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Christianity's Indispensable Social Teaching

The Most Reverend George Pell *is the Metropolitan Archbishop of Sydney, Australia. Dr. Pell holds a Doctorate of Philosophy in church history from the University of Oxford. From 1990 to 1995, he was member of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and from 1990 to 2000 he was a member of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Dr. Pell has written widely in religious and secular magazines, journals, and newspapers, and he regularly speaks on television and radio.*

R&L: *You have done some scholarly work on the history of the church's social thought. What is Roman Catholic social teaching, and why is it important, particularly with respect to non-Catholics?*

Pell: Modern Catholic social teaching is generally traced back to Pope Leo XIII (who reigned from 1878–1903) and, especially, to his great encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). This encyclical built on the work of socially aware bishops and thinkers, especially from Germany, France, and the United States. As the encyclical's title suggests, it focused on the new social and political situation that had emerged in Europe over the course of the nineteenth century, and it spelled out a set of broad principles that were drawn from the natural law and concerned the rights and obligations of workers, employers, and the state. It repudiated socialism and defended the right to private property and enterprise, supported workers' rights to a just wage and to organization in unions, and insisted on the importance of the family and the beneficial role of voluntary organizations in modern society. It caused a great stir at the time, but it is interesting how much of it we have now come to take for granted.

Christianity is not a private lifestyle choice, although some in society would like to confine it to this. Christian living and Christian values have public benefits and consequences, and people who are serious about their faith generally seek to live it out in an appropriate way in every part of life. The church offers its social teaching to all Christians and people of goodwill as a series of reflections on the best way to advance the common good and defend important human values. It is not an alternative ideology—a "third way" between capitalism and communism, to use an old-fashioned phrase. While the church's social teaching frequently entails practical suggestions on specific questions, its main concerns are to maintain and improve the decencies of public life and to provide sustained Christian reflection on the principles that should animate and govern political, economic, and social arrangements in a good society.

R&L: *How has the church's social teaching influenced your ministry in the realms of culture, the marketplace, and the political arena?*

Pell: The social teaching of the church has been a significant influence and resource for me in my work as a priest and bishop. When I was growing up in the middle of the last century, social teaching received a considerable amount of attention in Australia through the influence of Bob Santamaria, one of our greatest Catholic intellectuals and

activists, who made it the center of his own work. So the major encyclicals and the discussions around them were familiar to me as a young man, and I have followed the explorations of that teaching under John Paul II with great interest.

It is part of my job as a bishop to speak out on social issues—not all the time, but when necessary and appropriate. It is sometimes difficult to know when to speak and when to keep silent. For example, an important issue in Australia at the moment is the handling of refugees who come to our country, and I have spoken on behalf of the Australian bishops on this matter. Earlier in my career I was part of a bishops' inquiry into the distribution of wealth in Australia, and I was also head of the bishops' overseas aid organization, Caritas Australia. The applications of Catholic social teaching in these areas are obvious. Less obvious, perhaps, is the application of this teaching in our engagement with the secular culture, and this has been a long-standing interest of mine. I try to give one or two major public addresses each year on aspects of this question, and I see this clearly as part of the work of evangelization. I am not interested in entering public debate simply to build a profile. The major reason for engaging with these issues has to be my duty as a bishop to spread the Good News. This does not mean we should confine ourselves to pious platitudes. John Paul II has provided a great lead in this, as in so many other things.

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R&L: *Pope John Paul II has written in his encyclical letter* Centesimus Annus *that "the Church's social teaching is itself a valid instrument of evangelization." How is this true?*

Pell: This sentence comes from section 54 of *Centesimus Annus,* and it is worth reflecting on the explanation that the pope himself gives for this claim. The church's social teaching focuses on the individual person and his life in "the complex network of relationships" that constitute modern society. It might be said that we do not need religion to tell us that human beings are social animals and that life in society gives rise to certain responsibilities, and the pope implicitly concedes this point. But the definition of human identity is not exhausted by sociability. We can fully understand our nature only through the revelations of faith. We are social beings, but we are also creatures of God. We are destined not only for society but also for eternity. Our life in society should be understood as part of the journey along the road to salvation.

It is for this reason that the pope says that "it is precisely from faith that the church's social teaching begins." The Christian life is not lived in private, and, for Catholics, the church's social teaching is not an optional extra. The social encyclicals form part of the Magisterium of the church and are not merely for discussion purposes. On the other hand, we should not think that we can fulfill our duties as Christians simply by becoming involved in social justice issues. A related misunderstanding is to attempt to hold on to our young people by encouraging their interest in social issues without encouraging a deepening of their faith. After over thirty years of trying this, however, we can confidently say that doing this, in fact, works against evangelization.

The social teaching of the church is first and foremost Christian teaching; "it proclaims God and his mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals man to himself." As the Holy Father emphasizes in *Centesimus Annus,* "in this light, and only in this light," does the church's social teaching then go on to concern itself with issues such as human rights (including the rights of working people), family, education, the role of the state, war and peace, economy and culture, and "respect for life from the moment of conception until death." It is interesting to note that the pope includes family and life issues on his list of social concerns. To date, these issues have been quarantined from the church's social justice work; while there have been some pragmatic advantages in doing this, it has probably made it easier for people to forget about the crucial role of faith in underpinning this work.

R&L: *You have written that John Paul II's "major ethical contribution to date is, in fact, a critique of Western culture's*

view of freedom and a demonstration of freedom's connection with truth, particularly the truths expressed in the natural moral law." What is that critique?

Pell: Last year, a young Dominican priest in Australia, Fr. Anthony Fisher, who is one of the world's leading Catholic bioethicists, attended a major conference of regulators of artificial reproductive technology. At this conference, one of the presenters argued strongly that, on issues such as artificial reproductive technology, governments and lawmakers should refuse to receive submissions from groups such as the Catholic Church because democracy has nothing to do with morality; it is all about respecting individual choice. The concept of freedom at work here—and in the transgressive "breakthroughs" of artificial reproductive technology—is one of limitless possibility. There is nothing to which we

IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION

Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661)

"Every man by nature is a freeman born; by nature no man cometh out of the womb under any civil subjection to king, prince, or judge."

When Charles II assumed the throne of England in 1660, one of the first acts of his government was to ban Samuel Rutherford's masterwork of political theory, *Lex, Rex*. Condemned as "a book inveighing against monarchie, and laying ground for rebellion," *Lex, Rex* was burned in public, and its author was charged with treason, dismissed from his post as rector of the University of Saint Andrews, and placed under house arrest. His colleagues feared he would be executed. Rutherford, though seriously ill, could not have been more calm; he said that "he would willingly dye on the scaffold for that book with a good conscience." Things never came to that; Rutherford's illness prevented him from appearing before parliament, and he died in March of 1661.

Rutherford was no stranger to controversy; throughout his life, his fervent Puritanism placed him at odds with Scotland's governmental and religious authorities. He graduated from Edinburgh University in 1621; two years later, he was appointed the regent of humanity at his alma mater. In 1627, Rutherford assumed a pulpit in the parish of Anwoth in Galloway; he served there until 1636, when he was deposed on account of his non-conformist religious convictions and exiled to Aberdeen. Two years later, after his exile was lifted, Rutherford returned to Anwoth; shortly thereafter, he was appointed professor of divinity at the University of Saint Andrews. In 1643, he went to London for the Westminster Assembly of Divines; it was here that he completed *Lex, Rex*.

Lex, Rex begins with Rutherford affirming the classical Christian idea that there is a strong connection between the natural law and scriptural revelation; as he put it, "The Scripture's arguments may be drawn out of the school of nature." From this concept, Rutherford derived his theory of limited government and constitutionalism—a theory that would eventually draw the fury of his king. For Rutherford, the natural law teaches that man is born free and, consequently, no one is born a ruler by right; "no man bringeth out of the womb with him a sceptre and a crown upon his head," in his words. By saying this, however, Rutherford does not mean to say that political authority is not ordained by God; on the contrary, God does establish the legitimacy of political offices, but these offices and the powers they wield are to be differentiated from the office holders. Kings, like everyone else, are subject to the laws of nature and Scripture, as well as the positive laws from which they are derived. Kings who act otherwise are tyrants—and tyrants, according to Rutherford, are to be resisted.

Sources: Lex Rex *by Samuel Rutherford (Sprinkle Publications, 1982), and* Politics, Religion, and the British Revolutions *by John Coffey (Cambridge University Press, 1997).*

can or should say "no" if it is part of an individual's self-realization. The only acceptable limits are those that are necessary to protect minors (even this is assailed by some), the health of others, the well-being of the environment, and property rights.

This may sound like a caricature, but we know it is not. And what the pope has said, in effect, is that freedom in this form is not only unsustainable in the longer term but also representative of a radical human diminishment. Freedom is a great good and part of our essence as human beings, but it is not an end in itself. It is a gift, and it is meant to be used for a purpose. That purpose is the service of truth, which, when we realize the truth about ourselves, means the service of others. When human autonomy is treated as an absolute, freedom becomes the increasingly brutal assertion of self against others; it becomes self-defeating. To avoid this, freedom needs truth. This does not entail establishing a theocracy but, rather, reflecting on what it means to be human and on what sorts of political, social, and economic arrangements are needed to encourage the development of a society based on service of others rather than on ruthless self-realization. The Holy Father, in his major encyclicals and public addresses, has tackled the problems facing the secularized culture of the West, and the fact that the question of truth and freedom is now squarely back on the public agenda undoubtedly represents a major ethical contribution.

Freedom is a great good, and it is part of our essence as human beings, but it is not an end in itself. It is a gift, and it is meant to be used for a purpose.

R&L: *How should one understand Catholic social teaching's view of the market? What are the conditions and extent of its affirmation of free markets?*

Pell: Contrary to some people's expectations, the Catholic Church is not an enemy of the market. In a development of social doctrine, the pope clearly set out the church's approach in section 42 of *Centesimus Annus.* It is not a simple matter of saying that a free-market economy is always and everywhere good. A great deal depends on what we mean in talking about a free-market economy. If we mean "an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of businesses, the market, private property, and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as human creativity in the economic sector," then the church supports the free market. But if we mean "a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is religious and ethical," then the church opposes it.

In his remarks about globalization over the course of the past year, the Holy Father seems to have given priority not so much to whether a global free economy can help make poor countries wealthier but to how it affects their culture and society. The questions we should ask about globalization—Does it promote individualism at the expense of justice? Does it respect cultures? Does it work to enfranchise people? Does it serve or subvert freedom? Does it damage families and local communities?—are really the same sorts of questions we have to ask about any given set of economic arrangements, including the free market.

R&L: *How do you view the church's involvement in and ministry to the world of business?*

Pell: I think this is an area where we could do a bit better. The network of guilds or professional associations for Catholics is much weaker now than it has been, and, in many cases, these associations have simply gone out of existence. As willingness to join groups with formal membership structures declines, regular forums with different audiences on particular moral challenges in business might be one useful contribution.

There are many fine Christians who are senior and successful business leaders, and their witness and example to their colleagues are invaluable. But I think we could do more to develop the idea of business as a vocation and to deepen business people's understanding of the importance of their work—not just for themselves and their families but for society as a whole. Business people could be more aware of the moral imperatives that drive and restrict their activities.

R&L: *To your way of thinking, what is the appropriate role of the clergy in a free society?*

Pell: We currently have a situation in Australia that illustrates the typical problem facing clergy and church leaders when they address important public policy issues. As I mentioned, the Catholic bishops—and many other Christian leaders—have recently spoken out on the question of refugees attempting to enter Australia. The political and cultural Left has universally welcomed this intervention, whereas some

of those on the Right have told us that the church should stay out of politics. On the other hand, we are currently awaiting a decision from our High Court (the equivalent of the United States Supreme Court) on an appeal lodged by the Catholic bishops. This appeal challenges a court decision striking down a state law restricting access to assisted reproductive technology to married and de facto couples and giving access to single women and lesbians. Broadly speaking, the bishops' intervention in this matter has been supported by the political and cultural Right, while those on the Left have told us to stay out of politics.

My view is that very few people are consistent in saying that the church should stay out of politics, because there will always be an occasion where they will welcome the clergy's support on one issue or another. If, as church leaders, we believe that there are occasions where our contributions to the moral debate are necessary, we have to accept that almost every time we speak—on whatever issue it may be—someone, somewhere, will tell us to stay out of politics. This does not mean we should be any less careful in assessing whether an intervention is necessary and appropriate, or in framing it in terms of principle rather than politics. It does mean that such interventions will very seldom be welcomed generally, and never universally.

In the Catholic tradition, priests and bishops are not permitted to hold public office, and, as a matter of practical prudence and professional integrity, they should refrain from using their positions to advance the political interests of any party, except in extreme situations. We encourage lay people to be actively involved in their communities, and practical party politics is their business, not the business of the clergy. We live in democratic societies, and Christians and Christian churches have the right to be heard, like everyone else.

R&L: *I understand that you visited Poland last summer. What is your sense of the type of free society that is emerging in the formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe? What role is religion playing in that development?*

Pell: Yes, last July in Krakow I visited the Tertio Millennio Seminar on the Free Society. It was set up by Fr. Maciej Zieba, O.P. (a remarkable priest, intellectual and commentator) and run by Michael Novak, George Weigel, and Fr. Richard John Neuhaus. I was impressed with the young people I met there from both central and eastern Europe and the United States. It is a great initiative, and I was very happy to be part of it, if only in an informal way.

In Poland, as George Weigel has said, we have an unusual and unprecedented situation: an attempt to build a democratic society, both on the basis of a modern and Catholic culture, and in the aftermath of fifty years of Nazi and communist rule. This situation should be watched with interest because, if it is successful, it could show us what shape democracy could take in its next phase—some might say the shape democracy will *have* to take if it is going to survive and prosper and live up to its promise as a source of human flourishing. Can democracy be something other than secular democracy? This is the question that will be answered, in part, by the success or failure of the Polish experiment.

The situation in eastern and central Europe is immensely varied, and it is still in its early days. Religion played a critical role not only in keeping culture and the spirit of freedom and solidarity alive under communism but also in bringing the totalitarian regimes to an end, given the pivotal role of Poland in the communist collapse. Religion now has a critical role in building stable, prosperous, and democratic societies, and in widening the possibilities of democratic life. However, both clergy and lay leadership will need to develop instincts for cooperation and compromise—essential in a democracy but less useful in the struggle against totalitarianism.

R&L: *What do you see as the primary challenge for Christian social thought in the future?*

Pell: The Holy Father has said that it is "from faith that the church's social teaching begins." The primary challenge will be to keep the faith community strong so that a sufficient number of committed professionals—especially lay men and women, rich in faith and theologically prepared—will continue to be available in public life to explain and develop the Christian social justice tradition in our changing world. We have to remain a credible voice in the public square.

We could do more to develop the idea of business as a vocation and to deepen business people's understanding of the importance of their work.

The Good of Affluence

John R. Schneider

"We are going to see a revival in this country, and it's going to be led by rich people." — Michael Novak, cited in Dinesh D'Souza's Virtue of Prosperity

The title of my forthcoming book, *The Good of Affluence: Seeking God in a Culture of Wealth*, might raise an eyebrow or two. Readers who are at all familiar with contemporary Christian scholarship on the subject of economic life under capitalism will immediately catch that my approach is not typical, to say the least. Some may even be incredulous that any serious-minded person would dare to write a book stressing that affluence might be good, much less that God might be found amid the consumerism and materialism that is infectiously widespread in the culture of modern capitalism. (I have already received very sincere complaints from fellow scholars about the title.) Nevertheless, that is what I do in this book. Its larger purpose is to offer a fresh Christian understanding—a theology—for people seeking to express Christian faith and life in the depths of their involvement in the culture that has grown from modern high-tech capitalism. Obviously, I must believe that there is an affluence that is good, and that the conditions for it exist in modern capitalism.

One part of the thesis (building on the pioneering work of others, most especially Michael Novak) is that modern high-tech consumer-credit capitalism (as distinct from older forms) has given birth to kinds of affluence that are dramatically new. They are "new" in purely economic terms, to be sure. But, more important, these kinds of affluence are also new in a broadly cultural sense. The habits of heart and life that they engender constitute a vast improvement over anything that has ever existed before in human economic history.

The other (larger) argument is that this extraordinary turn of events all but cries out to Christian theologians to rediscover certain narratives and teachings in the sacred Scriptures that have for a very long time been all but banished from academic theology. These are narratives that provide the makings of a strong doctrine of Creation as it relates the divine vision for human beings in the physical world. In fact, these writings show that material affluence of a sort is absolutely essential to God's creative vision for all human beings amid the flourishing that he has in store for his entire creation. These texts about material abundance and blessing—particularly the narratives of Eden and the Promised Land—are thus anything but incidental trappings to the Christian perspective on economic life that we are seeking. On the contrary, they are quite paradigmatic (or typological, if you like), and so it is past time that scholars get over their embarrassment at the vulgarities of the "Prosperity Gospel" and treat these texts as paradigmatic in theology.

The Moral Theologian's Suspicion of Capitalism

Novak wrote in his *Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* that "democratic capitalism is not just a system but a way of life." But what kind of "way of life" is it? Most Christian moral theologians seem to think that it is not a very good one—at least not for Christians seeking to be true to their faith. This generally negative attitude toward affluence under capitalism grows from powerful influences that are now as antiquated as they are influential among Christian intellectuals. One is the moral analysis of Marx, who taught all good people to believe that capitalism could work only by means of social injustices in the intolerable extreme. While everyone now knows that Marx was mistaken about the certain doom of capitalism, his moral analysis of capitalism as a social system remains strangely intact in Christian moral theory. A second great influence is the grand thesis of Max Weber, famous for his theory that the unique virtues of European Christians (most especially Calvinists) gave birth and life to modern capitalism. The terrible irony, Weber judged, is that these virtues (somehow) inevitably evolved into a culture thoroughly animated by vice. Thus, according to Weber, the poor unwitting Christians had manufactured for themselves what he called an "iron cage." As long as they immersed themselves in the self-seeking, self-gratifying world of capitalism, there was no escape from its stronghold. As long as they lived under capitalism, they simply could not be faithful Christians.

However, there is a third factor that may be an even more basic influence on Christian theologians and ethicists than the moral theories of Marx and Weber. In Christian history, almost all spiritual and moral teaching on affluence has been quite negative. This is slowly changing, especially in Roman Catholic teaching, but on the whole, it is true that contemporary Christian thinkers have almost no models in their tradition that might encourage a more favorable disposition toward the condition of affluence. Historically, the people who have stressed the goodness of riches are generally (and rightly) considered villains in the story—one thinks of the aristocratic clergy after Constantine, the Renaissance popes, and now our own television evangelists. On the contrary, our heroes are almost one-sidedly people who have delivered prophetic judgments against the rich. Who can but admire the strenuous discipline of the Benedictines and Franciscans, the moderate counsel of an Aquinas or Luther or Calvin, the austerity of a Wesley? When one considers such heroes together with the cultural judgments of Marx and Weber, it is no great wonder that Christian theologians focus on the evils, dangers, and burdens of wealth under capitalism and can barely bring themselves to say anything good about it.

But as Pope Leo XIII observed in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the modern revolutions in Europe, Britain, and America wrought radically "new things" requiring equally "new" responses from the church. Old wineskins were bursting, and new ones needed quickly to replace them or all the world would be lost to the Gospel. Since 1891, Christian thinkers have made remarkable progress in engaging the "new" realities of democracy and modern science, but they have lagged behind in the creative engagement of the social economy. It is time for Christian thinkers to reckon more seriously than they have with at least three new things (even newer than the things with which Leo XIII concerned himself).

Modern capitalism has been the greatest liberating force in human history; one billion people now live in conditions of enduring relative affluence.

— John R. Schneider

New Things Demanding a New Approach

The first new thing is that, since the end of World War II, the forecasts of Marx have proven to be as wrong as they could be. In no less than twenty-five nations, capitalism has liberated entire societies from all but the smallest traces of poverty. At breathtaking speed, modern high-tech capitalism has been the greatest liberating force in human history: One billion people now live in conditions of enduring relative affluence. Influential Christian writers (such as Stanley Hauerwas, among others) rightly resist the inference that this feat is a moral good. (Their point, roughly, is that the Anti-Christ will perform works so great as to deceive the very elect.) But surely we would be right to ask such writers, Does Satan cast out Satan? It certainly seems an unlikely trick for the god of oppression.

At any rate, we now know beyond controversy that modern high-tech economies do not work in the same way that the ancient orders did in the days of Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin. Nor do they work in the ways that the capitalism observed by Wesley, Marx, and Weber did. Modern high-tech capitalism (in contrast to mercantile and industrial economies) works primarily by means of the creation of wealth, not by its seizure from others. Of the many studies that now prove this to be so, perhaps the most intriguing is Hernando De Soto's *Mystery of Capital*. A Peruvian economist who is mainly involved with Third-World development, De Soto is no blind advocate of capitalism. Nevertheless, in explaining why capitalism works (in the instances that it does), he makes a fundamental distinction between mere "assets," on the one hand, and real "capital," on the other. Contrary to common opinion, assets are not synonymous with capital, which exists if and only if political and legal conditions enable dead assets to come to life in new and creative forms. To use De Soto's analogy, it is like the difference between a hydroelectric power plant (asset) and the electricity it generates (capital).

This model helps one to see that the entire moral situation of affluence is as different as it can be from that of previous times (or in non-capitalistic systems of our time). And it furthers the point made in such readable form by Dinesh D' Souza in his recent book, *The Virtue of Prosperity*. The nature of modern capitalism is normally to reward and encourage good ethical behavior in doing business. Of course, it does not guarantee good moral behavior, nor does it invariably punish bad behavior. No order of freedom (not democracy, not even science) can guarantee as much. But the point is that, unlike anything that has existed before, modern

capitalism commonly does reward and encourage people to be better than they otherwise would be. All these are truly new things; our ancient and modern moral traditions do not posses adequate resources to understand them, so we need a new theological response that allows us to see into these new things more deeply.

Taking the "Lord of the Banquet" Seriously

Such a theological response should be rooted in a doctrine of Creation. Most moral theologies are rooted in the doctrine of redemption, and, frequently, they fail to capture the biblical manner in which the very notion of redemption is sensible only in the terms established by the divine vision of life that is given in the narratives of creation. That vision is clearly incomprehensible without material abundance. This truth comes forth in the narratives on Eden and their vision of plenty and delight. It emerges again in the fundamental narrative of the Exodus, as God does not merely redeem his people from oppression and poverty (as widely observed) but also establishes them as a nation in a land "filled with milk and honey." The legal, and later prophetic, commands and obligations of Scripture do not renounce this vision; on the contrary, they follow quite directly from it and use it as their visionary aim. All these teachings—especially the most severe ones—are directives *for* rich people of God on how to *be* rich in a godly, rather than an ungodly, way. In no way do they exonerate poverty as "blessed"; on the contrary, poverty is the very evil that God means (through rich people) to eliminate. Poverty is to humanity as chaos is to cosmos.

All these teachings—especially the most severe ones—are directives for *rich people of God on how to* be *rich in a godly, rather than an ungodly, way.*

One must be sensitive to the typological function of these texts to discern how their vision is also (darkly) manifest in the narratives of Christ in the New Testament. There is no radical departure from the Old Testament paradigm of "wealth as blessing"—only a profound repetition of that theme in a radically new (incarnate) form. Contrary to widespread supposition, Jesus' narrative life was not one of poverty. Nor were his ringing judgments and severe teachings against the rich a denial of that original divine vision for human beings. The incarnation, vocation, and teachings of Jesus must be placed in quite different terms. In his incarnation, he clearly did not choose literal poverty as his condition, for he was an artisan for most of his life. Furthermore, he clearly did not adopt a lifestyle of anything resembling poverty during his public mission, nor did he make divestment of property a condition of discipleship. Close scrutiny supports the view of New Testament experts (such as Luke Johnson) that Jesus' behavior and ethical teachings grew consciously from the models of the prophets. That explains why he did not eschew the enjoyments of material life but instead opposed the godlessness of his rich contemporaries with a style of "eating and drinking" that was his own. So wild and unguarded did his lifestyle seem to them—and not least to Judas Iscariot—that they deemed him "a drunkard and a glutton," and they wished him dead. Contrary to what we generally hear, in his public manner of life he was "the Christ of delight" and "Lord of the Banquet" (to cite the phrase of David Moessner). He was the very incarnation of that Messianic Feast, which was his constant theme and promise.

Modern globalism, another new thing, which, in my view, has unleashed some very unfortunate confusion in Christian thinking on the subject of moral obligations that weigh upon the affluent. (The prime example is the influential book by Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger.*) My book contains a running argument with him on almost every level of the view he defends. But alas, in order to see these ideas in developed forms and to make informed judgments on their merits, I am afraid that one must in the end read them in the book.

In conclusion, Jesus Christ is, among other things, the incarnation of affluence as God envisions it for human beings. Of course, he was not affluent in the way that modern people in advanced socities are affluent under capitalism. But on the noted assumption that the cultures these societies give forth are open to Christian faith and life, and not in the least closed to them as Weber's Iron Cage implies, Jesus Christ thus is a living light by which to seek an affluence that is good.

John R. Schneider *is professor of theology at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a contributing editor for* Religion & Liberty. *His forthcoming book,* The Good of Affluence, *will be published this summer by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.*

A Humanist for Our Time

Samuel Gregg

The story of Wilhelm Röpke's life is that of a genuine Renaissance man—though in the tradition of Erasmus rather than Machiavelli. It is the tale of a man who combined profound knowledge of several intellectual disciplines with a genuine confidence that people can indeed know the truth. But one of the strengths of John Zmirak's new intellectual biography is that it underlines the extent to which Röpke's life was also a tale of profound moral witness to truth. For his consistent willingness to make this choice for truth, Röpke paid a heavy price, including, at times, outright persecution from ideologues of the Left and the Right.

Zmirak begins his study by bringing to the fore—in a way underestimated by previous commentators—what is perhaps the most important cultural influence on Röpke's thinking: his experience of living in Switzerland from the 1930s until his death in 1966. Zmirak's portrait of Switzerland's politically decentralized, market-oriented, and yet rather traditional society provides a useful context for understanding the ideas that appear in Röpke's most important books, such as *The Social Crisis of Our Time* (1942) and *A Humane Economy* (1958).

Wilhelm Röpke: Swiss Localist, Global Economist
by John Zmirak

ISI Books
xii + 229 pp. Paperback: $14.95

The Anti-Collectivist in Exile

In Switzerland, Röpke discovered a multi-ethnic society that had avoided the political excesses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Switzerland's cultivation of economic liberty was, in Röpke's view, fundamental to its success, primarily because such liberty was conducted in a culture that emphasized personal responsibility and an institutional framework that encouraged the growth of genuinely free associations. From observing this society, Röpke drew conclusions that he considered universally applicable. These conclusions led him in later life, for example, to be deeply suspicious of supranational organizations.

The perpetual contrast with Switzerland foremost in Röpke's mind was his direct experience, first, of Weimar Germany—an experiment in grafting a liberal-democratic constitution onto a highly fractured and authoritarian-inclined society—and, second, of Nazi totalitarianism. In later years, Röpke warned that the vanquishing of Nazism did not mean that the totalitarian temptation had been exorcised from the Western mind. Even prior to 1933, Röpke pointedly highlighted the eerily similar character of the Nazi and communist economic programs, as well as their mutual affirmation of a one-party state.

As Zmirak makes clear, Röpke was so accomplished that he could have risen to high office in the German academy, if he had given his blessing to the Nazi state, as did Martin Heidegger and many other German intellectuals. Born in Saxony in 1899, Röpke was quick to achieve intellectual distinction. Having attained his first degree in law and a doctorate in economics through study at the universities of Tübingen, Göttingen, and Marburg, Röpke was appointed professor at the University of Jena in 1924, making him the youngest professor in the German world. Moreover, as a decorated World War I veteran, tall with blond hair and blue eyes, Röpke epitomized the Nazis' Aryan *übermensch* fantasy.

Röpke refused, however, to mollify his decidedly positive views of liberal democracy and the free economy. Zmirak underscores the strength of Röpke's beliefs by highlighting the fact that, just two weeks after the Nazis' assumption of power, Röpke effectively committed career suicide by delivering a lecture at Frankfurt-am-Main in which he described National Socialism as a "mass revolt against reason, freedom, humanity and against the written and unwritten millennial rules that enable a highly differentiated human community to exist without degrading individuals into slaves of the state." Within ten months of uttering these words, Röpke was forced into early, unpaid retirement and had to look abroad for employment.

During the following years of exile in Turkey—before he eventually settled in Switzerland—Röpke grew increasingly frustrated with the rapid spread of collectivist ideas, but he never gave up articulating his sophisticated critique of such theories. Zmirak, however, establishes a strong case for suggesting that another important aspect of these years included changes in Röpke's understanding of freedom and the liberal tradition. Zmirak illustrates that, prior to Röpke's exile, he was critical of pre-Enlightenment European thought—especially the Christian Middle Ages and its implications for freedom. At this point of his life, Röpke essentially embraced the "orthodox liberal" view of history in which figures such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Voltaire were "stars that arose to illuminate the darkness." Zmirak poignantly observes that these words "taken alone, might have come from any skeptical thinker of the nineteenth century."

The factors that caused Röpke to repudiate the instrumental-rationalist versions of liberalism that remained central to the thought of some of his colleagues (most notably, Ludwig von Mises) were many. Röpke's experience of the collapse of the old liberal order throughout continental Europe in the wake of the decidedly anti-Christian movements of Nazism, fascism, and communism alerted this son of a Lutheran pastor to the indispensability of Christianity's contribution to the cause of Western freedom. In an echo of Alexis de Tocqueville, Röpke began to credit Christianity for "having elevated the individual forever from a mere constituent of an immanent state into a transcendent creature of a just and merciful God."

Röpke's experience of the collapse of the old liberal order alerted him to the indispensability of Christianity's contribution to the cause of Western freedom.

— Samuel Gregg

This is not to say that Röpke departed at any stage from his commitment to reason when it came to political and economic debate. Instead, he appears to have accepted many of the critical insights of Old Whigs such as Edmund Burke (like Röpke, a deeply religious man who had a youthful flirtation with rationalism) concerning the importance of just authority and tradition in preventing statism. Röpke was henceforth careful to underline the subtle but important distinctions between, for example, the feudal and absolute monarchies that preceded the French Revolution, and tyrannical regimes such as Jacobin France, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union.

In the Ruins of Postwar Germany

That these developments in Röpke's thinking occurred in the years preceding and during the Second World War was indeed providential. He could not have known that many of his ideas were soon to be applied in an unexpected context: the political, social, economic, and moral ruin that was Germany in 1945. Zmirak goes to some length to trace the influence of the ideas of Röpke and others such as Walter Eucken, Franz Böhm, Alfred Müller-Armack, and Alexander Rüstow (all associated with the Freiburg *ordo* liberal school) upon Ludwig Erhard, the man responsible for the liberalization of the postwar German economy. As Zmirak reminds us, Erhard's abolition of price, wage, and currency controls was undertaken against the advice of Keynesian economic advisers to the Allied Military Occupation authorities and the overwhelmingly socialistic inclinations of most newly emerging German political parties. Opposition to the reforms, led by the Social Democrat trade unions, continued after their implementation, and Röpke played an important role in pressing the intellectual case for economic liberalization via newspaper and journal articles.

The secret of the *ordo* liberal program's success may be found in the distinction that Röpke and others made between competitive market processes and the institutional framework within which free economic activity occurs. While insisting that the state should help to shape and defend the social and economic order, *ordo* liberals also believed that market processes should be left to competing individuals. Zmirak particularly stresses Röpke's emphasis on ensuring that the price system was allowed to function in an unimpeded way.

Although many of Röpke's arguments were expressed in terms of economic efficiency, Zmirak demonstrates that Röpke was also anxious to underline the political importance of economic freedom. He argued, for example, that the socialized ownership of industry advocated by the Social Democrats and some Christian thinkers meant that "a new Hitler would not even be compelled to go out of his way to find stupid or unscrupulous industrialists and to bamboozle them; he would only have to shout at cowering government officials managing the nationalized industries." In this way, Röpke

indirectly underlined the falsity of the assumption that governmental bureaucrats customarily act in ways that serve the common good—a supposition subsequently brought into systematic question by the economist James Buchanan in the 1970s.

A Third Way, Rightly Understood

The last sections of Zmirak's biography are devoted to exploring Röpke's idea of a "third way." This, too, is to be welcomed, not least because of the deep ambiguity and, at times, outright intellectual incoherence currently associated with the term. Zmirak's analysis is especially helpful because it illustrates that Röpke's "third way" has little, if anything, to do with the vaguely articulated philosophy of prominent users of the term, such as Tony Blair or Gerhard Schroeder, and even less to do with the somewhat odd melange of utilitarianism, left-communitarianism, and sociology that the philosopher Anthony Giddens collates under the term.

When Röpke used the expression, "third way," he was emphasizing the need for a free society to complement the market economy and a limited state with both a flourishing range of intermediate associations as well as a moral culture that recognized what Christians understand as the objective hierarchy of values. Concerning intermediate associations, Röpke was clearly influenced by his observation of how such organizations prevented freedom from degenerating into anarchy in politically and economically decentralized Switzerland. Regarding issues of moral culture, Röpke was deeply disturbed by what he described as Western society's "proletarianization"—that is, a growing sameness and monotony of social and cultural conditions. Interestingly, Röpke insisted that this creeping proletarianization would result in greater cravings on the part of the population to receive social services and economic security from the state. From the standpoint of the history of ideas, Röpke's "third way" reflects two distinctly Tocquevillian themes underlined in the second volume of *Democracy in America*: first, the importance of intermediate associations for a healthy, non-atomistic democracy; and, second, democracy's potential to degenerate into "soft despotism."

These and other themes found throughout Röpke's work remind us of another reason that contemporary Christians who believe in authentic freedom have sound reasons for revisiting Röpke's ideas. Careful reading of Zmirak's biography illustrates that Röpke provides us with a model of how an orthodox Christian can engage with the modern world without simply aping transitory secular intellectual fashions.

There was much about modernity that Röpke celebrated. He did not, for example, maintain any romantic illusions about the conditions of material well-being that prevailed in the pre-modern world until free trade and the spread of economic freedom began to liberate man from the indignity of poverty.

At the same time, Röpke did not hesitate to underline the equally romantic delusions of Enlightenment rationalists and their modern heirs who thought that building a heaven on earth was possible. As a Christian humanist, Röpke accepted the insight of revelation, which is confirmed by right reason, that man—that is, real, existing man—is much more than *homo economicus*. "Above all," Röpke wrote, "man is *Homo religiosus*." From this standpoint, Röpke stressed the futility of modern man's attempt to get along without God, and maintained that atheistic and agnostic anthropologies of man were inadequate foundations for a truly free society. At the core of man's identity, Röpke stressed, is a spiritual and moral essence. This, by definition, means that man is destined for greater things than being a mere pleasure machine. In Röpke's view, this is the deeper meaning and purpose of freedom, a truth that unfortunately escapes some contemporary believers in the importance of human liberty.

Röpke maintained that atheistic and agnostic anthropologies of man were inadequate foundations for a truly free society.

In his conclusion, Zmirak remarks that it is a tragedy that Röpke died at a relatively young age in 1966. Within a few years, many Western universities were engulfed by a wave of contempt for reason and Christianity that has yet to abate. Given Röpke's past willingness to defend truth, regardless of the personal cost, Zmirak speculates that he would have provided a strong defense of the free economy against the new Left, precisely because it would have been based on the Christian humanism that is the glory of Western civilization, rather than on the ultimately unsatisfactory foundations of utilitarianism and secular liberalism. To this extent, Zmirak leaves us with an implied challenge, pointing to the need for a retrieval of Röpke's project and its application to the new world of the twenty-first century.

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Environmental Virtues—and Vices

Robert Royal

Religious writing on the environment generally fails for several specific reasons. First, most theologians and religious ethicists do not have a gift for science. Environmental science is especially hard because it requires, at a minimum, a good grasp of chemistry, physics, geology, and various subdivisions of biology. The scientist who can keep all the environmental balls in the air simultaneously is already a rare bird; but the theologian who can successfully apply his religious knowledge to a very different and difficult realm is as uncommon as any animal protected under the Endangered Species Act.

But that is only the beginning of the problem. If it were just a matter of bringing together our deepest values and one dominant modern mode of knowledge, we might manage tolerably enough. But environmental efforts—if they are not going to cause even worse problems than they solve—have to be mediated by politics and economics. By nature, these two disciplines are mired in differences of opinion and may change rapidly in response to circumstances—one of their most valuable features. Scientists and theologians alike are often tempted to think that their timeless truths should simply trump the messy procedures and cantankerous factions of public debates.

For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care
by Steven Bouma-Prediger

Baker Book House
234 pp. Paperback: $21.99

Virtues for a Good Life and a Good Relationship with the Created World

Steven Bouma-Prediger's *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* avoids some of these typical pitfalls. Unfortunately, it falls deeply into others—a true misfortune because the author displays occasional flashes of insight that might lead to a more satisfactory treatment. Bouma-Prediger, a professor in the religion department at Hope College in Michigan, writes in a basically genial Reformed idiom that avoids making idols of many current environmental nostrums. He sets forward a good case arguing why the Bible should be read as an encouragement to care for the earth (to begin with, the Creator and the Savior are the same God), and he defends biblical religion from the charge that it is responsible for current environmental problems.

But the heart of the book is a pair of chapters outlining, on the one hand, the strengths and weaknesses of seven common approaches to environmentalism, and articulating, on the other hand, an ecological virtue ethics. In the first of these chapters, Bouma-Prediger offers brief and nuanced descriptions of wise use, human and animal rights, bio-centrism, the wilderness movement, deep ecology, and (his favorite, if properly reformed) the land ethic. Wise use, for instance, he sees as helpful but, ultimately, too exclusively utilitarian. The rights of future generations or of sentient animals extend our moral considerations, but do not have complete consistency or truly universal scope. For a Christian, Bouma-Prediger argues, biocentrism must give way to theocentrism. Against the wilderness movement, he observes: "Few if any places are pristine, none are static, and the natural world is always an admixture of the benign and the harsh." Deep ecology is similarly criticized: "Insofar as proponents claim that all organisms have equal value or worth, it is unclear how to adjudicate competing interests or goods." Even the land ethic has to be supplemented with consideration for the nearly three-quarters of the globe that is water, protection for individual rights, and a hierarchy of values. All this is deftly and judiciously argued.

About ecological virtues, too, Bouma-Prediger makes a valuable contribution. Though his chapter on the subject is a little thin on concrete action—what emerges is of the bicycle-to-work, turn-your-compost-heap, recycle-milk-cartons, and write-your-Congressman variety—he is right to emphasize that much of what needs to be done environmentally depends on the kinds of people we are—that is, the kind of character

we develop in response to ecological as well as other life challenges. The right kinds of humility, frugality, honesty, courage, benevolence, wisdom, and hope are the virtues needed for any good life and, by extension, any good relationship with the created world.

The Besetting Sin of Environmentalism

The problem with this volume is not primarily what it contains, but what it does not. In a brief and abstract treatment, Bouma-Prediger essentially reproduces the dire environmental claims of the Worldwatch Institute without ever engaging alternative points of view. (He dismisses such serious voices as Dixy Lee Ray, Gregg Easterbrook, and the Acton Institute's Cornwall Declaration in a single footnote; Julian Simon, Ronald Bailey, Frederick Singer, Patrick Michaels, and a host of similar figures appear to be entirely off his radar scope.) Any conscientious student of environmental issues will want to review Worldwatch's claims. But there is a price to be paid for the easy assumption that the problems and their solutions are well known and beyond debate. Bouma-Prediger never has to wrestle with different interpretive structures or approaches to dealing with problems. As a result, his otherwise heartfelt religious vision falls rather patly into known categories.

For example, he warns about population growth but seems unaware that populations in developed countries around the world are generally shrinking. He fears the fragmentation of rainforests in the tropics but does not know that forests in northern latitudes are spreading. He lends an ear to environmentalists' plaints about urban sprawl and environmental racism but never really takes a close look at what these phenomena are or what they mean. (Would it better if we all went back to living on the land, concentrated ourselves in center cities, or spread factories and refineries evenly throughout the country?)

This stance may derive from a deeper one, the besetting sin of a certain type of environmentalism, which sees the human impact on nature as stemming almost solely from greed, rarely from want. People who accept the biblical view of creation, as Bouma-Prediger does, often succumb to this error. For example, we know that famine resulting from "natural" (i.e., non-human) causes has been a regular scourge for much of the human race, even down to quite recent times. Similarly, from the Book of Exodus and the history of Thucydides through the medieval Black Death and down to the twentieth century, natural epidemics have repeatedly savaged various populations. (In the early twentieth century roughly 40 million people around the world died from Spanish Influenza.) The population growth of the past century or so reflects, then, a noble victory over two recurring evils. Our relative abundance may shade off into gross consumerism or simple greed, but it also represents close attention to the potential embedded in the world by the Creator.

We can begin to take a more generous view of the wilderness only because we have essentially solved, despite some continuing difficulties, the problems of famine and epidemic. Bouma-Prediger notices that nature itself is often harsh or unstable, but that knowledge does not intrude on the attitudes he has absorbed from the usual environmental literature. Most people in most other cultures, including some of the very indigenous peoples whom he and other environmentalists so much admire, would take a very different view of nature—one that a Christian concerned with seeing the real character of the creation should not minimize.

An Authentic Christian Vision of Creation Care

For instance, when Mount Pinatubo erupted in 1991, in a matter of a few days it spewed something like twice the sulphur dioxide that the United States releases into the atmosphere in a whole year. Other natural sources do equally "negative" things. Bouma-Prediger himself notices that levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere have been naturally higher in the distant past than they are in today's post-industrial world, and that about 11,500 years ago—long before factories, automobiles, and coal-fired power plants—the earth's average temperature changed seven degrees Celsius in twenty to fifty years, a shift comparable to the highest projections for global warming over the next century by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Given all these natural variations, we may still be preparing some unhappy times for ourselves by our various activities. But to suggest that pollution is sin (as an Eastern

We can begin to take a more generous view of the wilderness only because we have essentially solved the problems of famine and epidemic.

— Robert Royal

Orthodox patriarch did not long ago) or to invoke the term *blasphemy* (as Bouma-Prediger and others do) for human effects on nature that do not depart greatly from what God himself has built into the system, seems to sin itself against the very virtues of honesty and wisdom that Bouma-Prediger seeks to instill. A calm look at the past few centuries of the human influence on the environment would show that we did no little damage when we were needy and unaware of our harm. Since we have become more secure materially and have recognized various problems, we are doing something about them and will improve still more, while maintaining better standards of living in the future. That should be the fuller ideal that inspires an authentic Christian vision of creation care.

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Book News

On the Unseriousness of Human Affairs
by James V. Schall
ISI Books
204 pp. Hardcover: $24.95

James V. Schall asks a very big question at the start of his book—"What is it about our lives that makes them worth living?"—and gives what may be for many a surprising answer: not the business of politics or economics but the "unserious" activities of human life. In this, he follows the classical and Christian traditions that find the highest expression of human culture in leisure—that is, in those things that we do when all work is done.

For Schall, human flourishing is not found in merely utilitarian activities but in things such as play, art, and contemplation. In his words, "We do some things just because they are beautiful." In the doing of such things, we learn that "the highest things, even prayer and belief, require a certain playfulness about them," for "it is only when we realize that human affairs stand not simply by themselves but relate us to our end—to our transcendent destiny—that we can relax about what we are, indeed *become* what we are." Schall's elaboration of this theme in this series of wise and delightful essays helps us see the importance of living unseriously.

The Founders' Almanac
edited by Matthew Spalding
The Heritage Foundation
xiv + 338 pp. Paperback: $10.95

According to Matthew Spalding, America's "present state of affairs demands the renewal of a civic literacy about the principles of the American Founding, particularly among citizens and statesmen intent on reviving those principles as guides for today's confused politics." To this end, he has deftly created an excellent reference work that helpfully presents much of the essential introductory material needed for a sound understanding of American political history and theory. In his words, *The Founders' Almanac* "is designed to be used on a regular basis, whether read through, dipped into, or referenced, depending on the reader's circumstances or opportunity." Indeed, any of these approaches to this book will reward the reader.

This volume includes brief and informative biographical sketches of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison. In addition, it contains a helpful selection of quotations from the Founding generation, as well as the text of the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and Washington's Farewell Address, with explanatory introductions. Rounding out the volume are a timeline of important events in the American Founding and an annotated bibliography for further reading. Lively anecdotes from the period are interspersed throughout. All in all, *The Founders' Almanac* is an indispensable reference work for any student of the American experiment.

Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation
by Geerhardus Vos
P&R Publishing
xxiv + 571 pp. Hardcover: $29.99

Geerhardus Vos, professor of biblical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary in the early twentieth century, remains a seminal resource for Reformed exegesis; this volume happily assembles Vos's shorter essays on this subject under one cover.

Toward a Free and Virtuous Society

Rev. Robert A. Sirico

It is a telling commentary on our times that the political and ethical cognoscenti associate freedom with licentiousness, antinomianism, atomistic individualism, and an array of similar vices antithetical to virtue. Despite this attitude on the part of many professional intellectuals, common sense tells any sane person that a society that is both free and virtuous is the place in which he would most want to live. But what exactly would it mean to advocate and work toward the construction of such a society?

One frequently hears the comment: "Liberty is fine, but it must not be taken to an extreme." According to this line of reasoning, liberty is only one virtue among many and should be balanced with numerous other virtues. The mistake here is that it is assumed that liberty or freedom is a virtue. Liberty is, rather, the context of actions and social institutions that facilitate or enable virtue. In other words, the requisite condition for a virtuous act is the ability to exercise choice in that action. We can thus say, then, that the predicate for virtue is liberty.

An animal cannot behave virtuously because it lacks the faculty of reason; it is only the human capacity for reflection and purposeful action that enables man to act in a virtuous manner. Indeed, the exact opposite is true as well: No one can be said to be behaving viciously who does not have the capacity of moral reflection toward his actions. If conscious moral action is to have any virtue or vice, then free choice must be presupposed. Freedom, therefore, is closely linked to the nature of the human person, since free choice depends upon man's ability to reason. Any person who fails to employ his God-given capacity for reason is acting below his human potential. So, an understanding of the nature of the human person is fundamental to any discussion of man's freedom.

Broadly speaking, we can describe the human person as possessing both a physical and spiritual nature. Different religious traditions will describe these aspects of the person divergently, but each description must attempt to account for the tangible material components of the person and for the spiritual or transcendent reality of the human condition. This fact of transcendence may be expressed as the soul or spirit; that creative impulse that tugs us beyond the corporeality of our existence; that produces art, literature, music, and philosophy; and that, ideally, expresses itself in surrender to the call of God.

Liberty is the context of actions and social institutions that facilitate or enable virtue.

The Reverend Edmund Opitz, a Congregationalist minister who has been writing on these themes for many years, puts it this way: "Political theory in our tradition is based on the assumption that men must be free in society because each person has a destiny beyond society which he can work out only under conditions of liberty." If it is true that each individual has such a destiny, then he cannot be treated merely as a means to an end, but as an end in himself. And if each individual is an end in himself, then it would be a gross violation of the essential nature and basic dignity that each person possesses to treat him as a means to someone else's ends. In addition to the violation of human dignity that would result, such a treatment of people (as means rather than ends in themselves) would undermine the very foundation of civil organization. No one, not even the perpetrator of human rights violations, ultimately would be safe in such a situation.

Rev. Robert A. Sirico *is a Roman Catholic priest and president of the Acton Institute. This essay is excerpted from his monograph* Toward a Free and Virtuous Society, *available from the institute.*

“Statesmen … may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand.”

—John Adams—