

Eden's Bridge: The Marketplace in Creation and Mission

David B. Doty

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David Doty announces that his book consists of seven points, demonstrating that the marketplace is part of God's intentional design. He writes that he "intends to open the door a bit wider ... and to invite others to carry the conversation forward" (xi–xii). This theology is listed on the one and only page of chapter 1. The rest of the book is more of a catalog or series of appendices of relevant and biblical information than an argument. Doty has a tendency to declare his conclusions and list rambling evidence rather than arguing and concluding.

The opening chapters on Genesis 1–3 interpret the events and new relationships of creation in terms of God's establishing the market. This assertion may be fair but equally fair and more credible would be finding the seeds of a society of inquisitive gatherers (Eden and post-Eden) or of a theocracy (Israel) that started as wandering shepherds or of a rudimentary agrarian society rather than of a market economy that appeared millennia later. However, I excuse Doty because he has established that God is actively interested in the material world, which defies materialists, deists, and the understandings of all Eastern religions and pantheists.

The discussion of the fall alludes to the distinction between the life of worldly self-focus and the life of spiritual God-focus. These are the two realms Hayek noted: the personal realm of family that is driven by religion and morals and the impersonal realm of the market. Doty rejects that distinction because it leads to a life entirely divorced from God and from morals that results in a drivenness for profit and a disinterest in helping others.

In chapter 3, Doty is interested in redeeming the market by keeping Christians and Christian values actively involved in it. His topics, not quite arguments, in addition to a general exposition of the Genesis passages, redemption, and four other "re-" words of Romans, are comments on sexuality, the patron/client relationship we have with God, *missio Dei*, the *telos* of all things, salt and light, with a mention of distributive justice. He includes unexpected praise for the specific efforts of Greenpeace and the United Nations (31–32).

He writes that the purpose of the opening chapters is to establish a biblical theology of the marketplace (44). Instead, I observe that he is establishing the necessity of adding Christians and Christian values to the impersonal and worldly forces of the marketplace without criticizing the marketplace as inherently evil. This is a refreshing approach.

Chapter 4, on terminology, contains the thematic comment that modern economics with its focus only on production and distribution is "isolated from moral responsibility" (51). Doty seeks to end that isolation by adding a variety of biblical ideas, terms, and topics. He wants to reform the marketplace by defining business as a mutually beneficial interpersonal exchange of value for profit and then by substituting relationship for profit (53–55). He expands the definition of market to include the social interaction necessary for the exchange of goods and services.

Having added relationships to the market, he has all but guaranteed his conclusion, but modern markets are characterized by being impersonal; you do not have to know everyone in your economic world to exchange goods and services. Nevertheless, his goal has evolved to redeeming markets, and this helps. The discussion of other terms in chapter 4 do not demonstrate that God created markets but that Christians in markets are expected to think and behave in Christian ways. For example, we are “to place a higher priority on human relationships than on . . . success” (75). His presentation of biblical terms and texts is an exemplary catalog.

Chapter 5 asserts that redeeming the marketplace is not just a good idea but is a postmillennial requirement for all Christians to bring in the kingdom (95). His ideas are challenging and worthy even for those who seek the less lofty goals of doing business as citizens of heaven in a secular world. As in earlier chapters, he jumps from idea to idea and manages to cover John Wesley’s precepts on family and Roman Catholic subsidiarity in successive sentences (99). He introduces his idea of social enterprise investment (104) in anticipation of his desire that God’s involvement in the marketplace be the new mission of Christians.

Doty’s discussion of market and mission in chapter 6 is clearly superior to the often rambling economic discussion (which almost hinges on his view of gold, bdellium, and onyx) of the previous chapter. His idea that Eden was sufficiently populated to carry out trade is a stretch (128–29). Although weak on economics, he is strong on business as mission. He is unexpectedly strong on the role of government (123).

While his insights on poverty and using business (he is a “serial entrepreneur,” 168) to help develop nations are valuable, he is equally fond of efforts to correct structural issues (134) in the political (nonmarket) realm. His organization of the needs of the poor from financial and intellectual capital and values to vision and hope and a savior is worthwhile, as are his insights on American limitations (160).

Readers hoping to categorize Doty will find that his strong support of social justice and environmentalism (174) does not mean that he subscribes to the United Nations’ view of the world or even to the European view of capitalism. He is determined to give a biblical view of every topic and while he stretches at times and can be disjointed, in this book he has done something commendable.

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