# RELIGION & LIBERTY

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# Christianity the Key to Dignity and Fulfillment at Work

## Interview: John D. Beckett

John D. Beckett is president of the R. W. Beckett Corporation in Elyria, Ohio. He joined his father's small manufacturing business in 1963, becoming president in 1965 upon his father's death. Since then, he has built the company and its newer affiliates to worldwide leadership in the production of components for oil and gas heating appliances. He is author of the new book *Loving Monday: Succeeding in Business Without Losing Your Soul* (InterVarsity Press).

***R&L: It is commonly held that it is impossible to be both a faithful Christian and a good businessman. How do you respond to this view?***

**Beckett:** This view is indeed common, but it is seriously flawed. Based on that logic, we would have to assume the Apostle Paul was not a good businessman when he was making and selling tents. More likely, he was an exemplary businessman, his products high in quality, fair in price. Can you see the people lined up to buy his tents?

The wrong view derives from a notion of the early Greeks whose dualistic view separated life into a higher, more noble realm and a lower, common realm. That thinking passed through to modern times bearing the names "sacred" and "secular." Today, many Christians hold to this dichotomy. Occupations, including business, are typically viewed as secular, and therefore less worthy than church-related, or sacred, pursuits.

One of the stunning achievements of the Cross is that it abolished the distinction between secular and sacred, such that "… nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tm 4:4). A. W. Tozer, in *The Pursuit of God*, puts it succinctly: "The sacred–secular antithesis has no foundation in the New Testament." For the faithful Christian, a calling to business is every bit as noble as a church-related occupation. God gives as much grace to fulfill that legitimate calling as He does any other.

***R&L: In your new book,* Loving Monday, *you list the three "enduring values" that guide the activities of your company: integrity, excellence, and profound respect for the individual. Why did you choose these three values, and not others, as your company's guiding principles?***

**Beckett:** I wanted our core values to meet certain tests. First, they needed to be elevated and worthy, but possible to achieve. Second, they had to be simple to remember and communicate, and, third, traceable to a biblical base.

To be useful, a set of values must be widely accepted and worked into the fabric of an organization—not simply lodged in the minds of those who formed them. I am pleased to see people at our company wearing t-shirts bearing these values, to hear them mentioned in conversation, and to see them considered as benchmarks for accountability in conduct.

Some have asked why profit is not included. As important as profit is, it is not a core value. It is the result of many things being done right by many people. A business that takes a principled approach, in my experience, always does better than the business that does not.

***R&L: I would like to explore each of these in turn. First, how do you define integrity, and why is it important?***

**Beckett:** Integrity means adherence to a standard of values. It is a biblically rooted concept embracing the ideas of truthfulness, honesty, uprightness, and wholeness. The opposite is compromise, fragmentation, and instability.

For example, when a person commits to be at an appointment on time, others are depending on that commitment's being kept. The person of integrity plans and executes in order to honor that commitment, undeterred by personal inconvenience, thus building a reputation for dependability, trustworthiness, and respect for others.

***R&L: What biblical concepts inform your understanding of excellence?***

**Beckett:** Excellence first appears in Genesis, chapter 1. God reflected upon each day of creation, gave a satisfied nod, declaring it "good." This culminated in His final assessment after the sixth day: "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good." Perhaps God was prone to British understatement. It was more than very good. It was perfect!

When man fell, sin abounded and something other than his excellence was introduced and proliferated. The vision for God's excellence was virtually lost. Then, in the fullness of time, Christ came, and the pattern for heavenly excellence took human form.

Jesus, the man, modeled excellence. Think about His exquisite craftsmanship during His carpentry years. Consider the preciseness of His communication, the commitment to His friends, the thoroughness and discipline with which He completed His task on earth. As we take on the character of Christ, those qualities lost in Eden can begin to reappear in our experience.

The Bible speaks of excellence in so many ways, but the ultimate standard is more than an idea. It is a person, the Person of Jesus Christ.

***R&L: Finally, how do you understand the concept of profound respect for the individual, and from where do you derive it?***

**Beckett:** Early in my Christian experience, someone explained that Christ would still have gone to the cross if only for me. I balked at that notion, but eventually realized it was true. God so highly regards each individual that He would have paid that price—just for you, just for me.

Man was created in God's own image and likeness. What a basis for our identity and our dignity! With this perspective, how can we have anything but profound respect for each other—regardless of situation or station in life. Each person is unique. We are obligated to view each other with the same high regard that the Lord does.

***R&L: Can you offer some examples of how your company's commitment to this ideal affects how it does business?***

**Beckett:** We get our employees together every few months to provide updates on how the company is doing and where it is going. It helps keep everyone on the same page. We met just this morning, so these examples are quite fresh.

First, we announced several promotions and reassignments. Each person had been carefully selected for advancement. These changes were all with existing personnel rather than with new people, affirming the company's respect for them and desire to see each grow personally. This pattern of advancement encourages others to excel and further equip themselves for future assignments.

Second, I addressed a current problem—excessive gossip among some employees. Using the context of our requirement for profound respect, I described right and wrong kinds of communications. Referencing James, chapter 4, I pointed out how the tongue, though small, is like the rudder of the Titanic, able even in a fierce storm to change the ship's course. Used wrongly,


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the tongue can curse others who have been made in God's own likeness. I set some guidelines for sound communications and gave counsel on how relationships damaged through gossip or slander could be healed through asking for and receiving forgiveness.

Businesses are no stronger than their people. Every investment made in their development will reap great rewards—productivity, morale, commitment, and enthusiasm. Ultimately these benefits flow through to the bottom line. Everyone comes out a winner!

***R&L: Have you ever encountered a situation where holding onto these ideals meant making decisions that went against the best economic interests of the company?***

**Beckett:** In the short term, we have. In the long term, no. Several times we have kept employees working during business

## In The Liberal Tradition

### Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920)

*"… we have gratefully to receive from the hand of God the institution of the state with its magistrates as a means of preservation.… On the other hand … by virtue of our natural impulse, we must ever watch against the danger which lurks for our personal liberty in the power of the state."*

Abraham Kuyper's life began in the small Dutch village of Maassluis on October 29, 1837. During his first pastorate, he developed a deep devotion to Jesus Christ, spurring him to a deep commitment to Calvinist principles, which profoundly influenced his later careers. He labored tirelessly, publishing two newspapers, leading a reform movement out of the state church, founding the Free University of Amsterdam, and serving as Prime Minister of the Netherlands. He died on November 8, 1920, after relentlessly endeavoring to integrate his faith and life; truly, his emphasis on worldview formation has had a transforming influence upon evangelicalism, via the diaspora of the Dutch Reformed churches.

In the mid-nineteenth century Dutch political arena, the increasing sympathy for the "No God, no master!" dictum of the French Revolution greatly concerned Kuyper. To desire freedom from an oppressive government or a heretical religion was one thing, but to eradicate religion from politics as spheres of mutual influence was, for Kuyper, unthinkable. Because man is sinful, he reasoned, a state that derives its power from men cannot avoid the vices of fallen human impulses. True limited government flourishes best when people recognize their sinful condition and acknowledge God's divine authority. In Kuyper's words, "The sovereignty of the state as the power that protects the individual and that defines the mutual relationships among the visible spheres, rises high *above* them by its right to command and compel. But *within* these spheres … another authority rules, an authority that descends directly from God apart from the state. This authority the state does not *confer* but *acknowledges*."

The insights of Kuyper's doctrine of sphere sovereignty were not limited to Reformed circles. The tradition of Roman Catholic social teaching developed a similar concept, the principle of subsidiarity. According to the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "A community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but, rather, should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good." As Kuyper would concur, the state that loses sight of the common good has already embarked on the path to statism. *A*

Sources: *Lectures on Calvinism* by Abraham Kuyper (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1931); *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* edited by James D. Bratt (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998).

slumps rather than laying them off and then rehiring. The decrease in profits was more than offset by increased loyalty, commitment, and our employees' self-worth.

On occasion we have decided to forego business rather than compromise our integrity. Such was the case when a foreign customer asked for what he called a commission, but what we concluded was a bribe. We said "no," but in this case there was a happy ending. He said, "Fine, I just thought I'd ask." He kept buying, and I think the relationship was actually strengthened because he realized we could not be tempted in this way.

***R&L: As a Christian businessman, how do you approach the free market and the free society? What are the responsibilities of the Christian businessman in each?***

**Beckett:** Our markets and our society enjoy the freedom they have today because of Judeo-Christian thought and practice in the early and ongoing history of our nation. The benefits have been enormous. We are free to supply products and provide services in accordance with customer requirements, not as dictated by a central planning committee. We can establish pricing, distribution, labor rates, and employee benefits consistent with market forces.

However, I am concerned that these freedoms are being progressively eroded. With our nation's large central government and a "big brother" mentality throughout its vast bureaucracy, we are seeing more regulation, and with it more intrusion into business.

For example, a few years ago the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (eeoc) proposed guidelines that many thought could restrict religious liberty in the workplace. If these guidelines had been adopted, discrimination charges could have been filed against employers for such activities as singing Christmas carols at a company event or using a bulletin board to announce a religious activity in the community. By God's grace—and a major effort by Christian business leaders—the proposed guidelines were withdrawn. The climate remains unfriendly, however, demanding that we remain vigilant in defense of our precious freedoms.

***R&L: In addition to running R. W. Beckett, you also founded Advent Industries, an organization dedicated to developing the work skills of people who are difficult to employ. What prompted you to do this, how does this organization function, and what have been its results?***

**Beckett:** We founded Advent in 1979 during a period of high unemployment in our area. I was troubled about those who were unfit for employment—those with prison records or substance abuse problems, and school dropouts. They simply could not find normal jobs.

Advent performed manufacturing work for area employers whose alternative was to take the jobs to Mexico or offshore. It was led by a no-nonsense boss with a big heart, and we maintained a disciplined but compassionate work environment. Bible study was a regular part of the work day. Employees would typically complete the training program in one to two years, then go into the general labor market.

Over 50 percent of Advent's 1200 "graduates" found and held good jobs. More important, nearly 90 percent were helped spiritually during their employment, producing some lasting changes in their habits and conduct.

Sadly, Advent was closed within the past year. The labor market has been so tight that employees find they do not have to go through rigorous training to get jobs. We simply have not been able to find enough suitable candidates. Perhaps it will reopen in the future if and when the need arises.

***R&L: Finally, in your book you contrast two views of the world of work, one of drudgery and futility and one of dignity and fulfillment. How can people make this latter view a reality?***

**Beckett:** I named my book *Loving Monday* because this title reflects the importance of our having a positive attitude toward work. The prevailing culture says "Thank God it's Friday," but that is not the way God intended us to approach our vocations. Those who find dignity and fulfillment in their work see it as a calling, just as important as a direct form of ministry. They are working "unto the Lord," not to please men.

The prevailing culture says "Thank God it's Friday," but that is not the way God intended us to approach our vocations.

I do not want to minimize the plight of millions who find their work to be more characterized by drudgery than dignity, but I would challenge them. Have they really made their work a matter of prayer? Have they considered the lessons God is trying to teach? Have they humbly but with determination tried to make improvements? If the job is intolerable and cannot be changed, that person needs to find work alternatives, trusting the Lord for the place of His choosing. Dignity and fulfillment become a reality when we are in the right job, looking to the Lord for His grace in every situation and circumstance. *A*

# The Heart of Mystery, The Heart of Enterprise

*François Michelin*

We laymen expect ministers to lead us to the threshold of mystery. Our work is terribly rationalistic, and rationalism is always in opposition to the profound nature of man. Consequently, ministers should not try too hard to base their reflections on economic or financial facts, but, starting from the nature of the human person illumined by revelation, on the heart of human mystery. Truly, the Original Sin was an attitude that rejected mystery, an attempt to find a rationalism that has led us to disaster. Further, the mission of Christ was revealed through parables, a parable itself being a door to the mystery that we expect from ministers.

Consider Sirach 38:24–34, which speaks of the artisans and the scribes. The scribes are in their public places, making beautiful discourses and recounting all manner of things. The artisans sustain creation. Without the artisans, the cities would not exist. And the object of their prayers is the business of their trades. This is why we laymen have need of men of prayer, reason, and contemplation. Mystery surrounds us, and ministers lead us to the heart of the problems of man amidst this present-day technological civilization.

### The Mystery of Unique Human Personality

Permit me to share some of the experiences I have had in industry. The first, which has greatly impressed me, is the following: One day, into my office—which is the office of my grandfather, the founder of our firm—a sixty-five-year-old man came to bid me *adieu* as he went into retirement. He said to me, "I am very moved to be in this office. Permit me to explain. In 1938, when your grandfather was seventy years old and I was but sixteen, I came here bearing a letter for him. And that man, your grandfather, when he saw me coming, told me, 'Come in, *monsieur*, please take a seat.' And that '*monsieur*' pronounced by your grandfather has remained with me, in my mind and in my heart."

We then spoke a bit about what that *monsieur* means. *Monsieur* is the contraction of *Mon seigneur*—in English, my lord. If I, for example, say that you are my lord, I am recognizing that you have within you some irreducible part in your personality that transcends my rapport with you, that you have some part of the truth that only you possess. As Pope John Paul II has often affirmed, every person is unique and unrepeatable. This is the true foundation of enterprise; if one does not take the time to listen to the people around him, he commits a grave mistake—I would say, almost a sin—because he has not been attentive to the truth that God has placed in those people and that he needs to welcome and receive if he wishes to do well in his business.

A second story. The inventor of the radial pneumatic, Mr. Marius Mignol, who, sadly, is dead now, came to our firm as a typographer, without any intellectual formation. Normally, he would have been sent to the printery, but my grandfather had told the personnel officers, "Don't stop with labels. Look around and remember that it is necessary to break through the rock to get to the hidden diamond." So Mr. Mignol was placed in a position where we could observe how he reacted to increasingly complicated problems. He showed himself to be a man of amazing imagination and strong character, perhaps difficult—I knew him—but, nonetheless, a veritable technological revolutionary.

This attitude toward Mr. Mignol must be the attitude of every entrepreneur, of every manager. And the opposite applies. If employees regard their superiors with the label "superior," they lose sight of the man. This applies to François Michelin as well: Take away the "Michelin," and it is "François" that counts, because "Michelin" is but a label. Thus we return to the notion of mystery. As Pope John Paul II reminds us, every man and woman posseses a unique potential that must be developed; it does not matter how.

### Who Is the Worker? Who Is the Boss?

A third story. One day, when returning to the factory, I came face-to-face with a representative who was distributing some leaflets and who was from the French Democratic Confederation of Workers, one of the largest industrial labor unions in France. I do not remember his name, but I recall his sharp blue eyes. We spoke but, regrettably, could not agree. We were discussing what a worker is, and I asked him, "Am I a worker?" He responded, "You are not a worker because you do not have the status of a worker." (To define a man by his status seems to me extremely reductionist, profoundly materialistic, and, essentially, Marxist. In any event, we continued the conversation.) I asked

him, "Then what should I tell my wife? If I am not working, what am I doing?"

He replied, "Look here, you cannot be a worker, because a worker is someone who receives orders. The boss, by definition, is someone who gives orders and does not receive them. Consequently, you are not a worker." I responded, "In your opinion, what defines the form of a plowshare? Is it the will of the farmer or the nature of the terrain?" "Obviously, the nature of the terrain," he answered. Then I told him, "The nature of the terrain gives an order to the farmer. One sees in the word 'order' something of the coercive, but that order is but the expression of a reality one cannot go against. Furthermore, that reality is necessary to give sense to creation."

I continued, "At the factory we make tires. Where do they come from? What are they for? Aren't they something that touch the ground, and don't we put a certain number on each vehicle? Thus, what determines the form of the tire is the nature of the rubber, of the road, and of the vehicle over it, and, above all, the desires of the passengers. Consequently, it is the customers who want to ride down the road in a vehicle who give us the order to manufacture tires with such-and-such characteristics."

I went on to add, "When Mr. Mercedes or Mr. Opel or Mr. Ford or Mr. Fiat or Mr. Renault ask me to manufacture tires for their vehicles, it is an order they give me. Then I have to order the rubber, the steel, the nylon, and the like, to make a tire that works for their automobiles." By the end, I was a worker, and the class struggle completely disappeared, for we all had the same responsibility to transform raw material into the objects our clients need.

### "With Sweat on Your Brow Shall You Eat Your Bread"

Now allow me to make some reflections on the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Centesimus Annus* in regard to how they speak about workers and owners—a manner that, to me, seems to smack of Marxism. This manner is understandable, since *Rerum Novarum* was—and *Centesimus Annus* is, to a certain, lesser degree—a reaction to the *Communist Manifesto*. It is, however, dangerous to locate things within this dialectical model. It may be intelligible to those who see things by the light of faith, but it is difficult for those in the world, especially a de-Christianized world. In the words of Pope John XXIII, we need to "discourse anew in new terms." This is what happened at the Second Vatican Council, which, as Pope John Paul II reminds us, was the first council that was positive and without anathemas.

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— François Michelin

Perhaps I am going too far. I recall, however, a discussion about Original Sin with one of the most intelligent entrepreneurs in France. He told me that it did not exist, and I found myself without a response. I was saddened because I felt that I had to share with him the hope that is within me, so I searched for a way to explain Original Sin. What I ended up with was a poor analogy, but it sufficed to put us on the path toward a reflection on the mystery. I told him that Original Sin is like someone who refuses to read a machine's instruction manual, thinking, out of pride, that he can understand it by himself. Admittedly, it is a poor analogy, but for those who work the land or in factories, it does have a very precise meaning. We continued along these lines and spoke of the account of the Fall in Genesis, chapter 3, of "The woman you put with me gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate it" and of "With sweat on your brow shall you eat your bread," or in other words, "You will work with sweat on your brow."

What did God mean by that, "with sweat on your brow"? I do not think it is only a result of Original Sin, since one perspires when one is hot or due to physical exertion. Perspiration is essential for the regulation of the body's temperature; thus, it is a natural phenomenon. No, God intended some other meaning when He spoke of "sweat on your brow." Rejecting the mystery of creation, man found nature totally incomprehensible to him. Thus, the sweat on one's brow is the sweat of pride, which is obligated to kneel in order to understand the world. Consequently, work is painful insofar as it humbles the pride of man. But there is something beyond this: the joy of knowing and participating in creation. This interpretation is not something I am inventing; it can be found in Pope John Paul II's book *The Sign of Contradiction*—a book that one would do well to read and reread.

I remember another occasion in a factory during a strike led by a commu-

nist unionist whom I had come to like, a Mr. Jacqson. A large group of excited people surrounded me, and we began a discussion that lasted about three hours. At the end, he said, "Let's go, comrades; we know well that it's the customer who commands." In fact, when one poses the question "Where does the money to run the factory come from?", the answer is, from those with money—capitalists in the working sense of the term, not the Marxist—and the customers. Our firm has an operating budget of some seventy billion francs, some thirty billion of which are salaries paid by the customers who buy or do not buy our tires.

### You Cannot Buy a Rack of Lamb with a Tire

I posed a similar question to some politicians in the early 1980s, which was then in France an era of triumphant socialism: "Who, in your judgment, is the principal mover in an enterprise?" The answers varied with the background, education, and age of my interlocutor. Some said it was the financial officer; others, the unionist; others, the factory manager; and still others, the worker. One person came close with the suggestion that it might be the marketing director. To all these I answered, "I think you have forgotten something: The customer is the principal mover of enterprise." And some replied, "But the customer isn't part of the enterprise! He's on the outside." My response: "Perhaps, but to manufacture a tire is one thing and to sell it, another. Wealth is created only when the tire is sold. Tires in stock represent salaries, and I cannot pay salaries in tires. It would be a tad difficult to go to the grocery store carrying a tire with the intention of trading it for a steak or rack of lamb!" Effectively, my interlocutors were led to understand that while the customer may not be within an enterprise, he is its heart.

Why its heart? Because—and this is in the theological sense of the word—he is both its point of departure and its object. The customer has needs to satisfy, and the purpose of enterprise is to find ways to satisfy these needs; thus he is at both the start and the finish. He is an essential part of the enterprise, even if from outside the firm, although it would be better to say that he transcends the firm. It has been a strongly Marxist tendency to consider business as an end in itself without reference to customers. It certainly is easier to reason and easier to satisfy pride thus, but it is completely false. It must never be forgotten that economic democracy consists in the service of people with needs.

And one needs to know when to tell the customer that one does not have the product the customer needs. Here we come to the notion of industrial ethics, but therein is also a mystery. The foundation of ethics is love, the concrete love of service to man, love that crosses over from serving the customer to serving people within the business. There are indeed owners who go too far, who practice the capitalism of the jungle, but one does not ban marriage because there are pederasts. The drama of free enterprise cannot camouflage the fact that we are sinners and will abuse our freedom. Yet the economy of responsibility—what we call the market economy or free-choice economy—is a true educator. It permits experimentation, and what we have in the wake of Original Sin is the need to experiment. We learn from experience, and there is no experience that compares to the market economy as a demanding teacher, capable of putting our pride in its place.

There is a phrase in *Laborem Excercens*—echoed, I believe, in *Centesimus Annus*—that speaks of the structures of sin. It is a vast question, one which shocks me. If one references acting persons in this context, however, one can see how the structures of sin can be restrained. Separate an act from its consequences, and one kills all possibility of education and self-determination. Thus the structures of sin are revealed—any structure that separates the act from its consequences and thus renders the act incapable of educating.

There are indeed owners who go too far, who practice the capitalism of the jungle, but one does not ban marriage because there are pederasts.

### Kneeling Before the Mystery

Once more I appeal to ministers to lead us all to the heart of mystery. Human intelligence is incapable of comprehending God; she is merely capable of kneeling and, by grace, making an act of faith. Saint John of the Cross teaches us that faith is a possession in an obscure state, but ministers steward the light that can permit us to accept this darkness. This is the essential role of their vocation. We need a bread of which we do not have sufficient quantities. As children, we need bread, and we need someone to break it. *A*

***François Michelin*** *has been since 1958 managing partner of the Compagnie Générale des Etablissements Michelin, the world's largest tire manufacturer. This essay is adapted from his remarks at the Acton Institute's 1997 international congress in Rome celebrating the fifth anniversary of* Centesimus Annus *and is excerpted from the book recording its proceedings, forthcoming this year from the Libreria Editrice Vaticana.*

# Whose Liberty? Which Religion?: Acton and Kuyper

*John Bolt*

During his 1831 visit to the United States, French nobleman Alexis de Tocqueville was surprised to see the positive role played by active religious faith in nurturing liberty. The dogma of the Enlightenment's secularizing *philosophes* predicted the waning of religious enthusiasm as enlightenment and freedom spread, but Tocqueville's American experience contradicted this dogma. In his great work, *Democracy in America*, he observed that religion and freedom were inseparably linked for Americans; one could not be conceived without the other. From this he drew a general lesson: "Despotism may be able to do without faith, but freedom cannot" (vol. I, pt. II, ch. 9).

Our twentieth century seems in many ways to have empirically demonstrated Tocqueville's principle, and a growing body of literature now sounds a supportive chorus. Fyodor Dostoyevski, so it is now often said, was absolutely right about the shadow side of the dictum: "If God is dead, everything is permitted." Stated differently, history—particularly our experience of totalitarianism in the twentieth century—appears to have verified that it is practically impossible for a people to be both free and good without God.

But now a difficult question: *Which* religion helps a people to be free? Is Tocqueville's axiom true for religion in general or only for a particular religion? Is there something specific about the content or character of American religious experience that has no historical analogues in, for example, Roman Catholic Spain, Hindu India, Confucian China, or Muslim Persia? Equally awkward is the question of truth. Can "false" religions nurture genuine freedom and morality together, or must religious claims be "true" to have moral efficacy in a free society?

It is here that the shoe pinches for secular social conservatives. The belief in religion's importance in public life for maintaining a free and virtuous people is one of the defining marks of social conservatism, but it is not always clear whether such convictions are merely utilitarian in character or whether they are rooted in an equal passion for religious truth. Affirming the need for belief in God simply to "prevent the servants from stealing the silver" hardly rises to the level of meaningful and effective religious commitment. The truth question will not go away.

But our problem is even worse. History also throws in our face counterexamples to Tocqueville's principle, instances where religion has been the source of intolerance and hateful conduct rather than good. Alongside the horrors of godless totalitarianism in the twentieth century, we must in all honesty also account for Belfast, Beirut, and Bosnia. For good measure let us throw in the Crusades, the Wars of Religion, the Inquisition, and even the Salem witch trials. Is it possible to sort all this out and still defend Tocqueville's principle?

## Lord Acton and Abraham Kuyper: Two Champions of Liberty

I shall attempt at least a beginning in this essay by comparing two champions of liberty, a pair of contemporaries, the Dutch Calvinist theologian–statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) and the Acton Institute's namesake, the Roman Catholic British historian Lord John Acton (1834–1902), both of whom judged religion essential to liberty. After a brief survey of each man's view of religion and liberty, I shall consider their assessments of a horrific and much-debated event in European religious conflict, the notorious Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre of August 24, 1572, and following. I will then conclude with some reflections on how these two distinct Christian traditions—the Catholic and the Calvinist (not exactly historically known for their harmonious coexistence)—can, in fact, make common cause for the sake of liberty.

Abraham Kuyper visited the United States in 1898 to deliver the prestigious Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary, which were eventually published as *Lectures on Calvinism*. In those lectures, as well as in the numerous addresses he gave in a two-month whirlwind American tour, Kuyper repeatedly praised the American experiment in ordered liberty, claiming the spirit of Calvinism as its soul. Among Kuyper's favorite and oft-used quotations was one from American historian George Bancroft: "The fanatic for Calvinism was a fanatic for liberty." Kuyper traced the line of political liberty from a seed planted in Calvin's Geneva through its transplantation in the Calvinist Netherlands and Puritan England to its full flowering in New England. As corroboration of this historical scenario, Kuyper cited Bancroft's assessment that America's "enthusiasm for freedom was born from its enthusiasm for Calvinism." In

Kuyper's view, America had been providentially blessed in order to be the world's beacon of liberty.

The reason for this linkage, according to Kuyper, is the Calvinist emphasis on the sovereignty of God. Neither the popular sovereignty of the French Revolution nor the state sovereignty of *ancien regime* absolute monarchism (or modern socialism) can fulfill the promise of liberty. Individual persons as well as social institutions such as the family do not derive their rights and legitimacy *mediately* from the state but *immediately* from the Sovereign God Himself. Political freedom is possible when each citizen's clear and final allegiance is to God. This is the genuine equality that, in Kuyper's view, led to full liberty of conscience and political freedom. In that context, he also judged, the hierarchically ordered polity of Rome, combined with its insistence on sacerdotal mediation, could not bring about full liberty.

### John Calvin or Thomas Aquinas?

Lord Acton shared this conviction that religion was essential to freedom. In his *History of Freedom* he concurred with "the idea that religious liberty is the generating principle of civil, and that civil liberty is the necessary condition of religious." Though this specific conviction was, in Acton's judgment, "a discovery reserved for the seventeenth century," he traces its key ingredient, liberty of conscience, back to Thomas Aquinas rather than John Calvin. And though sharing Kuyper's appreciation for America as "the grandest polity in the history of mankind," in a review of James Bryce's *American Commonwealth*, the Catholic historian scoffs at the accepted doctrine that Calvinist Puritanism was the inspiration for the American Revolution: "If Calvin prompted the Revolution, it was after he had suffered from contact with Tom Paine." Acton concludes another essay titled "The Protestant Theory of Persecution" with the following fascinating contrast:

> In the same age the Puritans and the Catholics sought a refuge beyond the Atlantic from the persecution which they suffered together under the Stuarts. Flying for the same reason, and from the same oppression, they were enabled respectively to carry out their own views in the colonies which they founded in Massachusetts and Maryland, and the history of those two States exhibits faithfully the contrast between the two churches. The Catholic emigrants established, for the first time in modern history, a government in which religion was free, and with it the germ of that religious liberty which now prevails in America. The Puritans, on the other hand, revived with greater severity the penal laws of the mother country.

So now we have rival claims for the title "champion of liberty." Like simultaneous claimants to heavyweight boxing titles, each one has some semblance of legitimacy. Each one also partakes in a history that casts doubt on the claim. Kuyper realized this when he addressed the problem of church and state in his third Stone Lecture:

> [The difficulty] lies in the pile and fagots of Servetus. It lies in the attitude of the Presbyterians toward the independents. It lies in the restrictions of liberty of worship and in the "civil disabilities" under which for centuries even in the Netherlands the Roman Catholics have suffered. The difficulty lies in the fact that an article of our old Calvinistic Confession of Faith [*Belgic Confession*, art.36, j.b.] entrusts to the government the task "of defending against and of extirpating every form of idolatry and false religion, and to protect the sacred service of the Church." The difficulty lies in the unanimous and uniform advice of Calvin and his epigones, who demanded intervention of the government in the matter of religion.

Kuyper adds: "The accusation is therefore a natural one: that, by choosing in favor of liberty of religion, we do not pick up the gauntlet for Calvinism, but that we directly oppose it." Kuyper then goes on, somewhat defensively, to allege a historical unfairness in highlighting the execution of Michael Servetus "whilst the Calvinists, in the age of Reformation, yielded their victims, by tens of thousands, to the scaffold and the stake." Kuyper's own judgment, however, is unequivocal: "Notwithstanding all this, I not only deplore that one stake [of Servetus], but I unconditionally disapprove of it."

> Calvinists and Catholics alike have mixed records on the matter of liberty. Rather than Calvin or Aquinas, it is preferable to go back to the Early Church.
>
> — John Bolt

### The Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre

Kuyper's reference to "tens of thousands" of Calvinist victims naturally brings us to the legendary Saint Bartholomew's massacre of 1572. First, a brief history of events. In the ongoing

conflict between the Catholic court and the French Calvinists, an uneasy truce had been achieved through the mediation of the Huguenot leader, Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, culminating in the religiously "mixed marriage" in August 1572 between Protestant Henry of Navarre and Catholic Marguerite of Valois, the sister of King Charles IX. With the provocation of the keenly Catholic Queen Mother, Catharine de' Medici, and with the apparent acquiescence of Pope Gregory XIII, Admiral Coligny was assassinated on August 24, 1572, precipitating a nationwide orgy of Huguenot slaughter by French mobs that lasted into the month of October. Estimates indicate a death toll in the neighborhood of fifty thousand.

While the events of 1572 are in themselves momentous, the mythological characterization and propogandist use of them that followed is even more significant. The assassination of Admiral Coligny and the massacre that ensued became one of the chief cornerstones of Protestant martyrology. Thanks to the printing press and the exodus of Calvinist refugees from France—primarily through Geneva—the memory of the massacre was kept alive throughout Europe and played a significant role in internationalizing the Reformed faith, spurring Calvinist devotion in trying circumstances and times. As the weight of Protestant martyrological interpretation grew, a response from the Catholic side did also. And that brings us back to Kuyper and Acton, both of whom wrote substantive essays on the massacre, focusing on the changing Catholic historiography.

Lord Acton was a scrupulous historian whose passion for honesty in dealing with historical sources and evidence got him into trouble with ecclesiastical authorities on several occasions. He would not fudge the record even when it portrayed his own church in a bad light. In his Saint Bartholomew's essay, Acton painstakingly traces Catholic responses to the massacre from initial defiance to final denial. The defiant response alleged Huguenot crimes in plotting against the French court; the massacre was acknowledged but justified as a legitimate reaction to real threats against public order by admitted heretics who deserved no mercy. The culmination of this attitude is reflected in Pope Gregory XIII's commissioning of a commemorative medal and Giorgio Vasari's triumphant painting of the massacre for the Sala Regia of the Vatican palace.

As Acton traces Catholic responses to the massacre, he observes that the posture of defiant acknowledgment ("Yes, we did; they deserved it") could not be maintained. The theory that was used to justify the slaughter ("Confirmed heretics must be rigorously punished … It is mercy to kill heretics that they may sin no more"), he notes, "has done more than plots and massacres to cast discredit on the Catholics." Furthermore, "the majority of the Catholics who were not under the direct influence of Madrid or Rome recognized the inexpiable horror of the crime" though the concern to defend Rome remained intact.

### Truth Is the Foundation of Liberty

There did come, however, a change in Catholic opinion: "That which had been defiantly acknowledged and defended required to be ingeniously explained away. The same motive which had justified the murder now prompted the lie." Fearful of implicating the papacy and thus providing further fuel for the fires of anti-Catholic hatred, apologists for the Church lied:

> A swarm of facts were invented to meet the difficulty: The victims were insignificant in number; they were slain for no reason connected with religion; the Pope believed in the existence of the plot; the plot was a reality; the medal is fictitious; the massacre was a feint concerted with the Protestants themselves…. These things were repeated so often that they have been sometimes believed.

But Acton will have none of it. He concludes his essay with these remarkable words: "Such things will cease to be written when men perceive that truth is the only merit that gives dignity and worth to history."

In 1872, approaching the tricentennial of the massacre, Abraham Kuyper challenged precisely this revisionist Catholic historiography in a series of editorials later published as a brochure. Using some of the same archival evidence as Acton, though painting in broader brush strokes, Kuyper called on his fellow Dutch Calvinists to revive their martyrology but without continuing hatred for their Catholic compatriots. He also acknowledged Protestant guilt in the wars of religion (though not equally!) and called for genuine freedom of conscience in civic life.

The convergence here between Acton and Kuyper suggests some lessons for us. We must be historically honest and modest in our claims. Calvinists and Catholics alike have mixed records on the matter of liberty. Rather than focusing on Calvin or Aquinas, it is preferable to go back to the Early Church—to Augustine, Athanasius, and Irenaeus. It is the biblical doctrine of the image of God in every person that is the indispensable fountain of human dignity and civil liberty. Finally, as the writings of Pope John Paul II so clearly remind us, the question of liberty, of human dignity and life, can never be separated from the question of truth. It is the truth that alone sets us free, even when it is uncomfortable truth. *A*

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# Liberalism Versus Community?

## *A Review Essay by Douglas B. Rasmussen*

*The Essential Communitarian Reader*, edited by Amitai Etzioni, is a disappointing book. It is not clearly focused. It reads at times more like the platform of a political party than a set of serious essays designed to challenge the dominant Western political paradigm of the last few centuries. Most of its essays do not come close to addressing the fundamental issues that divide classical liberals and communitarians. I will later comment on some of the more thoughtful essays in this volume, but first I would like to make clear just what is at stake in the current liberal–communitarian debate.

***The Essential Communitarian Reader***
edited by Amitai Etzioni

Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
1998. 300 pp. Paper: $16.95

Communitarianism is a collection of views from diverse sources that claim to challenge in various ways the central tenet of the liberal political vision. Though the liberal vision is complex and has evolved (or, as in the case of the United States, devolved) over the last century, its fundamental tenet is that liberty should be the central and primary concern of the political order. Communitarianism opposes this liberal tenet. Communitarianism thus derives its general meaning and force from its opposition to liberalism.

What has provided communitarianism with its particular meaning and force and has made it interesting in the last few years, however, has been its argumentative strategy. Communitarianism has included under its banner the following truths: that human beings are naturally social; that ethical relativism is an inadequate moral theory; that liberty cannot be defined or understood without an ethical commitment; that any theory of rights capable of motivating human conduct must ultimately be based on a conception of the human good; and that rights are not ethically fundamental. Communitarianism has, then, sought to show that liberalism is neither philosophically justifiable nor socially and culturally viable because it is incompatible with these truths. It has argued that because liberalism's fundamental tenet requires rejecting these truths, this tenet is false. In other words, the argumentative strategy of the communitarians has been what logicians call "*modus tollens*." If p, then q; not-q; therefore not-p. If one is to hold that liberty should be the central and primary concern of the political order, then these truths must be denied. Yet these truths cannot be denied. Therefore, it is not true that liberty should be the central and primary concern of the political order.

The first premise of the communitarian argument is not true, however. Liberalism does not require denying these truths. Though there have been liberal theorists who have denied these truths, it is not the case that these truths *must* be rejected in order to maintain liberalism's fundamental tenet. There are many liberal theorists, myself included, who accept every one of these truths. Indeed, these truths can even be used in making the case for the political centrality and primacy of liberty. The strategy of communitarianism, therefore, does not succeed.

Further, there is a fundamental confusion that reigns in the current debate between liberals and communitarians. This confusion lies behind the communitarian argumentative strategy and pertains to how liberalism is conceived. Is liberalism a normative theory or a metanormative theory? In other words, is liberalism a theory of ethics that tells us what is inherently good and how we ought to conduct ourselves? Or, is it a political theory whose aim is the creation and maintenance of the political condition under which people might choose ennobling lives?

### Liberalism's Problem

In the current debate between liberals and communitarians, these questions are not asked. Liberalism is viewed as both a normative and metanormative theory. Indeed, for some, liberalism is even considered an overarching philosophy. This confusion results both from contemporary liberals forgetting that liberalism is a political theory whose aim is not the same as that of ethics and also from communitarians (and conservatives) assuming that political theory is simply ethics writ large. This confusion reduces contemporary political discourse to a debate between left-wing versus right-wing social engineers. It is political discourse that is contrary to the essential core of liberalism.

If the liberal–communitarian debate is to go anywhere, one must first realize that the aim of politics and the aim of ethics are not identical and that liberalism is a metanormative theory. Second, one must realize that the metanormativity of liberalism can only be understood in light of a particular problem. This problem is important and difficult, and I shall call it "liberalism's problem."

This problem results from trying to reconcile two necessary features of the human good—namely, individuality and natural sociality. Liberalism's problem may be expressed as follows: How do we allow for the possibility that individuals might flourish in different ways (in different communities and cultures) without creating moral conflict? How do we find a political/legal context that will *in principle* not require that the human flourishing of *any* person or group to be sacrificed to others?

This is a crucial problem, and it is one that the Ancients and Medievals did not adequately address. But it is the problem that liberalism addresses, and it is in terms of this problem that liberalism is to be understood. Indeed, liberalism's success or failure is to be judged in light of the solution it offers to this problem, not any other.

Liberalism is therefore limited. It does not try to answer all the important questions of life. It is certainly not a normative theory. It does not seek to make people virtuous or fulfilled. It is, then, a mistake to judge a liberal regime by whether it creates virtuous citizens.

Instead, liberalism attempts to provide the political/legal backdrop against which people might have the possibility to pursue their unique forms of the good life in a manner that is consistent with their need to be open to relationships with any person. Liberalism does not assume that natural sociality precludes one from having relationships with those not from one's community.

Accordingly, the concept of the rights to liberty and property, which many classical liberals used to determine the justification for and scope of governmental action, should also not be viewed as a principle by which people learn how to be good or do their duty. The concept of rights is not meant to replace other moral concepts such as goodness or duty. Rather, the concept is a metanormative principle and thus is to be judged by whether it can provide a solution to liberalism's problem.

### Laws and Morals

Hence, the function of rights is conceptually distinct from the function of other ethical concepts, and the two should not be confused. Communitarians (and many conservatives) fall afoul of this distinction because they forget what Thomas Aquinas taught about the nature of abstraction—namely, that to consider something abstractly is not necessarily to falsify. Just because we can think of the form and function of one type of ethical concept without thinking of the form and function of other types of ethical concepts does not show that these other types of ethical concepts do not exist. That is to say, just because we can think of rights without thinking of other ethical concepts does not show that there are no other ethical concepts besides rights that human beings need.

Liberalism does not seek to make people virtuous or fulfilled. It is, then, a mistake to judge a liberal regime by whether it creates virtuous citizens.

Indeed, all of the communitarian complaints about liberalism's failure to generate moral concepts sufficient to guide human life are simply beside the point. They assume without argument that the aim of government is to create virtuous citizenry. Yet to say that X-ing is morally right or good and ought to be done does not, in and of itself, imply that X-ing ought to be legally required. Nor does saying that X-ing is morally wrong or bad and ought not to be done, in and of itself, imply that X-ing ought to be legally prohibited. As Aquinas distinguished, there are demands of justice that are morally binding, and there are demands of justice that are morally *and* legally binding. Something being right or wrong does not, by itself, carry any implications about what should be a concern of the political/legal order.

One needs to consider what it is that makes something a political/legal concern. It takes more than knowing that something is morally good or bad. The issue of universality must be addressed because human sociality is not limited to any select group; and the issue of individuality must be addressed, too, because the human good is not some Platonic Form. Yet to do this is but to consider liberalism's problem. Once we see the realities that give rise to this problem, then it is communitarianism that is an instance of a conception that divorces rather than distinguishes.

Communitarians do, of course, both reject the liberal attempt to distinguish politics from ethics and accuse liberalism of trying to separate the two. We find this argumentative strategy in Phillip Selznick's essay, "Foundations of Communitarian Liberalism." He observes that "politics and government cannot be divorced from fundamental values." Indeed, this is right. Political principles cannot be divorced from ethical principles; there must be a connection. That is not to say that they are identical or exist in an isomorphic relation. In fact, there can be an ethical ba-

sis for why there needs to be political principles concerned with peace and order, as defined by the rights to liberty and property, without thereby making the human good or fulfillment of moral obligations the aim of government.

### The Destruction of the Moral Life

Selznick further argues that it is the common good of the political community that connects politics to ethics, but then he argues that this common good cannot be procedural or understood in terms of a framework of laws grounded on basic rights. This would be what he calls "a meager common good." Rather, something more substantive is required, and that is determined by "abandoning our special interests and perspectives."

Yet the whole point of ethics, at least as Aristotle saw it, is to allow us to see how the human good is manifested in the particularities of our own lives and to act accordingly. The human good is in reality neither abstract nor universal, and each of us needs to be practically wise in fashioning this good into its singly proper form. Indeed, the virtuous life demands that we not ignore what is uniquely our moral integrity nor sacrifice it for something else. For example, we should not try to transcend our special interests in our family or friends for the sake of "humanity." We can and should have an interest in others, but this pull must be based in something concrete, not abstract and universal.

Ultimately, what Selznick calls for is the democratization of the moral life. However, this is nothing more than its very destruction, and it illustrates well the confusion of normativity with metanormativity. Further, it represents a failure to see the reality of liberalism's problem, because it blithely assumes that the pluralistic character of the human good is something that not only can but ought to be ignored.

Thomas A. Spragens, Jr.'s essay, "The Limitations of Libertarianism," continues the argumentative strategy noted above. He argues, among other things, that political liberty requires some connection with morality. It cannot be defined as simply doing as one pleases (or as merely the lack of external impediment) and still remain a meaningful political ideal. This is of course true, but it does not follow from this that liberalism is false or that liberty is thereby to be understood as simply "when we are governed by laws of our own making." This understanding only returns us to where we started, for what is (are) the principle(s) to be employed in the creation of a political/legal order? The liberal answer is, of course, liberty, but liberty understood in terms of what would solve liberalism's problem.

The human good is in reality neither abstract nor universal, and each of us needs to be practically wise in fashioning this good into its singly proper form.

It is sometimes said that liberty is "liberty to do as we ought to do," and this is most generally understood as a nonliberal view. However, if we keep liberalism's problem in mind and understand "ought" in terms of what would solve this difficulty, then the "ought" in the above statement can be interpreted as directed toward what a polity's legal system ought to protect and sanction, not how individuals should conduct their lives. Basic rights would then define what liberty is, and liberty would be achieved through the creation of political/legal order based on rights. Understood in this way, law and liberty are fundamentally interdependent. There is no inherent opposition.

The central issue that faces liberalism is whether the rights to liberty and property do provide a solution to liberalism's problem. Or, less idealistically, do these rights come closer than any other set of principles to solving this problem? These rights provide guidance in the creation of a political context for social life in which anyone and everyone might have the possibility of choosing for themselves how they should live their lives. What these rights seek to protect, then, is not the human flourishing of every person but only its possible pursuit by individuals in a social context. More precisely, these rights only protect the possibility of self-direction by requiring the political order to legally prohibit and punish the nonconsensual use by persons and groups of the lives and resources of others. It should be realized that these rights do not even guarantee that people would choose, let alone choose as they should, but they do nonetheless provide a link between—though not an identification of—politics and ethics. They do offer the hope of solving liberalism's problem.

There are a few other essays of note in this volume. Bell's, Taylor's, and Glendon's have insights, but none of these really gets to the basic issues that divide liberals and communitarians. The central problem with the essays in this volume is that they assume that economists represent liberal theory almost entirely. The philosophical literature on behalf of liberty and liberalism of the last twenty years is barely touched. The complexities and ambiguities of liberalism do indeed need to be explored, especially if the communitarian challenge is to be appreciated, but this volume does not do that. *A*

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# Book News

**The Life of Thomas More**
*Peter Ackroyd*
*Doubleday, 1998*
*447 pp. Hardcover: $30.00*

Peter Ackroyd weds the thoroughness of a scholar to the sensibilities of a novelist to create a well-documented and highly-readable biography of this famed "man for all seasons." This book is good to read and, what is more, tells a good story—of how one man refused to compromise his religious convictions to curry favor with temporal powers.

**A Man in Full**
*Tom Wolfe*
*Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998*
*747 pp. Hardcover: $28.95*

Tom Wolfe's long-awaited second novel is really two books: the one a rollicking chronicle of the state of American culture at the cusp of the new millennium, the other an old-fashioned morality play.

Wolfe as cultural chronicler presents the kind of insightful and comprehensive cross-sectional description of the follies of contemporary American life that made his *The Bonfire of the Vanities* such a triumph. In *A Man in Full*, topics such as racial politics, sexual mores, and the 1960s counterculture receive withering scrutiny. The upshot of Wolfe's analysis is that late-1990s American culture suffers from widespread moral confusion, resulting in widespread cultural instability. Which brings us to Wolfe as moralist.

In other places, Wolfe has paid homage to the the prophetic accuracy of Freidrich Nietzsche. As Wolfe explains, Nietzsche wrote of " 'the history of … two centuries.' He predicted (in *Ecce Homo*) that the twentieth century would be a century of 'wars such as have never happened on earth,' wars catastrophic beyond all imagining." Our experience in the twentieth century has been precisely this, but Wolfe reminds us that Nietzsche had more to say. "But then, in the twenty-first, would come a period more dreadful than the great wars, a time of 'the total eclipse of all values' (in *The Will to Power*). This would also be a frantic period of 'revaluation,' in which people would try to find new systems of values to replace the osteoporotic skeletons of the old." The resulting chaos will make the twentieth century look mild by comparison. Wolfe concludes, "Ecce vates! Ecce vates! Behold the prophet!"

In *A Man in Full*, Wolfe seems to indicate that the fulfillment of this Nietzschean prophecy is upon us, and the solution he offers through the single moral exemplar in the novel is a return to a pre-modern moral tradition (from a rather surprising source). Wolfe is always worth reading for his fine, fun style; *A Man in Full* offers the additional benefit of moral exhortation to help us dodge a Nietzschean destiny.

**In Praise of Commercial Culture**
*Tyler Cowden*
*Harvard University Press, 1998*
*278 pp. Hardcover: $27.95*

A common assumption is that free markets inevitably impoverish the visual arts, music, and literature. Not so, masterfully argues Tyler Cowden. In reality, markets foster the creation of all manner of culture, both high and low. The reason, according to Cowden, is that "a commercial society … offers a rich variety of niches." As he explains more fully, "the virtues of cultural markets lie not in the quality of mass taste but rather in the ability of artists to find minority support for their own conceptions." Further, he cites the diversity and richness of modern culture as compelling proof.

But is Cowden a bit *too* enthusiastic and uncritical of contemporary culture? For example, he exclaims effusively, "Today's video stores are treasure chests of modern cultural achievement, following along the lines of the ancient Ptolemaic library in Alexandria, but far more successful…." Perhaps. But does mere fecundity indicate health? Or, rather, is the health of culture more directly related to the health of the soul? Such an inquiry is, admittedly, beyond the scope of Cowen's excellent economic analysis but crucial to this discussion.

**Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers**
*Christopher A. Hall*
*InterVarsity Press, 1998*
*225 pp. Paper: $11.99*

Evangelicalism of late has been reaching back to older church traditions to inform its views of worship, theology, and devotional life. As this book demonstrates, it now seeks to do the same in the field of biblical interpretation.

*Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* is essentially an introduction to InterVarsity Press's Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture series, compiled under the direction of Thomas C. Oden. Hall's intention is to present the thought of the fathers within their historical context and to offer evaluations of their approaches to Scripture, all of which is aimed at those with little exposure to patristics. Those seeking a more comprehensive introduction may be frustrated by the book's limited focus, but such readers should find Hall's guides to further reading satisfying.

**—Gregory Dunn**

***Rev. Robert A. Sirico***

# The Return of Faith on Film

Like other religious leaders, I was courted by the makers of *Prince of Egypt* to review the project and offer my perspective. I was prepared to resist these overtures for fear of being politically manipulated. I viewed parts of the film in earlier stages and made suggestions, which were taken seriously, as were those made by others from a variety of religious traditions. In the end, again like the others, I, too, am won over. This movie is a spectacular revelation, both as a piece of filmmaking and also, more importantly, as a moving story of God's intervention in the history of man. By dramatically recounting a historical incident from ancient times, it highlights the universal and always current themes of captivity and liberation, despair and hope, doubt and faith.

DreamWorks has lived up to its name.

When they began this project, the makers of *Prince of Egypt* knew they were treading on sacred ground. The Old Testament story of Moses leading the people of Israel from captivity is a literary cornerstone of Western civilization. It is an event that deeply informs the theology of both Judaism and Christianity.

There was the danger of trivializing the important subject through animation, but, instead, the animation proves to be a strength rather than a weakness. Through a combination of traditional and computer techniques, the film shows the viewer scenes that would have been impossible to film. The scene in which Moses splits the Red Sea (among many others) is brilliant.

I also feared it would be laden with political baggage. I once asked the four-year-old daughter of a friend whether or not she would see Disney's *Pocahantas*. Elizabeth replied, no, because it was "propaganda" (and she could define the word). Indeed it was. The beautiful story of love and conversion was turned into a New-Age tale of environmental politics.

*Prince of Egypt*, on the other hand, is an explicit call to authentic faith. The core of the story is emphatically theocentric. Instead of a vague spirituality, Moses directly hears the voice of God and it entirely envelops him. He is altered irrevocably. You feel his conversion. Even the theme song "If You Believe" includes the line "If you believe, you will see God's wonders."

Another moral point that comes through: Sometimes faithfulness to truth may have negative consequences, but we must persevere in prayer and do God's will. Moses goes to his Pharoah-brother, Ramses, to plead for mercy and freedom for the Jewish people, but Pharaoh hardens his heart. Yet Moses is faithful to God's will.

Films and videos sympathetic to religious themes have remained a specialized and highly segmented market. This has created some tension between people of faith and Hollywood over the years.

> Generally, the market reflects rather than leads the culture.

*Prince of Egypt* begins to heal the breech, and then some. It appears that DreamWorks came to terms with the religious, Bible-centered nature of the American people. It is a movie to uplift the culture rather than drag it down. If the film does well, it will demonstrate that it is possible to make expensive, commercially viable films that show respect for religious values.

No doubt, DreamWorks will be accused of profiteering from people's religion. But this is a wildly misguided charge. There need not be a contradiction in doing the right thing and making a successful, profitable production. The people at DreamWorks deserve to earn a good profit for their service to the American people in general, and to the religious communities in particular.

Generally, the market reflects rather than leads the culture. It is significant that a prestigious movie company like DreamWorks would undertake an Old Testament story on this scale. Most exciting is what this movie may portend for the future. May this be only the beginning of a new era in filmmaking. May it also forecast a return to faith in popular culture. *A*

***Fr. Sirico** is the co-founder and president of the Acton Institute and a Roman Catholic priest.*

"This description of creation, which we find in the very first chapter of the book of Genesis, is also *in a sense the first 'gospel of work.'* For it shows what the dignity of work consists of: It teaches that man ought to imitate God, his Creator, in working, because man alone has the unique characteristic of likeness to God."

—Pope John Paul II—

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