

# RELIGION & LIBERTY

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## Christianity, Classical Liberalism are Liberty's Foundations



### Interview: Leonard Liggio

Leonard Liggio is Executive Vice President of the Atlas Economic Research Foundation and Distinguished Senior Scholar at the Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University. He is a former President of the Philadelphia Society, Chairman of the Advisory Council of The Heritage Foundation's Salvatori Center for Academic Leadership, Treasurer of The Mont Pelerin Society, and a founding board member of the Acton Institute. His hard

work and generosity have made him one of this century's most respected figures in the international movement for liberty. The following is excerpted from a longer interview conducted at this year's Mont Pelerin Society meeting in Vienna, Austria.

**R&L:** Explain the difference between classical liberalism and modern liberalism.

**Liggio:** Modern liberals have tried to steal the cloak of classical liberalism. Classical liberalism was the dominant philosophy in the United States and England, really, until about the First World War. The war, unfortunately, was a disaster for liberalism, because it disrupted constitutional order. All the countries at war used extreme measures of repression. Even England and America created police states on the model of Germany or their Czarist

allies and trampled liberty underfoot. At the same time, they trampled economic liberty by allocating resources through central planning, again modeled on the German desperation as they were cut off by the wartime blockade. In fact, Lenin viewed the German wartime operations of centralization as the model for his Bolshevik regime. It gave him what he felt were practical models for creating centralized direction of the economy once the Bolshevik revolution occurred.

So the First World War was this great watershed, a great tragedy for all who were killed or wounded on

the battlefield, for the many who died or were disabled by the epidemics that followed, and for the economic waste that prevented investment in the postwar period and led to the great depression and to movements toward greater government control. So, everywhere, liberalism was put on the defensive by this catastrophe.

**R&L:** So you are saying classical liberalism and modern liberalism do not share the same historical and philosophical foundations and sources?

**Liggio:** They do not. Some of the people who claim to be liberal, I never refer to as liberal. I call them "collectivists" or "social democrats." Classical liberalism is liberalism, but the current collectivists have captured that designation in the United States. Happily they did not capture it in Europe, and were glad enough to call themselves socialists. But no one in America wants to be called socialist and admit what they are.

**R&L:** And that is why advocates of

INSIDE THIS ISSUE • Interview: Leonard Liggio © Articles: "To Reduce Wealth or Poverty?" by Carl-Johan Westholm, and "Seven Years After the Fall" by Barbara von der Heydt © Review Essay: "The Pope's Divisions" by John-Peter Pham © In the Liberal Tradition: Rose Wilder Lane © Column: "The Left on the Run" by Rev. Robert A. Sirico © Plus Book News.

**a free society in Europe today are still called liberals?**

**Liggio:** Yes.

**R&L: What impact is classical liberalism having on European politics today?**

**Liggio:** Well, it has revived tremendously, because most importantly, the concrete failure of the East European and Soviet collectivized economy has led to the recognition that only the market can provide wealth. The societies in Eastern Europe until 1989 had been able to survive for decades due to the West's support.

By the late 1980s, the West itself was beginning to suffer from its own internal collectivist politics and economics. In other words, the collectivism of the American and European governments sapped their own strength, but so did trying to prop up the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe with enormous loans to buy, for instance, the agricultural surplus of the West, which then fed these unfortunate people. They would have been so much better off if the system had collapsed in 1979, or 1969 when the Czech spring showed that

it had collapsed.

Yet, when the Soviets marched in, the West was still willing to lend hundreds of millions and billions of dollars to the whole Eastern Bloc to keep it on an oxygen tube. There was so much poverty created by this long-term system that it is now going to take decades for these coun-

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**Religious institutions were totally separate from political institutions only in the Christian West. This created space in which free institutions could emerge.**

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tries to recover and get back into some sort of reasonable economic system.

It is going to be a hard process, and they are making it harder on themselves by not reforming quickly enough and by retaining so much of the communist apparatus. But you cannot blame them, since most of the West has its own apparatus of state control and has not made much of a move towards reform. So do not blame these people for thinking, "Well, we must be on the right track by following America or Western Europe in keeping state control of

many industries."

**R&L: You were one of the early leaders in the American classical liberal revival. What role has your faith played in this cause?**

**Liggio:** Well, I would not be a classical liberal if I had not been a very active Christian. Classical liberalism was the natural consequence of a number of things: that I was interested in Christian thought, and especially Aristotelian thought, that I had a strong interest in moral philosophy, that I had the advantage of an education entirely focused around moral philosophy during all of my academic studies, and that I spent as much time as I could studying theology and Christian history.

**R&L: What role did Christianity play in the emergence of the components of a free society: free markets, limited government, and the like?**

**Liggio:** I think we have to look at comparative history. Of all the civilizations around the world, why did only the Christian West become both free and prosperous? We are talking about distinctions between civiliza-

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tions. Asian civilization, for example, did not become free and prosperous, even though it had a lot of cultural creativity. But we must also look at other Christian civilizations, such as the Byzantine, Abyssinian, Georgian, and Armenian Christian empires, all of which lasted for many centuries but did not create the kind of free and prosperous society the Christian West did.

Many scholars have studied this and have come to the conclusion that

this is due to the fact that the religious institutions were totally separate from, and often in conflict with, political institutions only in the Christian West. This created the space in which free institutions could emerge. The idea of independent religious institutions is absent even in Eastern Christianity; their religious institutions are part of the bureaucracy of the state. In Western Europe, though, the religious institutions were autonomous among

themselves, and totally independent from and often in opposition to state power. The result was the creation of a polycentric system. And whenever this system was threatened by claims of total empire by the political rulers, Christian philosophy was utilized as part of its defense.

So within that space, the economic institutions—often modeled on the religious institutions as autonomous entities—could flourish and survive.

## Rose Wilder Lane 1886-1968

*“Again and again, in sermons and parables and acts, Christ said that all men are free.”*

Although she came from humble, pioneer beginnings, author and journalist Rose Wilder Lane came to prominence at the close of World War II as a staunch defender of freedom. Lane is best known for her book *The Discovery of Freedom*, published in 1943, which traces the six-thousand year development of freedom from its roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition to the present day. Though Lane later came to dislike the book—she thought it too hastily written—it became an underground classic and one of the foundational documents of the modern libertarian movement. She is less well-known for her role in preparing for publication, often by rewriting, her mother's recollections of frontier life, the popular *Little House on the Prairie* series.

Lane was born on December 5, 1886 into a poor farming family in the Dakota Territory. Dropping out of school in the ninth grade, she was determined to see the world. She worked various odd jobs before finding her start as a journalist for the *San Francisco Bulletin*, a radical labor paper. Lane visited the Soviet Union four years after the Bolshevik Revolution, and upon her return to the United States she wrote, “I came out of the Soviet Union no longer a communist, because I believed in personal freedom.”

Lane was most comfortable being described as simply “a theist,” but did not see any essential contradiction between religion and the philosophy of freedom. According to Lane, because of the doctrine of monotheism, people came to believe in one creator God who judges men's actions, instead of a pantheist pantheon of capricious gods. Additionally, the laws of morality are woven into the fibre of creation and provide the guide for human behavior. It is from these doctrines, Lane argued, that the Christian conceptions of individual responsibility and self-control are derived; essential qualities for the preservation of a free society. A



Sources: “Three Women Who Inspired the Modern Libertarian Movement,” *The Freeman*, May 1996 by Jim Powell, *The Discovery of Freedom* by Rose Wilder Lane (Arno Press, 1972).

**R&L:** *Many modern thinkers feel that a robust public expression of Christianity or religion threatens freedom. What's your response to that?*

**Liggio:** It is unbelievable to me that anyone could say that sort of thing. But since I am a historian, I know that many people are not knowledgeable in history and can make all kinds of statements that have no relevance to the situation. First of all, anyone's religious views are totally unthreatening to me. I am glad when anyone has religious views; it makes me very confident in them. I have a lot of trust in people that have religious views, compared to people that do not. It makes for a much healthier society.

I once was at a meeting in which someone made what I took to be an uncomplimentary reference to Mennonites on the ground that they often barter among themselves, and therefore did not participate in buying at Wal-Mart or whatever the case might be. I said that where I lived, I would pay a premium to live among Mennonite neighbors. It would give me so much confidence, I would be willing to pay extra taxes if Mennonites moved into my neighborhood. And the same with any other religious group. I would pay a premium if I could maximize the number of religious people among whom I live.

I do not feel threatened at all; I am very happy to have people expressing their religious views and expressing them strongly.

**R&L:** *Well, the argument would be that some Christians tend toward theocracy, and want to politically impose religious values and moral standards on all of us.*

**Liggio:** I think that is typically a case of misunderstanding. Most Christians are anxious not to have immoral and anti-Christian views imposed on them. They want to protect themselves from being inundated with anti-Christian or immoral ideas and are trying to find ways and means to do that. As a classical liberal, I certainly want to join

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**Capitalism, as Gary Becker has pointed out, is the great anti-Malthusian philosophy. Capitalism wants more people, and wants to help more people by increased production.**

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them in trying to find solutions to these evils that we find in society. It is not easy, but it is very important for society to try and find ways to minimize the immorality we see around us.

**R&L:** *Why is it that those who are thought to be the chief vanguards of the free society, people like bankers, businessmen, wealthy people, often support causes and movements that strive to limit economic and political liberty?*

**Liggio:** Well, most people, including business people, want to reduce risk and limit the amount of uncertainty in their business activities. That is a wholesome thing as long as they find means like insurance. Insurance is one of the most important ways, and there are so many kinds of insurance now, so many ways of using insurance to minimize risk, that using illegitimate and illicit means, like using force, using the violence of the state to prevent competition,

is not only immoral in itself, but counterproductive. It is immoral, because it interferes with the rights of every ordinary consumer to buy the best product at the appropriate or the cheapest cost that he wants, and to be able to buy what numbers of it that he wishes.

This is the core, we might say, of the industrial revolution; it was a consumer revolution. It was the desire of consumers to have more than one piece of clothing. That led to a demand for a huge amount of cotton, which was hard to satisfy with spinning wheels. So cotton spinning was mechanized by water power, which provided enough cotton so people could have multiple changes of clothes. This contributed mightily to hygienic improvement in the West, and therefore to population increase.

Population increase is one of the important values of a capitalist society. A socialist society wants to have very few mouths to feed. They do not want to have to clothe or support many people, because they cannot afford to. That is why we find that it was in the socialist countries where abortion is the most intensive and prevalent, and encouraged totally by the state.

**R&L:** *Sometimes mandated by the state.*

**Liggio:** And mandated to reduce the number of consumers. Capitalism, as Gary Becker has pointed out, is the great anti-Malthusian philosophy. Capitalism wants more people, and wants to help more people by increased production. More people actually makes it more efficient to produce more products. A

# To Reduce Wealth or Poverty ?

Carl-Johan Westholm

*This essay—originally printed in Swedish in 1994—was prompted by the 1993 pastoral letter, “On the Rich and the Poor,” from the bishops of the Church of Sweden, formerly the established church. The following was written as a letter in reply, not to attack the bishops or the church, but to clarify what has been distorted by some of the bishops’ formulations.*

*The bishops’ pastoral letter was given considerable attention in Sweden when it was published, as was this reply. It appears here in English for the first time. The first half appeared last issue; the second half appears this issue.*

**M**an was given freedom and ate of the fruit of knowledge. Only one who is free can do right and wrong. This capacity to will is what separates mankind from the animals. Only one who has knowledge has moral responsibility. When men co-operate with each other under equal conditions, it is due to an agreement between them.

## The Invisible Hand

When Martin Luther emphasized the freedom of the individual to take a stand on eternal issues, he also legitimized the individual’s right to take a stand on secular issues. Just as people are not supposed to obey religious authorities blindly, they are not supposed to obey secular ones blindly either. Luther’s inquiry into secular and spiritual rule, and whether an evil man can perform

good deeds, dates from this time.

This last question, as far as economics is concerned, was later decisively answered by Adam Smith, educated in moral philosophy and, to some degree, in theology. Smith argued that you get your bread not because the baker is altruistic, but because it is in the baker’s own in-

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The invisible hand ensures that people acting in their self-interest will voluntarily co-operate, without any commandments regarding the details of production.

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terest to bake. If you find his bread tasty, and if he can charge for it, he will profit from baking bread and you will profit from buying it.

This *invisible hand* was one of Adam Smith’s great achievements. When supply and demand meet—spontaneous order—the result is far superior than it would have been if people had tried to centrally plan the production of bread. It is therefore no coincidence that Moses did not write “You shall bake your bread so that you may live in the land” on the tablets of stone. The invisible hand ensures that people acting in their self-interest will voluntarily co-operate, without any commandments regarding the details of production. The commandment “Thou shalt not steal” is, however, necessary for the protection of property rights.

## Freedom of Contract

Two parties agree to do something together if both believe they will mutually profit by their collaboration. All contracts are therefore voluntary. This does not mean, however, that the result will turn out well for both parties; the collaboration can turn out to have been a misjudgment. Neither the individual nor the collective are omniscient. Thus a contract can turn out to benefit only one party, or even be bad for both.

Furthermore, if a contract is entered into between parties who are so unequal that one of them is in fact forced to participate, there is no freedom of contract. It is the same if an illiterate who is badly informed of a contract’s content signs one. This classic debate about the necessary requirements for a working freedom of contract was mainly conducted towards the end of the nineteenth century. But from this discussion about individual contract rights, the debate came to be conducted in terms of categories and classes. The error here is that while an individual can move from one state of being to another, a whole social class, by definition, cannot. This is why lower classes are always poorer than upper classes, which easily leads to the static analysis of exploitation. It is important to note that the membership of both classes is not always constant.

When a person starts a factory and begins hiring, he may become

much wealthier than those he hires. If we want to make it so this person is not to become wealthy in this way, we have two alternatives. Either this person should, from the start, have the same salary as his employees, or this person should not start his business at all.

The former would mean that the employees must also share some of the financial risk, of which they may

course this is true. But is it a coincidence that the pastoral letter does not write about “socialism” but “so-called scientific socialism”? Is it also a coincidence that the pastoral letter does not name the ideology that today dominates Sweden and that is attributed by many absolute values, namely democracy?

If by democracy we mean absolute majority rule, then it is clear that

advantage that whatever is believed to be bad will gradually diminish. Dictatorships fall slower while they collect evils.

### Taxation and Debt

It would not inspire confidence if one were to pronounce on Christianity, quote the ten commandments, and forget half of them. Likewise, it is equally serious when the Synod pronounces on economics and forgets fifty percent. One example is when the pastoral letter writes the following: “The warning-flag that the Church has carried with it from its very first days is raised anew against today’s monetary and financial systems. It is the interest rate, and with it the currency fluctuations that threatens the indebted countries.” Really? Look, for example, at Sweden. We do indeed have problems with the interest rate and the currency fluctuations. We have fallen deep into debt and have lost much of our wealth. But just like other poor countries, the basic problem is our inferior capacity to produce and to create.

Is it not right that most of the payment for a service should go to the one who provides the service? That most of the payment for work goes to the one who performs the work? That most of the payment for a product goes to the one who produces the good? Likewise, is it not therefore right that most of the return on capital goes to the one who provides the capital? It has not always been that way in Sweden, and in other countries as well. For example, it is no coincidence that Tanzania (more than fifty percent of Tanzania’s foreign trade consisted of Swedish aid) had one of Africa’s highest marginal tax rates on income for a long time. Tanzania was not threatened by interest rates or currency fluctuations. It

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**We know one thing from modern history: What no one owns is badly kept, and what everyone owns ends up to be no one’s responsibility.**

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not be aware. If so, the decision to start up any business, with all its attendant economic risks, would be spread among too many people. An important factor behind the rise of business in the nineteenth century was that with the emergence of corporate law, contract rights were being codified. That is, responsibility for a business was limited to the size of the equity stake. The limited liability company is one of the most important inventions of modern times.

The second possibility—that no one is allowed to start a business, forcing everyone to remain equal—is a principle only consistent with the quiet of a cemetery. It has nothing to do with life.

### The Dangers of Idolatry

The bishops write that “all ideologies and social systems that are presented as absolute and hence shapers of the future become idols. This is true when capitalism, so-called scientific socialism, mercantilism, liberalism, nationalism, and other such society-shaping systems are attributed absolute values and the ability to shape the future.” Of

a society can have too much democracy and move towards despotism. It would, of course, be equally devastating to bargain for everything, instead of voting. It should not be possible to vote for or to buy everything. The issue is how to realize a multifaceted society. A society must not only contain politics and economics, but also family, science, arts, and religion.

The pastoral letter also refers to the notion of “the responsibility of trusteeship.” This is based upon something not mentioned, but lately formulated, namely the notion that we do not own the Earth, but have been given it to pass on to our children. But these environmental concerns give no answer to the question: Should property be owned communistically, or by individuals and their voluntary organizations, such as limited liability companies and joint partnerships? We know one thing from modern history: What no one owns is badly kept, and what everyone owns ends up to be no one’s responsibility. The environmental damage in the socialist economies, scientific or not, is well documented. Market economies at least have the

was threatened by high taxes and a regulated economy. This leads to corruption and to despair.

In the tradition of the Church there is an insight, a common theme, that wealth is something very good, but also very perilous. The bishops write: "Creation itself offers an abundance of life and means of subsistence, but everything can be abused and mankind lose the blessings." What has happened in Sweden and in the global economy during the postwar period is that the world's wealth has been put primarily in the hands of the state. Taxes have increased and public sectors expanded. How should the Church view the concentration of ownership in public hands? The states have become richer than ever, but this pastoral letter does not devote one line to this situation. Another who did reflect on this problem said that we should "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." Our question today is: What things are Caesar's?

For many years it has been sung on First of May that "the Internationale brings happiness to all." Is this not blasphemy, or at least idolatry? To think that any political idea can guarantee happiness is political messianism. The money changers in today's Temple are mainly selling political ideas, not currencies.

### Economics and Morality

The bishops also write that "the gifts of life, which exist in abundance, must be shared generously and in solidarity in order to become a blessing." If the "gifts of life" means something other than money, for instance personal talents or attributes, they certainly do exist in abundance, but they cannot be shared. These are personal possessions. An attribute that is at one time

valuable can in another context be worthless. The problem is not only how we should receive and distribute the gifts of life, but how we *make use of them*.

Distributing the gifts of life is not a problem; what is fair can always be discussed. But it is always possible to share, be it fairly or unfairly? How shall we use the gifts of life fairly? Matthew 25:29 says "Every one who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." The moral duty to use one's talents and not slacken is important for this very important reason; of this there is nothing in the pastoral letter. Should not the individual demand much of himself?

Neither money nor politics guarantee happiness, though they are important for peoples' living conditions. I agree with the bishops when they write that economic growth is only one dimension of the good life.

The bishops are concerned that we all strive for higher morals in the field of economic responsibility and for respect for good basic principles. It is for this very reason that it is im-

would not the bishops have felt themselves under attack? In the same manner, statements of this kind must be seen as attacks on every merchant, businessman, and entrepreneur.

It is not because business morals are high, and justice unproblematic—such is clearly not the case—that I have wanted to present some complementary and partly critical views of the Church of Sweden's bishops' 1993 pastoral letter on justice and morality in the global economy. It is rather the opposite. It is important that the experience and competence that the bishops possess is put to better use, including matters other than purely clerical. This is not because Church matters have become less important, but because we live in an age when religious secularization has been replaced by political secularization.

The Swedish people were de-Christianized fairly early, but not without religion. Politics as the giver of all good gifts—the new manna from heaven—was a necessary condition for the emergence of the welfare state. Many still believe that it is the welfare state that lifted Swe-

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Politics as the giver of all good gifts—the new manna from heaven—was a necessary condition for the emergence of the welfare state.

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portant we discuss these issues forthrightly. The bishops write "The common weal must take precedence over private profit." Here it is hinted that private profit, the driving force of the market economy, will not lead to the general improvement of society. If someone had said that the common weal must be given precedence over the profits of the Church,

den from poverty. The truth is that with annual economic growth of three-and-a-half percent, standards of living will double every twenty years. No redistributive policy in the world can improve standards of living for everyone. But fewer people now have faith in politics. In fact, more people tend to doubt everything. For this reason, too, it is im-

portant to formulate the problems correctly.

### The Decisive Question

This is the decisive question regarding poverty and wealth: *Which is more important to reduce, poverty or wealth?* If it is more important to reduce wealth, the solution is very simple. The state can by one single decision confiscate all the private

four hundred thousand openly unemployed, two hundred thousand in relief work and forty thousand in premature retirement. These are to be supported by four million employed, who must also pay for child care and old age pensions. In addition, we have a large public debt which rises by one thousand crowns per worker and week.

If it is the case that the perspec-

a different kind.

One is their commercial value, that is, the market value of a person's work. This varies with demand. The other is their political value, the influence one person can have in politics. These two latter human values can change, but the first is fixed. Man differs from the animals. He has free will and can choose between right and wrong. Just as no one should become boastful because of success in business or in politics, no one should feel envy towards the business or political success of others. Every individual has a unique value as a human being.

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**In the long run, it is not possible to maintain human value without maintaining the idea of personal responsibility.**

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wealth in the land. But if the important issue is not to reduce wealth but to reduce poverty, then the problem is vastly greater. It is then impossible to solve the question with a single decision. Instead, poverty must be fought continuously.

Ernst Wigforss wrote in a Social Democratic motion to the Swedish Parliament in the 1920s that poverty is borne with equanimity if it is shared by everyone. Non-socialist politicians also tend with some hesitation to agree with him. But as Wigforss' distant relative, Harald Wigforss—for many years editor of *Handelstidningen* in Gothenburg—has pointed out, this view is a half truth, because that was not the way Sweden grew rich. The truth is instead that poverty is borne with equanimity if everyone is united in combating it.

The Swedes of the late nineteenth century did not aim at distributing poverty evenly, but combating it. One-fourth of the population emigrated to the United States of America. There they found both new means of livelihood and a greater measure of religious freedom.

In Sweden we now have almost

tive of the poor gives the best insight into poverty, we Swedes will quickly become more insightful. That view is not reasonably one that the bishops support, even if it is the logical consequence of the letter formulated by Bishop Biörn Fjärstedt. What we need instead in Sweden is to see a sufficiently large number of young Swedish men and women who dare to start up new businesses. Some of these from the start will want to help those who are worse off if they themselves are doing well, but many of them will be thinking about themselves. It is only when wealth has been created, however, that people begin to think about how to use it.

It is, of course, not good if a business is doing badly. But many think that it is also not good if it is doing well. These people prefer that companies do only moderately well. But life is not moderate, except on average. Some people will make much more money than others. It is therefore important to stress that there are different kinds of human values.

The first is each individual's unique value as a human being. This is what is meant by "respect for life." The two other human values are of

### Towards the Future

Sweden has for quite a long time lived in an idyll where it was assumed that everyone wishes to do good. But no more. During the last few years we have seen evil worshipped in black masses. Communism has fallen in Eastern Europe, but in its place we have raw nationalism; look at the long-running civil war raging in the former Yugoslavia.

Many are today talking about the importance of the institutions for the development of economic and political systems. The Church is such an institution. But attitudes, which work together with institutions, are equally important. It comes down to disposition. This word has almost disappeared from use—just like personal responsibility. But in the long run it is not possible to maintain human value without maintaining the idea of personal responsibility. **A**

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**Carl-Johan Westholm** has a Ph.D. in political science. He is president of the Swedish Federation of Private Enterprises and secretary of the Mont Pelerin Society.



# Seven Years After the Fall

Barbara von der Heydt

It was seven years ago that the Berlin Wall fell, liberating all of Central and Eastern Europe in a resounding crash. Now some in Western Europe wish it were standing again, while others in the East wonder what they've gained. Corruption has flourished in the ensuing moral vacuum. Not a few people have concluded communism is preferable to anarchy or poverty. The moral and spiritual leaders of the peaceful revolution have little political influence and they struggle to define the Permanent Things in a culture in flux.

It would be presumptuous of us in the West to offer advice, as our culture deteriorates apace. Once self-evident truths, which were the legacy of western civilization, are under full assault. Post-modernism, multi-culturalism, and revisionism dissolve the Permanent Things.

## Ancient Roots of Western Order

The culture of contemporary Europe and America has ancient roots, as Russell Kirk explained lucidly in *The Roots of American Order*. These roots sprang from the ancient Hebrew perception of a purposeful, moral existence under God. They were enlarged through the philosophical and political understanding of the ancient Greeks. They were nurtured by the Roman concepts of personal virtue, law, justice, and reason. These were later entwined with the Christian understanding of the

hope of personal redemption and sanctification. On this organic order grew an Anglo-Saxon understanding of liberty under law, property rights, and the tension between order and freedom. Such was the flowering of Europe as it was planted on American soil, together with the concept of a market economy. It is

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The moral and spiritual leaders of the peaceful revolution have little political influence, and they struggle to define the Permanent Things in a culture in flux.

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these common roots which today must be refreshed if our culture is to have the richness it has known in the past and bear new blossoms.

The cultural and intellectual heritage we share is the result of centuries of incremental growth, the accumulated inspiration and wisdom of those who have gone before us. Europe and America are now the trustees of more than two thousand years of culture which has grown this way. The task now is to define the things of lasting truth and beauty, defend them, and transmit them to those who follow, to enable the growth of a healthy contemporary culture from venerable roots.

## The Vision No Longer Binds

In utterly different ways, both East and West have lost the order

which held their diverse elements in cohesion. There was at one time a broad consensus in America on the fundamental questions of personal responsibility and freedom. Voluntary association and acceptance of a shared body of ideals held the American identity intact, conferring it anew on generations of immigrants. This shared vision no longer binds. The centrifugal forces of ethnicity and the "culture wars" are tearing the fabric of the American commonweal into tatters.

The communist order which was maintained by the iron fist from above now has splintered into ethnic entities which savage each other. In an empire once coerced into unity by ideology, national and ethnic rivalries now flicker and flame. Bloodlines are again the arbiters of identity.

In the American experience, it was once possible to claim, "We hold these truths to be self-evident." In the Soviet experience, the Party determined what truth was. Now there are few in either the East or the West who are sure that truth exists at all.

A multi-cultural society easily becomes a society without values. Some would argue that even the term *values* is suspect, as it implies a measure of taste, rather than the certainty of permanent things by which one evaluates. What was once weighed against natural law or revealed divine truth has been de-based to cultural or personal preference.

But we are not condemned to flounder in the darkness; we have simply lost sight of the stars by which we navigate. Our Creator imprinted his law on our hearts as we came into being; through it we recognize moral truth. C. S. Lewis characterizes it in his book *The Abolition of Man* as the Tao, or the Way, “the reality beyond all predicates.... It is the way every man should tread... conforming all activities to that great exemplar.” Lewis quotes from the major teachings of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Hebrew and Christian sources, as well as Babylonian writings, ancient Chinese and Norse texts to illustrate his point. What each of these civilizations has discovered is stunningly consistent: We should honor our Creator. We should not murder. We should honor our parents and our duties to our families. We should not lie or cheat. We should show kindness to the weak. Here is evidence gleaned from the ages affirming that the same moral truths have been revealed again and again, not as a matter of taste, but as immutable verities, perilous to ignore.

ishing books, and forbidding contact with people holding competing ideas. Yet it was precisely in this climate of oppression that a “second culture” sprouted.

The dissidents in Central Europe set about to define the Permanent Things, and reclaim them. Poets and playwrights articulated a vision the communists had banned, but could not eradicate. Philosophers in Prague worked as furnace stokers by day, wrote by night, and published their works as *samizdat*. The “Flying University” in Poland offered a classical education to serious students who could not study the same ideas in official universities. There were private concerts, exhibitions, seminars, publishing houses, information networks, trade unions, and contacts across the borders. Dissidents and lovers of the truth constructed a civil society of parallel, free structures. Here were sown the seeds of the moral revolution which preceded the political one.

We get a glimpse of the “second culture” if we look at the writings of Václav Havel, Adam Michnik, and György Konrád—a Czech, a

ing: his conscience, his ‘subjectivity’, his duty to live in truth, and his right to live in dignity.”

These writers, as did other leaders of the peaceful revolution of 1989, affirm that there is truth, that there are causes worth suffering and dying for, and that moral power supersedes political might. As Václav Havel put it in his essay “Politics and Conscience”: “It is becoming evident... that a single, seemingly powerless person who dares to cry out the word of truth and to stand behind it with all his person and all his life, ready to pay a high price, has, surprisingly, greater power... than do thousands of anonymous voters.” This is a vision precious few in the West could articulate for themselves today.

For the people who have since been freed from the Soviet yoke, it has been a shock to realize that their vision of the West does not match the reality of what it has become. The culture of the West is neither as vile as had been propagandized, nor is it as good as the dissidents had hoped. The past forty-odd years of relatively peaceful prosperity on one side of the Berlin Wall, and the experience of Marxism on the other, have yielded different fruits. One need not unduly glorify those who resisted Soviet domination to conclude that they have perhaps led more examined lives than those who have not been tested in similar ways. We in the West have much to learn, if we will listen.

### Fragments and a Loom

The countries of Central Europe now find themselves in a head-spinning transition from a severe paucity of telephones, copying machines, international reading material, and computers, into the Brave New World of the Internet, satellite

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Those who have recently emerged from the shadow of totalitarianism have had their own culture wars.... Yet it was precisely in this climate of oppression that a “second culture” sprouted.

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### The Power of the Powerless

Those who have recently emerged from the shadow of totalitarianism have had their own culture wars. Soviet leaders knew very well that admitting another culture other than their own was dangerous, which explains the remarkable energy they invested in silencing their critics, rewriting their history, ban-

Pole, and a Hungarian. Theirs is a realm not defined by geography, but a kingdom of the spirit. Timothy Garton Ash remarked of these writers: “All three reassert the fundamental premises of Judeo-Christian individualism. Reversing the traditional priorities of socialism, they begin not with the state or society, but with the individual human be-

communications, cellular telephones, and an absolute glut of information. It would be a grave error to assume that those in the West who have wallowed in the increasing torrents of information are any wiser.

One thing our culture is struggling to define is the difference between information and knowledge. While information is now available through silicon chips, computers, television cables, disks, and video, it comes at great velocity, unsorted, disconnected from meaning. We live in a world of multiple visual images, ten-second sound bites, channel surfing, and fragmented conscience.

Edna St. Vincent Millay put the problem into succinct, prophetic words:

Upon this gifted age, in its dark hour  
Rains from the sky a meteoric shower  
Of facts... they lie unquestioned,  
uncombined  
Wisdom enough to leech us of our ill  
Is daily spun, but there exists no loom  
To weave it into fabric...

Education should provide this loom. But there is a lack of consensus among educators, and the lack of courage to affirm that eternal verities exist. The rough beast slouches in each of our countries, east and west. The breakdown of education, public and private manners, and morality is spectacular and devastating. The corruption of culture is abundantly evident. We must rally the remnant within, and set about the earnest business of reknitting the fabric of culture in each of our own countries.

### The Crucible of Culture

Political, economic and cultural matters cannot be isolated from one another. They all form the matrix of civilization. But particularly in the

ideological twentieth century, culture has become a negligible by-product, or something which can be manipulated to fit the current political design. We have become “culture conscious” but in a way that emphasizes our differences, without showing us a way to transcend them.

It is a fallacy of our age, with ancient roots, to believe that the politi-

cess, as order is an organic growth, and culture can be perceived but not contrived.

As T. S. Eliot concludes in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, with words which have only become more true in the years since they were written, “We are common trustees [of] the legacy of Greece, Rome, and Israel, and the legacy of

“Political, economic and cultural matters cannot be isolated from one another. They all form the matrix of civilization.”

—Barbara von der Heydt



cal institutions are the supreme instruments for ordering human affairs. Our age is one of radical politicization. But the force that drives civilization is not located in its political or economic structures. Its forms can only offer a harness. It is a shallow hope to put our faith in democracy and capitalism, alone. The vitality of a culture is in the hearts, habits, and minds of the people who live within it: Edmund Burke knew that the character of a nation depends on the character of its citizens.

Cultural disintegration is the most serious sort of devastation, and that which is hardest to repair. It can come undone in a few years of violence, or in decades of neglect. Central Europe is weary after the head-on assault of Marxist ideology, while the West is unraveling from within. We are all in need. It is our shared task now to define the eternal verities and live them. It is a slow pro-

cess throughout the last 2000 years. In a world which has seen such material devastation as ours, these spiritual possessions are also in imminent peril.”

A culture is the incarnation of the beliefs of a people. It reflects and shapes simultaneously. St. Paul urges us to cherish the highest: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” If we can transmit with vibrancy the best elements of our culture, devotion to the divine, truth, beauty, and virtue, we will have lived well. A

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**Barbara von der Heydt** is a Senior Fellow with the Acton Institute, and the author of *Candles Behind the Wall: Heroes of the Peaceful Revolution that Shattered Communism*.

# The Pope's Divisions

A Review Essay by John-Peter Pham

The collapse of Communism as a world ideological force occasions not only a thorough reassessment of many of the economic and political presuppositions which were fundamental to the post-World War II world, but also a reevaluation of many of the historical interpretations founded on these same presuppositions and widespread during the same period. In fact, one of the major criticisms of the caste of professional historians and political scientists in the United States is their failure as a group, with a few notable exceptions, to take measure of the ideological stakes in both the World War and the ensuing Cold War. Rather, they introduced—or passively allowed to be introduced—Marxist-Leninist interpretations into the contemporary discourse. Moreover, the conditions of conflict made it all the easier to circulate various lies to which was lent a certain credence, both then and later, precisely because they fit into the conventional Communist vision of reality.

One of the victims of this historical process has been the Catholic Church in general, and the Holy See and the person of Pope Pius XII in particular. Scarcely a word is written on the intersection of religion and the world polity without at least an oblique reference to the supposed indifference—if not alleged outright partisan favor—of the late pontiff towards the evils perpetrated by National Socialism. Even neo-liberal law professor Stephen L. Carter of

Yale in his otherwise admirable recent treatise on American law and religion, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion*, somehow finds it necessary to mouth the cliché that “the stony silence of the Roman Catholic hierarchy during the years of Nazi dominance of Europe could

make him uniquely qualified to treat his chosen subject.

## A Historian's Minefield

Graham's point of departure is the moral and political dilemma in which Pope Pius XII and the Holy See found themselves in at the advent of the Second World War when the Church faced two opposing ideologies, Communism and National Socialism. Neither operated in a vacuum; rather, they reflected, exploited, and probed many weak aspects of modern society. As Graham notes: “Communism, with Karl Marx, highlighted the social or labor question in capitalist society. National Socialism awakened and pushed to its ultimate the nation-

alism lurking under the surface throughout Europe. The form it took in Germany proved so venomous because it flourished in a large, industrialized, and well-disciplined base, disoriented by economic distress and the humiliating memory of a lost war... Under these conditions, nationalism slipped easily into racism.”

Both ideologies shared common roots in a materialist, this-world view of the meaning of life, in whose perspective any religion claiming to be supernatural was necessarily an irrelevant, unsocial, inimical stumbling block; witness Stalin's often-repeated sneer about “How many divisions does the Pope have?” The Catholic Church was thus, by reason of the necessity of her very survival, a major protagonist in this century's

## *The Vatican and Communism in World War II: What Really Happened?*

by Robert A. Graham, SJ

Ignatius Press

1996. 199 pp. Paper: \$12.95

hardly have been taken by the regime as anything but a religious license to continue their slaughter.”

Jesuit Father Robert A. Graham's essays on this subject, derived from studies published over the years in the Rome-based fortnightly journal of record *La Civiltà Cattolica*, have now been collected together and reworked into a volume entitled *The Vatican and Communism in World War II: What Really Happened?* This volume, following on the heels of the same author's authoritative *Vatican Diplomacy, Pope Pius XII, and the Jews*, and his monumental multi-volume edition of *Acts and Documents of the Holy See Relative to the Second World War*, comes from a scholar whose lifetime of research in the secret Vatican archives and in the official archives of Europe and America

political and moral struggle against these twin ideologies. While World War II offers a convenient starting point for the study of this question, it is also a historian's minefield of false suppositions and outright lies on the attitude of the Holy See toward either Communism or Nazism.

A typical example is the widespread interpretation that the papacy—incarnate, so it seemed, in the person of Pius XII—was “obsessed” with Communism, an interpretation which is cited compulsively to explain the policies of the period. The Vatican was “soft” on Nazism, goes the conventional wisdom, because of its “panic” over Communism. To many in the self-defined intellectual elite, the long-standing Catholic opposition to Communism—all too well justified by the speedy collapse of the latter in the wake of the events of 1989—was a reactionary attack on progress. Of course, as Graham amply documents, in the era of appeasement which many a historian would prefer to forget, Pope Pius XI's 1937 encyclical condemning Nazism, *Mit brennender Sorge*, was decried even in Britain as “narrow-minded clerical interference.”

Graham's exhaustive studies explode historical myth after historical myth, from international Communism's supposed constant opposition to Nazism (false) to the Vatican's alleged support for Hitler's self-proclaimed “crusade” against Soviet Russia (likewise false). The essays in *The Vatican and Communism* illustrate, chapter and verse, how these myths are little better than Communist-inspired corruptions of the record.

Of course, the Second World War placed the Church, with its many roots planted in the soils of every belligerent and neutral, in a delicate situation in which it had a very restricted sphere of influence. More-

over, the moral and spiritual issues arising from the conflict were extraordinarily complicated, although few of the belligerents were willing or able to recognize this. In fact, in such a situation one finds a clear illustration of the tragedy in which politics is easily read into the stances and actions of the Holy See while the religious motivations are either obscured or ignored. And perhaps it is in the reminder of this inevitable consequence of the international position of the Holy See that is the particularly relevant contribution of Graham's book.

Statesmen, in particular, are apt to view the Church's *pris de position* solely in the light of their own immediate, purely secular concerns. Amid such confusion, the sources of the diplomatic policy of the Holy See remain obscured, as was the experience of Pius XII. And when his actions could not be criticized, his motives were placed under fire with subjective criteria. Few are willing to accord a pontiff credit for being

was bound to misunderstand or exploit. Every party in a conflict—whether it be ideological warfare or an actual shooting war—is likely to regard the Church as either implicitly friendly or implicitly hostile, according to whether it feels that her actions (or inaction) help or hinder its cause. In his conclusion, in fact, Graham emphasizes that at times when all energies, particularly moral and spiritual energies, are focused on the winning of a conflict, the mission of the Holy See can often risk either being expropriated outright or wholly rejected, as can be verified today in an entirely different context: the wholesale ignorance by certain sectors of the paradigmatic shift in the Church's social magisterium carried out by the current Holy Father, John Paul II.

#### Subject to No Earthly Power

In this final regard, it is perhaps quite *a propos* that Graham's final essay is a study of the rejection by the Church of Franco Rodano and

“Few are willing to accord a pontiff credit for being motivated by purely religious motives when he acts on the world stage.”

—John Peter-Pham



motivated by purely religious motives when he acts on the world stage. If his actions serve the national cause, they are applauded. If they run counter to national interests, they are denounced.

Added to this confused context, the supranational stance of the Holy See often imposed on the pope certain courses of action (or inaction) which one or the other belligerent

his Christian Communist movement in Italy in the immediate aftermath of the war. Rodano and his associates thought themselves capable of finding a formula for successfully divorcing Marxist-Leninism from its atheistic and materialistic roots. They were neither the first nor the last to try to bridge the gap between the Christian conception of life and the Communist vision. They ac-

cepted, however, the main points of the Communist program, albeit abstracting from some of its ideological presuppositions. In so doing, they isolated the Church's concern for social reform from the sound principles first articulated by Leo XIII in his encyclical *Rerum novarum*. In their tactics in the ideological war for the future of the West, the Christian communists picked and chose, cafeteria style, from the Church's social magisterium. In so doing, they ignored truth and thus, the march of history, on which they staked so much, passed them by.

Graham places all these considerations, whether about the Second World War or about the subsequent and continuing ideological conflicts of vision, in perspective when he writes, by way of eloquent conclusion: "The Church was founded with a mission by Jesus Christ and subject to no earthy power. From this point of view the Church is an 'idea', an abstraction, intangible, transcending politics. This of course is not understood, much less accepted by the world's political forces. The Church is in the world but not of it. The implications of this came out forcibly during World War II. The Catholic Church is indebted to Pius XII for having consistently adhered to this fundamental conception, despite the enormous pressures that governments could and did exert on the Papacy. When World War II has receded into distant memory, the precedent of Pius XII will serve his successors in the See of Peter. Triumphalism? The highway of history is strewn with the wreckage of once all-powerful enemies of the Church." A

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**John-Peter Pham**, a Catholic priest of the diocese of Peoria, Illinois, holds degrees in economics, theology, and canon law. He is a Fellow of the Acton Institute.



## Book News



### **Handbook on Religious Liberty Around the World**

*Pedro C. Moreno, ed.*  
*The Rutherford Institute*  
 347 pp. Paper: \$29.95

Missionaries, students, and those interested in the plight of persecuted religious groups will appreciate the *Handbook on Religious Liberty Around the World*. Published by the Rutherford Institute, this manual offers detailed, comprehensive analyses of the levels of freedom and toleration that are enjoyed by various religions throughout the world.

John Whitehead, founder of the Rutherford Institute, admits that the book pays special attention to the plight of Christians, but, as he notes, this is because Christians are the "single most persecuted group in the world." Those interested in other religions should not be discouraged, however; the struggles of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism are all covered as well.

In a clear and "user friendly" way the *Handbook* offers the reader an insight into the particularities of several nations within the seven major regions of the world. Including information such as the historical background of religions within the nation, the constitutional provisions or laws of the nation (if any) that relate to religion, and reported cases of intolerance, the *Handbook* explains which nations are "good," and which ones are the worst offenders. Thus, this book is useful both academically and practically. Whatever your purpose, you will find the *Handbook* an invaluable resource, and an enlightening review of the relationship between religion and liberty around the world.

### **World Survey of Economic Freedom 1995-1996**

*Richard E. Messick, ed.*  
*Transaction Publishers*  
 219 pp. Paper: \$8.95

Freedom House has created a reference gem for anyone interested in comparative politics and economic liberties worldwide. Using seven criterion, ranging from the freedom to hold property and earn a living, to the amount of government interference in the economy and hindrance to individual economic initiative, Freedom House has examined the economic policies and conditions of eighty-two nations around the world. The countries included in the survey were chosen irrespective of their political, cultural, and religious traditions, or their level of economic development.

Given the breadth of this academic venture, the authors could not go into terrific detail on every nation. However, the information provided is sufficient for those interested in a broad overview of the status of economic liberty around the world. There are some surprises; particularly, the former Communist states of the Polish and Czech republics, and the former Soviet republics of Estonia and Lithuania are ranked as "free" economies, a rating that would have been impossible a few years ago. This type of surprise is one of the subtle themes within this book. By emphasizing the progress that various economies can make, Freedom House is offering a sense of hope to other countries of the world whose economies are held captive by legal barriers.

—**Brian K. Pinaire**



*Rev. Robert A. Sirico*

## The Left on the Run

**E**conomic conservatives—people who hoped the Republican Congress would reduce existing government barriers to free enterprise—are down in the dumps. It appears that expectations generated by the November 1994 election were well above the ability of this Congress to perform. From their point of view, after all the battles on taxes, regulations, the budget, and more, nothing really dramatic took place. Even though the good guys, for once, were in charge of the purse strings, from all appearances, it was business as usual in Washington.

Is this attitude justified?

No, because it misses the bigger picture. It's true that this Congress did not deliver according to promise, and many principled lawmakers are as aware of this as anyone else. But if ideas have consequences, something much more profound has taken place that will insure the free enterprisers the last victory. The American political and intellectual culture has undergone a dramatic shift.

In the upcoming election, no candidate for federal office will campaign for bigger government. The candidates who do, or who are perceived as doing so, will likely lose. The proponents of government solutions have lost the moral and political high ground. Bigger government only means higher taxes, more bureaucracy, and more policy failures. What's more, everyone but the liberal elite knows it. Serious people no longer doubt it.

Sixty years ago, this would have been unimaginable. In those days, all "serious thinkers" in the West were on the side of socialism and planning. Intellectuals and politicians, East and West, were united on one central supposition about the future: freedom and democracy have failed and socialism and the managed society will take their place.

These were times when anyone who touted free enterprise and political freedom was laughed at and scorned, especially in the most "liberal" circles. Poli-

ticians rode to power on the promise of using government power to bring about progress. Everyone agreed that societies could not manage themselves, but rather they needed a great leader to guide them, plan them, mold them, and make them after the general will.

It took decades for this pro-socialist attitude to recede as the dominant strain of social thought among American intelligentsia. But today it has been reduced to, at best, marginal status. Of course, the soft-socialism of social democracy, the welfare state, and corporate planning survived—until very recently. Increasingly, however, all important intellectual and political battles are between the minority who have high regard for planned, secular society and the majority who do not.

How can the economic conservatives win more concrete battles in the future? They need a political program that is intellectually coherent and the self assurance that it is both moral and workable. To make this possible, economic conservatives will need to train themselves to develop a greater affection for the capacity of religious faith to bolster enterprise. The religious right could do for some more economic education and adopt a greater tolerance toward decentralized solutions to social problems.

Such things come in time. For some reason, people and cultures attach a great deal of significance to the idea of a century ending, and even more so to the end of a millennium. Think of what the message will be at this end of this one. Will it be that our future is with the omnipotent state which has done so much for so many in our times? Hardly. It will be that the state has failed. The future is on the side of the ruled, not the rulers. *A*

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*Rev. Robert A. Sirico is President of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. A longer version of this article appeared in The Detroit News, July 28, 1996*

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*The future is on the side of the ruled, not the rulers.*

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“Man will ultimately be governed  
by God or by tyrants.”

—Benjamin Franklin—

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