

ACTON INSTITUTE

# Religion & Liberty

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## Exporting Hope: An Interview with Mart Laar



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# Editor's Note



It is a measure of how radically the situation of Europe has changed in the past generation that one regularly encounters seminars and symposia with grand but gloomy titled “Whither Europe?” or “The European Future?”

The question mark is key. There is much doubt about the health of Europe. Part of that is a demographic issue with plunging birthrates and mass immigration, the specter has been raised of a European future that is lacking Europeans. But it is more than that. If the European body is weak, the cause

might be in the European soul.

This issue of *Religion & Liberty* looks at that question, benefiting from the insights of some of Europe’s leading voices. Our lead interview is with Mart Laar, the former Estonian prime minister, who talks about “exporting hope” in the context of his country’s post-communist transformation. A view from Western Europe is provided by Jose Maria Aznar, the former Spanish prime minister, who speaks directly about the moral foundations of liberty. Both leaders were featured speakers at an Acton conference in Rome this past May.

Our book review looks at a collaboration between Marcello Pera, former president of the Italian Senate, and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. These two thinkers, one political and the other theological, examine the roots of Europe. Pera also has addressed Acton conferences.

And I am delighted to include a text from Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and

Kaliningrad, which adds to our pages a Russian Orthodox perspective on the European soul. Our regular “Double-Edged Sword” feature on Scripture takes up the theme of “divinization”—a particular emphasis of Orthodox theology.

The European question is not only one of politics or economics, but of what lies behind politics and economics, namely the world of culture, ideas, values and faith. In that sense, the European question is not only for Europeans. I would draw your attention on our Acton FAQ, which illustrates how Acton is supporting research on these questions on three different continents.

Just as the human soul animates the human body, understanding the soul of a nation, a people, or even a continent, is critical to understanding the status of that nation, people or continent. It is not possible only to measure that from the outside as it were. This issue of *R&L* gets us inside so to speak, the European soul.

*Robert A. Sirico*

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Mart Laar

# Exporting Hope

An Interview with Mart Laar

Born in 1960 behind the Iron Curtain, Mart Laar was the prime minister of Estonia from 1992 to 1994 and from 1999 to 2002. A historian by training, he is the author of the 1992 book *War in the Woods*, which documents the Estonian resistance fighters' struggle against the Soviet Union after World War II. As prime minister of Estonia, Laar's free-market reforms took Estonia from a country devastated by Soviet economics to one of the most vibrant in Europe. He currently lectures all over the world about Estonia's renaissance and rise from communism.

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*Growing up in Estonia, when was the first moment that you realized there was something wrong with the Soviet system?*

I couldn't actually say the exact moment. It was very early, but not too early, because my grandfather has told me some stories that I don't remember myself. I was born on the twenty-second of April, the same day Vladimir Lenin was born. I nearly gave my grandfather a heart attack when he asked once whom I loved most in the world. There are a lot of beautiful [people I could have named], including my grandfather, but I shocked him, saying that I most loved Lenin. He was really shocked that his grandson was so brainwashed. But it didn't last very long. Because when you're honest, you understand the Soviet system very quickly because the truth is so clear. The contrast between the truth and Soviet propaganda is very clear and seeable for everybody. Everything said around you was a lie—not only some

things, but everything. And when you started to hear family stories, what had happened with your family, what had happened with your father, with your grandparents, it became even clearer how evil the Soviet system was. The speech President Reagan gave about the evil empire was very welcomed in Estonia. We saw the first statement really telling the truth.

In this sense, it made life easier, or it made fighting against evil easier. When you are in a situation where the lines between good and evil are not so clear, it's sometimes even more complicated. In some ways, the fight against the totalitarian system is the easy part of life.

*What kept hope alive for Estonians?*

When you understand how the Soviet system works, it gives you some freedom. The Soviet system is based on absolute terror and fear. So when you first kill millions or tens of millions or hundreds of millions of people, then [everyone] is just so afraid that nobody will resist. And then when you see some resistance come, it's no longer necessary to kill a million people, only to kill hundreds of people to get them back under control. To keep this fear alive, they continually need to punish somebody, to put somebody to the chain. And to keep this fear alive, it's not necessary to put people through the system because they have actually done something [against the Soviet system]. You just put someone to the chain and then everybody is more afraid. And when you understand that you can be doomed anyway, then actually you

are freed because—what is the difference?

*Why does communism always lead to killing people?*

It couldn't be otherwise. The system is actually so unproductive, so unfair, so stu-

**"The Soviet system is based on absolute terror and fear. So when you first kill millions of people, then [everyone] is just so afraid that nobody will resist."**

pid, the people are not very eager to volunteer [for it]. To get people to go along, you must base the system on fear. So you must make people fear. And to make them afraid, the most effective way is to kill them. The communist terror has been especially effective in this. Nazi terror was selective. If you were Jewish then your family was killed. If you were just communist, [under the Nazis] your family probably survived. There were very clear rules. In the red terror, there were no rules. You could be the highest party man—maybe you were the real hangman yourself and killed hundreds of thousands of people—and it wouldn't save you. In one moment it was decided that you would disappear, and you disappear. Nobody was secure.

*continued on pg 12*



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# Europe Is Losing Its Soul

by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad

Europe is a unique cultural and spiritual phenomenon that was formed over the course of centuries and is currently undergoing fundamental changes. Why does the fate of Europe concern us, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church? Because Russia, while possessing a distinctive culture and self-consciousness, is also an integral part of Europe. It is not by chance that Dostoevsky, who like nobody else was conscious of Russia's uniqueness, nevertheless called Europe his second home. In the Russian soul, Europe occupies a special place, primarily because of its Christian roots. I would like to stress that these roots go back not only to Western Christianity, but also to Eastern Christianity, mainly through Byzantium.

As is known, the very name Byzantium is artificial and came into use only in the sixteenth century in the West. Until then Byzantium was known as the Roman or Roman empire, and the Byzantines called themselves Romans or Romanians. This empire, whose capital was Constantinople, stretched to both the West and the East. This totality that comprised both the Eastern and Western parts decisively influenced the formation of modern European civilization. For example, nobody will contest the assertion that St. Augustine is a father of Western European thought, but it should be remembered that Eastern neoplatonists exerted decisive influence on him. Western Scholasticism, which became the cradle of modern philosophy, was formed under the influence of the

Eastern Cappadocians and the Corpus Areopagiticum. The legal culture of Western Europe grew out of the Code of Canon Law of Emperor Justinian. And even if we look at the era after the tragic division of Western and Eastern Christendom, the Byzantines continued to exert tremendous influence on Western thought and culture. It is not by chance that the mass emigration of educated Greeks to Italy after the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in the fifteenth century coincided with the beginning of the Italian Renaissance. Vestiges of Byzantine culture in the West can be seen even today in the Cathedral of St. Mark in Venice and in the Spanish paintings of the Cretan iconographer Domenikos Theotokopoulos, known as El Greco.

What is occurring in modern Europe? We are all observers of how a dramatic weakening of Europe's Christian identity is taking place. Europe is losing the characteristics given to it by Christianity—I would like to stress: both Western and Eastern! Europe is losing its soul.

European values are becoming more and more secular, but I would not say that these values have totally lost their ties with Christianity. Many of them could not have appeared if there had been no Christianity in Europe. They represent a watered-down, worldly version of traditional European Christian values, and in this devitalized version are often turned against the Christianity that gave birth to

"The recent scandal caused by the publication of caricatures of the prophet Mohammed demonstrates that it was not Christianity that caused the collisions, but rather secularism...."

them, casting doubt on the Christian identity of Europe. Breaking with the spiritual foundations of European civilization, these values risk losing the good that was placed in them by Christianity. Our concern is that Europe, having lost its connection to Christianity, may in the end make recourse to such forms of oppression or even violence against the individual that have always been foreign to her. Russia, as no other country, has experienced just how grave the break with one's spiritual roots can be for civilization, something that threatens societies not only with the loss of their countenance, but also with the rise of violence toward the person, egregious violations of personal freedom, and the suppression of spiritual needs. The history of Russia in the twentieth century should serve as a warning to modern Europe, demonstrating that the rejection of the spiritual and cultural foundations on which a civilization is founded can present a serious threat to civilization itself.

## Europe Is Losing Its Soul

Indeed, the forms of social relations that were shaped in the twentieth century were to a significant extent a secularized variant of values characteristic of the Russian spiritual tradition: collectivism became the secularized version of conciliarity (“sobornost”) and the community-centered life, a single state ideology replaced the spiritual authority of the church.

Today one might say that the Muslim population is increasing dramatically in Europe. In view of this, can Europe remain Christian while not entering into conflict with Islam? The recent scandal caused by the publication of caricatures of the prophet Mohammed demonstrates that it was not Christianity that caused the collisions, but rather secularism, the secularization of society, which behaved with disdain toward spiritual values and the sacred. In this regard the positive example of Russia is remarkable, where Orthodoxy, Islam, and other traditional religions peacefully coexist to the extent that respect for faith and sacred things is maintained in society. In other words, Islam is ready to coexist peacefully with Christianity. Extremism, rooted in radical sentiments within Islam, is as a rule directed not against Christianity itself but against the lack of spirituality and the secularization of Western societies. Of course, we do not attempt to justify extremism, but are simply speaking of the causes that give rise to it. Thus, the secularization of Europe not only undermines the foundations of European identity, but also provokes conflict with religious groups that do not wish to subject themselves to the general tendency of secularization.

In view of this it seems to me extremely important to return to the Christian meaning of the European values that under-

went secularization, central to which are freedom and human rights. In their secularized form these values, as mentioned above, lose their profundity and can even turn against the person and the spiritual foundations of his personality. [In] April 2006, the Jubilee Tenth World Russian People’s Council was held in Moscow. One of the highlights of this forum was the adoption of the *Declaration on the Rights and Dignity of the Person*. Some have already christened this document as a particularly Russian declaration of human rights affirming an understanding of rights opposite to the Western understanding. However, this was not the task of those who prepared this *Declaration*. Their task was rather to give a Christian interpretation of some fundamental categories that move world politics today—those of human rights and liberties. We have attempted to integrate a theological foundation into this concept of human rights, thereby uniting, or rather re-uniting, this concept with traditional Christian views.

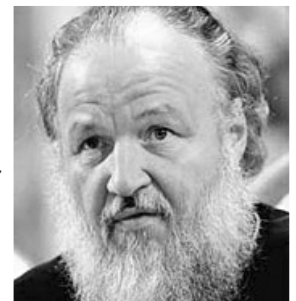
At the foundation of this declaration lie two principal distinctions: between two meanings of human dignity, which we have agreed to call value and dignity, as well as between two meanings of freedom: freedom as the non-determinateness of human actions and freedom as not being subjugated to evil and sin. The fact that man is created in the image of God, as well as the fact of the incarnation, i.e. the assumption by the Son of God of our nature for the salvation of the human race, serve as the basis for the affirmation of the pre-eminent value of human nature. This value cannot be taken away or destroyed. It should be respected by everyone: by other people, society, the state, etc. An integral part of human nature that gives it special value is the

freedom of choice. This freedom was placed into human nature by God himself and cannot be violated by anyone: neither other people, nor evil powers, nor even God himself.

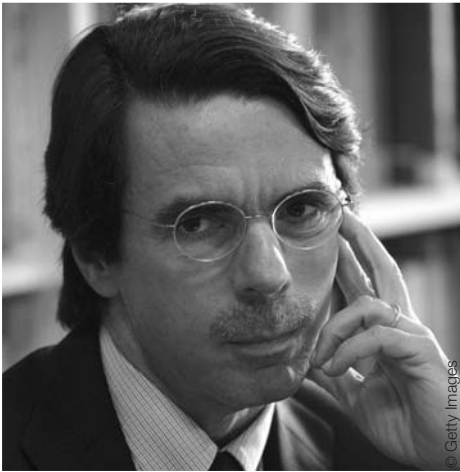
By itself this freedom is only an instrument with which the person realizes his moral choices. Freedom of choice should be used for attaining freedom from sin. Only by liberating oneself from the shackles of sin and acquiring the “freedom of the glory of God’s children,” as St. Paul wrote in his Epistle to the Romans (8:21), can one give meaning to his inherent ability to make free choices and acquire that which in the *Declaration* is called dignity. Human dignity is the highest goal of existence. Expressed in theological terms, it corresponds to the likeness of God in the person. Dignity is acquired when one makes his choices in favor of the good, and is lost when one chooses evil.

We can testify to the fact that the welfare and perhaps the very existence of human civilization in a globalized world will to a great extent depend on the ability to combine rights and freedoms with moral responsibility. For freedom and morality, placed by God himself into human nature and which belong to everyone regardless of their culture or religion, are able to combine the existing civilizational models in a peaceful and viable manner.

*This article was adapted from a speech given in Vienna by Met. Kirill. A full transcript of his speech is available in the May 11, 2006, issue of the Europaica Bulletin. Translated from Russian by*



*Metropolitan Kirill*



Jose Maria Aznar

# Dignity, Democracy, and the Free Market

by Jose Maria Aznar

*The Acton Institute is hosting a series of lectures celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of Centesimus Annus, Pope John Paul II's landmark encyclical. The following is taken from President Aznar's address delivered on May 4, 2006, at the Italian Parliament in Rome.*

The myth of the perfect society is certainly nothing new. The idea of an earthly paradise organized by superior men, whether they be aristocrats, wise philosophers, or members of a self-appointed proletarian avant-garde, has been an incessant theme in human affairs since the time of Plato.

However, the twentieth century laid bare exactly what these utopias conceal: the fact that all of these idyllic and harmonious invented societies subordinate everything to a central plan, accompanied by the implacable repression of any kind of behavior that strays from the course that is marked out. The experience of communism has undoubtedly changed our view of utopia today. We now know that the search for absolute perfection within the realm of social affairs sooner or later leads to absolute horror.

In Europe, when totalitarian societies such as these took on a nightmarish quality, it was easy to see and to say these things. It was obviously much harder to warn of the disastrous consequences of socialism twenty-six years before the Bolshevik Revolution even took place. But that is exactly what His Holiness Leo XIII did, with considerable courage and farsightedness, in 1891 in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

The conceptual farsightedness of Leo XIII resided in his defense of private property as an individual right, and not so much in terms of its social and economic benefits. On this point, Leo XIII fully agreed with the classical property theory enshrined in liberal thought, which could be summarized by the following thesis proposed by John Locke: "every man has a property in his own person."

John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* glows with the spirit of *Rerum Novarum*. It states that the market economy is the most efficient

**"Only those decisions that we take freely endow our actions with moral value, for better or for worse."**

system when it comes to the allocation of resources and that it is capable of satisfying the needs of the largest number of people. However, it also adds that the main virtue of the market economy compared to the socialist economy is that the mechanisms of the market "give central place to the person's desires and preferences" and, therefore, apart from its technical advantages, is compatible with the dignity and freedom of the individual. What is more, it not only makes these values possible, but it develops and promotes them.

The social function of private property and the market economy is no minor matter.

However, I would like to highlight the personal and moral dimension and stress the justification of private property as being essential to the individual, rather than focusing on its social benefits, which undoubtedly exist.

If I am not mistaken, the social doctrine upheld by the church regards private property as the ideal manifestation of the universal destination of goods. However, it qualifies this position by stating that private property is not only at the service of the common good, but that the common good, in turn, is also at the service of the individual, in which respect for the right to private property is an essential condition for ensuring the individual's freedom and development.

Leo XIII warned us that abolishing private property would have disastrous consequences because it would paralyze any sense of responsibility and remove any desire to work and, as a result, would diminish levels of prosperity. However, his most important point, in my view, was that denying the right to private property as an individual right represented a threat to civilization, which is to say, to man himself and to his sense of dignity.

The drifting course of socialism over the decades following the publication of *Rerum Novarum* confirmed the predictions that were made by Leo XIII. Bolshevism based its planned economy on a rejection of private property, regarding it as the root of all evil, while also adopting a radically hostile approach to personal initiative,

“... denying the right to private property as an individual right represented a threat to civilization ... to man himself and his sense of dignity.”

which it branded as a form of egotism.

Even today, individualism continues to receive very bad press and is frequently associated with egotism and social chaos. That is why I must explain exactly what I mean by the term “individualism.” I am referring to a synthesis of Christianity and ancient philosophy, especially stoicism, a fusion that took place during the Renaissance and subsequently developed and expanded throughout all the societies that we consider to be part of Western civilization. Its essential features include respect for the individual, for his own opinions and tastes, and the belief that it is desirable for all men to be able to develop their own talents and personal inclinations. In this respect, individualism is intimately linked to the ideas of autonomy and personal freedom as moral values and political principles.

Only those decisions that we take freely endow our actions with moral value, for better or for worse. Outside the realm of personal responsibility, there is no good or evil. Personal freedom is a prerequisite for morality.

Only in a democratic, free-market society can human beings preserve their dignity. To defend individual freedom is to protect human dignity. And protecting individual freedom requires respect for private property and the free market. Without these two social institutions, any attempt to build a more humane society is doomed to fail.

*Jose Maria Aznar was the president of Spain from 1996 to 2004.*

## *What is the Acton Institute doing to support promising young scholars?*

An important part of the work of the Acton Institute is promoting the scholarship of tomorrow. Aside from offering conferences, seminars, and publication, the Acton Institute promotes scholarship monetarily. The Calihan Academic Fellowships, Research Fellowships, and Travel Grants provide monetary assistance to students of special potential, encouraging them to explore the intersection of religious principles with human dignity, the importance of the rule of law, limited government, and religious and economic liberty.

Following are some examples of our Calihan recipients and their work:

Rachel Patterson—an Australian lawyer and a master’s student at Columbia Law School—spent the summer of 2006 writing a textbook on Australian family law to be published by Cambridge University Press. Ms. Patterson is a TFAVS alumna and received honorable mention in the 2005 Acton Essay contest.

Marek Tracz-Tryniecki—a doctoral student in legal and political thought at the University of Maria Curie-Sktodowska—will be writing his doctoral dissertation on the thought of Tocqueville in light of Catholic social teaching. Mr. Tracz-Tryniecki was a finalist in the Acton Essay contest.

Matthew Wright—a doctoral student in public law and political theory at the University of Texas at Austin—will be working with Professor Robert George at Princeton as a student research collaborator. His research topic will be “the new natural law.” Mr. Wright was a participant in the 2006 Acton University and received an honorable mention in the 2001 Acton Essay contest.

By helping young scholars from around the world pursue their academic vocations, the Acton Institute multiplies its own work and ensures the pursuit of freedom and virtue in academia for years to come.



Kris Alan Mauren  
Executive Director



Rachel Patterson



# Conjugal Economics

by Andrew Lynn

The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man” (Genesis 2:23). When Adam awoke from his nap and uttered these words about his wife, he offered a view of how God’s perfectly formed male-female relationship was meant to look. Only eight verses later this ideal relationship comes to an end when man and woman fall from the perfect plan of God.

In her book *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World*, Carrie Miles works to reunite modern day perceptions of marriage with God’s vision of marriage as it was originally intended. Miles offers up a readable and insightful book by taking an interdisciplinary approach, discerning where we have let sin rewrite our views on marriage and sexuality. Instead of focusing upon coercive, unrealistic, or more secularly pleasing solutions to the decline of family and marriage in society, Miles advises Christians to “let our redemption, our joy, our peace, and our love for each other permeate our lives to such an extent that we become the light of the world.”

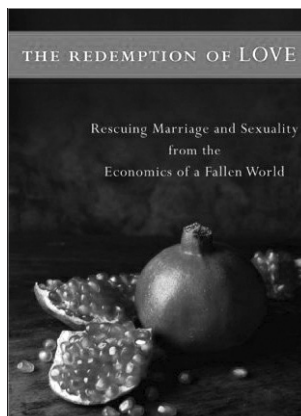
Miles acts as a skilled guide through the Bible’s many teachings and insights upon marriage and sexuality, stopping along the way in Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and the teachings of Jesus and Paul in the New Testament. But what separates *The Redemption of Love* from many other Christian books on marriage is the economic approach that Miles brings to the

role of the family in society. She heads up this analysis with a provocative thesis that reverses typical views of causation: “The sexual revolution, rising rates of divorce, promiscuity, and out-of-wedlock births are the results, not the cause, of the breakdown of the family.” Tracing causation back a step further, Miles argues that the family broke down in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries due to changing economic incentives that men and women faced when making decisions about family, love, and morality.

At the center of this argument is the rapid decline in birth rates between 1800 and today. In 1800 American woman bore seven children on average, compared to an average below two today. As America moved from a rural, agrarian economy to a more urbanized, industrial economy, families no longer had as great a need for child laborers. At the same time, institutions in society other than the family were looked to for providing care and services for par-

ents in their older years. Ultimately the economic imperative for family has decreased from pre-industrial times, according to Miles, and this has freed individuals to pursue untraditional families, divorce, and immorality without having to worry about economic retributions. Having children out of wedlock or acquiring a divorce lost its sting when single-parent households—and most significantly single women—were able to make it on their own, largely due to emerging technology.

In essence, Miles’s argument suggests that both human virtue and depravity take a backseat to economic incentives that ultimately guide human decisions. She states that people before the divorce and sexual revolution were no more virtuous than us, but their virtues were largely the “material requirements of survival under the economic conditions that prevailed.” Though a compelling argument, it is difficult to accept that God strengthened the “two shall become one flesh” bond of marriage



**The Redemption of Love**  
 by Carrie A. Miles  
 Brazos Press  
 240 pp. Paperback \$16.00  
 ISBN 1-58743-150-5



with a temporary adhesive of economic necessity that seemed to wear off just in time for our current age.

When Paul in Ephesians commands husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, the metaphor demonstrates the intense depth of self-sacrificial love that husbands are to have for their wives, comparable to Christ becoming nothing and giving his life for his bride, the church (Ephesians 5:25–29). Marriage has always been a high calling, which is why Jesus says it isn't for everyone (Matthew 19:11). The consequences of the fall, however, have certainly tarnished the reality of husband-wife relations, as seen in Genesis 3.

When sin contaminated marriage long ago, did it reduce it to only an economic solution to a problem we no longer have? Undoubtedly, to answer in the affirmative is to suggest that marriage is far less than what Paul admonished it to be. After all, there can be no greater example of a relationship free of or entirely antithetical to economic incentives than the example of Christ and the church. If marriage has effectively been reduced to an economic fad now out of style, then we must give sin its proper credit for so severely corrupting God's original intention for marriage, and recognize sin as the driving force behind today's sexual revolution, rising rates in divorce, promiscuity, and out-of-wedlock births. Miles may be crediting economic forces with too much influence when, in actuality, sin did its work long before the large economic shift in society.

However, economics is a factor worth looking at when thinking about the family institution in a historical context. *The Redemption of Love* should be credited with bringing this valuable tool to the discussion we must have as traditional family structures continue to decline in our society. An interdisciplinary approach like Miles's—one that places Biblical truths at its forefront—is the ideal starting point for any effort to reinstate family as the institution central to maintaining virtue in a fallen world.

*Andrew Lynn is a senior at the University of Notre Dame.*

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

## Genesis 17:3

*"When Abraham prostrated himself, God continued to speak to him: 'My covenant with you is this: you are to become the father of a host of nations.'" Gen. 17:3*

Within decades of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, the good news had spread from Jerusalem through the Hellenistic culture of the eastern Mediterranean to Rome, and to ends-of-earth places such as India and the British Isles. In the following centuries, holy men and women protected the heritage of Western civilization in monasteries and convents, and then re-evangelized the barbarian-conquered West, thereby helping to create a new entity known as Europe. Over the next two millennia, Christianity built much of what we take for granted in civilization today: universities, economics, a belief in human rights and the dignity of all persons.

**"The Gospel is indeed a civilizing force, but certainly it promised more than simply to make us all civil."**

Certainly, the house of modern civilization was built on the foundations of Christianity. But is a strong civilization all the Gospel offers? The Gospel is indeed a civilizing force, but certainly it promised more than simply to make us all civil. After all, to what end civilization?

Civilization is important, but Western civilization especially so, for it contains within it a reminder of the point of civilization: the pursuit of God in Christ. When God promised Abraham he would be the father of many nations, it is safe to say he did not have in mind traditions of learning and culture, great works of architecture, or international economic systems. Rather, this covenant was based on the communion of all people with their Creator. And yet, civilization and "divinization" move in the same direction—toward the proper ordering and development of the human person. A true and solid civilization in this world will encourage, assist, and allow persons to pursue their proper ends, which ultimately are not of this world. It is in this sense that philosopher Jacques Maritain can say that "to civilize is to spiritualize."

And so the nation that would spring from the faith of Abraham would also serve as a springboard for the salvation of all nations. Christ's salvific work, from one nation and for all nations, means that all nations might become more fully themselves, just as it means all persons might become more fully themselves. And in the end, "a great multitude ... of every nation, race, people, and tongue" will cry out in a loud voice "Salvation comes from our God" (Rev. 7:9–10).



# Europe without Roots

by Marcello Pera

Optimism is obligatory, but it's cheap. In the current situation, there is a heavy price to pay. Relativism has wreaked havoc, and it continues to act as a mirror and an echo chamber for the dark mood that has fallen over the West. It has paralyzed the West, when it is already disoriented and at a standstill, rendered it defenseless when it is already acquiescent, and confused it when it is already reluctant to rise to the challenge.

One should not think of philosophy as a luxury for initiates, to be consumed only within the walls of the university. It is instead a powerful tool for the promotion and spread of ideas and energy, and a vehicle of influential opinions. It always has been. It would thus be mistaken to think that relativism has never hurt anyone, or that it has never steered anyone down the wrong path, or even that it represents the height of theoretical tolerance, political elegance, and philosophical reflection. The opposite instead is true.

Plato's *Republic* supports a strong, shrewd state. Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* leads to his provisional moral code. Marx's surplus-value is grounded in the class struggle. Hume's "association of ideas" is connected with the morality of sympathy and the liberal ethic. Croce's "dialectic of the distinct" is based on absolute freedom. Gentile's "pure act" leads to totalitarianism or permanent revolution. Popper's "conjectures and refutations" are linked to the open society, Nozick's "minimum state" leads to anarchy, and Rawls's "theory of justice" to

liberal democracy. The list goes on. In the same way, the relativism that preaches the equivalence of values or cultures is grounded not so much in tolerance as in acquiescence, more inclined toward capitulation than awareness, more focused on decline than on the force of conviction, progress, and mission (which were once typical of Christianity, Europe, and the West).

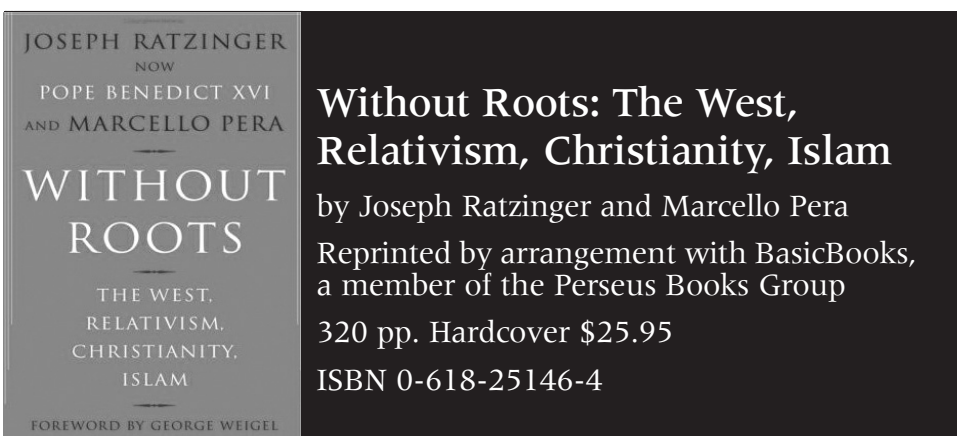
Allow me to cite another example, which refers back to my discussion of theological relativism: the question of the Christian roots of Europe. When the proposal was made to insert a reference to the Christian roots of Europe into the preamble to the European Constitutional Treaty, it was rejected, for reasons that should give us food for thought.

Pope John Paul II's personal commitment to this cause is well known. In 2004 he delivered a series of statements on the subject: "The identity of Europe would be incomprehensible without Christianity"

(May 2); "You don't cut off the roots from which you were born" (June 20); and "May Europe be itself and come to terms with its Christian roots" (August 4). So important did he consider it that he devoted a long, detailed Apostolic Exhortation to the topic. The essence of his argument could be summed up in a single quotation:

The Christian faith has shaped the culture of the continent and is inextricably bound up with its history, to the extent that Europe's history would be incomprehensible without reference to the events which marked first the great period of evangelization and then the long centuries in which Christianity, despite the painful division between East and West, came to be the religion of the European peoples.

Unfortunately, these words went unheeded, like a *vox clamantis in deserto*, a voice crying out in the wilderness. The proposal was rejected and the defeat was round. What is most disturbing is that it was ac



## Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam

by Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera

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## Europe without Roots

accompanied not by a bang but by a whimper. Not even the church, in my opinion, rose to the challenge.

The reason for this half-heartedness is not because there is some truth to the proposition that Europe does not have Christian roots (or, to be more precise, Judeo-Christian roots). Or because our freedoms and our liberalism do not depend on the Christianity from which they are derived and to which they are bound. On the contrary, it is true that almost all of the achievements that we consider most laudable are derived from Christianity or were influenced by Christianity, by the message of God become Man.

In truth, without this message, which has transformed all human beings into persons in the image of God, individuals would have no dignity.

In truth, our values, rights, and duties of equality, tolerance, respect, solidarity, and compassion are born from God's sacrifice.

In truth, our attitude toward others, toward all others, whatever their condition, class, appearance, or culture, is shaped by the Christian revolution.

In truth, even our institutions are inspired by Christianity, including the secular institutions of government that render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. And this list goes on.

So why then did this proposal fail and why were its proponents so feeble? Why was the pope's insistent appeal ignored? My own explanation is that in the age of triumphant relativism and "silent apostasy," *belief in the true no longer exists: the mission of the true is considered fundamentalism, and the very affirmation of the true creates or raises fears.*

If these opinions and sentiments have infiltrated Christian theology, if from the philosophy departments they have trickled down into the clergy and spread to the parishes and families in the apartment buildings next door, how can we hope that Christians will obtain for their faith the recognition it deserves? How can we hope that the clergy and the Christian masses of Europe will mobilize on behalf of a faith that reminds them of their grave responsibilities, at the same time as they are being mobilized in favor of a peace that must be made and a dialogue that must be entertained with the very people who openly attack the fundamental values of the West and desire neither peace nor dialogue?

*"In truth, our values, rights, and duties of equality, tolerance, respect, solidarity, and compassion are born from God's sacrifice."*

The fight to obtain recognition for the Christian roots of today's Europe has proved to be in vain. To give you one example, the theologian Gösta Hallonsten asked,

In this process of unification, what role could be played by Christianity which, while inextricably linked with the historical identity of the European peoples, is nevertheless seen today more as old merchandise meant for exportation rather than as a specific product of the European market?

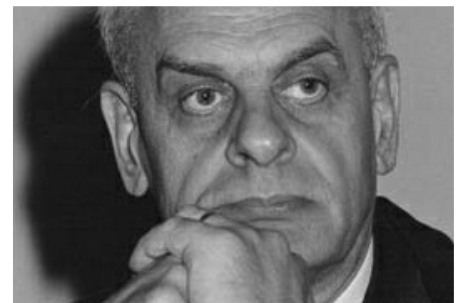
The role it plays is, alas, a weak one.

Relativism has debilitated our Christian defenses and prepared or inclined us for surrender. It has convinced us that there is nothing worth fighting for or risking. It does not even object when others attempt to remove the crucifix from our schools (this happened in Italy). It presumes to see itself at the foundations of the secular state while it actually changes (or deconstructs) into a secular state religion of the state that prohibits Muslim girls in a European country from wearing the *hijab* to school (this happened in France). It shirks the educational burden of true integration, and one fine day it decides to separate these same boys and girls of Islamic faith from other boys and girls in a scholastic ghetto (this also happened in Italy).

Perhaps the West today no longer understands what is right. It only knows what is wrong, and it readjusts its notions of right and wrong every time someone complains about one of its errors. Or maybe it is simply exhausted. As [Mario] Vargas Llosa has said, "Democracy is an event that provokes yawns in the countries in which rule of law exists."

I hope that he's wrong, and that the lethargy he describes does not exist. But if, unfortunately, he is right, then we need to start rubbing our eyes and wake up.

*Marcello Pera is a philosopher and the former president of the Italian Senate.*



*Marcello Pera*



*What would you say to those Western intellectuals who still sympathize with Marxism and question whether it would have worked had it been done a little bit differently?*

I don't understand Western intellectuals who continuously support the Marxist ideas. I am always interested in asking [kids in Che Guevara t-shirts] if the next t-shirt they wear will show Hitler. I don't understand why someone who kills one or ten persons is called murderer and someone who kills hundreds of thousands of people is called a hero. And when someone kills millions of people, he is called a great statesman. That's something that is very hard to understand. And I especially don't understand the people who say that maybe communism might have worked if we had done it differently. Do what differently? Kill more people? The only way to keep communism alive is to kill significantly more people, because communism is based on massive violence and fear.

*What is the difference between the way a free market looks at human beings and the way the Soviet model looks at humans?*

The Soviet model of life was that the human being has no value. He is some part of the system. It's very bad to think, it's not necessary to become active. You must just listen to what is told to you. That is one reason why the system fails. The market economy, when it's a normal market, depends on the people and their activity. It trusts people. I do not say so much that the market must be trusted, but that

the people must be trusted.

*Describe the Estonian economy during and just after communism.*

In 1939, it was hard to find two more similar countries as Finland and Estonia. We were very similar in language, culture, and living standards. Our economies were more or less the same. Then in 1940, Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union and Finland successfully protected its independence. Look at what happened in this context during these fifty years and then you can understand how terrible the communist system really is. And it's not only in the economy. This is in all fields of life—the social structure, cultural standards, education, healthcare, or whatever. When you compare those two countries, which were exactly the same in 1939 in 1989, then you will find what communism really means, and how bad it is. Our economy, our nature, and our environment was destroyed. We were in a situation where it looked like there was no hope, no way out. When we took power in 1992, the economic situation was such that we had 1,000 percent inflation. There was no gasoline for the cars, so there were no cars in the streets. Unemployment ran somewhere around 30 percent to 40 percent. There was absolute dependence on Russia for trade. More than 92 percent of our trade was connected with Russia, so we were absolutely broken down. It couldn't have been worse. There was a huge increase of poverty and a huge

increase of social inequality, and that was quite a bad picture to start. We were starting from nothing.

*Can you talk about the principles that you decided were absolutely essential for forming a solid foundation for a new government?*

I think the first important task we had to deal with was to wake the people up, to give them new heart. Encourage them to make decisions, to really empower them. And most of the reforms had this goal because the government couldn't change the country, only people could. And the government task in this reform was to give this power to people, and it meant a lot of reform in a lot of areas. The second principle was to do it as simply as possible because only then would it start to work. If you get too complicated, reform complicated systems to ideas and solutions, then you will probably lose so much time that you will fail. And finally, everything you do, you must do quickly because this window of opportunity was limited where the people would live with such radical measures.

Basing our activities on these three main principles, we launched different kinds of reforms, starting with the political one: We took the former communists out of office, made a smaller but more effective administration, and introduced the rule of law. Independent and democratic institutions

*"I never understood Western intellectuals who continuously support the Marxist ideas. I am always interested in asking [kids in Che Guevara t-shirts] if the next t-shirt they wear will show Hitler."*

“When we compare Estonia now to Estonia fifteen years ago, we actually don’t remember very much what the country looked like ... Everything has changed. And what I like most in the changes is how the people look.”

are crucial to making a market economy work. Without them it’s not possible. And then we restored property rights to the people as quickly and fast as we could to make people, owners again and not the government. I think this is one basic idea to empower the people and to give them possibilities. None of the other economic reforms have the same [force]. We encouraged Estonians to make decisions and to be responsible for their own lives.

*What is the effect of competition on an economy?*

I think one thing that I learned from the Milton Freedman book [*Free to Choose*] is that competition is the most important thing. To support competition, you must open your markets. So that’s what I did. And, of course, I must say, a lot of these old fashioned Soviet factory workers were very angry with me. They said that we were not protecting the national industry and that it would all go down. Some [wanted] subsidies, which I refused, of course. I answered them very simply. You have now two options left, to die or to start working to produce something you can sell in the world market. And I must say, most of them decided to start working because they were good. Reconstruction was necessary. There were some countries in our neighborhood that tried to protect so-called

industry, to continue the production the same way [as before], which meant that they kept production at low quality and had lower economic development.

When we compare Estonia now to Estonia fifteen years ago, actually, we don’t remember very much what the country looked like. When we look at documentaries, it looks like a very old country. So we don’t remember anymore because the changes have been so big. It is very hard to say what has not changed. Everything has changed. And what I like most in the changes is how the people look. [Before] people didn’t look you in the eyes very much. Everybody was used to looking down, and they didn’t smile. Now, there is an enormous difference. I think that this is the best sign that we have done this reform quite well.

*Is Estonia a model for other countries?*

Estonians themselves, of course, do not think that Estonians are a model. We are always dissatisfied with what we have done, because when we are not the best in the world, we are not satisfied. So when we look at how fast we are moving, when we compare ourselves with other countries, then there is some pride. But it’s something new for Estonians to be models. We have been a quite small and forgotten country, victims of a lot of attacks and foreign rulers and so on.

More and more people understand this. Estonians are looked to for their experience, especially in those countries in transition from a communist to a free economy. Some people don’t trust the American experts because the context from which their advice on reform is given is very different. But they know that we Estonians faced the same situations. Somehow we got out and they didn’t—or haven’t yet—which means that they want to listen to practical advice on how we did it.

I must say, the Estonians are pretty much like people everywhere. We have become part of the Western civilization in all good and all bad things, which means there are a lot of new challenges now ahead. But I think we are quite similar. People are always quite similar.

At the same time—this is important—Estonia gives hope. I remember when we got the first of our results in the reforms, I met Vice President Al Gore. At the end of the meeting he said, “You’re not exporting a lot of goods out of the world, but you’re exporting hope.” And, of course, this always makes us proud because, as I said, it must be remembered, this is not the government, not the prime minister or whomever in the government is doing this reform or making the country a model. It is the people, and the government must only empower the people and trust the people



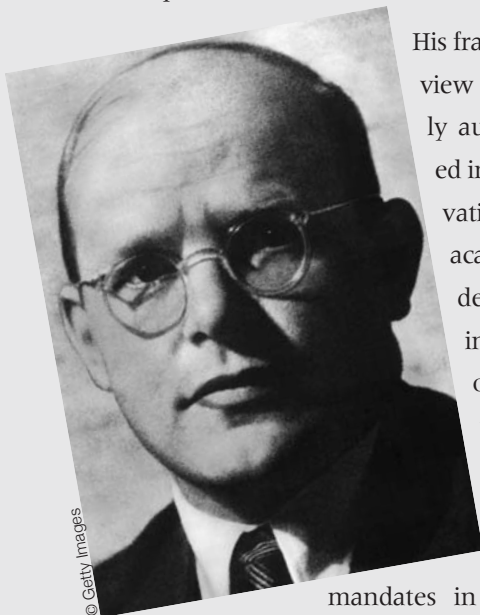
A market in the town square, Raekoja Plats, Tallinn, Estonia.

## Dietrich Bonhoeffer [1906–1945]

Born on February 4, 1906, in Breslau, then part of Imperial Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer began his theological education in 1923 at the University of Tübingen. He later trained under liberal theologians Adolf von Harnack and Reinhold Seeberg.

Following what he would later call a conversion experience, Bonhoeffer intensified his focus on contemporary theological problems facing the church. With the ascendancy of the Nazi party in Germany, Bonhoeffer was among the first of the German theologians to perceive the pervasiveness and significance of the looming Nazi threat.

When the pro-Nazi German Christian party won the church elections in the summer of 1933, Bonhoeffer quickly opposed the anti-Semitism of the Nazis in an important article, “The Church and the Jewish Question.” In this piece Bonhoeffer provided a seminal overview of his perspective of the church’s relationship to the state.



His framework was based on a view of the normative worldly authorities, first articulated in his doctrine of “preservation orders” in his early academic lectures and later developed in mature form in his ethics manuscripts of the early 1940s. In these latter documents, Bonhoeffer speaks of four unique and divinely instituted mandates in the world: work (or labor), marriage (or family), government, and church.

The recognition of the legitimate but limited role of government in human affairs enabled Bonhoeffer to oppose the

“Whether or not government is aware of its own true basis, its task consists in maintaining by the power of the sword an outward justice in which life is preserved and is thus held open for Christ.”

perversion of the state represented by the National Socialists.

Marriage is not made by the government, but is affirmed by the government. The great spheres of work are not themselves undertaken by the government, but they are subject to its supervision within certain limits—later to be described—to governmental direction. Government should never seek to become the agent of these areas of work, for this would seriously endanger their divine mandate along with its own.

Bonhoeffer’s resistance to the Nazi regime included his support for and pastoral participation in the Confessing Church along with other prominent Protestant theologians like Karl Barth and Martin Niemöller, as well as his intricate association with the broader ecumenical movement. When the effectiveness of the Confessing Church’s opposition to Hitler was blunted and his efforts to bring the moral authority of the ecumenical movement to bear failed, Bonhoeffer became involved with the so-called Abwehr conspiracy, which intended to assassinate Hitler, overthrow the Nazi regime, and end the war.

After imprisonment for his role in the escape of Jews to Switzerland, Bonhoeffer was implicated in the failed assassination attempt of July 20, 1944. At the age of thirty-nine, he was hanged by the S.S. at the Flossenbürg concentration camp on April 9, 1945, just weeks before the liberation of the area under Allied troops. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s life and death are a testament to his commitment to the Christian faith and his ardent opposition to the absolutism and idolatry of Nazi Germany.



## Interest and Responsibility

Since at least the middle ages, the payment and receipt of interest has existed under a moral cloud, due mainly to a misunderstanding concerning what interest is and why it exists. Medieval theologians gradually came around to the view that now prevails in economic science.

What connects all forms of interest is the insight that interest is nothing more or less than the exchange ratios between different time horizons. If I prefer to save now, I must put off current consumption. If you prefer to spend now, you must acquire the resources to do so. We can make an exchange between the money you want to spend and the money I want to save. I agree to lend you money, and we negotiate a fee to put to work what might otherwise have been idle resources.

In doing so, of course, I cannot dictate the terms because I must depend on your willingness to pay and I must compete with other lenders who want your business. The result is the interest rate, which is the agreed-upon price differential that reflects the degree to which people prefer consumption over saving.

And let us not make mistakes that the early medieval theologians made in questioning the moral status of interest. In the parable of the talents (Mathew 25:14–30), the last servant is chastised: “Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest” (verse 29). To have not earned interest was considered by the master to be losing money.

The same is true of all interest. Capital earns a return comparable to the going rate of interest because capital must be accumulated over time at the expense of current consumption. Banks and mortgage companies earn interest because they specialize in accumulating non-consumed sources of capital and putting it to use in the form of current spending, via a freely agreed upon contract.

The preference for present versus future consumption can

involve a moral component. For example, a credit card in the hands of a young college student can be a wonderful tool for obtaining essential services and providing a convenient means of navigating the day-to-day business of going to school. Or it can be an enabler of profligacy that leads to personal and financial catastrophe. Actually, we can make the same point about adults. Credit cards can be an essential tool but they can also encourage extraordinary vice based on a distorted sense.

People often complain about the high rates of interest on credit card debt, and legislation is often put forward to cap what credit card companies are charging, as if they were simply taking advantage of borrowers.

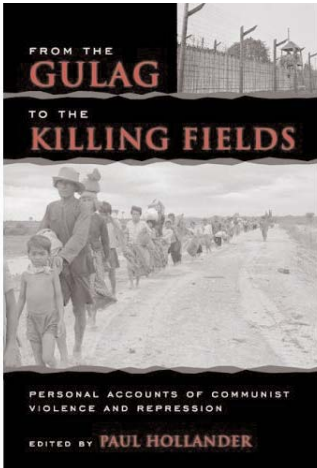
But consider this: interest rates are only high if a balance is carried over from month to month, and sometimes they grow the longer a balance is carried over. This has the effective of discouraging this kind of behavior relative to what it would be if the interest rate were lower.

“We can see how the interest rate helps encourage responsible behavior. It rewards those who save while it asks a fee from those who consume now. Not only that, it manages to do so on a sliding scale.”

Thus can we see how the interest rate helps encourage responsible behavior. It rewards those who save while it asks a fee from those who consume now. Not only that, it manages to do so on a sliding scale. The more you save, the more your rewards; the more you borrow, the more one is expected to pay for the privilege. We might say that that interest rate is yet another miracle of the market.

*Rev. Robert A. Sirico is president of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

# Reviews



## From the Gulag to the Killing Fields

Edited by Paul Hollander • ISI Books, 2006

760 pp. • \$35.00

Review by John Couretas

In a personal account of his internment in the Albanian gulag, Nika Stajka catalogued the fourteen types of torture that communist authorities used against prisoners. These ranged from shooting by firing squad to sleep deprivation to the cutting of flesh with scissors and knives.

In his memoir, published in 1980, Stajka recalls:

We were all labeled as “enemies of the people,” reactionaries, traitors, saboteurs, criminals, villains ... that is why the “popular government” had no mercy for anyone of us, although we had been told at first that work was a great privilege for us, with the “socialist emulation” on our empty stomachs and enduring club blows on our backs, worse off than animals, since we were all between the ages of sixteen and forty-five years, while the aged and handicapped, unable to work, “ate the government bread as parasites.” They said that “it was better to eliminate” the latter.

In an excellent new book, Paul Hollander has assembled an impressive collection of concentration camp memoirs by people who were among the millions of “state enemies” of communism—from the Soviet gulag, through Eastern Europe, China, Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Hollander argues that these intensely personal accounts “provide a superior way to grasp the human costs and consequences” of the twentieth century’s great communist terror. What’s more, these “experiences, when clearly articulated and eloquently recalled, tend to be more informative and memorable than quantitative data and scholarly analysis—though of course the latter too are vital for a full understanding of the phenomenon.”

For many in the West, the lack of a personal, concrete understanding of the reality of forced labor camps, mass murder and state-sponsored terror in distant communist lands made it extremely difficult to comprehend what was happening. The numbers were too fantastic, the systems of repression too elabo-

rate and all-encompassing, the weight of human suffering beyond measure. The tales of those few who did manage to escape the system and give their account to the West were often received with disinterest or outright scorn. This couldn’t be, could it? Surely these political refugees from Stalin’s and Mao’s and Fidel’s and Pol Pot’s utopias were exaggerating. Weren’t they?

In her forward to Hollander’s book, Anne Applebaum notes that, “Only now, in the wake of the collapse of the USSR, is it truly possible to understand the cross-cultural, multinational history of communism as a single phenomenon.” She notes that prison camp literature describes “the myriad ways in which the prisoners themselves altered the rules of the often bizarre, surreal world that they had been forced to inhabit.” (Applebaum’s “Gulag: A History,” published in 2003 by Doubleday, would make an excellent companion to Hollander’s book.)

Hollander has contributed a valuable introduction to the book, which is very helpful in placing these personal accounts into a coherent historical context. He describes the distinctive features of communist repression. Hollander makes important distinctions between the nature of Nazi mass murder and communist political violence. There is a revealing look at the attention gap in Western industrialized societies concerning communist terror—still evident today concerning regimes in such places as Cuba and North Korea—and a lengthy historical and social analysis of the character of repression in communist states.

In the introduction, Hollander directs our attention to the recent “fusion of mass murder (albeit on a smaller scale) with religious-utopian impulses that has been demonstrated by those Islamic suicide bombers and pilots who have eagerly destroyed themselves and others in pursuit of individual salvation and what they consider to be social-political redemptions and justice.” This is an important point because much of the current debate about Islamic terrorism is not about the nature of these “impulses,” which are obvious, but whether they will find their outlet on a horrifically larger scale of destruction and murder.