



Convivium Irenicum 2019: “Reforming Justice: Protestant Wisdom, Economic Freedom, and Modern Injustice”

Plenary Speaker: Brian Dijkema

Brian Dijkema is Program Director of Work and Economics at the leading Canadian Christian thinktank, Cardus, and Senior Editor of *Comment* magazine. Prior to joining Cardus, Brian worked for almost a decade in labour relations in Canada after completing his master's degree with Cardus Senior Fellow, Jonathan Chaplin. He has also done work on international human rights, with a focus on labour, economic, and social rights in Latin America and China. As a graduate of Redeemer University College, an avid disciple of the Reformed theological tradition, and a paragon of principled irenicism, he is the perfect guide to lead us in a discussion of these challenging but crucial questions.

Locations: Montreat Conference Center, Black Mountain, NC
AND
Lake Coeur d’Alene, ID

Dates: May 28–31 AND August 14–17, 2019

Justice is at the center of the biblical vision of human flourishing and obedience to God, yet today many confessional Protestants are leery of the term, seeing it as a Trojan horse under which liberal social and ethical agendas will be smuggled into the church, and individual freedoms relinquished to an all-powerful central state. In response, we are tempted to shrink down the scope of the term, either reminding ourselves, as good Protestants, that the only justice worth having is that of a soul made right with God—and no human action can achieve that—or by adopting some stripped-down version of the “harm principle,” and arguing that the only task of justice is to rectify direct, physically-harmful interpersonal offenses.

However, our theological and ethical tradition gives us so much more to say, offering a vision of human dominion in community which challenges the shibboleths of both left and right. Our Scriptures are profoundly attentive to the ways in which the human vocation to dominion becomes transformed into a quest for domination, alienating us from one another, the earth we are called to steward, and from the fruits of our own labor. Our theological forebears—including the Protestant Reformers—drew upon the biblical vision for economic justice, as well as the philosophical ethics of the natural law tradition, to challenge the structures of unfreedom that thwarted the human vocation in their own times, and we must take up the challenge to do likewise for our own day. This requires attentiveness not merely to exegesis and ethics, law and history, but also to the insights of modern economics and critical theory.

Accordingly, in this year’s Convivium Irenicum, we invite papers that are exegetical, historical, and/or normative, developing a biblical account of economic justice and freedom,



THE DAVENANT TRUST

considering earlier teaching within the Christian ethical tradition on these themes, and interacting closely with modern social and economic challenges in order to present faithful solutions for our own time. Examples of fruitful lines of inquiry include, but are certainly not limited to:

- What is the so-called “Protestant work ethic,” really? Does it have insights to offer today to debates over work and welfare, particularly with the looming disruption of automation?
- What is the proper understanding of property in Scripture and the Christian tradition? How does it challenge false understandings on both Left and Right today?
- Does older Christian teaching on “usury” still have anything to teach us about contemporary monetary thinking and banking?
- What do we mean by “justice”? Is it merely procedural—fairness in exchange, protection of rights, etc.—or is it substantive, requiring action to ensure just outcomes?
- How does modern justice discourse compare to historical and biblical justice discourse?
- What is the Reformational understanding of the vocation of civil authority? To what extent does it need to be revised or rethought today?
- Does the state have the duty to promote positive goods versus merely preventing evil?
- Does the “harm principle” function adequately as a rule for determining appropriate governAre there limits to the harm principle?
- Is there a legitimate form of individualism? More generally, how do individual, family, and state sovereignty relate?
- How should Christians respond to critical theory?
- In what way do modern economic systems and theory interfere with or relate to the biblical dominion mandate?
- What is the function of women in the biblical dominion mandate versus the modern workforce?
- What are needed biblical and philosophical emphases in relation to questions of human vocation, economy, and statehood that are neglected in contemporary debates?
- Can “third way” economics helpfully address contemporary crises of racial tension and/or injustice?

Abstracts of between 200 and 300 words must be submitted to b.littlejohn@davenantinstitute.org by February 1, 2019 for consideration.

Please note that since there are two iterations of the Convivium this year, you will need to specify when submitting your proposal which of the two you intend to attend (or whether you are open to attend either).