



WORDS & DEEDS

Godly training to meet harsh economic reality is here

AMY SHERMAN HAS A PH.D. in economic development from the University of Virginia. She has lectured on the subject around the world. When she discusses the topic, her sophisticated understanding and vocabulary could easily leave a listener in the dark.

But when Amy Sherman wants to take the economic temperature of a particular city, town, or neighborhood, she uses a remarkably simple tool. She just drives around and counts storefronts.

In one particular Memphis neighborhood, she told me, you'll find 13 payday lenders, six car title loan stores, three rent-to-own stores, and four pawn shops. And right down that street there is Mo' Money Tax Services, a business that entices low-income patrons with the promise of immediate tax refunds—but offsets that benefit with exorbitant interest rates.

So, Amy Sherman. If you had to choose in the next few minutes where you want to spend the rest of your career, helping folks understand the complexities of economic theory, where would it be? In a university classroom with some bright grad students? Or in an elementary school setting in a neighborhood like the one you described in Memphis, helping third graders understand the nitty-gritty basics of how dollars behave?

"I don't like having to make that choice," she tells me. "I've always seen myself as a scholar-practitioner—one foot in policy, with the other in practice. I hope I can keep it that way."

That's the way, I think to myself, it should be for every follower of Jesus. Word and deed people—never just abstract ideas, and never just random acts of kindness. The two always need to be wrapped up with each other. As a friend told me 40 years ago, "The deeds are there to validate our words. The words are there to explain our deeds."

Amy Sherman is just one of a team of thoughtful activists who (as described on page 42) have become very serious about passing on

sound economic theory to another generation. In this column last December, I told you readers how we at WORLD have become concerned about good elementary education in the area of economics—and I asked you to send me some of your best ideas. More than 700 of you responded, and I thank you all for a wealth of material. But Sherman put me in touch with an effort that is going well beyond the realm of ideas. The folks with whom she is working have their theoretic act together (it seems to me), but are working out that theory in real life as well. That word and deed combination is impressive.

Amy Sherman's earliest interest in such issues was sparked by an 8th grade short-term missions trip to rural Appalachia, where she got her first exposure to poverty. "I helped put some roofs on houses," she recalls, "and knew this would be central to my life's work." But it didn't take long for her to discover that just going back to the field year after year—which she did—wasn't enough. (She's supportive of short-term missions efforts—but only as long as participants realize it's more about stretching their own hearts and vision than it is to provide significant help for the poor). Big-hearted relief, by itself, doesn't solve the problems. She developed a growing appetite to discover how economic systems work and how defective systems can be changed.

And now she's zealous as well to help even little kids develop both heads and hearts for the practice of biblically sound economic understanding. If done well, she thinks, that will include a strong dose of free market economics that appreciates freedom and opportunity. But it will also stress what it means to be a citizen in God's kingdom and point out to young students the excesses of consumerism and materialism.

All this, and more, will be spelled out in her new book, *Kingdom Calling: Vocational Stewardship for the Common Good*, to be released this fall by InterVarsity Press. The message there will be for adults rather than little kids. But it will stress the need for employing both godly heads and godly hearts as we pursue economic realities. ☉

