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To Be Drawn Out of Ourselves Toward God



Gilbert C. Meilaender, Ph.D., is the Phyllis and Richard Duesenberg Professor of Christian Ethics at Valparaiso University. Previously, he taught at the University of Virginia and Oberlin College. He is the author of many books, including *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis* (Eerdmans), *Bioethics: A Primer for Christians* (Eerdmans), and, most recently, *Things That Count* (ISI Books).

R&L: In your new book, *Things That Count*, you have an essay subtitled, “*The Problem of Possessions*.” What is the problem with possessions?

Meilaender: I suppose there are a number of problems with possessions, not just some single problem. But at least one central problem is the way in which possessions tend to capture our trust. Human beings need to seek security, yet the very act of seeking security seems to seduce us into placing our trust somewhere other than in God. We sometimes tend to think that, as long as we get the right inner spirit, the world of possessions ceases to be dangerous to us. There is some truth to this view, but it is not only the case that our inner spirit shapes the way we deal with things. It is also true that the external world, the world of things and possessions, has a way of reaching in, taking hold of, and shaping our inner spirit. It is true that having many possessions is a seductive lure that will distort the inner spirit in various ways. It is also

true that having too few things can do the same.

R&L: So there are many issues surrounding the question of how we relate to our possessions.

Meilaender: Just as there is no single problem with possessions, there is no single answer to the problem of possessions;

rather, there is always this dialectical relationship between how our spirit shapes the way we deal with things and the way that things shape our inner spirit. So we finally deceive ourselves if we think that the problem of possessions can be solved simply through attainment of the right kind of inner spirit, whereupon the world of possessions, however structured, is perfectly safe. On the contrary, it is always dangerous.

R&L: In the same essay, you characterize the Christian attitude toward things as a double movement of enjoyment and renunciation. Can you unpack that?

Meilaender: This is something I learned from C. S. Lewis, especially from his novel, *Perelandra*, and his great ethical work, *The Four Loves*. Simply renouncing possessions—recommended as a general principle for everyone, always, rather than as a possible course for some people, at some

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particular time—is, in a sense, turning away from the good gifts that God offers us. Such gifts are not to be renounced as much as they are to be offered back to the one from whom they came. We are to receive through them what Lewis calls, in *Letters to Malcolm*, “shafts of the divine glory” and thus to be drawn out of ourselves toward God. So possessions are to be received with thanksgiving and enjoyed as gifts. That is one pole of the dialectic: enjoyment.

R&L: *And the other pole?*

Meilaender: Renunciation is also necessary. These good things—good as they are—are not the One from whom they come. It is not only easy to forget that these good things are merely shafts of divine glory—stepping stones on the way to God—but also to suppose that, because they are sometimes so good, we can rest the whole weight of our heart’s longing upon them, that they will really satisfy that longing. When we do that—or, better, because we are always more or less inclined to do that—renunciation becomes necessary as a continual reminder that the good gifts of God, good as they are, are still not where our heart’s longing can finally find its rest.

So both poles of this dialectic—enjoyment and renuncia-

tion—are necessary. One enjoys these good things because God gave them, and they point us toward him. One renounces them because, finally, they are not the Giver, the One in whom our hearts are to rest. And some manner of movement back and forth between these two poles is necessary not for the sake of merely enjoying or renouncing but for being drawn out of ourselves toward God, which this double movement makes possible.

R&L: *Another issue with which you have dealt recently is work, especially in the book you recently edited, Working: Its Meaning and Its Limits. What is it about us that we strive to give our work meaning?*

Meilaender: First, I would say that I do not think that work necessarily has to have meaning. At the least, I want to be careful about making such a claim because I believe there may be work in which it is very difficult to find meaning, and there is nothing wrong when people who cannot find any particular meaning in their work look elsewhere for meaning. In other words, I do not want to say that human beings are *fundamentally* workers and that work *alone* gives life significance. In that sense, the language of vocation—which, of course, my Lutheran forbears had a lot to do with making so central—can be overdone.

Having said that, I think it is right to say that there does seem to be a drive in human beings to find meaning and significance in their work. We do not want to think that work is pointless. One reason we think this way is because work, at its best—and it is not always at its best—gives full scope to our possibilities. It engages us intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally. It calls forth important human capacities, and I think that is what everyone wants to experience, but I do not know if all work is capable of evoking that experience. Indeed, classically understood, the Christian notion of vocation does not require work to evoke that experience. Vocation only requires work to serve one’s neighbor; that is meaning enough.

R&L: *What do you mean when you say that our notion of vocation can be overdone?*

Meilaender: Vocation can be overdone in a couple of ways. First, it sometimes places work at the very center of human consciousness in ways that I do not think it has to be. One could find the primary meaning of life in being a father rather than in being a worker. Or one could understand the point of work simply in providing for one’s family. The second problem is that the notion of vocation sometimes makes one feel guilty for not finding meaning in tedious and boring work,

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Editor: Gregory Dunn

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as if somehow one ought to be more engaged. I do not think that the notion of vocation, which is supposed to energize work, is effective if it simply makes people feel guilty.

R&L: *What, then, is a proper understanding of vocation?*

Meilaender: In its original sense—the sense that the Protestant reformers really had in mind—vocation had nothing in

particular to do with self-fulfillment but had everything to do with serving one's neighbor. Work that serves others is honorable and pleases God, even if it does not seem to be all that honored in the eyes of the world. The question of whether particular work can be fulfilling is not unimportant; people do look for fulfillment in their work, as I mentioned earlier. The point of vocation, however, is not being fulfilled but finding one's place in serving one's neighbor and, thereby,

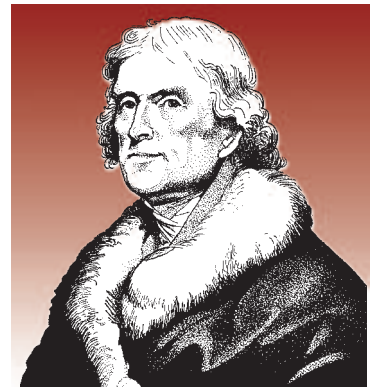
Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826)

“The mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God. These are grounds of hope for others.”

Thomas Jefferson was one of the most eminent men of an exceptionally eminent generation. He was handsome, articulate, vigorous, and a steadfast friend. He was also an accomplished scientist, farmer, and architect. His massive library formed the core of the Library of Congress's new collection after the first was lost in the burning of Washington in the War of 1812. It could perhaps be said that when one thinks of America, one thinks of Jefferson.

Jefferson was born April 13, 1743, on a plantation on the Rivanna River in Virginia. He attended College of William and Mary; afterwards, he studied English common law. His political career began in 1768, when he was twenty-five. In his public life he served as a representative in the Virginia House of Burgesses, Virginia Convention, Continental Congress, Confederation Congress, as well as Governor of Virginia, Minister of Finance, Secretary of State, Vice President, and President of the United States. But of all these accomplishments of an accomplished life, near his death Jefferson chose as his epitaph, “Author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for religious freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia.”

Jefferson was a deist, common for men of learning of his time. According to one commentator, he “rejected the Trinity, scoffed at the miracles recorded in the Bible, and commented that Jesus suffered from a delusion if he truly thought he was the son of God.” However, men of faith of the time could find common cause with Jefferson because he, like others of the Founding generation, understood that there is fundamental agreement between the moral precepts of human reason and those of revealed religion. In other words, political life is to be founded on natural right, and this doctrine of natural right forms the basis of Jefferson's arguments in such documents as the Declaration and the Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty—arguments that have since ignited the fires of freedom around the globe. In Jefferson's words: “The error seems not sufficiently eradicated, that the operations of the mind, as well as the acts of the body, are subject to the coercion of the laws. But our rulers can have no authority over such natural rights, only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we have never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God. The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others.”



Sources: Public and Private Papers by Thomas Jefferson (Vintage Books, 1990), and The Politics of Reason and Revelation by John G. West, Jr. (University Press of Kansas, 1996).

doing God's work—even if that work does not seem particularly fulfilling. Even when work is tedious and boring, there is something about it that pleases God.

R&L: *I am reminded of the definition of vocation given by the English Puritan William Perkins: “a vocation or calling is a certain kind of life ordained and imposed on man by God for the public good.”*

Meilaender: I think that definition captures the real theme of the Reformation's understanding of vocation—that you serve your neighbors in your vocation, and I serve my neighbors in my vocation, and God put this whole set of vocations together to serve many neighbors. Again, Perkins's language does not emphasize fulfillment but obedience.

R&L: *In fact, Perkins says that the idea of vocation provides comfort in the “crosses and calamities” of one's work.*

Meilaender: That's right. There is another very powerful passage from John Calvin's *Institutes* that gets it just about right: “Each man will bear and swallow the discomforts, vexations, weariness, and anxieties in his way of life, when he has been persuaded that the burden was laid upon him by God.” In other words, you may not find your work particularly fulfilling or satisfying, but you will be content to bear those burdens because that is where you are supposed to be.

R&L: *It sounds as if one of the primary considerations in*

In its original sense, vocation had nothing in particular to do with self-fulfillment but had everything to do with serving one's neighbor.

thinking rightly about our vocation is that it be directed toward love of God and love of neighbor. Is that accurate?

Meilaender: I think so. But I want to add that, just as there is nothing wrong with simply enjoying our possessions, there is nothing wrong with simply enjoying our work. It does not have to be solely directed toward serving our neighbor or done for the sake of the neighbor or anything like that. The point is that we are finally and always drawn out of ourselves toward God and toward the neighbor in God.

R&L: *In addition to vocation, what are some other theological concepts that are important to our thinking about work?*

Meilaender: One is the effects of sin, which has turned work into toil, so that work takes on an irksome and burdensome quality that presumably it would not have had in paradise. Many of the burdens of work we discussed above can be thought of as burdens that we would not have had to carry in a perfect world but do have to carry in our fallen world.


Another is the idea of rest, of Sabbath, which is important because it qualifies any claim about the centrality of work in human life. To be human, finally, is not to be a worker but to be one whose life is directed toward God. The whole notion that one rests from work not to recharge for more work but to say that the world is not finally sustained by man's efforts has been of great importance in Christian, as well as Jewish, thinking about work.

R&L: *In addition to Sabbath, there are other activities that limit claims of the centrality of work—I am thinking of things such as play, leisure, and rest. How do such activities differ from each other?*

Meilaender: The distinction between work and play, though apparently obvious at one level, is, in fact, a difficult concept to understand clearly. For example, some seem to want to argue that, at the highest level, when the worker is fully involved in his work, it is difficult to distinguish work from play. But I do not think that this view ultimately rings true to experience; most find play to be simply a kind of carefree rest from work, an amusement that essentially makes it possible to return to work newly invigorated.

Leisure is something different. The point of leisure is not to recharge in order to work better. Leisure, finally, is a kind of activity—not an activity that is productive in the same way as work but in a way that engages the highest human capacities, whatever those finally are. For classical thinkers, that capacity

is love for the True, the Beautiful, and the Good.

For Christian thinkers, that capacity is resting in God, as when Saint Augustine writes in the first chapter of the first book of his *Confessions* that our hearts are restless until they rest in God. And, in this context, rest means engaging in the praise of God; in fact, the whole first chapter of the first book of the *Confessions* is about praise. When the classical notion of leisure as the highest kind of human activity is Christianized, the highest form of human activity moves beyond love for the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, to worship. So the point of the Christian Sabbath is not refraining from work for the sake of doing nothing but doing what is higher than work: engaging in the praise of God. 

“Almighty God Hath Created the Mind Free”

Steven Hayward

Lord Acton, the great historian of freedom, understood that “liberty is the delicate fruit of a mature civilization.” The liberty of which he spoke embraced a broad scope of human freedom, including dimensions political, intellectual, economic, and, especially, religious. The civilization of which he spoke was the West, whose heritage of Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christian faith indelibly marked it and inexorably pushed it toward the full panoply of liberties we enjoy today and to which the rest of the world looks. And the history he sought to express was the unfolding witness to the expansion, refinement, and richer application of the principles of liberty.

In celebration of the Acton Institute’s tenth anniversary and in the spirit of Lord Acton, Religion & Liberty is publishing a series of essays tracing the history of, as Edmund Burke put it, “this fierce spirit of liberty.” We shall look at several watershed documents from the past thousand years (continuing this issue with the Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty), each of which displays one facet of the nature of liberty. We do so to remember our origins and to know our aim. And we do so because, in the words of Winston Churchill, “We must never cease to proclaim in fearless tones the great principles of freedom.” — the Editor

The “establishment clause” of the First Amendment—“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”—has long been regarded as the constitutional bulwark of religious liberty in the United States, as well as the locus of the principle of the separation of church and state. Before there was the First Amendment, however, there was the Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty, enacted by the Virginia legislature in January 1786, three years before Congress proposed the First Amendment. Unlike the brief instruction of the First Amendment’s “establishment clause,” which is only sixteen words long, the Virginia Statute, at 730 words, not only sets a legal standard but also lays out the whole theory of the interrelationship between civil and religious liberty and the very foundation for limited government itself. Of all the constitutional innovations of the American Founding, this

is the most important. Only a small portion of the Virginia Statute is what we would today recognize as a law; most of the Statute is an explanation of the principles behind the law. However, reviewing the political theory expressed in the Virginia Statute helps remind us that the American Founding was about much more than simply securing separation from the imperial monarchy of Great Britain.

The Politically Destabilizing Implications of a Transcendent Doctrine

To understand the mutual and reciprocal relationship of civil and religious liberty in the American form of government, it is necessary to understand exactly what kind of problem the American Founders were trying to solve. The Founders were striving to find a way to harmonize the hitherto competing claims of reason and revelation; however the broader historical and political context of this problem is more complex.

The rise of Christianity in the late years of the Roman Empire revolutionized world politics because it paved the way for the eventual development of liberal individualism. Prior to Christianity, civil and religious authority were unified; the pagan gods of the city and the rulers of the city were one, church and state were indistinguishable, and one’s religious allegiance was bound up with one’s political allegiance. Christianity planted the seeds to upend all this because it severed an individual’s religious obligation from his political obligation, as was expressed in the injunction to “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, and render unto God what is God’s.” Henceforth, one’s religious salvation depended on the direct act of faith toward the one God who transcends all temporal and political orders, which is why the Great Commission calls Christians to proclaim the faith in “all nations.”

The implications of such a transcendent doctrine were just as politically destabilizing as Socrates’ impious inquiries in ancient Athens—if God’s kingdom is not of this world, then the individual’s allegiance to the temporal political regime is necessarily weakened—which is why the Roman Empire had either to destroy Christianity or to assimilate it. Having failed at the former, the Empire was forced to do the

latter with the Edict of Constantine. Christianity's teaching about the dignity and worth of the individual was a milestone in the long evolution of the idea of liberty, but its liberal individualist implications were slow to be recognized, and European politics became rife with religious faction. Such sectarianism was the basis for most of the conflicts, civil wars, and political struggles throughout Europe for the next 1,500 years.

It was this specter of political faction based on religious sectarianism that the American Founders wanted to avoid. The solution, fortunately, lay within their grasp. By the time of the American Founding, the propitious moment had arrived when the new Lockean political philosophy of liberal individualism fell into congruence with the Christian teaching of the dignity of the individual. Put another way, the traditions of reason and revelation had reached a common ground regarding the nature of the moral order, on which rest the natural rights of mankind. This view is most succinctly expressed in the phrase in the Declaration of Independence that refers to "the laws of nature and nature's God." Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration, sounded like a good Thomist when he remarked that "reason and revelation say the same thing, only revelation says it in a louder, more insistent voice."

Here an important distinction must be observed between the mere toleration of religion and religious freedom as a matter of right.

— Steven Hayward



Claims of a Christian Nation Refuted

The narrower historical context of the Virginia Statute is this: Although Virginia had abolished mandatory church attendance laws in 1777, in 1785 Patrick Henry and other eminent Virginians (including, for a time, George Washington) wanted to grant all Christian denominations equal state recognition—along with taxpayer support. More broadly, there was still considerable support for making the United States officially a "Christian" nation. Samuel Adams, for example, argued that the object of any constitutional reform should be the founding of the "Christian Sparta." This particular proposal in favor of state support for religion, as well as the

broader current of opinion in favor of an explicitly Christian government, excited the efforts of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, George Mason, and others to advance the ground of civil and religious liberty through the separation of church and state, which, they understood, would strengthen both kinds of liberty.

Jefferson was the author of the Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty, but because he was serving as Ambassador to France at the time, his bill was shepherded through the legislature by Madison, who would go on to write the First Amendment in 1789. (Madison anticipated much of Jefferson's argument in his own "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments," which he wrote in 1785.) Jefferson, it is said, wrote the Virginia Statute with Locke's *Letters on Toleration* at his elbow. And here an important distinction must be observed—the distinction between mere *toleration* of religion and religious freedom as a *matter of right*. Toleration clearly implies that whatever religious freedom a sovereign may allow is a matter of his discretion and indulgence; therefore, it might be removed or restricted at any time. The American scheme moved well beyond religious toleration to religious liberty as a matter of right. George Washington put the matter memorably in his famous letter to the Newport Synagogue: "It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights."

"It Neither Picks My Pocket Nor Breaks My Leg"

Most recollections of the Virginia Statute highlight the phrase directed against having state-sanctioned or taxpayer-supported denominations: "to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical." (Why, by the way, cannot this same principle be applied to modern proposals to have taxpayer funding for political candidates? But that is another subject.) But much more important than the principle of dis-establishment of religion is Jefferson's explanation of the broader theory behind it. In this sense the Virginia Statute can be regarded as Jefferson's commentary on the Declaration of Independence. The Statute makes three explicit references to natural right, and this is the heart of the matter. It is because all people have the natural right of conscience—to choose their own form of worship free of governmental interference or coercion—that government is obligated to respect the freedom of religion. But the same

principle of equal rights derived from nature means that religious sects should not seek to impose their own doctrine on others through the means of political power. This is because the ground of all of our rights is the same as the ground of our right to religious liberty; therefore, it is unnecessary and wrong to impose religious doctrine through secular means.

As the Virginia Statute puts it, “our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry.” (Jefferson put the point more memorably with his remark in *Notes on Virginia* that, “It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”) Jefferson, who is often accused of having been a closet atheist, recognized a second sound reason for dis-establishment that many clear-thinking Christians at the time shared with him: Establishing an official church, requiring church attendance by law, or supporting churches with taxpayer money (all of which were proposed in Virginia at the time) “tends only to corrupt the principles of that religion it is meant to encourage.” While the Anglican and Baptist denominations in Virginia wanted state sanction and taxpayer support, several evangelical denominations opposed it, correctly observing that “religious establishment has never been a means of prospering the gospel.” The Presbyterian Church of Virginia agreed, adding in a petition that “experience has shown that this dependence [on government], where it has been effected, has been an injury rather than an aid.” Religion and morality, the Presbyterians concluded, “can be promoted only by the internal conviction of the mind and its voluntary choice which such establishments cannot effect.”

In other words, if, instead of grasping for secular political power, different Christian denominations competed for the souls of citizens, then religion, paradoxically, could have a larger and more salutary effect on the character of society. It is tempting to see this as an example of the superiority of competition over monopoly, and although this would not be wrong (the example of moribund state churches in Europe today bolsters this point), it is too superficial. The paradox of strengthening religion by seemingly weakening it politically is central to the American character. Consider the following two statements by George Washington. In 1796, Washington said that “the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.” Yet in his famous farewell address two years later, Washington said, “Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”

A Rebuke to Attackers of Reason and Revelation in Equal Measure

This was not a contradiction or even a paradox to the Founders because they understood the essential harmony between the moral teachings of reason (natural law, if you like) and the moral teachings of revealed religion when it came to political questions. The principle of the separation of church and state is today widely misinterpreted to mean the *exclusion* of religion from public life. The Founders, to the contrary, thought a fastidious neutrality on the part of the state between denominations and faiths would strengthen the influence of faith in our culture.

It is important to recognize today that the embrace of the

The Founders thought a fastidious neutrality on the part of the state between denominations and faiths would strengthen the influence of faith in our culture.

marginalizing view of the separation of church and state arises ultimately from the skeptical attack on all revealed religion that began, coincidentally, at the same time as the rise of liberal individualism during the Enlightenment. But the radical skepticism that first trained its sights on revealed religion was not satisfied with this target alone, and the progress of what we call “postmodernism” has shown that radical skepticism now attacks and rejects the possibility of objective reason as well as revelation. In other words, the modern attack on religion has become equally an attack on the secular basis of our individual natural rights as the Founders understood them. This is why the Virginia Statute, rightly understood, is a rebuke to the so-called liberals of our day who attack reason and revelation in equal measure and who, by doing so, undermine the basis of both civil and religious liberty. ©

Steven Hayward, Ph.D., is a senior fellow at the Pacific Research Institute in San Francisco and a contributing editor to *Religion & Liberty*. He is currently working on a major book about contemporary American history, *The Age of Reagan: A Chronicle of the Closing Decades of the Twentieth Century*.



Christian Glass Ceilings

Pedro C. Moreno

Why are we here on earth? What did God intend when he created us and placed us on this planet? And what is the purpose of the human race's continued existence? These questions may never be fully answered. And even if they are, we may never fully comprehend the answers with our finite minds. However, there is no reason we should not explore some possible answers. In fact, many people have already done so and have come to different conclusions.

Sadly, some of those conclusions have created "Christian glass ceilings." By that, I mean limitations Christians have imposed on themselves because of a particular understanding of Scripture that emphasizes heaven over earth; spirit over mind and body; church and evangelism over work, commerce, and enterprise; and the planet Earth over the rest of the universe.

Creation Is Not Irrelevant

Before we consider these possible answers, however, let us imagine God at the moment before Creation took place. There he is, in all his eternal and infinite magnificence, beauty, and power. The physical universe as we know it does not exist. He then pronounces the words, "Let there be light," and launches the whole universe into existence, with its billions of galaxies, stars, and planets. Then he picks one of those billions of planets, called Earth, and says, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule ... over all the earth" (Gen. 1:26).

Some contend that God created humans with the main purpose of bringing them to heaven, at which point the earth and the whole universe would be rolled back. But if that is so, then why did God make humans immortal when he created them? And why did he place them on earth, not in heaven?

According to Scripture, God created Adam and Eve and made them immortal. Not only that, but God placed them in the Garden of Eden—*here on earth*, not in heaven. This indicates that God intended for Adam and Eve to live here, on earth, forever. Moreover, before the Fall an intimate communion between God and Adam and Eve existed—and Adam and Eve were here on earth. The sole fact that God would

impose such stiff penalties on the human race, including death and hell, demonstrates that their act of disobedience had broken something precious and invaluable—their close relationship with their Creator and his creation.

In his mercy God sent Jesus Christ, his son, to redeem the human race. Now, if we are going to believe that God's only intention is to bring all Christians with him to heaven and get rid of the rest of the universe, why did he not do it shortly after Jesus Christ came to earth? There were many people then who put their trust in him. Some may say that it is because the world was not yet fully evangelized, and that may be true. After all, Scripture does say that "this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations, and then the end shall come" (Mt. 24:14). I have heard evangelists say, based on this verse, that we must all evangelize unreached "people groups" so that we can "hurry up the return of the King." But are we not overlooking the fact that God, though interested in the evangelization of the world, is also sovereign?

Moreover, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and thus the end of the world as we know it, is not linked to the full evangelization of the world, at least not in the minds of the apostles. As an example, Paul thought that Christ would come back before he died (1 Thes. 4:15, 17). Christians since Paul have continually made predictions about the end of the world, especially at the end of the first millennium and increasingly now as we enter a third millennium.

Another argument is that these are the "last days" of our world. That is true. But it was also true of the days of the twelve apostles, about two thousand years ago. Peter, in explaining the events at Pentecost when he and the other apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in different tongues, pointed out that it had already been prophesied by Joel that this would occur in the "last days" (Acts 2:16, 17). Others say that today we are two thousand years nearer to the end; thus, the end is approaching. But, following this line of reasoning, what would you think if a five-year-old child talked frequently about his or her "approaching" death? It is true that after we are born we start getting closer to death. It is also true that the young person would be five years "nearer"

to his or her death. But what kind of mentality is that? It is possible that somebody will die young; in fact, many do. But early death is not guaranteed. In the same way, the Lord does not guarantee that our “death” as the human race will take place in a couple of years or months. The Lord Jesus Christ did say that he is coming back soon (Rev. 22:20), but we should know by now, after almost two thousand years, that the time span of his “soon” is much longer than our “soon.”

Still other individuals justify their preoccupation with “heavenly” matters at the expense of “earthly” affairs by quoting Colossians 3:2, which says, “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” They conclude that what we do here on earth, such as work, commerce, business, and so forth, is not really important. What we need to concentrate on are “things above,” the “heavenly things,” such as church, evangelism, and prayer. However, the context of this and similar verses leads us to a different conclusion. Further on, Colossians clarifies what it means by “things that are on earth” when it states in verses 5 and 6: “Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come....”

“Things that are on earth,” therefore, does not refer to things such as business, politics, and economics, but to sin. Scripture’s intention when instructing us to set our minds on “things above” is not to tell us to look at the clouds to see which one the Lord is riding in his Second Coming, or to evangelize all day, or to attend church day and night, but to understand that we have been regenerated, that we must stop sinning, and that we have been enabled to live a holy life in everything that we do.

The Three Glass Ceilings

Going back to the concept of the Christian glass ceilings, I believe that as a result of our prevalent theology we have set at least three glass ceilings against ourselves that are hindering our lives and our societal impact. The first glass ceiling is at the individual level. It is our overemphasis on the importance of our spirits at the expense of our bodies and, especially, our minds. The second glass ceiling is at the collective level. It is our insistence on putting the church, evangelism, and “spiritual disciplines” such as prayer and Bible reading over aspects of our lives such as family, work, community, and nation. The third glass ceiling we have con-

structed is found at the global level. We have set the earth and its resources as the limit of our discovery process, our imagination, and our commitment for exploration over and above the rest of the universe.

Now, having adopted this theology and these three glass ceilings, we have concluded that we have exhausted, or at least are close to exhausting, whatever was there to explore, conquer, know, or experience. As we contemplate our reduced and limited environment, which is the product of our Christian glass ceilings, we feel exhausted, cramped, and uneasy about staying here on earth any longer. We want to soar, but we want to soar in heaven—there is no more room to soar here on earth, or in the different spheres of life, or in our minds or bodies.

As we wait for final passage into heaven, once in a while we look up through the glass ceiling and see brief glimpses of other horizons, other realities, other frontiers to explore—in our minds, in the arts, in outer space. But since, according to our theology, those frontiers are not important, or relevant, or transcendent, we sadly look away, suppressing any excitement, attraction (which is even considered temptation by some), or motivation in exploring them. Heaven is sufficient, fast approaching, and all there is to our existence, both now and in the future.



Do you believe for a moment that Jesus Christ would have been a mediocre carpenter?

— Pedro C. Moreno

What would our Lord Jesus Christ say or do in a similar situation? Let us consider for a moment Jesus, the carpenter. A client approaches Jesus and requests a table to be made. The price and time of delivery are agreed upon. At the due time the client is presented with a rough, unvarnished, unstable table, with one leg shorter than the others. In response to the client’s justified complaint, Jesus provides this excuse: “Well, I have other more important, transcendent work to do. I have to read the Scriptures and visit the temple. I have to prepare myself for my ministry. I do not have time to spend on such an unimportant thing as making a table.” Do you believe for a moment that Jesus Christ would have been a mediocre carpenter? Of course, the Lord must have made

the best tables and must have had the integrity and honesty to give his clients what they requested and their money's worth at the agreed time.

Moreover, if the “things of this world” are not important, Jesus Christ, the God of the universe, would not have taken up a human body and come into this world physically. He would never have eaten the products of this world, or mentioned seeds and coins and chickens in his teachings. If our spirits are the only things he is interested in, he could have saved us from his home in heaven.

Achievements Not Borne of Mediocrity and Isolation

The fact is that the God of the universe did decide to come in bodily form into this physical existence. Not only that, but he ended up using most of his limited time here on earth—thirty out of his thirty-three years—on “unimportant,” “non-transcendent,” “insignificant” and “non-spiritual” activities such as carpentry. He exercised his “ministry” (in the narrow view of this term) for only three years. Was that just a waste of time?

The fact is that all areas of our lives are interdependent and interconnected. Essential parts of our being are our mind and our body as well as our spirit. We could not function in this world if we did not have all of these acting in unison. The local church and evangelism would be impossible without the participation and contribution of people involved in science, carpentry, and printing. The technology that the evangelists are happily using to reach the world with the Gospel,

We also need a horizontal-spatial interconnection. The development of science and technology requires a strong, reliable political system, a prosperous economy, a legal system that encourages and protects invention and creativity, a strong work ethic, a long-term vision and commitment, high educational levels, and the national will to undertake larger-than-life projects. A short-term vision of the world would never have produced as complex a society as we have today.


If our forefathers had possessed this short-term mentality, the whole American experiment, with its contributions to the world in terms of constitutional principles, financial aid, and technological progress, would never have taken place. Not only that, but to insist on asserting a theology that despises science, technology, the arts, and progress in general is to declare that the American experiment has been but a waste.

Shattering the Glass Ceilings

We must live the Gospel, not just preach it, if we want to transform our world (evangelism in the broader sense) as well as reach the people of this world (evangelism in the narrow sense). Recent research published by the Barna Report demonstrates that “evangelism through personal relationships produces almost twice as many converts as do sermons, church services, and evangelistic events.” In other words, it is our lives, lived in the fullness of our humanness and in the full environment of economics, commerce, art, business, and politics that will ultimately accomplish the transformation of this world and will point people to Christ.

As Saint Francis of Assisi would say, “Preach the Gospel at all times; if need be, use words.”

What must we do, then? I believe it is time to shatter the Christian glass ceilings at the individual, collective, and global levels, and to reach for Christ's ceiling, which encompasses spirit,

body, and mind. It is big enough for church, work, family, business, science, and the arts. And it is magnificent enough to include the Earth, the moon, the planets, the Milky Way—indeed, the whole universe. 

Pedro C. Moreno is the senior director of justice initiatives with Prison Fellowship International. Previously, he worked as international coordinator for the Rutherford Institute. He has written for the Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times, and First Things, among others. He is the editor of the Handbook on Religious Liberty around the World.

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once and for all, have not come out of the blue. In fact, they would never have been invented if previous generations had despised and minimized science, technology, business, and so on, as we are doing today. For science and technology to be possible, we need to build one step at a time, over a long period of time in a historical interconnection, from ancient and basic mathematical and physical calculations to the discovery of electricity, to the transistor, to the telephone, to the computer chip, to the World Wide Web. These were not achievements borne of mediocrity and isolation. They required centuries of hard work and scientific development with the active participation and, often, the leadership of Christians.

Fraternal Societies and Social Concern

D. Eric Schansberg

The first Christmas after my wife and I were married, we received an interesting gift from her grandparents—a year’s worth of dues for membership at their Moose lodge. We had visited the lodge with them and other family members, using the expansive dance floor in a conservative setting to two-step our way to an enjoyable evening, but we had never seriously considered becoming members. Exercising the gift meant joining the lodge and going through its applications and initiation rites. The paperwork was modest, but the initiation ceremony was more painful—mostly long-winded and intensely boring but also occasionally interesting and quite memorable. The devotion to the causes they supported was admirable; the extent to which moderately educated folks had gone to memorize relatively lengthy parts of the ceremony was impressive; and the rituals within the ceremony were odd and even a bit disconcerting. Unfortunately, the men and women were seated separately, so my wife and I didn’t even have the pleasure of exchanging notes, whispers, and smiles.

Over the next year, we still went to the lodge only with family and then did not renew our membership. For better or worse, my days as a loyal Moose had ended.

David Beito’s book, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890–1967*, provided much-needed context to my short encounter with the Moose. The text is well written and scrupulously documented, including surveys and empirical studies of organizational performance. Beito provides both a useful overview and tremendous detail about the various historical contexts in which fraternal societies operated and the variety of functions they tried to serve. (The details can be skimmed or absorbed, depending on one’s level of interest.)

Beito notes that fraternal societies were especially prominent in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, developing as disposable income, immigra-

tion, and domestic migration to cities all increased. They were larger than any other voluntary association (possibly excepting churches), having one-third of all males as members in 1920. Groups such as Masons, Moose, and Odd Fellows were, in essence, middle-class versions of Edmund Burke’s “little platoons,” formed on the basis of common social traits (class and ethnicity), common moral values (patriotism and thrift), and economic needs (insurance and safety-net assistance). Fraternal societies acted as a forum for entertainment and promoted social cohesion, but perhaps most importantly, they provided

mutual aid to members in distress and formed cooperatives that efficiently took care of health care, life insurance (even dominating the field for a time), and funeral benefits (“to avoid a pauper’s grave”). Beito also devotes a number of chapters to the special projects of fraternal societies—namely, orphanages and hospitals. Fraternal societies declined precipitously in the 1930s, as their usefulness diminished in the face of social, economic, and political competition, especially from the government’s leaps into realms origi-

nally covered by fraternal societies (such as Social Security and welfare).

A Third Category of Assistance

Beito adds much to both the history and the contemporary debate over public welfare and private charity. That said, fraternal efforts to render assistance belong in a third category. Although assistance rendered to needy fraternal members was privately provided, it was not considered charity. Within fraternal societies, there was the probability of “direct reciprocity,” meaning that the recipient today could become the donor tomorrow. The assistance—because it was between members—was viewed very differently from charity. In Beito’s example, the Odd Fellows used the terms *benefit* and *right* instead of *charity* and *relief* to denote this difference.

Beito’s approach is from a different angle than Marvin

***From Mutual Aid
to the Welfare State:
Fraternal Societies and Social
Services, 1890–1967***
by David T. Beito

University of North Carolina Press
320 + xiv pp. Paper: \$24.95

Olasky's in his seminal work, *The Tragedy of American Compassion*. Whereas Olasky emphasizes the perspective of the aid-givers within charity and welfare, Beito focuses on the prospective recipients. Olasky's "supply-side" approach analyzes the debate within the aid-giving community: how and to whom to render assistance. By contrast, Beito's "demand-side" analysis discusses how the needy passionately wanted to avoid the stigma of accepting welfare or charity (again, defined as assistance without direct reciprocity). Fraternalism provided a popular way to avoid this stigma, ensuring one against life's trials without having to accept "hierarchical" relief from relatively wealthy outsiders in a manner that was often adversarial, patronizing, and degrading.


Interestingly, fraternalism elicited a combination of social cooperation and individualism—a willingness to help but a pride in self-reliance. Further, fraternalism did police its own. The rituals for which fraternalism are perhaps most famous were initially embraced to foil attempts to obtain assistance fraudulently. Moreover, the rituals were constructed in a way that taught moral and practical lessons. Benefits were usually conditional on appropriate conduct and membership in good standing. Such behavioral regulations derived from a desire not only to enforce conformity to social and cultural norms but also to protect the fraternalism's investments, especially in

established base and the ability to easily develop community contacts.) These service providers were slandered and even blackballed by the American Medical Association, since they undercut wages. Although lodge doctors may have, on average, provided lower-quality care, they did provide lower-cost service to those who could not afford higher prices. This practice was eventually eliminated through persecution by the AMA and through the increasing effectiveness of its cartel, which restricted the overall number of licensed doctors. Second, fraternalism was largely successful in areas where private charity and government remain largely unsuccessful today, especially working in cities, dealing with the needy, and providing competent, low-cost health care—areas where fraternalism was most active. With respect to fraternal social welfare models, Beito argues that it would be foolish either to recreate them or to dismiss them as "the quaint curiosities of a bygone era." That said, fraternalism clearly has lessons to teach us about the importance of subsidiarity and the "little platoons" throughout society that pragmatically address social concerns.

In his Encyclical Letter *Quadragesimo Anno* (no. 78), Pius XI noted—even in 1931—that

when we speak of the reform of institutions, the State comes chiefly to mind ... [because of the] near extinction of that rich social life which was once highly developed through associations of various kinds.... This is to the great harm of the State itself, for with a structure of social governance lost, and with the taking over of all the burdens which the wrecked associations once bore, the State has been overwhelmed and crushed by almost infinite tasks and duties.

Surely, this is more true today. With the continued growth of government and the subsequent atrophy of the little pla-

toons, society finds itself relying on the state, which cannot solve these problems adequately, if at all. Therefore, the hope is that non-governmental entities—most notably the church, but also private health care insurance co-ops, modestly resurgent fraternal societies, and other groups—will emerge in the coming years. 

Fraternalism provided mutual aid to members in distress and formed cooperatives that took care of health care, life insurance, and funeral benefits.

— D. Eric Schansberg



life insurance. Beito notes that they were practicing "actuarial science ... in an embryonic stage."

Quaint Curiosities of a Bygone Age?

Not only is Beito's study historically interesting, but it is also relevant today. First, the book is replete with examples of the use of government by interest groups to restrict the "economic activity" of fraternalism (chiefly in health care and life insurance)—a very common practice today. For example, Beito devotes a chapter to "the evil of the lodge practice," where doctors contracted with lodges to provide general medical care for a fixed fee. (This was a natural way for some doctors to get started in the profession, giving them an es-

D. Eric Schansberg, Ph.D., is professor of economics at Indiana University (New Albany), the author of Poor Policy: How Government Harms the Poor (Westview), and a contributing editor to Religion & Liberty.

Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There

by David Brooks

Simon and Schuster, 284 pp. Hardcover: \$25.00

Review by Gregory Dunn

Graying hippies with ponytails hold forth on the minutiae of capitalism. Sixties psychedelic music is used on commercials for retirement planning. Your broker has a tattoo. Is not this strange?

All around us, the square and the hip have morphed into an odd new thing. Bohemians and bourgeoisie, once combatants, are now convivial, enjoying venti cappuccinos in each other's company in coffee houses all across upscale American neighborhoods. At least that is the contention of David Brooks, senior editor of the *Weekly Standard*, in *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*. In short, the past decade has seen a cease-fire in the culture wars that raged in the previous three. Brooks's shorthand for this resolution is that bohemians and bourgeoisie have melded into a new elite of bourgeois bohemians—or Bobos, for short.

Back in the day—say, the 1950s—it was much easier to tell these folks apart. As Brooks describes them, “the bourgeois prized materialism, order, regularity, custom, rational thinking, self-discipline, and productivity.” By contrast, “the bohemians celebrated creativity, rebellion, novelty, self-expression, anti-materialism, and vivid experience.” And never would the twain meet, each group and its values anathema to the other—the Cornelius Vanderbilts against the Henry David Thoreaus, if you will. Until, that is, the 1990s, when the educated elite accomplished the “grand achievement” of inventing a “way of living that lets you be an affluent success and at the same time a free-spirit rebel.”

So consider the 1990s business executive. Once corporate America was dominated by conservative burghers in stolid gray flannel suits. “Today,” Brooks riffs, “being a ceo means that you have such lofty and daring theories and ideas that you need a team of minions chasing you around with ropes just to tie you down.” The Organization Man is out; the Hipster Capitalist, in. Or consider Bobos at home: They cannot just press a pair of pants; they have to practice the Feng Shui of Ironing, where “a wrinkle is actually ‘tension’ in the fabric,” and “releasing the tension by removing the wrinkle improves the flow of ch'i.” Or Bobos at play: They cannot just go outside and enjoy themselves; they have to be

“serious” recreationalists—so much so that “the most accomplished are so serious they never have any fun at all.” (Brooks's wickedly funny set pieces, such as his descriptions of “The Code of Financial Correctness” and “How to Be an Intellectual Giant,” are alone worth the price of the book.)

Bobos in Paradise, then, is Brooks's report of the manners and mores of this new elite as well as a lively journalistic


account of the social changes of the past half century. He calls his method “comic sociology,” where “the idea is to get at the essence of cultural patterns, getting the flavor of the times without trying to pin it down with meticulous exactitude.” Further, he is up front about the lack of theory in his book: “Max Weber has nothing to worry about from me,” he confesses. But I suspect Brooks is jesting at least a little, for alongside his witty descriptions he has placed some fairly subtle intellectual work. Indeed, his suggestion that the bohemian and the bourgeois have been reconciled is a serious argument, one that Brooks has woven into a nearly seamless cloth.

Nearly seamless, but not quite. In the end, it is unclear whether the bohemian and the bourgeois are truly reconciled in this new Bobo age. It seems, rather, that the bohemian has really co-opted the bourgeois. A case in point is Brooks's fine description of Bobo religion, which he calls “flexidoxy.” (Incidentally, another delight of the book is the names that Brooks gives to his observations.) Not merely an anything-goes relativism, flexidoxy is a “hybrid mixture of freedom and flexibility on the one hand and the longing for rigor and orthodoxy on the other.”

Put another way, religious Bobos immerse themselves in the communities and traditions of their religion but pick and choose what they will believe and how they will practice it. Brooks observes of such spirituality that “somehow it is rigor without submission” and “orthodoxy without obedience.” Such thorough refusal to submit and to obey is perhaps the best example of an unreconciled tension between the bohemian and the bourgeois in the Bobo world. It is also evidence that perhaps Brooks's declaration of reconciliation is too hastily made. This irreducible kernel of radical self-concern has more to do with bohemian self-expression than it does with bourgeois self-discipline; hence Bobos—at least in their religious life—appear to be really bohemians with a simulacrum of the bourgeois rather than a genuine reconciliation of the two.

Brooks does recognize the problem this Bobo self-

centeredness poses. "What worries me most," Brooks quotes from Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, "is the danger that amid all the constant trivial preoccupations of private life, ambition may lose both its force and its greatness, that human passions may grow gentler and at the same time baser, with the result that the body social may become daily quieter and less aspiring." Though Brooks ultimately does conclude that "it's good to live in a Bobo world," he also warns

that Tocqueville's fear has come to pass, and so calls Bobos to take up an attitude of public spiritedness. The question begged, however, is whether such a self-contented and self-consumed class is constitutionally able to submit to the rigors of public service. And even if it is, do we really want to live in a Bobo world? 

Gregory Dunn is the editor of Religion & Liberty.

Book News

Shakespeare as Political Thinker

John E. Alvis and Thomas G. West, editors
ISI Books
xx + 416 pp. Cloth: \$24.95

This second revised edition of *Shakespeare as Political Thinker* (first printed in 1981) happily brings a good book back into print, with two new chapters and modest revisions to five others. According to the editors, "the essays collected in this volume proceed from the common conviction that Shakespeare's poetry conveys a wisdom concerning political things commensurate with the charm and vigor that distinguish his artistry." The seventeen essays, all written by distinguished scholars, address both the breadth of Shakespeare's works (engaging his comedies, histories, and tragedies, as well as his sonnets) and the scope of Western political reflection. *Shakespeare as Political Thinker* is an essential addition to the library of anyone interested in political, philosophic, and religious questions.

A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War

Harry V. Jaffa
Rowman and Littlefield
xiv + 550 pp. Hardcover: \$35.00

Over forty years ago, Harry Jaffa promised, at the end of his *Crisis of the House Divided* (now recognized as a landmark in Lincoln studies), a sequel. At long last, the sequel has arrived. Conceived as a commentary on Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, *A New Birth of Freedom*, in fact, ranges across the whole terrain of American history and political thought. It must do so, according to Jaffa, because the Gettysburg Address is "a speech within a drama." Therefore, "a commen-

contentious, *A New Birth of Freedom* is, still, a mighty achievement that will likely (and justly) dominate the landscape of American political thought for some time to come.


God's Renaissance Man: Abraham Kuyper

James E. McGoldrick
Evangelical Press
320 pp. Paper: \$14.99

A good English biography of Abraham Kuyper has been needed for a long time; the last one to appear was in 1960, and, though adequate, it did have its flaws. James McGoldrick (a professor of history at Cedarville College) has done a good job filling this void. His account of Kuyper's life and thought is balanced, contextualized, and accessible to non-specialist readers. Especially helpful is the annotated bibliography of Kuyper resources available in English.

The Best Christian Writing 2000

John Wilson, editor
Harper San Francisco
xii + 340 pp. Paper: \$15.00

Compiling the best of anything can be a tricky business, and the product can often be uneven and unsatisfactory. But John Wilson, editor of the new annual series of which this book is the inaugural volume, has pulled off the trick splendidly. According to Wilson (also editor-in-chief of *Books and Culture*), Christian writing is "writing informed by the distinctively Christian understanding of reality." The twenty-seven excellent essays Wilson has gathered compass a pleasing variety of styles, topics, and forms, and display a spectrum of Christian traditions. All told, this is an excellent collection worth owning. 

The Biblical Case for Entrepreneurship




Those who consider the entrepreneurial vocation a necessary evil should realize that Scripture lends ample support to entrepreneurial activity. In Matthew 25:14–30, we find Jesus’ parable of the talents. As with all parables, its meaning is multi-layered. Its eternal meaning relates to how we use God’s gift of grace. With regard to the material world, it is a story about capital, investment, entrepreneurship, and the proper use of economic resources.

I do not pretend to build an entire ethic for capitalism from this parable. Yet one of its critical lessons is this: It is not immoral to profit from our resources, wit, and labor. Writing for an entirely different audience and context, Austrian economist Israel Kirzner employs the concept of entrepreneurial alertness to show the significance of cultivating one’s natural ability, time, and resources. Building on the work of Ludwig von Mises, Kirzner acknowledges that by seeking new opportunities and engaging in goal-directed activity, entrepreneurs strive “to pursue goals efficiently, once ends and means are clearly identified, but also with the drive and alertness needed to identify which ends to strive for and which means are available.”

Without overstating the similarity between Kirzner’s concept and the parable of the talents, there seems to be a natural connection between the discovery of entrepreneurial opportunities and the master’s admonition in Matthew 25 to be watchful of his return and to be caretakers of his property. Thus, with respect to profit, the only alternative is loss, which, in the case of the third servant, constitutes poor stewardship. However, the voluntary surrender of wealth, such as in almsgiving or in its more radical form of renouncing the right to ownership of property (as in the traditional vow of poverty taken by members of certain religious orders), should not be confused with economic loss. In the former case, a legitimate good is foregone in exchange for another to which one has been uniquely called. In the latter case, to fail deliberately in an economic endeavor, or to do so as a result of sloth, is to show disrespect for God’s gift and for one’s responsibility as a steward.

Nevertheless, we must distinguish properly between the moral obligation to be economically creative and productive, on the one hand, and to employ one’s talents and resources prudently and magnanimously, on the other. It is clear from the parable of the talents and the cultural mandate in Genesis 1 that in subduing the earth, people need to be attentive to the possibilities for change, development, and investment. Furthermore, because humans are created in the image of God and have been endowed with reason and free will, human actions necessarily involve a creative dimension. Thus, in the case of the third servant who placed his single talent into the ground, it was the non-use of his ability to remain alert to future possibilities that led to his being severely chastised.

In the book of Genesis, we read that God gave the earth with all its resources to Adam and Eve. They were to mix their labor with the raw material of creation to produce usable goods for their family. Similarly, the master in the parable of the talents expected his servants to use the resources at their disposal to increase the value of his holdings. Through this parable, God commands us to use our talents productively; we are exhorted to work, to be creative, and to reject idleness. 

It is not immoral to profit from our resources, wit, and labor.

***Rev. Robert A. Sirico** is a Roman Catholic priest and the president of the Acton Institute. This essay is adapted from *The Entrepreneurial Vocation*, a forthcoming Acton Institute monograph.*

“Truth is great and will prevail if left to herself.... She is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate.”

—Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty—