

RELIGION & LIBERTY

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Christianity, the Foundation and Conservator of Freedom

Interview: Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn

Born in 1909 in Austria, Dr. Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn is a prolific writer on the political theory of human freedom and has been published in *National Review*, *Modern Age*, and *The Freeman*, among others. His most recent English books include *Leftism Revisited* and *Liberty or Equality*. In addition, Dr. Kuehnelt-Leddihn is a gifted artist whose paintings have been widely acclaimed.

R&L: *You have often described yourself as an arch-liberal. The word liberalism has very different meanings in the United States and Europe. Could you explain the differences of those understandings of this term?*

Kuehnelt-Leddihn: The term *liberal* in its political connotation we owe to Spain, the nation that always valued freedom most highly if not excessively, and therefore also produced a great many anarchists in the last one hundred fifty years. Resisting the Napoleonic invasion, Spain proclaimed in the liberated south, in Cadiz, a liberal constitution whose supporters were called *los liberales*.^{*} (They denounced their opponents as *los serviles*.) In 1816 Southey used the expression *liberal* for the first

time in England but still in its Spanish form, *liberales*. Sir Walter Scott adopted the French form *lib raux*. In 1832, in connection with the big parliamentary reform, the Whigs assumed the liberal label, the Tories the conservative one. Oddly enough, it was the liberal Chateaubriand who called his paper *Le conservateur*, a word he invented, but in that early period liberals and conservatives were not so far from each other.

In the United States I observe the perversion of the term *liberal*, which caused real liberals to call themselves *libertarians*. The large, hospitable house of liberalism kept all its windows and doors open, and thus the winds from outside could pervade the building. As a good liberal, one has to be open-minded, to respect the signs of the

times and these, unfortunately, were leftist and collectivistic. Thus, self-confessed liberals became illiberal. *The American Mercury*, then editorially managed by Eugene Lyons, published a series of Creeds: the Creed of a Conservative, the Creed of a Reactionary, the Creed of a Socialist, and then, separately, the Creed of an Old-fashioned Liberal, and the Creed of a New Liberal. Needless to say, the latter leaned toward socialism and the omnipotent state. When I speak in Asia, South America, Africa, Australia, or Europe, I have no trouble identifying myself as a liberal. In the United States, where time-honored expressions are so easily confounded, I have to begin with explanations. It's too bad!

In Europe we do not distinguish sharply any longer between conservatives and liberals. I consider myself to be a liberal in the European sense, or to be more precise, a Neo-Liberal, but I never call myself a conservative. *Chronicles* has accepted an article of mine titled *Conservative or Rightist?* I am for the word *Rightist*. Right is right and left is wrong, you see, and in all languages right has a positive meaning

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and left a negative one. In Italian, typically, *la sinistra* is the left and *il sinistro* is the mishap or the calamity. Japanese describes evil as *hidarimae*, the thing in front of the left. And in the Bible, it says in Ecclesiastes, which the Hebrews call *Kohleleth*, that the heart of the wise man beats on his right side and the heart of the fool on his left.

R&L: *Being, then, both a historian and a liberal, could you describe the history of the classical liberal tradition?*

Kuehnelt-Leddihn: First, we have pre-liberalism, that is, liberalism from a time when people who were liberals did not call themselves liberals, and the word *liberal* was not used in an economic way or in any other way. For example, Adam Smith is a pre-liberal, as is Edmund Burke, who also is invoked by conservatives, which is very important. As democracy answers the question, Who should rule? with, the majority of politically equal citizens either in person or through their representatives, liberalism answers the question, How should government be exercised? Liberalism answers that question by saying that government should be exercised in such a way that each individual citizen receives the greatest amount of freedom, but *reason-*

able freedom with its technical and moral limitations. In other words, freedom is the principle of liberalism.

Then we have Early Liberalism. I count Tocqueville, Montalembert, and finally, Lord Acton as very typical Early Liberals. (As you can see, these tenden-

Now, if man is a creator and a persona, he needs the possibilities to exercise his creativeness, and for that he needs freedom. Here, then, is the demand for freedom.

cies do overlap in time very widely; you cannot say where one stops and the other begins. After all, Tocqueville was born in 1805, and Acton died only in 1902.) These Early Liberals are little interested in economics, but they are Roman Catholics, bound by their religious faith, and also which is quite typical all aristocrats. The nobility always has been the most liberal-minded layer of society and the most sensitive opponents of autocratic government. Consider Runnymede in 1215 where the English barons tried to get more rights and to limit royal power.

The next stage is formed by the Old Liberals, but they unfortunately have a tendency toward philosophical relativ-

ism. And in their opposition against interference and limitations, they very often take on an anti-Christian, and specially an anti-Catholic, tendency which, of course, is differently developed in various persons. This is the reason why we find a condemnation of

liberalism in Article Eighty of the *Syllabus*, but, of course that condemnation is of Old Liberalism

In 1947 there was a very important event in the history of liberalism the establishment of the Mont Pelerin Society, which took place in the Mont Pelerin Hotel. The founders of that society Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich A. von Hayek, and Wilhelm Röpke

proposed to call it the Tocqueville-Acton Society, whereupon Professor Frank Knight of the University of Chicago rose, banged the table, and said, If you call this society after two Roman Catholic aristocrats, I'll quit. Well, they then decided to call the society not after any great men but after the hotel where they were meeting.

The Mont Pelerin Society suffered a severe schism when the Neo-Liberals walked out in 1961, a move led by Wilhelm Röpke with Alexander Rüstow and me. We called ourselves the Neo-Liberals as opposed to the Old Liberals. Many of the outstanding Neo-Liberals were Germans and Austrians who had experienced the Third Reich

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and saw the importance of looking for eternal values in the Christian message. They were very conscious of the Early Liberals and, like them, believed very strongly in moral limitations and were convinced that Christianity was a very powerful factor in establishing freedom.

After all, *eleutheria*, which means freedom, is mentioned again and again in the New Testament, but *isotes*, equality, is not.

R&L: *In what way is Christianity a factor in establishing freedom? Or perhaps in other words, what is the relationship between religion and liberty?*

Kuehnelt-Leddihn: The Bible teaches us that man is created in the image of God, in spite of original sin, as in Genesis 8:21, Man's mind from his childhood tends toward evil. Of course, God is very different from man, but not to-

tally. See, if we are like God, then God is like us in some ways. God is the Creator; we are also creators. If you paint a picture, or write a book, or plant a garden, or even make a pair of really rst-rate shoes, then you are a creator. Animals create, yes, but automatically. Think of an ant-heap, if you like; this kind of activity is automatic, but man's is different. He is a creator.

Christianity has a personalistic theology, which is very important. The

Antonio Rosmini-Serbati (1797–1855)

“The state must serve man and not the other way around. Society is properly the means; individuals are the end.”

1997 is the bicentennial of the birth of the Italian priest, theologian, political reformer, and philosopher, Antonio Rosmini. During a time marked by ferment against the established order, Rosmini dedicated his life to reconciling Roman Catholic teaching with modern philosophical and political thought. He sought to harmonize old and new ideas by showing how any true development depends on growth from basic, immutable principles. His bold project made him a controversial figure both inside and outside the church.

Rosmini firmly grounded law and politics in the dignity of the human person. According to him, freedom and private property were necessary consequences of man's dignity and therefore needed to be protected. Rosmini considered freedom to be the power each person has to use all of his talents and resources, and property to be the union of goods with human personality, physically, intellectually, and morally.

Such ideas led Rosmini to praise the conclusions of his contemporary, Alexis de Tocqueville, concerning democracy in America and to support the liberal elements of the Italian nationalist movement. He tried, to no avail, to persuade Pope Pius IX of the movement's merits. Eventually, he fell into disfavor with the pope and with invading Austrian troops.

But time has led to his rehabilitation. A new Italian series on The Great Liberals is devoting its first edition to him; he will be followed by Mises, Hayek, and Tocqueville and, earlier this year, Pope John Paul II introduced his cause for canonization, the first step in what might eventually lead to his being declared a saint.



A

Sources: *Rosmini: Priest, Philosopher, Patriot* by Claude Leatham (Longmans, Green and Co, 1957), and *The Life of Antonio Rosmini-Serbati* by G. B. Pagani (Routledge & Sons, 1906).

word *person* comes not, as Jacques Maritain thought, from *per se*, meaning by itself, but from the Etruscan word *phers*, which was the mask of the actor. The mask gave a specific role to the actor on the stage. So, life is a grand game, a great play of God (I am citing here Hugo Rahner, who is the more gifted brother of Karl Rahner and who has written about the playful God in his book *Man at Play*) in which we are actors. We play with God. We have a responsibility to play our roles, which God might have chosen, but which we are acting with our own lights, on our own behalf, prayerfully trying to comply to His great game and fulfill our destiny and our task here on earth.

Now, if man is a creator and a *persona*, he needs the possibilities to exercise his creativeness, and for that he needs freedom. Here, then, is the demand for freedom. This is a discovery that Hayek whom I knew very well, indeed made very much at the end of his life. In his last book he suddenly sees that religion has something to do with freedom, a discovery that Mises did not make. The realization that religion can make a demand for freedom is very important.

R&L: *Would it be fair to say, then, that the principle of the Imago Dei is the foundation upon which freedom rests?*

Kuehnelt-Leddihn: That's right; we have been created in the image of God.

R&L: *What then is Christianity's role in the preservation of freedom? If Christianity provides principles that establish freedom, how does Christianity conserve freedom in a society?*

Kuehnelt-Leddihn: Christians should speak out when they see measures that unnecessarily restrict freedoms; they should protest publicly in the name of freedom and in the name of the Chris-

tian faith. I must here emphasize that the formula is as much freedom as is reasonably possible, but only as much intervention as is absolutely necessary, you see, with the maximum of the former and the minimum of the latter.

The difficulty is doing that in a democratic framework where the vast majority of people live very materialistically and therefore choose interventions from above from the state which bring them advantages. In such a system, the people say to the parties, We will vote for you if you give us material advantages (which might be handouts) and if you give us freedoms (which might be totally immoral, like abortion and so on). In other words, the people blackmail the parties, and the parties are eager, eager, eager to get the majority's votes, votes, votes. And it goes the other way around, with the parties bribing the people and declaring: If you vote for us, you'll get that and we're committed to this. It's what I call the BB gun bribing and blackmailing, blackmailing and bribing. This leads us nowhere.

We must always keep in mind Romans 12:2, Do not conform to the *aion* and *aion* means the world and the spirit of the period. As Christians we have to resist the spirit of the time. Chesterton made a wonderful remark: The Catholic Church is the only thing which protects us from the degrading servitude of being a child of your time. In other words, we do not give in. We stay our own course, which is not the course of the flow of the time in which we live. The church, therefore, always has been a stranger in this world, but at this present time, the church is more of a stranger than ever in the past. We can make no compromise at all with the spirit of this time.

R&L: *What is the spirit of this time? What is it that the church must resist?*

Kuehnelt-Leddihn: Anthropolatry, the

worship of man. Saint Augustine wrote *The City of God* and a group of American agnostics wrote *The City of Man*, published in 1940. We are in the period of the worship of man and the corresponding idea that God created the world as Supreme Architect but then retired, and it is now up to man to build the city of man. That is blasphemous. We have to keep in mind the City of God, of course, not the city of man.

R&L: *What form of government, then, provides the soundest moral basis for freedom?*

Kuehnelt-Leddihn: That is a very large question. According to Plato, there can be no good government unless the philosophers are kings and the kings philosophers, by which he does not mean Ph.D.s and crowned heads. What he does mean is the rule of those well-informed and knowledgeable. But do not forget there are two aspects to this: There is knowledge, and there is experience, and they have to go together. Knowledge alone is insufficient; practice alone is insufficient. To be a good ruler, one needs the combination of knowledge and practice to which has been added moral principles. Now, you had such a form of government in China with the Mandarins. The man who became a Mandarin was one who passed the examinations, and they were frightfully difficult, taken over the course of days. I had the privilege to talk to Dr. Sung-Fo the son of Sun Yat Sen, the founder of the Chinese Republic who was the director in Taiwan of the examination board for the civil service. He told me, We don't look to see if you're from Princeton or Harvard. That means nothing; here you must pass the examination. And if you passed, then you were accepted as an administrator, as a civil servant, and these people were highly respected by the population because they knew they were great scholars. **A**

Misesian Economics and the Bible

by Mark W. Hendrickson

One of the several magnificent intellectual achievements of the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises (1881—1973) was his development of a comprehensive science of human action, called praxeology. One of the main conclusions drawn from praxeology is that free markets will result in more prosperity than government-directed economic activity a position that naturally makes Misesian economics popular with conservatives. At the same time, one aspect of praxeology often poses a gigantic stumbling block to conservatives of deep religious convictions. They have been perplexed and put off by Mises' insistence that, in praxeology, he had developed a *Wertfrei* (value-free) science of economics.

Praxeology and the Bible

Man is a moral being, the argument goes. Therefore, man's economic behavior his inner choices and consequent outer actions inevitably involve questions of right and wrong, good and bad that is, of ethical or moral values. Seen in that light, praxeology strikes these individuals as counterintuitive or unrealistic at the very least, intrinsically awed if not utterly fallacious, and perhaps even scandalous. There is only one problem with this line of thinking: It is a mistake based on a *non sequitur*. Just because Mises posits a value-free science of economics, it does not follow that he does not believe that man's economic behavior is devoid of moral content.

The basic tenet of praxeology is that humans make choices, and those choices result from the ineluctable fact that hu-

mans choose that which they value more over that which they value less. That is *how* humans act, which is just as empirical a question as how blood circulates through the body. *Why* humans make the choices they do is a separate question. Why a person values what he values, and whether his choices are morally good or bad these are extremely important matters, but they are the province of religion, psychology, and maybe even biology, not of economics.

The classical school of economic thought the generally free-market economists whose theoretical models dominated the Anglophonic world from the appearance of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 up until the neoclassical revolution of the 1870s in fact had been guilty of trying to divorce economic behavior from morality. This error was enshrined in their reification of *homo economicus*. Economic man was a theoretical device or concept by which the classical economists endeavored to distill man's economic behavior from the rest of his being often with ludicrous results, as you can imagine. Misesian praxeology, rather than perpetuating this error, corrects it. Mises abandoned the convoluted efforts to pretend, for the sake of economic analysis, that humans were coldly calculating, soulless, profit-maximizing beings. Instead, he readily acknowledged that humans are complex beings whose economic behavior is informed and influenced by the unique, ever-changing combination of the various religious, psychological, biological motivations (his values, goals, perceptions, desires, and the like) competing for supremacy

within the individual as he is confronted with the particular set of circumstances surrounding him at a given point in time. Mises emphatically eschewed as futile and impossible any attempt to separate economic action from the totality of the individual.

In the individual human consciousness, economic values and ethical values coexist and often affect each other. Praxeology acknowledges this reality, as does the Bible. Both Mises and the Bible have much to say about human action, but Misesian economics focuses on the descriptive aspects of human action, while the Bible's orientation is toward the prescriptive. That is not to say, though, that Mises ignores the impact of ethical values on human behavior, nor that the Bible is silent on the value-free, descriptive aspects of human action. In fact, the Bible lends considerable support to Misesian praxeology.

The Descriptive and the Prescriptive

In the Bible, as in life, the descriptive and the prescriptive are both present. Naturally, the prescriptive tends to be more explicit (after all, the purpose of the Word of God is to provide guidance for how to live a good life in this world, and how to receive salvation). The descriptive, by contrast, is often implicit that is, it is treated in Scripture in a matter-of-fact manner as the morally neutral background against which the drama of human life, with its never-ending battle of good against evil, takes place. For example, the fact that the law of gravity pulls things downward is not good or evil; it is simply the way this world normally works. [I emphasize

normally, because Jesus promenade on the lake (Matt. 14:25—32), and Elisha making the iron ax float (2 Kings 6:1—7), indicate that gravity, like other natural laws of this physical world, is not immutable or eternal but a temporal law, which at any time may be superseded by a divine, spiritual law.]

The Bible makes it clear that the same aspect of human life can have both a value-free and a value-laden context.

economists: *pro t*. Of course, when the Bible mentions *pro t*, it often includes wise counsel about what goals are worthy of man's striving and what pursuits will leave him empty, unfilled, and alienated from God; nevertheless, the clear tenor of the Bible is that the impulse to strive to improve one's sense of well-being is not inherently good or evil but simply the way humans are. The Master Himself acknowledges the hu-

man's peachable honor and integrity, who never would have borrowed an important idea without giving full attribution, as is attested by the fastidious use of footnotes in his books.

The dualistic biblical approach to economic concepts dealing with them in a Misesian value-free descriptive sense as distinct from a prescriptive, value-laden context also occurs with regard to price. Christian theologians in particular have been wrestling with the concept of a just price at least since the time of Thomas Aquinas. The problem with this quest is that, in reading the Bible, one sees that prices in general are neither just nor unjust but morally neutral, being determined by the interplay of supply and demand. The most vivid example of this in the Bible is the Syrians' siege of Samaria. After the city was cut off from all sources of supply, prices soared to unbelievable heights as extreme scarcity increased the marginal utility of the remaining economic goods many times over. When divine intervention caused the Syrians to abandon all their belongings and flee, four lepers found the camp deserted. They then noticed the besieged city, whose occupants thereupon helped themselves to the abandoned goods. Quite naturally, prices promptly returned to normal, as the equilibrium between supply and demand was restored (See 2 Kings 6:24—7:18).

The natural law value-free phenomenon of prices tending to equilibrate supply and demand by no means implies that one's moral values one's sense of right and wrong never affect the price one charges or pays. Abraham and King David each received generous offers of gifts: Abraham a burying place for Sarah, and David a plot of ground and the necessary paraphernalia to build an altar and make offerings to the Lord (See Gen. 23 and 1 Chron. 21:18—26). Both of them decided that it was not right for them to take advantage of their exalted

The “classical school” of economic thought in fact had been guilty of trying to divorce economic behavior from morality. This error was enshrined in their reification of *homo economicus*.

Take human sexuality, for example: That human procreation can ensue from sexual intercourse is a statement of fact, not a value judgment. It is simply a recognition of natural law (once again, a temporal law, as the Immaculate Conception proved). An entirely separate issue is the value-laden question of when sexual intercourse is moral.

Similarly, the Bible deals with economic phenomena in both value-free and value-laden contexts. The logical starting point for discussing the Bible's dualistic treatment of economic concepts is the starting point of Misesian economics: the fundamental premise that individual human beings make choices motivated by a desire to increase their happiness (or at least to diminish their sense of uneasiness, as Mises somewhat negatively phrased it). From this axiom, Mises developed what he termed economics in the broad sense in his 1922 masterpiece, *Socialism*—a concept that evolved into the less cumbersome term *praxeology* by the time his *magnum opus*, *Human Action*, appeared in 1949. When the Bible deals with this identical concept, it uses a simple word common in the contemporary lexicon of

man: person's faculty for rational economic planning. In his statement, “Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?” (Luke 14:28).

Catallactics and the Bible

Similar to the parallel between Mises' praxeology and the Bible's *pro t*, is the striking congruence between what Mises called economics in the narrow sense—in *Socialism* and catallactics—the science of exchange within a monetary framework, what most people think of as economics—in *Human Action*, and the biblical usage of the word *gain*. (Note that in both the Bible and *Human Action* the reader will find some overlap between the concepts of *pro t* and gain, praxeology and catallactics.) Indeed, the equivalence of the Misesian terms with the biblical terms is at times so uncanny that one could be excused for wondering if Mises hadn't borrowed the praxeological-catallactic paradigm from the Holy Scriptures. However, you can rest assured that he did not, for Ludwig von Mises was a man and scholar of unim-

rank. Each instead insisted on paying the price that to them seemed most just, which, in each instance, appears to have been the market price as much money as it is worth in Abraham's words, and the full price in David's. These great men of God clearly did not behave like *homo economicus* but they did behave praxeologically.

Another example of an economic phenomenon that can be either value-free or value-laden is interest. Historically, Christendom struggled with the question of whether interest is moral or immoral. Today, interest is still forbidden in some Muslim lands. Interestingly, the one time that the Savior mentioned the subject was a parable in which the two industrious servants were praised by the returning nobleman for having increased the value of the resources he had entrusted to them, and the timid servant was denounced for not even putting the money entrusted to him in a bank where it at least would have earned usury (Luke 19:23). Here was an implicit recognition of the fact that there is a time value to money that is, that a dollar normally is worth more today than next year; hence borrowers are willing to offer a future premium for the use of the dollar today. Like prices being determined by supply and demand, this is a morally neutral phenomenon. The Old Testament does not proscribe usury *in toto*, but only in specific applications, such as when Nehemiah exorciated the Jews for using their own children as collateral thus profanely valuing human life (or at least the lives of the chosen people of God) less than mammon (Neh. 5:1—10).

Spiritual Law Trumps Natural Law

I hope to have demonstrated that the Bible, rather than refuting the notion of a value-free economics, actually corroborates its existence. The biblical treatment of natural law economics, i.e., praxeology, is sparse occasional de-

tails in the earthly backdrop to the great drama of the divine reaching and redeeming the human but unmistakably present. Whereas the Bible briefly records incidents illustrating natural-law economic phenomena, the writings of Mises amply elucidate them. Mises, not the Bible, is the expositor of the natural laws of economics.

Let me hasten to add that this does not mean that Mises has given us the final word on economics, for natural law is never ultimate law. The Bible plainly shows us that spiritual law trumps natural law in economics as surely as it does in physics and biology. The Bible clearly indicates the existence of higher laws of economics in episodes such as the sudden appearing of water to Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 21:14—19); the Hebrew refugees being sustained in the wilderness by manna, quail, and water gushing out of rock (Ex. 16:11—18 and 17:5,6); the widow's supply of oil not being depleted but more than meeting her needs (2 Kings 4: 1—7); the feeding (to satiety with food left over) of far more people than could normally be fed by what appeared to human sense as a woefully inadequate quantity of food (2 Kings 4:42—44; Mark 8:1—21). Mises

man to those who trust in Him.

Moses, Mises, and Private Property

There is another classification of economic phenomena about which both Mises and the Bible speak, and that is political economy. When economic phenomena shift more into the realm of the normative into political issues such as taxation, a public policy on debt, the redistribution of wealth, workfare versus welfare then the Bible necessarily eclipses Mises as the greater authority. Mises has much to contribute to understanding the economic implications of such policies, but the Bible, for those of us who accept it as our guide to right and wrong, must be the primary source from which to derive the moral values that are codified in human legislation.

It is significant, though, that there is one political-ethical issue confronting all societies that both Mises and the Bible insist is of paramount importance, and about which they are in full and perfect agreement: the principle of private property. Moses and Mises addressed this issue from different angles. Moses relayed the fundamental moral teaching of God's revealed law: Thou shalt not steal to mankind. Mises dem-

It is significant that there is one political-ethical issue confronting all societies about which both Mises and the Bible are in full and perfect agreement: the principle of private property.

was silent about the spiritual, divine laws of economics that are manifested in the Bible the laws that demonstrate that, to the heavenly minded the Christ-imbued consciousness there is no lack; that good is always present, that supply is always more than sufficient to meet legitimate demand; that an illimitable God of love can bestow nothing less than abundant evidence of His love for

demonstrated by irrefutable logic that if a society desires prosperity, then the only rational choice is for governments to honor and protect each individual's property rights.

Mises hoped that rationality could accomplish what a prophet could not: to get all mankind eventually to agree on the superiority of the private property

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The New Testament and Public Life

by T. William Boxx

From the historical beginnings of the Christian movement, there has been an understanding that the governing authorities of the world are under the providence of God. According to Saint Paul, government serves a valuable and divinely ordained purpose until the *Parousia*, when the return of Christ will fully inaugurate the new creation. Government, Paul declares, is instituted by God and is God's servant for your good. Its fundamental function is to provide law and order and punish wrongdoers: For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Thus Christians are conscience-bound to honor governmental authority and be law-abiding citizens (Rom. 13:1—7). At the same time, it is implied that government is accountable to God and is to serve the common good. Perhaps Paul's views here in Romans reflect something of the tradition from the Gospel saying of Jesus, Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's (Mark 12:17; Matt. 22:21; Luke 20:25); it is certainly in consort with the practice of the temple priests in Jerusalem who made sacrifices for (but not to, as others did) the Roman emperor.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, a similar admonition regarding government is expressed by Peter when he tells his readers to be subject to governmental institutions, which exist to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right; thus, they are to honor the emperor (1 Pet. 2:13—17). Likewise, in the letter to Titus, there is the admonition to be submissive to rulers and authorities (Titus 3:1; cf. 1 Tim. 2:2).

One could also look to the book of Acts of the Apostles, which chronicles the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem throughout the Roman empire to the capital of Rome. A careful reading of Acts shows that the author who addresses his combined work Luke-Acts to a Roman official or nobleman, the most excellent Theophilus, demonstrates Christianity to be a nonsubversive religious movement that should be tolerated, if not respected, by the Roman government. Illustrative of this is his depiction of Paul as a good Roman citizen, a respecter of Roman law, and no wrongdoer all of which is generally recognized by the governing authorities, although ultimately he would lose his head (not recounted in Acts) at Roman hands.

God's Will for Our Good

One could say, however, that the rather optimistic tone of the story told in Acts of the spread of Christianity through the Roman world, as well as the accommodating political sentiments in Romans, 1 Peter, and Titus, fail to anticipate times of official persecution and setbacks and hardly provide useful guidance for living in unjust regimes. Without question, the whole of Christian values, experience, and reason must be brought to bear when dealing with the complex sociopolitical situations of religious oppression and persecution, and in the end we must obey God rather than men, as said Peter and the other Apostles (Acts 5:29), but one obviously must distinguish between the theological idea that political and civil order is God's will for our good and its various

human applications.

The existence of civil government is part of God's design for our well-being. Although Christians are a people whose ultimate commonwealth is in heaven (Phil. 3:20) or the kingdom of God, in the meantime we are subject to a divinely ordered world that takes into account both temporal and spiritual order: God's rule extends to both spheres. Another implied principle is that government is not absolute and exists only to serve our good as ordained by God, and government is to be an encouragement to moral behavior.

The Christian message, especially as formulated by Paul and his followers, was able to address the culturally framed (Greco-Roman) religious and moral longings of Gentiles. In a key scene in Acts, Paul is in Athens and begins his missionary work there by preaching first in the synagogue and then in the agora—that is, the market place or public square where commercial, governmental, and philosophical activities mingled. Paul's preaching there kindled the interest of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, and he was able to dialogue with them because he used biblical and philosophical concepts held in common with them such as the unity of humanity as children of God as a point of contact (Acts 17:16—34).

To some degree, then, Pauline Christianity incorporated the best of Greco-Roman virtues and could appeal to reason, not just Judeo-Christian revelation. Thus, Christianity was able to attract and persuade those foreign to the Jewish culture from which it sprang. For instance, some of Paul's moral language

could have been recited by any Greek philosopher, such as the Stoic virtues he commends to the Philippians: whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence (virtue), if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Phil. 4:8).

These are characteristics that mark the life of those who are in Christ, but they are also those which could generally be interpreted as at least tacitly making one a virtuous member of society.

Christians are to carry out their lives in a responsible manner so as to be a burden to no one and to command the respect of all. Paul says in the first letter to the Thessalonians that they should aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; so that you may command the respect of outsiders and be dependent on nobody (1 Thess. 4:11–12). Here is a basis for the work ethic and respect for community relations so important in the social history of the United States and which is constitutive for stable social order.

Paul and Equality

There is an explicit principle of equality in Paul's theology that seems at variance with certain aspects of the ancient social structures to which he and his later followers related. He says quite forthrightly that for Christians, There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). This equality refers to all individuals equal standing before God and their need of God's redeeming grace in Christ. It is a religious equality that embraces the new creation so that all else is secondary in relevance. There is a certain consonance between Paul's sense of equality and Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors and sin-

ners (e.g., Luke 5:29–32). The radical nature of God's kingdom undoes such alienating social attitudes and shows that all are equally in need of God's grace.

In time this religious equality in Paul becomes the basis of ideas about human equality in general when Christians realize that they must more deeply attend to questions of civil society. Because all stand before God equally and all are equally creatures of God, an enlightened Christian society that so recognizes this can hardly justify anything but equality before the law within its sociopolitical order, in spite of the grueling graduality of its full actualization. In our own civic context, this theological understanding can be seen in the American Founders' reaction that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.

The Gospel and letters of John are another important biblical source for questions of social as well as spiritual life. The Gospel imitates the creation account in the book of Genesis, using the same introductory words: In the beginning. Christianity now understands Creation in a new way and to express that understanding John uses a

through created nature, including reason. This understanding can also be inferred from Paul, who implies in Romans 1:18–23 that pagans before Christ could have known God and moral rightness through the created order because such has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. To some extent at least, they are able to do what the moral law requires because it is written on their hearts (Rom. 2:14–15). In spite of humanity's fallen state, knowledge of basic moral precepts and ability to search for God, though impaired, is not obliterated.

Principles from John

Of crucial theological importance is John's incarnational understanding. In spite of the high degree of spirituality in the Gospel, the physical and material cannot be meaningless in a religion whose God became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Christ truly came as a man, not just a spirit seeming to have a body. From the understanding of the human credibility of Jesus, against those who denied it and broke away from the Community of John, there accrues some dignity to humanity in its fullness as well. We are not just spirits

Because all stand before God equally and all are equally creatures of God, an enlightened Christian society that so recognizes this can hardly justify anything but equality before the law.

term linked to a Greek Stoic concept, *logos*, which was the principle of reason and order in the universe. Thus, it is through the Word that all things were made (John 1:1–3). In a manner of speaking, we may say that the principle of reason is understood to be joined with creation.

It follows that some truths about the Creator and Creation can be known

trying to escape the entrapment of our bodies, as later Gnostics held, for therefore the conditions of bodily life would be of no importance. No, we are embodied souls or ensouled bodies and part of God's creation. Human life matters in Christianity, and so also do provisions to sustain and order life in the world.

An equally important concept in John is the identification of God as truth.

God calls us to be truth-seeking people, to realize that there are distinctions to be made among values and ideas about how to live in the world. Not all things can be equally true and good because ultimate grounding of such rests in God. The Spirit of God in the world is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). In John, Jesus says you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (John 8:32). There is no pos-

Western Culture's Heritage of Faith

In conclusion, Christian faith and practice gave rise to certain political and social principles: Civil government is part of God's plan and Christians should be good citizens and promote a virtuous society. Government, however, is not absolute but rather, accountable to God and exists primarily to promote law and order. Individuals have both personal and social responsibilities, includ-

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sibility of real freedom without order and the truth from which it comes. We know only in part and imperfectly (1 Cor. 13:9,12) but we know that we live not in a creation of chaos and accident where there is really no basis for life's judgments but individual will and power. The attitude of limitless variability and relativity that has nothing to do with the truth, belongs to the father of lies (John 8:44).

The good political order requires a proper concept of freedom. For freedom Christ has set us free, Paul tells us. For we are called to freedom but it is a freedom to do what is right, not freedom as an opportunity for the flesh (Gal. 5:1,13). The first letter of Peter tells us that we are to live as free people, yet without using our freedom as a pretext for evil (1 Pet. 2:16). Our lexicon of freedom includes a sense of moral responsibility. No social order can endure freedom without responsibility, and a society whose institutions of governance and culture celebrate freedom as only individual rights apart from the consideration of standards of propriety and moral principle is a society at war with itself.

ing a strong work ethic and a concern for good social order. Truth and a moral order are inherent to God's creation, and a viable society, in all of its institutions, depends upon this recognition.

Finally, in our modern times, when cultural relativism is celebrated and Western culture is often denigrated, the core of which is the Judeo-Christian tradition, it should be remembered that ideas about human dignity, equality, and freedom surely not to be thought of as mere values developed from that heritage of faith. A

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continued from page 7

order. Mises based that hope on the fact that virtually all men have the faculty of reason, whereas rational men often disagree over the authority of a particular prophet and the consequent authority of his message. My own suspicion which only future centuries will confirm or disprove is that Mises' hope is in vain. I say this for two reasons: First, I believe that only Christ, and not human reason, is capable of vanquishing the sin that rebels against the will of God; second, whereas it is possible for virtually everyone to grasp the simple concept "Thou shalt not steal," I doubt there will ever be an age when most people choose to slog through *Human Action* or even some simpler exposition of praxeological science.

One of Our Own

That having been said, I will close with a word of benediction for what Mises has accomplished in his work as an economist. Mises demonstrated definitively to human reason why private property is an indispensable principle on which to base any society. In doing so, he did not discover a new principle but vigorously defended an old one a principle that is not just economic but moral; not only rational but religious; not merely humanly wise but divinely inspired.

Indeed, what greater intellectual achievement can there be than to confirm the truth that God's law is the right way, obedience to which brings abundant blessings? We who uphold the Judeo-Christian tradition should be proud to claim Ludwig von Mises as one of our own. A

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The Encyclical Legacy of John Paul II

A Review Essay by Gregory M. A. Gronbacher

Remarkable changes have taken place within the Roman Catholic Church under the papacy of John Paul II. As the twentieth century draws to a close, we see in retrospect that this century has witnessed in sheer numbers alone more deaths and wholesale destruction of human life and institutions than any previous. Yet even in the midst of such depressing circumstances, worldwide, Catholics find themselves in a dynamic, effective, and revitalized institution that, according to some, now ranks among the world's foremost defenders of basic human rights. That our time has witnessed the amazing transformation of the Catholic Church from a staunch defender of the old-world political order to a democratic sympathizer is due in no small measure to the visionary leadership of John Paul II.

Furthermore, Catholic theology has undergone a quiet revolution in the past eighteen years of this papacy, a revolution best described in one word: *personalism*. Personalism is a school of philosophic thought that emphasizes a renewed recognition of the dignity of the human person and a willingness to make this fact a central tenet of all intellectual and academic endeavors. Hence, Catholic theology has become personalist under the guidance of a pope whose indelible mark of personalism can be clearly seen in his encyclicals.

Catholics and other Christians have grown in their appreciation of the pastoral and intellectual leadership provided by Pope John Paul II. We have lived through eighteen years of an in-

spired and active pontificate the likes of which has not been seen since the days of Leo XIII. In addition to his warmth, faith, and eagerness for the gospel, this pope will leave to the church universal the gift of his encyclicals.

An encyclical simply an open let-

The Encyclicals of John Paul II

edited with introductions by
J. Michael Miller, CSB

Our Sunday Visitor Books
1996. 1008 pp. Cloth: \$49.95

ter to the church and to all people of goodwill addresses important matters of theology and pastoral significance. These letters, though not usually long, are meant to carry the weight of authoritative teaching.

To date, John Paul has promulgated twelve encyclicals, each now compiled into a newly-bound, one-volume reference work, *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, edited by J. Michael Miller, CSB, with helpful introductory matter accompanying each encyclical.

Four Significant Encyclicals for Catholic Social Teaching

In the volume's *Introduction*, Miller provides a sound technical exposition of the history and theology of encyclicals. The different types of encyclicals, their uses, to whom they are addressed, and the like, are all nicely explained. The *Introduction* whets the reader's appetite

and makes it clear that the pontificate of Pope John Paul II is extraordinary in many ways, not the least of which is the way this present Pope has utilized the encyclical form more than any other pope of recent memory. The use of this format preserves John Paul's legacy for future generations of students of Catholic social thought as they have the opportunity to study his collected letters and documents. Of the twelve letters, perhaps the four most significant for these purposes are *Redemptor Hominis*, *Veritatis Splendor*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and *Centesimus Annus*.

In *Redemptor Hominis* (redeemer of mankind), the pope's first encyclical, we find one of the central keys to the intellectual agenda of his pontificate: the dignity of the human person redeemed in Christ. Jesus Christ, the redeemer of mankind, reveals two essential facts to humanity: first, the nature of God the Father, His love, mercy, and compassion; and second, the true nature of man, fully redeemed and living life abundantly. The pope notes that this second aspect of the revelation of Jesus Christ is often overlooked, and it is from this revelation that John Paul grounds his understanding of the dignity of the human person and seeks to refocus theology along personalist lines.

In *Veritatis Splendor* (the splendor of truth), the longest encyclical of John Paul's pontificate, the pope addresses the issue of moral relativism, so pervasive in modern society and even present within the church. In his view, the greatest threat to the freedom of the West is moral relativism, for it has usurped the

traditional understanding of truth. Where once we sought to make our judgments correspond to an objective reality, we now strive to subject the world according to whim and with little or no relation to reality. As a result, the modern mind is unable to accept any sort of truth claim. Our culture's embrace of relativism has led to a congenital dis-

to the culture of death stands the culture of life, that force inspired by the source of life itself, which affirms the sanctity of life and the dignity of all persons.

Finally, the ground-breaking encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (one hundred years) is the pinnacle of John Paul's contributions to Catholic social teaching. The pope movingly addresses the

man should be free economically so he can enter into more cooperative relationships with others and meet his obligations to work in order to provide for the needs of his family, his community, his nation, and ultimately all humanity. In this way, John Paul is echoing the Catholic Whig tradition of Lord Acton who wrote that Liberty is not the power of doing what we like, but the right of being able to do what we ought.

Catholics and other Christians have grown in their appreciation of the pastoral and intellectual leadership provided by Pope John Paul II. In addition to his warmth, faith, and eagerness for the gospel, this pope will leave the church universal the gifts of his encyclicals.

ortion of freedom: Indeed, the course of the twentieth century could well be described as the history of the distortion of freedom. In contradistinction to this contemporary view of freedom, John Paul offers a vision of freedom rooted in the truth about human nature. According to him, genuine freedom is measured by our ability to choose the good in all areas of human life, that is, man must exercise his freedom and live in accord with his own objective nature. This vision of man is deeply rooted in the natural-law tradition of morality, which resists relativistic interpretations and applications and believes that moral norms are fixed in both the nature of God and the nature of man. This encyclical, more than any other, rightly has received widespread attention.

Evangelium Vitae (the gospel of life) builds upon the work outlined in *Veritatis Splendor*. In this letter the pope makes his dramatic distinction between the culture of life and the culture of death. John Paul sadly notes that the culture of death is a strong force in the later half of the twentieth century, a culture that hates life and actively promotes abortion, euthanasia, and a general disrespect for human dignity. In opposition

colossal wreck of collectivism and socialism in former communist countries of Eastern Europe and attributes the failure of socialism to a fallacious anthropology that denies the liberty of man. In this way, the restraint of economic liberty leads to social disarray of all kinds. Most significantly, the pope, for the first time in the history of the modern Church, gives a limited endorsement of free markets. Furthermore, in the interest of avoiding the pitfalls of radical capitalist ideology, he rightly calls on all to exercise economic freedom in relation to norms of justice and love. In this way, this document is an excellent summary of the past hundred years of Catholic social teaching and provides a coherent outline for the ordering of a society both free and virtuous.

In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul also seeks to deepen and, in some respects, to discipline the debate over rights by linking rights to obligations and truth. He argues forcefully that conscience is not some kind of moral free agent in which an autonomous self declares something to be right because it is right for me. Rather, rights exist so that we can fulfill our obligations. Thus, to take an example from one sphere of life, a

An Effective Encounter with Modernity

In all his encyclicals, John Paul's defense of human rights arises out of a deep commitment to a Christological humanism, a love for Jesus Christ, and a deep respect for human dignity. It is this passion for the depth of the human experience that has allowed him to enter into an effective encounter with modernity. John Paul's personalism, infused throughout each encyclical, is the intellectual blueprint for a free and virtuous society in the next millennium.

As we now head into the twilight of John Paul II's papacy, the Catholic Church is beginning to fully appreciate the blessing bestowed by the Holy Spirit in this pontificate. Since his election in 1979, the pope has guided the church with an eye toward the year 2000 and has in many ways reformed the church through his teachings and actions. We now have a magnificent opportunity to enter more deeply into John Paul's mind through this collection of encyclicals. Sadly, when the unthinkable, but inevitable, happens and the pontificate of John Paul II ends, we will continue to be enriched by his interpretations of theology and philosophy. **A**

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American Catholic
The Saints and Sinners Who Built
America's Most Powerful Church

by Charles Morris

Times Books, 1997. 511 pp. Cloth: \$27.50

Review by Rev. Paul Scalia

The American Roman Catholic is a curious animal, forever trying to modify the docile, traditional, receptive spirit of the Catholic by the independent, innovative, frontier mentality of the American. Results of his endeavor vary from the impressive and influential to the disedifying and disastrous. His task is never-ending simply because it is impossible: American cannot modify Catholic.

In the aptly named *American Catholic*, Charles Morris seeks to give the definitive history of this creature. From the start, he acknowledges the inherent tension between a church anchored in dogma and tradition and a culture based on innovation and individualism. The Catholic Church and the United States have had quite a past, and Morris provides a captivating account of their stormy relationship. Unfortunately, while the book's first two parts (Rise and Triumph) provide good history and fascinating reading, the third part (Crisis) rather quickly degenerates into a peculiarly American forum for proposed church reform.

Morris's decline from history to trendy ecclesial issues ruins a beautifully written and lively narrative of the Catholic Church in the United States. He first details the Irish beginnings of Catholicism in America in David and Goliath terms: how uprooted, ignorant Irish peasants became the architects of the church's powerful structure. Next, he gives a great presentation of the trium-

phant mid-twentieth century Catholic Church that had such a profound impact on all parts of American life.

In the final part, however, Morris loses his footing, not because he misunderstands American culture but because he misunderstands the Catholic Church. He has a distinctly American ecclesiology that applies American views about self-government to the Catholic Church. Therefore, Morris sees the church as the work of our hands and thus easily guided by whatever changes are apparently needed in a given situation. While his thinking may apply to the United States government, it ignores the church's divine founding and eschatological purpose. When applied to the church, this policy-centered outlook spawns a utilitarian Catholicism seeking not the true but the useful.

Glimpses of Morris's error come fairly early. At one point, he reduces the Council of Trent to that moment when the church adopted its official hard line against Protestantism. Of course, both Protestants and Catholics would agree that Trent presented not just a hard line policy but, in fact, the Catholic Church's official teaching on such permanent things as revelation, sacraments, grace, and nature. Morris also discusses the church's opposition to communism as though it were a policy decision rather than a matter of theology and truth. Throughout the book, Morris seems to consider the church's nature and teachings as malleable as our government's.

This awed understanding leads Morris astray most of all in his analysis of the Catholic Church's present crisis. Within the church today one can find two groups, perhaps most easily described as liberal and conservative, embroiled in a continuing debate about liturgy, sexuality, politics, and the like. Morris attempts to present them accurately, especially in his profile of the dioceses of Lincoln, Nebraska, and Saginaw, Michigan. Unfortunately, he does not appreciate the theological bases of the disagreements and consequently reduces them to alternative visions of Catholicism. His mistaken perception of the church renders him incapable of giving a proper diagnosis of the problem and possible solutions.

For example, Morris's examination of the Mass lacks any appreciation for the truth about Catholic worship. In his description of the Masses in the Lincoln and Saginaw dioceses, he treats drastically different ceremonies as though they were simply alternative visions of the Mass. As a result, he equates a Mass celebrated according to the rubrics with a Mass plagued by abuses. He ignores the fact that much of what occurs during the Saginaw Mass is quite simply illicit and contrary to what the church intends the Mass to be. On the other hand, when in Lincoln the priest does what the church asks of him during Mass, Morris can only see the actions as political, subtle touches meant to promote a certain agenda. He fails to understand that the priests in Lincoln intend not to advance an ideology but simply to present the truth of the Mass.

Similarly, Morris aims to treat divergent views on sexuality as though they are different opinions of equal value. Unfortunately, he himself does not present them equally. In the chapter titled *The Struggle with Sexuality*, he provides all the arguments of the dissenters, while giving only a superficial

presentation of the Catholic Church's official teaching. Throughout the chapter, Morris maintains a smug tone, derisive and mocking of traditional church teachings. Aside from its arrogance, the chapter is simply bad research: Apparently, Morris could not find anyone to defend the church's teachings on homosexuality, masturbation, and contraception. In the many pages he dedicates to contraception, he gives only one paragraph to the Natural Family Planning method.

Toward the end of the book, Morris's approach becomes increasingly political and his biases more evident. In one of the last pages, he unveils his utilitarian dogma in stating that the Catholic Church's doctrine will have to evolve out of dialogue with Catholics, not separate from them. Catholicism, of course, is a revealed religion, meaning that doctrine comes not from our dialogue but from God Himself. That Morris would even imply otherwise indicates a tremendous confusion about the basis of the Catholic Church.

The final page lays bare the arrogance that girds such utilitarian thought. Morris proclaims the church's moral teachings as necessary for peasants fighting their way out of the bogs, and good enough for second-generation immigrants on the first rungs of middle-class respectability. Now, however, Catholics in America no longer need these teachings because, except for the newest waves of Hispanic immigrants, [they] have long since made it in America. The truth was good as long as it was needed by the ignorant and poor but it is quite unnecessary now. In this way the book that began with the history of Catholicism in America ends in the promotion of a condescending, self-serving Catholicism. A

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Book News



On Faith and Free Government

Daniel C. Palm, editor
Rowman and Littlefield, 1997
215 pp. Paper: \$22.95

In *On Faith and Free Government*, Daniel C. Palm, professor of political science at Azusa Pacific University, has assembled a very useful collection of resources on the role of religion in the American political order. The book is in two parts: the first a number of contemporary essays by various experts on American political thought, the second a selection of primary documents from the period of the American Founding.

The contributors to Part I all seek to shed light on different aspects of this issue. Thomas G. West presents an overview of the Founders' position that religion provides essential foundational support for political liberty. Palm draws out important distinctions between the ideas of religious toleration and religious liberty and explains how the latter is superior. Harry V. Jaffa, in his insightful essay, explains how the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence and thus, sound constitutional political theory are resolutely rooted in a Judeo-Christian cosmology. Glen E. Thurow shows how the Founders resolved the apparent conflict with the biblical mandate to submit to ruling authorities and the revolutionary imperative to resist tyranny. James R. Rogers demonstrates how the vocabulary the Founders used in their explication of the nature of liberties is a vocabulary inseparable from, and hence incomprehensible without, Christian theism.

All these essays wrestle with original documents from the Founding, including presidential pronouncements

such as Washington's Farewell Address, early American laws such as the Northwest Ordinance, and perhaps most useful sermons from prominent colonial churchmen. Many of these are included in Part II and complete this excellent resource for understanding the Founder's view of the relationship between religion and liberty.

Memoir on Pauperism

Alexis de Tocqueville
Introduction by Gertrude Himmelfarb
Ivan R. Dee, 1997
80 pp. Paper: \$6.95

Tocqueville's *Memoir on Pauperism* perhaps his least-known work is primarily an argument against public relief. Tocqueville's concerns center chiefly around the unforeseen consequences of the good intentions that inspire any system of large-scale state-sponsored relief to the able-bodied poor. The issues he raises are familiar to our contemporary debate: that the right to public charity ultimately traps its claimant in a degrading system, that it produces an overweening and oppressive bureaucratic state, that it weakens the poor's incentive to work, and that it severs the essential moral ties between giver and receiver that exist in private charity.

Gertrude Himmelfarb's introduction provides essential context to both the circumstances in which Tocqueville came to write the *Memoir* and the history of the development of public assistance in his day. The re-publication of this little work is good news, as it provides a glimpse into how a previous generation responded to the peril of state-sponsored public relief.

Gregory Dunn

Medical Technology, Medical Ethics

The usual line on medical ethics goes something like this. In the old days, ethics and medicine weren't often in conflict. The physician intervened to save lives when he could, but his main limitation was technological. Nowadays, however, we have the technology to keep life going for an indeterminate period, blurring distinctions between life and death. This reality necessitates that doctors and families make difficult decisions about when to pull the plug. And since finances are always an issue, making those decisions requires us to think not just about life itself but preeminently about the quality of life.

Herein lies the supposed ethical difficulty. Issues of quality of life cannot be decided by the patient; others, especially those who pay the bill (it can be society as a whole), must intervene.

As we intervene, we must remember that it's not only the line between life and death that is no longer clear; it is equally difficult to distinguish between what might have once been called murder and what is now more correctly seen as passive euthanasia. And voilá, the unthinkable is now permissible and even ethical.

To be sure, not everyone takes it this far. But what's missing in these discussions is an awareness that it is not the advance of medical technology by itself that creates these conflicts but the lack of a basic framework to guide us, based on time-tested rules, in making ethical decisions.

No matter the technology, doctors have always faced choices imposed by the ever-present reality of scarcity; this was as true in ancient Greece as it is today. Indeed, the ethical troubles introduced by modern medicine as such have been wildly exaggerated. We always confront the same objective: to do the best that we can to preserve life given the material world in which the means to save life are always limited while the demands are unlimited. The question of whether to do more has always been with us.

So why do we hear so much about the moral burden

that comes with technological advance? It's a cover for what is truly absent from modern discussions of medical ethics: a coherent framework for telling right from wrong.

There is a crucial difference between deliberate abandonment of a patient denying food and water, for example and failing to use every possible avenue of treatment. But what precisely is this difference? The distinction between ordinary and extraordinary means of sustenance, the most basic element of medical ethics, has been

accepted from the earliest centuries of the Christian era to our own

Ordinary means include food and water, what is needed to preserve life under ordinary conditions. Extraordinary means are anything above that, which should be taken if conditions permit it but that morality

doesn't necessarily require if economics or other considerations intervene. Yet today, the field of medical ethics is dominated by endless fretting over technological woes but precious little discussion of even this basic distinction.

Technological advance, like economic progress, contains no inherent moral logic to guide it. To serve the betterment of human life, objective moral norms must serve as guideposts. This is why all social development must take place within a culture that defends human life the only possible reason for either scientific or economic progress.

If basic moral teachings don't always provide obvious answers in the most unusual medical cases, they at least orient us toward making ethical decisions based on a clear set of values. These choices have always confronted medical workers and always will. **A**

Fr. Sirico is co-founder and president of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. A longer version of this article appeared in the on-line magazine Intellectual Capital, July 10, 1997, and can be accessed via www.intellectualcapital.com.

“Liberty is not a gift but an acquisition; not a state of rest but of effort and growth; not a starting point but a result of government, or at least a starting point only as an object; not a datum but an aim.”

—Lord Acton—

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