

Religion & Liberty

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



Beyond the apocalypse: Getting serious about climate and conservation

Luther's apple tree

China exports its
'social credit' system
to Venezuela

Pope Francis ties
foreign aid to
corruption

EDITOR'S NOTE

Rev. Ben Johnson MANAGING EDITOR

When 16-year-old Greta Thunberg stood before the UN Climate Action Summit, she “announced a sort of secular apocalypse,” writes Rev. Robert A. Sirico. This issue of *Religion & Liberty* focuses on the siren song of alarmism, and how people of faith should approach the very real environmental debate.

The Acton Institute’s director of communications, John Couretas, contributes the cover story on moving beyond the environmental apocalypse. “Regrettably, too many religious leaders have bought into the apocalyptic hysteria and urgent demands for sweeping, top-down solutions,” he writes.

We are privileged to feature an essay from John A. Baden, the founder of Foundation for Research on Economics and the Environment (FREE), which develops his “trinity” of environmental virtues: responsible liberty, sustainable ecology, and modest prosperity.

Anne Rathbone Bradley examines how economic freedom transforms a growing population into a resource for ecological healing. “More people, rather than fewer, add to human prosperity,” she writes. “What good is a planet with no one in it?”

“The antidote to alarmism” proposes the most important Bible verse for the current environmental dialogue.

The inherently corrupting nature of government-to-government aid has drawn the attention of Pope Francis, as Andrew Vanderput documents in his invaluable essay. Doug Bandow warns that surveillance is an integral part of socialism.

Philip Booth continues his thoughts on national healthcare from the Spring 2019 issue, noting that “Christians should take a special interest” in the topic due to its ethical dimensions.

“In the liberal tradition” remembers the forgotten president, classical scholar, and Christian minister James Garfield, whose rags-to-riches story inspired even Frederick Douglass.

We hope this issue helps dispel the pessimism that obscures the most prosperous era in history.

This issue has been made possible in part thanks to a generous donation from Jeffrey and Cynthia Littmann. Jeffrey and Cynthia Littmann are champions of conservation and the good stewardship of our natural resources as a gift from God.



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COVER STORY

09 Beyond the apocalypse: Getting serious about climate and conservation | John Couretas



ESSAY

03 China exports its ‘social credit’ system to Venezuela

Doug Bandow



ESSAY

07 Luther’s apple tree

John Baden



ESSAY

16 Pope Francis ties foreign aid to corruption

Andrew Vanderput

02 Acton Briefs

- 05 The moral quandary of national healthcare
- 12 President James A. Garfield (1831-1881)
- 13 The antidote to fear
- 15 Earth’s greatest resources: human creativity and economic freedom
- 17 The myth of the young entrepreneur
- 18 Founding a Republic of Letters
- 20 The faith of the secularist
- 22 Renewing the face of the earth

Amazon chief: Liberation theology keeps my people poor

Joseph Sunde

ACTON INSTITUTE

As the recent Synod of Bishops from the Pan-Amazonian region gathered, a local chief voiced his objections to liberation theology. Jonas Marcolino Macuxí, chief of the Macuxi tribe, told the *National Catholic Register* that a “dictatorship” of liberation theologians has kept indigenous people in poverty.

“Beginning in 1980, the tendency has been to see any kind of development in the Amazon – roads, big projects, etc. – as part of this idea that progress is bad,” he explained. “Until the 1980s, the military regime had a positive view of development, but as military rule ended, there was specifically an element that said progress is bad.”

Though the indigenous peoples’ struggle is undeniable, there is a tendency to blame markets and romanticize the very features that compound their suffering. According to Marcolino, many would prefer the comforts and stability that can come from economic modernization, never mind the corresponding social improvements. “These liberation theologians are promoting the idea that the Indians who still live in a primitive way are very happy,” he says. “But that’s not true. It’s false. We are not living in paradise. It’s a very hard life.” The article notes that Marcolino “was baptized Catholic but became Protestant, partly because of the state of the Catholic Church in the region.”

When asked directly if “a free-market economy is the way to overcome this,” Marcolino heartily agreed:

Yes, exactly; we should be allowed to develop our economy, because the region is very rich. All the natural resources are there. But in the Indian reserves, you cannot touch them, and that’s to the detriment of the people who live there. They [those who wish to keep them primitive] have neutralized reason. It’s obvious those things should be explored, but we’re not allowed to do it. We’re not allowed to use our intelligence.

Marcolino’s perspective offers a healthy challenge to the typical myths about the region: social, economic, environmental, and otherwise.

A bait and switch at Peter’s Pence?

Andrew Vanderput

ACTON INSTITUTE

A *Wall Street Journal* article on the Vatican’s main charitable appeal landed a bombshell in the midst of the holiday giving season. The Roman Catholic Church conducts an annual collection known as Peter’s Pence, which is promoted as supporting mercy ministries and serving those most in need. Shockingly, the *Journal* has reported that for at least the last five years “as little as 10%” of the approximately \$55 million raised annually through this popular appeal has actually gone to charitable work. The rest has gone “toward plugging the hole in the Vatican’s own administrative budget.”

The *Journal* goes on to explain that this is permissible. Indeed, the website for Peter’s Pence mentions that the collection “also contributes to the support of the Apostolic See and the activities of the Holy See,” which “consists of the central administration of the Catholic Church and the papal diplomatic network around the world.”

That’s probably news to most people who have donated. People who have given to the collection, at least through the Peter’s Pence website, would rightly be confused and outraged that the vast majority of their money was going to administrative purposes. The preponderance of the language and images used on the site emphasize its charitable dimensions. The website of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also states, “The purpose of the Peter’s Pence Collection is to provide the Holy Father with the financial means to respond to those who are suffering as a result of war, oppression, natural disaster, and disease.”

Administrative costs are necessary to run churches and charitable organizations. The popular charity accountability organization Charity Navigator states that no more than 15 percent of a charity’s revenue going toward administrative costs is acceptable. With 90 percent of its collections used for administrative costs, however, Peter’s Pence falls far short of this ideal.

Given the great disparity between how it is marketed and what the vast majority of the collection is actually used for, Vatican officials have a great deal of explaining to do.

The uneasy conscience of a fair trade fundamentalist

Jordan J. Ballor

ACTON INSTITUTE

In *The Christian Century*, Rev. David Mesenbring, an early advocate of fair trade policies, reveals that he thinks there’s good reason to doubt the efficacy of the movement:

I was an early adopter of fair trade. Prior exposure to rural poverty in Africa had sensitized me to the plight of farmers in the global economy. Searching for a fair trade logo on my purchases of coffee and chocolate made me feel generous – as though I had sacrificed a bit of my economic interest to improve the lives of poor farmers. Convincing an entire congregation to sell fair trade goods during its coffee hour multiplied that generous feeling.

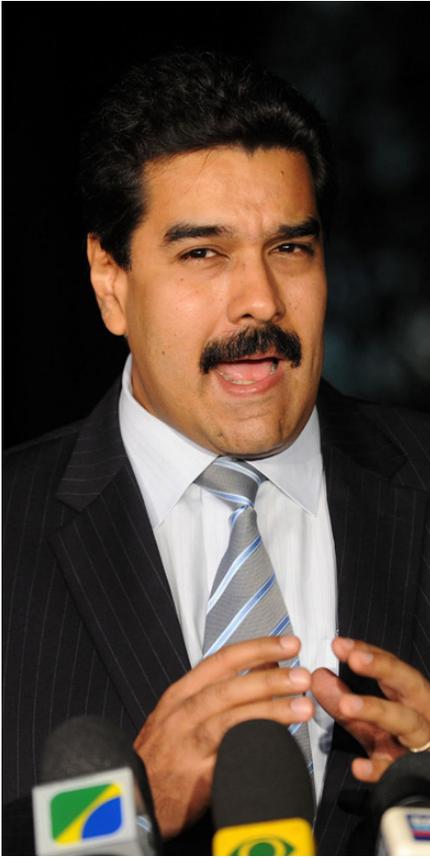
That “generous feeling” is as far as many religious fair trade advocates get. But once Mesenbring moved beyond the vague intentions behind fair trade, questions emerged:

I’d never considered how much fair trade status costs farmers, nor the logistical impossibility of inspecting every small farm. In fact, I’d never given any thought at all to how compliance gets monitored.

Mesenbring notes the complexities of global trade, and concludes:

Today, an ever-evolving international fair trade movement makes it hard to know what standards are being certified by which mark. Worse still, research suggests fair trade isn’t rescuing farmers in the Global South who are struggling to survive the rapacious forces of global markets. In fact, fair trade’s biggest winners might well be the consciences of its consumers, along with retailers and movement promoters.

Mesenbring’s encounter with the economic realities of international trade and religious advocacy is worth considering. His narrative could be read as a realization that global capitalism cannot really be reformed. Or it could be read as what happens when good intentions meet economic realities.



ESSAY

China exports its 'social credit' system to Venezuela

Doug Bandow

The death of Mao Zedong 43 years ago freed the Chinese people from his idiosyncratic brand of repression. The dramatic entry of the People's Republic of China into the international economic system transformed China, lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, and created a new world power.

Contrary to the hopes of many advocates of engagement, economic integration

did not bring political liberalization, though the PRC's control became less than absolute. Carefully calibrated dissent could be expressed on policy, though one could not challenge the Chinese Communist Party's control. Contacts with the West burgeoned.

Then came Xi Jinping. The time he spent in America as a student seemed to fill him more with fear than respect. Since becoming president in 2013, he has consolidated his personal power and strengthened the CCP's control. In effect, he has revived Maoism and totalitarianism, attempting to crush any hint of dissent.

A million or more Muslim Uighurs are in reeducation camps. A national campaign is in full swing to suppress religious faith, with an effort to turn churches into propaganda chambers for the CCP. Internet censorship is tighter; academic exchanges are tougher. Political education is being reinstated for students. Journalists are being tested for their loyalty to the new Red Emperor. The latter pushed the party to dump term limits for the president and broke with precedent in jailing former top officials. Now no one imagines Xi voluntarily yielding power, since he would be an obvious target of retaliation.

Perhaps the creepiest tool of repression is the social credit system. The ultimate aim appears to be a unified system by which the state rates peoples' and businesses' behavior, rewarding and punishing accordingly. The system would essentially establish a "credit" rating for individuals and firms. Be a good citizen and you get financial discounts, better loan terms, and exemption from deposit requirements. Fail to meet the state's criteria and your child can forget getting into a good university. If the government judges you to be socially bankrupt, you can't buy a train ticket, rent a hotel room, or even use a credit card. In the future you might be banned from online dating. Companies could be treated similarly, with disparate treatment in terms of taxation, credit, public procurement, and more. Commerce Ministry Spokesman Gao Feng insisted the CCP's merely aimed "to create a more standardized, fair, transparent, and predictable legal business environment."

Today the social credit process remains incomplete, a mix of national

government blacklists, local government pilot programs, official business regulation, and private rating systems. *Time's* Charlie Campbell describes an "overlapping mishmash of commercial and state-run systems." However, in the future more oppressive control is likely to be exercised by the central government. Already, localities have been targeting religious believers. Extirpating religious faith is high on Beijing's priority list, along with exacting political subservience. Today, Chinese seek to enhance their rating by demonstrating their loyalty to Xi and the CCP. Moreover, noted Campbell, "In one region, neighborhoods have dedicated watchers to record deeds and misdeeds." The social credit system is expected to become the ultimate means of political control.

A number of Chinese companies are involved in making the system work practically. One is the ZTE Corporation, which has worked on a system of "smart cards" using RFID (radio-frequency identification) and QR (Quick Response) codes. Unfortunately, Beijing is profiting both economically and politically by exporting this system.

In recent years, the regime has been promoting what it calls the Beijing Consensus, in opposition to the Washington Consensus. The PRC offers the possibility of economic development alongside political dictatorship. Countries such as Zimbabwe, Burma, and Sudan, under sanction from the West, avidly turned to the PRC. However, the relationship has not been without controversy, since Beijing does little out of charity. For instance, in Burma the military desired to loosen China's tight embrace and allow a measure of democracy to end the West's economic *cordon sanitaire*. In Zambia, China became an election issue and contributed to the government's defeat.

Nevertheless, some dictatorships in the developing world remain willing to sacrifice sovereignty for control. A decade ago, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez sent officials to China to learn about its national ID program. The PRC's system was expected to do much more than identify participants, with plans to monitor and record behavior. Initially, the Chavez government hired a Cuban firm for \$172 million to make millions of ID cards.

A member of Venezuela's delegation, Anthony Daquin, the justice ministry's

top information security adviser, told Reuters, “What we saw in China changed everything.” He recognized the potential threat to liberty, observing that officials “were looking to have citizen control.” When Daquin raised these concerns, he was detained and beaten. After he essentially bought his release from his security agents, he fled abroad.

In succeeding years, nothing much happened. The Caracas regime was spectacularly incompetent and corrupt, and seemed capable of doing little more than wrecking the economy and social order. Chavez’s death in 2013 also created political instability, as the regime desperately sought to maintain power by manipulating the rules and oppressing its opponents.

However, three years ago the 1984 nightmare reemerged, as the government again considered creating its own social credit system. Last year, the Venezuelan government – driven to bankruptcy more by its own socialist follies than U.S. sanctions – hired ZTE Corp. to create a national ID system to protect “national security.” With food scarce, medicine nonexistent, and inflation beyond measure, the Nicolás Maduro regime is spending \$70 million to create a national database and mobile payment system. “A team of ZTE employees is now embedded in a special unit within Cantv, the Venezuelan stat telecommunications company that manages the database,” reported Reuters.

No one believes that the program is innocent. Already the regime distributes heavily subsidized food boxes for its political advantage. Maduro’s cronies, under siege at home and abroad, are almost certainly seeking to monitor Venezuelans and improve the government’s ability to reward and punish them accordingly. The system, reported Reuters, “stores such details as birthdays, family information, employment and income, property owned, medical history, state benefits received, presence on social media, membership of a political party and whether a person voted.” This information is obviously useful for a repressive government and correspondingly dangerous for individuals.

Maduro has been urging Venezuelans to sign up for the ID card to “build the new Venezuela.” Even though his regime

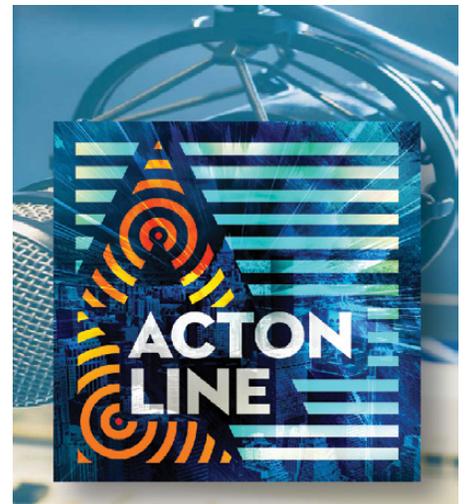
has been doing far more destroying than creating, millions have followed his advice. Of course, the regime has rewarded those who did and punished those who did not. Government employees face special pressure to join; public benefits, including health care and pension payments, require signing up. Opposition legislator Mariela Magallanes told Reuters that “the government knows exactly who is most vulnerable to pressure.” A former minister in the Chavez government, Hector Navarro, called the plan “blackmail,” warning that “Venezuelans with the cards now have more rights than those without.”

Reuters contacted the head of ZTE’s Venezuelan unit, who argued that no laws were being broken and the firm had no control over Caracas’ use of the technology, that the company was not backing the government but simply “developing our market.” This may be true, but it is also irrelevant. ZTE understands how the Maduro regime is likely to abuse the system. And Beijing’s policy is to stand by tyrannical rulers such as Maduro, who publicly thanked the PRC for its assistance. Indeed, at least some of the funding is coming from the Venezuela China Joint Fund, a bilateral program. The “Beijing Consensus” is taking another ugly turn.

There is no simple political answer to the PRC’s return to Maoist totalitarianism. Contra the claims of some, America has few means to forcibly transform other nations politically, especially a great power with nuclear weapons. And having failed in its efforts to oust Maduro, Washington is unable to halt China’s effort to strengthen oppression in Venezuela – or spread such systems elsewhere.

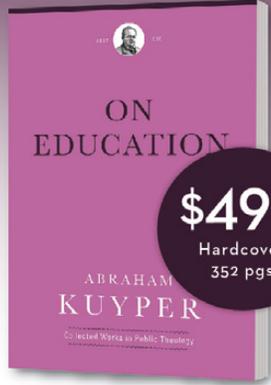
Still, the God-given desire for liberty persists around the world. It is important that Americans never stop supporting human life, freedom, and dignity. Someday, we hope and pray, the victims oppressed by China and its tyrannous allies will receive justice and enjoy a better future.

Doug Bandow is a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute and former Special Assistant to President Ronald Reagan. He is the author of Foreign Follies: America’s New Global Empire. 



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ESSAY

The moral quandary of national healthcare

Philip Booth

Almost all discussions about health policy focus on whether different systems of providing healthcare are more efficient, more equitable, or lead to better health outcomes. These are, of course, important issues. Just like food, shelter, or education, healthcare does possess value in and of itself. But as St. John Henry Newman reminds us in the last chapter of *The Idea of a University*, which focuses on medical education, we should have deeper considerations in mind when judging healthcare systems.

To begin with, Christians should take a special interest in issues related to the provision of healthcare, because so many decisions taken in the medical arena involve ethical judgements. These things are too important to be left only to the state or to those commercial interests that take a purely utilitarian view. For this reason, Christians in the West should consider how they can develop institutions to help recover their traditional role as the major providers of healthcare.

Medical decisions often, if not normally, involve ethical aspects. In the UK, about 50 per cent of all medical care is provided in the last 18 months of life. A great deal of medical care also takes place at the beginning of life – that is, from conception until soon after birth. The socialisation and state monopolisation of medicine can require people to pay for things they find morally repugnant, such as abortion services, invasive fertility treatment, and possibly euthanasia.

In systems such as that of the UK, where there is complete socialisation in a single-payer system and the nationalisation of healthcare providers, there is no possibility of creating a network of practitioners who put a particular ethical perspective at the centre of all they do. The government should not make it difficult for people to choose a healthcare provider that takes a Christian view of the protection of life from conception, or an appropriate view about palliative care near death. By taxing people to pay for healthcare in a state-provided system, all but the very richest are prevented from making ethical choices about their healthcare settings. These kinds of ethical decisions are intrinsic to healthcare, and ethics should not be nationalised away.

In Britain, the one healthcare sector that the state has not taken over is the hospice sector. This is a Christian-inspired movement that cares for people as they approach death. Hospices are widely admired, as they allow people to die with dignity in a way which is consistent with a Christian ethic. This is something that should be the responsibility of Christian institutions and not state bureaucracies. In the UK, the hospice sector is a beacon of Christian hope. But, interestingly, it is also a beacon of independence



Photo: (Credit: J.C. Galligan, Public domain)

from the National Health Service (NHS).

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has reflected some of this thinking in its own reflections on Obamacare. In a letter to Congress in 2017, the bishops wrote:

The Catholic bishops of the United States have consistently advocated for access to decent health care that safeguards and affirms human life and dignity from conception until natural death. ... While we supported the general goal of the law to expand medical coverage for many poor and vulnerable people, the USCCB ultimately opposed the Affordable Care Act because it expanded the role of the federal government in funding and facilitating abortion and plans that cover abortion, and it failed to provide essential conscience protections.

The important questions, though, are not limited to overtly ethical considerations, such as matters to do with abortion or euthanasia. We should also recognise the intrinsic relationship between medical practitioners and their patients. Relationships involved in the provision of healthcare should be one of total devotion from medical practitioners towards their patients. Of course, there are many non-religious medical practitioners who are devoted to their patients and many religious medical practitioners who are not. However, the concepts of vocation, love, and sacrifice are intrinsic to the Christian calling and can, arguably, best be practised in a pluralistic healthcare sector of which Christian institutions are an integral part – even if the state is helping finance the healthcare of the poor.

Interestingly, Newman raised the question of medical education in a talk that comprises the last chapter of *The Idea of a University*. Just as Christians should play a significant role in the provision of healthcare, they should be at the forefront of the provision of medical education, too. Newman's case for Christian medical education was based on the important Christian principle of the unity of knowledge. If medical education is done in a technical and secular context, biology will be the apex of the discipline. As Newman put it, we will treat man as an animal with only physical needs. If medical education is undertaken in a Christian context, then medical science will be – or ought to be

– understood in the context of a Christian understanding of the human person. Bodily health is not the ultimate end of man: There is a higher law and spiritual needs beyond the finite. Christian medical practitioners, invoking God's law and the spiritual aspect of life, may come to different conclusions about how to provide healthcare in particular situations than when purely utilitarian considerations are paramount. These should be reflected both in medical practice and medical education. Public policy should allow this but will not do so if medicine is provided as a state monopoly.

Christian social thought calls attention to the person in his or her totality: physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual. In this context, it is interesting to note that the word "health" has its roots in the Old English word "hoelth," meaning wholeness. Healthcare should be about the whole person and not just about the provision of a technical service.

It is impossible for a health system that is dominated by a state bureaucracy to properly recognise this. At the same time, just as Christians should point out that the state should not monopolise healthcare, it is the responsibility of Christians – individually and institutionally – to ensure that (just as with education) we are not leaving a vacuum that it is too easy for the state to have an excuse to fill.

Christians have something special to offer in the provision of healthcare. Whilst in countries such as the U.S. and Germany, this is widely understood and accepted in practice, in the UK things are very different. In the UK, Roman Catholics (and many, though not all Christians) tend to accept that parents should be able to educate their children in religious schools. Furthermore, it is also widely assumed that Catholic institutions ought to be paramount in the education of maths teachers, history teachers, and so on (including my own university, St. Mary's). Should similar reasoning not apply to the practice of medicine and medical education? The practice of medicine and medical education can never be morally neutral.

Philip Booth is professor of finance, public policy and ethics at St. Mary's University, Twickenham, which is the UK's largest Catholic university. He is also a senior academic fellow at the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA). 

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ESSAY

Luther's apple tree

John Baden

As the story goes, when Martin Luther was asked what he would do if the world were to end tomorrow, he answered, "I would plant an apple tree today." It's a lovely anecdote, and it bears within it a kernel of truth about environmental stewardship. The lesson here, from my perspective, is that care of creation begins and ends with you and me. Most of what we hear in the media, and from too many environmental activists, is alarmism and warnings of near-term catastrophe on date certain. (This somehow always gets pushed out again and again. Why don't doomsayers have any respect for deadlines?) We are told

that sweeping plans for reconstructing economic and political institutions are mandatory if we are to survive.

If you buy into all of this, there's little that awaits you but the vice of despondency. Its opposing virtue is positive action taken by free men and women. We must, as the saying goes, do the next right thing. I count myself as one of those conservationists who believes that we can grow the economy while protecting the environment and that long-term growth requires us to be good stewards.

My "trinity" for good stewardship integrates responsible liberty, sustainable ecology, and modest prosperity. These three elements provide the context for wholesome lives. Within this trinity, communities flourish. Eliminate any one, and life becomes problematic.

Of the three elements of this trinity, modest prosperity is often underrated, especially by Greens with a woke philosophy. Socialists and other authoritarians fail to understand the linkages among liberty, prosperity, and sustainable ecological systems. They assure us that the looming crisis is a huge threat, be it a new ice age in the 1970s or global warm-

ing today. The current threat demands transformational actions mandated by fines, laws, and regulations, such as the Green New Deal. (I was interviewed about this utopian plan on the *Acton Line* podcast in April.)

I believe climate change is indeed real and poses genuine long-term threats. It also has substantial benefits. Unfortunately, the threat of climate change is employed as a rationale to use popular opinion and regulation to cause other people to behave as progressive elites think they should. And it produces resentment and resistance to constructive energy policies.

Progressives view economics as a subset of engineering rather than a field study for evolutionary biology. Hence, progressives assert that prosperity can be designed and administered by the government through regulations and directives. But this never has worked, and never will. Why is that?

Bureaucratic knowledge is incomplete, and errors are common. Bureaucracies are also largely unaccountable – not only to voters but also the elected officials who (at least, in theory) oversee them. Further,

Photo: Apple orchard (Public domain.)

the sort of incentives in place at government bodies charged to protect the environment often yield perverse outcomes. Federal programs to subsidize the draining of prairie potholes, America's "duck factories," offer clear and destructive examples. Bureau of Reclamation irrigation dams, salmon run destroyers, provide others. Here as elsewhere, political forces trump ecology and economics.

Prosperity, as contrasted to windfall gains from winning a lottery or finding gold, evolves as individuals discover ways to move resources to higher value. And it's amazing what you can accomplish with determination, elbow grease, and a vision.

My own story is what I know best. Two college-professors-turned-ranchers – yours truly and Ramona Marotz-Baden – took their Enterprise Ranch in Gallatin Gateway, Montana, out of development play by placing it in a conservation easement. We bought abused land and water at a low price. Over the decades, we restored agriculture, fish, and wildlife to sustainable full production. (See "Betting the Ranch" in the Winter 2018 issue of *Religion & Liberty*.)

Today, due to Ramona's work and mine, the ranch is a beautiful and highly productive property. Its value is greatly enhanced by America's changed economy and technology. And its location in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem – and between Bozeman and Big Sky, Montana – is a great advantage.

Here is how it works: Liberty permits and fosters environmental entrepreneurship. Consider the progress in stream restoration and solar applications. Liberty also encourages wealth creation over redistribution. Prosperous people often favor, and can afford, policies that promote environmental quality. In contrast, poor people worldwide are more willing to sacrifice ecology for income or basic subsistence – which is a purely rational response.

Forty years ago, most Greens were allergic to economic thinking. In contrast, my colleagues and I in the free market environmental movement understood that people's sensitivity to ecological quality increases with education and income. This is especially true of rural places blessed with the Gallatin Valley's qualities of wildlife, scenery, and topography.

Our Bozeman-area population is

not a random sample of America. People elect to live here, often at some cost in foregone opportunities and comfort. Montana remains the most remote of the contiguous 48 states. It's also largely arid, having only half the average precipitation of the Midwest. Further, it long had an extremely harsh climate with subzero temperatures common throughout the winter – which seemed to last several months too long.

However, geography is no longer destiny. For historical and technological reasons involving communication, culture, education, and transportation, the costs of necessities have declined throughout the Gallatin Valley area – some dramatically. Consider the internet, Montana State University's \$100 million research programs, Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport, Fed EX and UPS, Gore-Tex for clothing, and Tyvek for housing. A conjunction of improvements has made our valley increasingly attractive. It's a magnet for high human capital. Today's problems involve crowding, congestion, and fears of losing paradise. This stands in sharp contrast with towns and counties in the greater region, the great majority of which are losing population.

Dangers lie in the fruits of success. Americans with high human capital, or those who simply desire to live closer to the nation's unparalleled scenic beauty, are moving not just to Bozeman but other western magnets like Salt Lake City, Boise, Denver, and Albuquerque. Salt Lake, with its easy access to skiing, mountain biking, and fly fishing, also offers low corporate tax rates, utility prices, and rents. Because of its burgeoning tech sector, the Wasatch Front is garnering attention as "the next Silicon Valley."

A student of economics will not be surprised that there are tradeoffs in the form of pressure on housing prices, traffic congestion, work force skills, and the social strain that attends an influx of new arrivals unfamiliar with a region's culture and history. It's an old story.

In Bozeman, housing affordability is a major issue. The median sales price for a home in Gallatin County is \$465,500, according to the Gallatin Association of Realtors. City planners – by definition a profession fond of central planning – are looking to control sprawl with urban densification and mass transit, among other

measures. But millennials, like most Americans, favor spacious, single-family housing for themselves and their young families.

How Bozeman and other western cities manage this problem will determine how well they preserve the best of what they have to offer. California's housing policies are in large part responsible for its current crisis of affordability. (A typical million-dollar, single-family home offers just 1,150 square feet of living space, in a state with vast undeveloped lands.) It's a huge problem for the state's middle class. As the demographer Joel Kotkin recently put it, "The Golden State used to be a rising tide lifting all sorts of boats. Now it's a rising tide lifting a few yachts."

Citizens of Ramona's and my generation are great beneficiaries of progress. Many of us enjoy responsible liberty, a sustainable agricultural/ecological system, and at least modest prosperity. We are doubly blessed to live in America, clearly the world's most successful, large-scale social experiment.

America harbors the fragile trinity of liberty, ecology, and prosperity. I urge you to appreciate, understand, and defend this trinity. It's recurrently under assault by authoritarians of several stripes – people who demand ever more government control, which they identify or manufacture threats to justify.

There is no easy cure for the progressives' naivete about our economy, ecology, and energy. America is evolving toward their green energy ideal, but we can't legislate unicorns on treadmills as sources of pollution-free power. Recall the shepherd boy who falsely cried wolf. He repeatedly tricked villagers into thinking wolves were eating their sheep. When a wolf actually appeared, and the boy called for help, the villagers thought it was another false alarm.

Instead of crying wolf and throwing the village into a panic, let's do something that will actually improve the environment. Let's grab a shovel and plant an apple tree.

John A. Baden, Ph.D., is founder and chairman of the Foundation for Research on Economics and the Environment in Bozeman, Montana. FREE's focus is environmental economics and policy analysis. 



FEATURE

Beyond the apocalypse:

Getting serious about climate and conservation

John Couretas

The apocalyptic, “end of the world” story is a staple of popular culture. There seems to be an unlimited appetite for the quasi-religious unveiling (ή αποκάλυψις in the Greek) of humanity’s inexorable doom and hellish end. Maybe part of that appeal is the mainstreaming of science fiction, once a pulp subgenre and available now wherever movies, videos, and books are digitally streamed. Or maybe the culture is just mired in childish fantasies.

“The popular appetite for spectacle in the form of natural disaster and human calamity is a major impetus for the production of shallow apocalyptic fiction in every medium,” writes scholar Lorenzo DiTommaso. “This shallowness speaks to the issue of popular appeal, for at its core, apocalypticism is an adolescent worldview. It describes the world in uncomplicated terms of good and evil, offers simplistic responses to complex problems, and places responsibility for solving these problems elsewhere.”

That’s also a good description of some corners of environmental activism, and projects such as the Green New Deal, with its plans to abolish fossil fuels and deindustrialize the U.S. economy (itself a melding of sci-fi and fantasy) to achieve

Photo: Extinction Rebellion. (Photo credit: Leon Wong / Shutterstock.com. Editorial use only.)

arbitrary de-carbonization benchmarks. (In truth, it's really a "how-do-you-change-the-entire-economy thing," admitted Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's former chief of staff, Saikat Chakrabarti.) We have only 12 years to ward off catastrophe, says Rep. Ocasio-Cortez, or "the world is going to end." Unwittingly, she has contributed yet another failed prediction of doom to the long running list compiled by the political Right.

Real adolescents have been enlisted in the fight to remake reality. Out of nowhere, 16-year-old Greta Thunberg emerged in 2019 at the forefront of a media-driven campaign to convince the world that teenagers skipping school for a "climate strike" will get adults to "unite behind the science" and do as they're told.

"People are suffering," Thunberg said at a UN conference in September. "People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairytales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"

But perhaps nowhere are the adolescent fantasies of environmental apocalypse – and the sort of high-certitude, simplistic responses to life's problems commonly heard from teenagers – more pronounced than in the Extinction Rebellion phenomenon. It aims for a net-zero emissions economy by 2025, five years ahead of Ocasio-Cortez's plan. "XR" is known for disrupting or shutting down roads and public transport in major cities worldwide. Never mind that the great mass of humanity is trying to get to work, pay their bills, take care of their families, and "keep the fairytales of eternal economic growth" chugging along.

XR wants "governments to accede to a key demand: creating a citizen's assembly that accelerates society away from climate-destroying industries." It aims for a "tipping point" of 3.5 percent of the population mobilized and eager to sweep away the slow-moving deliberations of democracies that obstruct our net-zero future. "We do not trust our government to make the bold, swift, and long-term changes necessary to achieve these changes, and we do not intend to hand further power to our politicians," XR announces.

XR isn't saying when its citizen's assembly will hand back the levers of power to democratically elected governments. Its political theorists cite the toppling of

repressive regimes – Milosevic in Serbia and Marcos in the Philippines – as evidence that a highly committed cadre can effect change. The group might also have cited the relatively small numbers of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in Russia in 1910 (fewer than 100,000 in a nation of some 125 million).

Regrettably, too many religious leaders have bought into the apocalyptic hysteria and urgent demands for sweeping, top-down solutions. Their moral influence is too often indistinguishable from the political Left, which demands state intervention and sees capitalism and consumerism as despoiling the natural environment.

In 2017, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis issued a joint declaration – a "Prayer for Creation" – decrying humanity's "propensity to interrupt the world's delicate and balanced ecosystems, our insatiable desire to manipulate and control the planet's limited resources, and our greed for limitless profit in markets – all these have alienated us from the original purpose of creation. We no longer respect nature as a shared gift; instead, we regard it as a private possession. We no longer associate with nature in order to sustain it; instead, we lord over it to support our own constructs."

Typically, Bartholomew and Francis have focused on "magical solutions" – stumping for unenforceable international treaties that would do next to nothing to improve the climate – which are not only unfeasible politically but misstate the nature of the problem. A decade ago, Roger Pielke, author of *The Climate Fix: What Scientists and Politicians Won't Tell you about Global Warming* (2010, Basic Books), pointed out that these sorts of pronouncements

are really just for show. "Symbolism is of course an essential part of politics, but when it becomes detached from reality – or even worse, used to exclude consideration of realistic proposals – the inevitable outcome is that policies will likely fail to achieve the promised ends," he wrote. "This outcome is highly problematic for

those who actually care about the substance of climate policy proposals."

More recently, Pielke analyzed the U.S. energy mix and showed that the growth of renewable energy was simply an addition to what we're already using. Fossil fuels were not displaced; there was only a shift to natural gas as a replacement for coal. "The U.S. has not yet begun its journey towards net-zero carbon dioxide, whether by 2050 or any other year," he concluded. "None of the proposals put forward by Democratic candidates for president are plausible. This battle has yet to be joined."

The tone-deaf scolding by religious leaders like Bartholomew and Francis is not only an exercise in magical thinking, it also ignores the contributions of millions of their own parishioners in churches around the world who would describe themselves as environmentalists or conservationists. People who care about the environment, and the places they love, roll up their sleeves and get to work.

Attitudes are shifting toward a more positive engagement on the political Right, with organizations like ConservAmerica and the American Conservation Coalition. This past summer, a group of GOP senators and congressmen formed the Roosevelt Conservation Caucus to restore the party's credibility on environmental and conservation issues (and to counter the Green New Deal).

While public opinion sentiments on climate change are most pitched on the Left, younger GOP voters are joining them. Talk to conservatives who are active in environmental work, and they will often say things like, "Who doesn't believe climate change is real?" This despite a healthy skepticism of a debate that is utterly polarized. In their 2015 article "Conservatives and Climate Change," Jim

Manzi and Peter Wehner said it was not enough to stake out a position of neutrality on climate science.

"Scientific ignorance is not an excuse for refusing to stake out a position," they wrote. "Politicians rely on engineers to help them figure out which bridges are worth building, on physicists to suggest which

Regrettably, too many religious leaders have bought into the apocalyptic hysteria and urgent demands for sweeping, top-down solutions.

defense projects are most feasible, and on biologists to better understand the threat of Ebola or Swine Flu. There is no reason why climate change should be different.”

Why not embrace policies and practices that focus on climate mitigation and adaptation, and concrete and practical actions at the ground level that have the potential to make things better? It’s a bet on the future, where there is no room for fatalism or despair.

Here’s what that looks like. The Property and Environment Research Center in Bozeman, Montana, has collected dozens of case studies of market-based entrepreneurial approaches to preserve wildlife habitats and address pollution problems. The stories show how individual initiative and broad civic participation can solve knotty problems. To cite just one example, an “enviropreneur” in New Hampshire named Brett Howell was troubled by the death of loons that ingested fishing tackle made of lead. He worked with the Loon Preservation Committee and the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department to set up a tackle buyback program. Anglers who turned in at least an ounce of lead tackle received a \$10 gift certificate to purchase non-toxic alternatives at partner shops. The program removed more than 3,000 pieces of lead tackle from state waters, providing a safer habitat for loons, according to PERC.

In his 2012 book *How to Think Seriously About the Planet: The Case for Environmental Conservatism*, philosopher Roger Scruton argued that none of the treaty-based, globalist environmental programs put forth by the political Left have a hope of succeeding if they are not rooted in individual or civic action. “Environmental problems must be addressed by all of us in our everyday circumstances, and should not be confiscated by the state,” he writes. “Their solution is possible only if people are motivated to confront them, and the task of government is to create those conditions in which the right kind of motive can emerge and solidify.”

To describe these grassroots motives, Scruton coined the word *oikophilia* (pronounced ECO-philía), or “the love and feeling for home.” The state, he writes, should “make room” for these ground-up efforts, although Scruton’s careful not to demonize every government conservation program. He’s for exploring “the

ways in which rational beings can reach co-operative solutions to problems that cannot be addressed either by the individual or the centralized state.”

Scruton defends “initiatives against global schemes, civil association against political activism, and small-scale institutions of friendship against large-scale and purpose-driven campaigns.” On climate change, Scruton describes its appeal partly due to the ability to “internationalize” the problem and present a “calamity so great” that nothing in the way of everyday solutions will do. “The only feasible response to the threat of global warming is to devote our resources to how we might produce energy cheaply and renewably, and then making those discoveries available around the world.”

It’s not just conservatives who are working on reasonable approaches. The practical progressives at the Breakthrough Institute hope to create cooler, more reasoned debates. Tisha Schuller, an environmentalist who went to work for the oil and gas industry, observed in the Winter 2018 edition of *Breakthrough Journal* that she understands the anti-environmentalist attitudes of many people. “But vilifying environmentalists is no way to live,” she writes. “No one gets to corner the market on loving the outdoors, wanting to protect special places, and taking solace and refreshment in nature.”

Yes, there may be “wildly different ways” of going at it. But most everyone, she says, “want[s] the same things – a reasonable quality of life, the opportunity to improve our circumstances, and access to beautiful, healthy, natural environments.”

A “discerning environmentalism” as she describes it, “requires that we let go of some traditional positions that don’t stand up to scrutiny, honestly assess trade-offs, and seek the best energy solutions, and make environmental values available to people of every political, socioeconomic, and cultural persuasion.”

This sounds eminently reasonable. And it puts the apocalyptic scenarios and frightful doomsayers in the place where they belong: harmlessly relegated to the screens of dystopian Hollywood blockbusters.

John Couretas is the Acton Institute’s director of communications and executive editor of Religion & Liberty. **R&L**



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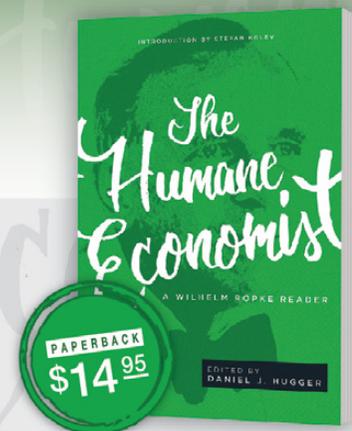
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PRESIDENT JAMES A. GARFIELD (1831-1881)

Rev. Ben Johnson

The life of President James Garfield, one of the nation's forgotten presidents, exemplifies the transformational power of hard work, classical scholarship, and sound economics. James Abram Garfield was born on November 19, 1831, in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. His father, Abram, died fighting a fire that threatened their farm when James was a toddler. Although Abram's widow, Eliza, raised their children in poverty, James' genius shone so early that she insisted he focus on his studies.

Garfield paid for tuition at the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute by working as a janitor, performing manual labor in front of his classmates. Yet he soon won a post teaching Greek, Latin, and classical literature, and at age 25, became the school's president. He also served as an ordained minister of the Disciples of Christ.

Although he lacked any military training, Garfield commanded his troops to victory in the Civil War, becoming a major general. His district elected him to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1862, but he refused to take his seat until December 1863, when President Lincoln convinced Garfield he would be of greater service in Congress. Garfield's eloquent orations soon made him his party's unofficial spokesman.

Because of his humble origins, he believed every person should be free to pursue his potential. "I never meet a ragged boy in the street without feeling that I may owe him a salute, for I know not what possibilities may be buttoned



up under his coat,' he said. He felt, for anyone who possessed "the magnificent possibilities of life, it is not fitting that he should be permanently commanded. He should be a commander."

The Republican passionately embraced abolitionism and supported the Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution. He said emancipation "from slavery to the full rights of citizenship" obviously had a "beneficent effect upon our institutions and people." In the 1880 campaign, he told a visiting black delegation, "I would rather be with you defeated than against you and victorious."

As part of the House Appropriations Committee, Garfield turned his keen mind to mastering economics. He supported the gold standard and opposed attempts to inflate the currency through the coinage of silver

or printing Greenbacks. "Any party which commits itself to paper money will go down amid the general disaster," he said. Garfield became the rare Republican who favored lowering tariffs to benefit consumers. He also voted against federal relief projects that lacked constitutional authorization.

Garfield's speech at the 1880 Republican National Convention on behalf of another candidate so captivated the delegates that they nominated Garfield, over his objections. Horatio Alger wrote his campaign biography. Frederick Douglass said in his endorsement speech the congressman's inspirational story "has shown us how it is possible for an American to rise."

Garfield promised to unite his country, keep the economy sound, and remove all artificial barriers to prosperity. His greatest nemeses would be those who sought power for personal enrichment. Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York, the leader of the Stalwarts, favored the patronage system. So, too, did a mentally disturbed fanatic named Charles Guiteau, who shot Garfield in the back, twice, on July 2, 1881.

Garfield would linger between life and death, succumbing to an infection caused by antiquated medical techniques on September 19, 1881. The twentieth president died without enacting his generous vision for his country and has slipped from historical memory. Yet he served, and serves, as a beacon of hope that anyone with the proper talent and ambition can ascend to the greatest pinnacles of power – and open the door for others to follow.



ESSAY

The antidote to fear

Rev. Ben Johnson

What differentiates a Christian view of the environment from a secular one? Too often, even confused Christians don't know. Reading putatively faith-based attempts to address the environmental debate often leaves one none the wiser. Many writers simply recycle the same premises, and conclusions, as secularists, sometimes tacking on Bible verses which otherwise seem not to affect the substance of their thought.

Others make a tentative start by basing their discussion of Christian environmental stewardship on a citation of the Book of Genesis. People of faith should strive to place the human person at the center of this – and every – topic. However, the current

state of climate alarmism and panic finds its antidote in a different citation.

In this age of agitation, the verse that should guide distinctively Christian environmental discussions is 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."

Peace of mind provides needed grounding for a climate debate awash in alarmism – and high-pressure sales tactics. "The world is going to end in 12 years if we don't address climate change," said the author of the Green New Deal, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Not to be outdone, former presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke said the nation must "make this transition in the 10 years we have left to us, as the scientists tell us." Both touted their own plans – and their acquisition of power – as the answer. Threat inflation has even affected the terms of debate, which have escalated from "climate change," to "climate emergency," to "climate catastrophe" – almost invariably modified by the term "existential."

The tenor of the environmental dialogue has concerned Petteri Taalas, the secretary-general of the UN's special agency

on weather and climate, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). "The atmosphere created by the media has been provoking anxiety," he warned. Climate "doomsters and extremists" have cobbled together a Green-based ideology that resembles "religious extremism." He cited as two examples the unrealistic demand for "zero [carbon] emissions by 2025" and the widespread view "that children are a negative thing" for the planet. Environmental extremists place their proposed sacrifices of life and GDP on the altar of anxiety.

Fear and haste short-circuit wisdom. The reason lies in undisputed science. Fear activates a part of the brain known as the amygdala, which primes the body for a fight or flight response. The prefrontal cortex later places the perceived threat into wider context and determines whether it really poses a danger. (The hormones released during this process also create a "rush," explaining why some people enjoy high-risk sports or scary movies, or seemingly revel in tales of impending climate catastrophe.) However, if the mind is bombarded with an endless string of apocalyptic threats, the brain's higher analysis process cannot begin. Instead, the person gets swept along in

Photo: (Credit: Antonello Maronggi / Shutterstock.com. For editorial use only.)

a sea of dread-driven conformity.

Only a calm mind can begin to assess the shortcomings of the proposals and panaceas or – more importantly – invent creative solutions. History shows the power of this insight. Pope John Paul II lit the rhetorical fuse that would cause Communism to implode when he stood before his native Poland and recited three simple words: “Be not afraid.” The Gospels, which record Christ telling the apostles to maintain their courage despite wars and rumors of wars, should inspire us to have the fortitude not to panic at the sight of computer-generated models. People of faith need to maintain the prudence demanded by many of today’s proffered environmental fixes.

Take, for instance, the Green New Deal. The House Resolution supporting the plan states that inaction will cost “more than \$500,000,000,000 in lost annual economic output in the United States by the year 2100.” To save \$500 billion, its sponsors propose a plan with an estimated price tag of \$93 trillion. Further, AOC has acknowledged the success of the Green New Deal requires scientists “to invent technology that’s never even been invented yet.” Clear-headed voters may doubt the wisdom of switching from reliable energy to an ill-defined program whose solutions are untested, unscalable, or, as the congresswoman has admitted, nonexistent.

Another example came when 11,000 scientists signed a statement demanding that the world’s governments enact “bold and drastic transformations regarding economic and population policies” to limit the global population and, hence, its carbon footprint. “Our goals need to shift from GDP growth and the pursuit of affluence toward ... reducing inequality,” the document said. Discerning thinkers might question the notion that the survival of the human race demands that it stop reproducing itself. They would realize that economic growth allows citizens to focus on long-term goals, such as environmental protection, and gives them the resources to weather the literal storm that may follow unforeseen outcomes or incomplete climate mitigation.

Reality has also asserted itself on the technology the Obama administration called the best system of emission reduction: carbon capture. Carbon capture is to greenhouse gas emissions what the Strategic Defense Initiative was to a nuclear attack. Both identify, disarm, and neutralize

the threat. Carbon capture technology pulls carbon out of the air, then sequesters it deep beneath the earth, removing carbon emissions from the atmosphere entirely. “One of our plants does the work of 40 million trees,” boasted Steve Oldham, a CEO in the industry.

Unfortunately, the technology is too expensive for mass development. But two facilities have made the process financially viable by using their carbon reserves in enhanced oil recovery. Petra Nova in Texas and Boundary Dam 3 in Saskatchewan inject the captured carbon into oil reservoirs to extract additional fuel, providing more abundant resources while reducing their carbon footprint.

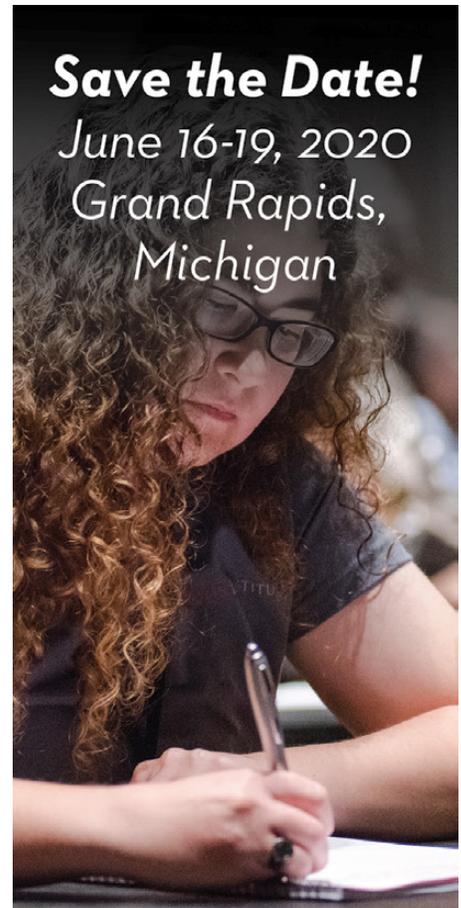
Apart from this use, its cost has proven prohibitive. “Finding new commercial uses for the captured CO₂ is key to lowering the costs of these technologies and scaling them up,” according to Columbia University’s Earth Institute. If the government experts’ solution is to save the planet, it will only do so thanks to the force many of them say is destroying the environment: the profit motive.

This insight would seem less counterintuitive if the climate debate put the human person, and his purpose, at its center. The Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes* states, “When man develops the earth by the work of his hands or with the aid of technology, in order that it might bear fruit and become a dwelling worthy of the whole human family ... he carries out the design of God manifested at the beginning of time, that he should subdue the earth, perfect creation, and develop himself. At the same time, he obeys the commandment of Christ that he place himself at the service of his brethren.”

Markets and free exchange create a remunerative system of mutual service. This dogmatic Catholic document confirms that service stems from divine love. And the Christian worldview teaches that true love must be free from fear.

Two thousand years ago, the angels announced the birth of the Savior by proclaiming, “Peace on earth.” Two millennia later, that remains Christians’ most valuable asset.

Rev. Ben Johnson is managing editor of Religion & Liberty, editor of the Acton Institute’s transatlantic website, and an Eastern Orthodox priest. 



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Earth's greatest resources: human creativity and economic freedom

Anne Rathbone Bradley

In 1980, despite slow and steady progress in the race against poverty and human immiseration, 44 percent of the world's population still lived in extreme poverty. In 1820, that number was 94 percent. Despite these massive economic gains, many were worried about the future of planet Earth. In 1980, two of the most significant thinkers of their day, biologist Paul Ehrlich and economist Julian Simon, brought their insights to bear on the problem. These academics came from vastly different disciplines and perspectives. In 1968, Ehrlich published *The Population Bomb*, which predicted that worldwide famines and apocalyptic resource depletion would lead to social unrest. He wrote:

The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate

Ehrlich is a biologist, not an economist, and perhaps some of his worries about growing populations and the harm they could do under certain conditions are warranted. After all, an infinitely growing population without proper institutions will deplete resources and lead to environmental and social unrest.

Paul Ehrlich was countered by Julian Simon, the University of Maryland economist and author of *The Ultimate Resource*, who saw human beings not only as mouths to feed but as hands to work. "The world's problem is not too many people," Simon wrote, "but the lack of political and economic freedom."

These two scientists had opposing viewpoints about the future and human survival. Simon believed that human creativity made resources less, rather than more, scarce. He challenged Ehrlich to a bet that over the period of 1980 to 1990, five resources of Ehrlich's choosing would decrease in price. This would signal that their scarcity was lessening because of innovation and discovery.

In the end, Simon won the bet. Those five resources became more abundant. And his key insight remains correct: Human beings are good for the planet and are the key resource in assuring better, safer, and more sustainable environmental performance. To achieve those outcomes, we must have the proper understanding of who we are and why we are here. We also need institutions that allow us to live for that purpose and unleash our creativity. Perhaps counter-intuitively for the Malthusians, human beings are the solution to environmental problems.

God's design and desires for creation must inform our purposes in this world. God reveals His purposes in Genesis: We are here to glorify Him and to assist His created order in working as it is intended. Genesis is a story of purpose and abundance. God gifted us everything we needed in the garden and more. He gifted us with minds to create. We are made in the *imago Dei*; we bear the image of God, which implies purpose and creativity. We are to fill the earth and subdue it (Genesis 1:27), and we are to work in our portion of

creation and care for it (Gen. 2:15).

These verses imply both cultivation and protection. We are to learn, experiment, and discover with our minds. In this process of human ingenuity and creativity, we can improve our conditions and create value without plundering or destroying the earth. There is a balance between creativity and entrepreneurship, on the one hand, and stewarding the earth's resources, on the other.

But human beings are fallen and sinful, so we will have opportunistic tendencies to exploit, plunder, ravage, and destroy these resources. Rampant population growth can only harm the environment if it occurs outside the confines of the institutions of human dignity and free markets. Human beings require economic freedom, not only to flourish materially, but to protect scarce resources and to make them more abundant.

The tradeoffs of material production and global commerce bring new environmental problems and raise questions that must be addressed. Life in the days of subsistence farming did not present any looming environmental problems; the advent of industrial production, and its discovery that fossil fuels and other scarce resources are essential to material well-being, brings environmental tradeoffs. Population growth ensures that the demand for material comforts created with scarce resources will grow – but this doesn't have to result in a Malthusian or Ehrlichean apocalypse. Human beings are both the source of, and the solution to, environmental problems. We need human creativity to discover more efficient and prudent ways of combining those resources, as well as discovering alternate sources of energy.

Economic freedom provides the institutions so essential for environmental stewardship by ensuring entrepreneurship, sound property rights through the rule of law, freedom to enter and exit markets, and a limited government that protects those institutions. Economic freedom allows us to solve problems and provides entrepreneurs with sound incentives to invest in our environmental future.

The humans-are-bad-for-the-planet trope is not new but has gained momentum from American politicians, who recklessly suggest that the only way to save the planet is to slow human reproduction. This is certainly not what God intends, nor is it necessary. People will help us save and preserve the planet; they are our best hope of mitigating the unintended environmental tradeoffs that accompany material progress. Without economic freedom we will destroy, pillage, and plunder our scarce resources. But economic freedom allows us to make great contributions to human flourishing. More people, rather than fewer, add to human prosperity and allow us to live in and actualize God's purpose for the created order.

After all, what good is a planet with no one in it?

Anne Rathbone Bradley, Ph.D. is the George and Sally Mayer Fellow for Economic Education and the academic director at The Fund for American Studies. She received her Ph.D. in economics from George Mason University in 2006. 



ESSAY

Pope Francis ties foreign aid to corruption

Andrew Vanderput

Much has been written about the unintended consequences of foreign aid flowing from the West to developing countries. Economists such as Dambisa Moyo, William Easterly, and Angus Deaton have all commented on the downright pernicious effects of government-to-government aid. Not too long ago, a new voice joined this distinguished chorus of foreign aid critics: Pope Francis. During his recent visit to the East African nation of Mozambique, Pope Francis made striking comments which suggested a link between foreign aid and corruption. The pope stated:

At times it seems that those who approach with the alleged desire to help have other interests. Sadly, this happens with brothers and sisters of the same land, who let themselves be corrupted. It is very dangerous to think that this is the price to be paid for foreign aid.

In other words, the pope lamented that

the hundreds of millions (and sometimes, billions) of dollars that flood an impoverished nation in the form of aid have had the caustic effect of breeding corruption. Why would aid have this effect? Simply put, foreign aid enables governments to act free of accountability. How does this happen?

Governments of developed countries rely primarily on businesses, a bustling middle class, and other economic actors for their revenue. In return, those members and institutions of a country's civil society expect that their government will provide various public goods, like national defense, roads, and a functioning and fair judicial system. Likewise, those in civil society expect government transparency and accountability.

This is not the case when a government receives foreign aid. The total amount of aid funds provided to developing countries can make up an enormous percentage of their GDP and their governments' resources. For example, the World Bank states that official net development aid to Mozambique in 2017 equaled roughly 76 percent of its government's total expenses – a staggering percentage.

With that amount of money coming from outside its borders, rather than from its citizens, the government can afford to ignore its people and behave corruptly. Moyo put it well in her best-selling book, *Dead Aid*: "Foreign aid short-circuits this link [between a government and its people]. Because the government's financial dependence on its citizens has been reduced, it owes its people nothing."

In the same spirit Deaton, the Yale economist and Nobel Laureate, stated:

I worry a lot about African countries where almost all government expenditure is coming from external sources. And that, to me, is the really crazy thing. And those governments have no incentives at all to respond to their people, because the only incentives they have are to deal with the aid agencies and to work with the aid agencies.

However foreign governments, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other development agencies may try to make sure their funds are used properly, this is difficult due to the fungible nature of money, public sentiment, and other factors.

Aid not only renders governments immune to their people's cry for accountability and competency, it utterly discourages them from forming the very institutions necessary for a flourishing economy in the first place. These include a functioning and just court system, a secure property rights apparatus, and a business-friendly regulation and tax structure.

Why would those who prosper from the foreign aid status quo do anything to divest themselves of power? Developing those institutions would result in the formation of a rival, prosperous, and politically powerful civil society. Suddenly, those who had long enjoyed perennial windfalls free of accountability would see their economic and political power wane. Such an incentive structure surely discourages reform.

Large sums of money flying around can cause government corruption to rear its ugly head anywhere, including in the West. However, large sums of money in the form of aid have a particularly damaging impact on the overall health of developing countries.

Perhaps Pope Francis' words will cause both critics and proponents of foreign aid alike to think harder about the unintended consequences of a seemingly benevolent government program. We all need to strive to provide the most effective and sustainable assistance to those most in need.

Andrew Vanderput is the Poverty Initiatives Manager at the Acton Institute, where he promotes business and enterprise solutions to material poverty. [R&L](#)

Fighting Fake News



ESSAY

The myth of the young entrepreneur

Michael Matheson Miller

When I tell people the average age of entrepreneurs is not in their twenties but around 40, they are surprised. Yet it is true; the young success stories that capture media attention, like Mark Zuckerberg, are outliers. The idea that most entrepreneurs are young is a myth.

Once we think about it, it makes sense that people with experience, business skills, and insight would be more likely to start a business than a twenty-something with fewer skills and minimal experience. There are examples of young people with a great idea, but this is much less common than an experienced businessman starting a new venture. As Jeffrey Tucker writes in an article for The American Institute for Economic Research:

The legend of the twenty-something business wunderkind is everywhere in pop culture. Here's the problem.

The data are in. It turns out that the whole thing is a gigantic myth. Young founders of businesses fail, almost certainly, and at a much greater rate than people who are much older, wiser, more skilled, and more knowledgeable about the industry. It turns out that succeeding in business is extremely difficult. It takes maturity above all else to achieve it.

Tucker refers to a new study by Javier Miranda, principal economist at the U.S. Census Bureau; Benjamin Jones, professor at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University; and Pierre Azoulay, professor at MIT's Sloan School of Management and research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research.

They conclude that the average age for a successful entrepreneur is 45 years old – even higher than I thought. Tucker explains the study's findings:

Younger founders appear strongly disadvantaged in their tendency to produce the highest-growth companies. Below age 25, founders appear to do badly (or rather, do well extremely rarely), but there is a sharp increase in performance at age 25. Between ages 25 and 35, performance seems fairly flat. Starting after age 35, there is increased success probabilities.

Another large surge in performance comes at age 46 and is sustained toward age 60.

Tucker argues that the myth of young entrepreneurs has created false hope for young people who don't realize how difficult business is. As I explain, in most cases it tends to be older people with experience and insight who have the ideas and skills to start a new business. This doesn't mean young people don't occasionally succeed in their ventures – and more power to them. But it is not the norm, and Tucker is right that perpetuating this myth can end up hurting the young more than it helps them.

I also think that this is a manifestation of something I call the "Boomer-Millennial problem." Both baby boomers and millennials are large generations, and they are both highly self-referential (some might say narcissistic). As Tucker notes, Zuckerberg is reported to have once said, "Young people are smarter." But it is not all their fault. They have been groomed to be self-congratulatory by their baby boomer mentors and parents.

Boomers self-indulge in their affirmation of young people and how they can change the world, etc. But this false affirmation sets up young people for disappointment when they come into contact with reality. This is only part of a larger problem with millennials and work. I have worked with a number of millennials and generally like working with them – I have not found them lazy as some claim. My experience is rather that they have been indoctrinated to think too highly of themselves. They think they are ready to take positions of leadership too early. They don't know what they don't know; and since they don't know it, they just assume it doesn't exist.

Part of their confidence comes from the fact that they are digital natives, so when they first got to work, all the older boomers and members of Generation X complimented them on their tech skills. Egged on, especially by their boomer elders, they equated their software prowess with wisdom and business insight.

Encouragement is important, and it can go a long way toward helping people succeed in business and in life. But it has to be grounded in reality and not myth. Life is difficult. So is work. So is building a business. Failures are inevitable. We need to encourage persistence and help ourselves and others develop prudence – seeing the

Photo: Mark Zuckerberg in 2018. (Photo credit: Anthony Quintano, CC BY 2.0)

world as it is – and what Aristotle called *phronesis* – good judgment and wisdom. This is essential for good business, and more importantly, a good life.

As Aristotle wrote almost 2,500 years ago in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

[A]lthough the young may be experts in geometry and mathematics and similar branches of knowledge, we do not consider that a young man can have Prudence. The reason is that Prudence includes a knowledge of particular facts, and this is derived from experience, which a young man does not possess; for experience is the fruit of years. (One might indeed further enquire why it is that, though a boy may be a mathematician, he cannot be a metaphysician or a natural philosopher. Perhaps the answer is that Mathematics deals with abstractions, whereas the first principles of Metaphysics and Natural Philosophy are derived from experience: The young can only repeat them without conviction of their truth, whereas the formal concepts of Mathematics are easily understood.)

As Tucker notes, ultimately it is a disservice to encourage young people to become entrepreneurs. He writes:

The bigger problem with urging young people to start businesses is that this advice feeds disgruntlement with an actual path to success, which is not running a cool startup but doing the very thing that entrepreneurship chic implicitly puts down: getting a skill, obeying the boss, gaining wisdom, and developing a solid career bit by bit.

We should stop lying to young people about commerce and tell the truth that business is hard. Work is hard. Saving money is hard. Serving customers is hard. For some people, just showing up is hard. These are all learned skills. The fun comes once you master them ...

“Start a business when you are young?” Tucker concludes. “Sure. Just don’t quit your day job yet.”

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BOOK

Founding a Republic of Letters

Beyond Tenebrae: Christian Humanism in the Twilight of the West

Bradley Birzer | Angelico Press | 2019 | 258 pgs

Reviewed by Josh Herring



Bradley Birzer's *Beyond Tenebrae: Christian Humanism in the Twilight of the West* recounts the narratives of the men and women of the previous century who dared to embrace the “permanent things.” In an age where confusion reigns about the most basic of human assumptions, Birzer writes of those who sought permanence. *Beyond Tenebrae* follows the pattern of Russell Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*: It lays out no rubric or policy. Instead, through the lives of Christian humanists, Birzer enchants the mind and draws the reader into a living dialogue of letters.

Tenebrae refers to the time of spiritual darkness between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, when the Light of Life seemed gone from the world. The title's metaphor establishes the present as a time of darkness, and Christian humanism as a candle burning in that darkness. Though the forces of progressivism seek to extinguish the flame, biographer Birzer shows a chain of humanists who kept alight enduring truths through their humanistic studies.

The book is divided into two parts. In the initial “Conserving Christian Humanism,” Birzer spends six chapters defining key terms, of which “humanism” and “conservative” are the most significant. Identifying as a humanist, Birzer explains the need to rescue the term *humanism*: “Yet when I mention ... ‘humanism’ among conservatives, I am almost always greeted with silence, head shaking, or actual visible disgust. Almost all conservatives, it seems, associate humanism with secularism and atheism and radicalism.” Instead of contemporary secular humanism, Birzer seeks to restore the term with five “canons of humanism.” Humanists “believe in the dignity of the human person,” and they “see liberal education as the most proper education for the development and nurturing of a human being.” Christian humanism locates the human person “in the middle of things,” above the animals yet below the angels. Fourthly, “the humanist upholds citizenship in the Republic of Letters – across time – as higher than loyalty to any nation or worldly powers.” Finally, “while the humanists have never agreed about a god or God, the humanist understands that someTHING stands above any one person or all of humanity together.” (Emphasis in original.)

Birzer pays homage to Kirk by listing the six “canons of conservatism,” and then describes five principles giving coherence to the Republic of Letters. He writes that “the conservative is always and everywhere a dogmatist in the proper sense of the term. The true dogmatist promotes a series of ‘good little truths’ without reifying all knowledge as absolute or absolutist, recognizing the importance of a partial understanding of things.” The five principles constitute the core of this right “dogmatism.”

“The first principle of the conservative,” he writes, “is the preciousness of each individual human person, each person an unrepeatable center of dignity and freedom.” Conservatives also affirm “the necessity of community.” The third dogma is concerned with “the need to preserve and defend liberal education.” Fourth, the conservative believes “the most important knowledge is poetic knowledge.” By this, Birzer means the mythic truth, what Richard Weaver called the “metaphysical dream,” and what Charles Colson called a “worldview.” The story within which we interpret the world is itself the most important kind

of knowledge. Lastly, the conservative upholds an “embracing of the classical and Christian virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, faith, hope, and charity.” Conservatism, then, is a certain set of values that Birzer contends are best encountered through the Republic of Letters.

In the second section, “Personalities and Groups,” Birzer writes 27 short essays explaining 26 figures from the twentieth century (Kirk gets two chapters) and their contributions to this literary Republic. Some figures will be no surprise to Birzer’s readers: J.R.R. Tolkien, Christopher Dawson, Irving Babbitt, and Eric Voegelin all feature prominently. There is a second tier of names with less fame: T.E. Hulme, Canon B.I. Bell, Theodor Haecker, Clyde Kilby, and “The Order Men” (who founded the journal *Order*) fall into this category. And then there some surprises: Birzer includes Margaret Atwood of *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Maddaddam* fame, along with Ray Bradbury, Shirley Jackson, and Walter Miller. Several other people receive essays, including one each for Birzer’s grandparents.

The second half of *Beyond Tenebrae* is a loose collection of essays that holds together through participation in the previously outlined principles of humanism and conservatism. These figures are bound together, not by education or ideology, but by participation in a life spent pursuing truth and expressing it in writing. As one works through the different essays, two metaphors come to mind. In one sense, *Beyond Tenebrae* represents an orchestra made up of major and minor instruments. Several essays, (mostly on previous subjects of Birzer’s book-length biographies, or his family members), come across with a greater depth of insight and significance. The other essays function as secondary instruments, deepening the themes introduced by the first set. At the same time, the essays function as a delicate web of ideas, complex to the point that direct description would shatter the delicacy of the whole. Birzer’s approach is reminiscent of Kierkegaard’s oblique philosophy; rather than didactically telling people how to be conservative humanists, Birzer’s biographical approach invites the reader to enter a lived experience of conservatism, worked out in the real world by real people. In this sense, the strongest essays in the collection are the two dedicated to his grandparents, Wendelin and Julitta Basgall.

Many books have attempted to recount the changes in Western civilization across the twentieth century. Brad Birzer’s *Beyond Tenebrae* offers something different; rather than a tale of decline, Birzer’s stories reveal endurance and renewal in the midst of a decadent world. While he ends with a Rod Dreher-esque note of pessimistic realism, Birzer’s book demonstrates an ongoing hope. The West will survive into a future day; the perennial things will continue. And in each generation, a few will inherit the tradition and carry on the legacy of Christian Humanism within this Republic of Letters, which extends through time and space.

Beyond Tenebrae flows out of Brad Birzer’s lifelong passion for Christian humanism. It combines his professional skill as a biographer with his personal love of ideas. In this book, he does what he has done in the classroom for years: inspire the reader to dive deep into the Great Tradition. And in that inspiration lies hope for the West.

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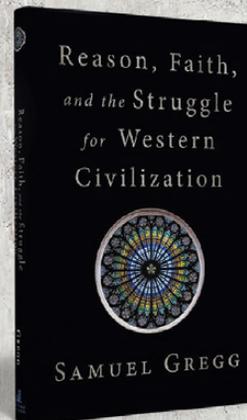
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BOOK

The faith of the secularist

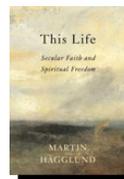
This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom

Martin Hägglund | Pantheon Books | 2019 | 450 pgs

Reviewed by J. Daryl Charles, Ph.D.

In his newest book, Martin Hägglund turns religious faith upside down. *This Life* constitutes a full-scale denial of the transcendent – on any level of human perception – and a declaration that religion is “unnecessary,” “boring,” and worst of all, obsessed with “eternity.” Hägglund finds this last feature particularly odious, because religious faith calls people’s attention away from the values that he believes really matter – namely, the needs of the present life – in favor of an “other-worldly” consciousness that prevents them (and society at large) from experiencing true “freedom.” The necessary substitute for this misplaced faith in religious dogma, the author insists, is a “secular faith,” a “new” perspective on the value and extent of our finiteness. In this, he notes, his thought is indebted to the insights of the much “misunderstood” Karl Marx.

This Life is divided into six chapters intended to elucidate the nature of “secular faith” (Part One) and “spiritual freedom” (Part Two). The contents of Part One are organized under the intriguing titles “Faith,” “Love,” and “Responsibility,” which convey the author’s desire to mimic the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love. However, he imbues them with an entirely secular meaning. Part Two is devoted to the “emancipating possibilities” of that “secular faith.” Its three chapters attempt to develop a philosophical argument for the primacy of the finite, reinterpret Marx’s critique of capitalism with a view to underscore the superiority of Marxist values, and argue that Marx – properly



understood – facilitates democracy (or what Hägglund calls “democratic socialism”). Making these sorts of arguments will not be easy, and they will strike the reader as, in many ways, self-contradictory.

Following a sweeping intellectual tour that finds its inspiration chiefly in Marx and Nietzsche, Hägglund’s disdain for religion stems in part from the presupposition that “eternal life” is “unattainable” and, in fact, “undesirable.” Hence, we should understand ourselves as mere mortals, focusing solely and intentionally on the present life. By this measure, “secular faith” is conceived as a life that is temporal, a life that will end and, hence, a life that should focus on material reality. The implication for Hägglund is that religious faith devalues our lives by restricting us in our present life through its eschatological or other-worldly values and concerns.

This sort of philosophy, of course, needs to be substantiated, since it flies in face of conventional thinking, as well as most people’s experience. Here, in marshalling support for his thesis, the author looks to a leading – if not *the* leading – materialist thinker of recent Western history: Karl Marx. After all, in Marx’s day a growing recognition was afoot that “we do not have to be subjected to the laws of religion or capital ... but can transform our historical situation through collective action and create institutions for the free development of social individuals as an end itself.”

In attempting to develop his thesis, Hägglund will find it necessary to circumvent the most obvious obstacle: recent history. Thus, he offers the standard dodge that totalitarian regimes “failed to grasp the insights of Marx not only in practice but also in theory.” One might call this the old “Marx was misunderstood” strategy. For this reason, Hägglund argues that we must “retrieve and develop Marx’s insights in a new direction,” in order to properly understand the nature and outworking of true “freedom.”

The blitheness with which Marxists circumvent the historical record would be less outrageous if it weren’t for the utterly tragic results *in praxis* that have followed Marxist thought on every continent. Where in the world, past or present, do we find nations in which the adoption of Marxist ideas has led to a flourishing culture? One is at a loss to find one unless,

of course, Häggglund wishes to cite present-day Venezuela (which is conveniently ignored in his book). The most that Häggglund can do is point to Europe's so-called "democratic socialist" nations, such as Sweden. Even these nations engage in a greater degree of market capitalism than Häggglund is willing to acknowledge. However, to argue for "democratic socialism" is to attempt to have it both ways. Here again we see the parasitic nature of Marxist-socialist thought, for in practice, no human beings or societies are capable of flourishing under its economic, political, and social policies.

But there is a reason for this failure – a reason which transcends strict economics. That reason is anthropological. For the materialist, the human person is to be understood solely in material – and hence "economic" – terms. The human person, devoid of the spiritual component, lacks intrinsic dignity and an attendant ability to flourish. And absent the spiritual component, which produces in human beings an awareness of that intrinsic dignity (based on the *imago Dei*), there can be no moral ecology in which societies function and cultures thrive.

Through his writings, Michael Novak reminds us of the triangle of systems that are mutually dependent on one another, interacting and creating the conditions for human flourishing. These three systems are the political culture, the economic culture, and the moral-social culture. Without the last, the former two suffer and collapse. Hence, the ecology of "freedom" that is so important to Häggglund is utterly impossible without a moral culture. And a moral culture is dependent on the religious impulse, as the Founding Fathers of this nation recognized, as Alexis de Tocqueville observed, and as every generation must learn – for better or worse. For this reason, religious freedom has been called the "first freedom." If people are not free to follow the sacred rights of conscience – as is the tragic case in many parts of the world and in all nations that are committed to Marxist ideology – they have no chance of attaining any sort of "democratic" character, and they will be unable to flourish. Rather, they will be persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, or killed, since "freedom" is the right to disagree, and the state cannot tolerate any measure of dissent.

Like all heresy, Häggglund's work be-

gins with a perversion of the truth. From the standpoint of the reader, perhaps the most frustrating aspect of this tendency is Häggglund's borrowing terms that convey value and meaning in a religious context and importing them into his arguments for a secular paradise. At the same time, Häggglund is to be applauded for at least being honest about secularism as a philosophy, for indeed it is a religion and it *functions* as a religion. Since secularism cannot be proven to be true, and since it cannot explain away the reality of the transcendent, it must make pronouncements by faith. Perhaps unwittingly Häggglund hereby undermines the secular argument which he and others would seek to advance: Secularism, too, proceeds on certain metaphysical assumptions, even when it is in denial of them at the theoretical level.

In the end, the secular outlook is to be embraced or rejected on the basis of faith. However, its standard problem is that it is essentially parasitic; that is, it can only exist where there is religious faith and only where claims to transcendent metaphysical reality already exist. Relatively speaking, then, if we view it from the standpoint of human history, secularism is a recent development. Like bacteria, it needs prior life to sustain any sort of "existence" of its own.

Over the years I have thought long and hard about the current condition of European nations, perhaps because I married a European citizen and spent the early years of married life living in Europe. What has always struck me is the sheer rapidity with which European nations have become wholly secularized. This is true, not only of Scandinavian countries – the author of *This Life* is Swedish – and most of what is formerly Lutheran northern Europe, but also of the nations of southern Europe which historically are predominantly Roman Catholic. One gets the impression that European nations are competing to see which country can jettison its religious heritage the fastest.

In the end, the "democratic socialism" being advocated by Martin Häggglund does not, alas, lead to "spiritual freedom." In fact, the European model of "democratic socialism" would appear to be in the early throes of a new subservience. Consider what Islamists have long predicted about Europe, and the possibility that in 50 years Europe could have an Islamic

majority. Strangely, not a word about Europe's crisis of character and its utter lack of values is found in *This Life*. Häggglund seems blissfully unaware that Europe may not be "European" for much longer. For into that secular vacuum – wherein people believe nothing, affirm nothing, and live only for the present (as Häggglund advocates) – has appeared another worldview. It is a metaphysical outlook that is decidedly religious and eschatological in orientation. It honors "martyrs" who go to their graves in order to transform European culture into a new religious despotism. This struggle, or *jihad*, for cultural ascent in Europe need not be violent, although it may – and in fact often does – require violence and intimidation. It is truly unfortunate that Häggglund seems unaware of the practical end to which his commitment to Marxist thinking and so-called "democratic socialism" leads. His call, as developed in *This Life*, to a "new secular vision" – a call to move "beyond religion and capitalism" – approximates an invitation to political, economic, and socio-cultural suicide. The path that he proposes leads to serfdom, repression, and poverty.

It has been said that the only place where Marxist thinking still exists in the West is in universities. The cynic might observe that this is the natural result when a young professor of comparative literature and the humanities at Yale like Häggglund – possessing no sense of historical memory and engaging no serious economic theorists of our time – starts writing books on "political economy" and "spiritual freedom." But we must eclipse cynicism to point out that Häggglund is wrongheaded and misguided (when not utterly naïve) to revivify Marxist thinking about capitalism and deem it "misunderstood." The proof, as they say, is in the pudding, and no one has contributed to more death, destruction, and human misery in our world during the last 150 years than Karl Marx. Häggglund is correct to identify secularism as a faith; at least in this regard, he is honest. He is wrong – dead wrong – to blithely insist that it leads to "spiritual freedom." It will lead, rather, to a Hell on earth, as we have tragically witnessed again and again for more than a century.

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

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RENEWING THE FACE OF THE EARTH

Rev. Robert A. Sirico

The most reported remarks from September’s United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York were not from a scientist, an economist, or any of the world leaders present. They were the words of 16-year-old Greta Thunberg: “People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction.” Her remarks were passionate, full of anger, frustration, and fear. They were not grounded in any sound science, economic analysis, or political realism. They announced a sort of secular apocalypse.

Apocalyptic thinking precedes our debate over climate change and environmental stewardship by several millennia. There is, of course, a kernel of truth to this thinking. The prophets teach us that an apocalypse is an “unveiling,” that there will be both an end to life as well as a last judgment. This tends to order the mind. The cause of that end, however, will not be merely material but providential, and “the day and the hour knoweth no man.” Moreover, it is unavoidable and, as such, creates a sense of urgency in those who believe in its coming. We learn to judge ourselves and our own actions against its looming backdrop.

Note, however, the difference with the apocalyptic thinking of much of the environmental movement. Their coming environmental apocalypse springs from material causes, which change over the decades. It comes to us with dire but constantly changing warnings akin to the “new light” dispensed by the Watchtower Society: 1874, no 1914, no 1924, back to 1914; perhaps 1975 ... ? Its date is certain, however many times it is revised and pushed back. In the case of the Environmentalist Watchtower, the end is always avoidable, as long as its directives to increase the size of the State are heeded.

Creation is a gift of a loving God. The earth is our home, not our judge. The responsibilities of environmental stewardship are among the many obligations we have, all of which must be balanced and properly discerned. We are entrusted with a garden, not a jungle, one that we are to till and keep (Gen. 2:15). In substituting a secular environmental apocalypse, we are being admonished to cease tilling and keeping, to back off and let the garden return to its natural state, so to speak. This is the moral superiority of the jungle, as though the work of human labor despoils rather than enhances the creation. Animated by fear, we are encouraged to embrace an ideology of primitivism.

At a conference in Rome Jonas Marcolino Macuxí, the chief of the Amazonian Macuxí tribe, spoke of the dangers of such a primitivist ideology. In his home country of Brazil, he describes how missionary workers informed by liberation theology embraced the environmental movement and its deficient anthropology. This has prevented the Amazon region from developing and traps indigenous people in poverty. He told the *National Catholic Register*:

Many of the great Indian leaders see such theology as a leveling down. These liberation theologians are promoting the idea that the Indians who still live in a primitive way are very happy, living in paradise, etc., and wanting to promote this idea to everybody else.

But that’s not true. It’s false. We are not living in paradise. It’s a very hard life; people have insects all over their feet, bats in their homes.

The words of Jonas Marcolino Macuxí were not nearly as widely reported as those of Greta Thunberg. They complicate the narrative. We have many pressing environmental concerns, but those are not our only concerns. The fear of secular environmental apocalypse causes many to forget those concerns; in surrendering ourselves to an ideology rooted in fear, we forget our duties to our neighbors and to nature itself.

Our charge to till and keep the creation is a hopeful but difficult one. It involves enjoying the fruits of the earth and treasuring it as a gift. It involves making prudential judgments balancing our rights and duties. It is only through this sort of careful discernment, informed by sound economic principles, that we can realize the common good, including the care for the earth, our common home.

Fr. Robert A. Sirico is the co-founder of the Acton Institute. [R&L](#)

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