



Call for Papers

Dialogue between Economics and Theology on

Human Nature & Community

Human beings are by nature relational beings who tend to live in communities. What does this imply, and how is life shaped by communal relationships? Theology has addressed these fundamental questions explicitly and extensively. Economic models often aggregate communities into single agents (methodological individualism) or draw on game theory, whenever notions of community are required for analysis. This conference is an invitation to explore the topic of community from the perspectives of economics and theology.

On June 19 and 20, 2025, the Erasmus Economics & Theology Institute (EETI, Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands), the Institute of Leadership and Social Ethics (ILSE, ETF Leuven, Belgium) and the Economic Humanist Group will organise an international academic conference addressing this theme, focusing on the dialogue between economics and Christian theology. The conference will provide an opportunity to engage with and learn from a diverse group of global leading thinkers in these fields.

In economics, the role of virtue in communal relationships has been reduced to prudence. Economic thought generally assumes that markets can economise on virtue, which is often conceived of as an exogenously determined factor. As economics has increasingly enjoyed wider applications in the social sciences, it has tried to model human communities and institutions based on Rational Choice Theory. This violates at least one notion of virtue - good action which doesn't pass a cost benefit analysis. Nevertheless, the discipline is not monochrome. Profound engagement with notions of human community have occurred in, for instance, network economics, the neoclassical economics of the family and the feminist economics of care.

Reflections on 'personhood' are at the discipline's core in theology. What it means to be human is the starting point for further reflection on human life and relationships. The Biblical starting point is Genesis 1:26: Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness . . ." (NIV). This being created in the imago Dei (image of God) has been the subject of much debate in theology, mainly focusing on the precise interpretation of the passage. The imago Dei inspires and guides human activity and relations – human beings are normatively compelled to virtuous community life (faith, hope and love), which has economic implications.

At this conference, we want to explore the topic of community from the perspectives of economics and theology as equal partners in a promising dialogue. We invite the disciplines to question and respond to each other and to venture into the interdisciplinary field of Economics and Theology, where cross-over questions arise that need input from both disciplines. You can find the guiding questions below.

**Rotterdam
19 & 20 June 2025**



Erasmus University Rotterdam

Economic Modelling Questions to Theology

- What can theology say about the visions of community in models of consumption, production, and trade?
- What can theology say about the concepts of community in neoclassical economics, neo-Marxian economics and game-theoretic economics?
- What does virtuous community life mean, and what does it imply for economic relations?
- What does it mean for economic models to view society as a web of households rather than individuals?
- Can theological anthropology add insights to the "tragedy of the commons" within an economic model of collective action?

Theological Questions to Economic Modelling

- What are the economic implications of the different notions of the imago Dei, for example, regarding relationality?
- What role does gender play in notions of community?
- What are the economic implications of the notion of theological community ('People of God')?
- Is it possible to test theological predictions about which sciences will progress and which will not?
- If you were to advise the economists' research programme towards a more profound understanding of flourishing/virtuous communities, which human qualities and virtues would you advise economists to build into their models? (e.g. honesty, generosity, humility, etc.). How could we empirically measure these attributes (e.g. through instrumental variables)?

Integrative Questions

- Across the disciplines of theology/ philosophy/ economics, what similar words mean different things and what different words mean similar things?*
- For example, how do theologians and economists define 'love'? What are the commonalities/differences between these definitions, and can they enrich each other?
- What is the best conceptual/ methodological entry point for integrating theology and economics?
- What are exemplars of mainstream theological method and mainstream economic method, and how do they compare and contrast?
- Theological and economic comparisons of particular community policies, e.g. transatlantic policy differences on homelessness or health care?
- The "logic of collective action" can differ significantly from individual action. What are the convergences and differences between economic and theological views?
- Should an opulence index be introduced (similar to the poverty index), and if so, what would be the benefits?

Time & Place

The conference will be held on June 19 & 20 June, 2025, at the Erasmus Economics Theology Institute, part of the Erasmus University Rotterdam. The address is: Burgemeester Oudlaan 50, 3062 PA Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Registration information will be available soon on the website: www.eeti.nl

Publication

We consider dedicating a special issue of the academic peer-reviewed Journal of Economics, Theology and Religion (JETR) to the publication of selected papers.

Abstracts

Scholars are invited to submit an abstract for a paper. Abstracts should be maximum 500 words and fall within the theme of the conference as described above. Each abstract will be assessed blindly by two experts. Abstracts are to be submitted by email to Dr. Steven van den Heuvel, at info@etf-ilse.org.

Please attach two separate Word documents to your email:

- Document 1: Your paper proposal, include key bibliographic sources consulted (max. 5). In this document, all references identifying the author should be removed.
- Document 2: Your last name, first name, email address, institutional address, the title of your abstract, as well as a short CV (maximum 1 page).

Deadline: January 31, 2025.

You can expect to receive a response by February 28, 2025 at the latest.

Erasmus
Economics & Theology
Institute



ILSE is
a research
institute of

