

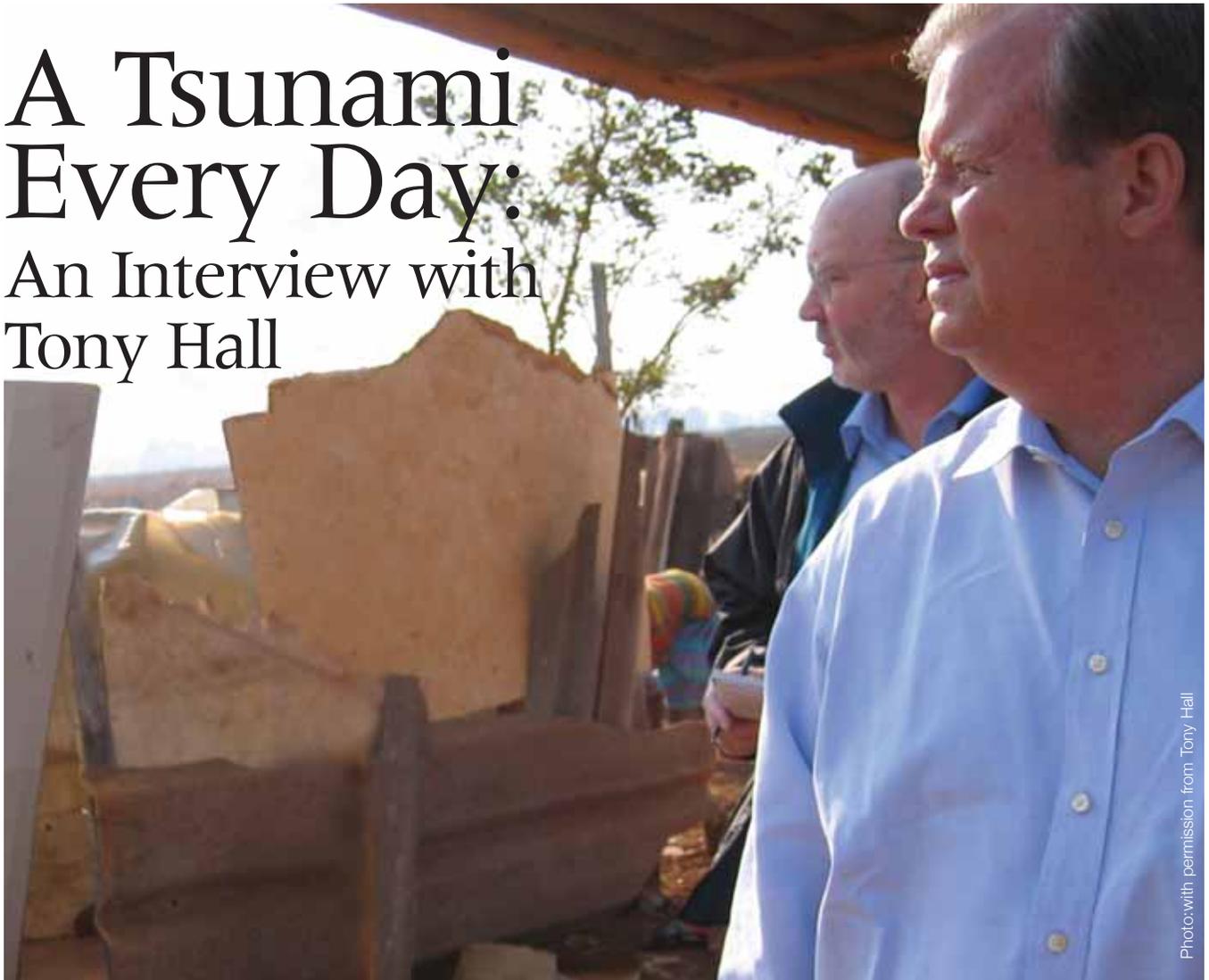
Religion & Liberty

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A Tsunami Every Day: An Interview with Tony Hall



Photograph with permission from Tony Hall

A leading advocate for the world's hungry and a former Democratic congressman from Ohio, Tony Hall served as the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome from 2002 until April of this year. He is shown here at a demolition site just outside Harare. More than 700,000 people were forcibly removed from homes and land by the government of Zimbabwe's Operation "Throw Out Trash." Ambassador Hall spoke with the director of Acton's Rome office, Kishore Jayabalan.

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Editor's Note



The many works of the Acton Institute bring us constantly into contact with the creative power of human liberty—we regularly are impressed, I think, with the potential for economic growth and dynamism. In this issue of *Religion & Liberty*, our thoughts turn to situations where that growth and dynamism is most needed—the desperate situations of poverty and hunger that still persist.

“To feed the hungry” remains a basic work of mercy, the goal of much charitable activity. It is also the work of major institutions such as the United Nations

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Our feature interview in this issue is with Tony Hall, former Democratic congressman and, until recently, U.S. Ambassador to FAO in Rome. He spoke with the head of our Rome office, Kishore Jayabalan.

“To feed the hungry” is also a basic economic imperative. Indeed, the economy has to provide food for the vast majority—charity and aid are necessarily limited to feeding only a small proportion of any population. Piero Morandini gives an update from the world of agricultural and biotechnology, and the prospects they offer for more abundant and efficient food production. It’s important to know the facts on the ground (that’s where the food grows!) and his article helps us do that. Just one fact to remember: Almost 30 percent of total crop production is lost to pests. If something could be done about that ... but you can read it for yourself.

I draw your attention also to John

Schneider’s article on Pope Benedict XVI’s first encyclical letter, released earlier this year: *God is Love (Deus Caritas Est)*. We will be returning to that encyclical repeatedly as it addresses two fundamental points. First, for all Christians, it speaks of the nature of divine and human love. Second, in particular for us at Acton, it addresses an issue close to our mission, namely, the proper role of charity, and the difference between truly faith-filled responses and bureaucratic ones. It was gratifying to see issues we deal with at Acton treated so sympathetically in *God is Love*.

Finally, our “Liberal Tradition” profile subject is the Reverend Edmund Opitz. Most of our subjects in that feature are long dead and their work has stood the test of time. Opitz died only recently, but his name will be familiar to followers of Acton’s work, and it is not necessary to wait to declare that his work will endure. *Requiescat in pace.*

Father Raymond

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A Tsunami Every Day

An Interview with Tony Hall

How has your faith shaped your political priorities, especially with regard to the fight against hunger?

It's quite a major part. A friend of mine who used to work [with me]—a believer—would come in and pray with me, and we would read the scripture. He said, "Don't you think it's time you started to take God into your workplace?" I thought, "Yeah, I do, but I don't know how to do it. I don't want to wear religion on my sleeve, because I see so many people do that and to me it looks hypocritical. I want to do it in a way in which I honor God, but I really don't know how to do it." So in 1984, when I was a member of Congress, we heard about this amazing famine in Ethiopia, and at the time I was chairman of a subcommittee on international hunger. I decided to go and see it, to try to understand it. So I went to Ethiopia, and I saw this disastrous famine. And I never got over it, because I saw so many people die. I remember going to the clinic where Missionaries of Charity were and the doctor said to me, "We need to go outside because a lot of people have gathered. They have come from all over the region. They've been hungry. They've had to sell everything to get here, and we can only take about five or six children." So we went outside, and there must have been a couple thousand people there. And I said, "What do you mean only five or six children?" He said, "That's all we can handle so the rest are going to have to die. That's how far gone they are." So we walked among them. They were thrusting their children at us, and I never got over that. Later on that day, I saw about 50,000 people just get so tired—they had been on the march to find a place where they could find some food and

water—and they just settled down in a plateau and started to die. Coming back on the plane, I remembered what my friend had said about bringing God into the workplace. I said this is a way that I can do that. I'm chairman of the committee. I can devote my life or a good portion of my life to trying to help people, and it's a way I can bring my faith into the workplace as a congressman.

So even if it's about saving five or six people, that is a way you can manifest your faith. You felt that your faith really put you in this place to help, even if it's just a handful of people, just one lost sheep, or one lost coin.

Absolutely. I remember when somebody said to Mother Teresa once, "Don't you think what you do is a drop in the bucket?" She said, "No, it's a drop in the ocean. But if I didn't do it, it'd be one less drop." And I thought that was a good saying. You do what you can do, and you do the thing that's in front of you. And that was in front of me. This whole chairmanship and everything was thrust upon me, and I felt that this is what I should do. This is what I can do.

When you work with the hungry, how does faith strengthen you in such difficult circumstances?

Well, there are a couple things. One—and again I quote Mother Teresa on this—she said Jesus is with the poor. So number one, he's with them. Number two, I take people with me when I go on a trip to pray with me, and we get up every morning and read scripture and pray. I started doing this about ten or twelve years ago because I found going on these kinds of trips, seeing people who were dying, especially children, was too hard. It was just too difficult, and I needed strength

and power. And as the scripture says, when two or more go together—two or more are gathered together in his name—he's there. It says in Thessalonians if you go out like this you will have power, conviction, and the Holy Spirit. So I found that really works. And

"...somebody said to Mother Teresa once, "Don't you think what you do is a drop in the bucket?" She said, "No, it's a drop in the ocean. But if I didn't do it, it'd be one less drop."

third, I also found that it's not easy to be with the poor and the sick and the dying. But I began to pray about it: that God would help me to experience him more, to understand more why he's there, but also to be able to get beyond the death and the misery I see. And God has been great. He's been able to help me as I prayed to understand. I don't know how people do this year after year without faith, because it's too difficult, too hard. It's got to rip at your heart. And I really don't know many people without faith who can work in this field very long without suffering greatly. They burn out. I'm sure there are some people out there who can do it, but I have met very few.

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Art: Getty Images

Loving Our Neighbor—Near and Far

by John R. Schneider

St. Augustine once wrote, “You cannot love what you do not know.” He was making a disarmingly simple point about the first great Christian commandment to love God, wholeheartedly. However, Augustine’s words also apply to the second great commandment—to love our neighbor, unselfishly. The application is especially important now, in our newly globalized world, and Pope Benedict XVI’s recent encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, provides a timely framework for seeing how that is so.

In the second half of the letter, Benedict XVI writes: “Today the means of mass communication have made our planet smaller, rapidly narrowing the distance between different peoples and cultures.” As suggested in an earlier passage, this dramatic change is among the latest in that spigot of “new things” that keeps coming forth from the wellsprings of modern capitalism. The letter thus continues the steady flow of tradition that extends from Leo XIII, in *Rerum Novarum* (1891), to John Paul II, in *Centesimus Annus* (1991).

As Benedict XVI observes, our shrinking world elicits new awareness of “how much suffering there is in the world.” And most importantly, it has enlarged the world of our “neighbor.” Citing Vatican II, this is indeed a new thing: “charitable activity can and should embrace all peoples.” For “we now have at our disposal numerous means for offering humanitarian assistance to our brothers and sisters in need.” As a consequence, older parochial and national

boundaries are blurred, as concern for our neighbor “has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world.” The once remote global poor have become the Global Neighbor. The “they” has become a “he” or “she,” a Lazarus lying at our gate.

The main focus of what remains in the papal letter is on the desired attitudes and qualities of the people who work for the church’s charitable organizations. His counsel to them is remarkably rich in its effort to lay out distinctly Christian teaching on human love in this context. But what I wish to do in the remainder of this essay is to focus on a somewhat different concern—a deadly new temptation—in addition to the ones that Benedict XVI directly engages in the letter. This temptation is especially great for sensitive laypeople, those who do not work for the church’s charitable organizations, or live otherwise amid the world’s poor. They rather seek to serve God while living and working within cultures of advanced capitalism, and thus amid the world’s most affluent.

When they face the poverty of their Global Neighbor amid their own prosperity, they are indeed moved. The trouble is that very often the experience does not move them to enlarge the reach of love from where they are. It rather enervates them in a fundamentally existential way. It weakens their capacity to affirm the goodness of who they are, their ability to love *themselves* and to envision how, as themselves, they

“As Benedict XVI observes, our shrinking world elicits new awareness of ‘how much suffering there is in the world.’ And most importantly, it has enlarged the world of our ‘neighbor.’”

might well love others. The Global Neighbor seems to them to expose their entire social and economic existence in all its typical modern human forms as evil before God. They feel God’s disapproval and condemnation fall upon their entire cultural existence, because of its social and economic forms—on the forms of their marriage, family, property, work, and lifestyle. It is an assault on the depths of their personhood, as shaped by their culture.

I propose that what I have just described is, for a great many Christian people, not the dawning of a “prophetic” awareness, as certain Christian writers encourage them to think it is. I propose that for most Christian people the experience is diabolical and destructive, and counts among the novel temptations that such Christians face in our global time. Of course, it is rarely understood that way.

The Temptation of Brute Utility

Reflective Christians should be alarmed that Peter Singer—an atheistic moral

Loving Our Neighbor—Near and Far



philosopher—has given this temptation its most lucid and persuasive voice. Singer is famous (or notorious) for advocating abortion, euthanasia, and even infanticide as state policies to further a more “just” global distribution of wealth. Christians will instantly discern in this advocacy a hardened form of what Benedict XVI refers to broadly as “the anti-culture of death.” These programmatic policy proposals make sense to Singer, since in his metaphysics he is a materialist (“what you eat you are”), and in his ethics he is a material utilitarian. Material utilitarianism simply teaches that our moral compass must always point toward achieving the greatest material good for the greatest number of people possible. And since people are poor worldwide, it makes sense to eliminate unnecessary and expensive people in order to save them. The metaphysics and ethics of Christianity obviously prevent such theory or practice, since they are anchored by belief that every human *individual* is created in the image of God. Christians thus instantly and rightly recoil in disgust and horror at Singer’s program of death in the name of life. Unfortunately, however, too few Christian writers, teachers, and ministers

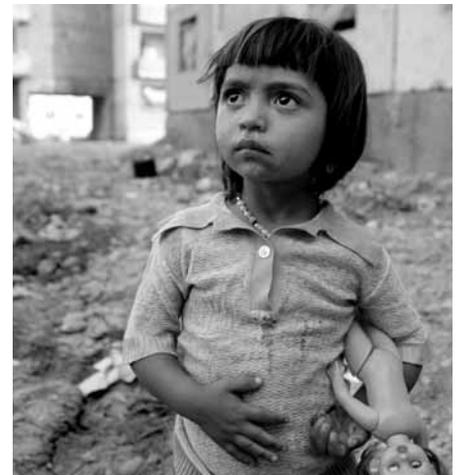
have discerned a similar devaluation of humanity in Singer’s proposals about economic *habits*, or more particularly, on habits of *consumption* and general lifestyle within advanced social economies.

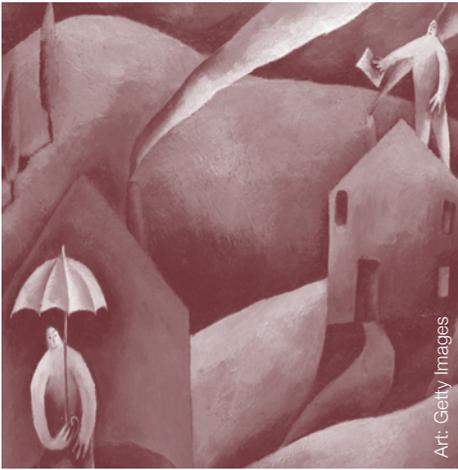
Singer’s “paradigm case” is a story he tells of a woman from Brazil named Dora. Dora is poor. One day she reads a flyer promising \$1,000 to anyone who brings an orphaned child off the street to a specified place for care and adoption. Dora knows of such a boy; she takes him to the place, receives her money, and then buys her very first television. But then Dora learns from the news channel that a child-smuggling ring is operating in her neighborhood, and that they are buying children for \$1,000 and selling them into slavery worldwide. Realizing what she has done, Dora returns the TV, takes the money back, and frees the little boy. But, Singer muses, what if she had not done so? What if Dora had put the boy out of mind and simply enjoyed her new luxury? Obviously, we would judge her guilty of something terribly immoral. She would be responsible for whatever evils happened to the poor child. But Singer concludes: This case illustrates the situation for modern consumers who enjoy luxuries despite the palpable presence of their poor Global Neighbor. Routine consumption, then, is judged the moral equal of oppression and murder.

On close inspection, Singer’s analysis goes way beyond the matter of consumption and lifestyle. It also has profound implications for moral assessment of the economic infrastructure—market patterns of investment, production, advertising, product distribution, the offering of services and so forth, and for the economic forms that human personhood, marriage, and family take in such human cultures. His analysis amounts to a moral condemnation of cap-

italism as a “way of life” (Michael Novak’s fine phrase). It thus stands as a moral indictment of involvement in the culture at any level. As a material utilitarian, Singer, of course, can bear this moral burden. Since consumer capitalism creates the most material good for the most people, and no better alternative exists, to eliminate consumer capitalism would itself be immoral. Like Marx, Singer can endure the oppression, exploitation, destruction, and killing that he believes is *inherent* in capitalism for the same reason he endures the costs involved in systematic abortion, euthanasia, and infanticide. They are the costs of doing “good” as best we can. So instead of removing capitalism, he urges societies to reduce consumption of non-necessities by one third (which may amount to the same thing), and then to distribute the discretionary wealth (which he imagines is “left over”) to the world’s poor.

But—and here is my point—on Singer’s moral analysis of capitalism, the Christian cannot bear this burden. They (we) cannot plausibly accept his judgment of routine consumption as vicious evil, as oppressive, exploitative, and murderous, on the one hand, and remain nevertheless immersed in a veritable economic culture of such





Art: Getty Images

morally vicious habits, on the other. On his analysis, a model program of “simpler living” might as well be called “comparatively less oppressing,” or “less extreme exploiting,” or just plain “killing fewer poor people.” The sad truth, however, is that Christian advocates of “simpler living” typically do accept one version or another of Singer’s moral analysis without seeming to grasp what is implied by doing so. In the process, alas, they give a Christian “prophetic” form to his seductive, and destructive, voice of condemnation against entire populations of good and decent people. They are led to think, perforce, that the judgments of Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah are aimed at them (for eating at restaurants, or working in various businesses, for having nice homes, or cars, and so forth) right along with the likes of Imel-

da Marcos, Saddam Hussein, or the executive culprits at Enron.

However, for Christians who are convinced—for good reasons—that the church has a strong role to play *within* cultures of consumer capitalism, this implication alone should be enough to expose Singer’s judgment as seriously anti-Christian in this area, too. If indeed we have learned, especially in the light of *Rerum Novarum* and its successors, how to bring human value to the “new things” of labor, capital, and entrepreneurial enterprise, there must be a way to humanize existence in consumer capitalism—even as we respect the new nearness of our Global Neighbor, and seek to make him our Friend. Obviously, my last points along this line must be left to stand as suggestive, and not as anything like complete proposals.

“Human Particularity” and a “Multiplicity of Goods”

In order to find an answer, we must at least get on the right track. I believe that two interlocking Christian notions help us to do so, especially in the light of certain comments in *Deus Caritas Est*. One of the notions I call “human particularity,” the other a “multiplicity of goods.”

By “human particularity” I refer to the simple biblical truth that God respects and even blesses our natural limitations as

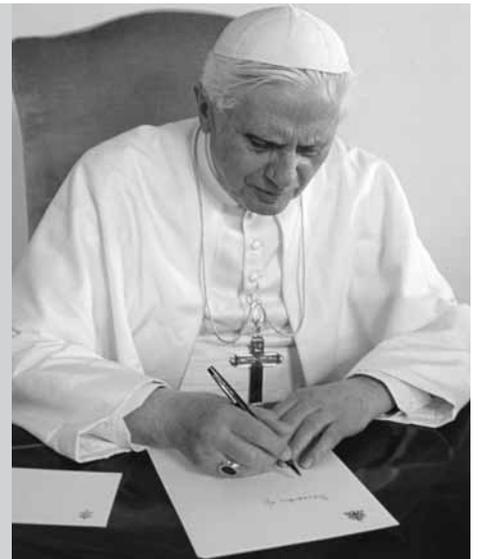
creatures. He does not call us to be “gods,” or even “messiahs.” In a different context (on the seductions of partisan ideology) Benedict XVI teaches similarly: “It is God who governs the world, not we.” God calls men and women into new forms of their natural “particularity,” and achieves “universality” in and through them, not despite them. Furthermore, if it is true, as Benedict XVI writes (also in a different context), that love is not merely about meeting needs, but is “a sharing of my very self” and that “I must be personally present in my gift,” then perhaps this recasting of Augustine’s words is also true: What we *know* best we can *love* best. Stated in this way, one makes appeal to something like the well-known Catholic principle of subsidiarity, applying it freshly, though, to the complex matter of personal Christian *vocation*. We should take seriously the likelihood that God *calls* us to be and to serve precisely where we are.

This suggestion leads to yet a second one, that there exists a metaphysical “multiplicity of goods.” There are, of course, material goods, but not only those. We cannot really *live* by bread alone. The haunting stare of our Global Neighbor makes it very hard not to ignore or to downplay the human (and even moral) importance of other goods. But neither we, nor our Global Neighbor, will ever really live without them. Besides spiritual goods, we must

Pope Benedict XVI on charitable service:

There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord’s hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we.

—From *Deus Caritas Est*



re-affirm the human importance of intellectual goods and aesthetic goods, too, and with them the multiplicity of *loves* they validate. There exist many valid loves in and through which to mediate divine and human love for our neighbors.

So our question is now sharper, at least. If called into the “particularity” involved in the goodness of one love or another (as a company CEO, say, or manager, employee, butcher, baker, candlestick maker, violinist, chemist, meat packer, writer of fiction, artist, housewife, househusband, fashion designer, film maker, or farmer), how do I also extend love to my Global Neighbor from afar? But to formulate the question this way is already to resist the temptation of self-contempt (in this case an escapist’s rebellion against the call of God—for we are able to hate best what we know best, too). It is also to have *framed* an answer yet to come. For if formulated in these terms, none of us can know in advance the form that such distant love between persons may take. In seeking, prayer and faith, however, we may trust that God knows, and that (also presuming prayer and faith) God and time will tell. And we may trust that God will do so in *love*—for our Global Neighbor, of course, but also for us, in keeping with *who* and *where* we are.

John R. Schneider is a professor of religion at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



A begger in Sierra Leone

Photo: © Peter Williams / WCC

I’ve seen advertisements for Acton University. Is this conference going to replace the Toward a Free and Virtuous Society conferences?

For fifteen years, the Acton Institute has been reaching out to religious leaders, students, scholars, and business people in highly focused events in the United States and abroad. Now, Acton University will bring all of these groups together in a single “main event” to learn together and share experiences from all over the world.

Acton University reaches a large and diverse audience and will be offered to the general public. With more than forty courses in philosophy, theology, economics, business, and effective compassion, the university allows participants to design their own conference experience, availing themselves of the knowledge of some of the leading experts in these fields.

Acton is excited about this new endeavor. Still, the university does not change our commitments to our other popular events, most notably the Toward a Free and Virtuous Society (FAVS) conferences. One of the many strengths of the FAVS conferences is the intimacy the smaller gathering affords. The limited size of these gatherings—twenty or twenty-five students at a time—allows Acton faculty to address a wide range of specific concerns, both in and out of the classroom, while at the same time to invest personally in each student. FAVS is a highly targeted and effective means of connecting with seminarians and future religious leaders.

What FAVS and the university have in common is the interpersonal interaction among the participants. By engaging one another in the marketplace of ideas, conference and university participants are able not only to further their own education in matters of great importance, but also to connect with allies toward the building of a free and virtuous society. With Acton University in particular, we are able to reach a broader and more diversified network of teachers, preachers, students, business and nonprofit leaders, and scholars.

To register for Acton University, please visit www.acton.org/ActonU.

Kris Mauren
Executive Director

“The Acton Institute provides the world’s foremost training in the theology and philosophy of the free-market model. Participants gain a genuine appreciation for the human capacity to innovate, produce, and provide.”

Michael Lee, adjunct professor of finance, Johns Hopkins University.





I, T-Shirt: Lessons from the Cotton Industry

by Adam Mills

I remember being a teenager, proudly lacing up a new pair of Nikes as a news story blared on the television. The story reported on the poor children in Asia who crafted my new fashion statement in cruel conditions for mere pennies a day. I won't lie; it stole the luster for me. I was unaware then that there was more to the story than simply poor children in a sweatshop and fancy me in my Nikes. Now that I am older, I recognize that trade and globalization—issues so vital to the extension of human rights—are rarely presented evenhandedly in the media. This is why Dr. Pietra Rivoli's *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy* is so refreshing. Detailing the life cycle of a t-shirt, Rivoli approaches the politics of world trade on a personal—not an ideological—level. Along the way she introduces us to the cotton farmer in Texas, the factory worker in China, and the West African who markets second-hand clothing to his countrymen. With this story-like approach to the global economy, much can be learned about the reality of and myths about our shrinking economic world.

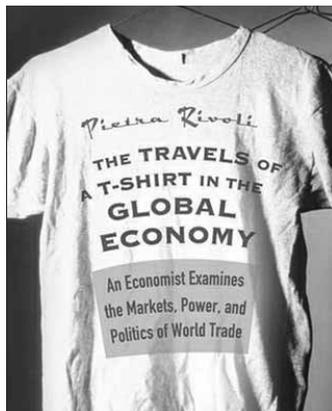
As she tells the story of Nelson and Ruth Reinsch, cotton farmers in Symer, Texas, Rivoli explains how for the last 200 years, the United States has managed to be the world leader in cotton production—no small feat. This accomplishment is the result of a strange marriage: entrepreneurial farmers with superior technology, and subsidies. While critics of the American cotton industry often decry U.S. success in

the cotton industry as purely the result of subsidies, the fact remains that a large part of this success can be attributed to the creativity of the U.S. farmer—more efficient harvest methods, better quality crop production, etc. Nonetheless, the industry has benefited from the combination of slave labor (early on) and heavy government subsidies (more recently) that have protected U.S. cotton producers from dealing with an uncertain labor market.

This odd weave in the cotton industry between entrepreneurialism and protectionist policies dispels some of the notions about exactly how free some markets are. But Rivoli also dispels common misconceptions about factories in developing countries. Leaving the cotton fields of Texas for the factories of China, Rivoli does not find the Dickensonian sweatshop nightmare often portrayed by enemies of globalization. Cotton Mill Shanghai Number 36 certainly does not offer the nicest of working conditions, but it does offer op-

portunity, something most workers in these places did not have previously. Here, many of the factory workers are young rural women with no ability to escape the poverty of subsistence farming. They are hardworking—twelve-hour shifts—and “docile”—content to stay in factory dormitories. These qualities make them attractive to the labor market, but these workers accept their hardships now in order to have the power to make more of their own choices later. For example, with the wages that Tao Yong Fang has made, she has been able to refuse an arranged marriage and, out of her own wages, return the dowry paid for her. In many ways, the sweatshop is offering these women a means of seizing dignity through increased economic freedom.

Rivoli's book clarifies many clumsy generalizations. She explains that some free economies are not as free as we think—that is, they preach freedom but enact a measure of protectionism—and that some



The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy

by Pietra Rivoli

John Wiley and Sons, Inc

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Double-Edged Sword: *The Power of the Word*



Photo: Getty Images

“oppressed” economies are not as oppressed as we think—that is, low wages by American standards are high wages by Chinese standards. But Rivoli does not conclude from her travels that a lack of purity in the current free market somehow discredits the idea of free markets. Rivoli ends her journey in the “freest” free market to which her t-shirt has yet been exposed: the West African open-air markets of *mitumba*, or American second hand clothing. Trans-Americas Trading Company, one of a handful of U.S. businesses that maximize the profit and utility of textiles, purchases unwanted clothing donated to charities like the Salvation Army. Enormous bales of secondhand clothing are then shipped to ports in Tanzania where the bales are unloaded and moved unopened to warehouses. Here, groups of street vendors and business owners gather to dicker over the prices of the clothing, their bidding guided by their own economic know-how and knowledge of their consumer. Later, in the open-air market, prices are agreed upon in a direct exchange between entrepreneur and consumer. Some Westerners may label this practice—marketing American second-hand goods in Third World countries—demeaning to the dignity of impoverished Africans. However, as Rivoli points out, the consumer on the street would say they find the real indignity not in wearing America’s castoffs, but in wearing nothing at all.

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Deuteronomy 8:3

“He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you manna, a food unknown to you and your fathers, in order to show you that not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord.” Deuteronomy 8:3

It was never easy to be God’s chosen people. As some have noted, God singled out Israel from among the nations to beat into their heads certain truths about himself so these truths would not be lost to the world; for this the world is immeasurably in debt. One specific lesson God relayed through his people to the world is recounted in the passage above.

As Moses led his people through the desert, God allowed them hunger to teach a lesson: You are more than your stomach. For a group of people lost in the desert, hungry and grumpy at the very least, this may have seemed like sadistic timing for such a lesson.

Those whose bellies
we feed are more than
their stomachs—they
have souls that need to
be fed as well ...

But it was perfect timing. In the form of manna, God provided—but just enough. Just enough to force the Jews daily to turn to God for sustenance. And in their daily act of supplication, the Jews were to learn that physical sustenance is but one form of sustenance for the human person—a very important truth.

It is not uncommon to speak of “spiritual nourishment,” but how often do we unpack this metaphor and find its true significance? Nourishment, in the physical sense, is not simply something that fuels us; it is something absolutely necessary for our survival. How many of us view our spiritual nourishment in the same way? Don’t we tend to think of “being fed spiritually” merely in terms of “satisfaction” instead of as an absolute necessity for survival?

This idea has great consequence in our own lives, but the idea has implications for our acts of charity as well. Those whose bellies we feed are more than their stomachs—they have souls that need to be fed as well, and not just with chicken soup. In addition to needing actual bread, the needy need the Bread of Life, Christ, the Incarnation of Love. In fact, not only do they need it—they crave it.

And so we are called to move alongside his apostles among the hungry crowds with baskets of this bread, with hearts overflowing with the love of the Father. Yes, we are called to be prudent and responsible in our charity—Christ did, after all, make sure the apostles gathered up all the extra bread afterward—but we are called to deliver in abundance the love for which the world is so malnourished.



For I Was Hungry and You Fed Me: Ag-biotech and Hunger

by Piero Morandini

To well-fed (sometimes overfed) people in Western countries, it is certainly odd to think of food as a life-saving medicine. But for those suffering from chronic hunger and malnutrition, the idea is a reality. It is repeated over and over again that the amount of food produced in the world is enough to feed all the hungry people in the world; hence, the solution to hunger is not to increase production but to improve distribution of what is already being produced. As sensible this statement might seem, it is of no help to the hungry.

Large amounts of food are indeed produced in the West, but this is mainly used to feed animals that eventually become food themselves. Granted, the conversion is quite inefficient, requiring ten kilos of feed (mostly maize and soy) to produce one kilo of meat. In principle, it might make sense to stop feeding the animals and use the maize and soy to feed the hungry. But for such a thing to happen, it would first be necessary to convince all meat-eaters to reduce their food consumption. Secondly, all the maize and soy producers would have to donate their product—since they are not making a profit—and ship it where it is needed. And thirdly, the handlers would have to effectively deliver the food to the needy—usually a daunting task—and to do so without destroying the local agriculture and trade market. In essence, those who advocate redistribution rather than better production methods are not interested in feeding the hungry in a sustainable fashion; they are actually in-

terested in institutionalizing perpetual alms for the hungry.

For those with the gift of plenty, there are, of course, situations where alms are not only good but morally imperative. Alms, however, cannot be the rule. Rather, it is important that every country tries to produce enough food or other goods to trade for food. We do no one a favor if we make them dependent on us for their survival.

So to suggest that the redistribution of existent food is the solution to the tragedy of hunger is to shift the demand of a solution to others, thereby implying someone else is at fault for 850 million hungry people. But unfortunately these “others” are not going to change their habits to satisfy the needs of the poor. Western consumers are probably not going to eat less meat, nor are farmers going to donate their harvest, nor are traders going to pay for the shipping, nor are handlers going to redistribute it carefully enough. If all these prerequisites could be achieved simultaneously, the strategy could be effective—the hungry could be fed. I could even commend it and start, as a consumer, to pursue it. But nevertheless, I am quite skeptical about the chances of success. Many lives are at stake here—those of children in particular—so it is wise to look for strategies that enable the poor and hungry to meet their own needs by their own efforts. Agricultural biotechnology can help to achieve this by making crop production more efficient.

One way ag-biotechnology can help to

feed the hungry is by addressing the problem of pests. Around 30 percent of harvested food is lost to pests: viruses, bacteria, fungi, insects, and other animals destroy it before it reaches the mouths of the hungry. Any effort to avoid these losses *automatically makes more food available*, without the need of increasing production. This can be achieved by developing crop plants that produce toxins specific to major pests but essentially non-toxic to humans. For instance, so-called Bt maize has one gene, normally present in a bacterium called *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt), which drives the production of protein effective against

“We do no one a favor if we make them dependent on us for their survival.”

some insect pests (technically speaking it is said that the gene is “expressed”). The protein is, however, much less toxic than table salt to animals—and remember that we ingest several grams of table salt per day. A similar approach is the development of transgenic crops producing tiny amounts of a protein, avidin, otherwise absent in crops. Avidin binds biotin, a vitamin, with great strength. Humans and animals are used to ingesting avidin because it is normally present in eggs. Avidin is harmless to humans and animals, being destroyed in the gut. Avidin is toxic to some insects, however, because they are not able to

For I Was Hungry and You Fed Me



destroy avidin, preventing the insect from getting an adequate supply of biotin.

Production can also be increased by creating virus resistant plants (e.g. papaya). These are made by inserting a viral gene that gives rise to a protein tampering with normal virus replication or propagation: In effect the plant is vaccinated against the virus. The gene and the protein in question are normally present at a billion copies in infected plants, and humans have eaten these infected plants without harm for thousands of years. It is silly to worry about the minuscule quantity of viral DNA and protein in transgenic plants, while continuing to swallow the same DNA and protein in far larger amounts from “natural” infected plants.

A promising strategy is the breeding of plant varieties resistant to biotic (e.g. bacterial and fungal pathogens) as well as abiotic stresses (e.g.: heat, frost, drought). As we better understand how pathogens elude cell surveillance systems or how some plants resist to frost, we should be more able to breed resistant varieties.

Ag-biotechnology can help to address another problem: weeds. Weeds are nice for students of biodiversity, but are more than a nuisance to farmers: they are a yield

drag. Because weeds compete for nutrients, water, and sunlight, allowing too many weeds means losing part of the harvest (up to 80 percent when left growing uncontrolled). Therefore, weeds must be controlled, and the development of herbicide-tolerant crops can help farmers to do the job.

In addition to addressing problems of quantity—loss of crops to pests or weeds—plant biotechnology can also help tackle the problem of quality. For example, many people in the world have poor diets, diets lacking the essential vitamins, proteins, carbohydrates, or fats necessary for a healthy life. Many people, especially children in Asia for instance, do not receive enough vitamin A and many women do not get enough iron. Therefore, producing food crops where the quantity of these components are increased by metabolic engineering is a major field of research:

“...ag-biotech has a great potential for relieving poor people and for fighting malnutrition. But science is not a magic bullet...”

Rice with more vitamin A or iron has been developed and is a great hope for malnourished people whose food staple is rice.

A striking bonus about ag-biotech is that the technology is built “in the seed.” To reap the benefits of the technology, one needs nothing more, in most cases, than the engineered seed. Obviously, fertilizers or hybrid seeds can further improve yields, but such things are not essential for the technology to work (with the exception of herbicide tolerant crops, where an addi-

tional input, the herbicide, is needed).

The benefits of ag-biotechnology include more than just more and better crops. A farmer’s agricultural practices are also affected advantageously and without requiring special training or education. Simplified practices—that is, more efficient crops—mean reduced labor requirements. Increases in yields or reductions in costs (e.g. less pesticides) mean higher profits. So the poor farmer may (and actually does) gain at least as much as a wealthy farmer from the technology.

Ag-biotech will allow greater food availability where it is most needed with limited or no additional input than a bag of seeds. By increasing crop production efficiency and quality, ag-biotech has a great potential for relieving poor people and for fighting malnutrition. But science is not a magic bullet and will not do these things automatically. Many changes are still required in the social structure and education system of poor nations, as well as in the hearts of people living in areas of perennial conflict. Science will not give human life meaning nor will it extinguish the longing of the human heart for its fulfillment: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee, O Lord,” said St. Augustine. And we will not use the potential of science automatically for the good, because science multiplies the power of human will: it can reduce (or increase) human suffering. Simple fertilizers can boost crop production or they can be turned into explosives. The decision to turn from farming to terrorism lies, first of all, with the farmer. And the science of agricultural biotechnology can help to reduce human suffering, if we so will to use it.

Piero Morandini is a biologist at the University of Milan.



Why do you think hunger still exists in parts of the world, especially in Africa?

When a tsunami comes up, you'll see it because it'll be on television and the coverage will be constant. And when a Hurricane Katrina comes up, you'll see it. But we have Hurricane Katrinas and tsunamis almost every day. Twenty-five thousand people will die today. And they're dying from hunger. They're dying from disease that's related to hunger. That's incredible. So number one, unless it's on television, [people] don't see it. Number two, a lot of people are not educated to the fact that there are about 850 million people right now who are hungry. I find that when we show them that, people respond. Americans are really good about responding when they are educated about the fact that [the hungry] are there. There is also a segment in the society that resents the poor. They don't want to be poor. They don't want to know about the poor, and they want to get as far away from the poor as they can. These people might have been poor sometimes. There's also the fact that the political will is not there yet. It's not a high enough priority among our leaders. Another reason is that the spiritual will is not there. This issue really should be solved and managed and helped by the spirit, by the people of faith in the world, and there are not enough people of faith working on this.

Now part of the U.S. Mission to the United Nation Agencies here in Rome is a mission to ensure proper stewardship of American resources provided to benefit the poor and the hungry. What does this stewardship look like? Could you explain a

little bit what we mean by stewardship?

In the last five years, the United States has given \$6 billion to the World Food Program in food and water or food and money. That's a lot of money. As a matter of fact, that represents about 50 percent of everything that goes to the World Food Program. So to be a proper steward of that money is to travel and see where it goes, whether it's Zimbabwe, or North Korea, or wherever we are feeding and helping people. To be a proper steward of the money and the resources that are coming from the United States [is] to watch it, to monitor it, to understand it, to make sure that it gets to the people.

Do you find that there's a lot of room for improvement when it comes to the operational side of things such as administrative costs?

We watch our food and money that goes through the World Food Program. Normally it goes through them to NGOs. It'll go to the Catholic Relief Services or CARE or the World Vision or Save Children of the World. They contract with them. Almost the same way we do it through USAID. We contract with NGOs. We don't believe in giving our food and money to the governments anymore because we have a government problem. We've learned in the past that our money, our food, and everything gets stolen. It never gets to the people. So we don't give it to the governments. We try to give it to the NGOs or to non-partisan groups. We have accountants. We have monitors. We watch it. This surprises people when I tell them. We lose very little of our food and money. It sur-

prises people when I tell them that we do a pretty good job of it. We've made mistakes in the past, and we have corrected them. But governments are a big, big issue. Corruption is a big issue. And we won't give it to that government. We don't trust them.

Would you be able to highlight both some particular successes of the U.N. Food Programs and also specific areas where the work can be improved?

I remember when I first came here three years ago there was a major drought in Southern Africa. We bought a lot of food. We moved it down to Southern Africa because we knew that there was going to be a major drought. And we averted major famine and hunger down there. We saved lots of lives because we were on top of it. This was three years ago, but there are successes all the time. The tsunami was a great success: we were in there feeding twenty-four hours after the problem. We have lots of successes, even on a daily basis, but you never hear about it. These are the kinds of things that don't draw the press. What draws the press is fighting, killing, wars, destruction, riots, corruption. But feeding 100,000 people today—if I were to tell CNN, it most likely won't make it into their news. But it's part of every day. And to the other question: One of the problems is that we are barely keeping our head above water, not only financially, but because there are so many hungry people in the world today. There are always about forty crises going on in the world. And when you also add the tsunamis, the Katrinas, the earthquake in Pakistan, you put them all together on top of the forty crises—we're

"This issue [hunger] really should be solved and managed and helped ... by the people of faith in the world. And there are not enough people of faith working on this."

“I’m a big believer in faith-based organizations. These people are amazing. They’re not there to work for the dollar ... They’re there because they care. They sustain themselves through their faith. They last longer. ”

barely keeping our head above water. Out of the 850 million people who are hungry in the world right now, we’re only getting at about 10 percent.

In your role as Ambassador here, can you highlight some of things that private charities are particularly good at fighting? And how do you find that these private charities coexistent with governmental programs?

They’re particularly good at being nonpartisan, nonpolitical. They have low overheads and are trustworthy. We like to use them both in the United States and in the U.N. system. They are a must. They’re most important. They do invaluable work. We couldn’t do it without them. We not only contract with these NGOs through USAID, but we contract with them through the World Food Program. And if we didn’t have them, a lot of stuff wouldn’t be going out. They’re important to us.

Do you find that religious charities tend to bring something unique to work in this field?

I’m a big believer in faith-based organizations. These people are amazing. They’re not there to work for the dollar. They’re not there because they’re getting big salaries. They’re there because they care. They sustain themselves through their faith. They last longer. They can continue to do it much longer, and the ones I’ve dealt with are very trustworthy.

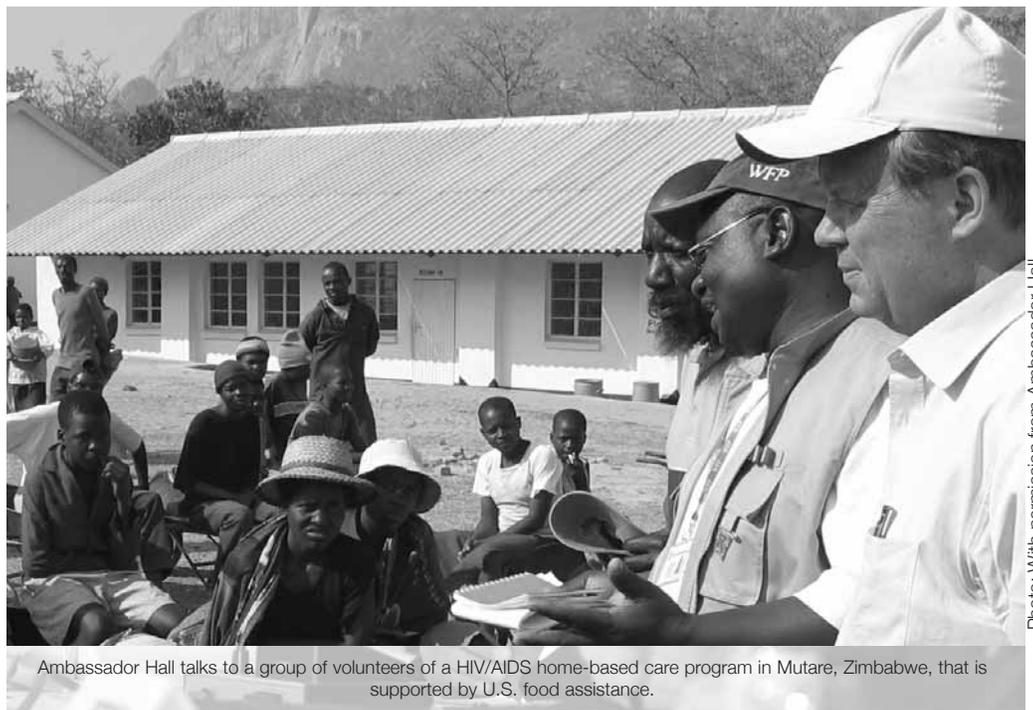
How do you think that agricultural subsidies in the developed, as well the developing world, affect the hunger problem?

Well first off, I would hope that we could get rid of our subsidies. They hurt the poor farmers of the world in a very substantial way. These farmers can’t trade with many of the developed nations because of subsidies, because of restrictions. That doesn’t necessarily mean if we lifted everything tomorrow all these farmers would be much better off, because who is to say that the people in the developed nations would buy the produce? It might not be as superior as some of the stuff we have in our own countries. But over a number of years with help, teaching, research, and scientific breakthrough, I think the livelihood of these people would not only be sustained but they could live a much better life. So it is important that we get rid of these subsidies and these restrictions on trade for agriculture products.

Can biotechnology help alleviate hunger?

Biotech food is important because it allows us to use less pesticides, and it’s a very good product. In America, we eat it everyday. But we have leaders of countries in Africa who say biotech food is poison—absolutely the

most ridiculous statement I’ve ever heard. Because if you look at the science of it, you look at the results of it, biotech food has a future. It can feed millions of people. It can help people in Africa, all over the world. It’s not the sole answer to hunger. It’s part of the answer. It’s more of a trade issue for the Europeans. They tell a lot of the Africans that if you take biotech food from America, we’re not going to trade with you. So number one, what they’re saying is very politically motivated. Number two, I look at it as a moral problem. We have lots of good foods that are genetically modified; our maize and our soybeans feed millions of people every year. Nobody has ever gotten sick off of them. You use less pesticides [with biotech food]. It’s a superior product in many ways. And it’s a constant source of irritation when you know that this food is basically good and wholesome, and we can get it to people very quickly, and yet people say it’s poison. It’s a real political issue, but I also look at it as a moral issue. We’ve had leaders in Africa that have refused our food because it’s a biotech food, and their people have starved to death. I have felt that dictators and leaders who have food and refuse to give it to their people violate one of the most basic human rights. So I look at it very much as a moral issue.



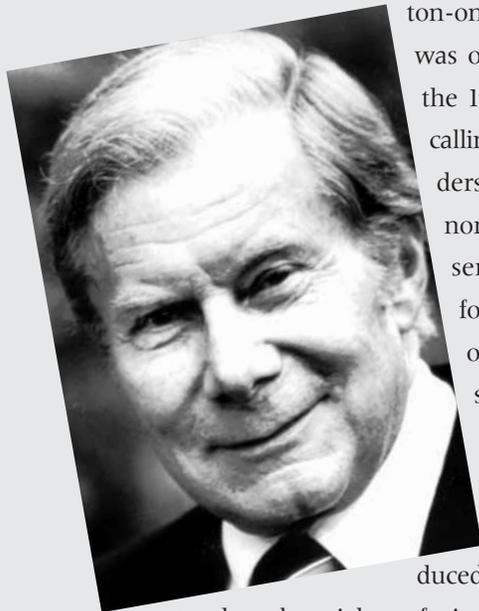
Ambassador Hall talks to a group of volunteers of a HIV/AIDS home-based care program in Mutare, Zimbabwe, that is supported by U.S. food assistance.

Photo: With permission from Ambassador Hall

Edmund A. Opitz [1914–2006]

God has laid down rules for us in every walk of life, including the proper organization of our economic affairs. The free economy is a system of voluntary arrangements that brings together people who have work skills, who use tools and machinery to increase their output, thus producing the incredible abundance of goods and services we enjoy as consumers. Economics ... is in the realm of means, but it supplies the essential means for enriching our lives in the realms of the mind and spirit; as well as in music, art, and literature.

The Rev. Edmund A. Opitz was a Congregationalist minister who for decades championed the cause of a free society and the need to anchor that society in a transcendent morality. A man of wide reading and high culture, Opitz was for many years on the staff of the Foundation for Economic Education in Irvington-on-Hudson, New York. He was one of the few voices in the 1950s through the 1990s calling for an integrated understanding between economic liberty and religious sensibility. He was the founder and coordinator of the Remnant, a fellowship of conservative and libertarian ministers.



A significant portion of Opitz's work was produced in the midst of the cultural and social confusion of the 1960s, which would eventually lead to the production of his erudite book outlining both the reasons and the importance of such an integration in *Religion and Capitalism: Allies, not Enemies*. Although

“Men must be free in society because each person has a destiny beyond society which he can work out only under the conditions of liberty.”

theologized forms of Marxism were only just coming into vogue, Opitz was able to spot the trajectory of such philosophical seeds in their nascent form, and while it would be excessive to say that the writing of Opitz caused the shift in religious thinking away from socialist paradigms, it would not be inaccurate to say that the moral premises and arguments he employed are at the root of such shifts. Presently, the manifest economic and moral failure of economic collectivism is laid bare for all to see. But when Opitz first began making his case for the free society most were skeptical.

Despite the demise of Real Socialism—practiced socialism—there remain significant numbers of people who still fail to see how a free economic order in a free society can be consistent with the transcendent ends of religion and morality. Opitz confronted the confusion of a purely spiritualized religion when he argued that moral sense can and must be made of the physical world, which was fashioned by a benevolent God, who then situated the human family within the exigencies of scarcity—and thus the law of supply and demand. Never to be mistaken for an “economic fundamentalist,” much less a theocrat of any variety, Opitz was always careful to note that Christianity *qua* Christianity offered no specific economic model any more than economics *qua* economics has any specific moral model to proffer—which is precisely why they both need each other.

A longer version of this article originally appeared on National Review Online.



The Virtues of Development

Imagine yourself in the fifteenth century, at a university in Spain or Italy, a time of increasing scientific discovery, technical innovation, economic development, rising prosperity, and

increasing intellectual awareness of the meaning of economic science. You are involved in the great intellectual project of discovering the laws of economics and applying these laws to the world. You have discovered what goes into the creation of a price, what causes inflation, how trade works, and why innovations come to be available to all. You begin to see a glimmer of a great hope: a future without mass deprivation, disease, persistent infant death, and human suffering.

Now jump forward more than 500 years and observe: The world population has exploded in size but instead of suffering you see that the masses live better than all the kings of old. There is food, medicine, and clothing available for the world, and rates of development are remarkable. Markets are global, technology is advancing at a break-neck speed, people from all over can communicate and cooperate instantly, and the productive efforts of nearly the whole human population are being employed to the betterment of the whole human family.

Might you think that those scientific discoveries 500 years earlier were spectacularly successful? Most certainly. To see the human population flourish and prosper is a grand and glorious thing, and a step toward realizing God's will for the world.

And yet: This very prosperity has given rise to some very strange political impulses in our time. There are those who, instead of rejoicing in the increased prosperity, see nothing but evil. They see the spread of technology as imperialism. They denounce global integration as wicked and capitalism as corrupting. They see vast supermarkets filled with food for all at low prices and they say it is a disgrace.

Only a few decades ago, we saw a political left that celebrated wealth for all and sought redistribution precisely so that people

would no longer experience radical material deprivation. Now that it is increasingly clear that the means toward that end is markets and freedom—the democratization of the means of production, not forced redistribution, it seems that the left is more attached to its statist means than its material ends.

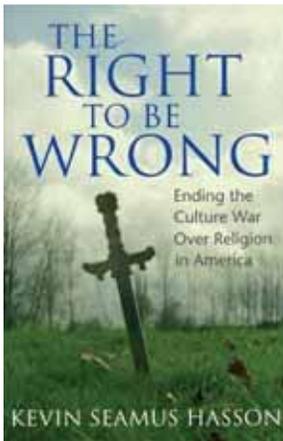
Others are driven by a more legitimate, if misguided, view that wealth necessarily corrupts the soul. Certainly wealth can corrupt. But so can poverty, or nearly anything else if misused. Wealth without morality leads to vice and moral corruption. So the answer is not an imposed poverty, but evangelism and conversion. This is why entrepreneurs and advocates of market freedom have a special obligation to emphasize the responsible use of prosperity, leisure, and charity.

Still others become very upset that wealth is not shared equally by all. This is a dangerous conviction because it can only lead to the celebration of expropriation. We need to realize that material equality should not be a policy goal; what we should seek

“We need to realize that material equality should not be a policy goal; what we should seek is the universal increase in material well-being, even when its benefits are inequitably distributed.”

is the universal increase in material well-being, even when its benefits are inequitably distributed. All of human experience and study suggests that there is only one means for bringing about this ideal: the market economy within a strong juridical framework that protects the right to property and life.

The Acton Institute has long undertaken to translate into English the writings of the first economic scientists of the late middle ages. In a time of great ambivalence toward the spreading of prosperity, we need to be reminded that to seek the well-being of all, defined in both spiritual and material terms, is a goal consistent with moral and scientific thinking.



The Right To Be Wrong: Ending the Culture War Over Religion in America

By Kevin Seamus Hasson • Encounter Books, San Francisco, 2005

176 pp. • \$25.95

Review by William Perales

Mary Dyer was regarded as a “very proper and comely young woman”—that is, before she broke the law and was hanged. Her crime: being a Quaker in Massachusetts Bay Colony. Laws against this were on the books and notice had been given. Everything was legal. Was it moral?

Three hundred years later, Zach, a first-grade student, was excited to learn that his teacher was going to let him read in front of the class for the first time. She added a personal touch to the experience by allowing him to read from his favorite book, which Zach brought the next day: the *Beginner's Bible*. The teacher told him he could not read it in front of the class and would have to read it to her in private. Is this right?

These are just two of the many anecdotes Kevin Seamus Hasson relates in *The Right To Be Wrong: Ending the Culture War Over Religion in America*, his narrative account of the struggle over religious liberty. The work explains how certain events and laws helped to shape the codification of religious liberty in the United States—for good and for bad.

Every good story has a good villain. This one has two: Hasson calls them the Pilgrims and the Park Rangers. With a detailed analysis of the historical record, Hasson shows how the actual Pilgrims were not, in fact, searching for religious freedom per se but rather were searching for a land to institute their own religious practices. As Hasson shows, these Pilgrims soon attempted to outlaw any dissenters from the Pilgrim vision of the truth where conscientious objectors had no rights. The Pilgrims are still around today and still up to their old games: believing they have the one true religion, they want it declared the official one—all others should be driven from the public square. Fortunately, these sort are not as numerous (nor as dangerous) as they once were. Those qualities belong to the other set of villains.

The Park Rangers, says Hasson, are “the well-intentioned but bumbling bureaucrats ... For the Park Rangers, freedom requires driving away other people’s truths, no matter how harmless.” Park Rangers think their position respects all differing viewpoints, that their “tolerance” makes it safe and comfortable for minority views to get a seat at the American altar of religious pluralism. All views, however, must remain private. Park Rangers insist that “the price of freedom for everyone is that no one can be allowed to publicly claim that anything transcendent is absolutely true.” These self-appointed guardians of the public trust are in full force today as seen by the attempts to censor individual religious expression throughout the land. A reading of recent legal discussions and cases confirms this.

Having shown how both Pilgrims and Park Rangers are extremists, Hasson then develops the philosophical foundation to solve the conflict. Reflecting upon our common and universal human experiences, Hasson roots his solution in a truth claim about who we are: We are persons who “share a thirst for the true and the good, and a conscience that drives our quest to find them and then insists that we embrace and express publicly what we believe we’ve found.” This truth about us reveals that we are “born to seek freely the truth about God.” Hasson stresses the “freely” part; the government should as well.

The story of America begins with the Pilgrims, and since then has unfolded as a drama with one overriding theme: the desire for freedom. Though at times she has fallen short of her ideals, America has grown to be a place where religious freedom has found a home. The final act has yet to be played out, but freedom is safe as long as we all recognize that no matter how right we think we are, our neighbor still has the right to be wrong.

William Perales is a graduate student in philosophy at Loyola Marymount University and winner of the 2004 Lord Acton Essay Contest.