RELIGION & LIBERTY

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Profitable Business Focuses on Humans First

Steven W. Mataro *is President and Chief Executive Officer of America's Siding Company, Inc. and America's Supply Company, Inc. America's Siding is a residential vinyl installation company located in Georgia. They also install windows, garage doors, and gutters. America's Supply is the supply arm for America's Siding. Mr. Mataro is from New Jersey originally. Unwilling to raise his children in the tough neighborhood in which he grew up, he relocated with his family to Georgia about seventeen years ago. He started doing business as a subcontractor for America's Home Place, using America's Siding as a business name. Now America's Siding is a multi-million dollar a year operation and employs over thirty people. Mr. Mataro has five children and is a deeply committed Christian.*

R&L: *I understand that you have a unique way of doing business. Tell me about it.*

Mataro: While maintaining high standards of quality for all our installation jobs, my approach is to hire and train young men—high school age or a little older—who are in trouble with the law, in school, or at home. Their parents, schools, or courts bring them to me. These young men are more to me than a mere source of business output. My wife and I house several of these young guys. We try to teach them a little bit of biblical beliefs as well as teamship and friendship. Meanwhile we help them learn a good trade that they can take anywhere in the world and use. That is what sets our company apart and makes it unique.

R&L: *What motivates you to practice business this way? Is it an evangelistic faith or more of a general desire to contribute to the betterment of society?*

Mataro: God gives me the love and motivation every day to try and do what is best for the guys. My history as a troubled youth in New Jersey gave me a knack for working side by side with these young men and giving them the guidance that they need. We take guys who have a hard time reading or spelling and we work on that. We teach them that they need to be good parents and raise their children properly, and that they must work to help others. Every Saturday is mandatory community service day. We take these guys out and find different projects for them to do. We do a lot of community service, such as building ramps for the disabled or siding the women's shelter, anything that is hands on. They also give back to the community on these projects by using the talent we teach them, which gives them a sense of satisfaction about what they can do. When they use their construction skills, they see the finished product that same day and physically witness how they have helped someone else. So it's definitely a leg up for them spiritually, physically, and mentally to benefit others, and themselves, by using their skills.

R&L: *So you see it as a good thing that they can use the skills they are learning to participate in the market place?*

You have to have a passion in your heart for what you do. If you believe in what you do and you work hard, the money is and always will be secondary. The reward is the fact that at the end of the day you know you put in a good day of productivity, and you can be proud of what you left behind that day.

Mataro: Absolutely. Their whole lives they have been told they will never be anything. Same thing for me in the neighborhood I grew up in. "You'll never make it to eighteen. You'll be gone before eighteen the way you live your life and you don't have a future. You'll never succeed." We try to erase all of that in their lives as well as putting God in their heart. We show them that God has never made anything that hasn't been perfect, even though it might be broken now. God makes us in his image, so everyone has great value and ability to work. We just have to be able to focus our energy toward doing the work that suits us best. These young men are so talented. They just need the opportunity to express that, and the market provides that opportunity for them.

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R&L: *If society were set up in such a way that the market did not function efficiently, would that present a harder challenge for what you are trying to do with these young men?*

Mataro: I view it like this: You have to have a passion in your heart for what you do. If you believe in what you do and you work hard, the money is and always will be secondary. The reward is the fact that at the end of the day you know you put in a good day of productivity, and you can be proud of what you left behind that day. The reward is to have a home or food or clothes or to accomplish whatever goals you set for yourself. But if you don't want to do better everyday, to constantly learn better ways to produce, and to share what you've learned with someone else, I don't know how a person like that can get out of bed in the morning. I started American Siding seventeen years ago. I flew here from New Jersey with one hundred dollars in my pocket, because I came from a crime infested neighborhood in northern New Jersey and I didn't want to raise my kids in that environment. I wanted better for them. I didn't know anyone at all in Georgia but we came because there was an article that said this county was the fastest growing county for construction. So with faith in my heart I got off that plane and started my life. The American economy provided me with this opportunity and I worked hard every day. As my company grew, I wanted to share this experience with young men like myself so that they could take the same opportunity to make something out of their lives. But along the way I've had some great mentors, like the Chief Executive Officer and several Vice Presidents of America's Home Place, who taught me that opportunity is nothing without God. It's not about entering the market place just to make money. It's about the adventure of building people up so that they may serve others.

R&L: *So it would be fair to say that the real purpose for your business is the young men themselves.*

Mataro: Yes, without a doubt. As a matter of fact, right now, with the help of our friends at America's Home Place, my company is in the process of building a program to further help more young men. The name of this program is Servant Builders. Just this week the grading has been done to build our first home, one of many needed on our seventy acre farm in Toccoa, Georgia, to house and train even more young men in the construction field. Each house will hold up to twelve men. Once they complete the twelve month program, they will be ready to go out into the world and do

what God wants, namely, serve others.

R&L: *Do you think that many people approach business as a service to other humans?*

Mataro: Not enough. Take the corporate reporting scandals on Wall Street. Those executives lost sight of the fact that the reason they have a business is to serve other humans. That's what's going on there. The executives are worried about the numbers, but they are not worried about the people whom the numbers affect. It's based exclusively on production. Consistency is the key to life, to be consistent at what you do everyday and to try to improve on it. I am a person who has a goal to produce something of value and we work with these young men and they produce quality workmanship, doing an honest day's work and learning a good trade—

IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION

Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003)

"One's worldview inevitably conditions one's behavior, including political involvements. The future of freedom itself may well hinge on a decision of whether the Judeo-Christian heritage is to be checked at the entrance to the public square."

Illustrated by Vincent Harriger

Born on January 22, 1913, to German immigrants in New York City, Carl F. H. Henry was not raised in a religious family environment. In 1933, while Henry was editor of *The Smithtown Star* and a stringer for *The New York Times*, Henry met with a man named Gene Bedford. They had a three hour conversation about the Christian faith, after which they prayed The Lord's Prayer together. Henry converted to the Christian faith on the spot and became convinced that he should go to college to prepare for a life of Christian service. He attended Wheaton College, recognizing that "faith without reason is not worth much, and that reason is not an enemy but an ally of genuine faith, and moreover that the resurrection of Jesus is an historical event."

Henry pursued graduate studies at Wheaton, earning a M.A., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, where Henry earned his Th.D. after being ordained a Baptist minister, and Boston University, where he earned his second doctorate. In 1947, Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, challenging the withdrawal of fundamentalists from society, was published. "Among my concerns," he wrote, "was to engage evangelicals in a discussion of social and cultural problems and to help define authentic involvement." Henry became the editor of *Christianity Today* in 1955 and left in 1968. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Henry helped shape a new generation of evangelical leadership by serving on the boards of Prison Fellowship, the Institute for Religion and Democracy, and the Ethics and Public Policy Center. An able encourager and champion of evangelicals serving in many facets of society, Henry entertained panoramic visions of evangelical cooperation and co-belligerency on behalf of preserving and articulating biblical values, while insistently calling for evangelical repentance and renewal to precede forays into politics, social action, media, and higher education.

On granting Henry the Mark O. Hatfield Leadership Award from the Christian Council of Colleges and Universities in 2000, Union University President David S. Dockery said, "Few people in the twentieth century have done more to articulate the importance of a coherent Christian world and life view than Carl F. H. Henry. No Christian college or university in North America carries forth the commitment to the integration of faith and learning without Henry's influence, even if many on our campuses are unaware of that influence."

Source: Beth Spring and CT Staff, Christianity Today *(December 8, 2003), www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/149/14.0.html.*

Everything we do should be based on the long term ....Every time you wake up in the morning, you should not be thinking of today.I think that seeking immediate gratification is the quickest way to failure ....In order to secure everything for yourself today, you will have to short someone for tomorrow. The get rich quick mentality has got to go.

not a trade that is overly back breaking, but a good, solid trade—that they can feel good about everyday. You can put vinyl siding on a house in two days, and the house never looks the same. That is what we try to teach these kids. We explain the Christian faith to them, that faith is the basis for everything. We have to have faith to see something that isn't there. We have to believe in the Lord so that even though we don't see him, we can be confident that he's there. So we try to instill the faith that allows them to see things that aren't there yet, not only the siding on a house, but also their intrinsic value as persons created in God's image. The way to stop the scandals on Wall Street or anywhere else is to be honest with each other. If I had a bad day at work I should be able to express that honestly: I didn't produce as much as I would have liked to today. I had a bad day. I had a lot on my mind. I should of gotten on ten squares of siding, but there was a lot of traffic. I got to work a little later, and I only got on six today. When the boss comes up to us and asks how our week was, our impulse is to say "great" like a reflex. With my guys, I try to break that reflex down. So when I ask them how their week has gone, I want them to break it down for me honestly. I want to hear something like: "I had a great Monday and Tuesday, but Wednesday I didn't get up as much as I should've, but I kept it in mind that I needed to catch up by the end of the week, so I put in the extra effort and time and I did the best I could. How does that sound, boss?" That is the ethical way to practice business. Accountability starts with us as individual leaders, and it is transmitted through our leadership by example.

R&L: *You mentioned honesty, accountability, and faith. What other virtues should corporate executives have?*

Mataro: They should take seriously their responsibility toward everyone who's under them. For example, you're writing an interview for a magazine or a company. In order to produce a good interview, you have to feel good about its content. The content comes from my words, but they come out rough on the tape. You polish them into a readable transcript that I approve and then come out with a good product. When you print this interview, you should feel like this labor was not in vain. At the end of the day you should feel that you have a good, honest transcript for the interview and produced what you consider to be a good result. You take pride in that. It all starts with understanding self-worth. That is what we are trying to put in all these young men. Corporate executives need to put all of that ahead of having meetings and crunching numbers and worrying about the criteria for getting loans. If we make our people more accountable to us and open ourselves to be more accountable to them, we won't have to lie. We can't lead them to believe that we are going to chop their head off every time they don't meet a number, no matter how much they want to or how hard they have tried. Fear motivation is no way to build or run a business. Only with trust can people grow.

R&L: *What do you think of the short term investment mentality so prevalent in today's market?*

Mataro: I don't think we should ever think short term. Did the Lord only save us for short term? Did he build us for short term? Last time I checked he hung on that cross for us to have eternity, so that we can be forgiven for our sins not just for the weekend, but also for eternity. Everything we do should be based on the long term, or at least it should be. Every time you wake up in the morning, you should not be thinking of today. I think that seeking immediate gratification is the quickest way to failure. Someone will suffer for that immediate gratification. In order to secure everything for yourself today, you will have to short someone for tomorrow. The get rich quick mentality has got to go. Take the thinking I've learned over the years from all the good people at America's Home Place. No matter which one of their offices I visit, the thinking is the same. You're only as good as your last house. These guys are knocking out 1,200 houses a year now and are growing fast, but the house that they are worried about the most is the last one. Why? Because that's the one that represents them, not only the 1,199 houses before it, but the last house, the last homeowner. Every house you do reflects who you are, and every word that comes out of your mouth reflects who you are, and people sometimes speak a little too quickly. They unintentionally speak nontruths, because they don't pause long enough to think out the question that was asked to them. They answer too quickly and find themselves stuck because it already came out.

R&L: *For all your efforts with these young men, do you achieve positive results? Do these young men turn themselves around based on the principles of faith and morality that you teach them?*

Mataro: These young men have been in the paper sixty-four times in seventeen years. They've received awards from the mayor and had a front-page news article about how their company does business differently. After 9/11 all the guys came together, raised up money, and painted a 280 foot fence on a major road red, white, and blue along with words of prayer for all the families. These guys were the town misfits at one time and now they've grown up to be the town leaders. When the mayor of the town gives your guys and the company an award for what they have done for the town over the years, you know in your heart you are doing the right thing.

R&L: *Aside from these successes with these young men, is your business profitable?*

Mataro: Thank the Lord, it's very profitable. It's more profitable than I ever imagined it would be. We make thousands of dollars every month in profits. But we use those profits for other projects, like the ones I was talking about before. My wife and I own seventy acres of land with horses, a few ponds for fishing, four wheelers for the guys, and we live in a beautiful house. We use all this space so that the guys we take in have a good place to live. We want to do all we can to discourage them from leaving and finding the same old trouble. By offering them a better alternative, we also teach them that we earn profit not just so the business or a person can sit on a pile of gold, but also that it can and should be shared with others. Servant builders is what we feel our company is all about.

Sustaining People and Planet: The Moral Challenge of the Twenty-first Century

Dennis T. Avery

The book of Genesis says human beings were given dominion over the natural world. Scripture also teaches that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Ps 24:1). Thus, human society's dominion over the earth is one of stewardship. We have a responsibility to ensure that the earth is managed properly on behalf of its only rightful owner, God. Wasting the earth's resources is an unquestionable dereliction of our stewardship responsibilities. But this is only one of our obligations to God. Our overarching responsibility is to seek first God's kingdom (Mt 6:33). In addition to maintaining the earth as good stewards, seeking the kingdom of God includes loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39), meaning that we must be striving to search for the lost, heal the sick, shelter the homeless, protect the abused, and feed the hungry (Matt. 25:34-46). In the populous and affluent twenty-first century, sometimes being a proper steward of the planet seems to conflict with the command to love our neighbor. Many environmental activists appear to take this conflict as an axiomatic reality. But that is an error. The kingdom of God is never divided against itself. A quick look at environmental topics regarding overpopulation, high-yield farming, and industrial development is enough to demonstrate that it is not God's call to stewardship and loving our neighbor that create undo strain on the environment, but rather certain activists' vision of an environmental utopia that amounts to nothing less than erasing most humans from God's earth.

What About Overpopulation?

Too many environmentally concerned people have decided that the world is overpopulated. Paul Ehrlich, author of *The Population Bomb*, has said, "Global human population is threatening our future … as we attempt to feed our growing numbers, we are jeopardizing Earth's ability to sustain any life at all." He calls for a radical reduction in human numbers. Ted Turner, media billionaire, has said, "A total population of 250–300 million people would be ideal." That would eliminate ninety-five percent of the present world population. Fewer people would make it easier to solve environmental issues, but this solution is draconian. Famines, epidemics, or forced abortions would need to be implemented to achieve such an end. Allowing such things to occur would be a monstrous dereliction of our responsibility to care for the well-being of our neighbors.

Furthermore, some environmentalists misunderstand the role of human beings in relationship to the earth. The Worldwatch Institute says churches just need to get past their outmoded "concern" over the "moral status of humanity in the natural order" to be good environmentalists. That concern is never outmoded. Christ's words "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" have no moratorium. Furthermore, that concern is what keeps humans humane, fit subjects of the kingdom of God. If we accept the Worldwatch Institute's position that there is no moral status of humanity in the natural order, then human beings cease being creatures made in the very image and likeness of God, the only ones capable of managing the planet's resources in ways that benefit all life on earth. From the Worldwatch Institute's perspective, humans may be perceived as a blight upon the earth, a disease to be eradicated as painstakingly as any other virus. The reality is that since God created us in his own likeness and image, we are then by nature creators who can transform the earth's natural resources to better sustain life rather than consumers who merely have the capacity to deplete the earth's natural resources.

Not only do these environmentalists' claims about overpopulation prompt an ill-conceived notion of humanity, these claims are not even valid. There is no upward human population spiral. The current world population surge, now nearing its end, was caused by modern medicine lowering the death rates, not higher world food production. In fact, the world is 40 years into the first era when more food production means better diets for children, instead of an increase in human numbers. Since 1960 and the Green Revolution, births per woman in the Third World have dropped from 6.2 to about 2.8, and are still declining rapidly. Population stability is 2.1 births, and the First World is already below that, at 1.7 and declining. The birth rate reductions have been caused by factors such as increased food security, rising personal incomes, female education, and urbanization—all of which lead

couples to use today's improved contraceptive technology. The ongoing global birth decline is dramatic and unprecedented. In fact, many European countries face concerns regarding underpopulation as a result of this birth decline.

Stewardship in Twenty-first Century Human Society

Worrying about how the enormous human family will survive on an earth of limited resources is not a modern phenomenon. Citizens of the Roman Empire worried about soil erosion and declining farm yields nearly two thousand years ago, with good reason: Soil erosion has always been the most vulnerable aspect of human society. Environmental activists today prey on this long-held and valid fear of soil erosion to undermine our confidence in the sustainability of modern high-yield farming. They insist that today's high crop yields give only an illusion of a sustainable food supply, because the farmers are "mining the soil." Again, that is not the truth.

In fact, modern high-yield farming techniques allow farmers to be much better stewards of the soil than the previous generations. Thanks to chemical fertilizer, modern farmers no longer need to "wear out" their soils. In the traditional farming of the nineteenth century, growing crops often took more nutrients out of the soil than farmers could replace with manure. As yields and soil organic matter declined, the farm would be abandoned as "worn out." Today farmers use soil testing and industrially supplied nutrients to keep their soils rich and productive. In addition, modern farmers invented conservation tillage. This farming system eliminates plowing by using herbicides to control weeds, planting through the unplowed soil. It cuts erosion by up to ninety-five percent and encourages the presence of far more earthworms and subsoil bacteria. What is more, high-yield farming preserves more than the soil. It has already saved at least twelve million square miles of forests and wildlands. In other words, it would take twelve million square miles more of land—three-fourths of the total amount of forests and wildlands on the globe—to produce the necessary food supply if farmers were still limited to the low crop yields of the 1950s. Instead, three times as many people as the world had in the 1950s have food from essentially the same amount of cropland used then. One of the bases upon which Christ separated the sheep from the goats was related to whether they fed the hungry. Decrying the use of high-yield farming to perpetuate unsubstantiated ideals while people starve to death may advance certain activists' agendas, but it is goat-like behavior to say the least.

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Affluent Countries Are Better for the Environment in General

The First World enjoys a high degree of material prosperity relative to Third World countries. However, instead of considering whether there is any moral side to this affluence, environmental activists criticize the First World not only for its development of high-yield farming techniques, but also for its industrialism generally, the source of its affluence. Paul Ehrlich has commented that the affluent people of the First World were the worst polluters in the history of the world, would destroy half the world's wildlife species in the next few decades, and would bring about the ruin of the whole planet. This is an unfounded criticism that fails to appreciate the process of industrialization.

A World Bank staff team has documented a bell-shaped curve in environmental protection. In the early years of industrialization, forests die and pollution surges. Rising populations and higher incomes demand more farmland and better diets. But when per capita incomes reach a level of $5,000 to $8,000 annually a different set of factors take over. People are already well-fed and birth rates fall rapidly. With better inputs and management, crop yields rise, so less land per capita is needed for food. Diesel fuel substitutes for firewood, even as forests are replanted. Affluent people want cleaner air and are willing and able to pay for it. They begin to demand clean rivers for both health and aesthetic reasons. Affluence affords a person respite from the tyranny of scrambling to do whatever it takes to survive, and in that respite a person has the opportunity to contemplate how his or her actions affect the human society and the planet in general and to make any reforms necessary to discontinue or prevent any derivation from the responsibility to be biblical humanitarians and stewards.

Most of the Third World is currently in the most polluting phase of the industrialization process, a phase that the First World is leaving behind. Dr. Bjorn Lomborg's widely publicized book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, has been

fiercely condemned by eco-groups, but they have not been able to shake his key point: An objective analysis of the world's available eco-data shows virtually all of the First World environmental trends are virtuous. This creates a strong argument that affluence has moral potential after all, that the best thing we could do for the environment is to make the Third World more affluent.

Trade and the Biggest Agricultural Challenge in History

Trade helps countries become more affluent. A much-quoted study by Harvard's Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew Warner found that developing countries with open economies grew by 4.5 percent per year in the 1970s and 1980s, while those with closed economies grew a pitiful 0.7 percent per year. Nevertheless, in December 1999, activists took over the streets of Seattle to protest world trade. They claimed that "globalization" allowed big corporations to exploit Third World people. But there were no Third World people in the protests, just American labor union members, students, and a few veteran activists. The Seattle activists demanded, among other things, that everyone has the "right" to produce their own food. However, the world's good farmland is not well distributed to feed the eight billon affluent people projected to be living on earth by 2050. China, for example, has twenty percent of the world's population, but only seven percent of its arable land. Such densely populated tropical countries as Indonesia and Bangladesh and such arid countries as Egypt and Morocco will have difficulty providing high-quality diets in 2050 from their own farms.

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Meanwhile, in many countries where high-yield agriculture has been especially successful, farmers are able to produce more food than their consumers want. The marriage made in economic and environmental heaven is between the unmet demand for high-quality diets in densely populated Asian countries and the surplus food capacity of North America, South America, and Europe. Only a global market can make this marriage happen. Yet, while the World Trade Organization helped cut the average *nonfarm* tariff from forty percent to four percent since 1947, the average farm product tariff is still more than sixty percent. Agricultural trade has been stifled by more than $300 billon per year in rich-country farm subsidies that would be essentially unnecessary if we had free trade.

Certain "social justice" groups advocate blocking farm trade to save small family and traditional farms from corporate monopolies. But most of Europe's peasant farmers have already moved to the cities. The American family farm has just grown larger to match rising urban incomes. In their misguided zeal, the Luddites are actually blocking the changes in global farming patterns that are urgently needed to protect the very wildlife they claim to revere. Here lies the real problem. These activists have a vision of how the world should be, how society should be organized, and how wealth should be distributed. Their vision is not only often at odds with the goals they claim they are trying to accomplish, it is also in direct contravention of our responsibility to be good stewards of the earth and the caretakers of our fellow human beings. These activists seem to place their vision above God's direction about how we are to live our lives. Thus, in the end, these social justice groups have lapsed into idolatry, subverting the kingdom of God for their own vision of utopia.

In the Spirit of True Conservation

Last April, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., the world was offered a practical vision of how we could save room for the world's forests and wildlife in the more populous and more affluent world of the twenty-first century. Two Nobel Peace Prize winners, a co-founder of Greenpeace, the most recent winner of the World Food Prize, and the British author of the Gaia Hypothesis all signed a "Declaration in Support of Protecting Nature with High-Yield Farming and Forestry." This remarkably broad coalition is led by Dr. Norman Borlaug, Chairman Emeritus of our Center, and the 1970 winner of the Peace Prize for his work on high-yield crops for the Green Revolution in the 1960s. Borlaug asserts that the Green Revolution not only saved a billion people from starving, but also about 12 million square miles of wildlands from being plowed for low-yield food production.

The Declaration does not endorse any agricultural technology or system. It simply states that the world urgently needs higher yields based on sustainable advances in biology, ecology, chemistry, and technology. Nothing else humanity does for conservation in the twenty-first century will be nearly as important to wildland conservation as high-yield farms and forests, because nothing else would affect as much land. Nei-

ther recycling nor fuel cell cars will do much to save forests.

However, too many in the environmental movement are not as worried about conserving nature as they are about conserving it "in the right way." Too many activists demand that we achieve sustainability by massive numbers of forced abortions, or by "dumbing down" our society and shifting from our affluent suburban homes to high-rise apartments with sleeping porches instead of air conditioning. Again, as they subvert the sanctity of life and property rights for what they consider to be higher ideals, their idolatry becomes as apparent as a wart on the tip of a person's nose. It is simply immoral to achieve equality through imposed poverty. Nor is poverty likely to preserve the environment. It is more likely to restore high death rates, high birth rates, and the rape of the wildlands. Think about the barren aftermath of famine, with the wildlife eaten and the forests cleared for more low-yield crops. Those who serve the Lord Jesus Christ cannot morally accept such a conservation strategy, because we must seek the kingdom of God by loving our neighbor while also being good stewards of the earth's resources.

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The Faith-based Communities and True Conservation

America has always been the world leader in agricultural research, but U.S. agricultural research funding has dropped by about one-third since 1960, despite the rising costs of each research project. Private companies have suffered massive equity losses due to the anti-technology campaigns of Greenpeace and other eco-groups. The first and foremost task for those truly concerned about both ministering to people and stewarding nature should be to increase grassroots support to overcome the "organic mindset" that currently pervades the United States Congress and other governmental agencies. Currently, federal regulators are much more eager to cut our pesticide use another twenty-five percent than to raise crop yields anywhere, when in reality funding research and activity in areas related to high-yield farming techniques would better enrich lives and enhance conservation.

America needs to heed such organizations as the Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship (ICES), which is a coalition of like-minded individuals and organizations dedicated to demonstrating widespread support for traditional principles of stewardship. Formed in 1999, the ICES is in the process of developing a network of religious, academic, and community leaders who can offer sound theological, scientific, and economic perspectives on environmental issues, such as high-yield conservation, safe and sustainable field and forest yield gains, protection for forests and wildlife species, and the reduction of the terrible burdens of poverty and malnutrition worldwide. Soon, they will provide a credible alternative to liberal environmental advocacy for people in congregations, schools, government, and the religious and secular media. Over time, these types of organizations can help us ensure that sound theology, science, and economics, rather than soulless political ideologies, guide the principles of stewardship for people around the globe.

America also needs to look closely at agricultural biotechnology, but not through the lens of the deadly "precautionary principle," which would effectively bar all new technologies. Instead, we need to view agricultural biotechnology through the lens of high-yield conservation. The world is already using the high-powered seeds, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides that were produced during the first Green Revolution. We will need something extra to triple the farm yields again—and the only major new technology on the shelf is biotechnology.

Is it moral for the First World to reject our new understanding of DNA for agriculture, while we eagerly pursue the development of new biotech cures and drugs for ourselves? Is it moral for Europe to block the farm trade liberalization needed to protect tropical forests in densely-populated countries with rising incomes and diet aspirations? These questions can only be answered affirmatively if we forsake the kingdom of God in favor of pursuing an idolatrous vision of the environment. God has given us remarkable intelligence and societal skills to achieve his purposes, not our own. Now, we must respect the call to be good and faithful servants.

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Technology, Culture, and Christianity

Jordan J. Ballor

The commercial success of the *Matrix* franchise is emblematic of a pervasive cultural curiosity about the nature and future of the relationship between technology and humanity. In *The Matrix: Reloaded*, the savior-figure Neo has a conversation with Councillor Hamman, one of the leaders of the last human city Zion. Neo and Councillor Hamman travel to the engineering level of the city, where Hamman observes, "Almost no one comes down here, unless of course there's a problem. That's how it is with people. Nobody cares how it works, as long as it works …. I like it down here. I like to be reminded this city survives because of these machines."

Albert Borgmann, a professor of philosophy at the University of Montana, picks up on the heart of Hamman's observation, that the central characteristic of contemporary culture is its technological nature. As a Christian, Borgmann wonders about the future of the Gospel within such a technological culture. "Perhaps underneath the surface of technological liberty and prosperity there is a sense of captivity and deprivation, and we may hope that once we understand technology more incisively and clearly, there will be good news once again" (8). Borgmann contends that the industrial and post-industrial culture pervasive in the First World represent a unique threat to Christianity, and that "making room for Christianity is in fact the most promising response to technology" (8). This is the task to which Borgmann turns in the body of his book *Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology*.

Power Failure: Christianity in the Culture of Technology

by Albert Borgmann

Brazos Press
144 pp. Hardcover: $14.99

Borgmann is searching for the "heart of contemporary culture," which he finds to be technology, and he therefore seeks to articulate the "philosophy of technology" (14). Borgmann sees the pervasiveness of high technology in the advanced industrialized nations as their defining cultural characteristic. It is the invisibility and opacity of such technology, its clean integration into all aspects of life in the industrialized nation, that Borgmann takes special notice of, as "nearly everything that surrounds a citizen of such a society … rests on a sophisticated and unintelligible machinery" (16).

Borgmann critiques the technological culture contending that the culture of technology has aggravated and enhanced a malaise of the human spirit, or at least has effectively concealed the reality of such a failing. "In the Gospels, poverty is the manifestation of human frailty. In poverty it is apparent that humans cannot through a sheer act of the will, through an effort that would owe nothing to anyone, secure their welfare" (103).

The situation of the biblical poor stands in direct contrast to the situation of the biblical rich. The rich "are favored with food and physical health and seem to possess and control the conditions of their wholeness" (103). Their apparent "self-sufficient security secludes them from real life, which is celebrated in gratitude and sharing, in the gladly accepted dependence on others, and in the willingness to have others take part in one's gifts" (103). It is because of this situation that "it is difficult for the rich to be saved. They must, against their wealth, recognize their fundamental frailty and so become poor" (103).

The reality of human frailty that biblical poverty signifies is no less present in the modern technological culture, but its signification has become less clear and more fragmented. The great success of technological innovation is that "poverty as material deprivation and physical suffering is no longer a frequent human condition" in technologically advanced countries (103). It is this situation that Borgmann calls "advanced poverty," the "concealed" spiritual poverty of the technological nations.

"Technology is the systematic eradication of profound poverty, and it is just that success that gives rise to advanced poverty. It is the accomplishment of unquestionable comfort and security that has all but paralyzed our capacity to help and to be helped and so to have part in the fullness of life" (106). This poverty is related to the situation of the biblical

rich, as "advanced poverty, one might say, is a radically aggravated and universalized form of the condition of the rich of which the Bible speaks" (106).

Is the way then to make room for the Gospel to be found among the contemporary poor? Borgmann answers that it is not, because "the misery of the developing countries has lost its biblical profoundness too" (104). Because of the state of the technological countries, "global misery is no longer an essential sign of human frailty but a scandal, a cruel and unnecessary misfortune since the elimination of that misery is clearly possible, not only conceptually but in fact" (104). Because the elimination of poverty is technologically possible, "global poverty has attained, necessarily, I believe, a bitterness and brutality that make such poverty a difficult and contradictory setting for the promise of salvation" (104). This is in direct contrast to the theological approach, for example, of liberation theologians, who find direct parallels between what Borgmann calls biblical poverty and modern brute poverty.

The answer is not to decry all technological advances, therefore, and to pine for a pristine state of biblical premodern affairs. Technology that has a direct impact on alleviating human suffering should be celebrated and affirmed, although not necessarily unconditionally. "Surely God does not want us to court and suffer preventable harms. Our morally crucial circumstances are the exact mirror image of those that made for martyrs. Where theirs were overt, ours are concealed; where theirs were mortal to their bodies, ours are lethal to the soul; and where theirs tore them out of their normal life, ours channel our lives within the unquestioned banks of the technological culture" (114). The reform of the technological culture must therefore come in our everyday lives and the seemingly mundane choices we make daily.

Borgmann effectively uses an illustration of a person coming home from a long day's work, "frazzled and spent" (114). The rest of the evening is spent engaging in a variety of technological distractions, from television, to e-mail, to video games. A scant few words are exchanged between family members as everyone eats at different times, engages in different diversions, and heads off to bed to prepare for a repetition of the same process the next day. Borgmann asks incisively, "has this been an un-Christian evening?" (114). He concludes that although no sins of commission have occurred, such an evening is rife with sins of omission. He concludes that "a life without grace or gratitude is un-Christian, not in this failing or that, but from the ground up. It has become incapable of redemption. This is not an all-or-nothing affair, of course. But the rising specter of irredeemability is stalking all of us" (115).

The positive and Christian course of action would be to engage the world of "focal things," for all around us is "the world of personal engagements and engaging things …." (115). Borgmann notes the possibilities for real personal engagement and fellowship are endless and critical to our well-being. "The things I have in mind are good books, musical instruments, athletic equipment, works of art, and treasures of nature. The practices I am thinking of are those of dining, running, fishing, gardening, playing instruments, and reciting poetry" (124). Such are the activities and things that contribute to the health and prosperity of the vital human person.

Borgmann does not take an uninterrupted path to this point, however. At the beginning he tends to emphasize the negative aspects of technology rather than also seeing human innovation as a good manifestation of the cultural blessing in Genesis 1:26. This can give the impression that Borgmann is working from some sort of romanticist, neo-Luddite conception of technology. In the end, this is not really the case at all, but his largely negative view of technology results from the nature of this book. It is a reactionary critique against the prevailing cultural mores, and it is difficult to write such a critique, constructive though it may be, without erring at some point on the opposite extreme.

Some of his conclusions, too, are highly problematic. For example, a community that embodies such emphasis on focal things and practices is called a community of celebration. Borgmann finds that "without public support, genuine communities of celebration will be impossible, and to secure such support appropriately is the task of communal politics" (58). Borgmann is all too ready to place the task of reforming technological culture within the purview of governmental legislation and oversight. This statement is representative of Borgmann's general tendency to trust in a pervasively tolerant, politically correct notion of popular religious engagement.

Nevertheless, Borgmann's analysis of the culture of technology is helpful insofar as it seeks neither to "demolish technology nor run away from it" (8). Instead, he attempts to displace the worship of technology from its idolatrous throne in industrial and post-industrial nations. Borgmann raises issues that often are not explicitly dealt with in contemporary public discourse, but tend to remain unexpressed and unarticulated by many Christians. Technology is not an unmixed blessing nor is it completely evil. Relegating the use of technology within its proper sphere and keeping technology from dominating every aspect of our lives is the right path to "restrain it and redeem it" (8).

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The Market, the Needy, and the Argument

Megan Maloney

Wealth, Poverty, & Human Destiny is a joint project—by the John Templeton Foundation and the Intercollegiate Studies Institute—whose stated purpose is to investigate "whether and to what extent the market economy helps the poor." The book's co-editors, Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute and David Schindler of the John Paul II Institute in Washington, D.C., were given the task of gathering together an array of scholars who would offer their reflections on this question in the light of Christian faith. The result is a collection of essays by over a dozen scholars whose judgments on the free market reflect, quite naturally, the divergent perspectives of the editors. Bandow's contributors include Samuel Gregg, Daniel Griswold, Peter Hill, Jennifer Roback Morse, Michael Novak, John Neuhaus, Max Stackhouse and Lawrence Stratton, while Schindler's team consists of Wendell Berry, William Cavanaugh, David Crawford, V. Bradley Lewis, D. Stephen Long, and Adrian Walker.

Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny

Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler, editors

ISI Books 2003
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With the exception of the two editors' response essays, the contributors are not explicitly engaged in dialogue with one another, though their different perspectives naturally lead them to critical engagement with the judgments and values that the "other side" represents. The arrangement of the essays—alternating between Bandow's and Schindler's contributors—makes for a curious reading experience if one simply follows the order of presentation. Bandow's essayists tend to be more engaged with the actual question of how free markets affect the poor, since they generally regard the liberal economic order to be worthy of human nature and dignity, even as they acknowledge that it will ever reflect our sinfulness and the fact that God has truly given us the freedom to love or reject him and his loving designs. Schindler's essayists, on the other hand, tend to be more concerned with making the case that liberalism, liberal economics, and/or capitalism are themselves fundamentally disordered. In their judgment, liberalism does not accord, in theory or in practice, with the loving, self-giving *communio* of the Trinity that is the truest representation of our nature and destiny, whether we think of this in explicitly Christian terms, or see it in the natural ordination of all persons to love.

As a broad generalization, then, one might say that for the Bandow group, the first chapters of Genesis, the American sensibility to the Creator's gift of liberty, and the necessarily *evangelical* task of the Church are more prominent realities than they are for the Schindler group. God clearly commanded Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but he just as clearly made it possible—both in the created structure of Adam's being and in the created structure of Adam's environment—for Adam to choose to do otherwise. Adam was free to act in a way that was, in certain respects, at odds with the goodness of the structures God had created, even as his power of choice depended on the freedom that is part of those structures' intrinsic goodness.

The evangelical task of the Church is to introduce Adam, with his natural endowment of liberty (and his susceptibility to the father of lies) to the New Adam, who alone can offer him the glorious freedom of the children of God, and who alone gives him "the perfect law of liberty," to "hear" and to "do" and to "gaze into," as into an honest mirror (James 1: 25).

For Schindler *et al.*, on the other hand, a *communio* model of personhood is more to the fore. Our origin, our destiny, and the structure of our everyday reality, are all formed from within by the reality of loving, self-giving relationality and other-centered *communio*. If Genesis and the dominical command are the lodestars of a Christian classical liberalism, the Trinity and the self-giving of Jesus in the Paschal mystery are key to the *communio* vision.

Accordingly, a number of these authors propose rethinking economic exchange in terms of "gift," a concept that has received increasing attention of late from a number of scholars across a variety of disciplines, both secular and religious.

As Schindler and several of his contributors see it, the liberal notion of exchange grounded in mutual self-interest needs to be replaced with "gift and gratitude," which is the more fundamental form of exchange in God's creation. This is manifested in our very existence: we are beings who first receive the gift of ourselves from our Creator, hence our selves "always already" have a "prior centeredness in the other."

As he has argued extensively over the years, Schindler continues to argue that "liberalism" bears within itself a notion of the person that is at odds with both Christianity and reality: liberalism presumes an autonomous, self-centered self, abstracted from its constitutive relations with others, such that human relationality is construed in an extrinsic manner, something "added on" to a being who already exists as an autonomous, self-centered individual.

Much of this will be familiar to those who have followed the ongoing debates between Schindler, Novak, and Neuhaus. Familiar, as well, will be the usual charges leveled against capitalism, though readers may be surprised to encounter the assertion, in 2003, that "Christianity must continue to be open to socialism in a way that it cannot be open toward capitalism …." Some will find in *Wealth, Poverty & Human Destiny* ample confirmation of Neuhaus's conviction that "we are contending for the soul of the liberal tradition." That we must thus contend not only with liberals, but with conservative Christian anti-liberals, is one of the lessons of this book. Neuhaus's essay on "The Liberalism of John Paul II" is a highly recommended, inspirational gem in this regard.

This unusual collection of essays also suggests further lines of thought that might be profitably pursued (if one may be forgiven the desire for profit—several contributors apparently regard it as a species of sin!). The advocacy of "gift exchange" and the "gift and gratitude" paradigm by a number of contributors, combined with the salience of "the gift" in contemporary philosophy, ethics, and social theory, calls for examination. "Gift and gratitude" sound more noble and innocent than "mutual self interest," but is the matter so simple?

First, as Marcel Mauss's classical anthropological study of eighty years ago amply documents (*Essai sur le don*), real gifts and gift exchange are not as innocent and unproblematic as they may seem in the abstract. A gift economy can very readily incorporate status-seeking, competition, a utilitarian calculus, and the assertion of power or control over another—the same old human sins that crop up in the so-called "liberal form of exchange."

Secondly, Jacques Derrida's handling of "the gift" shows how the ontological reality of the Creator's gift to each of us—the gift of our own being—is far from unproblematic for the person who is ambivalent about entering into the relationship that "gratitude" requires. On one level, every person must receive the gift of himself because it is a "given" about which we, as creatures, have no choice. On this level, Schindler's ontology and anthropology are correct. But on another level, God has indeed also given us the possibility of receiving the gift of ourselves to some degree without receiving it *as* a gift, as *his gift* to us. As a giver, God does not compel us to see the gift character of all that he gives us as a requirement of our ability to receive it. We might say that God manifests, in this regard, his liberality. But God's liberality and Derrida's reluctant ambivalence before the relationship implied in receiving, *as God's gift*, what is "given," bring us back to Adam's moment of freedom and choice. Even though the very law "written in our hearts" directs us naturally to turn to our Creator in gratitude, this remains a personal and free act. Again we are faced with the task of evangelization and the necessity of grace, even within an ontology of being as "gift." Grace, in fact, is "gift" *par excellence*, the "gift of gifts" that allows us to receive all God's gifts with gratitude.

One disappointment—given the book's purpose—is that none of the authors who develop this idea that "the liberal form of exchange" must be supplanted by the *communio* form of exchange delve much into the problem of poverty. Where they do mention poverty, it is generally not the sort of poverty that plagues poor people like Lazarus, or my neighbors in the 'hood.' They speak, rather, of "the poverty of liberal economics," or "poverty of spirit." The goal is to become poor in spirit so we can understand wealth and poverty anew, in the light of Christ, rather than in the darkness of the liberal economic paradigm.

But do these thinkers understand that when they disparage self-love, and require that "the 'Smithian' desire for profit be recognized always and everywhere as a vice indicating a need for conversion," they are attacking two important keys to the healthy development of impoverished inner city residents and their neighborhoods? Proper self-love and locally-owned, *profitable*, licit businesses are utterly essential to urban renewal. And the two are interrelated. The contributors to this volume who emphasize the "gift" economy seem not to understand that the urban underclass in America has a profound need to exercise the God-given gifts of *dominion* and *self-determination* that John Paul II has written about so eloquently. On this point, evangelical urban pastors and classical liberal Christians will be in earnest agreement with the pope from Communist Poland.

One comes away from *Wealth, Poverty, & Human Destiny* with the impression that some of its contributors are so opposed to capitalism and profit-seeking that they would not

recognize something like the Reverend Leon Sullivan's Self-Help Investment Program as a gift from God. SHIP is a faith-based community investment program that has enabled poor urban communities to build up a pool of shared capital and invest it profitably in the economic redevelopment of their own neighborhoods. It is the sort of innovative, faith-based free market initiative that one would have expected to hear about in a book written by Christian scholars examining "whether and to what extent the free market helps the poor."

This lacuna is, in my judgment, the book's greatest weakness, given its stated purpose. Free markets surely help the poor, but free markets combined with Christian faith in action help the poor in a special way, combining the gifts of liberalism and capitalism with the undeniably precious gifts of Christian *communio*. Some readers will not feel this lack, but for those who do, it is bound to leave Jesus' words to the woman at the well rising up in their spirits: "*If you knew the gift of God!*"

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Book News

The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000

Edited by Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf
Cambridge University Press, 2003
244 pp. Hardcover: $60.00

In the early fourth century, Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. Constantine therefore effectively linked the religious and political spheres of society within the borders of the Empire. The result of this link was the religious and social order called Christendom. Christendom has lasted for over a thousand years in western Europe, but for over two centuries this social and religious order has been in decline. Enforced religious unity has given way to increasing pluralism. Since 1960, this process became greatly accelerated. The question is why. In *Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000*, a compilation of various essays, historians, sociologists, and theologians all try to answer this question. These contributing scholars include Callum G. Brown, Jeffrey Cox, Sheridan Gilley, Martin Greschat, Eva M. Hamberg, David Hempton, Lucian Holscher, Thomas Kselman, Michel Lagree, Yves Lambert, and Peter Van Rooden. They also address what the religious condition is in Europe now that Christendom is fading. After offering an overview of the current situation, these authors go back into the past, tracing the course of events in England, Ireland, France, Germany, and the Netherlands. They observe that changing attitudes toward death and technology and the evolution of religious language are sealing Christendom's fate. Their analysis offers a complex and ambiguous pattern that is more ambitious than many projects of this sort.

Business, Religion, and Spirituality: A New Synthesis

Edited by Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C.
University of Notre Dame Press, 2003
312 pp. Paperback: $25.00

This compilation is the result of a project by the Center for Ethics and Religious Values in Business to understand how religious faith and values practiced in the workplace affect the quality of important business decisions. According to a 1999 cover story in *Business Week*, Corporate America has been engulfed by a spiritual revival. The word "spiritual" is chosen carefully. This renewed interest in spirituality indicates that a large proportion of business people want to find ultimate purpose in their lives and work and then live accordingly. Historically, spirituality has been rooted in religion, but now the emphasis is on a spirituality disassociated from religion. All the contributors to this volume are, generally speaking, proponents of spirituality in the workplace. But they have some questions. They wrestle with whether spirituality can be disassociated from religion, what spirituality looks like when it is disassociated from religion, how this spirituality functions in the workplace, and what the role of Christianity and other religions is in this setting. These contributors, all of whom are accomplished scholars, clerics, professionals, or business executives, are Jamal A. Badawi, John Caron, Gerald F. Cavanagh, S.J., Lawrence S. Cunnignham, Andre L. Delbecq, Krishna S. Dhir, Edwin M. Epstein, John A. Gallagher, Peter J. Giammalvo, Mary Kathryn Grant, Robert G. Kennedy, Martin E. Marty, John McCall, Bowen H. McCoy, Claudia McGeary, James J. McGee, Ian I. Mitroff, Laura L. Nash, Stephen J. Porth, John T. Ryan III, David S. Steingard, and Patricia Vandenberg, C.S.C.

New Attitudes Toward an Old Problem

Rev. Robert A. Sirico

Many of us have a maligned understanding of how to be compassionate to those in poverty. Currently, a debilitating welfare culture exists within nations that have adopted to some degree the welfare state model. Many of us have grown accustomed to viewing poverty and compassion narrowly. Eventually, we must face not just minor reform, but the overturning of the old paradigm. Those working in the private sector, to whom the new welfare responsibilities will fall, must begin to adopt the following three perspectives.

First, we can no longer believe that simply writing a check satisfies the call of compassion. The poor are asking for much more than our money. We must begin to make the more difficult sacrifices of our time, energy, and talents. We must go to the poor where they live and enter into their poverty in order to help them rise above it. In our efforts to help those suffering the effects of poverty, dollars may be the least important consideration.

Another attitude that must change is our tendency to believe that as individuals we cannot make a meaningful contribution. When faced with a homeless person, the temptation is to think "What could I, with my limited experience and resources, do?" We therefore turn to simply giving money. We need to rethink this response and consider other ways we can contribute; perhaps volunteering at a private shelter, or maybe starting a shelter where there is none, or even having a conversation with a homeless person, as a person, and ask them what they truly need. This is the more radical approach because it requires that we listen to the poor and allow them to become part of the solution—not just the target of our pity.

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A third attitude we must adopt is to stop viewing the poor as incapable. One of the most egregious faults of current government programs is the hidden assumption that the poor will always remain poor. While admitting that some people suffer from more than the effects of poverty, which prevent them from becoming productive members of society, many of those receiving government assistance can contribute to the elevation of their standard of living. The poor themselves have to be a part of the solution to their own problems. Requiring some level of participation and responsibility on the part of individuals will offer the opportunity for more than dollars or a job, it will offer the opportunity for self-esteem.

This is the beauty of the principle of subsidiarity: it advises us to start one person at a time, one family at a time, dealing with whoever is nearest to us. The poor will be restored to wholeness only through transforming lives and families, not by temporarily alleviating their material poverty through handouts from impersonal government programs.

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The surest way to lose democracy is to take it for granted. Every citizen must contribute to its advancement in some way. No nation or culture can long survive the absence of transcendent values and absolutes.

—Carl F. H. Henry—