

RELIGION & LIBERTY

July and August • 2004

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

Volume 14 • Number 4

An Orthodox Look at Liberty and Economics in Russia



One of the abiding criticisms of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, at least as it is perceived in the West, is its relative lack of worldly dynamism, or interest in social reform, compared to Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The Orthodox are viewed by some as an insular and ethnically fragmented body of believers, detached from the affairs of this world and absorbed by their rich liturgical traditions and ascetic practices. This is, of course, grossly untrue. As theologian Savvas Agourides observed more

than 40 years ago: “In the last analysis, the ‘truth’ or ‘Orthodox tradition’ of the eastern Church is life; it is the realization of the life of Christ, not only within us but among us.”

*In this interview, **Nikolas Gvosdev** discusses the renewed interest in business ethics by the Russian Orthodox Church and the mounting criticism in the West of Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose policies are viewed as increasingly undemocratic. Yet, many Russians, after a decade of dislocating and damaging reforms, are looking to Putin for stability and an orderly reconstruction of the state and society. Gvosdev is editor of *In the National Interest* and a senior fellow for strategic studies at The Nixon Center.*

R & L: *In your writings on economics, you say that Orthodox Christian values, while not supporting an unfettered laissez-faire capitalism, do in fact support a socially-responsible, free-market system. How widespread are these views in Russia?*

Gvosdev: A good reference point for this is the Jubilee Bishops' Council, which was held in August 2000. At this conference, the Russian Orthodox Church adopted an authoritative

document, the “Bases of the Social Concept,” that sets forth the official church position on a variety of social questions. In the section dealing with economic issues, the document notes: “Those who work have the right to use the fruits of their labor ... At the same time, in accordance with God’s commandment those who labor are ordered to take care of those who for various reasons cannot earn their living, such as the weak, the sick, strangers (refugees), orphans, and widows—and to share with them the fruits of work.”

The Church maintains that all individual freedoms—both political and economic—are balanced by social responsibilities. This is a view that increasingly is being adopted by the Russian business community as well. When

he spoke at the Carnegie Endowment in the spring of this year, Viktor Vekselberg, chairman of the board of Siberian-Urals Aluminum, discussed some of the ways that Russian business is responding to the call for increased social responsibility—from full payment of taxes to active sponsorship of charitable and educational programs. Indeed, most Russian companies now have active philanthropic programs.

R & L: *The “Social Concept” adopted by the bishops also*

INSIDE THIS ISSUE 🌿 **Article:** “The Tithe: Land Rent to God” by John Kelly 🌿 **Review Essays:** “Weaver’s Southern Christendom” by Robert C. Cheeks and “Freedom Undone in the Courts” by Stephen J. Wolma 🌿 **In the Liberal Tradition:** Ferdinando Galiani 🌿 **Column:** “Boycotts Do Not Help the Poor” by the Rev. Robert A. Sirico 🌿 **Plus Book News.**

The Church maintains that all individual freedoms—both political and economic—are balanced by social responsibilities. This is a view that increasingly is being adopted by the Russian business community as well.

affirmed the legitimacy of private property?

Gvosdev: That's correct. The relevant parts are found in section seven: "The Church urges Christians to see in property God's gift given to be used for their own and their neighbors' benefit At the same time, Holy Scripture recognizes the human right to property and deplores any encroachment on it The Church recognizes the existence of various forms of ownership. Public, corporate, private, and mixed forms of property have taken different roots in the course of historical development in various countries. The Church does not give preference to any of these forms."

This is significant because, first and foremost, there has always been a certain romanticism in Russian thought, especially during the nineteenth century, about the superiority of

communal property over private ownership. During the 1990s, the "hard left"—including the Communists—tried to link the rejection of private property both with Christianity and with Russian nationalism. Gennady Zyuganov, who was the Communist candidate for the presidency in 1996, used the slogan "Jesus Christ was the first

Communist" in his efforts to win votes from religious believers. So it was important for the Church to reiterate that the concept of private property did not contradict Orthodox values. It is also important to keep in mind the Soviet legacy. Whatever one thinks of the way in which Anatoly Chubais handled privatization, one cannot escape the dilemma he faced. At that time, he said: "We had to make hundreds of thousands of people do something they had never done before. We had to fundamentally change their attitude to property."

R&L: *The Bishops' Council also affirmed the growing importance of intellectual property rights and deplored copyright violations. Has the Church's stand on IP issues had any effect on government policy?*

Gvosdev: The state hasn't adopted any policy just because the Church has made a declaration. But what is important is the message that it sends to Russian society. In Russia, as in other parts of eastern Europe, there is a steady trade in bootleg cassettes, compact disks and software. The Church's statement is a reminder that counterfeiting copyrighted material is stealing. It attacks a very prevalent attitude that theft is only wrong when one steals tangible items from a neighbor, and that stealing from a company or the state isn't wrong "because no one gets hurt."

R&L: *Russian President Vladimir Putin got Church backing earlier this year for his push to encourage private pensions funds, and for his anti-corruption drive. In what way was this support helpful?*

Gvosdev: The Church does not have a political constituency or a bloc of voters. But the Russian Orthodox Church is seen as the conveyor of national values, morals, and culture, in short, one of the yardsticks for assessing what is authentically Russian. Most citizens of the Russian Federation—approximately 70 percent—identify themselves as Orthodox. So for many Russians, believers and non-believers alike, the Russian Orthodox Church remains the final arbiter as to whether something can be considered "Russian" or whether it is "alien."



RELIGION & LIBERTY

A publication of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty
Volume 14 • Number 4

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

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R&L: A council sponsored by the Russian Orthodox Church published a “Ten Commandments for Businessmen” earlier this year, with the blessing of Patriarch Alexiy II and participation of business people. What, if any, discernable impact has the statement made on Russian life?

Gvosdev: It’s too early to say at this point. As with many other statements, the “Ten Commandments” reflect ideals

rather than reality.

But one of the wealthiest businessmen in Russia, Igor Naivalt, owner of Russia’s largest construction firm (the Baltic Construction Company), is renowned for donating a tithe on his profits to the Orthodox Church. There is also a growing entrepreneurial class that takes very seriously its responsibility for improving the welfare of society through active sponsorship of cultural and philanthropic projects. This

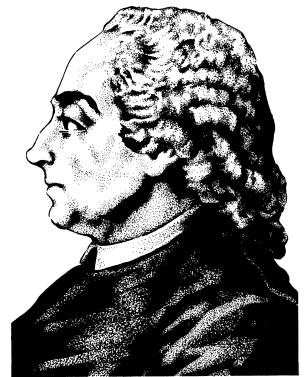
Ferdinando Galiani (1728–1787)

“Where there is no value, there is no freedom.”

Born in Chieti, Italy, Ferdinando Galiani was raised in Naples. Galiani was the nephew of the famous archbishop Coelestino Galiani. The archbishop made sure his nephew received a top quality education. The intention was for Galiani to serve the church as a member of the clergy someday. However, Galiani showed early promise as an economist who would fit into the academic elite of that time. He was an instrumental figure in the “Neapolitan Enlightenment” and one of the initiators of the Italian utilitarian tradition. Even so, he did not stray from the fundamental principles of truth and justice that his uncle had engrained into his mind as a youth. Galiani’s theoretical brilliance as an economist was always tempered by his understanding of the natural law and how natural-law principles affected economic philosophy.

Ferdinando Galiani wrote his masterwork, *Della Moneta*, when he was twenty-two-years-old and published it anonymously in 1751. While the ostensible subject of the piece is money and the monetary system, Galiani clearly sets forth the revolutionary notion of the importance of freedom to the well-being of any society that was being advanced by many of his contemporary thinkers, not the least of which being Voltaire. In this piece, Galiani reveals deep insights into the nature of man and his motivations for action. Galiani develops a profound subjective value theory on strong philosophical and psychological grounds that are rooted in the argument of personal freedom. Galiani considered the value of any thing in the world to be something that human beings determine for themselves naturally, through their own mutual agreement. No law or government should try to impose its estimations of value on others, because this coercion would introduce incorrect determinations of value that would eventually ruin and corrupt the natural order of things. The only way to establish the true value of the things was a completely free market in which neither prices nor wages were ever fixed by third-parties to the transactions in the market place.

The moral principle at stake for Galiani had to do with freedom. Imposing third party assessments of value on the market would inevitably limit the freedom to choose. This would result in some people receiving things they had not really earned and in other people having to part with what they had legitimately earned. Galiani was adamant that any form of control on the market aside from mutual agreement works a profound injustice on everyone living in a society and, therefore, is nothing short of tyranny. Only in maintaining individual liberty did Galiani see the possibility that justice will be promoted through an economic system.



Illustrated by Vincent Harriger

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is especially evident in a number of regions where government, business, and charitable groups meet together in what are termed “social chambers” to enhance cooperation. Even international charitable NGOs note an increasing “indigenouslyization” of charitable giving. Some 70 percent of the budget for Charities Aid Foundation’s Russia projects now comes from Russian donors.

R&L: *Is the Church in any position to offer this kind of guidance? Alexander Yakovlev, a former adviser to Mikhail Gorbachev, estimates that during the 70-year reign of Communism more than 200,000 Christian clergy were murdered, in many cases after beastly torturing. What effect has that had on the Church’s institutional ability to participate in the social and political life of Russia?*

Gvosdev: This is a great tragedy. Historian Dimitry Pospelovsky refers to the losses suffered by the Orthodox Church during the 20th century, particularly during the holocaust of Stalin’s tyranny during the 1930s, as the “eradication of the best.” Not only did Soviet persecution deprive the Church of many of its best minds and most effective thinkers and leaders, but the regime tried to reduce religion to the celebration of rituals, to deprive the Church of any meaningful social role. It really has been only fifteen years since the Orthodox Church was first given the opportunity to engage in philanthropy, to engage society via the airwaves, to begin to take its mission beyond the four walls of the church building.

And the rapid expansion of the Church during the 1990s has meant that many of its clergy and lay leaders are insufficiently trained. Indeed, many ordinary Russians still do not have a strong grounding in Orthodox beliefs and certainly not its social ethos. Russian society was profoundly secularized by the Soviet regime. Even today, while up to 70 percent of Russians describe themselves as “Orthodox,” only about six percent attend church services on a regular basis.

R&L: *One of the Ten Commandments for business people holds that “Wealth is not an end in itself. It must serve for the creation of a good life for any individual and the na-*

tion.” This is a characteristic expression of Orthodox thought on stewardship, is it not?

Gvosdev: It is taken directly from the patristic traditions of early Orthodoxy. In this view, it was not the acquisition of wealth that was taken as a sign of divine

favor, but what a person did with this wealth. *The Izmaragd*, a medieval Russian compendium of patristic sayings, advised, “Fortune is not born with you, but is entrusted to you by God for a few days. Therefore, distribute as a steward what is entrusted to you anywhere the entruster orders.” And St. Basil, in his famous advice to Amphilochius, notes that “The good man ... neither turns his heart to wealth when he has it, nor seeks after it if he has not. He treats what is given him not for his selfish enjoyment but for wise administration.”

R&L: *Another commandment asserts that “the political authority and the economic authority must be separated.” What is the background for the Church’s statement here?*

Gvosdev: Here, one sees the influence of current developments rather than a return to historical traditions. After all, in Russia’s medieval commercial republics—city-states akin to Italy’s Genoa or Florence—wealthy merchants and artisans were often entrusted with political leadership.

So this statement reflects the Church’s endorsement of the “bargain” offered by President Vladimir Putin to the heads of Russia’s major financial-industrial groups, the so-called “oligarchs”—to retain the opportunity to amass large fortunes in Russia, but not to use that wealth to purchase political immunity or to control the course of Russia’s economic development.

R&L: *Have Church leaders taken any position on the trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev, the Yukos oil chiefs? Is it possible to generalize, in a larger sense, about the Church’s view of the oligarchs who did very well for themselves in the sell-off of state enterprises?*

Gvosdev: The Church walks a fine line because the oligarchs and the financial-industrial groups that they control have been and continue to be major donors to the educational and philanthropic work of the Church. Some of the oligarchs—such as Sergei Pugachev or even Boris Berezovsky—are baptized Orthodox Christians. A stable middle class has not yet coalesced to become the prime supporter of religious activity, and so, as with other parts of civil society—political parties,

newspapers and media outlets, and charitable organizations—the Church continues to depend on the wealthy few for support. The Church has made the point that the concentration of wealth itself is a neutral condition, as it “can produce both sinful phenomena, such as theft, money-grubbing, unfair distribution of wealth, and the proper and morally justified use of wealth.”

R&L: *This brings us back to the question of privatization. Did the privatization of industrial assets and natural resources, admittedly badly managed, sour many people on market economics? What will it take to change that perception?*

Gvosdev: In theory, privatization should have worked to create a vast stake-holding class. For a short moment in the mid-1990s, more Russians held securities than Americans. The problem was that the reformers grouped around President Boris Yeltsin bought into the theory of creative destruction—raze the old system to the ground, unleash the market, and everything will shake itself out. Not a lot of attention was paid to preparing the soil—not only in creating viable regulatory and legal institutions that police a free-market but also in the enormous cultural change produced by the reforms.

R&L: *In May, Putin said Russia could double its GDP by 2010 and noted that only strong economic growth could provide the means to solve social problems. Has he become a free-marketer?*

Gvosdev: Putin is a pragmatist. He has embraced free-market measures—among them the flat tax, reducing the size of the bureaucracy, simplifying regulations—because they produce results, not out of any ideological predilection for such things.

R&L: *There is a growing sense in the West, among policy analysts and the media at least, that Putin is pushing for economic liberalization but not political reform. Is this your perception? And how far can economic prosperity advance without democratic reform?*

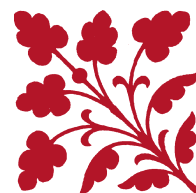
Gvosdev: Putin wants a regime that, while ensuring political stability, will promote economic growth. Yet the Putin team grapples with a paradox. While recognizing the immense value created by a pluralistic, competitive society, it fears that unrestrained pluralism—especially in the absence of strong mediating institutions—will be destructive for Russia.

What emerges is what I have termed “managed pluralism.” In such a system, there is some room for competition and choice but the central authority consciously regulates the available social, political, and economic options by design, with an eye to preserving stability or consensus. It is not accidental that Putin’s advisors have paid close attention to the East Asian model for economic and political transition.

R&L: *In the west, liberal democracy has developed in some places to an extreme of individualism. In the economic sphere, that can mean greed and selfishness. Is there any sense among Church leaders and the Russian populace that the Western model doesn’t fit them?*

Gvosdev: Metropolitan Kirill said as much a couple years ago in an address to the European Council of Religious Leaders in Oslo. He noted that Western institutions are “based on the so-called liberal principle, which proclaims individual freedoms as the highest value. The structure of society as a whole is arranged in a way to ensure the maximum possible realization of the individual rights and freedoms.” In contrast, Eastern Christian civilization, he observed, “has other characteristic features, such as the indisputable priority of the spiritual over the material, of self-denial and self-restriction over the aspiration for earthly success, of common interests over private ones, of the faithfulness to the truth and ideals over worldly benefits and earthly wellbeing.”

What the Church finds lacking in the Western model is the absence of any effective check on individual liberty if the use of that freedom leads to ends that are destructive for society. In traditional Orthodox thought, the individual conscience is supposed to be a person’s “autocratic master,” to use a Russian medieval saying—but historically the Church has accepted what we might term the Constantinian bargain—the opportunity to use the power of the state to improve the human condition. Patriarch Alexiy himself has observed, “The state has limited functions. It can protect that which is good. It can repulse evil. But only man himself, through his personal effort, can directly cultivate goodness.” Yet the temptation is always there to use the state as a shortcut.



The Tithe: Land Rent to God

by John Kelly

In the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus, God, speaking of the land he promised to the Israelites, announced a principle, which became the central economic statement of the Old Testament. The “milk and honey” that characterized descriptions of the land’s potential flowed from it. It reads:

Land will not be sold absolutely,
For the land belongs to ME,
And you are only strangers and guests of mine.
—Leviticus 25:23

This quote is the basis for a comprehensive set of macro-economic laws that set up the new nation of Israel. While these laws were being observed—which was for a much longer time than is generally acknowledged—ancient Israel was very successful and enjoyed great prosperity, freedom, and justice. Now God was not directly rewarding the Israelites for observing his economic Law. On the contrary, his economic Law was really that good—it really worked. It harmonized with both human nature and the nature of creation. It was good enough that it did not need God’s special intervention. It very naturally brought about economic success.

Before delving into this topic, some general caveats are required. The arguments herein are drawn from inferences made from Scripture and other sources that address the conditions that were present in ancient Israel. With that said, there is still very little source material regarding Israel’s tithe. So the hypotheses presented in this paper probably require further testing. The ultimate truth has not been found, only a reasonable theory.

The Law that the Lord gave to the Israelites involved much more than economics. The entire Law was designed to allow the Israelites to become the beneficiaries of a most excellent life. Clearly, the most extensive portion of the Law set out the rules governing the Israelites in their worship of Yahweh. Yet, economic rules and economic wisdom are also present. This “economic Law” and the references to it within the historical and prophetic books are the primary sources for the opinions presented here.

The tithe was one of the most critical facets of the economic Law. Even though it had this importance, it is very

much misunderstood today. To put it into proper context, a brief examination of the major features of Old Testament economic Law is necessary.

Land was very important in the promises that God made to the Israelites through Moses. People have always had a natural-law intuition that securely holding land can guarantee them personal freedom. The landless Israelites, standing at the edge of the Jordan, were no exception. Chapters thirty-three through thirty-five of Numbers detail how this land possession was to be organized. To each of the tribes, except Levi, a certain portion of the land was given, based on the land’s productivity and the tribe’s population. Then, in a similar manner, each of the tribes allotted its territory to its constituent clans, and then each clan did likewise to each of its families.

The family was free to use the land they now legally possessed, but they could not sell it or borrow money against it. They did not own the land; it belonged to God. Further, they were constrained by the other rules contained in the Land Law, the rules concerning the Sabbath day, the Sabbatical year, and the Jubilee. The Sabbath day was dedicated to God (Lev. 23:3). The Israelites were not to pursue occupational work on that day.

Every seventh year was called the Sabbatical year (Lev. 25:2–7). During this year, the land was to enjoy a Sabbath. It was not to be worked. The farmer and his family probably worked very hard during the Sabbatical year, fixing fences, improving irrigation ditches, patching roofs and making tools. The Sabbatical was not a year off for the farmer; it was a year off for the land. Also in that year, the Law said that all debts were cancelled and all slaves were freed (Deut 15:1). As a result of this seven-year maximum term, debt and slavery could not become important facets of the economy.

After seven Sabbaticals had passed, that is, after forty-nine years, the Jubilee was declared (Lev. 25:8–17). This observance was probably the most important economic moment for the Israelites. For good reason, it was called the “year of favor from the Lord.” During the year of Jubilee, each parcel of land was returned to its original possessor family free and clear of any debt or other obligation. If the

land had been leased out, the lease could not have a term beyond the Jubilee year. Once again, God owned the land. He chose to make each of the families of his chosen people equal inheritors of his bounty. The Jubilee kept his system intact by not allowing land to become concentrated in the hands of a few—his people could not be alienated from his land.

Based on this system, ancient Israel, one of the advanced countries of the day, probably had the characteristics of what we today would call a middle class nation. While it followed the Law, the nation's wealth was not concentrated; it was spread out among all the people. It was found in people's homes and barns, livestock and crops, carpets and clothing, and not in fabulous palaces and temples (as it was in many neighboring nations), at least not until the reign of Solomon. The Law created a country free of coercion from a landlord class. Realistically, there could be no landlord class, nor could there be a large class of landless peasants. With this kind of economic freedom, Israel may have been the most prosperous nation on earth.

God allowed his people to use and enjoy this wonderful land, yet the gift was not unconditional, as we have seen with the Sabbath, Sabbatical, and the Jubilee. There was one more condition. God demanded rent for the land. He set the rent level at a tenth of annual production, calling it the tithe.

All tithes on land, levied on the produce of the soil or on the fruit of trees, belong to Yahweh

—Leviticus 27:30

The scripture here is not literally speaking of tithes on the crop or on livestock. It is speaking of "tithes on land." The "produce of the soil or ... the fruit of trees" are the means of payment in a pre-monetary economy. The scripture seems to assume that the tithe is the rent payment for the use of God's land.

It is somewhat arresting to view the tithe as land rent, given our common view. Typically, we view the tithe as an income tax. Ten percent of what you earn belongs to God. This view is quite prevalent today, and has been so for centuries, even millennia. Nevertheless, that is not how the scripture describes it. In the Old Testament sense, in the sense of the Land Law, in the sense of the Pentateuch, that ten percent refers only to the land's agricultural productivity. God's land was not given to the Israelites outright; he allowed them

to use it. Their "user fee" was this ten percent—the tithe.

However, not everyone paid the tithe. In order to support the dominant agricultural and pastoral economy, an urban sub-economy was necessary. It included wheelwrights and harness makers, metalworkers, and toolmakers. Beyond those skilled craftsmen, other town occupations existed, such as traders, merchants, and people skilled in healing. In these supportive urban centers were many people who provided a product or performed a service for some sort of pay. Yet scripture does not mention, nor even infer, that a tenth of the goods produced by these people or a tenth of their incomes were to be given over to God.

As an entire tribe, the Levites were exempt from the tithe because they received no inheritance in land, not because they had no income (Num. 18:20). The Levites lived in the towns (Num. 35:2-8) and probably filled many of these urban occupations, along with leftover Canaanites. However,

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if a non-Levite family had income beyond what their land produced, say a retired farmer bought and sold cloth from Damascus, or the children of the family picked the weeds out of neighbors' fields for a small wage, nowhere did scripture demand a tithe from these additional family earnings. In the absence of references to income generally, it seems that the tithe was strictly a contract between the landowner, God, and the lessee, the possessor family, for the use of the land.

This must have created great prosperity. If a person could keep one hundred percent of the fruits of his or her labor on the land, paying only a ten percent land rent, how could it not be so? These families would have done very well. Moreover, since all family allotments had about the same productivity, all the tithes were about the same. There did not need to be an elaborate assessment or enforcement or accounting mechanism. Everyone was treated the same and everyone could afford it. It was a marvel.

If we are unclear on the collection of the tithe, we often have an even greater misunderstanding of its uses. Typically, we view these uses as supporting the religious endeavors of

the community. But is this correct?

Scripture tells us that the Levites, who lived in towns, were the first receivers of the tithe (Num. 18:26). A tenth of that tithe was dedicated to the Aaronite priests, a single clan of the Levites (Num. 18:26). It covered their needs, both ritual (for sacrifice) and sustaining. That obligation was met; one tenth of the tenth was sent off. The remaining Levites were divided into twenty-four mishmar or divisions, each of which took one week turns serving at the site of the Ark, aiding the Aaronite priests (I Chron. 23-26). Each week's mishmar needed support. That small need was met. Now what about the rest of the tithe? It must have amounted to something well in excess of eighty percent of what people had paid in. What did the Levites do with it?

Some people say that this substantial residual stayed with and supported the rest of the Levites. They postulate that these Levites had no gainful employment, that the tithe compensated them for praying and studying for the twenty-three weeks out of twenty-four that they were not assisting their Aaronite cousins. This would mean that for over ninety-five percent of the time, the community supported them completely in less than even a monastic existence (at least Monks worked and were self-supporting). If this was so, who then filled the urban occupations necessary to support the agricultural economy? It seems reasonable that the people who worked long and hard at their farms or with their herds, from whom the tithe was levied, would have registered some complaint in scripture over supporting otherwise able-bodied Levites in this manner. Widows were sometimes reduced to gleaning fields for their existence. It is doubtful that the populace would have countenanced that policy while fully supporting non-priest Levites in their praying and studying. In Deuteronomy 12:18-19, the people are asked to support the few Levites who were in financial distress. If the tithe were being used for their maintenance, they would not be in financial distress.

It does not seem likely that this monolithic praying/studying Levitical system existed. There was nothing in the Law that prevented the Levites from taking up those town occupations mentioned above. So, most, if not all of them would have done so—there was certainly the need. They were placed in forty-eight towns all around the nation. The reason these towns existed was to support the agricultural economy. If the Levites were given the towns and they did no work, there would be no one to fill these important jobs. Everyone else possessed and worked land.

Practically speaking, it is probable that the non-priest Levites filled the town occupations. If true, then the residual tithe was not needed for their support. So where did the residual go? It probably funded the community's residual needs. Since the religious needs were covered with the first tenth of the tithe, the residual covered those needs we would call civil or governmental today. In his kingdom, God did not differentiate between religious and secular. In the kingdom of God, all community needs were sacred.

In discussing the civil uses of the tithe, scripture is not very helpful in unwinding our modern church-state separation mentality. Yet, inferences can be made. Let us begin simply.

Scripture does not delineate how a farmer was to hitch up his ox to his plow, yet we know it was done. It does not prescribe which tools were to be used at harvest time and what techniques were to be employed in their use, yet we know that the crops were brought in. Still, as I alluded to earlier, we do see page after page of detailed instructions in

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the Pentateuch and elsewhere about just how God was to be worshiped. We should consider further the reason for scriptural silence on many important subjects, given scripture's exhaustive and repeated explanations on many others. Those things for which we have received seemingly endless and repeated rules govern behaviors that are not natural, so they have to be spelled out. They are rules that pull the people from anarchy to civilization. So there are not only rules describing the burnt offering, but also rules discussing skin diseases. The widow's rights over her heritage are defined as well as the behavior of the High Priest in the Holy of Holies. Much is defined. However, much is also left out.

Was there ever a bridge that needed repair in ancient Israel? How was the repair organized, funded, and accomplished? That the scripture is silent on this does not mean it did not happen. Indeed, there were continuous community projects and needs that were taken care of by some structure in this new nation, a structure that we would today call civil. For the first two hundred years or so, before the time of the kings, such a structure must have existed, and it was in all

likelihood funded by the residual of the tithe.

The Levites were probably the “bankers” of the residual tithe. They put it to use, like the first tenth, for the community’s general needs. It was the only available and sufficient funding source provided under the Law. Instead of pursuing typical urban occupations, a few of the Levites may also have used some of this residual to compensate them-

The community had no arbitrary claim on the labor or capital of its members. Later, under the kings, it was the violation of these principles that began the economic distress of the people that the prophets, including Jesus, railed against.

selves for becoming experts in organizing and managing these projects. The work they oversaw built the roads, repaired the bridges, expanded the irrigation systems, and even stocked the armories.

This may seem strange to us, especially since we experience the tithe only as a support for religious work. However, in a theocracy such as ancient Israel, all endeavors are considered religious. Theocracies are not attractive to twenty-first century Westerners, so we do not think too much about their attributes. We think of Iran and its mullahs or Torquemada’s inquisition in Spain and we quickly reject the idea of a church-state combination. Nevertheless, it is important to note that within theocracies, there is usually no distinction between the religious and the civil. Both of these are the community’s needs. God did not distinguish between them in his Law. Because the first collectors of the tithe were the Levites, and all of God’s work was considered sacred, it is easy to see how we would misunderstand. However, when we misunderstand the tithe, we miss one of the great differences between Israel under the Law and her neighboring kingdoms: Israel did not use the neighbors’ coercive tax structure to fund community or national needs. God said that simply collecting the land rent would suffice. This is the only community or common fund of substance mentioned in the Law. Later innovations by the kings were outside the Law of Moses; most were noted as harmful.

Having the tithe, the community had no need for further common funds. There would have been no taxes, as such. Under the Law, an Israelite’s labor was not forfeit or partially forfeit to the community, much less to a king or landlord. Nor was there a tax on people’s capital. Houses, barns, beasts of burden, or the jewelry of the women were not as-

sessed by the community for a tax. The commandment to tithe would provide enough community funds.

The Law commanded: *Thou shalt not steal* (Ex. 20:15). The commandment not only applied between equals, as we tend to view it, it applied also between the (relatively strong) community and its (relatively weak) members. The community had no arbitrary claim on the labor or capital of its members. Later, under the kings, it was the violation of these principles that began the economic distress of the people that the prophets, including Jesus, railed against.

The tithe is the last of the four great economic building blocks God set up in his Law, completing the system of the Sabbath, the Sabbatical year, and the Jubilee. The results for his people were freedom, justice, prosperity, and equal rights in the kingdom of God.

John L. Kelly is an investment broker in a major securities firm. This article is excerpted from his forthcoming book, The Kingdom of God.



Weaver's Southern Christendom

Robert C. Cheeks

On March 27, 1998, Belmont Abbey College in Belmont, North Carolina, hosted a two-day symposium to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Professor Richard Weaver's seminal book, *Ideas Have Consequences*. From that small gathering of 100 people nine speakers were asked to submit papers. These submissions make up a rather remarkable book entitled: *Steps Toward Restoration, The Consequences of Richard Weaver's Ideas*. The book was edited by Professor Ted Smith III, one of the symposium's organizers, and published by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in 1998. As Professor Smith explains in the introduction, the purpose of the symposium and the essays that followed was to "... focus less on the content of *Ideas Have Consequences* (and) more on its origins and effects"

In the opening essay Professor Smith details how Weaver's book came to be published by the Chicago Press, Weaver's objection to, what he considered, an atrocious cover, and the critical reviews published in the liberal media. Smith also provides an excellent biography of Weaver, explaining his dalliance with, first, "progressive" Christianity, then with "international socialism," culminating in his membership in the American Socialist Party. Smith explains that when Weaver went to Vanderbilt, to pursue his doctoral thesis, he found himself among prominent agrarians, particularly John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren. While he was a socialist he didn't particularly like the socialists he met; on the other hand, while he disagreed with the agrarian philosophy, he enjoyed the company of those agrarians in his circle of friends. Weaver's conundrum, a conflict of "feelings," was not a propitious start for a philosopher/rhetorician who would lead the charge against the statist barricades.

Not until 1939, Professor Smith points out, would Weaver finally make the break with socialism. Later, that same year he made the decision to halt his doctoral work at Vanderbilt and begin anew at Louisiana State University. His new doctoral dissertation, titled: *The Confederate South, 1865–1910*:

A Study in the Survival of a Mind and a Culture, was begun under H. Arlin Turner but completed under Cleanth Brooks.

His dissertation would reveal a particular American culture that essentially was feudal, chivalrous, hierarchical, stable, and harmonious. A culture that educated its "gentlemen" to understand virtue, morals, and a "humanism" that defines "the classic qualities of magnificence, magnanimity, and liberality" and one, in which, its people practiced an "older religiousness" that was conscientious in its rituals and obedient to doctrine.

So we come to the crux of Weaver's argument. The South, rejecting materialism as an end in itself, believed in those things

of higher value: in metaphysical absolutism, in an acceptance of universals, in the transcendent, and revealed Truth. Weaver understood the pernicious effects of Original Sin, that man's nature, while created good, is now corrupted, disposed more toward doing evil than doing good, and that this condition could not be relieved until man became subservient to God's Will and abandoned man's will. Then

a society could perpetuate a "moral order." All of these themes were writ large in Southern Christendom, rooted in the reality of the soil, in agrarianism. Her people conducted themselves with an eye toward God, and moral rectitude, with an understanding of the importance of the family, and the special relationship of the land and community. The South sought to re-create a non-materialist, moral, society and Weaver opined that, "Only this can save us from a future of nihilism, urged on by the demoniacal force of technology and by our own moral defeatism."

Mark G. Malvasi, writes that, "The Southern tradition, in Weaver's analysis, offered a core of resistance to the most powerfully corrupting forces of the modern age: rationalism, positivism, materialism, egalitarianism, individualism, and science." And, Malvasi argues that modernity had successfully "abolished both the past and the transcendent as dimensions of meaning." Man may become materially rich and

Steps Toward Restoration; The Consequences of Richard Weaver's Ideas

edited by Ted J. Smith III

Intercollegiate Studies Institute 1998
302 pp. Hardcover: \$24.95

physically comfortable, Malvasi explains, but there is a dysphoria expressed by “the deep psychic anxiety” and dramatic increases in mental illness. A society does not attain greatness merely by achieving wealth, abundance, and power but rather through the “resilience, magnanimity, and piety of its people.”

And, for Weaver, as Malvasi points out, the best evidence of this “resilience” was the Southern people who, “Trusting in God to bless and keep them and their loved ones, ... acquired a penetrating wisdom and a tragic spirituality amid the wreckage of their world.”

Author and historian, George H. Nash, posits that Weaver sought to “reestablish belief in the reality of transcendentals.” But, first, Weaver was required to explain in *Ideas Have Consequences* that America in 1948 was in cultural decline. A decline began four hundred years earlier—in Weaver’s opinion—when William of Occam espoused the “fateful doctrine of nominalism.” A doctrine that superseded medieval logical realism and in so doing was “the crucial event of the history of Western culture.” It was the virulent philosophical offspring of nominalism, relativism, empiricism, “the hubris of technology,” that Weaver so assiduously critiques.

Nash also points out Weaver’s total belief in “unalloyed moral and metaphysical absolutism.” And, because of his apodictic defense of that faith, the nascent conservative movement would not be reduced to “expediency and mindless pragmatism.” Because of Weaver, contemporary conservatism would be anchored on “objective moral order,” and a firm belief in “the permanent things.” And, along with this foundational element Weaver presented a “Roman Catholic interpretation” of modernity by claiming that “The metaphysical right of religion went out at the time of the Reformation.” And, because of the Reformation “... every man has been not only his own priest but his own professor of ethics, and the consequence is an anarchy which threatens even that minimum consensus of value necessary to the political state.”

Weaver postulated that the primary component, that moving force in the reality of societies was, *ideas*. Nash explains that this theme provided encouragement to conservatives who may have felt overwhelmed by the stunning rise of American statism, and the corresponding cultural decline brought about by materialism and nihilism. Nash refers to

*A society does not attain greatness
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Weaver as “eerily prescient” when he wrote; “We approach a condition in which we shall be amoral without the capacity to perceive it and degraded without means to measure our descent.”

Professor Lawrence J. Prelli examines Weaver’s book from a rhetorical perspective while utilizing *The Southern Tradition at Bay* as the “key” to understanding the depth and richness of his cogent arguments. Prelli’s essay explains why Weaver’s work so powerfully influenced some of the great intellects of the twentieth century and why his work continues to gain converts.

Marion Montgomery’s essay is an exegetical tour de force. It is a magnificent and in depth historical and metaphysical examination of the rise of false doctrines and the “collapse of Western civilization.” In a profound passage, pregnant with the knowledge of the immanent nature of man, Montgomery tells us “We are born traditionalists, like it or not ... we are

born original and regional, though we may make ourselves provincials in false pursuits of self-declared originality.” This essay is worth the price of the book. It should be published separately and distributed widely.

All of the essays in *Steps Toward Restoration* are incisively written, and sometimes poignant. They provide information that brings us to a deeper understanding of one of America’s leading intellects, a man who changed America’s political landscape forever and resisted the “demonic” forces at every opportunity.

There is, however, one point that none of the contributors spends much time with, and that’s Richard Weaver’s agrarian perspective. The significance of man’s inveterate relationship with the soil—the earth—establishes an intellectual and, more importantly, a moral nexus to the awareness and comprehension of the “permanent things.” A contribution by Wendell Berry or Gene Logsdon would have provided a certain intellectual verification from someone who is actually a practicing “agrarian!” But that observation in no way detracts from a book that stands as a beacon in “the darkening twilight of Christendom.”

Robert Cheeks reviews recent books on the subject of the history and society of the United States of America. These reviews have been published in varying journals and periodicals.

Freedom Undone in the Court

Stephen J. Wolma

There I sat, blinking under the fluorescent lights in the auditorium style classroom during my constitutional law class. I had gone to law school because I wanted to learn how to be a lawyer. I wanted to learn how to “think like a lawyer.” That’s what all the marketing brochures from the admissions offices in law schools all over the country promise incoming students. I didn’t know exactly what it meant to think like a lawyer. I assumed I would be asked to use reason and logic to apply the facts of a particular occurrence to the law that governed such an occurrence. Nothing overly complicated. I discovered my assumption could not be further from the truth.

The subject was the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. At least, that was the subject stated in the textbook and repeated by the professor. The real subject was substantive due process rights, which include such things as the ‘right’ to have an abortion and, now, to engage in homosexual acts. The case law we were studying all cited the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments as support for their rulings. The problem is that neither the Fifth nor the Fourteenth Amendments say anything whatsoever about substantive due process rights. Then it occurred to me what thinking like a lawyer was all about: I needed to do away with reason and logic and just answer my professor’s questions by regurgitating whatever the Supreme Court majority or plurality opinion said. The Constitution was not important, only what the prevailing number of justices said about the Constitution mattered.

I felt tricked. Here I had come to school thinking I would get an education on how to be a lawyer, and I ended up being force-fed the personal ideology of my law school professors’ favorite Supreme Court Justices. I am reminded of C.S. Lewis’ *The Abolition of Man*. Lewis criticizes a couple of writers—he gives them the pseudonyms Gaius and Titius—of a book on English composition and grammar. Instead of writing on English composition and grammar, Gaius and Titius have apparently used this subject as the occasion to

advance their own personal philosophical agenda. Lewis writes, “[Gaius and Titius] may be intending to make a clean sweep of traditional values and start with a new set. That position will be discussed later. If it is the position which Gaius and Titius are holding, I must, for the moment, content myself with pointing out that it is a philosophical and not a literary position. In filling their book with it they have been unjust to the parent or headmaster who buys it and who has got the work of amateur philosophers where he expected the work of professional grammarians.” It was like Lewis had sat through my constitutional law class. Where I was expecting the work of professional educators of law, I received the work of biased and amateur philosophers. None

of these professors had Ph.D.’s in moral philosophy or anthropology or theology, and yet they were trying to tell me that the Supreme Court rightfully used its substantive due process precedent to define when life begins, to prescribe the times and places that I may or may not pray to God, and to otherwise implement whatever social change the justices thought was necessary.

It’s not much better under the fluorescent lights of the courtroom either. In *The Supremacists: The Tyranny of Judges and How To Stop It*, Phyllis Schlafly exposes certain judges and justices as traitors to their office. She lifts up their robes and lets us see that underneath all the pomp and circumstance sit amateur, undisciplined philosophers more concerned with their political, social, or personal agendas than upholding the Constitution. Schlafly states the issues in the starkest of terms: “The assault by the judicial supremacists against the Constitution and the rule of law is the most serious issue facing our political system today. If unchecked, judicial supremacy will continue to grow like a cancer and destroy our republic” (viii). “Judicial supremacists” is Schlafly’s label for those judges who have forsaken their proper role as judges and usurped the legislature’s exclusive authority to make law. Judicial supremacists are the activist judges that President Bush has rightly accused of undermin-

The Supremacists: The Tyranny of Judges and How to Stop It

Phyllis Schlafly

Spence Publishing Company 2004
284 pp. Paperback: \$24.95

ing democracy by legislating from the bench and trying to remake the culture of America by court order. While the cancer of the judicial supremacists has not corrupted American society enough to threaten an immediate demise of the republic, Schlafly has not overstated the seriousness of this problem.

Schlafly points that out everything from speech in public about God to U.S. sovereignty, from taxation only with proper representation to fair and impartial elections, even from basic morality to common decency, all these could be wiped away by a judicial supremacist with no more effort than it takes to pound a gavel. Schlafly identifies the seed of this problem being planted in the nefarious and abominable opinion of the *Dred Scott* case. Although it cited *Marbury v. Madison* as the primary authority for their activism, the Warren court of the 1950s and 1960s used the reasoning of the *Dred Scott* case to usher in the reign of judicial supremacy and give us such debacles as *Roe v. Wade*, *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*, and *Lawrence v. Texas*. These judges have set themselves up as tyrants in what is supposed to be the land of the free and the home of the brave.

True to the promise made in her title, Schlafly describes how the United States can get out of this mess. She begins with a brief prelude on the necessity of reforming the Senate rules regarding the confirmation of federal judges. Skeptical that this will not be enough though, Schlafly encourages Congress to step up and use its constitutional power to restrict the courts' jurisdiction of over certain kinds of cases, revamp the entire court system under the Supreme Court itself, and restore the balance of power among the three branches of the federal government. In other words, she is calling for a complete reworking of our entire governmental infrastructure. While we are at it, we might as well ask Congress to ban all hurricanes from coming into Florida. Schlafly's solution is so unrealistic that it is as disheartening as it is disappointing.

Perhaps Schlafly is not to blame though. There does not seem to be any solution that can be justified on the basis of the Constitution other than the major overhaul that Schlafly proposes. Perhaps the subject of judicial supremacy cannot be treated in a manner that will at the very least keep the public from envisioning a sinking ship as the dominant image for the future of the United States. In any event, *The Supremacists* includes an excellent diagnosis and risk assessment of the problem created by the run-away imperiousness

embraced by critical members of the current American judiciary. If you are in the mood for reading about a condition of the American society that will probably outrage you and then leave you feeling completely impotent to do anything about it, *The Supremacists* is the book for you.

BOOK NEWS

The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation

By Richard M. Gamble

ISI Books, 2003

307 pp. Paperback: \$15.00

Primarily a historical account, *The War for Righteousness* offers an interesting perspective on the role of the clergy, mainly Protestants, in the development of the collective psyche of the United States of America. It was the sermons and speeches of the pastors, priests, and ministers in the U.S. that gave the American public the idea that they were a special nation, ordained by God to be a new Israel. These sermons and speeches became laced with the revolutionary fervor that spilled out of the Enlightenment. The Thirteen Colonies came to consider themselves more than

just a bunch of upstarts upset with the English Monarchy, they believed they were carrying out God's will to reestablish his kingdom within the borders of the United States of America.

Later, this Protestant clergy shifted from its puritanical, other-worldly focus to the more this-worldly focus of the social gospel. These eighteenth century clergy members, who prided themselves on being much more in tune with scientific and sociological thinking than their Puritan forefathers, promoted the salvation of all peoples through the creation of a perfectly just, socially harmonized nation-state. Salvation became limited to having a good life in a just nation in this world only. The United States of America was thought to be such a just nation, or, at least, they thought the United States of America had the potential to become such a nation. So when the American troops stepped onto the battlefield in France during the First World War, they saw themselves not only as righting an injustice, but as the embodiment of Christ

*The assault by the judicial
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himself, coming to establish his kingdom on earth. While modern readers in the United States, and certainly in other countries, will most likely not share the overblown self-image promoted by these clergymen, most will still find Richard M. Gamble's book informative as to the current debates that rage over such things as the War on Terror or other similar military campaigns.

The "American Way": Family and Community in the Shaping of the American Identity

By Allan Carlson

ISI Books, 2003

205 pp. Paperback: \$15.00

Do you know what most people in the United States of America say should be the organizational hub of a society? Maybe you are thinking it is the individual. That would fit with the ideals of Lockean individualism that have been infused into the political rhetoric of the United States for years. Maybe you are thinking it is business. After all, most people have probably come to believe in President Calvin Coolidge's famous aphorism that "the business of America is business." Maybe you are thinking it is a commitment to cultural diversity. Anyone who has stumbled through the doorways of the institutions of higher education in the United States of America in the past decade or so probably thinks there is no way to organize a society except around the totem of cultural diversity. They would all be wrong though.

Cultural diversity, business, and the individual are way down the list of what people in the U.S. take as the organizing point of reference. 67 percent of Americans say a society should be organized around family, and another 20 percent say that it should be the church. Combining these findings, it is safe to say that most Americans—an overwhelming majority of them in fact—think that the foundational element of society should be family and the religiously grounded community. That has been the paradigm for the American society over the course of its relatively short life-span. In *The "American Way,"* Allan Carlson examines six episodes in the crafting of a family- and community-centered national identity. More specifically, Carlson details the role of Theodore Roosevelt, German-American immigrants, a group of women Carlson calls the "maternalists," Henry Luce, and the chief architects of American foreign policy between 1946 and 1965 in these six historical episodes. More people in the United States of America see family and the religiously grounded community as the crux of society than in any other country in the world. Carlson's analysis sheds light on why so many

citizens of the United States hold this comparatively unique self-perception.

Evangelical Christian Executives: A New Model for Business Corporations

Lewis D. Solomon

Transaction Publishers, 2004

177 pp. Hardcover: \$34.95

One of the hot topics right now is spirituality in the work place. People either have left behind or are beginning to leave behind the notion that things like greed or profit maximization are enough to sustain the long-term viability of a corporation. Employees and managers want to believe their business is about something greater than lining theirs and their shareholders' pockets with higher and higher denominations of legal tender. Lewis D. Solomon takes up this topic in *Evangelical Christian Executives: A New Model for Business Corporations*. As indicated by this title, Solomon limits his focus to Christian spirituality in the work place. Solomon examines, from the standpoint of corporate governance, how some senior executives brought evangelical Christianity into their businesses, particularly those who sought to guide their firms through their religious faith and values.

Stating from the outset that he believes Jesus was neither the Son of God nor the path to salvation in this life or the hereafter, but really nothing more than a Hebrew prophet, Solomon tries to give an even-handed assessment of the impact of incorporating religious faith and values into corporate principles and practices. Specifically, from a bottom-line, results-oriented viewpoint, Solomon considers how this approach has an impact on not only profitability but also five other aspects: employee satisfaction and productivity, product and service quality and customer satisfaction, legal compliance, environmental consciousness and environmentally-friendly practices within the context of a specific business, and the level of charitable giving. Using these criteria, he performs case studies of the following corporations: Covenant Transport, Inc., R.B. Pamplin Corp., The ServiceMaster Co., Herman Miller, Inc., Interstate Batteries System of America, Inc., and R.W. Beckett Corp. He presents an intriguing analysis of the particular religious journey of these corporations and how their founder or chief executive officer led them, whether explicitly or implicitly, according to his or her faith and understanding of what it means to be a biblical servant- and steward-leader.

Boycotts Do Not Help the Poor



Religious groups that consider themselves progressive are always urging a boycott of one form or another. But an example that has gained national attention is unique in this respect: it is so absurdly silly that it might provide a good learning opportunity.

It seems that the restaurant Taco Bell buys some of the tomatoes it uses to make its food from growers in the Immokalee region of Southwest Florida, who rely heavily on low-wage migrant workers. These growers employ people who otherwise have few opportunities, which one might think is a wonderful thing. Taco Bell, in turn, is glad to find low-priced suppliers so that it can keep its food affordable and broaden its customer base to include even the poorest among us. This is a win-win situation for everyone, especially the workers who are undoubtedly pleased for the opportunity.

But activists do not see it this way. A boycott of Taco Bell began three years ago with a few people in the Florida area, but has been widely supported by national religious organizations. What will the boycott accomplish? It could cause lower profits for Taco Bell, leading to curbs on its production, leading to fewer tomato purchases, which leads to lower profits for growers and thus lower wages and layoffs. The end result is that the workers will be worse off. No matter how bad off you think these workers are, there is one sure way to make their plight worse: cut off their place within the economy of the division of labor.

And yet, that is precisely what the activists propose to do. Whether they do it through consumer boycotts or by forcing all migrant workers into a union that will impose high wage costs on the growers, it cannot be good for the poor. If the growers were to pay high wages, they would be culling from a different segment of the labor pool, and leave the poor to languish.

No matter how bad off you think these workers are, there is one sure way to make their plight worse: cut off their place within the economy of the division of labor.

No one doubts their sincerity of these activists. But they are not thinking beyond step one. Their policy prescriptions such as kicking corporations out of the developing world, unionizing workers, taxing businesses of all sorts, imposing benefits that business cannot afford to pay, can only make everyone worse off. These policies harm economic growth, impede on the right of association, violate private property, and hamper the hard work of enterprise and economic development.

Perhaps the activists could take the afternoon off from writing letters, giving radio interviews, building websites, and otherwise engaging in agitation and curl up with a book on economics. Just one afternoon spent learning about production, prices, wage formation, profit, consumer demand, and the vast web of market relations in which people voluntarily trade toward their own betterment and that of society as a whole, would save them a lifetime a wasted effort. Instead of stamping out opportunities for people, they might actually do some good in creating some for a change.

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

Mankind is at its best when it is most free.

This will be clear if we grasp the
principle of liberty. We must recall that the
basic principle is freedom of
choice, which saying many have on their
lips but few in their minds.

—Dante Alighieri—