question. Economics is not the height of human understanding. Theology and philosophy are the higher levels of understanding. Economists need to learn their place and not try and redo theology as if it were a general equilibrium theory. However, they will do more interesting research, as economics becomes much more interesting when it is about real people and institutions and less about mathematical modeling and linear regressions on numbers you have no real idea how they were generated.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

First, get the best training you can get. You do not need to do a dissertation in CST and economics to enter this space. But you do need to study the history of economic thought and philosophy. You cannot be effective or useful if you work for a Catholic organization if your economics education is at a PhD level and your theology education ended with confirmation. Too often I come across economists using their economics education to make theological pronouncements. My favorite (which I have heard more than once) is *"Sin exists because God faced scarcity"*. Creating the universe out of nothing seems to me the opposite of scarcity. You don't have to get a graduate degree in Theology, but you should study what graduate students in good theology departments study. I was very lucky in that my oldest daughter did a double major in theology and philosophy at Fordham and then a PhD in Theology at Boston College while I was entering this area of research, so I would often buy two copies of the books assigned for her classes so I could keep up.

I would recommend using your skills as an economist to work for Catholic organizations. There is a great need for this expertise, and NGOs rarely can afford to hire consultants, yet they are fighting agencies that have armies of such experts. Having reports written by someone with a Ph.D. after their name helps, as does having professors representing them or testifying on their behalf. At one time I told Sr. Margaret John Kelly, who ran the Vincentian Center as I mentioned it earlier, that I was thinking of doing a MA in Theology as I was finding it more interesting that economics. She said we have plenty of theologians, but we do not have enough people who do what you do. St. Paul wrote about many gifts and one spirit. Concentrate first on developing the gifts that are unique to you. Then say yes when you are asked to share those gifts.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I was an adjunct at St. John's for a year and when someone quit a week before the Fall semester, I was offered a full-time position as Instructor (I was still taking classes in my PhD program). I had good success publishing as a graduate student (5 refereed articles) which led to going up for tenure within 2 years of defending my dissertation and further publishing success led to promotion to full professor at 36. I spent a year as Visiting Professor at University College Cork in Ireland and while there started doing some research for Fr. Sean Healy and Sr. Brigid Reynolds of the Conference of Religious of Ireland. This led to me becoming an economist working for the Church.

While I was in Ireland, Sr. Margaret John Kelly started the Vincentian Center for Church and Society at St. John's, so that when I came back from Ireland there was a group working on how to better promote the Catholic mission of St. John's. My first exposure to CST was reading *Economic Justice for All* and going to some parish workshops on it with my mother. Pat Primeaux from the Theology Department gave a talk to the economics department where he defended arguments economists were making against EJA and I defended the Bishops positions, which confused the audience (Pat and I soon became great friends, disagreeing on economics but agreeing on the greatness of French Gothic Architecture).

My work on CST as an academic really starts when Dean Charles Kronke (who was Protestant) asked me to represent the business school at a meeting on CST and management education at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He said it would be a good career move (which I thought was nuts, but he was right as it had a profound impact). I remember the presentations by Michael Naughton and Ernest Petrucci and conversations on philosophical anthropology and human dignity and I committed to writing a paper on the implications of CST to understanding the economy. Some 40 + publications later I am still trying to work this out.

In the end, the purpose of CST is to bring us closer to God. By understanding and caring for God's creation, we grow closer to God and fulfilling our purpose. CST yields great insights into the nature of the economy and economic activity because economic activity is human activity and humans were created by God. This is why the principles of CST are universal principles, because they reflect God's creation: the human person created in God's image and likeness. Thus, after almost two decades I have discovered that the job of a Catholic economist is to find God in the economy. As God is everywhere, this is an easy job. God is easiest to find in the margins, with the poor and unwanted. Convincing an increasingly secular world of God's presence is a challenge. Convincing an affluent and materialist world that God is to be found with the poor is an even bigger challenge.

To the extent that I have had any success it is mostly due to my willingness to say yes to work on projects I know little about when asked. Whether it is trusting the Holy Spirit or not knowing enough to know what I don't know is anyone's guess.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

The first time I was asked to deliver the Holy See Permanent Mission to the United Nations "Intervention" (short speech), I was not surprisingly very nervous. Representing one billion Catholics is a lot of pressure. Back then, you only knew you were on the list to speak, but you didn't know when you would be called, so for nearly two hours I waited, and then I heard the chair announce "We will now hear from the representative of the Holy Spirit" (instead of Holy See, what the Vatican is called at the United Nations). Not surprisingly the mistake drew a lot of laughter. When it died down, I thanked the chair for the promotion, and proceeded to read the text of the Intervention. The mission issued a press release on my giving the speech and it was picked up by over a dozen Catholic newspapers. Unfortunately, none of the New York based papers covered it (and they had all interviewed me).

INTERVIEW WITH BERNHARD GUNTER, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

April 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "Overall, I don't think that being a Catholic economist is easier or harder than being a Protestant economist, a Muslim economist, or even an atheist economist. On the other hand, being a good, honest, fair person is more difficult than being a person who does not care."
- "I have always been passionate about fairness and justice. When I was about six years old, I went to my aunt asking her for a kitchen knife and a cutting board. Obviously, she asked me for what. My explanation was that one of their two cats had caught a mouse. I needed the knife to cut the already dead mouse in two to make sure that both cats got their fair share of the "jointly owned" mouse!"

You are an Assistant Professor of Economics at American University. Could you tell us a bit about the university?

With nearly 9,000 undergraduate students and slightly more than 4,000 graduate students, American University (AU) is a mid-size university in the nation's capital. While being a relatively expensive private university, AU is proud of the fact that currently 70 percent of graduates receive need-based or merit-based aid.

The university was founded in 1893 by John Fletcher Hurst, a respected Methodist bishop who dreamed of creating a university that trained public servants for the future. While it remains today affiliated with the Methodist Church, it is not a religious university, but a liberal arts-based university, focusing on both teaching and research. The university is currently ranked the 25th best university in the nation for undergraduate teaching.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Bernhard Gunter, an Assistant Professor of Economics at American University, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

Visit us at www.GlobalCatholicEducation.org.

What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

My main areas of research are development macroeconomics, debt sustainability analysis, and the social impact of globalization. I am also interested in analyzing poverty reduction policies, macroeconomic development strategies, and the economic challenges of climate change. I am fortunate that my main research areas are largely corresponding with the courses I teach at AU.

I am especially proud of having developed an undergraduate course that is half development economics and half moral philosophy. Students learn not only about the key issues that determine the lives of the people living in developing countries, but also about the ethical aspects of problems like those of poverty and inequality. Given the huge demand for this course by students, it has become my main course (typically teaching multiple sections of this course every semester), although I also continue to teach development macroeconomics and introductory macroeconomics at the undergraduate level and public economics at the graduate level.

I have chosen these fields based on my conviction that knowledge is power, and my hope is that the more my students know about issues like poverty and inequality, the more likely they will contribute to making the world a better place. Ultimately, being Catholic and having been exposed to Catholic Social Teaching are the foundations for having chosen this career and these fields.

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?

I am incredible lucky to being able to share my values in my teaching of at least one course, which I am teaching on a regular basis. I probably could also integrate some of my values into the other courses I teach, but actually don't want to do that as I don't consider that to be appropriate for teaching introductory macroeconomics. Instead of sharing my values by integrating them into the curriculum of my economics courses, I prefer to be a good and fair professor. Most students actually recognize if a professor is fair or not. And hence, I am not sharing my values via the curriculum, but by being a dedicated and fair professor.

There certainly are limits on being a "nice" professor, not only due to my own personal limitations, but unfortunately also as some students misunderstand being a nice professor with not being able to being strict with regards to, for example, enforcing deadlines. There is a delicate line between being accommodating to students and actually being unfair to others by being too accommodating. There are many grey areas where it is far from clear if an exception to the rule should be granted to a student or not. Even though I am sure that my being nice has been taken advantage of, overall (and based on my students' feedback) I seem to be doing fine.

Do your values affect your research? If so, in what way? And what are some challenges you face?

The way my values affect my research is through the choice of what research I do, to the degree that I have a choice. For example, I am not interested in research that benefits corporations, but research that makes the world a better place, especially by focusing on economic justice. Compared to being an economist in some organization or corporation that has its own agenda, being an academic certainly provides more such freedom.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

Overall, I don't think that being a Catholic economist is easier or harder than being a Protestant economist, a Muslim economist, or even an atheist economist. On the other hand, being a good, honest, fair person is more difficult than being a person who does not care. But unfortunately, I don't consider religion to be the key factor for a person being good or honest.

It could be argued that being a Catholic economist is easy because economics, philosophy and theology share some basic roots. However, most economists and mainstream economics have forgotten about these shared roots. To some degree, mainstream economics has become too technical, too sophisticated for its own good. Mainstream economics is focusing too much on fancy mathematical models, and not enough on the philosophical foundation of economics. That makes it slightly more difficult for conscientious economists, but I would not say that it makes it harder for specifically Catholic economists.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

If you have the ability to do a PhD in economics, go for it. We need more Catholic economists with a PhD. On the other hand, we also need more Catholics in other professions and disciplines. Furthermore, it is not so much being Catholic that makes you needed, but the hope that you will be the shining light we Catholics are supposed to be. We are at a crossroads, and your higher education will be useful to take the right turn. And following up on the last question: don't expect that it will be easier to complete your PhD just because you are Catholic.

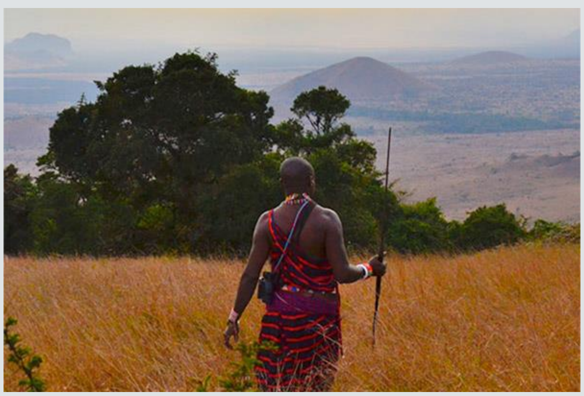
Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

Though I always wanted to make the world a better place, I did not imagine ending up as an economics professor. I had a previous career in international developmental organizations but then switched to focus more on development research. As a researcher, I found it useful to be associated to a university, and hence, I checked with my alma mater if I could teach in an adjunct faculty position. While teaching my first course in the spring of 2009, it became clear to me that I loved to teach more than I ever imagined, and I wanted to do more of it. After teaching in an adjunct position from 2009 to 2012, there was an opportunity for me to become at least temporarily a full-time professor as AU wanted me to teach more classes than I was allowed to teach as an adjunct faculty. So I became a full-time professor, initially for only one year, which was however renewed ever since.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I have always been passionate about fairness and justice. Even though I do not fully recall the event, my older cousins told me about the following event many times. I was about six years old when I was on the large farm of my uncle and aunt for summer vacation. One day, I went to my aunt asking her for a kitchen knife and a cutting board. Obviously, she asked me for what purpose I needed the knife and cutting board. My explanation was that one of their two cats had caught a mouse. I needed the knife to cut the already dead mouse in two to make sure that both cats got their fair share of the “jointly owned” mouse!

GLOBAL MAJORITY: A JOURNAL OF STUDENT RESEARCH



The *Global Majority E-Journal* (ISSN 2157-1252) is a biannual journal publishing on critical issues in the lives of the global majority: the more than 80 percent of the world's population living in developing countries. Topics discussed include poverty, population growth, access to safe water, climate change, and agricultural development. All articles are based on research papers written by AU undergraduate students (mostly freshmen) as one of the course requirements for AU's General Education Course: Econ-110, The Global Majority.

Source: https://www.american.edu/cas/economics/ejournal/

INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH KABOSKI, PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

April 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "We need to foster the dissemination of non-ideological and legitimate economic knowledge within Church conversations of the economy. At the same time, we need to help baptize the secular discipline of economics with Catholic values. Most economists, even practicing Catholics, don't have an appreciation of Catholic social doctrine."
- "The Catholic faith is both difficult and "a light yolk" at the same time. I think living a faithful life as an economist is probably no more or less difficult than any other profession."

You are a Professor of Economics at the University of Notre Dame. Could you tell us a bit about the university?

The University of Notre Dame is one of the premier Catholic universities in the United States. It was started in the mid-19th century by the Congregation of the Holy Cross, a French order, and despite its French origins and name, it became well known for educating the children of working class Irish immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is famous in the United States for its football team as well. It is now a wealthy Catholic school that is trying to move from being a liberal arts school to a research university. The economics department is a fairly new department, started around 2002 or so.

What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

I am a development economist, whose research mixes microeconomic and macroeconomic methods. The macroeconomic methods are more unique within development. I got interested in economics because I was concerned about poverty, but once I studied I realized that poverty in the U.S. paled in comparison to global poverty, so I concentrated on development.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Joseph Kaboski, a Professor of Economics at the University of Notre Dame, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

Visit us at www.GlobalCatholicEducation.org.

For teaching, I teach a graduate course in macroeconomic development, and an undergraduate course in economics and Catholic social thought, that I developed when I came to Notre Dame. I taught international trade in the past as well.

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?

When I taught at Ohio State, it was a public, secular university, and I would try to occasionally make comments or pose questions that would get the students to think about well-being in a somewhat broader sense that simply income or efficiency, but it was limited. Here at Notre Dame, my undergraduate course is quite explicit in Catholic values, but the graduate class is closer to what I did at Ohio State.

Do your values affect your research? In what way? And what are some challenges you face?

Certainly my values affect the focus of my research, the questions I ask, and how I view my findings. I have research on a Microfinance poverty program sponsored by Catholic Relief Services. I stay away from things like contraception, abortion, etc. Still, I am a very mainstream economist whose research is published in the field's secular journals. You would not read most of my research and find anything explicitly Catholic in them or really too far out of the ordinary. I appreciate the strengths of markets, competition, prices, incentives, and the importance of scarcity and constraints, but I also realize the limitations of markets, an important role for government, etc. I have recent research in the Amazon looking at a way of increasing the income of poor fishing communities by undermining a supply chain cartel, for example.

But, for example, I co-lead a UK-funded research program on the macroeconomic development of low income countries called STEG (Structural Transformation and Economic Growth), and my values are part of that. We have tried to avoid being ideological, get people involved from low income countries through a free virtual class, etc. In the UK, there is interest not only in growth but also sustainability, climate change, distributional concerns, and the status of women, which also helps. But for a research call we were writing, the original wording was to look for potential policies to address government distortions or market failures, which I thought was too narrow in focusing only on efficiency, and I pushed to broaden the language to include policies that would improve people's well-being more broadly.

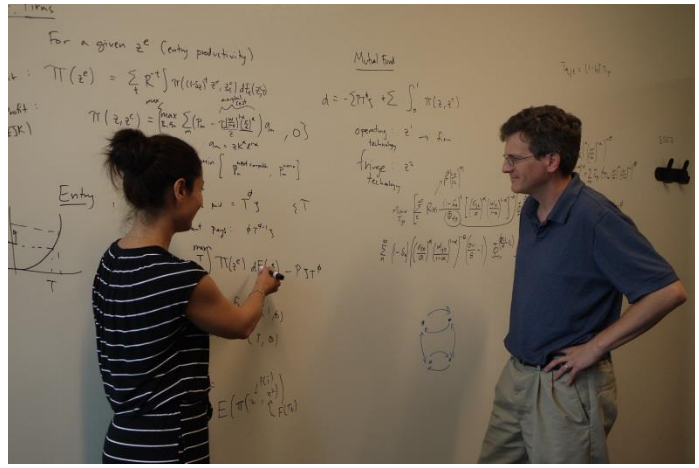


Photo: Teaching at University of Notre Dame.

You launched CREDO and have served as President of the association for many years. What has been achieved, and what needs to be done to strengthen the association and increase its impact?

We've grown tremendously, both in people involved and our activities. We have several hundred members, regular conferences, virtual panels, etc. We've had regular Masses and breakfasts at the ASSA (Allied Social Science Associations) annual meetings since our founding, and we're now members of the ASSA, so we will start having academic sessions as well. We have the summer seminar introducing economists to Catholic social teaching, and a monthly virtual seminar as well. And we have engaged bishops and Church leaders in many countries, including the USCCB and the Vatican. That's a lot of success.

But I think we need to improve and expand on all five dimensions of our mission. We need to build the community — we are only reaching a fraction of Catholic research economists, especially outside of the U.S., and we need to help foster the careers of young Catholic economists. We need to foster the dissemination of non-ideological and legitimate economic knowledge within Church conversations of the economy. Economists have a lot of important knowledge that matters for people's material well-being, but there is resistance to economists, especially quantitative economists, in many quarters of the Church. Even Pope Francis, for example, is very interested in the economy but — at the same time — very suspicious of economists. A lot of this is breaking down preconceptions of what economists are and do, and explaining the importance of economics for the things Catholics care about.

At the same time, we need to help baptize the secular discipline of economics with Catholic values, and that starts by helping CREDO members know and appreciate the Catholic insights. Most economists, even practicing Catholics, don't have an appreciation of Catholic social doctrine. In many case, we might not know what we should be caring about as Catholics, when it comes to the economy. So there is a lot of work to do, and I hope our movement of adding committees is a way of getting more people involved.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

The Catholic faith is both difficult and “a light yoke” at the same time. I think living a faithful life as an economist is probably no more or less difficult than any other profession. I have successes and failures, but the lightness of the yoke comes from realizing that God is merciful even in my failings and, given Jesus' victory which we celebrate later this week, my own success is not too critical in the grand scheme. I tell my students that there are a lot of different ways to serve God. That’s true within economics as well. You don’t need to be a development economist or teaching at a Catholic university. Perhaps what makes the vocation of an economist unique is that there is not much of a blueprint made for you of how to integrate your professional life into your faith, so it requires a lot of personal discernment. Again, I think the idea of CREDO can potentially be helpful is just giving young people examples of faithful economists.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

The Ph.D. is a big investment. Make sure you love economics and go to the best program you can get into. It will undoubtedly be a secular program, so it will take a lot of personal effort outside of class to grow your faith, both in the heart and intellectually. You will have to swim against the stream. Your advisor is unlikely to appreciate your religion, for example. But that is true of being a Christian these days, no matter where you are. It is countercultural to be Catholic, and if you follow the currents, there is a danger of losing your faith. At the same time, it has the advantage of making it almost impossible to be a lukewarm about your faith, however. A lukewarm faith, where God is just a side part of your life, is never a “stable equilibrium,” especially for an intellectual because it’s intellectually untenable. And people do still respond to the goodwill that they see in a fervent Christian.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I grew up in a big, Catholic family in the Rust Belt of the U.S., and we faced our share of economic struggles when I was a kid. My parents were both hard working and college-educated, but my father had several long unemployment spells when we were kids, and that left an impression on all of us. At the deepest points, I remember receiving free lunch (briefly) and Christmas toy donations, and I remember being quite ashamed by both. Today, I feel more shame for my pride back then, and I appreciate that having a background like that is quite rare in academia.

I studied engineering as an undergrad, but eventually moved into economics for graduate school because I thought it mattered more for people. I went to the University of Chicago, where I took classes from Becker and Lucas and went to daily Mass, where homilies would sometimes rail against market economics, the “Chicago Boys”, etc., so I needed to reconcile things in my mind and read up on Catholic social teaching. Fr. Bill Jabusch, the chaplain at Chicago, who wound up marrying my wife and me, helped me organize a conference on economics and Catholic Social Thought, and probably a decade later, Cardinal George asked me to do the same through the Lumen Christi Institute, and those conferences eventually grew into CREDO.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

At Notre Dame, the chapel door inscription says “God, Country, and Notre Dame”, but I’m a big fan of Wisconsin sports teams. The Green Bay Packers’ famous coach, Vince Lombardi (who was a daily communicant) had a motto of priorities: God, family, and the Green Bay Packers, in that order. I have a beautiful wife and a brood of kids. I try to keep my passions as God, family, and economics, with Wisconsin sports teams close in fourth place.

Photo: Department of Economics graduates at the University of Notre Dame.

Global Catholic Education Interview Series

INTERVIEW WITH MALCOLM KASS, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

April 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "The "facts" of economics don't speak for themselves any more than the data "speaks for itself." We use our values to identify and adjudicate between costs and benefits. Toward this end, I ask students to write reflection papers each week where they work through their own analysis of the tradeoffs."
- "More than often, the good that we value can have many different, even unpredictable forms. One of the best things about research has been such surprises, learning about interesting and new ways to manifest the values that many of us hold in common."

You are an Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Dallas. Could you tell us a bit about the university?

The University of Dallas (UD) is a small liberal arts university in Irving, TX (just outside of Dallas proper) and has about 2500 students, where 60% are undergraduates. UD has a strong Catholic identity, given its history and student body. The Sisters of Saint Mary of Namur founded UD, and the school has a history and close connection with the Cistercian Order. Our students reflect this Catholic identity, as 74% of our undergraduates self-identify as Catholic.

What makes UD unique as a liberal arts university is "The Core". The Core is a sequence of classes, a sequence common to all undergrad students. It covers the great works that shaped Western civilization. These classes range from history to theology to English to economics. In economics, we teach classics such as Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and the Papal Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Malcolm Kass, an Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Dallas, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

I currently research and teach Labor and Public economics topics. I also teach classes that complement these topics, Econometrics and UD's Core class, Fundamentals of Economics. Also, I have taught intermediate microeconomic and macroeconomic courses. As to "why" I chose public and labor economics; it starts with a desire to help local communities and students make better decisions or at least have a better understanding of the economic environment around them. In addition, these topics enhance my instruction of Catholic Social Teaching and the *Rerum Novarum* and *Centesimus Annus* encyclicals.

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?

I hope I convey to my students that to understand complex problems, you need to understand the stakeholders and their incentives and the constraints inherent in the situation. This complexity coupled with tradeoffs makes problem-solving difficult. And I am only looking at this from the economic point of view. Luckily, this approach matches the UD's mission statement, so yes, I can share my interests, which is encouraged by my school. When discussing the economics behind the public financing of facilities, there are many examples to use, such as public financing of new stadiums for professional sports teams. These sports examples work well for students.

It is a bit more challenging to teach labor economics and markets. The incentives behind guilds and unions are somewhat tricky for students, given their unfamiliarity with these economic structures. And while the idea of competitive pressures driving socially beneficial outcomes is readily apparent to me given my former engineering career, it is more challenging for students.

Do your values affect your research? If so, in what way? And what are some challenges you face?

UD encourages undergraduate research, and my policy research with undergraduates certainly reflects my desire to help local communities make better decisions. Last semester, I worked with a UD undergraduate designing a cost-benefit analysis of a new local professional sports team facility (that effectively guarantees the team's presence in the local community until 2045). The catch is that taxpayers will pay a large chunk of the bill, around $500 million in increased taxes. Our project critiqued the community leaders' arguments supporting the stadium and the analysis from two consulting white papers about the economic activity generated by professional sports teams. After which, we designed an economically sound cost-benefit study, similar to the work done at the US Office of Budget and Management. Ultimately, we found that it is unlikely that the community's benefits will outweigh the community's costs from the increased tax burden.

Some challenges I face are probably no different than any other university—lack of time, competing for attention, etc. But there is certainly nothing with the school's mission that conflicts with my interests.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

Given how much Catholic social teaching involves discussions around economics and markets and the school's emphasis on The Core, there are always students interested in economic topics regardless of their actual major. While I freely admit that my interests do not seem to conflict with the Church's teachings (I realize this isn't always true), in general, teaching at a Catholic university like UD that believes that economics is part of a multidisciplinary approach to problem-solving has many benefits, including interested students, interested faculty from different areas, etc.

The only minor difficulty comes from the heterogeneity in analytical thinking that students have, especially in the Fundamentals of Economics Core class. Hence, I need to be cautious about popping the clutch on the abstract modeling concepts of economics. This "governor" helps me refine my skills as a teacher, for it requires the use of a wide array of instructional techniques to explain the economic toolkit. Sometimes I use analytical models, sometimes case studies.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

One current issue in academia, economics included, is the near cultural homogeneity of its scholars. And this is not just for economics, but many academics, even those with varied interests, come from similar backgrounds. For instance, results from a new paper titled "Socioeconomic Roots of Academic Faculty" by Allison Morgan et al., show that faculty in US universities are 25 times more likely to have a parent with a Ph.D., and this proportion nearly doubles at more prestigious universities. I am a first-generation college kid (admittedly, I do have siblings who attended college before me), and my background was pretty unique overall. I think it hurts the field when only certain types self-select into a discipline. Scholars with a Catholic background would help.

A Ph.D. does take time, and a student should start that path when she is relatively young. But an Economics Ph.D. also provides opportunities, even beyond other disciplines. The economic toolkit is a mindset that trains individuals to think about how people would behave based on incentives, how markets can help or hurt, strategic thinking, etc. Therefore, it is advantageous overall. That is why there is a robust market for economics PhDs in academia and in the public and private sectors. In sum, there are worse ideas out there.

Photo: The new Texas Ranger stadium and its retractable roof.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I decided to go down this path relatively late in life. In my 30s, taking MBA classes at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, I decided to teach in a university setting, especially in economics. However, my wife had already established her career in the Dallas area, so I went to the University of Texas at Dallas, considered the strongest program in the area. Then I worked, sometimes it went well, other times not so well. I first worked as a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). But I knew that the UD was my primary goal. I started taking on adjunct positions there on top of my primary responsibilities at UTA. Eventually, by providence along with a large helping of stress, UD offered me an assistant professor position.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

What drives my teaching and research is helping students, and hopefully, the larger community, understand the ramifications of their decisions. Economics teaching is about analyzing situations, breaking a problem down into its smaller, inter-related parts, and then rebuilding it again to understand the issue in a more comprehensive manner. And this isn't to lead to a particular stance on an issue, but to help people attain a certain level of mental robustness, so they are not victimized by slant or groupthink or to accept a narrative because of a well-worded soundbite. That is why I worked with students on an evidence-based, legitimate cost-benefit analysis of public funding for the new Texas Ranger facility in Public Economics, and why I teach firms and unions' incentives in Labor Economics, and the distortions with government-backed price controls on food in Fundamentals of Economics. Armed with the economic toolkit, we all reflect on issues a bit more critically.

INTERVIEW WITH CAMILA MORALES, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

May 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "My research is largely motivated by my own lived experience. I moved to the US with my family when I was a teenager. I spoke little to no English and attended school in one of the poorest counties in the Metro Atlanta area. So, I enjoy working on topics that can help divulge a better understanding of the experiences of immigrant children and young adults."
- "Being a light in the classroom works. Students notice your joy, they notice your kind disposition towards them, they notice when professors care and when they do not, and they respond to that."

You are an Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Texas at Dallas. Could you tell us a bit about the University?

The University of Texas at Dallas (UTD) is a public research university, part of the University of Texas System, and primarily located in Richardson, TX (just north of Dallas). The school was first founded in the 1960s by Texas Instruments as the Graduate Research Center of the Southwest with a main focus on engineering, science, and technology. Today, UTD enrolls over 28,000 students from over 150 countries, with nearly 200 National Merit Scholars in the Fall 2020 freshmen cohort. It offers more than 140 academic programs across 8 schools, with STEM majors representing the top degrees conferred to undergraduates.

What has been your main area of research? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

My work lies at the intersection of K-12 education, labor economics, and immigration policy. For example, I have done work on the peer effects of attending school with refugees and examined the efficacy of school-based programs for English Learners.

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Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Camila Morales, Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Texas at Dallas, talks about her teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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I am currently working on several projects that examine the impact of immigration policies (e.g., DACA and immigration enforcement) on the labor and education outcomes of young adults and children in mixed-status households.

My research is largely motivated by my own lived experience. I moved to the US with my family when I was a teenager. I spoke little to no English and attended school in one of the poorest counties in the Metro Atlanta area. I experienced challenges in school as an English Learner, did not know how to navigate the transition to college, and witnessed firsthand how many of my peers faced limited economic opportunities because of their immigration status. So, I enjoy working on topics that can help divulge a better understanding of the experiences of immigrant children and young adults.

Do your values affect your research? In what way? And what are some challenges you faced or still face today?

As a Catholic, I believe I am called to use my talents and privileges to better the lives of others. So, I choose to work on topics that inform policies affecting the people in my community. My Catholic values affect the types of questions I address in my research and how I think about the broad implications of my work.

I approach my research as a balance of truth and love. As St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthians, even if I have all knowledge and wisdom, but have not love, I am nothing and gain nothing. I apply this in my work by not compromising on the truth, all while remembering that I study topics that affect people's lives and livelihoods.

I strive to remember that the data I use for analysis is the quantification of some aspects of people's lives, not simply numbers on a sheet. I like to meet with people in the communities that contribute to my studies. For example, I have met with many refugee students and learned about their stories. This was a valuable lesson and actually gave me good insight into mechanisms behind my findings.

I am new to the profession and maybe that is why I have not faced many challenges that put my Catholic values and research at odds. Perhaps my most challenging experience so far has been interpersonal relationships in the profession where I do not feel comfortable in sharing or being open about my faith.

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seemed to work and what does not?

I share my values with students indirectly by example. I strive to show grace and patience, treat students with dignity, and encourage them when I notice they are struggling. I began by appointment at UTD in the middle of the Covid pandemic, so I was constantly faced with students struggling to keep up with class, and frankly, just stay positive when everything around them seemed to be going wrong. It was challenging, but also an opportunity to grow in grace. Being a light in the classroom works. Students notice your joy, they notice your kind disposition towards them, they notice when professors care and when they do not, and they respond to that.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

I consider myself a Catholic first and an economist second. So, while I strive for excellence in my research and teaching, I try harder to not let it consume all my time or define my identity. I believe the work-centered culture in economics makes it challenging to have a balance. It is also a very secular discipline in terms of the people who become academics, so at times I find it lonely to be a Catholic economist. That said, being Catholic makes my career easier in that I know I find my worth in God, not any external recognition of my work. So, it takes the pressure off to be perfect for the sake of personal value. Instead, I feel free to pursue excellence in the service of God.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

With all the excitement in doing a PhD, there is also a lot of stress and pressure. Personally, it wasn't until I started my PhD that I struggled with imposter syndrome and the never-ending comparison game between peers. What got me through it all was grounding my identity in Christ. Practically, this meant that a setback in my research or a class presentation gone wrong was not devastating or a reason for anxiety. Knowing who I am in Christ and that my worth is fixed on being His child gives me peace. So, if you are contemplating a PhD in Economics, know that it will be challenging, but the Lord will see you through it. Prayer was also key (when isn't it!). I prayed before and during exams. I can't recount the many times I was stuck with a question and asked the Holy Spirit for help. Get a prayer card with St. Thomas Aquinas' prayer for students, it is beautiful and powerful.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I just started my career as an academic; I got my PhD from Georgia State University in the summer of 2020 and started at UTD in the fall. My personal journey involves a lot of work by the Lord. I never knew I would end up getting a PhD and becoming a professor. His plans are truly better than I could have ever imagined. He's put people in my life and opened opportunities that led me here. I got my bachelors in Econ from Georgia State and attended the American Economic Association Summer Training Program the summer I graduated. That program literally changed the trajectory of my career. It was there that I met many of the mentors I have today and was empowered to pursue a career in a field where very few people like me "make it". I truly believe I am here by the grace of God who gave me the courage to say yes to this journey.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I am passionate about spending time with my family and growing in my faith. I recently started learning and reading more about theology of the body and wow! It's fascinating.

INTERVIEW WITH DOUG NORTON, ASSISTANT TEACHING PROFESSOR AT FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

June 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "In the classroom, I can share my values in teaching. For example, in health economics we talk about "quality adjusted life years" or "value of a statistical life". How those quality adjustments are done, or the value of a life is determined, often leads to moral conversations."
- "For new graduates my suggestion is two-fold: sample and backward induct. Most people don't know what they want to do. The best way to figure that out is to sample different paths through coursework, undergraduate research, jobs, internships, volunteering, etc. Once you think you know, talk to someone who works in that area to help backward induct. Where you want to be in the future should help determine the kinds of investments you need to make now."

You are an Assistant Teaching Professor of Economics at Florida State University. Could you tell us a bit about the University?

Florida State University (FSU) is a large flagship public institution in Florida's capital city of Tallahassee. There are over 30,000 students at FSU but there are many pockets of more close-knit communities on campus too.

What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

As a teaching faculty, my primary responsibility is in the classroom. I teach a rotation of classes including public finance, health, intermediate micro, and special topics courses like economics of the family and religion. When I do research I include undergraduates in the process and the projects are often related to poverty, charitable action, education, and religion. For example, I just submitted a paper on the 1960s religious exercise cases (school prayer and Bible reading in schools) and how those rulings affected public school enrollment.

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Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Doug Norton, Assistant Teaching Professor at Florida State University, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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Later this year, I will be conducting field experiments with undergraduates at FSU to understand how low income individuals make labor market decisions when those choices lead to large losses in public assistance.

I also have a research agenda on behavioral insights into New Testament parables. This work starts with the premise that Jesus had excellent insight into human behavior, parables are timeless stories that speak to us today, and lab experiments can help highlight important facets of the stories. For example, Mark Isaac and I wrote a paper on the Parable of the Great Banquet. If we are modern day invitees to this banquet, what factors cause us to accept or reject an invitation? We posit opportunity costs like wealth, power, etc. (how people value outside options) lead people to turn down this valuable invitation as well as ambiguity over the value of the banquet. We show both of these factors matter and other factors matter too.

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?

In the classroom, I can share my values in teaching. For example, in health economics we talk about "quality adjusted life years" or "value of a statistical life". How those quality adjustments are done, or the value of a life is determined, often leads to moral conversations. In other classes, we can talk about Aquinas and the theory of just price when we discuss moral intuitions about price ceilings. Students have been open to these conversations. However, there are many times I will hold back in the classroom in ways I wouldn't if I were teaching at a different institution. But, some students have wanted to have these conversations during office hours and I have been open to that.

Do your values affect your research? If so, in what way? And what are some challenges you face?

Without a doubt my values affect my research. My work on religious exercise and parent decisions to exit public schools reflects how parents care about much more than test scores when choosing the school for their children. The field experiment on labor market decisions and public assistance represents a desire to understand and remove obstacles to economic mobility through charitable action and economic policy. Some of my work is mainstream and some is outside the box. The more outside the box work presents some challenges like people asking, "how is this economics?" One thing I like about being a teaching faculty is there isn't pressure to do what other people think is interesting or important. I have more freedom to choose topics.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

Being a Catholic economist is not hard. I am able to integrate insights from my faith into research and teaching. However, the extent to which those insights can be incorporated is less deep than it would be if I were teaching at a religious school. Sometimes this makes coverage of a topic feel incomplete.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

For new graduates my suggestion is two-fold: sample and backward induct. Most people don't know what they want to do. The best way to figure that out is to sample different paths through coursework, undergraduate research, jobs, internships, volunteering, etc. Once you think you know, talk to someone who works in that area to help backward induct. Where you want to be in the future should help determine the kinds of investments you need to make now. Throughout the process, pray and talk to a trusted mentor. If you decide to pursue a Ph.D., don't just do what you think others are interested in, do the things that also interest you. It will unleash your curiosity and productivity.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

This is going to be a long answer! Any story about my personal journey to this position should begin with my first year being an undergraduate at Florida State University because I was going nowhere fast. When I enrolled at FSU, I lived a typical undergraduate lifestyle until a profound conversion experience following my first year. I started attending the United Methodist campus ministry at FSU. Because I didn't grow up in the church, there was some intimidation with Sunday services and Bible studies. Everyone knew more than me. By God's grace I pressed on, discovered a generous community, and devoured everything I could about my newfound Christian faith. At this campus ministry, I also met my wife.

When I completed my undergraduate degree at FSU I planned to enter into the Peace Corps. I was set to do small business development in Nicaragua, but there was a last minute problem. Of all things, the Peace Corps was concerned about my teeth! Strange, I know. During winter break I received an unexpected email from a professor Mark Isaac who asked if I would be interested in being his research assistant during Spring 2007. That spring we wrote the start of two papers and a book together. We even designed a course called the "Economics of Compassion" which was a historical and contemporary look at poverty related issues at both domestic and international levels. It was an unbelievable collaboration, but at that time it felt temporary.

I wanted to work with the poor. I applied to Teach for America. But, when I interviewed, I said some things that were different from what they wanted to hear. I wasn't offered. I didn't know what I wanted to do. Many of my friends were going to seminary. I could see becoming a pastor too. But, I wasn't sure. Mark Isaac convinced me I should at least earn an M.S. in economics. That's what I did and I continued to work with Mark for the next few years until I finally decided to take the necessary math courses to enter into a Ph.D. program in Economics. It was an easy decision about where to apply. My wife was in the College of Medicine at FSU and I wanted to continue to work with Mark.

Graduate school was hard. Before graduate school, I don't think I knew what it meant to work hard. Those courses completely changed my reference point. I left Tallahassee a couple years into my program and completed my dissertation in Greenville, SC away from the nest. That was where my wife was completing her pediatric residency. It was during that period we converted to Catholicism and I became a father to three lovely little girls.

Going into the job market, I felt great about my prospects. I checked all the boxes to be a good candidate for an academic position. There were many interviews but I didn't convert those to campus visits at the rate I wanted. At one place I visited that seemed like a great fit, the position fell apart. At another place, I was at the top of the list until a snowstorm delayed deliberations, a faculty member left, and their ranking of candidates was shuffled. Those were both let downs. But, I still had a couple more campus visits lined up. Then, the row of apartments my wife and I lived in was consumed in flames! Nobody was hurt. But living out of a hotel with my wife who was pregnant with twins, working long hours at residency, and taking care of our 1.5 year old daughter while giving job talks seemed like too tall an order. I canceled the job talks and accepted a position with an educational technology start-up called MobLab. While there was an obvious "push" to take the job at MobLab, there was also a "pull". I am an experimental economist which means I create decision situations that are meant to mirror economic models. Then, I populate those models with real people and ask how those individuals make decisions. MobLab was bringing experiments to classrooms to help teach different economic concepts the way you might have a lab in physics or chemistry (Moblab is a mash-up of mobile laboratory). But, almost two years away from the classroom helped me understand how much I love teaching. I missed the classroom.

I wanted to go back onto the academic job market but I needed some time to publish papers and build a new research agenda. A position as a post-doctoral scholar opened at FSU! It would be easier to restart research in a place where I already had connections, especially with family responsibilities. Then, some months after we moved to Tallahassee my wife was offered a faculty position in the College of Medicine to teach medical students pediatrics and help start a clinic in a low-income part of Tallahassee. When the post-doctoral position was about finished, I went on the academic market again but leadership at FSU initiated a spousal hire for me to retain my wife. That is how I was hired as a teaching faculty at my alma mater FSU. I love teaching and interacting with students. Increasingly, I am also getting involved in the Tallahassee community joining in efforts to help engage the community, lift people out of poverty, and more. This position also has allowed me greater freedom to pursue different research projects I wouldn't have been able to do if I were tenure track. Importantly, it has also helped me achieve a happier balance with supporting my wife and children (we are expecting our fourth daughter in July 2021). To me these twists and turns represent God's grace and providence. I did not expect to be in Tallahassee in 2021 - 17 years after I arrived here as an undergraduate. But, this circuitous and barely believable path is beautiful. I feel blessed to be in this position and pray I become the best teacher, researcher, and leader I can be.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I am passionate about excellence in teaching. I want to help students see the power of economics to explain the world around them and I pray I can be the kind of mentor to students that Mark Isaac was to me. Once the pandemic subsides I am also hopeful to return to being a catechist at our local parish - something I haven't done consistently for a few years. I am excited about the opportunity to volunteer with more organizations in Tallahassee and help expose my daughters to more opportunities to serve. On a different note, I love sports. In particular, you can frequently find me attending and watching FSU Football and Basketball games. Go Noles!

INTERVIEW WITH CLARA PIANO, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AT SAMFORD UNIVERSITY

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

April 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "The "facts" of economics don't speak for themselves any more than the data "speaks for itself." We use our values to identify and adjudicate between costs and benefits. Toward this end, I ask students to write reflection papers each week where they work through their own analysis of the tradeoffs."
- "More than often, the good that we value can have many different, even unpredictable forms. One of the best things about research has been such surprises, learning about interesting and new ways to manifest the values that many of us hold in common."

[This interview was conducted when Clara was completing her PhD and teaching at Catholic University of America, i.e. before she joined Samford University].

How do you spend your time in a typical week?

I teach two courses at Catholic University right now, so on the days that I teach, I try to accomplish everything related to that aspect of my job—prepping lectures, meeting with students, or writing exams. As a relatively young and inexperienced professor, I also make extra time to listen to podcasts, read articles, and find books that relate to the courses I'm teaching. It's really important to me to take my students' time seriously.

The days during the week that I don't teach are devoted to research. I wake up, pray for the intercession of St. Thomas Aquinas, and get to writing. Right before lunch I go on a run with my dog to unwind and mull over any problems that arose in my work. The rest of my day is spent on more research activities, usually reading and/or with data. I always try to take Sundays off so I can fully be present at Mass, with family and friends, and in my leisure. It has taken me some time to hit my stride with a weekly schedule, but I'm the kind of person who thrives in patterns, so it was worth the experimentation with my schedule during grad school.

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What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Clara Piano, an Assistant Professor of Economics at Samford University, talks about her teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

During my PhD studies, my primary fields were Institutions and Development. However, I've always been fascinated by the role played by families and religions in society, so my research often engages with the fields of family economics and the economics of religion. For example, while writing a paper on Soviet family policy, I had the chance to engage with family economics, economic history, and Marxist and feminist scholars. I've also written on the role of the *in persona Christi Capitis* doctrine in shaping the institutions of the Catholic Church (primarily seminaries) which provided me the opportunity to dive more deeply into the economics of religion and history again.

What drew me originally to these fields was the same thing that drew me to economics itself— my personal experience of living in developing countries (both as a child and as an adult) and a Catholic Social Thought reading group during college. In particular, I wanted to understand why my grandma Mary was able to successfully find and fulfill her vocation as a nurse, and consequently benefit her family and community, while my abuela Maria in the Dominican Republic did not have the same freedom when it came to finding her unique economic vocation. The more I studied, the more I became convinced that understanding the comparative advantages of the state, the family, and religion is the key to a society that befits human dignity.

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?

Yes and no (on purpose). In economics, we often presume that the agents in our models and theories value wealth. This tends to work well, since wealth is itself a means for many diverse human ends (supporting one's family, running a business, caring for the poor), so it explains a lot of behavior. The purpose of an economics class is to learn economics, so I spend the vast majority of class time on economic history, theory, and evidence, to make sure that I'm exposing my students to all the important "facts." But of course, this is not the end of the conversation. The "facts" of economics don't speak for themselves any more than the data "speaks for itself." We use our values to identify and adjudicate between costs and benefits. Toward this end, I ask students to write reflection papers each week where they work through their own analysis of the tradeoffs. We openly discuss the often-difficult tradeoffs that the economic approach identifies. I also see this step in the process as part of the division of labor in society, with other disciplines (e.g., philosophy and theology) and institutions (e.g., family and religion) picking up where I leave off in my economics courses.

Do your values affect your research? If so, in what way? And what are some challenges you face?

Definitely! Knowledge begets love, and it works the other way around too. I am drawn to studying family and religion because I am convinced that they provide great value to society and individual lives, and I wanted to understand that better. My challenge is not so much being impartial about the things that I study (the best any of us can do is honest), but to persevere each day in falling in love with my specific research at the time. I noticed this while studying for my qualifying exams at the beginning of my PhD studies—the more I love what I'm trying to understand, the more I can understand it.

I also want to emphasize that a certain amount of open-mindedness, or trust in truth, is necessary in research. More than often, the good that we value can have many different, even unpredictable forms. One of the best things about research has been such surprises, learning about interesting and new ways to manifest the values that many of us hold in common.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

Mostly easy! As Catholics, we believe that each person has a unique vocation— a place where your particular talents meet a deep need in the world. When you discover your vocation (as I did during the last year of my undergraduate studies), it often feels like the easiest, most peaceful thing in the world. I still can't believe that I get to spend the rest of my life reading, writing, and teaching. Moreover, as Catholics, we are always on the side of truth. We don't need to be afraid of the truth found in economics, rather, we have a serious duty to seek it.

The only hard part so far is that, when you enter the intellectual world, you must really be certain about what you believe and why. Every aspect of your worldview may be scrutinized (rightfully so), and while this is a great benefit to you in the long run, it can be tedious and scary in the short run. Know who you are, and where you are going.

You are co-chair of the service committee of CREDO - why did you volunteer and what are you trying to achieve?

Yes, and it has been a great experience thus far! I volunteered to help out because I strongly believe in CREDO as an organization. It is a beautiful thing to connect with people who share so much in common with you, but who also have an entirely unique journey and perspective. I am young and inexperienced as an economist, but I do have a lot of enthusiasm to offer, so the service committee was a natural fit. I have also been involved in teaching catechism and confirmation classes at parishes for many years, and spent a semester of college doing service, so engaging with the broader community has always been something I felt drawn to.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

Pray about it! Then, when you are given peace and consolation about your decision, don’t let anyone dissuade you from it. If I had listened to some prominent authorities in my life, gotten a “real job” and not gone to graduate school, I would not have met my future husband! Of course, other people mean well, but your vocation is between you and God. Letting “The Divine Economist” influence your plans gives you the best chance at finding the happiness you were made for.

Also, I do have one book recommendation. This book continues to bring me peace and encouragement during the difficult times of my academic journey: The Intellectual Life (Sertillanges 1987).

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I did a limited search on the academic job market this past year, and I am grateful to have found a wonderful, tenure-track position at Samford University, which is also quite close to where my fiancé works. I don’t think I would have had as much success on the job market if I had not said “yes” to many opportunities that scared me at first — pursuing a research idea while still busy with classes, enjoying a lecturer role alongside my research, and jumping at opportunities that I knew I would initially fail at but improve with experience. I look forward to becoming a member of the Samford community and doing my best to pass on to students the incredible gift that my college professors gave me.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I have a beautiful dog (a Pyrador) whose name is Jace! No, I didn’t name him, but I took our first name-last name match as a sign that I should adopt him in particular, and it has been the best adventure. Jace and I are both extremely active, so we love running miles and miles along the Mount Vernon Trail each weekend. I’m passionate about nature and have always hiked, camped, and wandered, so it has been fun to have a piece of wild in my home each day.

Photo: Jace!

Photo: Jace & Jace

INTERVIEW WITH ERIC SCORSONE, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

June 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "I think, especially in working for a public university, one must be careful and balanced in presenting or teaching about one's values. I have never felt pressure not to teach my own values, but rather I hold myself accountable to teach a fair and balance view of public policy issues from a plurality of views."
- "My values impact the type of research I work on and how I teach. I am interested in doing work on issues that impact local communities and in particular marginalized communities. I am very drawn to the teaching of Pope Francis and wish to emulate the kinds of issues he emphasizes… I reach out and work with local public officials in communities where economic and social distress is widespread."

You are an Associate Professor of Economics at Michigan State University. Could you tell us a bit about the University?

Michigan State University (MSU) is a publicly funded university governed by an elected board of trustees who are elected by the residents of Michigan. It is one of the largest universities in the United States. It was founded in 1855 as land grant university by President Lincoln meaning that it was established to extend education to the general public beyond the elite who typically attended college at that time. This included areas of study including agriculture, practical engineering, and the agricultural extension service to assist farmers and farm households.

Today, it has extended these ideas to many other areas and the extension service works on nutrition and homeowner issues, urban agriculture and gardening, state and local government assistance, natural resource management along with all the traditional topical areas of a modern university.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Eric Scorsone, Associate Professor of Economics at Michigan State University, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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What has been your main area of research and what did you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

My interest has always been in public policy and I chose economics to be the field that I could best understand these issues. Over time, my focus became state and local government or subnational governments which are often less studied than national or federal governments but are almost always dealing with the most important issues of the day. Ultimately, I focused on state and local government finance because I spent time working as an economist in the Colorado Governor's Office as a PhD student working on state revenue forecasting and state tax policy. I founded and continue to run the MSU Extension Local Government Finance and Policy Center and work extensively with local governments in Michigan and globally.

Were you able to share your values in your teaching? What seemed to work and what does not?

I think, especially in working for a public university, one must be careful and balanced in presenting or teaching about one's values. I have never felt pressure not to teach my own values, but rather (from my own feelings) I hold myself accountable to teach a fair and balance view of public policy issues from a plurality of views. If someone asks about my own personal views, I am happy to share those and the foundation for those views.

Do your values affect your research, and if so in what way? And what are some challenges you faced or still face today?

I think my values impact the type of research I work on and how I teach. I am interested in doing work on issues that impact local communities and in particular marginalized communities. I am very drawn to the teaching of Pope Francis and wish to emulate the kinds of issues he emphasizes. I do research on topics that address policy issues relevant to marginalized communities in the local government context and I do much of my extension teaching to local public officials. In particular, I reach out and work with local public officials in communities where economic and social distress is widespread.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

It can be quite difficult especially at a public university. One cannot explicitly express religious values and so one needs to learn how to operate in this environment. I believe the best approach is to express your values through your actions. You treat people, colleagues, students and guests in line with your values and you act as you would want to be treated.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

I would recommend that your Catholic views shape the kind of research and teaching you want to pursue. The important questions of our day have been well highlighted by Pope Francis including racism, climate change, inequality, and the overall need to support marginalized communities. These are all topics an economist can tackle. If you want to be more explicit about your own views, you may want to pursue a degree at a Catholic university if that is a possibility. That said, it should be no problem to seek an education where you need to be and still be successful.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I ended up here after studying as an undergraduate student in economics at Loyola University Chicago. The Jesuits taught us that we needed to pursue our gifts to help others and be a beacon of light in the world. I took several classes in theology, economics, and business ethics that helped me understand how ethics, values and economics work together. From there, I spent time both in graduate school and the real world understanding what my role was to be. Although it was a nonlinear journey in many ways, I believe I ended up doing this work to help those in marginalized communities fully participate in the economy and society. A public land grant university has a similar mission to extend the resources of the university to those in need.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, I have been working on the frontlines with the Mayor of the city of Flint in Michigan. I chose to do this rather than simply stay at home and work. My responsibility has been to assist the Mayor and other elected officials. Flint is a community that has been hit with economic and social distress, a drinking water crisis in 2015, and now the pandemic. I don't do this work because I believe I am smarter than anyone, but rather to share my talents and gifts and help a struggling community.

INTERVIEW WITH LEONARD WANTCHEKON, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

June 2021

EXCERPTS:

- "The area I grew up in had three main characteristics that have helped shape my future career and research agenda. First, my community had a Catholic school built in it in 1895, and so education has always been highly valued. Second, my community was a multi-cultural place made up of migrants …, which made it a relatively open-minded village. Third, I was lucky to derive high aspirations and ambitions from my uncle and from my parents that drove me … to engage in political activism."
- "I have always been passionate about history and its role in our current lives… Benin has an incredibly fascinating history of the 'Amazons' – also called the 'female warriors'… They comprised of around one-third of the whole army... We are in the process of … creat[ing] a museum dedicated to them."

You are a Professor of Economics at Princeton University. Could you tell us a bit about the University?

Teaching in a university like Princeton is a great pleasure and real privilege. It is one of the top 3 or 5 schools in the country with very strong programs in Sciences, Engineering, and Humanities. Princeton provides a very stimulating research environment and has been really supportive of my academic as well as institutional building projects in Africa. On a personal level, I greatly enjoy working with the top-caliber colleagues from the Departments of Politics and Economics as well as the School of International Affairs here at Princeton.

What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

My fields are political economy, economic history, and development economics. I have conducted a wide range of studies on political institutions and governance, using field experiments.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Leonard Wantchekon, Professor at Princeton University, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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Currently, I use the methodology of institutional experiments to study candidate selection in local elections, bureaucratic governance, and the politics of education policies.

In economic history, I study the long-term effects of historical events in a nascent field called “cultural economics.” For instance, I collaborated with Nathan Nunn at Harvard on a paper called “Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa” (AER, 2011) where we discovered a strong link between current differences in trust levels within Africa to the transatlantic and Indian Ocean slave trade. Similarly, in another paper I wrote with Omar Garcia Ponce called “Critical Junctures” we found that levels of democracy in post-Cold War Africa can be traced back to the nature of its anti-colonial independence movements.

More recently, I have been employing a novel approach to study the effect of education on social mobility using historical micro-data from the first regional schools in late-19th century and early-20th century Benin. This new approach has proven to be very promising and I am currently applying it to study the social history of the origins of gender norms to the demand for education and to ethnic/racial inequalities in Africa and the US.

As you can tell, my research spans a wide array of fields! With regards to why I chose them, I would say it is the result of a number of factors. Some of my interests stem from my experiences growing up in Benin. The area I grew up in had three main characteristics that have helped shape my future career and research agenda. First, my community had a Catholic school built in it in 1895, and so education has always been highly valued. Second, my community was a multi-cultural place made up of migrants from throughout Benin, from Togo, and from elsewhere, which made it a relatively open-minded village. Third, I was lucky to derive high aspirations and ambitions from my uncle and from my parents that drove me to not only do well in school, but to engage in political activism from a young age. In addition to these values around education, open-mindedness, and political engagement, my research has always been informed by observations and experiences from growing up in Benin.

For example, the idea to study the legacy of the slave trade on trust levels in African countries was a direct result of my memories as a child in a country that, in the 17th and 18th centuries, had been a major supplier of slaves. I witnessed first-hand the resulting mistrust and skepticism that these legacies lent to much of the local population in their dealings with others.

Another big influence on my work comes from interacting with my doctoral advisers, Roger Myerson and Chris Udry. Roger, a Nobel prize-winning economic theorist, always stressed the need to imagine specific institutional fixes to political problems and to test them empirically and rigorously. Chris Udry is a pioneer of empirical development economics, and has always had a strong focus on field work and data quality. Both advisors influenced my work and career immensely.

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?

I strongly believe in the importance of emphasizing the role of social experience in research. I really like to enable students to turn their personal motivation and experience into advanced economic research. I strongly believe that important social insights can be gleaned when students leverage their own experiences interacting with the world and with others, their own cultural awareness, and their own intrinsic motivation to really get to the bottom of issues of development. My beliefs in the values of inclusivity and representativeness are at the foundation of my desire to promote education and graduate training. It is for this reason that I founded the African School of Economics.

Do your values affect your research? If so, in what way? And what are some challenges you face?

I have already mentioned the three values that my community in Benin inculcated in me from a young age: the values of education, open-mindedness, and political engagement. My values guide me towards selecting topics that I believe can help reduce poverty and violence while improving human understanding and collaboration.

For instance, I am currently leading a project in Nigeria aimed at developing new ways to foster dialogue between politicians and the general population in a way that makes governments more responsive to the needs of students and communities that they are elected to serve. I believe that, ultimately, it is my strong conviction in the potential of human collaboration, openness to new ideas, and dialogue, which all stem from the values bestowed in my formative years, that have shaped much of my work.

Another example is my interest in education and social mobility. Many of my recent research projects are aimed at understanding the factors that underpin poverty and slow upward mobility. The Catholic school established in my village in the late-19th century has been central to my ongoing fascination with education and social mobility.

You created the Africa School of Economics. How did that relate to your values?

As with my research work, my drive to start the African School of Economics (ASE) stems from those foundational values in education, openness to ideas, and political engagement instilled in me as a child in Benin. I have always strongly valued the importance of giving others a fair opportunity in life. African students, unfortunately, often grow up in environments that do not give them a chance to make the best of their skills and devotion. And so, to try and remedy this reality, I couldn't just sit in academia and write about education and social mobility, I had to act. ASE is the result of my values impelling me to action.

In the past, and still today to some extent, some of the most important work to mitigate these challenges is performed by Catholic missionaries on the continent. Drawing inspiration from their work has given me an avenue to bring my values to the fore with the creation of ASE. At ASE, the aim is to train young Africans to be able to apply their natural abilities in the generation of substantive and useful knowledge. This not only helps them build successful lives and careers, but also puts them in a position to advance the quality of life of all those on the continent.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

Being a Catholic economist is easy! Particularly so in the fields of development economics, welfare economics, and public economics. This is because the Catholic faith tends to align well with the types of research topics that are popular in those subfields like, for instance, the focus on reducing poverty and inequality. The concept of fairness too is central to many subfields of economics and aligns very well with Catholic principles.

In addition, the Catholic Church is a central part of many of the top economics programs in the world. In developing countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Chile, but also in North American and European universities, many of the top economics programs are hosted by schools that are mission-driven or at the very least retain a strong Catholic influence. The University of Notre Dame and Laval University in Canada come to mind as good examples.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

My main advice to young Catholics with aspirations of pursuing a PhD is to let their values guide their personal motivation, and then once you gain insights and publish ideas you should also “preach” (or disseminate) those findings to policy-makers so that your insights have the chance to leap off the page and into reality. A good economist is both a generator of ideas as well as a generator of action to manifest those ideas.

Ultimately, academia represents a fantastic avenue to help make the world a better place. Using your values as a guide to identify the biggest problems in the world today, can help you direct your research to the generation of knowledge that facilitates better governance and gives less-advantaged people better chances in life.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

I was born and raised in a small village in central Benin. My father was a subsistence farmer and was arrested when I was a kid for failing to pay a tax amounting to some 80 percent of our family income! The episode stayed with me and inspired my early days of political activism fighting for democracy and against unjust taxes on the poor. After entering the University of Benin in 1979, I put together a clandestine campus group to fight for freedom and democracy in the country. Needless to say, that was not well received by the authorities, and I was expelled after organizing a large general strike. I was forced into hiding for five years!

In the mid-1980s, the government came under pressure to be less oppressive, so I returned to the university campus where, however, I did not see the political change I had expected. So, naturally, we organized larger protests that involved university students, high school students, and civil servants. Within three months of coming out of hiding, I was arrested again and spent the rest of my time in Benin as a prisoner—until I escaped to Nigeria in 1986.

From Nigeria I was able to fly to Canada as a political refugee and immediately enrolled in Laval University in Quebec City. There I bypassed many undergraduate courses to go straight to an M.A. in economics, despite having no background in the discipline: the master's is actually my first university degree! After that, I earned my PhD in economics from Northwestern University in 1995, specializing in political economics and development economics.

My first academic job was at Yale University. They were looking for an assistant professor of political science with a specialty in game theory which happened to align closely to my interests and passions. I taught there from 1995 to 2001. I then taught for a decade at New York University, until Princeton offered me my current job in 2011. Now, I divide my time between my position here at Princeton, and the ASE campus in Benin where my dream of training African economists is taking shape.

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

In 1982, I visited Paris for the first time for two weeks. During that visit, I was so obsessed by art and military history that I would spend 10 hours a day touring le Louvre, the Museum of the Army, and the Museum of African Art among others. I have been nowhere else, not even the Eiffel Tower, the Parc des Princes (the football stadium), or La Sorbonne (the University).

In addition to my academic work at Princeton and my role founding and running ASE, I would really like to set up museums in Benin and other African countries, particularly around the sites of the first Catholic missions from the mid to late 19th Century in Zagnanado (my home town) and Agoue, the settlement of former slave returnees from Brazil.

I have always been passionate about history and its role in our current lives. And yet our history on the African continent is rarely told or relayed to younger generations in a way that resonates with them – through museums and cultural centers, This is largely due to a lack of investment. So an abiding aspiration of mine is to raise money to build museums on or around existing historical sites. The materials are there. The investment is not. For example, Benin has an incredibly fascinating history of the 'Amazons' – also called the 'female warriors' – where every conflict involved an elite, all-female military unit (not unlike Spartan women in ancient Greece). They comprised of around one-third of the whole army. My team in Benin has been able to identify about 50 or 60 of these female warriors and we are in the process of profiling them and create a museum dedicated to them.

Photo: Outdoor class in the late 19th Century in my hometown Zagnanado.

Photo: ASE and IERPE staff group picture (2014). Leonard is on the left.

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT WHAPLES, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS AT WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon

May 2021

EXCERPTS:

- “I believe that all scholars' values affect their research. How could they not? They guide every decision we make. Economics is all about weighing costs and benefits in making decisions. Moral values are about what we consider to be costs and what we consider to be benefits.”
- “Unfortunately, the Western World -- and especially academia in these countries -- has become increasingly hostile toward religion in all its forms. Fortunately, the economics profession doesn't seem to share this hostility. Do good work and you will succeed. So, the welcome mat is out and there are innumerable research topics where you can do good and do well at the same time.”

You are a Professor of Economics at Wake Forest University. Could you tell us a bit about the University?

I have taught for 30 years at Wake Forest University in North Carolina. Wake Forest is at the intersection of a liberal arts college and a research university. The classes are small -- our Introduction to Economics courses are capped at 35 students, other economics courses are capped at 25 students -- and the student body is fairly selective. U.S. News & World Report ranks Wake as 28th among national universities in the United States.

What has been your main area of research and what did you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?

Wake's "teacher-scholar" ideal aims for a balance between teaching and research. My research began in the field of economic history, with a focus on labor markets, but it has evolved toward a broader set of issues related to public policy and moral issues.

Box 1: Interview Series

What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website? The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

Why a series of interviews? Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

What is the focus of this interview? In this interview, Robert Whaples, Professor of Economics at Wake Forest University, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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This progression can be seen by the titles of the books I have edited (or co-edited) in the past decade: The Handbook of Modern Economic History (2012), The Handbook of Major Events in Economic History (2013), The Economic Crisis in Retrospect: Explanations by Great Economists (2013), Future: Economic Peril or Prosperity? (2016), Pope Francis and the Caring Society (2017), In All Fairness: Liberty, Equality, and the Quest for Human Dignity (2019), and New Thinking about Social Justice (forthcoming). Since 2013 I have co-edited the journal The Independent Review.

I love teaching and have taught an overload of courses for more than a decade. I think there is more value added in Introduction to Economics courses than in any other, and regularly teach that class. I also regularly teach Current Economic Issues and Natural Resource and Environmental Economics. I have also taught courses like American Economic History and Economics of Entrepreneurship.

Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seemed to work and what does not?

Yes. At the beginning of the semester, right after I have handed out the syllabus and discussed what will be covered for the semester, I say a short prayer in class. Usually it's something like this: "Almighty God, thank you for bringing us together this semester to learn economics. Please guide, guard, and protect us throughout the semester, throughout our lives, and throughout eternity." I close the semester with a similar prayer. Late in the semester I let students know that I've been praying for them by name throughout the semester.

Do your values affect your research? In what way? And what are some challenges you faced or still face today?

I believe that all scholars' values affect their research. How could they not? They guide every decision we make. Economics is all about weighing costs and benefits in making decisions. Moral values are about what we consider to be costs and what we consider to be benefits.

Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?

Being a Catholic is an utter joy, so being a Catholic economist isn't so much easy or hard, but unavoidable if you are both a Catholic and an economist.

What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?

Unfortunately, the Western World -- and especially academia in these countries -- has become increasingly hostile toward religion in all its forms. Fortunately, the economics profession doesn't seem to share this hostility. Do good work and you will succeed. So, the welcome mat is out and there are innumerable research topics where you can do good and do well at the same time.

Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?

You never know where you will end up in the academic job market. Fortunately for me, Wake Forest was looking for an economic historian when I was on the market as a newly minted Ph.D. And fortunately for me they didn't have a lot of money to spend, so their offers were rejected by a couple people ahead of me on their list!

I became an atheist while an undergraduate, but life left me asking questions, which were answered when I was baptized at the Easter vigil mass twenty-five years ago, and felt the power of the Holy Spirit. (Interestingly, I was baptized the same year that I earned tenure.)

Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?

I am very passionate about the faith, regularly attend mass about four times a week, and am a lay member of the Order of Preachers (Dominicans). I am also a dedicated walker. I commute by foot and take lengthy walks on weekends -- averaging close to two hours of walking per day. While I walk I pray.

Values, Economics, and Catholic Social Thought: Interviews with Catholic Economists