

# Editor's Opinion:

## *JBIB*, Macroeconomic Biblical Integration, and the Problem of Schengen Exclusion

LARRY G. LOCKE<sup>1</sup>

University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and LCC International University

**ABSTRACT:** The project of the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business* is the attempt to bring the discipline of Scripture and Christian theology to the theory and practice of business. *JBIB* articles, including some in this edition, demonstrate how businesses might better conduct their marketing, finance, management, and even accounting efforts by the application of biblical principles. In this article, the author seeks to extend the *JBIB* experiment to the area of macroeconomics and the commercial activity of nations. At a fundamental level, the activities of these parties are the same; they buy, sell, negotiate, finance, hire, communicate, strategize, and perform other commercial functions in much the same way that businesses do. One premise of this opinion is that the Word of God bears on the commercial choices of nations in much the same way that it does on the business activity of individuals and corporations. In this article, the author attempts to extend the discipline of biblical integration to macroeconomic decisions of nations utilizing the example of the continued refusal by various European governments to admit Romania and Bulgaria into the Schengen Agreement.

**KEYWORDS:** biblical integration, *JBIB*, Schengen Agreement, Schengen area, Romania, Bulgaria

The Schengen Agreement, as is common among European treaties, is named after the village where it was signed. Schengen is in the southeast part of Luxembourg and regionally borders both France and Germany, a symbolic location for inaugurating an agreement that would allow the free flow of goods and labor between former World Wars I and II enemies. It originated in 1985 and its initial signatories consisted of France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg (SchengenVisaInfo, n.d.). Over time it has grown to include 27 countries, including 23 of the 27 EU member states and all 4 members of the European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland) (ETIAS, n.d.). The area covered by the Schengen Agreement and the Schengen Convention, which followed in 1990, now represents the largest free travel area in the world at over 4 million square kilometers.

The purpose of the Schengen Agreement is to allow the free travel of both goods and labor between the member nations. To achieve that end, all members must agree to abstain from enforcing border controls between member nations, except in response to specific threats.

They must also agree to enforce a common set of border controls with respect to individuals entering their borders from outside the Schengen Area. In short, they must have limited border controls within the area and common procedures for controlling their borders with the world outside the area.

The result of the Schengen Agreement is that 427 million people can now move freely among the 27 member states to work, shop, or transport goods. Around 3.5 million people do just that every day, and approximately 1.7 million people live in one member state but work in another (European Council, 2023). The economic benefits to treaty members are significant. Groschl et al. (2016) estimated that reinstating hard borders within the area would decrease trade volumes by €221 billion and reduce the overall GDP of the EU membership by 0.31% or €39.3 billion. The parcel delivery industry alone estimates that the relaxed borders within the area save it €80 million per year (Heinze, 2015).

In keeping with its purpose, nations applying to join the Schengen Agreement must commit to limiting friction at border crossings within the Schengen Area

but, more importantly, must agree to institute a common control system of its borders with the world outside the area. New members must agree to a common set of entry conditions and to capture and share information with other member states through the Schengen Information System, to allow the tracking of wanted or missing individuals or stolen goods (European Council, 2023). It must surrender some control over its border security to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, commonly called Frontex (European Border and Coastguard Agency, 2022). It must also conform its migration and import and export policies to those of the Schengen Agreement members. Because the agreement allows for free movement of people and goods once they are located within the Schengen Area, any member nation that fails to protect its own external borders subjects all member nations to the associated risks of problems like uncontrolled migration and drug smuggling.

To be considered for entry into the agreement, countries must fulfill a list of specific conditions and then undergo a series of evaluations to determine whether those conditions were properly met. They must demonstrate that they can cooperate productively in the Schengen *acquis*, requiring activities such as issuing uniform Schengen visas; protecting personal data; and carrying out land, sea, and air operations to support border controls (European Area, 2023). They must also demonstrate that they can cooperate in law enforcement with other member states.

Once a country applying to join the agreement has demonstrated fulfillment of the conditions, the existing members of the Schengen Agreement must consult the European Parliament and then vote unanimously to approve the prospective new member. The unanimity required to admit a new member is a critical element of the application process as it allows every existing member, no matter its size, population, or proximity to the applicant, the ability to veto an application. To gain admission, applicants must persuade each member that it is worthy of admittance.

As of this writing in summer 2023, there are two countries that have been refused entry to the Schengen Agreement. Both Bulgaria and Romania have been part of the European Union since 2007 and have been applying to enter the Schengen Area for more than ten years. Their applications were approved by the European Parliament in June of 2011, but the standing members of the agreement failed to unanimously approve their inclusion (Liboreiro, 2022). A few members, including the Netherlands and Finland, voiced concerns over the levels of official corruption and organized crime in the prospective members.

Since the original rejection, however, both Bulgaria and Romania have re-applied. The European Union and European Parliament have agreed that all the conditions for admission into the Schengen Agreement have been met (Liboreiro, 2022). The European Parliament even passed a resolution on October 5, 2022, to move for the immediate admission of the two countries (Ojamo, 2023). A vote was taken in December 2022, and Bulgaria and Romania were once again rejected (Thorpe, 2022). The rejection of the two countries' applications to enter the Schengen Area was clearly not based on their satisfaction of the conditions of the treaty. Both Austria and the Netherlands voted no based on political perceptions of how immigration from the Balkans might impact their internal labor issues, and, reportedly, their desire to attract the anti-immigration vote for their respective ruling parties (Thorpe, 2022). This decision represents the *realpolitik* of economic decisions at the national level. Are decisions of this kind above the scriptural and theological analysis for which the *JBIB* stands?

Nations engage in activities that would be inappropriate for business, such as operating a criminal justice system (Romans 13:4). Much of what they do, however, has direct correlatives in the business world, only on a larger scale. In 2022, the US federal government spent \$6.27 trillion, representing 30% of the total goods and services provided in the US (Treasury Department, n.d.). All nations purchase goods and services, pay their employees, borrow money, and invest. They negotiate contracts, manage technology, gather data, communicate their messages to critical stakeholders, file and defend lawsuits, strategize, plan, and account for their revenues and expenses. Their goals are often different from the pure profit motive that drives many businesses, but many of their operations are very similar. Businesses rely on governments to correct potential market abuses, such as the exploitation of vulnerable customers or employees, but governments tend to have only their electorates to rely on when confronted by ethical temptations. If the ancient Jews in exile had an obligation to seek the good of the lands in which they lived (Jeremiah 29:7), how much more would Christian businesspeople living in democratic republics have an obligation to seek the good of our own nations. We have an obligation to speak the truth of God to our governments just as the disciples did in Acts 5. As Christian businesspeople, we have expertise that can illuminate the choices our governments make, and it would be anti-scriptural for us to fail to contribute that expertise (James 4:17).

Many economic decisions, both at the micro and macro levels, are made on the basis of egoism, the decision-makers promoting their own self-interest and utility (Shaver, 2023). Defenders of this ethical approach, such as Ayn Rand, would argue that it allows for the maximization of total utility in the economy as each participant seeks his own benefit without being distracted by the needs of others (Badhwar & Long, 2020). Applying this theory, each country in the Schengen Agreement should not admit Bulgaria and Romania unless their admission maximizes the voting country's national utility. Further, each country should extract the maximum amount for its concession to admit Bulgaria and Romania, selling its vote for the highest possible value. While this is the reality of the macroeconomic marketplace, is it a norm that Christian business leaders, or Christian business faculty, should endorse?

How would a biblical ethic apply to Bulgaria and Romania's situation? Luke 10 and the parable of the Good Samaritan suggest that, when confronted with a person who is suffering, even a person who is outside one's own community, the right thing to do is to extend oneself in the care of that suffering person. Applying this principle to the case of Romania and Bulgaria would indicate that the existing members of the Schengen Agreement could at least share some responsibility for correcting any ongoing vulnerability within Romania and Bulgaria that might make them unfit for membership. Extending a personal ethic, like the duties Christ lays on His followers to care for suffering foreigners, to a macroeconomic or national level may require some adjustments. Nations have multiple goals they must pursue and limited resources with which to pursue them. The extension of those ethics to a national scale is, nonetheless, a valid biblical exercise. Although the commandments of Exodus 20 could be applied on an individual level, the entire nation was judged and delivered into exile because many (though not all) failed to follow them (2 Kings 17:7). The laws of ancient Israel specifically forbade the oppression of foreigners (Exodus 22:21; Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:34) and the prophet Jeremiah indicates that the exile is, in part, a punishment for Judah's violation of that law (Jeremiah 7:6).

Some governments might be unwilling to respond directly to biblical arguments, wanting to avoid identifying with a particular faith, but there are alternative ways Christian business scholars can articulate those arguments in a persuasive fashion. A Kantian argument could produce the same result as the biblical analysis. In the spirit of the

Great Commandment (John 13:34), Immanuel Kant famously based his categorical imperatives on treating others as ends in themselves rather than as mere means to our own ends (Johnson & Cureton, 2022). In the case of those voting to keep Romania and Bulgaria out of the Schengen Agreement, the governments' motives of political self-protection seem unlikely to qualify as treating the applicants as ends in themselves.

This is the same kind of biblically informed argument Christian business scholars would apply to businesses facing similar decisions with potential profit impact. Many Christian businesspeople would espouse treating employees or customers with dignity as ends in themselves, even if objectifying them would produce better short-term returns. Do those arguments not apply equally well to the policy decisions of nations that will drive their macroeconomic success? When God chose the ancient nation of Israel to be His people, He did not do so merely to prosper it. He chose it to be a light to all nations (Isaiah 51:4; Luke 2:32) and a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). He routinely disciplined the nation and laid strictures on it when it refused to serve His purposes for it among the other nations (2 Kings 17:6-9; Psalm 99:8; Hosea 9:7).

The point of this article is not to resolve the ethical question of whether the existing Schengen nations should admit Romania and Bulgaria to the agreement, although the author would hope that it at least reveals the ethical weakness of their failure to do so. This article's purpose is to invite Christian business faculty to apply their skills and resources to questions of this scale. It is not just individual companies that can gain from our efforts. Whole industries, countries, and the global economy are also within our Christian mandate to steward the created order (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). As current editor of the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*, the author would welcome manuscripts seeking to address such matters and commend Christian business faculty who are willing to bring biblical truth to bear on some of the most troubling issues of our time.

#### Endnote

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Larry G. Locke** is a professor of management and associate dean of the McLane College of Business at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and a Research Fellow at LCC International University. (J.D., Harvard Law School; M.B.A., Harvard Business School; MATH, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary; M.St., Oxford University; B.S.E. Mathematics and B.A. Philosophy, Ouachita Baptist University. He has thirteen years' experience as a finance lawyer in the financial services industry. Mr. Locke is an ordained Baptist Minister and served as senior pastor of an independent Baptist Church in Massachusetts for seven years. His research interests include business ethics and regulatory philosophy.