

# RELIGION & LIBERTY

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## Changed Hearts, Not Politics, Prompt Social Renewal



Photo by Owen Carey

### Interview: Luis Palau

Often compared to the Rev. Billy Graham, evangelist Luis Palau is now well into his third decade of mass evangelism. He has spoken to hundreds of millions of people in ninety-five nations through radio and television broadcasts, and face-to-face to twelve million people in sixty-three nations. He is the author of numerous books, including his newest, *The Only Hope for America*.

**R&L:** *In some Christian circles, social action has taken precedence over evangelism. I am here thinking of the way that the pursuit of social justice has taken the place of the proclamation of the Gospel. What are your thoughts on this trend?*

**Palau:** My view is this: Evangelism, proclamation of the Gospel, is social action. It is social action because it changes the core of the problem, which is, the individual out of control from God. Conversion brings the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and His life into the picture and changes people who, in turn, become salt and light by living their lives without necessarily acting politically or in terms of “social action.” So I put Gospel proclamation first, because

you have nothing to work with unless you have people who have been converted.

**R&L:** *What kind of message do pastors need to be giving to business leaders in their churches?*

**Palau:** I keep saying to pastors “You must become chaplains to the business people who want to practice Christian principles.” I tell them to remember that the only other option to prosperity is poverty. I feel very strongly that pastors need to encourage entrepreneurs and business people, because they are the ones who build jobs, who encourage young people to dream of lifting themselves up from the dust heap. I think pastors need to quote Psalm

113, which says “The Lord raises the poor from the dust... and seats them with the princes of their people.” This idea that earning money is somehow “dirty business” has to be cleared up. So, the message that businessmen need to hear is that success is God’s purpose. The alternatives are either mediocrity or failure—really no alternatives at all. Success is God’s will, within the limits that it be for His glory and to exercise loving charity.

I was in Romania five years ago talking to a Baptist pastor, and I asked him how many businessmen he had in his congregation. He said “None, thank God.” He explained that businessmen would be so involved in their businesses that they would have no time for the church. Well, I had him traveling with me for two weeks, and I thought that by the end of two weeks this man’s got to change.

So I said to him “Do you realize that business is also the Church’s work?” “What do you mean?” he said. I told him that a man who is influencing a generation of workers in a Christlike manner is building up

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the Church, honoring the testimony, and speaking for Christ by his actions. This Baptist pastor was in shock.

At the end of the two weeks, as I was saying good-bye at the Bucharest airport, I asked him what his goal was as he went back to his church. And he said “I want to develop businessmen in my church.” Thank God he got it in two weeks of conversations!

**R&L: In your travels in Latin America you have undoubtedly encountered Liberation Theology. Tell us your thoughts on this ideology.**

**Palau:** I have often said that Liberation Theology is neither theology nor liberating. It uses the Bible to promote atheistic and Marxist praxis. On three counts in particular it just isn't biblical theology: the Fall, redemption, and regeneration. First, Liberation Theologians said that it is the structures and institutions of society that make man do evil things. Second, they insist redemption therefore requires destroying the old structures and institutions and building new ones that will make man behave gloriously. Third, regeneration happens when the new man emerges from those new structures and institutions.

But the biblical perspective states that fallen man and his evil heart are the problem from the beginning. Therefore redemption must include the redemption of the individual. The new man is the fruit of regeneration by the Holy Spirit through

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## Evangelism, proclamation of the Gospel, is social action.

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repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. So Liberation Theology turns out to be very unbiblical theology.

**R&L: Did Liberation Theology ever make significant inroads among evangelical missionaries or pastors?**

**Palau:** It was beginning to, and it was frightening and appalling to most leading evangelicals. The mainline churches had a significant portion of their foreign missionaries who were quite enthralled by it, but right now those people have completely lost their authority, partly because of the fall of the Soviet Union and the failure of Marxism, and partly because it was only a small minority who were advancing it. There was one seminary in Costa Rica and one in Argentina that were focal points and that sent out young

people all worked up about Liberation Theology. Now, I do not see any of them anywhere. Many have disappeared, and some have even moved to the United States that they once decried so thoroughly.

**R&L: Let's talk about this explosion of evangelical Christianity in Latin America. How has this affected the culture of those countries?**

**Palau:** Right now there is not one dictator in Latin America, except Castro. Now, I am not going to attribute that fact exclusively to the growth of conversion Christianity—that's what I like to call it—but it is an important factor. Change comes from the masses upward. We often think that if we could get the president or some of his cabinet to be converted, we would change the nation's trends. My study of history tells me that change comes when the masses are converted and they live out the biblical ethic in their personal family, and business life. Then, pressure builds in the community from the bottom up.

When Constantine converted to Christianity, the masses had been turning to Christ already and were shaking the foundations of the Roman Empire. Constantine certainly

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helped by instituting laws that were fairer to the Church and to Christians, but he was following the trend, not creating it.

So I think conversion Christians in Latin America have had an effect in the sense that there is now a growing love for true freedom and democracy. This is a result of the people who are turning to freedom concepts borne out of our Lord Jesus Christ: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.... If

the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed." Yes, evangelical Christianity is responsible for this, but also the charismatic movement in the Roman Catholic Church.

**R&L: Let's talk about the tensions between Catholicism and evangelical Christians in Latin America. How do you approach this question—you used the phrase "conversion Christianity" as opposed to evangelical Christianity, for instance.**

**Palau:** I'll tell you why I use that phrase. All of us need to be converted, whether Protestant or Catholic. Unless we have a personal experience of conversion to Christ, we are going to be as lost as the pagan in the bush of Brazil who has never met Christian civilization or Christian missionaries. We may have an outer garb of Christianity, but if our heart is not changed, we have nothing. I have come back to the United States from this last trip

## Edmund Burke 1729-1797

"I flatter myself that I love a manly, moral, regulated liberty as well as any gentleman... It is one of the gifts of Providence."

Born, raised, and educated in Ireland, Edmund Burke was one of the most well-known British statesmen and political philosophers of the eighteenth century. After gaining early recognition for his literary skills, Burke entered Parliament in 1766 and remained there for the next two decades.

Burke is often remembered for his vehement opposition to the French Revolution, presented in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. He saw in the French Revolution a fatal danger: A zealous but misguided state can destroy the delicate attachments on which a free society is built.

Because of his defense of tradition, Burke is sometimes thought of as a reactionary. Yet he loved liberty and favored many classical liberal positions in politics, religion, and economics. Burke never separated religion and liberty; he maintained that liberty is only possible because it is part of the eternal and transcendent moral order. His great concern was that freedom should never be confused with license; that true liberty must always be understood as ordered liberty.

In economics, Burke believed that private property is the foundation of a just social order and the spur to personal industry and national prosperity. He argued passionately against intrusive government monopolies and in favor of widespread access to acquiring property, which he thought serves as a powerful check on encroachments by the state. In his view, moral education by intermediary social institutions—the family, the church, the local community—can only flourish if the property that supports those institutions is secure. His support of economic liberty earned him the respect of Adam Smith, and his powerful defense of morally informed liberty earned Burke the admiration of Lord Acton, who regarded him as a timeless model of humane learning, religious virtue, and enlightened political action. **A**



Sources: *Selected Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* edited by Peter J. Stanlis (Regnery Gateway, 1963), and *The Political Economy of Edmund Burke* by Francis Canavan (Fordham University Press, 1995).

to El Salvador with a conviction that we had better start preaching conversion in America, because we have Catholics and Protestants who are Church people, but their life-styles simply do not speak of Jesus Christ.

Interestingly enough, at this moment the tensions between Protestants and Catholics are not too high. There is not open conflict among Christians in regard to secondary matters, and there is a positive emphasis on the foundational truths of Christianity: the Virgin Birth, the divinity of Christ, His perfect work on the cross, the need for conversion, the hope of resurrection. This is a good trend; we are not diverting attention to secondary matters but staying with the fundamentals. If we can continue to do that, I think the Western world can again experience a new cycle of spiritual reawakening.

The danger I see in Latin America is that now that evangelicals are numerically strong, there is the temptation to think “Now that we have the numbers, let’s have an evangelical political party.” It has tempted some people, who are perhaps rightly ambitious, to use the wrong methodology. My counsel has been

***R&L: Basically, you are warning against the assertion of theocracy.***

**Palau:** That is exactly right. God is not obligated to bless my political projects just because I am a committed Christian. It is a very poor trend to try to get the vote of believers strictly by saying “I’m a Christian. Therefore vote for me, and don’t ask any questions.” I think that approach is entirely wrong.

***R&L: We still have the obligation of prudence.***

**Palau:** Yes. We need to encourage Christians called to politics as a ministry to act honorably as politicians, knowing that in some countries they are going to face unbearable pressures. But the institutional Church should not be directly involved. It has always been the temptation of the Church to be obligated to make pronouncements on issues that are not within its province.

***R&L: You have said that “Politics has its limits” and that we should not “expect from politics what politics cannot deliver.” What are the***

maneuvering, but that their authority comes from and is established by God, and that they should therefore see themselves as ministers of God. When I spoke with our president at a breakfast, I told him that I am a minister in that I proclaim the Gospel, but that he, too, was a minister in that he serves the people. Political leaders serve the people in two ways: First, they are to affirm justice and righteousness, and to use the authority given them by God to be a terror to those who do wrong. In other words, they are to preserve freedom for peace-loving, justice-loving citizens. Second, they are to commend those who do right. So the limits of politics lie in those two fences; protecting the innocent and defenseless from evil assaults and fraud, and encouraging, commending, and facilitating the work of those whose main goals in life are to bring up their families freely, to make business happen, to lift up the economy, and to enjoy the creation that God has given us.

Politics has its limits: Politics cannot deliver submission to law. Politics cannot deliver godliness of life. Politics cannot force a family to stay together. We Christians run the risk right now of thinking that if we elect committed Christians, then somehow that in and of itself will sanctify the nation. I think that is a mistake. It would be beneficial, no doubt, but people are not changed by force of politics. When the majority of people in a nation are not committed to biblical principles, then they will elect people who are not committed to biblical principles. So we of the Church must focus on converting as many people as possible to Christ and build up their way of life biblically so that they keep the heat on elected officials as much by example as by public demands. **A**

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not to form Christian political parties. Every mistake they make will be blamed on the Church, and politicians *will* make mistakes. Politicians who happen to be Christians should not try to get Christian votes by appealing to the fact that they are Christian. They instead ought to appeal to voters on the basis of their character, principles, and programs.

***limits of politics, and what are the proper expectations that believers should have of politics?***

**Palau:** I go back to Romans 13 where Paul lays down some simple yet essential principles. Political leaders should see that they do not hold their positions by virtue of their own great wisdom, charisma, or political

# Biblical Foundations of Limited Government

by *Doug Bandow*

The proper role of government, the central concern of political theory, has long been a controversial issue within Christendom. Disputes continue today. From right to left, clerics claim that God stands on their side. There is, it seems, no simple Christian view of the state. And for good reason: Holy Scripture and church tradition give us guidelines and principles, but no detailed blueprint as to godly government. On most individual issues we are left with the apostle James' injunction to ask for wisdom, which God "gives generously to all without finding fault" (James 1:5).

What should people of faith expect their government to do? Christians should not treat the state as either redemptive or eternal. "No man can redeem the life of another," wrote the Psalmist (Ps. 49:7). Rather, it is the Lord who "will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity" (Ps. 98:9).

Beyond that, the Bible sets general boundaries for political debate. Scripture provides only limited guidance, however, because the dominant message of the Gospel, as well as the Hebrew writings, is man's relationship to God and his neighbors. Although many of these principles have some application to political relationships, the Bible gives much more guidance on how we should treat people than when we should coerce them, which is the defining characteristic of government.

The state's most fundamental role is to protect citizens from the sinful conduct of their neighbors.

The Bible indicates that government is to help preserve order—people's ability to live "peaceful and quiet lives," in Paul's words—in a sinful world. The state is to be a godly agent that not only allows men to follow God but also contains the

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harm that would occur in the absence of any public constraints on evil behavior. "The one in authority," wrote Paul, "is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:3, 4).

## A Neutral Arbiter and Protector

One goal of the state is just retribution. Deterrence, encouraging even evil men to respect others' rights, is another objective of government. Paul wrote that fear of punishment is one reason for compliance with the authorities (Rom. 3:5). This role for the civil authorities arises naturally from the fact that life is a gift of God that is to be protected. Physical assault is not the only threat to people enjoined to be creative and productive. So, too, is the deprivation through theft and fraud of the resources over which God has made people stewards. The public authorities are also to defend those within their jurisdiction from external or foreign threats.

Another recurring theme is reflected in King David's observation:

"The Lord is righteous, he loves justice." (Ps. 11:11) People are to exercise justice and righteousness as individuals. Civil rulers, too, are to be just and righteous. God ordered the royal house of Judah to "administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed" (Jer. 12:12). However, corporate duty differs from personal responsibility. Individuals must respond generously to the needs and rights of their neighbors; government must regulate, coercively yet fairly, relations between both righteous and unrighteous men. In short, the contrast is personal virtue versus public impartiality. An attempt by the state to practice the former rather than the latter is typified by this century's great totalitarian levelers, the communist revolutionaries.

Thus, government is to be a neutral arbiter and protector. Biblical justice protects all men in their enjoyment of God's blessings. It certainly is not to become a tool to rob and oppress. To King Shallum declared God: "Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor" (Jer. 22:13). Protection of the needy is of special concern to God: They are, after all, the least able to vindicate their own interests, especially in the face of a government that is easily subverted to favor the powerful. However, extra sensitivity to the abuse of the poor does not warrant prejudice in their favor. God commanded: "Do not pervert justice; do not show par-

tiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly” (Lev. 19:15).

In its focus on process, godly justice and righteousness are very different from the modern notion of “social justice,” which demands equality of economic and cultural outcomes. However appealing may be some proposals advanced under the rubric of “social justice,” they are

secular Roman leadership—looked much more like today’s America than ancient Israel.

Indeed, the move from a geographically bounded Jewish state to a Jewish community under the rule of pagan or secular civil authorities, of particular concern to Jews, and the shift from the Old to the New Covenant, of most interest to Christians, would appear to have changed

same, the institutions (country versus church) and the penalties (death versus excommunication) are different. For instance, in his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul instructed believers to disassociate themselves from “anyone who calls himself a brother” but is immoral. He did not apply the same rule to nonbelievers in the world, he explained, since “God will judge those outside” (1 Cor. 5:9-13).



“The state’s most fundamental role is to protect citizens from the sinful conduct of their neighbors.”

—Doug Bandow

### Restriction of the “Idol State”

Just as Scripture requires the state to act in some circumstances—to, for instance, punish the wrongdoer and promote justice—it also restricts government’s actions. The most important limitation flows from the first commandment given to Moses: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3). Although the “other gods” were usually such supposed deities as Baal, some secular rulers, notably the later Roman emperors, also claimed to be divine. In fact, in at least two instances, Tyre’s head and Israel’s Herod, the Lord punished kings for making or tolerating such preposterous claims.

Most secular rulers are more discreet in their formal pretensions, but many nevertheless act as quasi-gods. From the Pharaoh who held the Jews in captivity and ordered the murder of their newborn sons to the twentieth-century totalitarians with their personality cults, civil authorities have often usurped God’s role. Even the modern welfare state has increasingly turned into what author Herb Schlossberg calls “the idol state,” using “the language of compassion because its intention is a messianic one.”

The Bible suggests that an expansive government is bad not only because it might demand to be treated like God, but also because it will reflect the sinfulness of its participants and mistreat its citizens. The inescapable problem is that man is a fallen creature, all too willing to do

not matters of biblical justice, which guarantees a fair civil government nestled within a larger culture in which the wealthy and powerful recognize their obligation—to God—to help those in need.

### Government-Enforced Religious Laws Inappropriate

In the Old Testament, the government enforced many essentially “religious” laws, but this would not seem to be properly within the province of civil government today. Most obviously, these strictures were tied to the Israelites’ status as the chosen people. That is, God established the law to mold the nation of Israel as part of his overall plan of salvation.

Perhaps for this reason, public enforcement of many Old Testament norms required the active intervention of God, something no state today is likely to rely upon. In fact, by the time Jesus began his ministry, the old Hebraic rules appear to have been largely abandoned, and the Jewish world at that time—under a

the focus from national to individual responsibility and judgment.

Another reason to doubt that today’s state is mandated to enforce moral/religious rules is that most ultimately deal with matters of the heart as much as conduct. Paul wrote: “A man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code” (Rom. 2:29). Meaningful enforcement of the moral law, then, requires God’s direct intervention. However good the civil authorities may be at detecting and punishing, for example, adultery, no official, without divine wisdom, can judge lustful looks, or anger at one’s brother, which Christ equated with murder.

The argument against civil enforcement of essentially religious strictures is even more powerful for Christians because the church has taken over the spiritual role once reserved for the geographic nation of Israel. While the objective of maintaining spiritual purity is the

wrong. This sinful nature is exacerbated by the accumulation of power, which, warned Lord Acton, “tends to corrupt.” Why else would God have instructed the Israelites that their king was neither to acquire too many horses and wives, and too much gold and silver, nor to “consider himself to be better than his brothers” (Deut. 17:16-17, 20)? In fact, when the Israelites initially requested that God give them a king, He cautioned, through the prophet Samuel, that such a ruler would oppress them, and that they would receive no relief when they cried out. And history has certainly shown that “power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter” (Eccles. 4:1).

While Scripture is ultimately more concerned about spiritual freedom—particularly liberation from sin—than political freedom, the latter remains an important theme for at least three reasons.

First, the lives and dignity of human beings created in the image of God requires respect from other people, including governors. In the end, the least important person for whom Christ died is of greater value than the grandest empire.

Second, people must be free to respond to God’s grace, worship him, and integrate obedience to Him into their daily lives. This concern obviously animated Peter and John when they rejected the demand of the Sanhedrin, an ecclesiastical body that exercised considerable civil power, that they cease teaching in Jesus’ name. Paul, too, never hesitated to disobey civil authorities that denied him permission to preach.

Finally, Christ’s injunction that believers be salt and light requires them to have at least some autonomy from the state. In the Soviet Union, for instance, the government outlawed private charity, probably the most important practical outworking of a person’s Christian faith. The imperialistic tendencies of

Western welfare states to take over communal life may ultimately have much the same effect as the Soviet Union’s formal ban.

### The Issues In-Between

To know what government must and must not do is critical, but only a start, since most issues fall somewhere in between. Some broad biblical principles may help resolve them.

Consider poverty. God’s concern for the poor, the vulnerable, and the weak is persistent, pervasive, and powerful. Little is clearer in Scripture, Old and New Testament alike, than the duty of believers to care for those in need, particularly widows and orphans. Notably, however, the Bible does not vest this responsibility in the state. Neither does Scripture proscribe a public role, but it implies that believers should fulfill their individual and corporate responsibilities before turning to government, and any state programs should not violate other biblical norms, such as family formation.

About many other current public controversies, like comparable worth, insider trading, and the Export-Import Bank, the Bible offers little specific guidance.

Rather, these are often more matters of prudence than principle and fall within the permissive area of government activity. That is, there is neither a mandate for nor a prohibition against the government, say, regulating who may trade which securities based on what knowledge. God has chosen to leave the issue up to us rather than to state His own preference.

### Freedom is not Enough

What is the proper Christian role of the state? God provides us with principles to be applied with wisdom, rather than specific answers. Indeed, part of our Christian walk is working out our faith as we attempt to resolve problems in community with others.

In general, government should provide the legal scaffolding that allows people to try to collectively but voluntarily solve their problems. Only in extraordinary circumstances, where there is no other choice, should the state supplant private decision-making. Ultimately, a political system based on liberty will enhance man’s ability to provide for his family and others in need in his community, exercise dominion in transforming God’s creation, and enjoy the many gifts of God.

Of course, freedom is not enough. As Pope John Paul II explained, a market economy will work only “within a strong juridical framework which places [capitalism] at the service of human freedom in its totality and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious.” Government can provide the juridical framework, but the Church must provide the ethical

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Of course, freedom is not enough. Government can provide the juridical framework, but the Church must provide the ethical and religious core.

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and religious core. Without that core, a free society will still be better than an unfree society, but it will be neither good nor godly. **A**

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# Three New Testament Roots of Economic Liberty

by Howard Ahmanson

**W**e do not often think that Jesus Christ and the New Testament justifies capitalism. To the extent that capitalism means greed and self-indulgence, I should think not! Greed and self-indulgence are root human sins and will be manifested in any economic system

But if you think of capitalism as economic liberty, then there are several New Testament passages that argue in favor of it. I want to explore three passages that bring out foundational issues regarding the nature of economic justice and demonstrate a biblical sympathy with liberty and the market.

## Stones into Bread

*“The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread’” (Luke 4:3).*

The Son of God certainly had the power to rearrange the atomic structure of rocks into the carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen atoms found in bread. We really do not. I suppose we could if we worked on it, but it would be an expensive way of solving the world’s hunger problem. Scarcity is a real and tenacious problem of human existence. So when we talk about “justice” or “entitlements,” we must be very careful about what we are asking for. Every human being cannot have a claim on a specific quantity of a finite and limited resource such as food or land. Whatever “justice” is, it cannot be that. If someone decrees, therefore, that the demands of justice require

large amounts of certain scarce resources to exist in order to meet certain vast needs, he submits to the temptation that Jesus resisted, the temptation to turn stones into bread.

Property rights are not somehow inferior to other human rights. They

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When we talk about “justice” or “entitlements,” we must be very careful about what we are asking for.

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are the only juridical rights to resources, the only economic rights that exist. Health care is a finite resource; therefore every human being cannot have a juridical right to health care. If every human being is to have modern health care, it requires that resources be commanded into existence.

Minimum wage laws are an example of the “stones-into-bread” error. The historic Christian tradition—especially in Roman Catholic thought—offers many arguments for why a voluntarily agreed-to wage under a certain amount might be unjust under certain conditions. The passages often quoted in this connection, however, seem not to speak to the issue of a minimum wage but to the issue of employers who default on their contracts. Employers were next to impossible to sue and collect from in those days, so this sort of admonishment was necessary to protect the laborer.

It must be understood that decreeing a minimum wage is not the same thing as decreeing into existence the money to pay for it. As a consequence of a decreed minimum wage, fewer people will be hired. How few depends on something called the “elasticity of demand for labor.” The extra money to pay for these higher wages may be taken from someplace else in the firm, such as—in the worst case—investment in capital. Furthermore, the minimum wage sometimes can be an incentive to hire fewer workers by

investing in more machinery and technology. This is the one argument for a high minimum wage that is economically arguable. It is interesting that one never hears it advanced!

Now, it is a worthwhile argument to say “Yes, this is what justice requires, and we simply have to live with the fact that if we do what God requires, fewer people will be hired,” but to simply deny or overlook the fact that fewer will be hired is to commit the sin of presumption. There is an issue of justice here as well, for greater numbers of skilled workers are more likely to be hired than those who are less skilled or unskilled.

Another example of the “stones-into-bread” error is the issue of working hours and working conditions. The Sabbath commandment concerns both worship and rest. Where it has to do with rest, it is in the section of the law that contains commandments regarding our duty

to our neighbor, and is therefore of interest to civil law. The civil government may make laws about working hours, working conditions, and even the speed of work, since that can be a health issue. Such laws, however, impose costs on business and workers, and it is wrong not to take these costs into account. Furthermore, these costs can be borne more easily by larger businesses that are well-capitalized. The effect of cost-imposing regulations is that they almost always favor the well-capitalized organizations and the rich, who have the power to make an organization well-capitalized.

### Entitlements and Charity

*“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).*

This famous gospel passage pertains to economic ethics in this way: There is a distinction between the entitlements of justice (“wages”) and the work of charity or love (“gift”). The poor need help with their material needs, which are not an issue of entitlement but of charity. The poor also need legal justice in the courts, because they are usually relatively powerless in the legal system. But charity and justice are distinct. In fact, educated people in our own culture—and these not necessarily Christians—have raised concerns about the “explosion of rights” on our society.

It is certain that in many situations the poor are in fact oppressed and treated unjustly. Around the globe there are far too many “kleptocracies”—regimes where the political rulers exercise ultimate authority over all property and give it to whomever they will—that have kept many people poor. Sometimes, also, it is not that oppression is the cause of their poverty, but that their

poverty makes them vulnerable and therefore available for oppression.

### The Thieves of Compassion

*“But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ‘Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.’ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.” (John 12:4-6).*

There are many texts in the Bible on love and compassion for the poor. There are also many texts on covetousness and modesty. For example, Paul makes some specific recommendations to women in 1 Tim. 2:9-10: “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.” On a couple of occasions Jesus even rec-

try. It can make us proud of ourselves, or obsessed with ourselves, and indifferent to God. The reason that excess is condemned, therefore, is not for the materialistic reason that it diverts money from the poor, but because it can divert our worship and attention from God to our own outward beauty or wealth.

We often hear arguments that we ought not to build a beautiful building, commission a work of art, host a celebration, or even provide for the defense of our nation, because there are poor in the world. The argument that we ought not to do any particular thing because the poor exist is the argument of Judas, and if you hear it made, know that thieves are about who want to get their piece of the action.

These are only three examples of Scripture that speak to the biblical basis of the free market. Many more could be cited, and such exegesis is

“The New Testament roots of economic liberty, taken together, will provide a sound foundation for our economic and political culture.”

—Howard Ahmanson



ommended people to divest their properties and give the proceeds to the poor (Mt. 19:21, Luke 12:33-34). On these occasions, however, Jesus had the spiritual good of the people primarily in view; the fact that more resources were made available to the poor was a secondary consideration. Excess in material things—luxury—can lead to the sin of pride and idola-

the good work of those who are friends both to religion and freedom. Such New Testament roots of economic liberty, taken together, will provide a sound foundation for our economic and political culture. **A**

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**Howard Ahmanson** is president of *Fieldstead & Company*.

# The Vocation of Enterprise

A Review Essay by Conrad M. Black

As its title implies, Michael Novak's *Business as a Calling* brings a somewhat missionary zeal to the defense of commerce and capitalism, subjects that have been mainly exposed in the recent past to the zealotry of frenzied opponents. Mr. Novak's effervescence and originality as an advocate and his rigor as a scholar make for a provocative and interesting read. He traces the rise of capitalism, the docile acceptance by its practitioners that they were concerned with means and not ends, the identification of commerce with Darwinian and Spencerian unsentimentally, the rise of religious opponents like Paul Tillich and socialist opponents like R. H. Tawney, and the recent great public relations crisis of business.

## A Morally Serious Enterprise

His counter-attack starts early in the book and builds throughout. On page 8, we are advised that "business is a morally serious enterprise." Calvin Klein's suggestive advertising and Time-Warner's outrageous "gangsta rap" are cited as examples of moral commercial lapses that were rescinded after irresistible protest. He returns to the theme to accuse business, as advertisers, of acquiescing in and even promoting the destruction of its own reputation. In the television series "Dallas," the "most murderous, lying, double-dealing, cheating, wife-swapping cads" are businessmen, who, (as sponsors) "are the first minority not only to allow their moral reputation to be systematically dragged through

the mud every night but also to pay for the privilege." He makes the point that the entire economic and social system of the Western world could collapse if commercial interlocutors were really all "liars, scoundrels, and moral weaklings."

*Business as a Calling:  
Work and the Examined Life*  
by Michael Novak

The Free Press  
1996. 246 pp. Cloth: \$22.50

He defines a calling as unique to each individual, requiring talent, enjoyable, and energizing to the individual so-called and likely to be hard for the individual to discover. He invokes Sir John Templeton and Edward Crosby Johnson among exemplars.

As 23 million Americans in 1994 worked for governments and non-profit organizations, 11.5 million for the Fortune 500 and 89 million for smaller enterprises, among them 10.2 million self-employed people (including farmers), Mr. Novak argues that a great many Americans have heard the call. Mr. Novak convincingly debunks the antiquarian aristocratic condescensions to trade and Christian and socialistic type-casting of grubby businessmen, and makes the link between commerce and religious practice. According to a rather extensive 1990 survey, businessmen were the third most religiously observant leadership group

in the United States, 50 percent attending religious services at least once a month, after military officers (67 percent) and religious professionals (98 percent, the other 2 percent might have rather exotic views).

Saint John Chrysostom is invoked in support of the notion of commerce as "the material bond among peoples" and as a material sign of the "mystical body of Christ." The portrayal of commerce as a "faintly smelly enterprise" is taken back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, updated to Germany's nineteenth century *Das Sozialproblem* (poverty), ostensibly caused by some

people having too much money. "Intellectuals have rejoiced ever since in defining the business class as their number-one class enemy, the epitome and cause of social evil." The decriers of greed, privilege, and degeneracy and champions of economic equality are forcefully rebutted in turn.

## The Ideals of Business

Only a very few wealthy people "become hedonists, voluptuaries, gourmets, bon vivants, Epicureans, or even member of the 'idle rich'." Mr. Novak exalts the American ideal of equality of opportunity that assumes inequality of use of opportunity over the European enforcement of equality. Being "created equal" is held not to mean remaining equal in economic terms. He shares James Madison's view that enforcement of economic or social or professional equality is "wicked."

The ideals of business are pre-

sented as the sense of community, creativity, practical realism, and self-discovery. The intellectual founders of capitalism, Adam Ferguson, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith, liberated the world from feudal misery and Malthusian gloom, and the so-called “robber barons,” though not without their shortcomings, were self-made men who broadened the economic horizon of the whole world.

In support of this powerful sequence elegantly argued, a range of authorities is hurled into battle, from Andrew Carnegie to Mrs. Jerry Rubin (defending the grace of her husband’s economic conversion), to Karl Marx’s famous assertion in 1848 that the detested bourgeoisie in “scarce 100 years has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than all preceding generations together.”

Mr. Novak rejects Marx’s definition of capitalism as based on the principle of market exchange, private property, and the profit motive, and substitutes his own definition of a market system dependent on reciprocally supporting political and cultural systems and based on creative entrepreneurial and managerial intelligence. He has little difficulty establishing that capitalism is a much more efficient means of spreading wealth around a society than any other system, provided it is allowed to flourish, monitored vigilantly by its practitioners and others, and functions in a democratic society. For capitalism to function properly there must be general adherence to and enforcement of the traditional ethical virtues of Western civilizations, based on the Bible, Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, and Shakespeare.

Like a successful nineteenth-century military commander, Mr. Novak turns the repulse of his enemy into a rout and then a take-no-prisoners

slaughtering pursuit. Capitalism, because of the skill and qualities it requires, is the antidote to decadence. It is also the antidote to envy. Given equality and generosity of opportunity, people will measure their standing not against their neighbors’ but against where they were a few years previously themselves and where they want to be. In fact Americans are conspicuously less envious than other nationalities. Envy, Novak reminds us, is the principal target of the Ten Commandments, being condemned as “covetousness” seven times.

### Democracy and Capitalism

Capitalism and democracy are indispensable to each other. For example, elections are no substitute for economic opportunity in post-communist Eastern Europe.

Capitalism is the cornerstone of the American republic because Madison and Hamilton opted for a “commercial democracy” where the

exercising its prerogatives, would be a check on all the others.

Mr. Novak holds that the poor perception of capitalism in the United States and of the traditional values that foster it are due to the ambivalence about virtue and character on the part of the “high culture,” the intellectuals, professors, and artists; the disparagement of virtue and character by the entertainment media who are yet dependent on those qualities to make their dramas intelligible; the absence of these considerations in contemporary ethical discussion, and the moral relativism of the mass media.

In this climate, he claims the public school system has ceased to be concerned with virtue. For example, in fifty years the principal school disciplinary problems have changed from talking in class and chewing gum and dress code violations to drug and alcohol abuse, pregnancy, assault, and suicide.

Democracy and capitalism will

“Democracy and capitalism will flourish together in a society that remains rooted in the pursuit and elevation of virtue.”

—Conrad M. Black



cross-purposes of society’s different economic interests will prevent the landed gentry, bourgeoisie, urban masses, or any other single interest from predominating over the others. Capitalism is also represented as having appealed, correctly, to the authors of the U.S. Constitution as the most reliable bulwark against the tyranny of the majority, as each source of power in the society, in

flourish together in a society that remains rooted in the pursuit and elevation of virtue. Thus, recent leftist oracles and icons like the Club of Rome and north European social democracy are bowled over like tenpins.

In the last section of the book Mr. Novak urges companies to conduct their own civil rights campaigns, advocates a modest version of health

care reform, a novel form of catastrophic illness insurance, portable pensions, more aid for the homeless, practical business loans and advice to the Third World, and gives some advice to those setting up benevolent foundations (“caveat donor!”).

There are also some wild-eyed suggestions for turning labor unions into “independent business corporations, supplying trained and intelligent workers, as needed, to other corporations.”

Whether its enthusiasm delights or offends, this is a valuable book. It smites the leftist myth-makers hip and thigh and literally punishes the ungodly. There are a few Manichaean excesses. This author rightly states that “seventy years of communist mockery and abuse have destroyed the moral capital of Russia,” but I’m not so sure that country’s “religious and moral capital was built up by one thousand years of patient development.” If Russia had been a little more virtuous prior to 1917, the world would have been spared much in the intervening years.

The author’s enthusiasm for the present pope is understandable and well-expressed. Certainly the pope has undone almost all of the ill-considered economic nostrums of Paul VI, but he is prone to believe overly in the virtues of trade unions and he strained the Vatican’s resources to the breaking point by overpaying unskilled employees of the Holy See. John Paul II’s railings against materialist excesses are unexceptionable, but some of his reflections on capitalism generally are hard to square with Mr. Novak’s well-founded effusions on the same subject.

These are minor cavails; this is a profound and a refreshing book and I hope it accelerates the receding riptide in the intellectual economic debate. *A*

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*Conrad M. Black is chairman and CEO of Hollinger Inc, and the publisher of such newspapers as the London Daily Telegraph and the Jerusalem Post.*

## *His Holiness*

### *John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time*

by Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi

Doubleday, 1996

582 pp. Cloth: \$37.95

Review by George Weigel

Who killed communism? Western analysis (and not a few communists) first pointed the finger at the economic incapacities of Marxist-Leninist states. In a world defined by silicon chips and fiber-optic cables, communism—it was argued—just couldn’t compete. This gimlet-eyed focus on the economic causes of the collapse always seemed, though, an oddly Marxist “answer” to the puzzle. Happily, more thoughtful analyses based on a better understanding of the cast of characters in the gripping drama of the Marxist crack-up are now available.

That Pope John Paul II played an indispensable role in that demise is now widely conceded by numerous historians of (and actors in) the Cold War end-game—not least among them Mikhail Gorbachev. But the terms in which the pope’s role should be understood are likely to remain controversial. Former *Washington Post* reporter Carl Bernstein, who first wrote on this story for *Time* magazine, and Marco Politi, Vatican correspondent for the Italian daily *La Repubblica*, forcefully argue that the pope was a crucial protagonist in the struggle for freedom that began with the formation of Solidarity, the Polish trade union/political opposition, and ended with the implosion of the USSR. But their reading of these events through a conspiracy theory of history obscures at least as much as it illuminates about the many factors at work in this com-

plex historical process, and misses the originality of analysis and prescription that John Paul II applied to the confrontation with totalitarianism.

Karol Wojtyla brought a formidable philosophical and theological intelligence and a distinctive reading of twentieth-century history to the Chair of Saint Peter on Oct. 16, 1978. As Wojtyla understood it, the division of Europe after the 1945 Yalta conference was primarily a moral catastrophe in which false conceptions of the human person, human community, and human destiny had been imposed by raw force on historically Christian cultures. Communism was not only stupid economics and brutal politics; it was, first and foremost, a false humanism. Indeed, the economic idiocies and political repressions of communist regimes were expressions of this more fundamental flaw in communist theory. Thus the most effective antidote to the communist toxin, Wojtyla believed, was in the order of ideas and values: A truer humanism, defending basic human rights as inalienable attributes of human personhood, was the weapon with which communism could best be resisted.

For Wojtyla there was not tension but rather a deep linkage between these human rights claims and the Christian Gospel. And on the basis of that conviction he articulated, as pope, an original and (as things

turned out) astonishingly effective challenge to what politicians and international relations theorists had long assumed to be a given: the permanent division of Europe and communist hegemony east of the Elbe River. As Stalin famously queried, “And how many divisions has the pope?” But John Paul II had something more potent: a capacity to appeal to the consciences of peoples and nations, to the dignity of the human person, and to the vitality of ancient cultural traditions.

To the fury of the Soviet leadership, the pope put this approach into practice for more than two years before the Reagan administration took office in January 1981. Thus the Bernstein/Politi claim that communism was defeated by a secret “Holy Alliance” forged between John Paul II and President Reagan during a June 1982 private audience in Rome is out-of-sync historically. The authors’ interviews with former Reagan administration officials and some useful digging in recently released Soviet archival materials add interesting detail to the story of the 1980s. But their telling of the tale is frequently overwrought.

“There is no question,” Bernstein and Politi write, “that the pope offered [former CIA Director William] Casey his blessing” after one meeting in the early 1980s. No doubt he did, but that is precisely what he does dozens of times a day to those with whom he meets. Our authors find “equally stunning” the fact that “the CIA director and the supreme pontiff entered into a highly intimate, spiritual conversation.” But why should this be a surprise, given John Paul II’s fifty-year commitment to pastoral ministry with both the lowly and the mighty?

And then there is the depiction of the pope as intelligence link with U.S. Special Ambassador Vernon Walters in November 1981: “‘What

is this?’ asked the vicar of Christ,” studying a photograph. “‘Heavy equipment, Holy Father’—military vehicles, personnel carriers, tanks, for use by Polish security forces.” While there is, undoubtedly, a fascination in imagining John Paul II hunched over satellite intelligence photography with Walters, there is no reason to think that what the authors hyperbolically describe as an “intelligence shuttle at the highest level” between Washington and Rome had a significant impact on the pope’s analysis of—or approach to—the struggle for freedom in east central Europe. John Paul II thinks about these matters in rather different terms than those employed by diplomats, military officers, and spy masters.

Bernstein and Politi’s “Holy Alliance” hypothesis is, in short, an exaggeration that distorts the singularity of Wojtyla’s approach to the churning of history. That the Vatican and the White House had certain common interests in east central

intimately coordinated effort to bring communism to its knees. The Bernstein/Politi hypothesis is thus an interesting reminder that viewing history through exclusively political-economic lenses fails to capture the human and moral texture of great events—a cautionary tale for anyone trying to discern the contours of a coming century in which questions of religion are sure to play a dominant role.

So give Bernstein and Politi full marks for recognizing the centrality of John Paul II in the “hidden history of our time.” But the true nature of that “hiddenness” had far less to do with intelligence-sharing and other ephemera of high politics than it did with the struggles that took place within the hearts, wills, and, yes, souls of men and women determined to live “in the truth,” as the anti-communist resistance in east central Europe used to put it.

*His Holiness* is even less satisfactory in its description of John Paul

“For Wojtyla there was not tension but rather a deep linkage between these human rights claims and the Christian Gospel.”

—George Weigel



Europe is plain; that both the pope and the president suspected (against the counsel of their more traditional advisors) that the communist emperor had no clothes seems clear; that U.S. policy under Reagan and Vatican “Ostpolitik” under John Paul II were mutually reinforcing seems to have been borne out by events. But this does not amount to a “Holy Alliance” in the sense of an

II’s impact on the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world. Reading Bernstein and Politi, one would never know that this has been a pontificate of great theological creativity, or that John Paul II has understood his work as securing the legacy of the reforming Second Vatican Council (in which he played a crucial role as archbishop of Krakow, a role the authors badly

misrepresent). Bernstein and Politi cannot seem to grasp that, in exercising his teaching office on issues like sexual morality and the boundaries of theological speculation, Karol Wojtyla is not imposing his personal opinions on the Church in an authoritarian manner. Rather, he is articulating the authoritative tradition of Catholicism, of which he is the servant and custodian.

In fostering the image of an “angry pope” determined to “crush dissent,” the authors also ignore one of the central themes of John Paul II’s pontificate: As the pope put it in his landmark 1991 encyclical letter on missionary activity, “the Church persuades, she imposes nothing.” That a commitment to persuasion and a commitment to authoritative teaching are not mutually exclusive is, perhaps, something that Americans and other modern Westerners who equate freedom with individual autonomy find difficult to conceive. But one utterly misses the searching character of John Paul II’s radical challenge to the conventions of our time and our culture if one portrays him as an old man whom the fates have “left to rail at the new world he ... helped bring about.”

Or, to vary James Carville, you can’t get at the uniqueness of Pope John Paul II, the man, the religious leader, and the public figure, if you don’t constantly remind yourself, “It’s the theology, stupid.” A

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*George Weigel is a senior fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center. His books include The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism. This review originally appeared in the Sept. 22, 1996, Washington Post, © 1996 Washington Post Book World Service/Washington Post Writers Group. Reprinted with permission.*



## Book News



### **Economics in One Lesson: 50th Anniversary Edition**

*Henry Hazlitt*

*Laissez Faire Books, 1996*

*205 pp. Hard Cover: \$19.95*

*Economics on One Lesson*, a classic economic treatise, has been reissued in a fiftieth anniversary edition. The new edition features a foreword by flat-tax advocate and Republican presidential candidate Steve Forbes. The book is an introduction to economics written for the layman. Henry Hazlitt does a masterful job of presenting the economic structure around which classical liberalism has come into being. Hazlitt tackles such issues as pricing supports, labor unions, public works, minimum wages, and inflation and shows them all to be the enemy of productivity and prosperity. This book is a must read for anyone wishing to be fully informed about the consequences of leftist economic policies.

### **Why the Left Is Not Right**

*Ronald H. Nash*

*Zondervan Publishing House, 1996*

*222 pp. Paper: \$10.99*

Ronald Nash, the seminary professor and prolific author of over twenty five books, has just written a new book intended to inform contemporary Christians on the religious left. Although the media seeks to equate religion and conservatism, there is a large and powerful group of mainline and evangelical people that embrace the liberal cause. Nash seeks to explain where this move-

ment came from, who the leaders are, and how much influence they have. He does this by profiling three of the major figures in religious leftism: Jim Wallis, Ron Sider, and Tony Campolo. Full of interesting anecdotes and well-researched details, this book details the concerted attempt to overthrow the classical Christian attitude toward Marxism, wealth redistribution, and morality.

### **At the Limits of Political Philosophy**

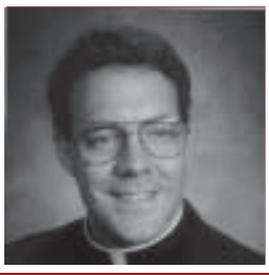
*James V. Schall*

*Catholic University of America Press, 1996*

*272 pp. Hard Cover: \$44.95*

Seldom does a book deal with the history and philosophy of political theory in a cogent and honest way. Schall describes the history of political philosophy as the history of brilliant errors. He then describes the cause of these errors—a lack of grounding in reality. Political reality encompasses sin, death, and suffering. He then uses the deaths of Socrates and Jesus as examples that hint at remedies for the reality of human misery. When such illustrations have been understood, there is a sure foundation on which to build a political structure that eschews both utopianism and Machiavelianism. This book is sobering in its analysis of political reality, but the approach sheds new light on our political institutions and the relevance of the Western experiment in good government.

—Matthew D. Prentice



*Rev. Robert A. Sirico*

## The Bishops' Big Economic Tent

To the joy of Catholics who support capitalist institutions, the U.S. Bishops have at long last applied the principle of ecumenism to economic issues. The vehicle is a short ten-point "Catholic Framework for Economic Life," passed unanimously at this year's meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. It comes ten years after "Economic Justice for All" the Bishops' controversial pastoral letter that disappointed so many businesspeople.

The new document departs from years of confusion, in which the Bishops appeared to side only with the left on economics. The statement is broader in its approach and more consistent with the Bishops' primary realm of competency: moral instruction. It is much sounder from an economic perspective, allowing ample room for holding the business economy and the free market in high regard. The Bishops embrace market institutions by name, and, in a praiseworthy departure, offer no explicit (or even implicit) endorsement of redistribution, confiscatory taxes, or regulatory management. Following are some examples of this new approach to economics.

"The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy." This underscores the reality—forgotten in an age of socialism and economic planning—that the economy is, in the first instance, made up of individuals who act, choose, and plan for the future. It is illegitimate to treat the economy as a superstructure—composed of huge and manipulatable aggregates—to which society must be forced to conform. Economic systems must be in accord with human nature, and not the reverse.

"All economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family, and serve the common good." Both individuals and institutions are subject to this stern standard,

including government and its bureaucracies. No institution has harmed family life more than big government, with its high taxes, bureaucratic red tape, and dependency-promoting welfarism. Economists from Joseph Schumpeter to Michael Novak and Gary Becker have stressed that vibrant family life and the common good are inseparably linked to private property, equal rights, and economic liberty.

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*The statement is more consistent with the Bishops' primary realm of competency: moral instruction.*

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"All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life." Some in the media claimed this plank endorses welfare rights, which would be alarming. It is a small step from welfare rights to socialism. In fact, the state-

ment says people have a right "to secure" necessities, and this qualifying phrase makes all the difference. A right to secure something is not the same as a right to the thing itself; securing requires initiative and action. There is no normative right to others' property, but only to secure necessities for ourselves in a manner consistent with others' rights.

I don't claim my free-market take on this statement is the definitive rendering, but herein lies the beauty of the Bishops' ten points. They have provided a moral framework that embraces markets, rejects socialism and excessive government management, calls upon people to put morality at the center of decision making, while tolerating divergent opinions on the details.

The Bishops are doing what they do best: providing moral and ethical guidance for individuals and societies. As John Paul II says, "In her social doctrine the Church does not propose a concrete political or economic model, but indicates the way, presents principles." A

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*Rev. Robert A. Sirico is president of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. A longer version of this article appeared in The Wall Street Journal, December 10, 1996*

“The moral foundation of political economy is not the satisfaction of appetite but the fulfillment of duties. Labor, patience, justice, peace, and self-denial are the mainsprings of economical production, and the metaphysical basis of the science is not in a philosophy which reduces religion and science to mere satisfaction of an appetite, like eating or drinking, but in the verification of the promise, ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice and all these things’—the necessities of life—‘shall be added unto you.’”

—Lord Acton—

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