

# RELIGION & LIBERTY

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## Good Financial Stewardship Part of God's Economy



### Interview: Larry Burkett

Larry Burkett is founder and president of Christian Financial Concepts, Inc., a ministry dedicated to teaching Biblical principles of financial management. His daily radio broadcasts are heard on more than 1000 outlets worldwide. More than two million copies of his books are in print, including *What Ever Happened to the American Dream* and *Debt-Free Living*.

**R&L:** *As a Christian financial advisor, how do you understand the connection between your faith and the world of economics and finances?*

**Burkett:** I believe there is a direct link between faith and finances. In the New Testament, our Lord gives us, depending on how you count them, around thirty-four parables, two-thirds of which deal with the subject of money. I believe Jesus uses money as teaching tool to illustrate graphically this point: The way we handle financial matters is an indicator of the way we handle spiritual matters.

That is what Jesus meant when he said, "If you are not faithful with the smallest of things, you will not be faithful with larger things either." Money is just one of those smaller things.

**R&L:** *An important part of your ministry is getting people debt-free and keeping them debt-free. What are the Biblical guidelines regarding going into debt?*

**Burkett:** It is better for God's people to be debt-free, because then what they own belongs to them, not someone else, and furthermore all that interest that is given away—that is what you really do with interest, give it away—can be put back into the Lord's kingdom to help other people. I try to use a balanced approach here, though, because the Scriptures do not say that we *must* be debt-free, but that there are certain limitations we should observe when borrowing. The problem today is that our generation has so grossly violated these limitations.

The first principle taught in God's Word is that debt should not be normal; it should be abnormal. Every reference to debt in Scripture is a warning, not an encouragement.

The second principle is that debt should never be long-term. In the Old Testament, every seventh year those who had loaned money to another had to forgive the loan, so that no one could be forced into debt forever. But in our generation we have thirty-year mortgages, forty-year mortgages, and now out in California they have just created a ninety-year mortgage. We just keep extending the cycle.

The third principle the Scriptures teach about debt is that we should not go into surety, meaning that there should be a certain way to close out a loan. The only way to do that is to collateralize it with the lender. For example, suppose I am going to buy a \$100,000 house and I am able to put \$20,000 down and finance the rest with a lender. My agreement with the lender should be that if ever I cannot make the payments, then I will give the house back and the lender keeps whatever I paid, but I am free and clear. I have therefore done what is called an *exculpatory* loan; I have been released

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE • Interview:** Larry Burkett © **Articles:** "Scholastic Economics: Thomistic Value Theory" by Gloria L. Zúñiga, and "The Reformation Roots of Social Contract" by David W. Hall © **Review Essay:** "Evangelical Political Activism: Faith and Prudence" by David L. Weeks © **Book Review:** Jeffrey Tucker on *Capitalism* © **Column:** "Of Markets and Morality" by Rev. Robert A. Sirico © **Plus Book News.**

from liability. On the other hand, if I do what is normal today, the agreement is that if ever I cannot pay, I give the house back, the lender sells it, and if it is not worth what I owe, then the lender sues me for the difference. That's *surety*, and it is almost exclusively the kind of lending that is being done in America today. So, the problem is not borrowing itself but the misuse of it.

Allow me to say a word here about consumer debt. Consumer debt is the worst kind of debt because the product one buys is usually consumed. An example of this would be using credit cards to cover car repairs, buy tires, or take vacations. However, if the card is paid in full each month, it is the equivalent of paying cash.

**R&L:** *Let's talk a bit about consumerism, which relates to consumer debt. There have been a lot of warnings about it—the pope, for instance, has warned against consumerism—because of its connection to materialism.*

**Burkett:** Consumerism in America is so pandemic because we are constantly told, "You need to have more, you need to have the best, you certainly need to have better than what somebody else has, and you need to have it now!" In our ministry here at Christian Financial

Concepts, we often counsel young couples who have bought things they cannot afford—houses, cars, motor homes, vacations. The use of credit to buy these things did not avoid the reality that they could not afford them; it

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**Christians need to be grounded in sound economic thinking because we are required by God to be good stewards of His money.... We are going to be held accountable to that standard.**

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only delayed it and made it worse. Unfortunately, the proliferation of credit allows families to buy things they cannot afford to own.

Automobiles are a good example of this principle. Most young couples cannot afford to buy a new automobile; their budget simply will not handle it. A family making less than \$50,000 per year should not spend more than 15 percent of their disposable income on an automobile. Yet, many young couples typically commit 25 to 30 percent of their income on automobiles. This trend has advanced to the next step, because now most young couples cannot even afford the down payment on a new car, so they

lease it instead, thus incurring a higher monthly payment. Again, these couples do not avoid the fact that they cannot afford a new car, they only delay it and make it worse. This is why the divorce rate among new marriages is so high—it is about 50 percent right now. Over 80 percent of young couples getting a divorce say their primary problem is financial.

**R&L:** *I think any pastor reading this will recognize what you are describing. Financial obligations put tremendous pressures on marriage.*

**Burkett:** There is no doubt that it can be awful, and committed Christian couples are certainly not immune to these kinds of problems. The danger is that because they are under such financial stress, they stop talking to each other. They do not read their Bibles. They do not pray together anymore. They just do not have the mental attitude to do these things, and as a result they lose what they consider to be their emotional surplus to draw upon. Eventually this wears into their marriage to the point where a husband or wife thinks, *If I could just get away from him or her everything will be okay*, and since our generation has made it so easy to get a divorce, they do it. Then almost without fail they go back out and marry

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somebody almost exactly like the person they divorced, and within a couple of years they have a second marriage on the rocks for exactly the same reasons.

**R&L:** *Why is it important for Christians to be grounded in sound economic thinking?*

**Burkett:** Christians need to be grounded in sound economic thinking because we are required by God to be good stewards of His money. A steward is a man-

ager of another's property. We are called by God to be His stewards, and we are going to be held accountable to that standard. Many Christians are capable of making a great deal of money, and some of them do not use it wisely. They save it for some rainy day, or they squander it, or they hoard it. I believe we need to ask ourselves constantly, "How much is enough; at what point do I say that this is all God wants me to have?" Once we know how much that is, everything God gives us beyond that is meant for some-

body else, and I am to be the purveyor of that through Christian organizations to meet the needs of others who are not going to be able to meet their own needs. I think the apostle Paul said it best in 2 Corinthians 8:14: "At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need." This is really what Christianity ought to be. Unfortunately, we do not do that very much today.

**R&L:** *We heard a lot in the last presi-*

## Adam Smith (1723–1790)

*"Beneficence is always free, it cannot be extorted by force, the mere want of it exposes us to no punishment; because the mere want of beneficence tends to do no real positive evil."*

Adam Smith is the most well-known expositor of capitalism of all time. He was born in Kirkcaldy, Scotland, a small coastal town near Edinburgh. Smith was educated at Glasgow University and Balliol College in Oxford, England. Later he lectured at Edinburgh and became a professor at Glasgow University. After a time, Smith went to France to tutor the Duke of Buccleugh and met Quesnay, Turgot, and Voltaire. While in France, Smith began to write *The Wealth of Nations* and continued writing it upon his return to Scotland. This influential work was published in 1776. In 1778 he followed in the footsteps of his father as a customs official. He died in Edinburgh.

Much emphasis is placed upon Smith's contribution to the economic field. Underappreciated is his view of religion and morality. In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith discussed the role of sympathy in connecting self-interest with virtue. If the free market is allowed to function and people are affluent, they will have time to worry about the plight of the indigent. In a primitive society, people primarily focus upon survival. Also, Smith argued that the market promoted virtues such as responsibility, honesty, frugality, ability, and self-control. In the quest for acquisition of wealth and power, these virtues are needed to succeed. In times past, there was no such channeling mechanism or incentive of the market to harness virtue. The rich and powerful depended upon deception and privilege in the pre-commercial era, Smith wrote.

Besides the market, other institutions such as the church and society would bolster virtue. Smith asserted that religion is an expression of the need for justice and benevolence in the material world and "enforces the natural sense of duty." However, Smith wrote that church establishment, that is, the funding of religion through taxation, would remove the incentive for proselytization. In society, Smith argued, association with like-minded people would foster like effects. If one chose to affiliate with good people, good results would tend to occur.



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Sources: *Adam Smith In His Time and Ours* by Jerry Z. Muller (Princeton University Press, 1993); and *Adam Smith: The Man and His Works* by E. G. West (Liberty Press, 1976).

*dential campaign about entitlement spending, like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. What is your view of such entitlement spending?*

**Burkett:** I can prove to anybody in fifteen minutes that we cannot continue to do what we are doing for another decade. The only way we have been able to fund what we have been funding is by huge amounts of deficit spending. To me this is unconscionable and immoral; we are drawing off our grandchildren's resources. They will either have to pay the money back or pay for it with an economic collapse, because we cannot continue borrowing to this extent. So the practical truth is that these entitlement programs are going to change, voluntarily or involuntarily. We will simply run out of money and then have to start borrowing more to make up the deficit, which will create inflation and ultimately destroy our currency. Every other nation that has tried to do what we are doing has ultimately ended up there. We have promised more than we can do.

For example, when Social Security began, it was intended only as a supplement. And even then, assuming that the average income during that time was \$2,200 a year, Social Security would have provided about \$200 a year, and we had twenty-two workers paying into that system for every recipient. Now forty or fifty years later, we have three people paying into the system per recipient, many of whom have more dispo-

able income than the young couples paying into the system. This is unconscionable.

In my opinion, we have to do several things. Where Social Security is concerned, we are going to have to tell the truth to people, that not everybody can draw it. If you do not need it, you cannot get it. That may not sound fair but, practically, it is the only way we are going to be able to make it sound. Second, we cannot continue to allow the government to spend the surplus that we are putting in. I keep hearing people say that there is a Social Security trust fund. There is no trust fund. It does not exist anymore. The reality is that the government takes money out of Social Security, transfers it to general revenue, spends the money, and puts an I.O.U. back in. Now, my question is, Where are they going to come up with the money to pay all those I.O.U.s when they come due? They are already spending more than they make per year. So there is no question that reform has to happen.

**R&L:** *What is the connection between a healthy society and a healthy economy? I am thinking here about the moral fabric of hard work, integrity, responsibility, and the like.*

**Burkett:** Financial and economic principles for individuals hold true for nations as well. The way people handle their money is an indicator of the way they handle other things, including spiritual things. Look at what we do with our money: We are not handling it well, we are frivolous with it, we buy foolish things with it. The American economy is nothing more than the reflection of our society in general, so just as we overspend in our society, we overspend in our government, and it is in debt. If you look around, you see a direct parallel to the way we are handling moral and social things in our society today. We are, as a society, doing very immoral things

in our economy: We are spending money that does not belong to us without any regard for how it will ever be paid back. So I think there is a direct parallel between the two. I do not think the economy caused it, I think the economy reflects it.

**R&L:** *Are you as pessimistic about the prospects here in America as you were when you wrote What Ever Happened to the American Dream, especially in light of the contention on the part of a number of political commentators that America is undergoing a conservative shift?*

**Burkett:** We are seeing a conservative cycle in American history, but I do think it is short term. If one looks at the American people, the pattern is that they get frightened about what is happening in the culture and become temporarily more conservative. For example, we would like to have someone solve our economic problems, but when you start telling individuals about how much they need to sacrifice to solve these problems, not very many people are willing to do that. Everyone wants the budget balanced but want someone else to do it. Therefore, I think what you are seeing is just a short-term conservative cycle, not a long-term one at all.

Although I am pessimistic from a social perspective, I am optimistic from a spiritual perspective. If we had true revival in America and a large number of Americans turned back to God and accepted Him as their authority, then we could reverse these cultural trends instantly. This thing is not unalterable; it is purely a matter of decision on our part. I think this is a great opportunity to share Christ with a lot of people who otherwise would not listen. If God's people will humble themselves and pray as they are asked to do, it will heal our land. It is up to Christians to take this responsibility. A

—Errata—

In the interview with Senator Rick Santorum in the May/June issue of *Religion & Liberty*, mention was made of remarks he gave in a speech to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. In reality, the speech was given at an event sponsored by Catholic Campaign for America. *Religion & Liberty* regrets any confusion this error may have caused.

# Scholastic Economics: Thomistic Value Theory

Gloria L. Zúñiga

It has been seventy years since historian Richard Henry Tawney concluded in his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* that, “the true descendant of the doctrines of Aquinas is the labor theory of value.” By this, he appears to mean that Saint Thomas Aquinas’ writings in value theory entail the proposition that the basis of value of an economic good is the amount of human labor expended in producing it. Thus, Tawney adds, “the last of the Schoolmen was Karl Marx.” Tawney was, of course, mistaken.

## From Aquinas to Marx

Economics, as understood in the modern sense, occupied a subordinate place in relation to ethics and law in Catholic medieval doctrine. Within this framework, economic value was not regarded as an intrinsic quality but, rather, as the physical, mental, and moral significance given to an object by the evaluating subject’s assessment of the object’s desirability, utility, and scarcity.

According to Schumpeter in his *History of Economic Analysis*, value theory analysis by the Scholastic Doctors “lacked nothing but the marginal apparatus.” Schumpeter alludes to the marginal utility theory—the economic breakthrough of the nineteenth century that demonstrates that the value of a good diminishes with each unit increment of the good. The learned work of many scholars of Scholastic economic thought, such as that of Emil Kauder, Raymond de Roover, Bernard Dempsey, Murray Rothbard, Alejandro Chafuen and Jesús Huerta de Soto, among others, confirms Schumpeter’s appraisal.

However glaring Tawney’s mistake in his characterization of Scholastic value theory, we have ample reason to judge him more leniently when we consider that his was a time of Anglo-Protestant hegemony in post World War I markets. While Weber’s thesis linked the Protestant ethic with the spirit of capitalism, the economic legacy of the Schoolmen to Catholicism was thought to be a foolish notion of just price and an obsession with usury. This image of the economic essence of Catholicism is antiquated and erroneous. Although this narrow image of Catholic economic thought became entrenched in the twentieth century even within the Church, in the Catholic academic enclaves prior to the twentieth century, however, the development of economic thought progressed mainly from the contributions by the Scholastics.

Italian and French economists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who made significant advances to the development of marginal utility theory were schooled in Aristotelian value theory as interpreted and presented in Scholastic texts. Thomistic economic thought, in particular, is grounded on private property and voluntary exchange as the principle for determining licit contracts. With few exceptions (such as the nominalists Jean de Gerson and Henry of Langenstein) the medieval Doctors agreed that the just price is discovered in the common estimation by market participants.

The just price is *not*, then, what many generalizations of the Scholastic view wrongly depict it to be: (1) a function of cost, (2) a determination to be right-

fully entrusted to lawmakers, or (3) the product of divine predetermination. It is true that Duns Scotus and a few of his followers argued that the just price is a function of cost, but this view was not held by any other of the Doctors. Additionally, the Doctors did not dispute price setting by lawmakers as a rightful activity, but they generally agreed that this should only occur in emergency situations. The only advocates of legislated price setting as a rule, rather than as an exception, were Jean de Gerson and Henry of Langenstein. None of the Doctors held, however, that the just price is predetermined and, hence, that buyers must consider the asking price as the just price.

*A fortiori*, the notions of market negotiation, competition, risk, and contract were well within the considerations of the medieval Doctors. Although Saint Thomas does not offer a definition of just price, he employs examples (borrowed from Roman texts) to suggest that a just price reflects variations in supply.

In order for Tawney’s connection between Scholasticism and the labor theory of value to be defensible, the account must provide a rigorous analysis of Scholastic economic thought that theoretically supports such a connection. Unfortunately, Tawney’s exposition of Scholastic economic thought leading to his dubious conclusion is too rushed, too anecdotal, too hermeneutical and, even, too poetic to allow the reader clearly to distinguish fact from speculation.

Despite all this, Tawney’s position offers one valid consideration. If Schumpeter is correct in his *History of Economic Analysis*, Adam Smith was in-

fluenced by Scholasticism more than by mercantilism and physiocracy. We know, for instance, that at Glasgow College economics was studied as part of moral philosophy. The courses in political economy given by Adam Smith's teacher, Francis Hutcheson, described the subject matter of political economy according to Saint Thomas' *Comments* on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. Moreover, Scholasticism influenced Adam Smith indirectly via Grotius and Pufendorf, whose works were used as textbooks for courses in moral philosophy. It is feasible to suppose, then, that Adam Smith's thought might prove to be a crucial link in demonstrating the viability of Tawney's conclusion.

### The Adam Smith Connection

What influence of Scholastic value theory can we find in Adam Smith's writings? In *The Wealth of Nations* we find a formulation of exchange that has been linked to that of Saint Thomas. More precisely, Adam Smith suggested

and expense of the goods exchanged are equal. In isolation from his other relevant material, and if Adam Smith's exchange value passage is also thrown in to establish a linear causal connection between Saint Thomas and Marx, this passage does give Tawney's conclusion some fertile ground. Nevertheless, there is an alternative interpretation of Saint Thomas' exchange value passage that squares more adequately with the rest of his ideas on economic value theory.

### Thomistic Value Theory

Medieval Catholic doctrine emerged from three sources: the Bible, Roman law, and Greek philosophy, especially that of Aristotle. The latter two sources were the most influential in the development of Scholastic economic thought. The classification of contracts in Roman law, for instance, provided the legal framework for the Thomistic notion of price as an element of an equitable exchange. Roman contract law required equity in the valuation of things ex-

just price not as fixed but as fluctuating according to diversity of time, place, and circumstances.

Albertus Magnus, independently of canon law, arrived at the conclusion that just price is obtained by the estimation of the participants in the market at the time of the sale. The work of his pupil Saint Thomas, though compatible, is less precise on this subject. Namely, Saint Thomas employs examples that imply that the just price is the market price, but what he had in mind about just price is perhaps less intelligible in his *Comments* to Aristotle's *Ethics* concerning exchange. As we mentioned earlier, Saint Thomas writes about exchange value in a way that resembles Smith's own discussion on exchange value. This passage is clearly the Achilles heel of Thomistic economic thought. If Tawney's conclusion is valid, then Saint Thomas' exchange value discussion might tender one of the needed premises. But can we attribute the classical interpretation of Smith's value theory to Saint Thomas? To answer this, we need to dig a little deeper.

Following Aristotle, Saint Thomas refers to commutative justice in the *Summa Theologica* as the rules of justice concerning exchange of goods or services among individuals. Saint Thomas describes commutative justice as the principle of absolute equality in any exchanges among individuals. The pecuniary valuation of goods does not appear to hinge on any intrinsic property of the goods themselves. The equality to which Saint Thomas refers, then, cannot mean that the goods exchanged are intrinsically equal in value.

The best explanation of what Saint Thomas means by absolute equality is the mutual satisfaction obtained by each contracting party in an exchange. The Schoolmen's common acceptance of just price as the market price also reinforces the thesis of the central role of subjective (economic) valuation in Saint



“Thomistic economic thought is grounded on private property and voluntary exchange as the principle for determining licit contracts.”

— Gloria Zúñiga

that there is an ultimate value in measuring exchange. So, for example, for the hunter of two beavers who exchanges his catch for one deer, the value of the deer is measurable in terms of the labor expended in hunting the beavers.

Compare this to Saint Thomas' *Comments* to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the latter, Saint Thomas writes that barter exchange is just if the labor

changed according to the rule of just price in the *Brachylogous*, a textbook on Roman law from the early twelfth century.

This concept of just price appears to have been first applied in canon law in the twelfth century by a decretal of Pope Alexander III. The canon *Placuit* became one of the fundamental texts of the just-price doctrine. This canon portrays

Thomas' account of exchange value. But if the nature of pecuniary exchange is not based on any objective measure, why would just barter exchange require equality based on labor and expenses? One feasible answer is that—in the absence of price as an indicator of market phenomena such as risk, scarcity, and changes in production costs—something else had to be employed.

Price is a value that reflects the significance attached to the good desired in relation to all other uses of the money in the buyer's assessment. In short, price makes possible the articulation of the ineffable subjective evaluations in tangible terms. Hence, price makes subjective evaluations publicly accessible. But barter exchange does not have the price mechanism to make subjective evaluations publicly accessible. The latter was an important consideration for Saint Thomas since he had to observe the commutative justice rule.

The only way for a market valuation of goods to be publicly accessible is by employing some other measure of value. The cost of inputs or tools employed in acquiring or producing a good plus the labor invested in that activity is perhaps a good substitute for price in barter situations. For example, Saint Thomas writes that if a cobbler wants corn for his meal, he must assess how many pairs of shoes he will have to offer for a bushel of corn in order for the farmer to accept the exchange. Owing to the nature of barter exchange, such an assessment is rather complicated and many things must be considered. But the main consideration is a subjective evaluation based on the needs of each of the parties. How does Saint Thomas describe the economic valuation of goods? Saint Thomas writes, "This one thing which measures all other things is, in truth, the need which embraces all exchangeable goods insofar as all things are referred to human needs." It seems clear, then, that Saint Thomas not only did not but,

more important, could not have reduced the value of a good to labor alone if he was to remain consistent.

In considering expenses, in addition to labor, Saint Thomas incorporates a notion that embraces very subjective factors such as risk and other costs that are borne by the valuing party. Thus, at least tacitly, Saint Thomas anticipated the modern concept of opportunity cost—i.e., the value of the sacrificed alternative—an idea formulated by the Austrian economists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. If this analysis is correct, then, despite his imprecise and scattered passages on exchange value, Saint Thomas was quite consistent with the subjectivism portrayed in the commonly accepted just-price doctrine and the notion of commutative justice of the Scholastics.

### Adam Smith's Value Theory

If it is true that Thomistic thought had a significant influence on the reasoning behind Smith's exchange value passage at issue here, then we can observe in Smith a retreat in sophistication from the notion of exchange value already attained by Saint Thomas.

In effect, Adam Smith characterized labor itself as a good deemed to have value for its own sake. Accordingly, the gains of any exchange can be measured only by the labor expended in obtaining the good that was given up in exchange. With this narrow framework, Adam Smith is forced to characterize the value of the exchange in terms of the labor investment embodied in the goods.

The influence Smith's *magnum opus* had on the development of the classical school of economics hindered any advance in the direction of marginal utility value calculation within the Anglo-Protestant academy. Ricardo and other classicists, for example, misinterpreted Adam Smith's ambiguous notion of exchange value, and this provided ample room for Karl Marx to transform

it into the thesis that the labor embodied in the final product is the ultimate and objective measure of value.

### Concluding Remarks

In order for the similarity in Saint Thomas' exchange-value passage with that of Adam Smith to fit into Marx's labor theory scheme, Saint Thomas must explicitly equate the economic value of a commodity to its cost of production measured in labor input. As we have seen from our analysis of Thomistic thought in its original context, Tawney's conclusion is not corroborated.

Moreover, the views of the Schoolmen on just price reflect the significance of things exchanged in relation to need (desirability and utility) as well as fluctuations in supply (scarcity). The legacy of Saint Thomas is the utilization of tangible measures, such as labor and expenses, within a framework of subjective economic value in order to make commutative justice perspicuous in the absence of prices. Adam Smith either misunderstood this or his ambiguous formulation of the right idea betrayed him. What is certain is that the labor theory of value is not a descendant of Saint Thomas.

What, then, led Adam Smith to focus on the idea of labor as the only tangible and absolute measure of value in a barter exchange? This is a difficult question to answer, and I will not attempt to tackle it here. But Emil Kauder did offer one intriguing hypothesis more than forty years ago. Kauder maintains that the Protestant glorification of labor influenced Adam Smith to place labor at the center of his economic value theory. If Tawney had lived long enough to consider this view, would he have concluded that Karl Marx was the last of the true Calvinists? **A**

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# The Reformation Roots of Social Contract

David W. Hall

Contrary to much secular thought, the historic emergence of a social contract that guarantees human liberty stems from the seedbed of Geneva's Reformation. To be sure, a different social contract, the humanist one, had its cradle in the secular thinking of the Enlightenment. The one I refer to as the social covenant (to distinguish) has resisted tyranny, totalitarianism, and authoritarianism with consistent and irrepressible force; the other has led to oppression, large-scale loss of life, and the general diminution of liberty, both economic and personal.

Following is a brief review of five leading tracts from the Reformation period that had wide and enduring political impact in support of liberty: *The Right of Magistrates* (1574) by Theodore Beza, *The Rights of the Crown of Scotland* (1579) by George Buchanan, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579) by Phillippe du Plessis Mornay, *Politica* (1603) by Johannes Althusius, and *Lex Rex* (1644) by Samuel Rutherford

## A Signal and Unique Contribution

To view these comparatively reveals a common fabric of political ideas that have evolved from this unique basis of thought. Much antecedent Western political thought is hopelessly confused if this lacuna is not illuminated. Moreover, it is not too much to claim that Western society owes many of its best political advances to the theology emanating from Geneva.

The evolution of resistance against monopolism had its root uniquely in Reformation thought. There were, to be sure, seedling precursors to Reformation

thought that cannot be developed in this essay. For example, Augustine and Aquinas, along with the best of Roman Catholic theology of the state, provided earlier and enduring support for this social covenant and resistance to tyranny. Antedating the Reformation teaching in *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, Aquinas argued that Christians are "obliged to obey authority that comes from God but not that which is not from God.... Whoever seizes power by violence does not become a true ruler and lord, and therefore it is permissible when the possibility exists for someone to reject that rulership...."

Turning points prior to the Reformation, however, were few and far between. The quantum advances in the doctrine of resistance during the years 1550–1650 were so monumental as to deserve notice as a signal and unique contribution. This Reformation evolution of a social covenant was subsequently manifested writ large in the origin of our Republic—despite the massive secularist *mythos* to the contrary.

Though medieval sources contained precedents for resistance, the Genevan paradigm especially animated the pursuit of theological foundations for greater democratic expression. In *The Cultural Significance of the Reformation* (1911), Karl Holl described the Reformation as initially setting "a rigid limit to the absolute power of the state." Further, he conceded "to the Reformation respect for being the first of all in modern times to have prepared the way for freedom of conscience in the state. All further victories with respect to toler-

ance rest on this first step...."

Everywhere Geneva's Calvinism went, so did its views of putting government in its place by opposing tyranny. Calvinism "placed a solid barrier in the path of the spread of absolutism." Even though Holl admits that some precursors of human rights were found in the Middle Ages, the normalization of universal human rights did not arrive except as a consequence of the Reformation impetus. Further, this advance was not merely the modification of a single point but "included in itself the transformation of the whole concept of the state." Planting the seeds that would eventually bear fruit in the American Revolution, Protestants generally laid the foundation for the motto on Thomas Jefferson's seal: "Resistance to Tyrants Is Obedience unto God."

## The Corporate Body of People Is Above the King

The second generation of reformers briskly articulated a theology of the state. Calvin's disciple, Theodore Beza (1520–1603), made considerable comments on political matters, much of which reflects the shock of the 1572 Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre of the Huguenots. Beza's *The Right of Magistrates* (1574) justified armed resistance led by intermediating magistrates against a king. The limitation of the magistracy is seen in Beza's assertion that the power of the lawful magistrate is neither infinite nor unconditional. If corruption is present, then resistance may be allowed. Beza's rule was: "On every occasion when we cannot obey the command of men without offending the

majesty and despising the authority of the King of kings and the Lord of lords,” then Christians must not submit.

Much of Beza’s thought on these matters was further developed in the 1579 *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, commonly attributed to Philippe du Plessis Mornay. Writing within the same decade as the Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre, Brutus (the pseudonymous author of the *Vindiciae*) denounced the arrogance of a state that assumed unlimited power unto itself, and maintained that the corporate body of the people is above the king. The argument—radical for its day—put the government in its place as an agency accountable to the citizens. *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* raised and answered these strikingly anticipatory questions that are as germane as the latest Independent Counsel’s investigation:

- Are kings themselves above the law?
- May the prince make new laws, or are they made by the people?
- Does the ruler have power of life and death over his subjects?
- May the king ignore the law in granting pardon to those found guilty?
- Does the property of the people belong to the king?
- Is the king the lawful owner of the kingdom?
- May the king use the property of the people for his own ends?

Notwithstanding, this powerful tract did not so much explicate a raw populism (the absolutizing of populism came later with Hobbes and the children of the Enlightenment) as it demonstrated “the impossibility of an absolute state.”

Since God had made a covenant with the king, the king also was to make a covenant with the people. If he violated his covenant, then this king could rightly be seen as having forfeited the right to rule. Thus, resistance would be vindicated in a case of covenant abdication. Whereas Beza had defended the right of

the intermediate magistrates to resist a ruler based on the fundamental rights of the people (“Everyone can resist those who in the violation of their official duties assume a tyrannical power over the subjects.”), and whereas the Scottish theologian George Buchanan advocated that citizens were “relieved of their obligation of obedience if the ruler damages” the ruler’s covenant, Brutus went so far as to advocate, in the words of Jurgen Moltmann, that “the traditional right of resistance of the estates against the crown is no longer defended, but rather a new federalistic-democratic idea of the state is propagated.”

One of the earliest systematic treatises of matters of state was George Buchanan’s *The Rights of the Crown of Scotland*. This 1579 work—perhaps the most influential political essay of the century—was an integrated Protestant argument for limited government. This early Protestant asserted that, “it was much safer to trust liberties to laws than to kings... confine them to narrow bounds, and thrust them, as it were, into

and... he should exercise over the people only those rights which he has received from their hands.” Buchanan noted: “The law then is paramount to the king, and serves to direct and moderate his passions and actions.”

According to this emerging consensus, a king exercised power on behalf of the people, whereas a tyrant wielded authority on behalf of himself: “For to make everything bend to your own nod, and to center in your own person the whole force of the laws, has the same effect as if you should abrogate all the laws.”

### No Power Is Absolute

Some scholars associate the pinnacle of Reformation political thought with the mature work of Johannes Althusius (1557–1638). Daniel Elazar asserts that the road to modern democracy was fueled “particularly among those exponents of Reformed Protestantism who developed a theology and politics that set the Western world back on the road to popular self-government, emphasizing

“Contrary to secular thought, the historic emergence of a social contract that guarantees human liberty stems from the seedbed of Geneva’s Reformation.”

—David W. Hall



cells of law... circumscribe [them] within a close prison.” Buchanan viewed the constitution as the means toward that end and thought it an egregious mistake to suppose that “nations created kings not for the maintenance of justice, but for the enjoyment of pleasure.” He maintained that, “the people from whom he [the king] derived his power should have the liberty of prescribing its bounds;

ing liberty and equality.”

The reformers saw all institutions under the sovereign administration of Christ. Thus, the power of the state could never be ultimate nor complete; it was inherently limited. It, too, was always *sub Deo*. Althusius and others spoke of the power of the state as limited and qualified by some objective standards outside itself. The state, if it failed to

heed these, forfeited its legitimacy. State legitimacy was always contingent upon conformity to an objective, supra-national, and unchanging standard. Far from being totalitarian, the power of a ruler is, at best, relative to other absolutes. “All power,” noted Althusius, “is limited by definite boundaries and laws. No power is absolute, infinite, unbridled, arbitrary, and lawless. Every power is bound to laws, right, and equity. Likewise, every civil power that is constituted by legitimate means can be terminated and abolished.” Althusius argued that the people could exist without a magistrate but not vice versa.

### Law Is King

Shortly thereafter, the Scotsman Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) echoed similar sentiments. In *Lex Rex* (Law Is King), Rutherford maintained that the people create the king; notwithstanding, true sovereignty belongs primarily to God, not the people. Upon the election of rulers, the people do not so much surrender the liberties and rights as delegate the authority to govern to the governor. Rutherford also recognized that people may resume their power at times, particularly if the king has become tyrannical. Rather than being above the law, the prince is under the law and subservient to the ends of the state; he is a servant, or executor (hence, executive power). Rutherford viewed civil governors not so much as dominating lords but as ministerial fiduciaries analogous to tutors, husbands, patrons, ministers, or fathers.

Rutherford maintained that the “law has a supremacy of constitution above the king,” for a king is one not by nature, but only by virtue of a constitution: “therefore, he must be king by a politic[al] constitution and law; and so the law, in that consideration, is above the king, because it is from a civil law that there is a king.... The king is under law, in regard of some coercive limita-

tion; because there is no absolute power given him to do what he listeth, as man.”

### Old World Theology, New World Politics

Puritan theologies like these loom large as the ideological predecessors of the New World that cultivated the strongest democracies to date. All sides, sympathetic to Puritans or not, admit that the Puritan faith was at the foundation of the New World colonies. Since this New World led to such paramount developments of government, the locus of the underlying root is not unimportant. Systemic features such as limited terms, balance of powers, citizen nullification, and interpositional magistracies were at the heart of New World government, all concepts that were popularized by the Reformation. One hundred years prior to the American Revolution, most of the major ideas were set, and they did not originate properly from Enlightenment social contract thought so much as from Buchanan/Rutherford’s social covenant, ensconced in its distinctly Biblical moorings.

For example, James Madison, who in his early days at Princeton was educated by John Witherspoon in the paradigm of John Knox, reflected this theology when he said, “But what is government but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary.” A Genevan theological belief, the doctrine of human depravity, animated his politics.

Abraham Kuyper summarized the political impact of God’s sovereignty as “a political faith which may be summarized in these three theses”:

“1. God only—and never any creature—is possessed of sovereign rights, in the destiny of nations, because God alone created them, maintains them by his Almighty power, and rules them by his ordinances. 2. Sin has, in the realm of politics, broken down the direct gov-

ernment of God, and therefore the exercise of authority, for the purpose of government, has subsequently been invested in men, as a mechanical remedy. And 3. in whatever form this authority may reveal itself, man never possesses power over his fellow man in any other way than by the authority which descends upon him from the majesty of God. Calvinism protests against state-omnicompetence, against the horrible conception that no right exists above and beyond existing laws, and against the pride of absolutism, which does not recognize constitutional rights.... Calvinism is to be praised for having built a dam across the absolutistic stream, not by appealing to popular force, nor to the hallucination of human greatness, but by deducing those rights and liberties of social life from the same source from which the high authority of government flows, even the absolute sovereignty of God.”

### Geneva’s Contribution

Geneva’s contributions to politics, constitutionalism, and the resistance to tyranny continues. In our own day the overthrow of totalitarianism has not been fueled by materialism or the love of liberty alone. Even a defense of property rights does not account for the instances of halting Leviathan in our century, nor does an abstract pursuit of liberty account for the principled resistance before the state-juggernauts of modernity. Only this distinctively biblical faith preserves the transcendental standard necessary to limit monopolism and tyrannical absolutism. The faith of the Reformation has a track record of blessing societies. **A**

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# Evangelical Political Activism: Faith and Prudence

David L. Weeks

The political resurgence of America's evangelical community raises anew ever-important questions about religion and politics. In *The Politics of Reason and Revelation*, John West revisits some of those questions: "Does religion have a political role, and if so, what should it be? What are the advantages of religion in politics? What are the dangers? And how can people of faith bring their religious beliefs to bear on public issues without dividing citizens along religious lines and infringing on the liberty of conscience of those who do not share their religious views?" West addresses these questions by examining the American founding and nineteenth-century evangelical activism in a manner that sheds light on contemporary developments.

Recent evangelical political initiatives have been met with hostility, criticism, and such obloquy as the infamous *Washington Post* article characterizing evangelicals as "largely poor, uneducated and easy to command." Such caricatures, however, are not wholly the fault of an unsympathetic press. In their political naiveté, evangelicals have often spoken or acted so as to reinforce preexisting prejudices. More importantly, many evangelical missteps show the lack of a carefully formulated social ethic born of reflection and long experience in public life.

Evangelicals, however, are not political neophytes. They may lack the centuries-old natural law tradition of Roman Catholicism, but contemporary evangelicals did not emerge *ex nihilo*;

they were preceded by Protestant reformers who drew on the teachings of the Church fathers and by Christian activists who have been a potent moral force for centuries. Unfortunately, several decades of political quiescence have caused many of today's evangelicals to

lose sight of this rich legacy. We can remedy this deficiency by studying history, especially the nineteenth century when evangelicals were a powerful political force in American public life.

The character of evangelical political activism in the early nineteenth century, according to West, was influenced by how the founding generation defined the political role of religion. Clear understanding of the Founders, therefore, is West's starting point.

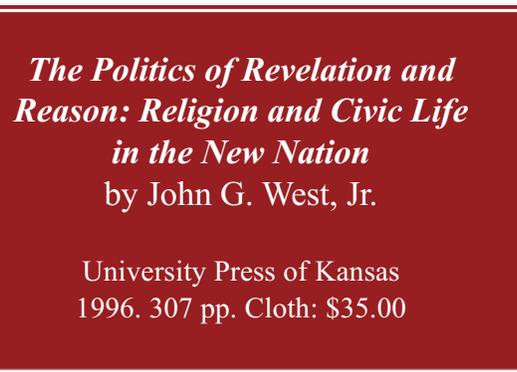
## The View From the Founding

West provides a thoroughly documented, succinct, yet nuanced, explanation of the Founders' views about the role of religion in republican government. Clearly, their personal religious faiths differed dramatically—Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were free-thinking Unitarians; John Witherspoon and John Jay were orthodox

Christians; John Adams was a deistic moralist; while the faiths of George Washington, James Madison, James Wilson, and Alexander Hamilton were either inconsistent, nonexistent, or intensely private. This disparate band of Founders, nevertheless, agreed on several propositions: Religious liberty is vital, morality is essential, and religion is an efficacious source of morality. Religious liberty, the foundational principle, requires a separation of church and state to protect churches and individuals from government intervention and was eventually guaranteed by the establishment and free exercise clauses of the First Amendment.

The Founders acknowledged, nonetheless, that the institutional separation of church and state does not divorce religion from politics. The separation is not absolute because religious belief often entails action that is susceptible to government regulation and because many political issues raise moral questions, require moral choices, and have moral consequences. When matters of morality are implicated in political debate, religious people will speak out. This involvement of religious people in political affairs is not generally disruptive, however, when the state, abiding by the dictates of reason, and the church, adhering to divine revelation, agree on matters of morality. The idea that the morality of revelation was largely "coincident with the morality of reason" was widely accepted at the time of the founding.

The early nineteenth century pro-



vides a test case for the Founders' theory and is carefully examined by West. After the second Great Awakening, evangelical crusades against lotteries, dueling, poverty, slavery, prostitution, and alcohol, as well as campaigns against removing the Cherokee nation from Georgia and reversing congressionally mandated Sunday mail deliveries, were spearheaded by prominent evangelical leaders. Lyman Beecher, Theodore Frelinghuysen, and Jeremiah Evarts understood and endorsed the Founders' solution to theological-political tension and exemplified prudent and principled Christian activism.

These evangelicals prized religious liberty as well as the political freedom to influence their country. They also rejoiced in a simple syllogism that West says was accepted by the founding fathers: "Morality is necessary for republican government; religion is necessary for morality; therefore, religion is necessary for republican government." This apparent agreement disguises some im-

zenry." These differences, generally, were resolved amicably in the nineteenth century but remain contentious in the twentieth.

Evangelicals, then and now, are tempted by the idea of a "Biblical politics." "Biblical politics" claims that moral knowledge is wholly dependent on the Bible and that moral rectitude requires spiritual regeneration. These notions antagonize friends and foes because they divide citizens along theological lines as well as keep evangelicals on the political periphery because they preempt philosophical and rhetorical links between the evangelical community and American society-at-large. West provides keen advice for today's evangelicals—learn from your forebears who resisted the temptation of a wholly "Biblical politics."

This does not mean Beecher and the others abandoned Scripture. They believed moral precepts could be known apart from the Bible, though humanity's fallen nature inhibited such rational un-

fundamental premise of the Founders' system... that the morality on which public discourse rests must be sanctioned by reason as well as revelation," evangelicals established working majorities via alliances with nonbelievers based upon common moral ground.

### Prudent Political Activism

Many other valuable lessons come from this era. For example, Beecher urged evangelicals to use voluntary reform associations rather than political parties as vehicles for change. The objectives of the reform associations were to encourage good behavior—hypocrisy and lawlessness devastate crusades—and to capture the hearts and minds of voters with nonpartisan, respectful, and restrained moral appeals. Beecher recognized the power of public opinion to shape legislation and the importance of moral sentiment to control private behavior. Clearly, "persuasion must precede coercion" because laws succeed best when people "are convinced of their propriety."

Four additional lessons for politically active believers: Focus on "great questions of national morality" rather than asserting a "Christian" position on every issue. "Moral right does not always equal political might." Prudence requires reconciling "idealism with the exigencies of the time." And, crusades by people of faith will inevitably elicit scurrilous attacks accusing believers of violating the separation of church and state.

This book brims with historical insight and good advice for all believers who are politically active in a hostile milieu. Make time to read it. **A**

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"West provides a thoroughly documented, succinct, yet nuanced, explanation of the Founders' views about the role of religion in republican government."

—David L. Weeks

portant differences. "If evangelicals and the Founders concurred on why morality is necessary for republicanism," West astutely points out, "they did not wholly agree on why religion is necessary for morality. Two points were at issue: the role of revelation in the acquisition of moral knowledge and the role of Christianity in the creation of a moral citi-

zation. Reason's failures, they concluded, could be overcome by Scripture, which "lays down the fundamental maxims of right and wrong with a clarity and finality that cannot be evaded." But because evangelicals believed Biblical teachings were rational, they were content "arguing public issues with rational appeals." By accepting "the most

*Capitalism*  
*A Complete and Integrated Understanding of  
the Nature and Value of Human Economic Life*

by George Reisman

Jameson Books, 1996

1046 pp. Cloth: \$95.00

Review by Jeffrey Tucker

In the last century, every important economist aspired to write a complete treatise on economic thought. The idea was to build up an airtight theory, primarily by use of deductive logic, to explain how people overcome a central human predicament: Material desires always exceed resources, so what system should societies adopt in order to meet limitless needs and become prosperous? Building a theory from the ground up was the means of demonstrating a theory's validity, allowing the reader to evaluate the merit of each step as the economist takes it.

These days, a systematic treatise such as *Capitalism* appears, at best, once every couple of generations. The last two on record are Ludwig von Mises' *Human Action* (1949) and Murray Rothbard's *Man, Economy, and State* (1962), both economists writing in the Austrian tradition. It's a tradition distinguished in the modern profession because it still accepts the idea that economics is indeed a social (not a natural) science that requires deductive (not positivist) methods.

The merit of the treatise is that it shows that economics is a systematic science that has universal applicability. This insight has been forgotten as the profession has become every more mathematically inclined and specialized. I'm reminded of a homily given by Cardinal O'Connor from the pulpit on the

question of whether New York City should retain rent control laws. He made some telling points but was at a loss to understand that the question he was dealing with required more than just specialized knowledge of the city's real estate markets. He needed a framework for understanding how prices work in all markets; lacking that, he ultimately came down against changing the law until economists could do more studies.

Early in Mises' own career as an economist, he undertook just such a study of Vienna's housing market. Using the methods of the German historical school, he discovered that the accumulation of data alone could reveal nothing about how to proceed. What he needed was a theory of how prices and markets work, which he could then use to discover in what ways the market was being inhibited by legal restrictions.

It is highly significant, then, that George Reisman has dedicated his remarkable book to "Ludwig von Mises, my teacher...." Professor Reisman, who teaches economics at Pepperdine University, is the translator of Mises' *Epistemological Problems in Economics* ([1933] 1960), and spent many years in his weekly New York seminar.

He is not a thoroughgoing Austrian. Indeed, under the influence of novelist Ayn Rand—he describes his encounters with the philosopher of selfishness in the introduction—he has rejected crucial

parts of Austrian value theory, including subjective value theory (unpersuasively so). Professor Reisman even attempts a fundamental reconstruction of the Austrian theory of price and cost (an aspect of the book thoroughly critiqued by Alexander Tabarrok in the *Review of Austrian Economics*, Vol. 10, no. 2). Even so, Reisman remains in the Austrian tradition of thinkers in most matters of theory, policy, and method.

The book does get technical at points, sometimes exceedingly so, but that should not deter the novice from tackling it. He provides solid theoretical grounding on a whole range of core issues involving the division of labor, private property, immutable economic laws (analogous to the natural law itself), the theory of the firm, competition and monopoly, money and banking, and economic growth. He applies this in a host of areas, from rent control, taxes, and inflation, to protectionism, economic regulation, education, and the welfare state. His conclusion is implied in the title: *Capitalism*, by which he means a completely unhampered market, serves individuals and societies better than any alternative system. Nearly every objection offered against the classically liberal economy is dealt with in the course of the narrative.

His treatment on oil shocks in the 1970s is as powerful as when it was first released in his book *Government Against the Economy* (1979). And perhaps the greatest contribution of this book is his section on the environment. The "all-encompassing doctrine of the environmental movement," he writes, "is that the continuation of economic progress is both impossible and dangerous." It is not a new view; Professor Reisman amasses evidence that gloom-and-doom environmental scenarios have always been with us. He concludes that

this view profoundly misunderstands the nature of man and the world.

Back to Cardinal O'Connor. Could he benefit from reading this book? Certainly, but he would be struck less by the power of the economic logic than by the book's profoundly anti-religious stance. Indeed, Professor Reisman adopts classically Randian ethics, viewing all human evil as an extension of "altruism" and all good flowing from "self interest." And unlike the mainstream Austrian writers, who were always careful to separate positive economics from normative matters of ethics, our author sees them bound up with each other by necessity. This position seriously compromises the book's value on all matters relating to ethics. The Randian perspective has also blinded our author to insights into the history of economic thought that he might have gleaned from the Christian tradition. For example, he makes the surprising and unsupported (and unsupported) claim that "the scholastics contributed nothing to sound economics."

No reviewer can resist commenting on this book's most conspicuous trait: its sheer size. With its index, it comes in at a whopping 1046 oversized pages. What's more, the publisher typeset it in a two-column format, so it may very well be a third to twice as lengthy as its page numbers alone indicate. This book may, in fact, be the biggest and longest book on economic theory ever written. Even with its failings, some of them serious, the appearance of this economic treatise should be an occasion for celebration. The scope and vision of Professor Reisman's treatise in defense of economic freedom is as broad as any book published in decades. **A**

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**Jeffrey Tucker** is director of research of the Ludwig von Mises Institute at Auburn University.



## Book News



### **Malcolm Muggeridge: A Biography**

Gregory Wolfe

*Eerdmans, 1997*

490 pp. Hardcover: \$35.00

Gregory Wolfe's *Malcolm Muggeridge: A Biography* tackles Britain's controversial iconoclast. Muggeridge was raised in a middle-class family, his father an active Fabian socialist. Muggeridge followed his father into the British socialist movement becoming a correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*. His faith, like many socialists of the time, fell upon the Soviet Union. He lived there for seven months, leaving angry and disillusioned toward the Soviets and the fawning Western leftists who idolized Soviet thuggery.

Most interesting in Wolfe's biography is his account of Muggeridge's inner spiritual struggle. While Muggeridge came to personify Christianity as "Saint Mugg," he was beset by compulsive womanizing, alcohol, and depression. His ambition led him to personal acclaim, yet he was drawn to faith and contemplation. Wolfe's biography is a fascinating anatomy of a complex man.

### **Renaissance: The Rebirth of Liberty in the Heart of Europe**

Václav Klaus

*Cato Institute, 1997*

227 pp. Paperback: \$9.95

*Renaissance: The Rebirth of Liberty in the Heart of Europe* is a collection of speeches and essays that detail Václav Klaus's vision of renewal after the stultifying brutality of communism. Klaus's commitment to classical liberal ideals are evident throughout, particularly in his address "The Ten Commandments

of Systemic Reform," where he advocates privatization, deregulation, and property rights. Klaus offers pragmatic public policy reforms that embody his classical liberal ideals. One can look to the Czech Republic with hopeful anticipation that his proposals bear fruit and serve as a model for the rest of Central Europe, if not the world. This book is essential for understanding the difficult transition that countries face when shifting from a closed system to a free society.

### **Heart of the World, Center of the Church**

David L. Schindler

*Eerdmans, 1997*

339 pp. Hardcover: \$37.50

In *Heart of the World, Center of the Church* David Schindler offers his unifying vision of *communio*, or communion, as the foundations for a social paradigm. Schindler's primary contention is that Catholicism and liberalism (in the classical sense) are irreconcilable. According to Schindler, liberalism "at its deepest level threatens Christianity." Logically, he therefore attacks John Courtney Murray's project on religious freedom and Novak's, Neuhaus's, and Weigel's view of economic freedom.

Schindler's writing is dense and rambling. Throughout he misinterprets Pope John Paul II's theological anthropology so as to incorporate the pope's thought into his schema of *communio*. Furthermore, Schindler's attempts to analyze economic life are inconsistent and poorly thought out. Sadly, this book offers us an incoherent theology poorly applied to social reality.

—Jon Hardy



*Rev. Robert A. Sirico*

## Of Markets and Morality

The great mantra of this prevailing culture of self-absorption is *tolerance*: If only everyone, everywhere, and under all circumstances could only be tolerant, we are assured, what a wonderful and peaceful world it would be. This kind of illiberal faith, this chic toleration, is so intolerant as to assert the truth claims of orthodox Judaism and Christianity. The problem with this arrogance (which always fails to see its own arrogance) is that it presumes that the Jewish and Christian reliance on the use of faith to apprehend some truths diminishes the importance of the mind, and hence, man himself.

This modern, liberal mindset begins by rejecting revelation, but in the course of its intellectual trajectory it must undermine not merely Biblical truth-claims but any claim to know truth. It does so to allow the individual to impose himself and his opinions on the world, creating God and others in his own image rather than shaping his views according to reality.

Theistic agnosticism in this way easily proceeds to moral agnosticism, and eventually, when it has run its course, one emerges as an epistemological agnostic—unable to assert knowledge of anything with certainty. All of this, then, is an attack on man, his capacity for choice, his dignity, and his intellect. It is an attack on the prerequisite for all intellectual and moral progress—and it is done in the very name of progress. It is an attack, eventually, upon human life itself exactly to the extent that it relativizes morality and virtue.

Ironically, this whole approach ends up destroying tolerance itself. Pluralism is not a beige, lukewarm man of undefined verbiage—a blended mixture of mild opinions calculated never to offend. It is vivid in hue, robust in texture. The roots of pluralism and tolerance are not found in a valueless agnosticism that holds to nothing in particular, or everything in general, but emerges within a certain stance to which people are committed, while accepting boundaries to its enforcement.

Defenders of genuine liberty stand opposed to the nihilistic subjectivism of our age. We desire to build a soci-

ety based upon the truth about man and God. Yet, one area of confusion that the advocates of the free economy must avoid making is the temptation to either idolatry the market economy, or to suppose that virtue is something that can be enacted by politicians and implemented by bureaucrats.

Of itself, the market and the technological advances that result from it, lack a *telos*—a proper end or purpose toward which this development is oriented. That end or purpose depends upon the human person who initiates economic actions, and who himself has absorbed from somewhere a sense of moral purpose. The market and technology lack the logic to tell us who we are and what we ought to do. For that we

must look elsewhere: to the texts of Scripture, to God's love and action on behalf of those created in His likeness and image.

The market and technology give us the *how*—and this how is critically important—for without it life would be burdensome and difficult. Earth would be unable to sustain the abundance that provides for human well-being and prosperity. But while the free market is necessary in providing the *how* of technological progress, it is to the Scriptures that we must look to discover the *ought* of our lives; to answer the perennial questions: How ought, then, we to live? What is the purpose, the value, and the end of our society, our homes, and our lives?

To separate the *how* from the *ought* is to create economic and moral chaos—it is to either place human life at the disposal of economic, technological, and emotional whim, or it is to become so heavenly minded we are no earthly good. We are called to become good servants in the culture of life. This requires us to master both our world and our moral lives, and live as dignified sons and daughters of the God of Life. **A**

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*Rev. Robert A. Sirico is president of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. This article is taken from his remarks at the Acton Institute's 1997 Annual Dinner.*

“There are many things government can’t do—many good purposes it must renounce. It must leave them to the enterprise of others. It cannot feed the people. It cannot enrich the people. It cannot teach the people. It cannot convert the people.”

—Lord Acton—

## RELIGION & LIBERTY

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