

# RELIGION & LIBERTY

January and February • 2000 A Publication of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty Volume 10 • Number 1

## Religious Liberty, the Center of Human Dignity



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Communist party. In other words, as long as one confesses that the state is primary, the state will permit one to do other things. Christianity refuses that confession, and that angers and scares totalitarian regimes.

**R&L:** *In your view, how should we respond to religious persecution?*

**R&L:** *You have written that "the confession, 'Caesar is not God,' sticks in the craw of every authoritarian regime and draws an angry and bloody response." What is it about this confession that stands Christianity athwart totalitarianism?*

**Marshall:** Historically, Christianity has sharply distinguished between political and spiritual authority, so one could never identify *sacerdotium*, the ecclesiastical order, with *regnum*, the political order. People may have been confused about the distinction and argued about it and had wars because of it, but the idea that there are "two swords" has never been lost. As long as one maintains this principle, one maintains that areas of human life exist properly beyond the authority of the state. The power of Caesar, therefore, must always be limited.

Totalitarian regimes, however, insist that the power of Caesar is absolute and primary. For example, to be a legal church in China, one has to accept the overarching authority of the

**Marshall:** The first thing to do is to pray. When I talk to persecuted Christians around the world, the first thing they ask for is prayer, which also includes, "Don't forget us." And this needs to be both a personal and a congregational commitment. The second thing is to meet people. Short-term missions, for example, are flourishing and are very important. They do some good for those overseas, but they do much good for those who go. We must remember that the church is an international body. The third thing is to publicize persecution inside and outside the Christian community. I spend a lot of time speaking about the persecution of the church around the world, and it is still a subject that is largely unknown to most Christians.

**R&L:** *What is the connection between religious freedom and other kinds of freedom?*

**Marshall:** The Center for Religious Freedom at Freedom

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House titles its newsletter *First Freedom* to emphasize that the first freedom for which people fought was religious freedom. It is the first part of the First Amendment in the United States Bill of Rights. The right to follow our conscience lies at the center of human dignity and is the core of every other human right. Furthermore, other rights are particular means of expressing this inner one. Freedom of the press is the ability to express what one believes. Freedom of assembly is the ability to gather with other people who share your beliefs. And, practically, the establishment of religious freedom has fostered other kinds of freedom. For example, there is a strong correlation between the spread of religious freedom and the spread of political freedom.

**R&L:** *Is the reverse true? Does political or economic freedom lead to greater religious freedom?*

**Marshall:** As a general rule, yes. For example, one aspect of economic freedom is the freedom to have property—which I regard specifically not as an economic but simply as a human right. If one has no property, he has no base from which to act. Freedom of the press is absolutely meaningless if one cannot own a press. Economic freedom is necessary for people to have the material means to be able to secure other forms of human rights.

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*A Publication of the Acton Institute for  
the Study of Religion and Liberty*  
Volume 10 • Number 1

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The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty was founded in 1990 to promote a free society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles. The Institute is supported by donations from foundations, corporations, and individuals and maintains a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

Letters and subscription requests should be directed to: *Religion & Liberty*; Acton Institute; 161 Ottawa Ave., n.w., Suite 301; Grand Rapids, MI 49503.

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But also remember that Germany and Italy in the 1930s were very wealthy states. Communism is not the only form of totalitarianism; historically, fascist powers have usually allowed the economy some independence but have tried to organize it through nationalism. There can be quite wealthy, highly industrialized powers that are evil regimes. There is no iron law that says rich countries are going to be nice.

**R&L:** *Earlier you noted that one consequence of the confession that “Caesar is not God” is that government should be limited. In your view, what resources in the Christian tradition best help us determine the just scope of the state?*

**Marshall:** In the modern age, Christian social teaching has explained the limitations of the state in a few ways: the Roman Catholic doctrine of subsidiarity, the reformed views of sphere sovereignty, and, in a less-developed way, the Lutheran theology of the two kingdoms. These principles differ in important ways, but it is quite clear to me that they are all trying to apprehend the same set of realities—essentially, that social institutions do not derive their sovereignty from the state. The church, the family, educational institutions, economic enterprises, and the like necessarily possess their own authority structure and independence. The state has not given it to them, and it cannot take it away from them.

**R&L:** *What does the application of these principles look like in practice?*

**Marshall:** First, remember that no theoretical structure will, by itself, give a direct answer to a practical problem. Theory shows how to approach things, but the approach will always have an open-ended quality to it. This is necessarily so; otherwise there would be no need for practical reason. One is always looking at the world with some theoretical approach in mind and, if one is wise, revising that theoretical approach where it does not fit reality.

The idea of sphere sovereignty did not drop from the heavens but is empirically derived. For example, let me take you to a university setting. Why should there be such a thing as academic freedom? Because it is impossible to compel someone to believe something. Our beliefs are not subject to our will. One could put a gun to the head of a mathematician and compel him to say that  $2 + 2 = 3$ , but he is not going to believe it. If he does believe it, he is no longer a mathematician. Mathematics is not subject to external compulsion; therefore, academic inquiry in general is not. As a university is an institution formed around academic inquiry, the institution must be free.

That is an empirical fact, and it is from these sorts of

observations that one can conclude that there are areas of human life with their own autonomy and authority. There is a theoretical side, but there is also a practical side because one is thinking about the nature of particular practices. That is what I mean by inquiring into what kind of independence, what kind of sovereignty, things have.

**R&L:** *You have done a great deal of thinking about work*

*and vocation, and you have argued that, through the Christian concept of vocation, everyday work acquires religious significance. I would like for us to trace briefly the history of this change. First, how did the early Christian view of work compare to that of the ancients?*

**Marshall:** The classical writers generally denigrate physical labor—being a craftsman as opposed to being a philoso-


## Luis de Molina (1535–1600)

*“For rule, jurisdiction, and ownership are things common to the entire human race, being based not on faith and charity but arising directly or indirectly from the very nature of things and their first foundation.”*

Born in Spain in 1535, Luis de Molina was one of the most accomplished, learned figures in the sixteenth-century revival of Scholasticism on the Iberian peninsula. A member of the Jesuit Order, Molina spent twenty-nine years of his life in Portugal—first as a student, then as a professor of theology, law, and philosophy. He was a gifted scholar and an exacting writer whose tireless devotion to scholarship prompted him to write the *Concordia*, his most famous theological work.

While best known as a theologian, Molina was also a renowned lawyer and astute political philosopher who wrote on a diverse set of topics, ranging from slavery to economics to war. His political philosophy was thoroughly explicated in his five-volume, posthumously published work, *De Justitia et Jure*, considered by many to be his magnum opus. In it, Molina not only outlines his theory of law but also demonstrates his classically liberal economic views on issues such as taxation, price controls, and monopolies—particularly as they relate to the state.

Underlying Molina’s social thinking is an unwavering belief—shared by many of the early Jesuit thinkers—in the free choice of the human person. According to Molina, “That agent is called free who, with all the prerequisites for acting having been posited, is able to act and able not to act, or is able to do one thing in such a way that he is also able to do some contrary thing.” Theologically, Molina’s focus on the freedom of the will translates to a rather intricate—and, in the sixteenth century, controversial—understanding of the nature of free human action in light of God’s grace and divine foreknowledge. In essence, the human person, Molina asserts, is an active agent of the divine will.

This concept of active agency applies to the political sphere as well. In fact, the concept of human liberty forms the basis of Molina’s view of civil society, in which persons, through God’s grace, are free to act virtuously in their role as citizens, making decisions for themselves on matters of their own physical and spiritual well-being. This concept finds concrete expression in Molina’s writings on economics, in which he affirms the importance of individual liberty in free-market exchanges, opposes government regulation of prices and markets, condemns the slave trade as immoral, and upholds private-property rights theory. Molina’s views on these issues—and many others—continue to influence theologians, philosophers, and economists even today. 



**Sources:** *The Political Philosophy of Luis de Molina, S.J.*, by Frank Bartholomew Costello, S.J. (Gonzaga, 1974), and *Political Thought in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, by Bernice Hamilton (Clarendon, 1963).

pher—as a slavish activity. Work deals with necessities, so it binds one to the earth. Work is the kind of thing animals do, not a distinctively human activity, and, so, should be avoided if at all possible. Those who do not have to work live a higher kind of life.

By comparison, it is striking that the Bible is immersed in the world of everyday work. Even in Genesis 1, God is portrayed as a worker, ordering and forming creation. In other religions, either God was so ineffable that the metaphor would not work, or work was so denigrated that the metaphor would be demeaning to God. In the Gospels, Jesus takes his examples of the Kingdom of God from the work of everyday life. And in the Epistles, one way Paul establishes his credibility as an apostle is by stating that he works with his hands for a living. So, with the arrival of Christianity, one finds a very positive appraisal of everyday work.

**R&L:** *Next, how did the medieval perception of work contrast with that of the Reformation?*

**Marshall:** Though I object to some parts of his thesis, by and large I think Max Weber is correct when he argues that, with the advent of Protestantism, one finds a new understanding of work that had a positive impact on the development of economic activities. Now, in medieval views, there *was* a positive appraisal of work. One finds that strongly in the monastic orders, most of which were not only given to prayer but also to all sorts of other activities—running gardens and orchards and the like. Such work was understood to be an important part of human life, but still you find, I think, some reverence for the classical view. Work, though positive, was still a second-class activity. There was a higher kind of life, the “religious” life, and a lower kind of life, the life of labor.

**R&L:** *And how did the understanding of vocation that came out of the Reformation modify this view?*

**Marshall:** The modern English usage of *calling* or *vocation*—as when we speak of *vocational counseling*—is derived directly from the English Protestant use of the word. One’s role as a father or mother and one’s work as a bricklayer or shoemaker or doctor is one’s vocation for God. And one serves both his fellow human beings and God through this vocation. One’s work, then, is a religious activity. It is what God calls us to. In this way, work itself becomes a particular form of piety. Too much so, I think.

**R&L:** *Too much so?*

**Marshall:** Yes. This emphasis within Protestantism on voca-


tion was—and is—good, but it can go overboard. In the past, what tended to happen was that one equated his vocation, how he served God, with his job to the exclusion of things like family duties. In this way, work, particularly paid work, started to be given priority over other parts of life. We see these distortions even by the late-sixteenth century.

**R&L:** *How, then, should Christians today approach their work?*

**Marshall:** First, there are two obvious things to avoid: workaholicism and laziness. Between those two extremes, the answer depends so much on circumstance. Some people who have had very successful careers may decide to become a priest. It does not mean that they thought their old work was bad, only that they now have a different calling. Others may decide to work in the inner city. They will be paid less, but they think it needs to be done, and so they do it. Still others may decide that they can earn quite a bit, which also means they can donate quite a bit. Rather than working in the inner city themselves, they can support several others to do it. In other cases, it is important that there are Christians who excel in particular careers, both because excellence is good for its own sake and also because it is helpful for other people to have role models. Finally, there are particular careers in which Christians are vastly underrepresented—I am thinking particularly of the media. Now, I have listed a number of choices, and each is defensible. I could not say on principled grounds that Christians should do one or the other, only that in making such choices one needs to consider his particular life circumstances and also the circumstances of the people around him.

**R&L:** *Finally, how should Christians approach their rest?*

**Marshall:** This is something I am still learning. I am coming to see that *rest* is tied very closely to *grace*. When one rests, he is saying that the world is not in his hands but in God’s hands. Another way to put it is that one no longer tries to earn but to receive. One no longer tries to justify himself but to accept that he is justified. To do that, one needs to truly believe that the world is in God’s hands.

We find it hard to rest because we have messianic complexes. We have the sneaking suspicion that the world will grind to a halt and fall apart without us. So, to learn that other people can manage without us and that God can manage without us, we rest. In other words, rest is accepting the gifts that come from God’s hands. The Sabbath is structured this way; one is to have a day of rest on which he is focused on God in a particular way. 



# On the Universal Destination of Material Goods

*John S. Barry*

From the very first pages of the Book of Genesis it is clear that all creation is ultimately a gift from God and that man was created to be his steward of this creation for the benefit of all God's children. As captured in *Gaudium et Spes*, a Vatican II document, "God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner." This fundamental principle—that all creation is ultimately God's and, therefore, belongs to all God's creatures—has come to be known as the *universal destination of material goods*.

Unfortunately, this teaching of the church, like so many others, has been misinterpreted over the centuries as supportive of one form of socialism or another, including government redistribution of wealth. Indeed, at first blush, the principle of the universal destination of material goods appears to be a troubling teaching for Christians committed to individual liberty and the free market. This principle would seem to indicate that all material goods should be held in common ownership, no matter their origin. If this were the case, however, then private property would be impossible. No individual would have the ability to say, "This is mine and not yours because I created it by means of my own blood, sweat, and tears."

A thorough understanding of the nature of private property and free-market exchange, however, exposes this apparent paradox as a chimera of the leftist's creation and not a fact of church teaching or economic reality. In fact, we will see that the freedom of exchange based on private property rights actually reinforces the church's teaching on the universal destination of material goods by limiting man's human impulses away from God *and* by magnifying man's positive impulses toward God's moral Scripture.

## **The Christian Understanding of Private Property and the Universal Destination of Material Goods**

The first step we must take is a review of the church's teaching on private property. The record here is not what those fearful of the market would have us believe. The Bible

and the teachings of the church strongly support man's natural right to private property. The Seventh Commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," is emphatic that one wrongs a neighbor by taking what belongs to him. The understanding of the biblical authors is that the act of stealing violates human dignity. Stealing, clearly, is seen as contrary to solidarity, to charity, and to the overall well-being of a community.

Much as do the Scriptures, the Fathers of the church generally give voice to the right to private property. As in the Bible, Saint Augustine teaches that private property is necessary and useful for our earthly sojourn as well as in accord with God's design of man himself. The world and its goods must be used, according to Augustine, for the journey from temporal existence to our homeland in eternity. Likewise, Saint Thomas Aquinas affirms a role for private property as part of man-made positive law that serves in the proper structuring of human affairs toward the common good.

The modern era of Roman Catholic social teaching can be said to have begun with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*, "Of the New Things." The new things to which the church was responding included the Industrial Revolution and the consequent changes in the disposition of labor and capital. Of primary concern, however, was socialism, which was gaining footholds in the West in both theory and practice. At the heart of the socialist agenda was the denial and abolition of the right to private ownership. Leo condemned socialism outright in this encyclical, and in so doing, launched the most concerted defense of private property that the church had seen to date. "Nature confers on man the right to possess things privately as his own" (no.10), Leo writes. Leo goes so far as to demand respect for the principle that "the right of private property ... be regarded as sacred" (no.65).

By the time of the pontificate of John Paul II, the principle of property rights was brought by the church into fuller conversation with contemporary economic science. The Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* was expressly written to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Leo XIII's watershed document and articulates a solid defense of economic freedom based on private property, provided that this free-

dom is oriented to human dignity and the truth about man. For John Paul II, property is an extension of the freedom of the human person. In this sense, private property is a proper extension of the subjectivity of the person into the material order.

In summary, from the early books of the Bible through modern Catholic social teaching, the right to private property has been as central to the Christian life as the universal destination of material goods. Therefore, it cannot simply be assumed that the existence of the church's teaching on the universal destination of material goods invalidates the institution of private property. A more elaborate understanding of the two principles is needed.

### **Alternative Economic Systems and the Universal Destination of Material Goods**

Let us assume for a moment that private property rights were abandoned as antithetical to the church's teaching on the universal destination of material goods. Another system for organizing economic activity would then have to emerge or (rather) be imposed. Indeed, various other systems that are not based on private property rights and free exchange have been proffered and even tried, often in the name of a just distribution of material goods.

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*Freedom of exchange based on private property rights reinforces the teaching of the universal destination of material goods by limiting man's impulses away from God and by magnifying man's impulses toward God's moral Scripture.*

*— John S. Barry*

One such non-liberal system oft attempted has been central planning. In the extreme, a single dictator or planning board is placed in charge of directing every aspect of economic activity. Less-severe systems have called merely for a central actor to redirect a portion of economic activity or material goods from one sector to another. In any case, a benevolent dictator or a planning board composed solely of moral individuals is required to establish a specific moral level and distribution of wealth. This may be possible in theory but is highly unlikely in reality. The cost of such strenuous self-restraint is too high for any human being to sustain. To state the problem more succinctly, we need turn to no less an authority than Lord Acton: "Power tends to corrupt,

and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The result—as the experience of dictatorships throughout history teaches—is a most unjust and arbitrary distribution of goods hardly in line with the church's teaching on the universal destination of material goods.

Another option is to delegate some or all decisions concerning wealth production and distribution to a collective decision-making process. In the extreme, collective decision making requires unanimous consent to make any and every economic decision. Every individual affected by a particular economic decision must agree to the course taken with regard to that decision. Since every economic decision will affect at least a small group of individuals, every decision becomes a group decision requiring unanimous consent. Again, a less-severe variation is possible, namely, a democratically elected representative portion of the entire population given the right to make decisions on behalf of the collective.

There are significant costs associated with a collective decision-making process, be it in the extreme or through an elected minority. First, there are tremendous "shoe leather" costs in simply gathering all affected parties together to make a decision. Second, the time necessarily spent by each individual to acquaint himself with the circumstances surround-

ing each decision is significant. A third, related cost is the time spent by individuals educating or lobbying fellow decision makers on the pros or cons of a particular choice. All of these costs take time, time that could be spent more productively in direct wealth creation that could benefit all individuals. Moreover, as economist Armen Alchian points out, "Under [common] ownership the costs of any decision or choice are less fully thrust upon the selector than under private property.... [T]he

gains to any owner resulting from any cost-saving action are less fully effective." In other words, there is a "moral hazard" problem associated with common ownership since individuals do not bear the full costs of their action (or inaction).

### **The Positive Case for Private Property Rights**

It is not merely because private property and market exchange are the best available options that we can claim their alignment with the principle of the universal destination of material goods. Inherent in a system of free exchange is actually a positive reinforcement of that doctrine.

First, private property and free exchange fully align the costs and benefits of economic decisions. There is no moral

hazard. Individuals have every incentive, therefore, to search for cost-saving measures because they will receive the full benefit of these actions. Likewise, individuals have every incentive to seek out new, productive opportunities because they will receive all of the direct benefits of such opportunities. The result is greater creation of wealth.

Second, free exchange based on secure private property rights leads to specialization in labor and ownership. Increased specialization of labor and ownership, as Adam Smith so elegantly pointed out in the eighteenth century, increases wealth production and accumulation because individuals can concentrate their efforts on a relatively few tasks. Specialists can incorporate more thorough knowledge in their work and can spot entrepreneurial opportunities more quickly and efficiently. Specialization and the alignment of costs and benefits lead to greater and more efficient production that, in turn, leads to a relatively large accumulation of wealth—wealth that can benefit all individuals better than if it were never created in the first place.

The creation and accumulation of wealth is only the first step toward fulfillment of the universal destination of material goods. How do private property rights and free exchange lead to a just distribution of goods? First, secure private property rights open the door to charity. Charity is impossible in the absence of privately owned property. Aquinas teaches that charity is not only the fundamental and most important virtue but that it is the form of all other virtue. Charity is love. And the two greatest biblical commandments are to love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself. Consider, in this context, Christ's parable of the widow's two mites. It was precisely because the widow's gift came from her *own* relative poverty that Christ exalts it over that of the wealthy. If there were no private property, the widow's pittance would be insignificant.

Just as important as the opportunity for charity is that private property rights and free exchange make one's economic sustenance dependent on making others happy. And, importantly, this is the case whether or not individuals realize the fact. Even if (or, more properly, when) individuals have self-enrichment as their sole incentive, their success is based on spreading their accumulated wealth. In a system of free exchange, accumulated wealth is not usually stored or hidden from sight but, instead, is traded or lent to others who are able to put these resources to immediate use. For example, wealth is invested in companies through the stock market. The employees of these companies are able to use this wealth to increase their own productivity and, therefore,

their own incomes. The important point is that, in a system of free exchange, wealth is not hoarded but, instead, put to its most productive use in the creation of further wealth. As Michael Novak has written, "Isn't it better that the rich invest, rather than merely consume or (like the aristocracies of old) spend their fortunes on courtiers, hangers-on, and private armies? Our current system encourages the wealthy to keep investing. That's socially useful." So we see that a system of free exchange distributes wealth to individuals depending on their productivity and not on some arbitrary characteristic such as birthright or the decision of a central planner or representative body.


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*How do private property rights and free exchange lead to a just distribution of goods? Secure private property rights open the door to charity. Charity is impossible in the absence of privately owned property.*

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### **Reinforcing the Church's Social Teaching**

We see that, far from being contradictory, private property rights and the freedom of exchange actually reinforce the church's teaching on the universal destination of material goods. First, as an alternative to either central planning or collective action, free-market exchange and private property, through specialization, produce the material wealth that is needed for just distribution in the first place. Moreover, private property allows for opportunities to practice the core Christian virtues of charity and love. Even more fundamentally, personal success in the free market ultimately depends on making others happy by giving to them exactly *what* they want, *where* they want it, and *when* they want it. And this is the case even if—in more base, human moments—individual economic actors are motivated only by self-interest.

In summary, more than any other variant of economic organization, private property and free exchange reinforce the church's teaching on the universal destination of material goods by magnifying man's positive impulses toward God's moral Scripture *and* limiting man's human impulses away from God. 

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# The Heritage of the Spanish Scholastics

## Leonard P. Liggio

The Yucatan was the center point of one of the most important moral debates in history. It can be summarized in the title of the book, *In Defense of the Indians: The Defense of the Most Reverend Lord, Don Fray Bartolome de Las Casas, of the Order of Preachers, Late Bishop of Chiapa, Against the Persecutors and Slanderers of the Peoples of the New World Discovered Across the Seas*. The Friar and Bishop, Bartolome de Las Casas, defended the Native Americans against the charge of those who wished to enslave them and kill them in the process—the charge being that Native Americans were not fully human, that they lacked the intellectual and religious capacity of Europeans.

The argument put forward by Las Casas is captured by the title of another book, *All Mankind Is One* (by Lewis Hanke), a study of the disputation before the Council of Castile between Bartolome Las Casas and his opponent Juan Gines de Sepulveda in 1550 regarding the intellectual capacity of the American Indians. Las Casas had introduced into Castile and Europe a new debate. Spain had recently witnessed the expulsion of two of the three cultures that had existed there for almost eight hundred years. The Crown of Castile completed the expulsion of the Spanish Jews and Moslems in 1492 because of their religious diversity, but there was no question of the intellectual equality, not to say superiority, of the Jews and Moslems over the Christians.

For one hundred years before Las Casas's writings, Portugal had been in contact with African civilizations along that continent's western coasts. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the BaKongo kingdom of the Lower Congo not only exchanged diplomatic representatives with the Holy See and the kingdoms of Portugal and Castile, but the son of the BaKongo king was consecrated a bishop in Rome and returned to administer his diocese in the Congo. The glorious civilizations of the African kingdoms and the successful completion of theological studies by African priests left no question of the intellectual and religious equality of the African peoples.

Thus, the claim of the Castilian conquistadors that the Native Americans were intellectually and spiritually inferior was a new charge. Indeed, it was so novel that there were no

traditions in Western thought to justify it. There was nothing in the Fathers of the church—Greek, Antiochan, Alexandrian, African, Roman, or Gallic—to justify it. Nor was there anything in the seventy-six volumes of the Abbe Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, nothing in the writings of Tertullian, Augustine in Africa, the Italians, Ambrose, Jerome, or the Gaullic Pelagius.

### A New World and Modern Problems

In a major contribution, *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study of Race Prejudice in the Modern World*, Lewis Hanke notes that already in 1511 on the island of Hispaniola the Castilians' murder, robbery, and enforced labor of the Native Americans were chastised by the Dominican friar, Antonio de Montesinos, who preached on the text, "I am a voice crying in the wilderness." According to Hanke, "Montesinos delivered the first important protest against the treatment being accorded the Indians by his Spanish countrymen, enquiring: 'Are these Indians not men? Do they not have rational souls? Are you not obliged to love them as you love yourselves?'" This sermon in America led immediately to a dispute at Burgos in Spain from which were issued the first two Spanish treatises on Indian problems and the first code drawn up for the treatment of Indians by Spaniards, the Laws of Burgos. It is worth noting that one of these treatises by the friar Matias de Pax, titled *Concerning the Rule of the Kings of Spain Over the Indians*, is not only the first study of this question by a Dominican but also the first known statement that the American Indians are not slaves in the Aristotelian sense.

The Laws of Burgos were proclaimed in 1512 but not rigorously followed. The new king of Castile, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, reinvestigated the issues. The first specific American application of the Aristotelian doctrine of natural slavery occurred in 1519 when Juan Quevedo, bishop of Darien, and Las Casas clashed at Barcelona before the young Emperor Charles V. Las Casas enunciated the basic concept that was to guide all his action on behalf of the Indians during the remaining half-century of his passionate life: "Our Christian religion is suitable for and may be adapted to



all the nations of the world, and all alike may receive it; and no one may be deprived of his liberty, nor may he be enslaved on the excuse that he is a natural slave, as it would appear that the reverend bishop (of Darien) advocates.”

Juan de Zumarraga, Franciscan and bishop of Mexico, played a notable role in this conflict of ideas simply by believing that the Indians were rational beings whose souls could be saved. This conviction formed the basis for every one of his contributions to Mexican culture: the establishment of the famous *colegio* for boys at Tlatelolco and the school for Indian girls in Mexico City, the bringing of the first printing press to America, the movement for a university in Mexico, and the writing of books for Indians. An indication of the bitter and open conflict that raged on the subject in 1537, the year after Zumarraga established the school for Indians at Tlatelolco, is the fact that Pope Paul III found it necessary to issue the famous bull *Sublimis Deus* in which he stated that Indians were not to be treated as “dumb brutes created for our service” but “as truly men ... capable of understanding the Catholic faith.” And the pope ordered: “The said Indians and all other people who may later be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property, even though they may be outside the faith of Jesus Christ ... nor should they in any way be enslaved.”

This great debate continued before Charles V and then Philip II. However, it had an equally profound course away from the Council of Castile. It initiated in the universities of Iberia a major investigation of the application of Aristotelian/Thomist philosophy to what we might call “modern” problems.

The Iberian universities included Salamanca (1243), Seville (1254), Valladolid (1346), Alcalá (1409), Coimbra (in Portugal), Valencia (1501), and Santiago (1504). Before the universities were formalized in the thirteenth century, they had had a long-standing reputation in languages, especially Hebrew and Arabic. Then, to the arts curriculum were added the two laws, Roman and Canon, philosophy and theology—the “ancient” problems.

The ancient problems discussed in the universities included the intellectual grounding of the political system of medieval Europe, in particular the rights and autonomy of the independent bodies, the estates. The theory and practice of representative institutions were a significant contribution by the thinkers when the medieval universities were taking formal shape. Drawing on the methods of election in the Benedictine Rule as distributed widely by the Cluniac Reform Movement, by the Cistercian and Augustinian rules,

and finally, the model of representation in the new Order of Preachers (Dominicans) for the English House of Commons, the theory and practice of representation in the civil sphere were widely discussed. Similarly, application was made to the ecclesiastical sphere by the theoretical contributions of Conciliarism.

### **The Contributions of the Iberian Schoolmen**

From the late-fifteenth through the mid-seventeenth centuries, Iberian universities rivaled Paris as the center of European learning. We mentally combine these Iberian universities when we speak of the School of Salamanca, as the primary university that educated most of the faculties in Iberia. They dealt with modern problems because these were presented by the “discoveries.” The Italian navigators who sailed on behalf of the Atlantic countries (Castile, Portugal, France, and England) brought to the European mind the discoveries of India, Brazil, and North and South America in a few years. These discoveries had an immense intellectual impact on Europe.

Furthermore, the discoveries had a direct and profound impact on Iberian intellectual life. As the disputations before official bodies by Las Casas show, they prompted major discussions regarding the relations and treatment of the Native Americans. This was accompanied in the universities with studious investigations of the moral implications of the discovery of these “peoples of the New World.” Thus, mod-

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***Modern economics, human rights, and international law were founded in the Iberian universities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was no minor achievement.***

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ern economics, human rights, and international law were founded in the Iberian universities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was no minor achievement. The greatness of the School of Salamanca is now receiving the recognition as a world-class intellectual center that it deserves. The Salamanca contribution to modern economics has been signaled by F. A. Hayek, along with Hayek’s former student, Marjorie Grice-Hutchinson, professor of economics at the University of Malaga.

The contribution of the School of Salamanca in international law has long been noted. Their focus on human rights and individual rights has received a fresh, scholarly recognition. There are dozens of Iberian writers who could be mentioned. A few who should be are: Francisco de Vitoria

(1480–1546), Domingo de Soto (1494–1560), Martin de Azpilcueta Navarrus (1493–1586), Diego de Covarrubias y Leiva (1512–1577), Luis de Molina (1535–1600), Juan de Mariana (1536–1624), and Francisco Suarez (1548–1617). James Gordley's important book, *The Philosophical Origins of Modern Contract Doctrine*, notes:

A synthesis between Roman law and Aristotelian and Thomistic moral philosophy was finally achieved in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It was part of a larger intellectual movement: the revival of Thomistic philosophy. The movement began in 1503, when a professor in the University of Paris named Pierre Crockaert underwent an intellectual conversion.... In 1512 he published a commentary on the last part of Thomas's *Summa Theologica* with the help of his pupil Francisco de Vitoria. Vitoria returned to his native Spain where, as a professor at the University of Salamanca from 1526 until his death in 1546, he founded the so-called Spanish natural-law school.

Human rights became the focus of the writings of the School of Salamanca because of the practical questions sent to them by the missionaries in the New World. Once the humanity of the Native Americans had been vindicated, the matter of their having the right to elect or reject the missionaries' offering of Christianity became paramount. One of the

***Human rights became the focus of the School of Salamanca because of the practical questions sent to them by the missionaries in the New World.***

***— Leonard P. Liggio***



important contributions of the School of Salamanca was the defense of the freedom of the human will in the sixteenth-century debates concerning free will and determinism. Thus, the free choice of the individual was central to their discussion.


The individual conscience has been viewed as the source of moral choices ever since the School of Salamanca. The individual conscience is free to elect or to reject commonly accepted standards of morality. Successful civilizations have been those in which a majority of people accepted the commonly accepted standards of morality. Unsuccessful civilizations have not seen a majority of people follow the commonly accepted standards of morality.

The twentieth century has provided an important model of unsuccessful civilizations—the socialist societies. These societies claimed to offer an alternative to historically successful societies—a better alternative. Socialist societies were built on an overwhelming stress on state power and the negation of individual choices. Alongside the system of coercion, the socialist societies claimed to have substituted moral goals for material rewards. People would produce for moral goals what they would not have for material rewards. Of course, reality showed that this is impossible. Moral incentives do not produce material products superior to those produced for material goals.

### **Return to Liberty, Restoration of Morality**

The so-called moral goals were not moral at all. How could they be, if they were based on coercion? Beyond that, if they were based on what is contrary to all we know about human nature. Thus, socialists have always claimed that they are able to transcend human nature to something superior in morality—the New Man, or the New Socialist Man. Yet they have not been any more successful than other utopias. We will not be able to achieve a return to liberty, to a market society, without a restoration of morality. But a special infusion of morality to achieve liberty will be temporary if it is not successful in restoring the market, or liberty.

The complexity of human nature reveals itself in the relationship of morality and liberty. We would prefer to live in an idealized world—a utopia—in which each person is moral solely because that is the right behavior. Sad as it might be, that is not the reality that God has given to us. Humans are not motivated by pure spiritual purposes. Humans are not moral simply because that is the correct behavior. We have

seen civilizations continue to decline when no effort was made to reverse the wrong paths that people had chosen. The legacy of the Salamancan schoolmen and their understanding of the link between liberty and morality provide a ready guide to help us avoid the same fate. 

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# Prophet or Siren? Ron Sider's Continued Influence

## *A Review Essay by Paul A. Mastin*

Ever since the 1977 publication of his *Rich Christians in the Age of Hunger*, Ron Sider has been among the most prominent voices calling American evangelicals to a greater concern for the poor. Since then, he has continued to write prolifically on the subject of poverty and the Christian's obligation to the poor. Sider has sold thousands of books, regularly writes for *Christianity Today* and other publications, is founder and president of Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), and publisher of *PRISM* magazine, an ESA publication. In these venues and others, Sider has been a relentless defender of the poor and has consistently challenged American Christians to take seriously God's mandated concern for the poor.

Sider not only calls others to heed the poor but also demonstrates a lifestyle of commitment to the poor. With a respectable academic pedigree from Yale, Sider could presumably have pursued a comfortable middle-class existence—teaching, writing, serving as a pastor, or working in some other occupation similar to those of his Ivy League peers. Yet for three decades he has lived in parts of Philadelphia into which his Yale colleagues might not want to venture after dark. Living among the poor was not only a conscious decision he and his wife made in order to better identify with and serve the poor but has also shaped his thinking and writing in ways that no academic research ever could.

Sider has been quite open about his lifestyle in his writings and in interviews. He does not hesitate to count himself among the “rich Christians” of his book title. A few years ago in an interview for a Christian magazine, Sider discussed his family's financial decision-making. His family has owned cars, and he has sent his children to Christian high schools and colleges, even though, as the interviewer presses, “children were starving in India.” He insists that he is not calling on wealthy American Christians to live at the poverty level, but to reconsider lifestyle and giving choices. In light of world

poverty, “we ought to spend less on ourselves and give more to others.” In his books, he has described the “graduated tithe,” a process by which a family gives beyond the ten percent tithe, increasing their giving exponentially as their income increases.

With his constant presence in evangelical publishing and publications, one must wonder what kind of influence he has had. In a conversation with the dean of an evangelical seminary, this reviewer made the comment that Ron Sider has had a great impact on the economic thinking of seminary students and professors. The dean challenged that statement, asking, How many pastors practice the graduated tithe? How many Christians have relocated to poorer neighborhoods than where they would otherwise live? How many have substantially altered their spending habits and increased their giving to the poor?

### ***Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America*** by Ronald J. Sider

Baker Books  
266 pp. Paperback: \$11.99

### **A Hard Look at Policies That Affect the Poor**

Ron Sider has, no doubt, asked himself these questions as well. Many Christians will testify to having been influenced by Sider's writings, but Sider would acknowledge that his work is far from over. In his recent book, *Just Generosity: A New Vision for Overcoming Poverty in America*, Sider revisits familiar themes, taking a hard look at policy areas that affect the poor. Like Sider's other works, *Just Generosity* is written for the layman but with a decidedly more technical tone, due to the process by which it came to be. Sider is part of the group of scholars who wrote the essays for *Toward a Just and Caring Society: Christian Responses to Poverty in America*, which Baker published in conjunction with the book under review. Sider uses the scholarly articles of that volume to provide much of the basis for his policy proposals in *Just Generosity*.

Sider opens *Just Generosity* by asking this question: Why, in the “richest society in human history” (27), does poverty

persist, and why do American Christians tolerate the levels of poverty that exist? In his trademark way, Sider discusses causes of poverty and gives a biblical foundation for caring for the poor. Although our nation has made much progress in addressing poverty, Sider argues, currently liberals and conservatives are stuck in a policy impasse. Liberals tend to blame structures and systems for the persistence of poverty, while conservatives tend to blame “wrong moral choices exacerbated by bad government policy” (35). Sider concludes, “Both are partly right.” Neither personal choices nor societal, legal, and economic structures can be excluded from a discussion of poverty.

Just as conservatives and liberals have disagreed on the causes of poverty, so have they disagreed on the solutions. Following Robert Bellah, Sider states that liberals have looked predominantly to government to solve the problem of poverty. Conservatives, on the other hand, “expected individuals to flourish if government got out of the way and let the market do its magic” (81). Sider calls for a renewal of civil society. A strong civil society not only upholds and teaches those moral qualities that can prevent individual poverty but also can instill a sense of community and a desire to provide help and support for one’s less fortunate neighbors. The religious community in particular can provide moral leadership

day article recounts, charitable giving in the United States hovers at around 2 percent of income. Regular church attenders account for a good deal of that; they average over 3 percent. One recent study found that evangelicals gave 4.27 percent of their income to their churches in 1993, down from 6.19 percent in 1968.

When Christians fall so short of giving a tithe to their own churches, it is no surprise that church-related and secular organizations that serve the poor struggle to attract and retain donors. Sider is correct to point out that at current levels of giving, civil society, including religious institutions, could never approach the level of support the poor currently receive from the government. Would that all Americans, Christians and otherwise, heed the call that Sider has been sending out for over twenty years now, and constantly consider how they, their churches, and the voluntary organizations of which they are a part might expand their involvement with the poor. Whether or not he sees his role as prophetic, Sider ought to be commended for his part in keeping this challenge before American Christians.

### Sider’s Mixed Message

However, Sider’s call to renew civil society has a flip side. Sider asserts that civil society has not and will not, in the very near future, rise to the tasks of serving the poor. As he puts it, “any suggestion that churches replace governmental care for the poor is unrealistic” (92). He makes it clear that he sees an important and permanent role for government: “Let no one misunderstand my call for a greatly expanded role for faith-based agencies in civil society as a libertarian rejection of government’s important role” (87).

Here Sider’s message is mixed. He can minimize the role of government: “Government should act as a last resort when other institutions do not or cannot care for the poor” (93). And he emphasizes that government policy must not weaken those primary structures in society that prevent and reduce poverty, such as the family and religious institutions. Yet, in each of the policy chapters, he turns to government policy as a final solution. Granted, he discusses the role of the family and civil society, but ultimately government solutions prevail.

Some brief examples may be helpful. *Problem:* The working poor do not earn enough to support a family. Possible solutions: Earned Income Tax Credit and other tax credits and benefits; minimum wages; federally mandated family

*Whatever his specific policy proposals, Sider’s final word is the commitment of individual Christians to pray for the poor.*

— Paul Mastin



in defense of morality and care for the poor, as well as developing structures and attitudes that prevent and reduce poverty.

This is where Ron Sider is at his best. He explicitly avoids the label “prophet,” but in many ways he continues the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, calling the church to repentance for its deafness to the cries of the poor. Granted, charitable giving in the United States exceeds that of most nations. Take a walk around any town in the country and you will see sign after sign of generosity. Hospitals, museums, schools, churches, and many other institutions that shape who we are were provided and are sustained by the generosity of countless Americans. However, as a recent *Christianity To-*



wage; government-funded jobs programs. *Problem:* Broken families have high rates of poverty. Possible solutions: Reformed divorce laws; home-ownership tax credits for low-income families; tax incentives for marriage. *Problem:* Many poor have limited or no access to health care. Possible solutions: Government-funded insurance; mandated job-related insurance for all workers. *Problem:* The poor receive inferior education. Possible solutions: Mandated equal per-student funding for all schools; voucher system.

These examples are not exhaustive, nor are they all bad proposals. Many of these find support among liberals. Others are favorites of conservatives. (One of Sider's real strengths in making proposals such as these is that he is careful to avoid being labeled, by offending both conservatives and liberals!) These examples are meant to demonstrate that Sider does lean heavily on government solutions in formulating a response to poverty. When he offers private-sector, voluntary solutions, he often does so with an expectation that they will be funded with government money. Throughout the book, Sider celebrates the Charitable Choice portion of the 1996 welfare bill, which permits faith-based agencies to receive federal grants for anti-poverty programs. This is not the forum in which to weigh the drawbacks and benefits of Charitable Choice, but that measure is another method of employing government means to reach the goal of responding to poverty.

One who knows Sider's writings at all will not be surprised by any of this. Sider can never be accused of advocating anarchy or any form of libertarianism. One might have hoped, however, that, given his strong endorsement of civil society, he would have offered more creative ways in which civil society can address poverty. His mantra that civil society can only do so much without the help of government left this reviewer wondering why Sider did not make some truly radical proposals involving voluntary action alone.

Sider would benefit from a healthy cynicism concerning government action. He freely criticizes the failure of private businesses to provide a just wage or health benefits to workers, the selfishness of middle-class parents who oppose the distribution of school funding from their children's schools to poor schools, the greed of business people who grant themselves ballooning salaries while workers' incomes stagnate, and other examples of inequality and injustice in our economic system. But the same human failings that lead to injustice and inequality in the private sector exist in the public sector as well. Human shortsightedness, selfishness, and sinfulness find their way just as easily into public policy and administration.


The reality is that many of the programs created by government to help the poor have had the opposite effect. Other

policies not specifically addressed to the poor have had unintended consequences harmful to the poor. When Charles Murray argued in *Losing Ground*, in 1984, that the Great Society programs so carefully designed to help the poor in fact made things worse, few took him seriously. But soon his arguments began to make sense to both Republicans and Democrats. Some now say that we need more government programs, or different kinds of programs. Others call for a limitation of government programs and the establishment or strengthening of voluntary structures. Sider aims toward the middle of these two sides, but his shots tend to fall on the side of government programs and government funding. The church would be better served if he would overcompensate, aiming toward less government involvement and more voluntary action, using his energies to propose and promote more creative, voluntary, nongovernmental solutions to the problems he discusses. Sider's siren song of reliance on government ultimately defeats his call to a renewed civil society.

### Seeing the Poor Through the Eyes of Christ

Whatever his specific policy proposals, Sider comes back around to the decisions of individual Christians. He never leaves the government out of the picture completely: "Fully or largely privatizing society's obligations to the least among us is impractical, unrealistic, and wrong" (218). But his bottom line, his final word, is the commitment of individual Christians to pray for the poor, to have personal contact with the poor, to commit to spending time serving the poor, to learn about the poor, and to evaluate their spending patterns in light of the needs of others. His "Generous Christians Campaign," in which Christians pledge to do all of the above, is a positive step in leading Christians to be more other-directed, to share from their personal abundance, and to begin seeing the poor through the eyes of Christ.

Many of Sider's specific policy proposals are objectionable, as is his overarching reliance on government solutions and funding, but in light of the pressing needs of the poor, and in light of the unprecedented wealth of Americans, his hopeful conclusion is a welcome, and needed, vision. "Generous Christians and other people of goodwill can transform our country. We can end the scandal of widespread poverty in the richest nation in history" (222)

Perhaps Sider could add to that an accompanying admonition from Abraham Kuyper, who wrote in *The Problem of Poverty*, "Never forget that all state relief for the poor is a blot on the honor of your Savior." 

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# Book News

## Essays in Economic Sociology

Max Weber, edited by Richard Swedberg

Princeton University Press

viii + 314 pp. Hardcover: \$35.00

Rightly or wrongly, few modern thinkers have had as deep and abiding influence on how we think about the sociological dynamics of religion and economics as Max Weber. Richard Swedberg, a Weber scholar and economic sociologist himself, has gathered into one volume the most important of Weber's writings on the sociology of economic life and added to them a helpful glossary of Weberian terms and a bibliographic guide to Weber's key works. The selections are organized around the central topics of modern capitalism; capitalism, law, and politics; capitalism, culture, and religion; and theoretical aspects of economic sociology. While we leave to others the important task of analyzing and critiquing Weber's thought, this book is a convenient introduction to his project.

## The Palladium of Justice: Origins of Trial by Jury

Leonard W. Levy

Ivan R. Dee

114 pp. Hardcover: \$18.95

Everyone intuitively feels that trial by jury is one crucial cornerstone of Western legal practice, but where did it originate? Leonard W. Levy sets out to answer this question by tracing the development of trial by jury from its genesis in the medieval inquest up to its fruition in the American colonies, covering a great deal of the history of ecclesiastical canon and European civil law along the way. He tells this important story clearly and quickly, providing a useful summary of the history of this important legal concept.

## The Great Republic: A History of America

Winston Churchill, edited by Winston S. Churchill

Random House

xii + 454 pp. Hardcover: \$25.95

*The Weekly Standard*, in announcing Winston Churchill as its choice for Man of the Century, cited the authority of Leo Strauss: "The tyrant stood at the pinnacle of his power. The contrast between the indomitable and magnanimous states-

man and the insane tyrant—this spectacle in its clear simplicity was one of the greatest lessons which men can learn, at any time." But further, "not a whit less important than his deeds and speeches are his writings," and among

his best is his magisterial *A History of the English Speaking Peoples*.

Churchill's grandson has drawn from this work, as well as other speeches and essays, to present in *The Great Republic* the Churchillian view of America. Such an editorial project is bound to result in a piecemeal work, for it breaks the long, smooth trajectory of the great story Churchill tells, but the depth of his political and historical reflection is hard to obscure. Given the choice, one should read *A History of the English Speaking Peoples* in full, but, otherwise, this book is a good entry into Churchill's political thought.

## Heart Aflame: Daily Readings from Calvin on the Psalms

John Calvin

P&R Publishing

xii + 366 pp. Paperback: \$14.99

As Sinclair B. Ferguson writes in his foreword, when it comes to spiritual direction, the name of the stern Genevan reformer is "not the first that comes to the minds of most Christians as the ideal companion." This book proves them mistaken. Comprised of material drawn from Calvin's *Commentary on the Psalms* (omitting its more technical discussions), *Heart Aflame* provides a year's worth of daily meditations to guide the reader through, in Calvin's words, the Psalter's "anatomy of all the parts of the soul."

## 2000 Years of Prayer

Michael Counsell, compiler

Moorhouse Publishing

xxviii + 644 pp. Hardcover: \$32.95

This vast collection of prayers from the past two millennia of Christian piety is a marvelous resource. It is preeminently catholic in its scope (some, perusing the contents, may think it *too* catholic), with prayers both famous and obscure from most every major religious figure in the history of the church. Arranged chronologically and divided according to major traditions, it introduces each set of prayers with a short and serviceable biographical introduction of their writer. *2000 Years of Prayer* should be on the shelf of anyone serious about spiritual devotion.

—Gregory Dunn

# Keeping Stable the Fabric of the World



In 1997 the Media Research Center surveyed prime-time television's portrayal of the businessman. The results, while not surprising, were sobering. The study found that, on television, businessmen committed far more crimes (29.2 percent) than those in all other occupations, including career criminals (9.7 percent). Overall, businessmen were shown making a contribution to society 25 percent of the time, but they cheated to get ahead almost 30 percent.

As I say, sobering but not surprising. We are (far too) accustomed to popular culture's prejudice against the entrepreneur, from Geoffrey Chaucer to Steven Spielberg. What did surprise me, though, were the findings of a poll of M.B.A. students conducted by two business professors (and cited in the *Wall Street Journal* on May 3, 1999); there, 73 percent of business students said they would hire a competitor's employee to obtain trade secrets, while only 60 percent of convicted criminals would do so. Could the popular culture's judgment of the businessman be correct?

Not exactly. According to business ethicist Marianne M. Jennings, the trouble is that "my M.B.A. students arrive already trained in fashionable academic socialism.... All this makes it very hard to teach business ethics. Students feel as if they have already sold their souls by entering an M.B.A. program, so they are resigned to, and comfortable with, all manner of ethical mischief." The problem is not that popular culture's prejudice is accurate but that the prejudice is afflicting the capitalists themselves. These ambitious M.B.A. students are living down to our expectations.

As our M.B.A. students demonstrate, the consequences of a divorce between the world of business and the world of faith are disastrous. It means not acknowledging any values higher than expediency, profit, and utility in the world of business. It results in a bloody or savage capitalism. Religious leaders often add to the confusion in their refusal to grant any moral sanction to the entrepreneur. Instead of praising the entrepreneur—person of ideas, the economic innovator, the provider of capital—the average priest or minister thinks that people in business carry extra guilt.

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*The consequences of a divorce between the world of business and the world of faith are disastrous.*

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I see matters differently. My own experience of working with an array of successful business leaders, combined with extensive reading in the fields of economics and business ethics, as well as a fair amount of meditation and prayer on these matters, has led me to the conclusion that the human thirst for the transcendent, drives people to seek excellence and to seek it especially in their work. This is also the case with the human capacity for knowledge. Various philosophers and theologians contend that the human quest for knowledge itself reveals that human beings were originally designed to have an immediate awareness of the truth. As the deuterocanonical Book of Sirach notes, those in the world of work "keep stable the fabric of the world, and their prayer is in the practice of their trade."

This pursuit of excellence, like the mind's original constitution, discloses humanity's orientation toward the highest and most supreme good, namely, the perfection of God in heaven. It is time that we begin to acknowledge the value of their profession, the wise stewardship of their talents, and the tangible contributions they make to society.




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*Rev. Robert A. Sirico is a Roman Catholic priest and president of the Acton Institute.*

“Give me the liberty to know, to utter,  
and to argue freely according to conscience,  
above all liberties.”

—John Milton—

RELIGION & LIBERTY

*A Publication of the Acton Institute for  
the Study of Religion and Liberty*

161 Ottawa Avenue n.w., Suite 301  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

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