

Religion & Liberty

ACTON INSTITUTE'S INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RELIGION,
ECONOMICS AND CULTURE



**To end child marriage,
change the economic
underpinnings**

GMOs, CRISPR and
the fight against hunger

Arvo Pärt and the
universal soul of music

Unlocking the future of
American incarceration

EDITOR'S NOTE

John Couretas EXECUTIVE EDITOR

We lead the Spring 2018 issue of *Religion & Liberty* with Rev. Ben Johnson's eye-opening feature about the global scourge of child marriage. "Child marriage offends the Western moral tradition, which holds that minors lack the intellectual maturity and life experience to grant consent," he writes. "But the harms it inflicts on girls, children and society are anything but abstract." Aspects involved in reversing the perverse economic incentives behind child marriage include economic freedom, property rights and demolishing the cultural "norms" that undergird the practice.

Bruce Edward Walker contributes two pieces. One looks at GMOs and CRISPR, a gene-editing tool, and how these technologies are used in agriculture. In his other article, Walker examines the career of Arvo Pärt, the Estonian composer of sacred music. The musician, whose Eastern Orthodox faith informs his work, once said: "I am not taking the task in my music to discuss some religious or special Orthodox values. I am trying to reflect the values in my music that could touch every individual, every person."

Acton president and co-founder Rev. Robert A. Sirico examines the tradition of Catholic social teaching on labor unions and offers a critique for the 21st century. "Despite its long history of supporting unions as a form of association, Catholic social teaching ... has not been sufficiently appreciative of modern realities about trade unions, most of which are led by professionals who have never had a blue-collar job in their entire lives," he writes.

In an excerpt from the Acton Institute's reissue of Lester DeKoster's *Communism & Christian Faith*, he observes it "is provocative how closely the Marxist position parallels Christian doctrine. It is Christian teaching that nothing of history shall enter unchanged into heaven. It is Marxist doctrine that nothing of history pertains to the classless society." Order the book today from the Acton book shop and gift it to anyone who might be seduced by the arguments of Communist and socialist ideologies.

And there's much more. Thank you for reading.



Cover Photo: "GREECE: REFUGEES ON HUNGER STRIKE IN ATHENS" by Panayotis Tzoumros (epinimages)

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Free trade and Brexit can help Africa flourish

Ibrahim B. Anoba

AFRICAN LIBERTY ORGANIZATION

In early 2018, all 54 member-states of the African Union (AU) will sign an agreement for a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) to make Africa the world's largest common market. The CFTA could increase trade within the region by an unprecedented 50 percent and create about \$35 billion in benefits.

This is necessary, as intra-African trade constitutes only 18 percent of the continent's total trade – an abysmal rating compared to the European Union's (EU) 70 percent. But a well-implemented free trade treaty could increase trade and benefit the ever-growing population of the continent with more material resources. It would also likely give Africa an advantage in negotiating more equitable agreements with the EU.

With Europe recognizing these alternatives, Africa would have the opportunity to elevate its bargaining position with the EU. Moreover, Africa's development commitments may give it more reasons to increase imports from Europe through the next two decades. The UK is already one of Africa's largest European partners, and leading Brexiteers have raised the possibility of importing more goods from Africa once the UK no longer has to abide by the EU's Common Agriculture Policy, which imposes 18 percent tariffs on African agricultural goods.

More than ever, Africa's economic potential as a market – especially as a home for technologically driven commodities to serve its sprouting population – is attracting

interest from emerging super-economies like China, India and Israel. The free trade plan would integrate the numerous fragmented markets to cooperate directly to increase productive capacity, information exchange, improved infrastructure and financial flow.

For an Africa faced with what seem to be daunting challenges that many believe can only be solved by greater central coordination, the decentralized and organic coordination brought about by the CFTA is an all-around winner.

French strike for the right to retire at 52

Rev. Ben Johnson

ACTON INSTITUTE

Some 4.5 million French were immobilized by a national rail strike over what might be termed the most thoroughly French of all labor demands: the right to retire with full benefits at age 52.

The nationalized railway, SNCF, kicked off the first of a nearly three-month-long strike in April. With 86 percent of all trains canceled nationwide, 230 miles of traffic jams congested French roads on "Black Tuesday." Video surfaced purporting to show desperate passengers climbing through the window of one of the few operational train cars.

France already faces fiscal strain for allowing its citizens to retire at age 62. According to the French free-market think tank Fondation iFRAP, that retirement age "has increased the burden on the state, hospitals, businesses and individuals. It has largely contributed to the increase in deficits and unemployment, and the loss of French competitiveness." Subtracting an additional decade of work creates an even less sustainable system – some-

thing Americans, who face \$6 trillion in unfunded pension liabilities, should understand.

Christians should seek to "live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). This includes cultivating harmonious, rather than adversarial, labor relations. To this end, Catholic social teaching circumscribes the conditions in which a labor strike would be considered morally licit.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church holds that a strike can be "morally legitimate when it cannot be avoided, or at least when it is necessary to obtain a proportionate benefit. It becomes morally unacceptable when accompanied by violence, or when objectives are included that are not directly linked to working conditions or are contrary to the common good."

Fifty years later, cities still suffer the economic effects of the 1968 riots

Joe Carter

ACTON INSTITUTE

The riots that began in 1968 after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—sometimes referred to as the Holy Week Uprising or King assassination riots—spread through 110 cities across the United States.

As historian Peter B. Levy notes,

Fifty-four cities suffered at least \$100,000 in property damage, with the nation's capital and Baltimore topping the list at approximately \$15 million and \$12 million, respectively. Thousands of small shopkeepers saw their life savings go up in smoke. Combined, 43 men and women were killed, approximately 3,500 were injured, and 27,000 were arrested. Not until over 58,000 National

Guardsmen and army troops joined local state and police forces did the uprisings cease. Put somewhat differently, during Holy Week 1968, the United States experienced its greatest wave of social unrest since the Civil War.

From 1964 to 1971, as many as 700 riots erupted in cities across America. The large numbers of injuries, deaths and property damage that occurred in predominantly black neighborhoods caused considerable short-term damage to the communities.

Between 1960 and 1980, severe riot cities had relative declines in male employment rates of 4 to 7 percentage points. Individual-level data for the 1970s suggests that this decline was especially large for men under the age of 30.

A second paper investigated the influence of riots on central city residential property values, especially black-owned properties:

They find that the riots significantly depressed the median value of black-owned property between 1960 and 1970, with little or no rebound in the 1970s. The baseline estimates for severe-riot cities relative to small-or-no-riot cities range from approximately 14 to 20 percent for black-owned properties, and from 6 to 10 percent for all central-city residential properties. Household-level data for the 1970s indicate that the racial gap in property values widened substantially in riot-afflicted cities relative to others.

Whatever the initial causes, the effect of the riots was economic harm that has lasted 50 years. However justified they might have seemed at the time, the riots serve as a reminder that the unintended consequences of our actions can have a destructive impact on our children for generations to come.

Pope Francis condemns usury – but what is it?

Philip Booth

Pope Francis recently spoke to an Italian anti-usury group to condemn the practice of “usury,” calling for more education and an end to exploitation. He spoke to both parties who might be involved in a problematic financial relationship. He wisely spoke about the importance of people living simple lives so as to not take on unnecessary debt, and he also spoke against lending at high rates of interest. He also commented on the importance of people helping those in need through volunteer work instead of lending money – excellent pastoral advice.

But what is usury? What is the Church’s teaching on it? When is it problematic and when is it wise for the government to intervene in the matter?

In some traditions, usury involves any lending with the expectation of receiving interest. Thomas E. Woods, in his book *The Church and the Market*, examines the history and evolution of the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching. He argues that the prohibition of all interest on lending is a difficult position to sustain as a universal principle.

Although some borrowers might need money for urgent consumption purposes (such as buying food), others may borrow to invest (for example, to start a business). Surely it is unreasonable for the lender not to receive compensation in the form of

interest, at least in the second case. After all, the borrower wants the capital to make some money for himself. The lender, in making a loan, is also giving up the opportunity to invest the money elsewhere and make a return, or he is deferring his own consumption. Not only that, it is surely just if the lender is compensated for inflation (the decline in the purchasing power of the money he lent), for risk (the possibility that he might not be paid back) and for related expenses (setting up the transaction, checking the bona fides of the borrower and so on).

For these reasons, the Catholic Church seems to have settled on a definition of usury that involves the charging of “excessive” interest. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* points out that the quest for a reasonable profit is perfectly acceptable. In a brief discussion, it focuses on the impact of the loan on the borrower – specifically, that if usury leads to hunger and death, the lender is indirectly committing murder.

This idea of excessive interest is not necessarily easy to put into operation, and its application in practice requires some ethical discernment. This is not to say that it is unimportant, but government regulation can be a sledgehammer that misses a nut. Let’s think of this from both the lender’s and borrower’s points of view.

Consider a payday loan. Such loans

are typically small and repaid over a short period of time. When their interest rates are “annualized” – calculated as if the loan were rolled over on the same terms, month after month, for a whole year – incredible rates of interest are quoted. However, it is, in fact, easy to reach a large figure for the interest rate without any substantial profit being made, simply because of the nature of the transaction.

For example, imagine a loan of £100 (approximately \$123 U.S.) for two weeks that involved an administration cost of only £5 (approximately \$6 U.S.), which was the only cost passed on to the customer (with no allowance for interest, profit or risk of non-repayment). The annual effective rate of interest on such a loan would be more than 250 percent. Comparing the cost of a short-term loan with longer-term alternatives is like comparing the cost of renting a hotel room at a nightly rate for 365 nights with renting a house for a year.

You might be thinking that the fact that the lender is not making a particularly large profit from the transaction is not much comfort for the borrower, as it could still lead the borrower into a spiral of debt with devastating consequences. But this is not as clear as it seems. An individual who has a very low, predictable income and uses a payday loan to meet



regular expenses is likely to run into trouble. However, if somebody whose winter electricity bill is due five days before he is to be paid takes out a payday loan and repays it within the month, he avoids either a bad credit record or the hassle (and possibly additional cost) of a bank overdraft. Students may also take out payday loans, perhaps because of the need to buy a large consumer item (such as a laptop), just before their student loan payment is made by the government. Before the market was regulated in the UK, the average payday loan borrower had a similar level of education as the average of the population and was more likely to be working.

What would happen if we were to regulate interest rates? We know the answer to this question, because many jurisdictions do regulate payday lending. Regulation of payday loans tends to make complete financial breakdown and subsequent difficulty obtaining housing and employment worse; leads to the use of illegal lenders, who tend to have rather brutal methods of enforcement; leads to greater reliance on family members; and leads to the use of more expensive forms of credit. (Evidence from various studies can be found in the IEA's *Flaws and Ceilings*, edited by Coyne and Coyne, pp. 139–146.)

Whether lending at high cost is exploitative, or sends the borrower into a

spiral of decline, very much depends on the particular circumstances of the lender and the borrower.


Perhaps Christians should reflect a little more on the Islamic perspective on usury. Here the focus is on the problems of debt contracts that involve interest. It is feared these lead to an unequal sharing of risk and, therefore, have a negative effect on personal relationships. For example, if somebody borrows money with interest to start a business and that business fails, the lender is owed a debt – and may pursue this with devastating consequences for the borrower. However, these consequences are much alleviated by the modern treatment of debt and bankruptcy, especially in the U.S. (though whether this is entirely a good thing is a moot point). Would it not be better if the lender took an equity interest in the business instead?

It might well be the case that it would be better for more providers of finance to take equity stakes instead of lending at interest. Christians could certainly learn from Muslims. However, their own difficulty is illustrated by the fact that so many Islamic finance products seem to try to get as close as possible to their Western equivalents whilst remaining compliant with Shari'a law.

What are the lessons? First, the tax system should never favor debt over eq-

uity. In most Western tax systems, equity finance is taxed at a penalizing rate. This was especially true in the U.S. until President Trump's recent reforms redressed the balance somewhat. Secondly, we should, as Pope Francis suggested, voluntarily help the needy out of charity rather than lending money. And perhaps churches should more actively support the development of credit unions. These could provide cheap loans and develop personal relationships with the borrowers to help them better manage their affairs. In addition, moneylending companies should behave ethically – they should be careful to ensure that their practices reduce, rather than increase, their clients' need for credit.

However, we should be wary of regulation. Some forms of regulation will have worse side effects than others. But all have the potential to make a bad situation worse and to increase the risk posed to those who are in daunting financial circumstances. Pope Francis' remarks did not mention regulation but, instead, offered pastoral advice that was sound – and important – for individuals to heed.

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TRANSLATLANTIC ESSAY

Marxism, the classless society and history

Lester DeKoster

Marx always insisted that he derived his system from a careful study of history. Marxists are fond of insisting that they think “concretely,” which means they always stick to the facts. That this is not really the case may be shown by an illustration.

Let us suppose that a student of Marxism grasps the truth that the concept of the classless society, the earthly paradise, is not only the capstone of Marxist theory but is also the capstone of Marxist propaganda. It is this vision which distinguishes Marxism from other forms of violent social criticism, like, say, anarchism, which has never been a serious contender for men’s allegiance. Sensing, then, that Marxism draws much of its propaganda appeal, both consciously and unconsciously, from the concept of a perfect society, the critic begins to examine that idea in some detail.

...the Marxist is very vague about the whole notion of the classless society.

He finds, first of all, as we have noted, that the Marxist is very vague about the whole notion of the classless society. Marx hardly discussed it systematically. Lenin generalized about it, and Stalin was much too busy explaining its delayed arrival to wish to theorize concerning it. If the critic presses the matter, and asks for more detail, he learns that the Communist draws no blueprints of the classless society now. Why? Well, basically because he cannot. Why not? Because it is impossible to do so in current language and thought-forms. Once more, why not? Because the very concepts and language which men now employ are fashioned by the environment of class struggle out of which they, like all spiritual forms, arise. Our very habits of thought are conditioned by class struggle. This is true because, Marx taught, matter always controls the forms of logic, psychology and language. This is simply materialism.

Therefore the language, logic and thought-forms of history as we live it cannot apply to the new society, where there will be no struggle. Thought-forms on this side of the revolution do

Photo: Stalin / Isak Brodsky / Wikimedia Commons



not apply to life on the other side. History has in this sense no claim on the classless society—the same history, of course, from which Marx claimed to draw his certainty that the classless society would be achieved.

Suppose, in the second place, that the critic insists that there must be something to be learned about the classless society on this side of the revolution, and points out that the Marxist himself does, after all, talk and think about it. And suppose that the critic proceeds to argue that communist experiments have been tried and found wanting, and communal enterprises have often failed; he then tries to apply the causes of these failures, as he understands them, to the idea of the classless society. What then?

He finds that the Marxist rejects abruptly all analogies drawn from history. Why? Because the classless society is, you will recall, strictly speaking beyond history. History as we know it, governed by the dialectic and conducive to struggle, will cease when the classless society comes into being. This being so, all argument drawn from present history cannot apply to post-history, to the classless society. The Marxist will not be bound by the lessons of history, the same history which is supposed to validate Marxism.

Or, finally, the critic draws one last arrow from his quiver. He seeks to project conclusions drawn from the nature of man himself into the new society. If man is like *this*, then in the classless society he must react like *that*, and so on. Briskly the Communist reminds him that the only “man” history knows is the victim of class struggle, whether he be of the proletariat or of the bourgeoisie. This kind of man will not exist in the classless society. Therefore any inference drawn from the one kind of man will not necessarily, or even probably, apply to the other. In judging the classless society, the Marxist accepts no responsibility to what history or introspection teach concerning the nature of mankind.

In summary, the Marxist denies that any aspect of history as we now know it can be used as a standard of judgment in the discussion of the classless society. This places him in an enviable argumentative position, or, rather, this removes the concept of the classless society out of the realm of argument altogether. The idea of the classless society becomes amorphous enough to be all things to all Marxists, and nothing to all critics. Between it and history there is, in reality, no logical passage at all. On this subject the Communist and the anti-Communist volley their charges over a bottomless gulf—the chasm which divides history from post-history.

This *chasm* between the dispensations is important. It represents for Marxism (though no Marxist puts it so) that hill which in *Pilgrim's Progress* is where the great burden of historical evil drops away. This infinite gulf between history and the classless society is for Marxism the unintentional recognition that man must pass through the infinite, in some sense, be-

“To escape historical evil the selves which now live and act in history would have to be destroyed. So long as the self of man is not regarded as *sui generis*, that is, a particular after its own kind, but rather as derivative from the material substratum which forms it, that self must disappear if the material undergoes radical change.”

fore he can enter “heaven.” The complete break which Marxist theory makes between history and the new society means, in fact, that man as he is will never get into the new world unaided.

It is quite inconceivable how a Marxist who lived before and through the revolution could enter the classless society. How could he, in reality, put on the “new man” in lieu of the man who had been formed by all the tensions of class struggle? And if he brought into the new society any of the vestiges of the old, they could become germs from which evil might once more develop.

Marxism, based as it is on philosophical materialism, has no concept of rebirth.

It is provocative how closely the Marxist position parallels Christian doctrine. It is Christian teaching that nothing of history shall enter *unchanged* into heaven. It is Marxist doctrine that nothing of history pertains to the classless society. But in Christianity the “new man” of heaven will be the “old man” reborn. The continuity is not broken. This rebirth, however, is not the work of the man, but the work of God.

Marxism, based as it is on philosophical materialism, has no concept of rebirth. At some point in history, the same persons who make the revolution, who staff and support the dictatorship of the proletariat, are supposed to enter the classless society. The fact that that process is presumed to be gradual obscures but does not lessen the tension which holds between things of “this” history and things of “that” post-history. The Marxist who makes that fateful crossing from history into post-history would leave his very self behind, for that self has been nurtured on the thought, the logic, the passions, the

struggles and the material realities of history. Without these, what *kind* of self, on Marxist grounds, remains?

To escape historical evil the selves which now live and act in history would have to be destroyed. So long as the self of man is not regarded as *sui generis*, that is, a particular after its own kind, but rather

as derivative from the material substratum which forms it, that self must disappear if the material undergoes radical change. This means that the men who conduct the revolution, who staff and support the dictatorship of the proletariat, could not enter the promised land. Nor could their children, born in the context of struggle. The gulf between history and post-history is fixed, and affords no crossing. This is instructive. It means simply that man cannot save himself.


This article is an excerpt from Communism & Christian Faith, with a new introduction by Pavel Hanes (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 2018), 67–71. 



Photo "GREECE: REFUGEES ON HUNGER STRIKE IN ATHENS" by Panayotis Tzavaras (apimages)

To end child marriage, change the economic underpinnings

Rev. Ben Johnson

On an afternoon three years ago, Sheskalo Pandey bounded through her front door to receive a life-changing message from her parents: She was going to be married.

They thought their daughter would be as happy as her childhood friends, many of whom had already found husbands. But Sheskalo was devastated. She was only 14.

Sheskalo, who lives in Nepal's southern province of Kapilvastu, desperately wanted to continue her education, but her parents believed an arranged marriage offered everyone better financial prospects.

Suddenly, Sheskalo had an inspiration that held the key to sparing her, dozens of girls in her village and potentially millions of girls around the world from coerced child marriage: She went into business for herself.

"I begged my brother to lend me enough money to buy some colored paper and glue," she said. She began making and selling crafts.

Her mother agreed to give her six months to make enough money to cover her schooling fees – but if she failed, she would be married off. Her father, who was quietly supportive, spent all his savings on a bicycle to expand her sales territory.

Sheskalo paid him back within two weeks. Her entrepreneurial venture now earns more than the national minimum wage. She is taking classes to learn computer technologies and plans to earn an accounting degree.

Her example convinced her friends that they need not be resigned to a life of scarcity and subservience.

"There are 35 of us who have bought our own bicycles now, and we stopped two girls from getting married last month," Sheskalo said.

Not all are as fortunate. In Mozambique, Carlina Nortino's impoverished family arranged her marriage at age 13, thwarting her dream of becoming a midwife. "It was never my desire to get married at that young age; I wanted to go to school. But I was forced to by my father,"

she said. "The family didn't have enough food to survive, so my father accepted the proposal" – and its accompanying dowry.

Child marriage, adult pain

Sheskalo and Carlina are two of the 15 million underage girls who are married every year – 41,000 a day, according to the World Bank. In some areas, as many as half of all girls will marry younger than age 18 – often far younger. One in every nine girls in developing countries will marry before they turn 15.

Child marriage offends the Western moral tradition, which holds that minors lack the intellectual maturity and life experience to grant consent. But the harms it inflicts on girls, children and society are anything but abstract.

Forcing a child bride to consummate her marriage before she is physically mature puts her life, and her baby, in danger. A 2013 study "demonstrates that a 10 percent reduction in girl child marriage could be associated with a 70 percent reduction in a country's maternal mortality rate." The World Health Organization (WHO) found that having a child before the age of 18 raises the infant mortality rate by 60 percent, and the child faces a 28 percent higher chance of dying before the age of five.

Childbearing is, unfortunately, only one threat to the girls' survival. Isolated from family, devoid of any support network and in subjection to their older husband, child brides are expected

"When I went outside, he flung something on my face ... and it started burning. I started screaming and running. He caught my hand and poured more of it on my back," she told Human Rights Watch.

He had attacked his child bride with acid.

"He burned my eyes. I cannot see properly anymore," she said.

Other abusers mix physical torment with a deeply cultivated sense of dependence.

At 16, Consolata became the second wife of a 37-year-old man – although polygamy is illegal in their native Burundi. "My parents forced me, since they had already taken money for my dowry," she said.

She instantly found herself plunged into a life of abuse – mentally by her husband's older wife and physically by her spouse. Her husband deprived her of economic resources in order to keep her subordinate to him.

"He beat me, and I had nowhere to go for support. He sold the property where I used to grow food," she said. "I was obliged to work for others to feed my children."

"I could not even attend Mass, because I was a second wife and not legally married," she told the nonprofit CARE.

In time, she got access to capital in the form of a \$5 loan, which brought her unprecedented autonomy. Within three years, she had earned \$1,000 in land and assets, which she owned in her own name.

Her achievement, without a formal education, underscores the economic damage of underage marriage. Child brides' wages are an estimated 9 percent

lower than if they had finished school. That amounts to \$7.6 billion a year in lost earnings and productivity – in Nigeria alone. Limiting girls from a poor background to the most rudimentary school-

ing locks them into destitution – and increases the chance of their daughters becoming child brides.

Child marriage "hampers efforts to end poverty and achieve economic growth and equity," said Quentin Wodon of the World Bank. Ending it is "not only the morally right thing to do" but also "the economically smart thing."

"A 2013 study 'demonstrates that a 10 percent reduction in girl child marriage could be associated with a 70 percent reduction in a country's maternal mortality rate.'"

to carry out all the work her husband's family demands – or suffer the often horrifying consequences.

Faiza Ahmed, a Bangladeshi girl, married right after finishing the fifth grade. When she could not procure a dowry sufficient to please her husband, he began beating her – until, one night, his abuse escalated.

The laws of economics apply to child brides too

"It's not complicated why girls are made to drop out of school: It's just about money," said Sheskalo. "People don't have enough food to eat three times a day, so if you have a daughter, you're going to want to find her a husband as soon as possible."

Dowries provide an additional incentive for families to marry off their daughters young. Since many societies see the newlywed child as part of her husband's family, younger brides will spend more years in their service. Therefore, dowries decrease over time. Conversely, in India, where tradition dictates that the bride's family give gifts to the groom, the dowry rises with the girl's age — economically rewarding the family for taking an "old maid," presumably unable to snare a husband sooner.

Economic incentives can entice families even when they resist strong cultural pressures. "If I was able to feed my children, I wouldn't have pushed her to get married so young," said Carlitos Camilo, Carlina's 49-year-old father. "Look at my other daughters. They grew up; they went to school; they got married at a normal age."

The West has made a concerted effort to curtail child marriage, but its key institutions have failed to grapple with its fundamental causes.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) focuses on legal prohibitions (which are ubiquitous but poorly enforced), "health information" and "reproductive health services." Yet the nonprofit BRAC found that 60 to 70 percent of young women in remote Bangladesh were already using some method of contraception — and, of course, contraceptives do nothing to prevent marriage.

The Guardian UK rather imaginatively attributed child marriage rates to climate change. Although the author admitted that "none of the villages" surveyed "had any way of recording the changes scientifically, or indeed felt any urge to do so."

In some instances, the government has recognized the economic underpinnings and simply pays girls to remain single. The northern Indian state of Haryana offers bonds to newborn girls redeemable on their 18th birthday, provided they are unmarried. These government programs have the unintended consequence of entrenching the system they are meant to eradicate. "Cash transfers tend to perpetuate dowry," UNICEF noted, "since parents use the grant for that purpose as soon as the girl turns 18 years old." The dowry system proves irresistible to desperately poor families who cannot, or will not, risk their economic future on the remote prospect of a government payout.

"The northern Indian state of Haryana offers bonds to newborn girls redeemable on their 18th birthday, provided they are unmarried. These government programs have the unintended consequence of entrenching the system they are meant to eradicate."

What works

The region's nonprofit sector has realized that government transfer payments do not mitigate the problem as well as the free market. BRAC has launched 360 clubs that teach rural girls aged 11 to 21 financial literacy, entrepreneurship, vocational skills and the use of savings and credit. "The program aims to provide [the participant] with training on such enterprise so that her contribution to her household becomes valuable, thereby contributing to increasing her agency," the group

states. The results have proven impressive in Uganda, where girls who stay in the club for two years are 58 percent less likely to marry before adulthood.

In India, the nonprofit Landesa teaches young girls the importance of land ownership, cultivation and financial literacy. "Strong, legal rights to land can provide the rural poor with the opportunity, security,



Photo: Transit camp for refugees, Ajlun Kamber / Shutterstock.com

and incentive they need to invest in their land to improve their harvests and their lives," the group states.

"Landlessness is the biggest indicator of poverty," said Sumit Gupta, chief revenue officer in Nadia district. "Using land literacy and land ownership to address these issues is a practical approach, and it has worked."

He added that girls who attend Landesa's classes are more likely to stay in school, marry later and own real assets in their own names.

Parents, once wary, now "send their daughters willingly," according to program supervisor Dilwara Mondal. "They can see the difference it's made to them, and to their lives." The program changes their incentives and shows them that education furthers their own self-interest.

The West has its own vested interest in finding a way to discourage child marriage, since it is no longer a purely exogenous problem.

Child marriage returns to the West

When German Chancellor Angela Merkel

invited millions of Middle Eastern migrants to settle in the EU in August 2015, she had not anticipated they would bring child brides with them. By the following July, the nation was home to 1,500 married minors – including 361 girls who were married before the age of 14. A German court validated the marriage of a 15-year-old Syrian girl to her 21-year-old cousin. Now, the problem blankets the EU. Sweden allowed migrants to live as man and wife with their underage brides inside government asylum centers. And in Turkey, which has long aspired to EU membership, the directorate of religious affairs ruled that Islamic law allows girls to marry at age nine.

In many ways, this marks a reversion to the mores of pre-Christian Europe. In *The Rise of Christianity*, Baylor University scholar Rodney Stark writes that classical marriages regularly took place as young as 11 or 12. "Christian women," however, "married at a substantially older age and had more choice about whom they married." He attributed the unusually high influx of female converts to the ancient Church's prohibition of abortion and infanticide (both of which targeted girls),

monogamy and the equal expectation of marital fidelity.

"Christianity was unusually appealing because within the Christian subculture women enjoyed far higher status than did women in the Greco-Roman world at large," Stark writes.

The Western heritage – with its strong belief in the equal dignity of all human beings, private property rights and respect for individual liberty so long as it does not violate the rights of others – drove child marriage out of the continent. Yet that philosophical and moral framework has been lacquered over by generations of economic collectivism, paralyzing guilt and identity politics. Worse, the faith that inspired it is receding. History and modern experience teach that this creed can reduce the scourge of child marriage, if the West is willing to defend and promote it without apology.

Rev. Ben Johnson is a senior editor at the Acton Institute. His work focuses on the principles necessary to create a free and virtuous society in the transatlantic sphere (the U.S., Canada and Europe). [R&L](#)

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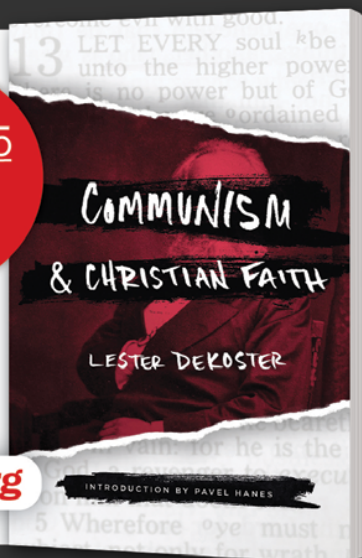
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Communism & Christian Faith,

by Lester DeKoster, offers a concise and incisive guide to the fundamentals of Marxism and draws a clear contrast between Communism and Christianity. While deeply critical of Communism, DeKoster reads Communist sources with care, avoids caricatures, and recognizes that Communism's attention to problems of suffering, exploitation, and injustice calls for a clear and positive Christian social vision.

Featuring a new introduction by Pavel Hanes

How overregulation is stifling the food truck revolution

Joseph Sunde

As protestors continue to boldly decry “corporate greed” with little definition or discernment, progressive policy-makers are just as quick to push a range of wage controls and market manipulations to mitigate the supposed vices of free and open exchange.

The painful irony, of course, is that the victims of such policies are not the fat-cat cronyists at the top, but the scrappy challengers at the bottom.

We’ve seen it with the recent embrace of the \$15 minimum wage, which continues to cripple and dismantle small businesses wherever it’s found, from Seattle to Minneapolis to California to New York. But while the wars over wages tend to be the loudest and most prominent, we mustn’t forget the pains and misfortunes due to plain-old regulatory excess, subtle and unexciting though it may be.

In the restaurant industry, for example, food trucks have posed a healthy challenge to the status quo, rattling entrenched corporate interests, diminishing barriers to entry and expanding opportunities for aspiring restaurateurs of all backgrounds. But alas, such opportunities are beginning to disappear in cities across the country, leaving many struggling beneath the weight of a growing pile of rules and regulations.

In *Food Truck Nation*, a new study from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, we see the scale and severity of the damage caused by a range of these regulatory roadblocks.

Compiling in-depth analysis of food-truck rules from 20 American cities, as well as in-depth surveys from 288 food truck owners, the study concludes that “in spite of rapid growth, regulatory barriers appear to be slowing a once hot industry.”

That trend of food trucks morphing into and being a part of brick-and-mortar restaurants is accelerating. In nearly every city in which they set up shop, food trucks offer a net positive to the established restaurant industry. While official figures on that type of growth are elusive, neighborhoods where food trucks cluster, such as around Washington, D.C.’s Farragut Square, have seen visible, concomitant growth in brick-and-mortar establishments.

In spite of rapid growth, regulatory barriers appear to be slowing a once hot industry. Market research by IBISWorld found that “despite strong performance ... high competition and unfavorable regulatory conditions in some cities have limited the growth of industry vendors.” That report predicts food truck growth will grind to a halt over the next few years. After five years of rapid growth, expected food truck growth is now only 0.4% a year through 2020.

Several of America’s largest cities are already experiencing slower, or zero, growth of their local food-truck economy.

The study ranks American cities by the food-truck friendliness of their regulatory climates, using average scores to indicate the ease or difficulty of three distinct activities: obtaining permits and licenses, complying with restrictions, and operating a food truck.

While cities like Portland, Denver and Orlando lead the way in friendly regulatory environments, others like San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Boston place solidly at the bottom, each due to excessive rules, fees and restrictions. “On average, starting and maintaining a food truck for one year requires an entrepreneur to complete 45 separate government-mandated procedures over the course of 37 business days, and spend \$28,276 on permits, licenses, and ongoing legal compliance,” the study concludes.

We also learn that the total weight of such regulations is far heavier than that endured by traditional restaurants, due (most likely) to intra-industry lobbying by brick-and-mortar competitors. “When new regulations enter the books, their sheer variance from city to city often betray their arbitrary nature,” the study explains. “At times, they appear to arise at the behest of established firms seeking restrictions against new competition.”

Once again, these are not the entrenched economic interests imagined by your typical, garden-variety progressive. “As Harvard’s Edward Glaeser pointed out,” the study reminds us, “you can begin an Internet company in Silicon Valley with little regulatory oversight; you need more than ten permits to open a grocery store in the Bronx.” This same regulatory inequality falls heaviest on food trucks at the state and local levels, directly affecting entrepreneurial opportunity for those who need it most.

The study also finds that food truck owners are “a diverse crowd of rich and poor and represent all races and genders.” In Chicago, for example, “roughly 80% of local food trucks are minority-owned small businesses,” most likely due to the (previously) low barrier to entry. “Owning and operating a food truck does not necessarily require an expensive degree, family connections, or English language skills. You just have to stand the heat.”

These are businesses that are vulnerable, independent and unprotected, almost by definition. If we truly aim to expand opportunity for all, including the disadvantaged, we would do well to fight and dismantle the regulatory regimes that seek to stifle such growth.

Joseph Sunde is an associate editor and writer for the Acton Institute. [R&L](#)

EDITH PENROSE (1914–1996)

Sarah Stanley

I don't take sides. I just gather facts and if people don't like my work they just don't like the facts.

—Edith Penrose

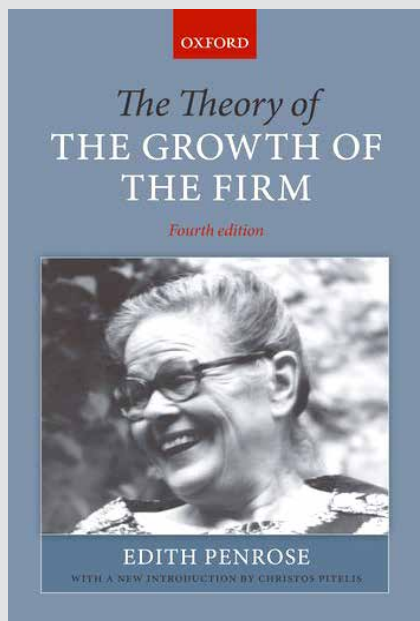
Economist Edith Penrose helped bridged the gap between economics and business strategy. While Penrose is not as well-known as she should be, nonetheless her 1959 work *The Theory of the Growth of the Firm* was widely influential. American-born and living for much of her life in Britain, Penrose taught in Baghdad, London, Australia, Cairo, Beirut, Tanzania and many more places.

On November 15, 1914, Edith Elura Tilton was born in Los Angeles to George Albert Tilton Jr., a construction engineer, and his wife, Hazel. Edith received a bachelor's degree from the University of California at Berkeley where she excelled in both academics and debate society. In her senior year, she studied under economic professor Ernest Francis Penrose. Edith would marry him in 1944.

Penrose suffered her fair share of tragedy. While hunting in 1938, her husband of just a few years, David Burton Denhardt, was mysteriously shot. No one was ever charged, but Edith was convinced he had been murdered. In February of the next year, she gave birth to their first child. She lost two brothers: one in World War II and another to a crash during a routine airplane exercise. In 1948, she suffered another terrible loss: her toddler son, Trevan, succumbed to an infection and suddenly died.

After graduating from Berkley, Edith continued to work for Professor Penrose and accepted a job under him with the International Labor Office in Geneva.

The Penrose book *Theory of the Growth*



of the Firm has been called “the most influential book of the second half of the twentieth century; bridging economics and management literatures.” It laid the foundation for the field of management studies and contemporary business strategy. Penrose’s work provided much influence for the “resource-based view” of business strategy.

Penrose received both a master’s degree and a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University where she worked closely with the Austrian-American economist Fritz Machlup. Unfortunately, her relationship with the institution ended sourly. She was never tenured despite her great work, and she became particularly disillusioned after Owen Lattimore, a fellow professor, was falsely accused of having anti-American tendencies.

In 1962, Penrose was appointed as

acting head of the brand-new department of economic and political studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. There she and her colleagues emphasized teaching and understanding developing economies. Penrose helped establish the *Journal of Development Studies*, the only of its kind, which is still a prestigious publication.

In January 1977, Penrose accepted one of her most significant posts: a position with the *Institut Européen d’Administration des Affaires* or European Institute of Business Administration (INSEAD) in France. At that time the institute was not particularly well-known as a business school, but Penrose helped turn it into a formidable player. Many of the other professors were younger and had recently received their Ph.D.s, while she had had years of teaching and research experience. Penrose became a mentor and somewhat of a surrogate mother to many students and other professors. She was famous throughout her life for being compassionate but forthright. She was especially diligent about championing for women at INSEAD and in the field more broadly. After retiring from INSEAD in 1984, she moved to a small village near Cambridge but continued her research on the oil industry. She rarely took a break from lecturing, traveling and consulting well into her retirement and died suddenly but peacefully in her sleep on October 11, 1996.

Sarah Stanley is the former managing editor of *Religion & Liberty*. [R&L](#)



FEATURE

GMOs, CRISPR and the fight against hunger

Bruce Edward Walker



Photo: Courtesy Legman Lab, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory

Then God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them'; and it was so."
Genesis 1:11

Thus began humanity's reliance on the earth and its bounty for sustenance, aesthetics and a persistent reminder of – in the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins – "God's Grandeur."

The Jesuit priest and poet cast a cold eye on humankind making a hash of the environment. He further asserted that the encroachment of civilization has disconnected Earth's inhabitants from the natural world.

Hopkins depicts the majority of humankind as oblivious to God's presence throughout nature and further unaware that God's handiwork will endure despite human ineptitude or natural disasters. Such temporal matters are usurped by God's concern for all His creation, which is divinely nourished and protected: "Because the Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings."

However, there are times when widespread drought and other weather events and pestilence destroy carefully cultivated agricultural crops. The economic impact on farmers can be devastating, while the societal impacts are potentially apocalyptic.

Human efforts to either alleviate the negative impacts of pests and droughts or simply increase crop yields for a growing population have obsessed farmers for centuries. Among the most beneficial – and seemingly controversial, especially for proponents of organic farming practices – methods to relieve such worries has been the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

However, GMOs might soon become yesterday's technology as new genetic methods are making impressive inroads throughout the planet. Specifically, Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR), a method of cross-breeding techniques both old and new, is making enormous strides – even in some of the planet's most difficult growing environments.

GMOs and the precautionary principle

The use of GMO seed has resulted in significant gains when it comes to feeding the world's hungry affordably and with little to no threat to environmental sustainability. However, despite no research to support opponents of GMOs, many of them subscribe to the Precautionary Principle. In short, those who adhere to this principle often state that some technologies are too recent to comprehend eventual long-term results on humans and the environment.

More than 60 countries prohibit or limit the sale or growth of GMO crops. Several well-funded groups, including GMO Inside, a coalition of nonprofits affiliated with Green America, are dedicated to convincing corporations and the public at large to move from GMOs to what they consider to be more sustainable solutions.

However, Blake Hurst, writing for *The National Review* in March, reported: "Meanwhile, back at the lab, a recent Italian paper reviewing over 6,000 studies and 20 years of data found that genetic modification has increased corn yields anywhere from 6 to 25 percent, while decreasing the presence of cancer-causing mycotoxins by a third. Another recent study found increased production in corn, soybeans, and canola resulting from the use of GMOs."

Hurst is referring in the first instance to a June 2017 Genetic Literacy Project study, "Impact of Genetically Engineered Maize on Agronomic, Environmental and Toxicological Traits: a Meta-Analysis of 21 Years of Field Data," conducted by four Italian academic researchers: Elisa Pellegrino, Stefano Bedini, Marco Nuti and Laura Ercoli.

Key findings of the analysis were reported by GLP writer Paul McDivitt:

- GMO corn varieties increased crop yields 5.6 to 24.5 percent relative to their non-GMO equivalents
- GMO corn crops had lower percentages of mycotoxins (~28.8 percent), fumonisins (~30.6 percent) and thricotecens (~36.5 percent), all of which can lead to economic losses and harm human and animal health

The second study cited by Hurst was released in June 2016 by United Kingdom-based PG Economics. The study concluded that GMOs improved environmental stability and resulted in an estimated \$100 per hectare (roughly 2.5 acres) benefit. According to the study:

"Two-thirds of these benefits derive from higher yields and extra production, with farmers in developing countries seeing the highest gains," said Graham Brookes, director of PG Economics and co-author of the report. "The environment is also benefiting as farmers increasingly adopt conservation tillage practices, build their weed management practices around more benign herbicides and replace insecticide use with insect resistant GM crops."

Worldwide economic benefits of GM crops have reached \$150 billion, according to the report, "GM Crops: Global Socio-Economic and Environmental Impacts 1996-2014."

Brian Baenig, executive vice president for food and agriculture for the Biotechnology Innovation Organization, stated the report's findings regarding biotechnology's contributions to the environment are especially significant.

"Crop biotechnology has reduced pesticide use by almost 581 million kilograms," reported Baenig. "In addition, farmers are spending less time on the tractor, burning less fossil fuels, which ultimately reduces carbon dioxide emissions." Additional benefits include improved soil quality and reduced need for harsh herbicides.

An interesting twist on the GMO debate occurred in February, when the Des Moines Register reported that Iowa State University researchers released a report revealing that Russia had been planting negative stories about GMOs. This revelation may explain much of the negative perceptions of GMOs.

The ISU researchers, already looking at how U.S. media portrayed genetic engineering and biotechnology, decided to include GMO news articles published on the U.S. versions of RT and Sputnik, news sites funded by the Russian government....

RT accounted for 34 percent of GMO-related articles among

the seven sites; Sputnik articles made up 19 percent.

The researchers also found RT and Sputnik used "GMO click bait" embedded in articles that most people would consider "negative or distasteful" to create an intentional negative reaction.

The CRISPR revolution

Regardless of the probability of GMOs being a safe and environmentally sound agricultural option, its days might be only one weapon in science's arsenal to defeat world hunger. CRISPR technology, which combines cross-breeding of plants with gene-splicing, has thus far proven itself invaluable in farmers' fights against harsh environments and pests.

Kevin Scott, a farmer from Valley Springs, South Dakota, and secretary of the American Soybean Association (ASA), also serves as a member of ASA's Biotech Working Group. He is the fourth generation of his family to work the same farmland and says he anticipates passing it on to a fifth generation.

Scott said he's been planning GMO corn since 1996. "We used a corn hybrid because of an infestation of corn borers," he said, referring to the European corn borer that is estimated to cost U.S. farmers more than \$1 billion annually. "We had been spending a

tremendous amount of money on treatments, but found the GMO seed to be a great fix."

After 1998, Scott said he began using GMO seed to counteract weed issues. He began using the corn seed, but followed suit with his bean crops in subsequent years. "Prior to the GMO seed, I was spending \$40 per acre on chemical controls that didn't work," he said. "Afterwards, I only had to spend \$10 per acre."

Scott added that although the "system worked well for 15 years, weeds are extremely smart, and developed a resistance to the Round-Up Ready." He said CRISPR techniques offer a faster path forward.

Explaining the course of natural selection over past centuries, Scott said CRISPR "speeds up the process by turning off or

on genes as needed." He acknowledged it "was a fairly crude process at first, but we're far more precise now. It's kind of old school, somewhat similar to comparing flip-phones to today's smartphones."

The benefits of CRISPR extend well beyond America's Heartland. The Guardian's Dylan Curran reported in March that CRISPR wheat is revolutionizing food production in, of all places, sub-Saharan Senegal. Scientists tested "thousands of wheat varieties" during a four-year test period before developing wheat that can flourish despite heat hovering consistently above 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

They did this through experimentation with contemporary breeding techniques and seeds from both modern and ancient wheat strains in what the lead scientists on the project described as "genome fingerprinting research."

Curran notes that wheat is traditionally considered a cold-weather crop indigenous in the Northern Hemisphere. "If you can grow it here, you can grow it anywhere," Dr. Filippo Bassi from the International Centre for Research in the Dry Areas told Curran. Bassi worked on the project with Professor Rodomiro Ortiz from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

Nearly as impressive is the rapid growth of the wheat, which is ready for harvest in only 92 days. Further, the wheat yield is six tons per hectare (slightly less than 2.5 acres), and requires less water and provides "five times more protein, as well as more vitamins and minerals" than Senegalese rice.

Currently, Senegal imports nearly \$37 million of wheat per year. According to Icarda, the CRISPR-developed wheat possesses the potential to increase local production of pasta by an estimated 1,900 percent. An additional benefit is that straw can be harvested once the wheat is collected – straw that can be used to feed or bed livestock and is sometimes used as a base for building material.

Humans have made great strides when it comes to developing new means to feed the world's hungry while, at the same time, serving as worthy environmental stewards. We have witnessed a tremendous 50 percent reduction in extreme world poverty over the past quarter century and might soon live in a world where starvation for most is but a memory.

Bruce Edward Walker is host of the Radio Free Acton "Upstream" podcast. [R&L](#)

"Nearly as impressive is the rapid growth of the wheat, which is ready for harvest in only 92 days."

BRIEF

Lessons from a craftsman on sanctified work

Joseph Sunde

Throughout its history, the American economy has transitioned from agrarian to industrial to information-driven. In turn, “work with the hands” has become less and less common, replaced by widespread automation and a host of intangible services.

Meanwhile, a quiet resurgence in craftsmanship has begun, whether one looks to the massive online marketplaces for handmade goods or the diverse range of specialized artisans who continue to find niches in a globalized economy.

Take Jack Martin, owner of Hockaday Handmade Brooms, who still prides himself on making “one broom at a time,” each made from homegrown broomcorn on his land in McNairy County, Tennessee. For Martin, making brooms isn’t just about a return to quality or offering a localist alternative to the mass-produced broom at the nearest big-box store. It’s about something a bit more mystical and sacred.

In a profile of Martin and his business, writer Shawn Pitts detected a palpable reverence for the broom itself, labeling Martin a “broom prophet” of sorts,

whose personality is akin to John the Immerser and whose product falls within a long tradition of southern folklore and superstition.

In the hands of Jack Martin, a broom is an objet d’art, born of the earth and handcrafted with elegant simplicity into a talisman worthy of veneration. Whether displayed for its exceptional beauty and quality — or used to sweep out the garage — an encounter with one of Martin’s brooms often sparks something like enchantment. It’s hard to reckon with such feelings — primal echoes from the past, perhaps.

The object itself proclaims its agricultural heritage. The bristles are made of natural broomcorn, cultivated in sight of the shop where Martin crafts his brooms, while handles are often cut from young timber nearby — living sacrifices to a down-home Demeter, the good goddess of Southern field and forest. And then there is the mystery of the thing itself, how its intended function — to clean — seems to breathe symbolic life into each broom.

It’s easy to see how our forebears concluded there was something more than sweeping afoot.

As the result of a family business that began over a century ago, Martin’s brooms have been widely recognized for their artistry, a fact that might lead some to dismiss them as mere museum pieces. For Martin, however, the meaning comes alive in their function and use. The glory and beauty of the broom is found, ultimately, in the labor.

“Every step of the process, from selecting and planting the seeds, to harvesting and combing the broomcorn, to wiring it onto the handle and sewing it into the familiar fan shape, is lovingly done by hand, with function in mind,” Pitts explains. “After all that, it seems a shame to hang it on the wall. A broom is sanctified in the sweeping.”

After presenting Martin with a range of southern superstitions about brooms and sweeping, Pitts asks about the source of it all. “Why all the spirituality and superstition surrounding brooms? Why do we project such power on them?”

“[Martin’s] answer was profound and painfully obvious,” Pitts writes. The mythology emerges from human intimacy with this ubiquitous object. Like the holy places on the earth, where divine life invades human space, objects are imbued

with meaning from our experience of them. The details may be lost to antiquity, but the broom earned its place in our imagination, and we do well to pay it the honor it is due.”

For Martin, the material and the spiritual are deeply connected. The sacred emerges not only from the act of sweeping itself, but through the relationship between human and tool, labor and application, creativity and service.

There are no great riches in store for the slow-and-steady broom craftsman, and Martin seems satisfied nevertheless. As Pitts observes, “There is something satisfying about walking in the old paths, something solemn and sacred in the work of the hands.”

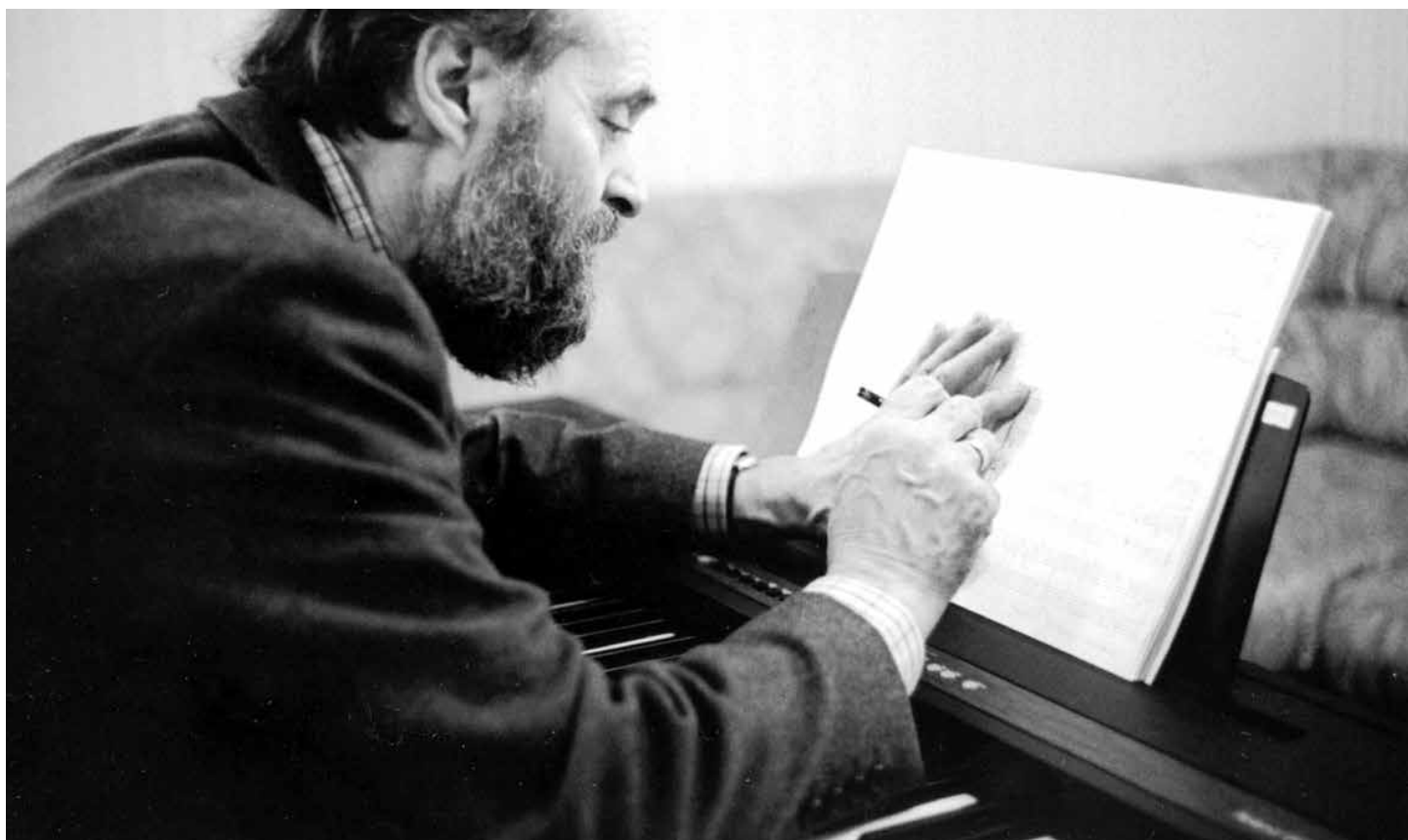
In beholding Martin’s comfort with his calling, one can’t help but be reminded of the famous line about street sweepers from Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech “What Is Your Life’s Blueprint?” In the speech, King notes the importance of our work, no matter how mundane, encouraging us to “set out to do it as if God Almighty called you at this particular moment in history to do it,” and to “set out to do such a good job that the living, the dead or the unborn couldn’t do it any better.

“If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Leontyne Price sings before the Metropolitan Opera,” King says. “Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well. If you can’t be a pine at the top of the hill, be a shrub in the valley. Be the best little shrub on the side of the hill.”

Working with one’s hands may make some of these realities easier to see and swallow, but the same lessons apply to the rest of us. No matter how intangible or fuzzy the value we create may seem or feel, we’d do well to recognize and embrace it.

No matter how fast our companies, products and industries may move, there is likely more value than we think, if only we’d see it.

Joseph Sunde is an associate editor and writer for the Acton Institute. [R&L](#)



FEATURE

Arvo Pärt and the universal soul of music

Bruce Edward Walker

Sacred music is not only a devotional exercise composed and performed to honor our Creator but also a bulwark against human sinfulness and frailties. Composer Arvo Pärt has been creating music of faith that inspires while at the same time subverts several of the most oppressive systems of government of the past century.

The composer's lifelong development

as a professional composer also led him to a deeper faith. He converted to Orthodox Christianity in 1972.

Theologian Peter Bouteneff observed that Pärt is frequently connected with the sacred life. "Although the composer's religious affiliation is specifically Orthodox Christian, his music and its impact carry an appeal beyond confessional and religious boundaries," he said. "His popularity crosses over customary distinctions between classical and popular music, sacred and secular art, liturgical space and concert hall."

Born in Estonia in 1935, Pärt (pronounced PAIRT) emerged as one of the most prominent composers of the past 75 years. His music exhibits deep religious faith that once was brutally suppressed by the state, which was a republic of the Soviet Union from 1940 until independence was declared in 1988.

Early years

Pärt learned to play piano on a keyboard that was missing several keys. He was drafted into the Soviet Army where he served as a drummer.

Pärt rose to prominence in Estonian

cultural circles in the late 1950s. A student of Heino Eller at the Tallinn Conservatory in his hometown, Pärt established himself first as a composer and recording director for Estonian Radio from 1958 to 1967 and graduated from the conservatory in 1963.

His first orchestral work, "Necrolog," was completed in 1960. He dedicated this early piece to victims of the Holocaust. "Necrolog" is considered the first Estonian musical composition to reflect the aesthetic theories of Austrian composer and painter Arnold Schoenberg, whose work in atonal music was deemed degenerate by the Third Reich. Not surprisingly, the Union of Soviet Composers denounced the piece as "avant-garde bourgeois music."

Pärt's creative restlessness subsequently led him to compose the cantata "Meie aed" ("Our Garden") and oratorio "Maailma samm" ("Stride of the World"), which won him the 1962 All-Union Young Composers' Competition. Music journalists have noted the apparent influences of Soviet composers Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich.

Pärt's first two symphonies as well as "The Credo for Piano, Orchestra and

Chorus" map his interest in creating musical collages of his own work; excerpts from musical pieces by other composers, such as Johannes Sebastian Bach and Peter Tchaikovsky; and improvisations by the orchestra and vocalists wherein the pitch is defined but the specific notes are not. "The Credo" also prompted controversy for including the assertion "I believe in Jesus Christ."

According to Arthur Lubow in a 2010 New York Times essay on Pärt, the controversy "dried up Pärt's official commissions, forcing him to rely on writing film scores to earn a living." Rather than being deterred, Pärt was invigorated: "It was my deep conviction that the words of Christ — 'You have heard an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but I say to you, Do not resist evil, go with love to your enemies' — this was a theological musical form. Love destroyed the hate. Not destroyed: the hate collapsed itself when it met the love. A convulsion."

When asked the same year during a radio interview to list those who inspired him, Pärt once again jeopardized his career by responding, "Of course, Christ. Because he solved his fraction perfectly, godly." According to the New York Times, "The section was edited out of the broadcast version, to avoid a government ban."

Tintinnabulation

Pärt spent three years studying French and Flemish medieval music after which he composed 1971's "Symphony No. 3" and 1972's symphonic cantata "Lied an die Geliebte." He returned from a four-year sabbatical with a new style he labeled "tintinnabulation" that reflects his study of medieval devotional music.

Tintinnabulation, Pärt explained in an essay on his website, is meant to suggest "bells, the bells' complex but rich sonorous mass of overtones, the gradual unfolding of patterns." He explains that he equates the sound of bells with the three notes of a musical triad.

The resulting music emulates Gregorian chants and other forms of medieval religious compositions. "I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played," he wrote. "This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence comforts me. I work with very few elements — with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials — with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of a triad are like bells. And that is why I call it tintinnabulation."

Similar to the minimalist simplicity of Gregorian chants, Pärt's tintinnabulation lends his subsequent work a prayerful, meditative quality. Not coincidentally, many compositions by Pärt following his development of tintinnabulation are of a distinctly religious nature.

During his four-year sabbatical, Pärt and his wife led a hard-scrabble life until his public reemergence as a composer in 1976. His first composition to gain public attention was "Fur Alina" — a piece written to console a bereft female friend. The friend and her husband had divorced and the couple's 18-year-old daughter had moved to England with her father.

"Fur Alina" was followed in 1977 by "Tabula Rasa," which consists of two movements: "Ludus" (Latin for "game") and "Silentium" (silence).

"This Soviet hell"

In 1980, Pärt and his family left Estonia and moved to Berlin.

In his New York Times essay, Lubow relates an anecdote about Pärt's exile:

Emigrating from the Soviet Union to the west in January 1980 with his wife, Nora, and their two small sons, the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt was stopped by border police at the Brest railroad station for a luggage search. "We had only seven suitcases, full of my scores, records and tapes," he recalled recently. "They said, 'Let's listen.' It was a big station. No one else was there. We took my record player and played 'Cantus.' It was like liturgy. Then they played another record, 'Missa Syllabica.' They were so friendly to us. I think it is the first time in the history of the Soviet Union that the police are friendly." He was joking, but not entirely. Later, when I asked Nora about that strange scene at the border, she said, "I saw the power of music to transform people."

Since his 1980 exile, Pärt has composed many works explicitly either Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox in content, depending on the organization that commissioned it. Among these works are "Passio" (1988); "Miseres" (1991); "Te Deum" (1995); "Litany" (1996); and "Johannes-Passion" (2001).

He and his wife returned to Estonia in the early 1990s, but he is no less forgiving of the current Russian government under Vladimir Putin. He has dedicated concert performances to Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the exiled Russian businessman, and Anna Politkovskaya, the murdered Russian journalist. "I am not a politician; I'm a dilettante," he told Lubow. "But this is normal thinking of people who came through this Soviet hell." In a 2014 New York Times interview, Pärt told William Robin: "I have never participated in political art.... My compositions have never been political, even the Khodorkovsky Symphony has really nothing to do with politics. It is written on text of prayers."

In 2014, Pärt received an honorary doctorate from St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, New York. "There's this kind of universally accessible spirituality going on, and yet it evidently has some particular sources in the context that he locates his own prayer life," said the theologian Bouteneff, a professor at St. Vladimir's. "It's where he goes to church, it's the texts that he reads, the ancient Greek fathers.... This is what he feeds his soul, and therefore: Is there some connection between this universally perceived and universally accessible spirituality, and the particular foundations in Eastern Orthodoxy?"

Pärt explained in the same interview that his music reflects his values, which he acknowledges coincide with his Orthodox beliefs. "If the listener also perceives what I felt while composing, I am very happy about it.... I am not taking the task in my music to discuss some religious or special Orthodox values. I am trying to reflect the values in my music that could touch every individual, every person."

The dynamic tension between freedom and discipline is crucial to appreciating the work of Arvo Pärt. One without the other is dangerous, he asserts. Not only does religious faith impose discipline necessary to lead lives of ordered liberty, but it as well promotes the freedom humanity requires to attain its fullest potential.

Bruce Edward Walker is host of the Radio Free Acton "Upstream" podcast. 



COLUMN

Labor unions, yesterday and today

Rev. Robert A. Sirico

A long-cherished predisposition on the part of the Roman Catholic Church is that labor unions act as a protection against the exploitation of workers. From Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* forward, the Church has been an outspoken proponent of organized labor, worker safety and human dignity.

Thus, it comes as little surprise that the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops weighed-in when the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments in February regarding the *Janus v. American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees* case. At

Photo: US Supreme Court Building at Dusk / Joe Ravi / Wikimedia Commons

issue is AFSCME's collection of dues from nonmembers in Illinois and the USCCB's opposition to right-to-work legislation.

The USCCB's amicus brief, however, succumbs to romantic notions of unions protecting employees from the child-labor sweatshops out of some 19th-century Dickensian dystopia or even Solidarity, the 1980s Polish trade union movement's struggle against oppression of workers by the Communist state. The contemporary reality of collective bargaining, particularly that conducted by public-sector unions, is vastly different.

"Beginning with *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, the social doctrine of the Catholic Church has contained 'repeated calls ... for the promotion of workers' associations that can defend their rights,'" reads the USCCB's brief, quoting in part Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. "These calls arise from the strong commitment of the Church to protect both the poor and vulnerable from exploitation, and the right of association from governmental infringement."

Despite its long history of supporting unions as a form of association, Catholic social teaching – especially as expressed by the USCCB in its Janus brief – has not been sufficiently appreciative of modern realities about trade unions, most of which are led by professionals who have never had a blue-collar job in their entire lives. More generally, a union's actions cannot be judged as good if they abrogate other principles – namely freedom and justice – promoted by the Church.

Among those freedoms rightly noted by the USCCB is the right of association, the foundational defense of unions, which entails, conversely, the right not to associate. By this I mean the freedom to disassociate oneself from organizations promoting agendas contrary to one's own beliefs.

Although unions are identified historically with free association, contemporary public-sector unions frequently ignore and even reverse that principle. Some Catholic bishops have not sufficiently recognized this point. There is also something fundamentally wrong with employees being coerced into financing candidates supporting causes with which the employee disagrees.

A strong supporter of the social role of labor unions, Pope John Paul II cautioned against the dangers of mission-creep shifting unions from protecting workers into effectively becoming political entities. "Unions do not have the character of political parties struggling for power; they should not be subjected to the decision of political parties or have too close links with them," warned the pope in his 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens*.

The unions defended in Catholic social teaching are not the same as those in 2018 America that have morphed into political action committees funded through forced membership. Such developments cannot be squared with freedom of association.

"[I]n view of present day attempts to enact so-called right-to-work laws the Church is duty bound to challenge such efforts by raising questions based on longstanding principles," continues the brief, quoting a 2015 speech to the Chicago Federation of Labor by Cardinal Blase Cupich. "We have to ask, 'Do these measures undermine the capacity of unions to organize, to represent workers and to negotiate contracts? Do such laws protect the weak and vulnerable? Do they promote the dignity of work and the rights of workers? Do they promote a more just society and a more fair economy? Do they advance the common good?'"

If the Cardinal were speaking of conditions for Illinois' public-sector employees resembling those described in Upton Sinclair's 1906 novel, *The Jungle*, he might have a point.

The problem with public-sector unions is that it is wrong that those who work for the state can tell the government under what conditions they will perform basic services vital to the common good. For public-sector unions, for example, to say they can decide to impede or close essential government services is to effectively usurp the government's legitimate authority in the name of sectional interests, not to mention hold the public hostage. This is unjust.

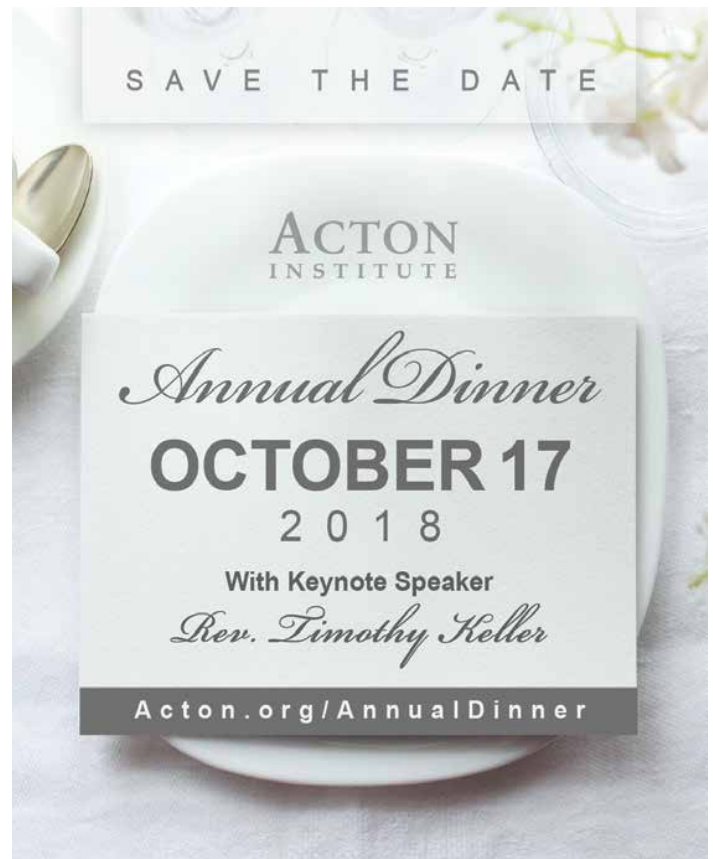
The injustice is worsened when public-sector unions use their unique bargaining position to extract money from state employees to fund the unions' activities without each employee's formal consent. Many of those activities have nothing to do with advancing the employees' interests and everything to do with unions promoting general left-wing political causes, many of which are antithetical to Catholic moral teaching.

Thus, we see that a crucial human rights issue at stake here concerns those employees who choose not to associate with organizations that embrace political and moral views antithetical to their own – and the taxpayers who have to foot the bill. It's the latter that not only pick up the tab for public employees, but also the union dues deducted from public servants' paychecks. Again, this is unjust.

Catholic social teaching on unions is predicated on whether such organizations effectively address the social challenges of their respective era. It's not incumbent for Catholics – doctrinally or otherwise – to underwrite or otherwise support union demands.

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BRIEF

Can economics bring back humility and civil discourse?

Steve Stapleton

Mark Twain is celebrated for the way his storytelling makes us laugh, mostly at ourselves. His work as author and humorist frequently spoke to the folly and truth of human nature. One quotation attributed to him goes, “It ain’t what we don’t know that gets us in trouble; it’s what we know for sure that just ain’t so.” We smile because we recognize this truth from our own experience. But more serious reflection may give us pause and make the most prideful among us a bit humbler. And more than a bit of humility will be required on all sides of the political divide if we are to communicate with each other in the coming year. We must rediscover the important role of reason and civil discourse to human progress through open dialogue. Rediscovering civil discourse is essential to keep this melting pot of a country from boiling over.

Today, reason seems upended, and our discourse has regressed to where even the fundamental importance of free speech — our first freedom — is being openly challenged. We have made a blood sport of spewing vitriol and ridicule at those with whom we disagree. This re-

treat from reason has led too many into the dangerous traps of identity politics, tribalism and irrational fundamentalism. How do we reclaim the mantle of reason and civil discourse in broader society?

Ironically, this coarsening of society is happening amid a growing body of scientific evidence that demonstrates how the human brain can err in its conclusions and convictions. Some of this evidence comes from the field of behavioral economics. Research is discovering how and why we can sometimes ignore facts or reason in our decision-making — particularly when they conflict with our preexisting understanding or strong desires. These kinds of errors surely exacerbate our growing incivility.

Behavioral economics is devoted to exploring why human beings regularly make economically irrational decisions. This past October, American economist Richard Thaler was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his work in the field of behavioral economics. Thaler’s work has added to the scientific body of knowledge of how we make decisions. The highly acclaimed book that Thaler coauthored with Cass Sunstein in 2008 — *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* — gained broad interest from both the business world and government. Economists have long observed that human behavior does not follow the predictions of traditional economic models. And their models universally assume that people make economically rational decisions. The goal of *Nudge* is to use this growing knowledge of human decision-making to devise ways to “nudge” people toward more desired decisions and behaviors. The question remains, desired by whom?

For example, encouraging employees to sign-up for 401(k) retirement savings has long been a challenge for business managers and owners. Today, rather than offering new employees the choice to opt into a 401(k)-retirement savings plan, more employers automatically enroll employees and give them the option to lower their savings rate or opt out. This small change, or “nudge,” takes advantage of the human tendency to procrastinate and is credited with increasing retirement savings in the U.S. Since both employers and workers are (eventually) happy, this is seen as a successful nudge.

Nudging is not without its critics,

particularly among those who lean libertarian. Mark D. White, a philosopher at the City University of New York, argues that nudging “is very much coercive, and in some ways more insidious than ‘old school’ paternalistic government policies such as prohibiting or taxing behavior.” Errors work in both directions. But our focus here is not on the pros and cons of nudging but rather on the growing body of knowledge and insights from behavioral economics to show human fallibility — of all parties.

Understanding how we are prone to err in our reasoning does not diminish the importance of human reason. Reason is built on learning and sharpened through dialogue. The importance of reason to human progress has been recorded since the ancient Greeks. Reason allowed primitive man to survive in a hostile world. Applied by theologians like Thomas Aquinas, reason gave birth to the concept of human equality. Reason ushered in the Enlightenment. All of human kind’s progress in the humanities, science and industry came through reason.

A return to reason through increased humility will be necessary to bring about a rebirth of civil discourse. For those of us who are people of faith, our faith informs us that humility is a virtue and excessive pride a sin. We know that we need to work on making a habit of humility. But what about the nonreligious among us who do not share these views? For those who do not believe in God but who do believe in “science,” perhaps the science behind behavioral economics can bring them to realize that they, too, will benefit from cultivating the habit of humility. If we are to stop “ignoring our own ignorance,” we will need to listen in order to understand, not merely to respond. Our discourse will become more civil if we will argue as if we were right but listen as though we could be wrong. Perhaps with newfound humility, people of goodwill on both sides of our cultural and political divide can bring tolerance, reason and civil discourse back to the public square.

Steve Stapleton has worked in the investment and financial consulting industry since 1986, serving individuals, business owners and nonprofit institutions with objective and unbiased investment consulting and wealth advisory services. [R&L](#)

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The notion of shared values on both sides of the Atlantic has received new attention. Leaders like French socialist president François Hollande cite “democracy, freedoms and the respect of every individual” as key values. But what about religious liberty, the breakdown of the welfare state, advancing secularism and the health of civil society? R&L Transatlantic will cover these issues here with new articles.

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BRIEF

UNLOCKING THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN INCARCERATION

Kahryn Riley

Two new books correct the narrative on soaring prison populations and offer a way out.

While home to 5 percent of the global population, the U.S. confines 25 percent of the global prison population. Nationwide, the population of all state prisons combined was more than 1.3 million in 2017. Simply put, we incarcerate more people than we probably should despite falling crime rates.

What is the “right” number of people to incarcerate? And how did we surpass it so excessively? Those called to act justly and love mercy may feel compelled to find answers – in which case the two books reviewed here will serve as excellent resources.

First, some background. The national crime rate had been pretty low through the 1950s and '60s, but it began climbing in the '70s and erupted in the '80s. There's not much consensus on why this happened or why crime seems to be falling so quickly today. The important point is that the “prison boom” that sent prison populations soaring to their present levels didn't begin until the '90s, after the crime wave began to recede.

This prison boom had an outside effect on black men, who make up the majority of prison populations nationwide. Part of the reason criminal justice reform has traditionally been a priority of liberal Democrats is because so many social justice advocates attribute this disparity to institutional racism perpetuated by whites through the war on drugs. This claim was once a core feature of the conventional wisdom about incarceration.

Fordham Law School professor John Pfaff calls it out in the introduction to *Locked In: The True Causes of Mass Incarceration and How to Achieve Real Reform*. He writes only 16 percent of state prisoners are serving time on drug charges. It is not the war on drugs but rather the increased rate at which people are sent to prison in the first place. The solution, Pfaff writes, is to impose guidelines on prosecutors to limit their effectively unfettered power to influence criminal sentencing.

Courts should define acceptable plea bargains and allow trial judges to review them for compliance, as New Jersey has done. States should establish low default sentences and identify factors that mitigate lengthy sentences, while ensuring that pleas are more consistent across race, age and class.

States should also prevent prosecutors from shifting costs from their county onto the state. They do this when they win felony convictions, which ensure that defendants will serve time in state penitentiaries rather than the local jail. California's sweeping Public Safety Realignment Act required counties to take responsibility for nonviolent offenders, even felons. This eliminated a budgetary moral hazard and ensured that only serious criminals entered state prisons, without raising the crime rate. Pfaff acknowledges that his changes might be controversial, but prosecutors currently operate with intense political pressure to seek punitive sentences and unfettered authority to procure them.

In *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*, James Forman Jr. identifies the crackdown on urban crime since the 1970s as responsible for subsequently eroding poor black neighborhoods in Washington – home to most of the clients he served as a public defender. Officials fielded demands from their constituents that seem unbelievable today. They called for “super aggressive” policing and decried the “revolving door” that allowed alleged criminals to walk free after being arrested or serving only a short sentence. Black politicians born under Jim Crow battled for pretrial detention, lengthy maximum sentences, more prison sentences and even mandatory minimums. Eventually these policies would have devastating consequences for people of color in Washington and across the country.

Still, the Judeo-Christian values of justice, compassion and dignity on which this country was founded permeate our culture. If we reverse the punitive course that created the incarceration crisis, it will surely be the result of the incremental and diffuse actions taken by people who espouse these values. They will bring about a safer, freer future.

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