

# RELIGION & LIBERTY

November and December • 1999 A Publication of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty Volume 9 • Number 6

## Biblical Worldview Crucial for the New Millennium



### Interview: Charles Colson

Charles Colson, founder and chairman of Prison Fellowship Ministries, is the author of fifteen books, including *Born Again*, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, *Loving God*, and, most recently, *How Now Shall We Live?* In 1993 he received the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. His weekday radio commentary, “Breakpoint,” airs on over three hundred stations across the United States.

**R&L:** *You have described How Now Shall We Live? as “the most significant book” of your career. Why do you feel this way, and what prompted you to write it?*

**Colson:** *How Now Shall We Live?* is the most significant book I have written because, in my mind, it is the lack of a biblical worldview—a well thought out understanding of how Christianity affects all of life—that results in the church being increasingly marginalized in society. So many Christians see Christianity as merely personal conversion or liturgical experience that they lose sight of the fact that all truth is God’s truth. Ultimate reality is found in Christ, whom the Bible describes as the Logos or plan of creation.

I have been thinking about this book

for ten years. Nancy Pearcey, my co-author, and I started writing three years ago when we realized that this message was absolutely crucial for presenting a vibrant Christian witness in the new millennium. Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* describes the new millennium as a “springtime of evangelization”; I think he is correct to say that we have that capability, but the crucial thing will be whether or not Christians are able to present a worldview that is a more reasonable way to order our lives than secular naturalism. Hence the book.

**R&L:** *In the course of your discussion of Christianity as a worldview, you write that “the dominating principle of Christian truth is not soteriological (i.e., justification by faith) but rather cosmological (i.e., the sovereignty of*

*the triune God over the whole cosmos, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible).” Could you unpack that statement for us and explain why it is important for the church to hear this truth in the new millennium?*

**Colson:** My statement that the dominating principle of Christian truth is not soteriological but, rather, cosmological is taken directly from Abraham Kuyper. He understood that the sovereignty of God is the overarching truth of biblical revelation. Kuyper, of course, was reflecting on the power of the Calvinistic worldview in the face of what he described as the “revolutionary” worldview that was rising in his day.

Salvation is, obviously, the heart of the Christian message, but starting with salvation is like opening a book in the middle. We first have to see that our God is the creator of the world, that sin was introduced into the world by human disobedience, and that redemption therefore becomes the way we can be restored to a right relationship with God. Salvation apart from an understanding of God’s sovereign work in the world—the fact that he is the God of the whole cosmos—shortchanges the biblical mes-

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE • Interview:** Charles Colson © **Articles:** “Modern Misconceptions About Monopoly” by Paul A. Cleveland, and “The Challenge of International Debt Relief” by Gary M. Quinlivan © **Review Essays:** “‘We Were Wrong!’ Yes: Hook Then, Slice Now” by John Bolt, and “Chronicle of a Christian Radical” by Rev. Robert A. Sirico © **In the Liberal Tradition:** Hugo Grotius.

sage. Such a shortchanging terribly weakens the church because we become obsessed with mere personal piety and our eternal well-being and ignore God's commandment to care about all of creation.

**R&L: You describe a biblical worldview using three focal points: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. I would like for us to explore each of these concepts. First, how do you understand the doctrine of Creation?**

**Colson:** Creation means that God spoke us and the whole cosmos into being. Christianity proclaims the eternally self-existent God who freely and graciously created all things for his glory and man's well-being. This stands in stark contrast to the dominant cultural belief "that the cosmos is all there is or ever will be" (Carl Sagan's famous dictum), that life arose as the result of a chance collision of molecules, and that it has, through an impersonal, unsupervised process, evolved into the world as we know it today. Secularism declares that only matter is eternal in any and all its forms—including human life—and has no purpose whatsoever. Happily, secular orthodoxy is being rapidly and seriously challenged by current scientific developments, more and more of which tend to support the theory of Intelligent Design.

**R&L: Next, what do you mean by the Fall?**

**Colson:** The first humans, who were real beings in history, disobeyed God. God created a world that was good and perfect, but gave us a free will, and by exercising that free will in disobedience to God, we introduced sin into the world. This original sin bent and distorted the human condition thereafter. This stands in stark contrast to the modern belief in the goodness of man, a notion embraced by Enlightenment thinkers. It has led to all manner of utopianism, which in the twentieth century has brought tyranny, death, and destruction to much of the world, as well as the erosion of personal responsibility across the board in Western societies. There is no more pernicious doctrine than modern utopianism.

**R&L: What is your view of Redemption?**

**Colson:** In Christ we are made new and our sins are forgiven. This is a radical understanding that God sent his Son to die on the cross to pay the price for our disobedience. What has been fascinating to me in the preparation of this book is the realization that *only* the biblical worldview offers a satisfactory explanation and answer to the human dilemma of sin and suffering. No other worldview offers redemption in the way the Chris-

tian worldview does. But Christ redeems the whole person, not just his soul, and sets him on a course of reconciling men and the world back to God.

**R&L: In that your purpose in advancing the biblical worldview is to get the church thinking about how to transform culture, let's look at the one area of culture—economics—in light of the categories of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. First, how should we think about economics in light of Creation?**

**Colson:** God created the world perfect. The first humans were to live in paradise and were given, in the cultural mandate, the task of cultivating the soil; they were also given intellectual tasks, that is, naming the animals. In a sense, God took five days to create the universe, and on the sixth day named humans as his agents to continue the creative process. Thus economics—from the Greek *oikonomia*, meaning stewardship—viewed from a creational aspect would be carrying out the perfect will of God in developing his creation to ever-higher stages of goodness. This obviously would place a high value on work, and economic pursuits would be directed toward furthering God's plan by seeking to bring out his goodness in every aspect of life. God created us to live in a completely harmonious community in which we would work to receive the

## RELIGION & LIBERTY

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

Volume 9 • Number 6

**Publisher:** Rev. Robert A. Sirico

**Editor:** Gregory Dunn

**Contributing Editors:**

William B. Allen, Ph.D.

John Attarian, Ph.D.

Doug Bandow, J.D.

Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, Ph.D. †

Rabbi Daniel Lapin

Ronald Nash, Ph.D.

Rev. James V. Schall, S.J.

Herbert Schlossberg, Ph.D.

The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty was founded in 1990 to promote a free society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles. The Institute is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, charitable, educational, and literary center. It is supported by donations from foundations, corporations, and individuals and maintains a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status.

Letters and subscription requests should be directed to: Acton Institute, 161 Ottawa St., NW, Suite 301, Grand Rapids, MI 49503 or phone (616) 454-3080.

The views of the authors expressed in *Religion & Liberty* are not necessarily those of the Acton Institute.

© 1999 Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty.

good benefits that God planned for us through the faithful and diligent exercise of our abilities in our own sphere for the benefit of all.

**R&L: Next, the Fall.**

**Colson:** The Fall embraced all things,

including God's creation. God proclaimed a curse on the ground. The harmony of God's relationship to creation was destroyed. Undeterred, God entered into a covenant with men, whereby he determined to renew them unto himself and set them back on a course of being channels of his blessing to the world.

**R&L: Last, what is the redemptive perspective of economics?**

**Colson:** As part of his covenant, God prescribed the law to his covenant people. His law was to be the basis of a new society in which men—having been delivered from captivity by God's cov-

## Hugo Grotius (1583–1645)

*“The law of nature of which we have spoken, comprising alike that which relates to the social life of man and that which is so called in a larger sense, proceeding as it does from the essential traits implanted in man, can nevertheless be attributed to God, because of his having willed that such traits exist in us.”*

In the United States' Capitol, twenty-three marble relief portraits of historical figures central to the principles of American law oversee the House Chamber. These portraits include Moses, Pope Gregory IX, Sir William Blackstone, and Hugo Grotius. In truth, Grotius's jurisprudence was considered authoritative by the American Founders.

A diplomat, lawyer, magistrate, scholar, and teacher, Grotius was born in Delft, Holland, on April 10, 1583. In 1625, the excesses of the Thirty Years' War compelled Grotius, a lifelong opponent of tyranny, to write his magnum opus, *The Law of War and Peace*, which is an excellent example of the many treatises on natural law written by jurists and theologians in western Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. For this reason, Grotius is considered the father of international law.

The concept of man's natural rationality and sociability is central to Grotius's understanding of natural law. What distinguishes man from the beasts is reason, which perceives that justice is a virtue, apart from any considerations of self-interest or expediency. Further, due to this natural rationality, man seeks society with others, possesses speech, and is inclined to behave justly, despite the fact that some choose not to follow their true nature. From these principles of rationality and sociability, Grotius derives his concept of human law: “To this sphere of law belong the abstaining from that which is another's, the restoration to another of anything of his which we may have, together with any gain which we may have received from it; the obligation to fulfill promises, the making good of a loss incurred through our fault, and the inflicting of penalties upon men according to their deserts.”

Grotius's thought is a watershed in the history of Protestant natural-law thinking because he grounded natural law in human nature rather than in the command of God. In spite of this, he still maintains a close connection to the classical tradition, in contrast to his contemporary Thomas Hobbes. A



Sources: *The Law of War and Peace*, by Hugo Grotius (Carnegie Foundation for International Peace, 1925), and *The History of Political Philosophy*, edited by Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

enant grace, would live in grace and truth out of gratitude to God and according to his statutes. The economic aspects of his law clearly are a reflection of his standard of justice in a fallen world. Private property is to be respected (note that two of the Ten Commandments deal with private property). The requirements of restitution found in Exodus 21 and 22 reflect a high regard for the preservation of private property as well as for individual dignity. At the same time, there is to be social justice. Landowners are to reserve a portion of their harvest (called gleanings) for the poor. Just wages are to be paid, and just balances are to be maintained in the marketplace. The poor and needy are to be protected from oppression, and the industrious faithful are to be rewarded for their labors. So, in the Old Testament, we see a pattern for God's economic plan.

Through redemption, we are restored to our pre-Fall state, albeit imperfectly. This does not mean we will not continue to sin or experience the consequences of the Fall, but it does mean that our mandate for the cultural commission has been returned to us. So we are to work

of economics that can simply be imposed on or introduced to a society apart from the whole framework of redemption provided for in God's covenant. Biblical economics will succeed only when it is pursued by redeemed men, men who love God supremely and who love their neighbors as themselves.

**R&L: What would the application of these three motifs look like in the secular public square?**

**Colson:** Look at capitalism unfettered by moral restraints, and you will see that it, like any other economic system, can be exploitative. It is the Christian who brings balance and moral concerns from revelation to bear on public policy. The Christian worldview speaks out against the corruption and ills that tend to be winked at in our day. It insists that the needy be cared for out of a motivation of love, not guilt. It requires justice, restitution, and reconciliation in matters of crime and punishment. It argues for self-giving as opposed to self-serving in all things. In the Christian view, we also find a very high view of work. Work is

**do you respond to such calls of radical separation from our culture?**

**Colson:** I could not disagree more with my esteemed colleague Paul Weyrich. The fundamentalist movement of the Christian church made a grievous mistake early in the twentieth century by withdrawing from the mainstream of society and building its separate, parallel institutions. That decision, as much as anything else, is responsible for the secularization of modern American life, as Francis Schaeffer argued eloquently in *The Great Evangelical Disaster*.

There is also a note of despair in the counsel that Weyrich gives the Christian world, that the culture war has been lost and we thus should abandon the field of battle. Despair is a sin, for it denies the sovereignty of God. Christians must never abandon the field of battle.

Further, such counsel is wrong because it comes at the very moment that cultural indicators are beginning to show a distinct shift. For example, reductions in crime, teenage pregnancies, and abortions are healthy signs. Christians must not disengage from the culture. This is a time for us boldly to proclaim Christian truth and thus help bring about what John Paul II foresees for the third millennium—a springtime of Christian evangelization.

---

**It is the lack of a biblical worldview—a well thought out understanding of how Christianity affects all of life—that results in the church being increasingly marginalized in society.**

---

in ways that glorify God and bear his righteous standards.

Thus it is that Christians are to be instruments of economic justice and to bring moral truth to bear in economic relations. The fact is that economics in a fallen world cannot be just unless it is balanced with a biblical understanding of morality, which is why the Christian plays such a vital role in formulating economic policies in a just society. It is important to note, at the same time, that the Bible does not present a philosophy

done to the glory of God with excellence and with a view to the benefit of ourselves and others.

**R&L: Earlier this year, Paul Weyrich shocked and dismayed many conservative evangelicals when he argued that they “need to take another tack” and “look at ways to separate [themselves] from the institutions that have been captured by ... enemies of [their] traditional culture.” From the framework of Christian worldview thinking, how**

**R&L: Writing about ecumenism, you note that, “focusing on worldview ... can help build bridges” between Protestant evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox believers. Can you explain, on the basis of your participation in Evangelicals and Catholics Together, how you have seen the biblical worldview promote such church unity?**

**Colson:** Father Richard Neuhaus and I saw that Christians from both the Catholic and Protestant confessions are  
*continued on page 7*

# Modern Misconceptions About Monopoly

Paul A. Cleveland

Much of the modern-day concern about the existence of monopolies is woefully misdirected. The government's current assault against Microsoft provides good evidence of a very misinformed understanding about what constitutes a detrimental monopoly. As D. T. Armentano has pointed out in connection to the case, "[Microsoft] earned its market position by innovating a user-friendly operating system at minimal cost to the consumer.... That it competed vigorously for market share cannot be doubted; but more important, it committed neither force nor fraud in its commercial activities. Yet for all this, it was rewarded with massive competitor envy and a decade of legal harassment." In light of the facts of this case, it is timely that we should consider the nature of monopoly.

We live in an age when the term *monopoly* has a very negative connotation, but we ought to examine in what sense the word deserves this negative assessment. *Webster's Dictionary* defines monopoly as "the sole power of vending any species of goods, obtained either by engrossing the articles in market by purchase, or by a license from the government confirming this privilege." In the first instance of the common usage of the term, namely the sovereign control over property following its purchase on the market, the word means that the ownership of property itself is a monopoly. This is certainly not a bad thing. In fact, a free market cannot exist unless people possess this kind of monopoly over their own property. It is the very essence of the free market. Fundamentally, this general privilege

affirms the individual's right to hold and use his own possessions according to his own inclinations.

## The Monopoly of Private Property

To understand why the protection of property is so important to the existence of a vibrant marketplace, we need to consider the definition of a free market. Basically, a free market is one in which people are free to engage in trading relationships on terms that they find agreeable. That is, a free market is one in which people trade with one another on a voluntary basis. In this case, each party to any particular trade is sovereign over whatever property he brings to the marketplace. Since each potential party is sovereign over his own property, a prospective buyer is free to accept or reject the offer of any seller. Furthermore, the consumer is free to enter or withdraw from the market at will. Likewise, every seller is free to accept or reject any offer made by a prospective customer to buy his product. In addition, every seller is free to withdraw from the marketplace any amount of the product that he might offer for sale. To be sure, some buyers and sellers are in better bargaining positions than others. Nonetheless, if an exchange of property is to be made at all, both parties to the trade must believe that they will be made better off as a result of the exchange. Otherwise, they would not trade. For this reason, sellers are always in competition with other sellers, and buyers are always in competition with other buyers. When a buyer and a seller agree to make an exchange of property, however, they enter into a cooperative relationship. That relation-

ship will continue within the context of terms agreeable to both parties so long as both are mutually satisfied. However, either party may choose to end the relationship if some better prospects come along, so long as they fulfill any prior obligations.

One of the problems of securing a free market is that sellers and buyers are amply motivated to avoid the rigors of competition in the marketplace through price-fixing schemes. Indeed, rather than live in a world where people are free to trade according to their own inclinations, many a seller would like to limit the choices available to consumers, and many a purchaser would desire to dictate the price that sellers might receive in exchange for their wares. As Clarence Carson has put the matter in *Basic Economics*:

However effective the market may be in setting prices which move goods and services or in benefiting people as consumers, there is always some degree of dissatisfaction with anything approaching the free market.... After all, the market is neither sentimental nor compassionate, nor does it take into account to any extent how hard anyone may have struggled to produce the goods he offers there or acquire the money with which to purchase goods.... Nothing is more likely than that we will often conclude that the price of what we have to offer is too low and that of what we want to buy too high.

For this reason, our immediate interest in our own wherewithal in a free marketplace is a constant threat to the market's very existence. That is, each of

us has sufficient motivation to limit the choices of others in order to promote our own interests. It is unquestionably the case, however, that material prosperity is most readily promoted in the free market. Study after economic study continues to point out the beneficial effects of freedom, but economic freedom rests on the existence and protection of private property. Therefore, we ought not use the term *monopoly* negatively if we mean by it the existence of private property. That sellers might be free to produce and sell their products as they see fit is hardly a situation that we should lament. Regrettably, as we examine the Microsoft case, the essence of the government's argument against the firm rests on the notion that the company ought not have that kind of control over its own property. That is, the government would argue that Microsoft ought not have the right to sell its own product in

is used in this fashion, it means that the sole privilege to direct certain property comes not simply from purchasing the property in the open market but, rather, from a grant of special privilege. In this case, the governing authority has assigned to one party a special favor that is being denied to all others. This is the kind of monopoly that was bemoaned by many people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and by early economists because it undercuts the free market by denying the inherent property rights of some so as to provide others with a special privilege. When governments engage in extending such favoritism to some at the expense of others, not only do those who are out of political favor lose, but consumers lose as well since there is less from which to choose in the marketplace. Herein lies the reason the term *monopoly* developed a negative connotation to begin with.

to do with the work of John Stuart Mill, who was an exceptionally brilliant man rigorously educated by his father. In turn, Mill's father was a student of Jeremy Bentham, who had argued that government policy ought to promote "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" and, therefore, argued that policy ought to be driven by a "hedonistic calculus." While this hedonistic calculus often translated into a defense of the free market in the minds of many economists of that day, Mill himself did not always argue in this fashion. In fact, John Stuart Mill favored numerous governmental interventions into the economy. For example, he favored the regular redistribution of wealth as a way to achieve a greater equality in society and, presumably, a greater level of happiness. But the very essence of such a position is an implicit denial of the importance of maintaining property rights on traditional moral grounds. Instead, a new kind of morality is imported into the discussion—namely, that property may be violated regularly if it serves the purpose of increasing happiness.

Utilitarianism is, however, wholly inadequate as a basis for developing a moral rule of life. In fact, the problems of this approach are numerous. For instance, how can interpersonal comparisons of happiness be made? As a first flaw in argumentation, this one is fatal. We might think of two children arguing between themselves as to which one of them would be happier to receive an ice cream cone. The first one says, as a matter of fact, that he would be very happy to have it, while the next child says that he would be infinitely happy to have the ice cream cone as his own. The argument between the two continues, as the first child claims emphatically that he will be infinitely, infinitely happy to receive it. The simple fact of the matter is that all such arguments degrade into sheer nonsense.

In addition to this problem, utilitari-

---

The end result of this kind of thinking has, in fact, been an expansion of governmental privileges and favors for some, achieved by imposing costs on others. Today, the government doles out favors by way of franchises, certificates of public convenience, licenses, price supports, and subsidies.

---

the marketplace on terms agreeable both to the company and its customers. Instead, the government claims that it is in a "better position" to direct the use of the firm's property. However, this "better position" is fundamentally driven by Microsoft's competitors who have not been as successful in attracting customers to their products. Basically, the government's case is one aimed at undermining the private property rights of one company for the purpose of providing benefits for its competitors.

This brings us to the second meaning of the term *monopoly*. When the term

### The Legacy of Utilitarianism

Nevertheless, this negative connotation has more and more been associated with the legitimate use of private property. In a kind of perverse fashion, our government is using the term as a means of waging an assault on private property, with antitrust laws being but one front of the attack. To understand this, it is necessary to understand the context in which these laws were developed. During the latter part of the nineteenth century the study of economics began embracing utilitarianism. This had much

anism has no means of discerning between different kinds of pleasure or of inter-temporal tradeoffs in pleasure and pain. In the first case, it cannot be determined whether sensual pleasures ought to be preferred to spiritual pleasures or vice versa. As a result, utilitarians invariably regard over-indulgence as a mere preference that cannot be judged inferior to moderation. In the second case, within the confines of utilitarianism, no judgment can be offered as to how we should judge between an immediate pleasure that might have long-term costs versus those pleasures that might be had in the course of time if only we could endure some initial pain. Once again, the utilitarian will treat the prodigal who pays no regard to his future prospects as being morally equal to the prudent man who saves in order to secure his future. In fact, utilitarianism offers no means of judging such problems since all such decisions are reduced to matters of immediate personal preference. Conversely, traditional morality has always excelled in discerning between foolish and wise behavior.

### Monopolies, Good and Bad

In truth, utilitarianism has greatly influenced the thinking of economists as well as that of the general populace. As a result, this has led to the development and expansion of welfare economics. The notion of consumers' sovereignty as an ideal rather than as a necessary fact of life has proliferated through society. Murray Rothbard in *Man, Economy, and State* has argued that it is a basic fact that everyone who is engaged in a productive endeavor in a free market is a property owner and, therefore, must make a sovereign choice of whether or not to produce for monetary gain. In addition, consumers in a free market have the choice of whether to buy something or not. In essence, the actions of all parties, both as consumers and as producers, reflect a sovereign control

over property. Utilitarian ethics aims to make it an evil to withhold an item from the marketplace so long as forcing a sale at a low price would bring greater happiness to the person buying the product at that price than it would cause pain to the person forced to sell at that price. However, to argue this is to undercut the very essence of property rights. This, he argues, is what many people have been more than a little willing to do. They have sacrificed the importance of property rights and the free market so as to promote utilitarian ethics. It is largely as a result of this kind of argumentation that antitrust laws, as well as a host of other kinds of government regulations of property, have been developed. It is also a result of this kind of thinking that has led to the extension of actual monopoly privileges in society.

The problem with this kind of thinking is that it enslaves the property of some for the benefit of others, and this is exactly the kind of monopoly that ought to be deplored. The end result of this kind of thinking has, in fact, been an expansion of governmental privileges and favors for some, achieved by imposing costs on others. Today, the government doles out favors by way of franchises, certificates of public convenience, licenses, price supports, and subsidies. In addition, it penalizes some efforts by way of tariffs and other taxes aimed at undermining the economic wherewithal of some potential producers in the market. These activities are the kind of monopolies that ought to be feared, but are more and more merely taken for granted. In truth, the American populace has been very much misled about the nature of monopoly. *A*

---

*Paul A. Cleveland, Ph.D., is an associate professor of economics at Birmingham-Southern College in Birmingham, Alabama.*

### Interview: Charles Colson *continued from page 4*

defending the same worldview; we therefore thought that we should join together to seek common ground wherever we could find it, to engage in dialogue to better understand one another's traditions and points of view, and to work toward a common witness in the world. That conviction was at the root of Evangelicals and Catholics Together in 1992. We subsequently have issued two statements and engaged in extensive, ongoing conversations. I firmly believe that we are finding unity together as brothers and sisters in Christ. By focusing, as Kuyper recommended, on the sovereignty of God and the larger issues of life in a postmodern world, we have been able to join hands at many points, discovering in the process that we have more in common than we suspected, yet holding on without compromise to the distinctives that make us evangelicals and Catholics. This is precisely what Kuyper called for in his 1898 Stone Lectures at Princeton: that we should join together in defense of the great confessions and creeds that unite us against the forces of pantheism (I would say, today, against the forces of secular naturalism).

We are seeing great results from our work, which is gaining acceptance among evangelicals and Catholics alike. In Ireland there is a group very much like ours in this country. In South America the Catholic bishops are meeting with Pentecostal leaders for open dialogue and are even beginning to issue some joint statements. Cardinal Cassidy from the Vatican has urged the various synods to study the *ect* documents and to be aware of the progress that has been made in agreements on such matters as salvation.

I think this is a God-ordained movement and that it will continue to bring Christians together in defense of the fundamental truths of the faith. *A*

# The Challenge of International Debt Relief

Gary M. Quinlivan

Proponents of third-world debt relief are lobbying for complete forgiveness of loans to poor countries in or by the year 2000. Some go on to argue that the citizens of these nations do not even owe the debt because it was borrowed by past corrupt governments for political and military purposes. All point out the moral issues behind debt relief, for such nations are unable to spend enough on education, health care, welfare reform, and infrastructure because they are saddled with the oppressive burden of large external debt.

There is no disagreement among economists that such a burden inhibits growth and impoverishes nations, but it would be naive to think that one only need classify the countries that need or deserve debt relief and then simply erase it without consequence. Someone will have to absorb (in manners described

spectively, \$136 billion, \$339 billion, and \$1,583 billion in outstanding external debt as of 1995.

In the following, we will examine several international debt relief proposals and focus on the consequences associated with granting debt relief. Supported by reasons given below, we believe that debt relief should be given to the poorest countries and to those developing countries suffering from financial distress, but, to prevent future recurrences of international debt problems, debt relief must lead to free-market and political reforms that emphasize private capital flows and an end to government bailouts.

## Various Proposals for Debt Relief

Numerous plans for debt relief have been proposed by various groups, poli-

better fiscal management—chiefly, increased tax revenue collection and fewer government expenditures.

Further, President Clinton and the g-7 countries expect the imf to take an aggressive role in the forgiveness of third-world debt, but if the imf were to forgive all its loans to low-income countries, the impact would be negligible. The imf had \$91 billion in outstanding loans and credit to developing countries as of April 1999, which represents only 5 percent of the developing countries' total outstanding external debt.

In addition, if we consider only loans that exceed \$1 billion, imf loans tend to be to medium human development countries or to lower-middle income countries, and no ldc has more than a \$1 billion loan. The only country that received more than a \$1 billion loan from the imf and was classified as a low-income country was Pakistan. A total of \$22.9 billion of the imf's loans and credits to developing countries went to Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela, which are upper-middle-income countries, and \$13.2 billion went to South Korea, which is a high-income country.

The g-7, with the support of the imf and World Bank, have proposed to reduce the debt of thirty-three African nations, along with Laos, Nicaragua, and Honduras—up to 70 percent of the \$127 billion they owe. Such relief would be only for debts owed to governments and multinational institutions.

Religious organizations, strongly supported by the Roman Catholic Church and various non-religious groups, have united to form an organization called the Jubilee 2000 Coalition,

---

below) the immense burden.

The size of this burden depends on how one defines a poor and financially troubled country. If we use the low-income ranking of countries as defined by the World Bank, external debt was \$435 billion in 1996. If, instead, we consider the three classifications of poor countries used by the United Nations—least-developed countries (ldc), countries with low human development, and developing countries—there was, re-

ticians, and international organizations. Plans by the United States and, more broadly, the g-7 countries (the world's major industrial nations), the International Monetary Fund (imf), and the World Bank are laden with conditions to promote free and open markets, as well as banking and political reforms. In the case of the United States, President Clinton's desideratum is to promote expenditures on education and health care. The imf, for its part, is demanding

---

If developed countries are truly concerned about the plight of developing nations, they need to free up their import/export markets.

---



which has called for complete debt relief of \$220 billion for the poorest 41 countries. The Jubilee 2000 Coalition is also suggesting that no conditions be attached to debt relief. This recommendation does not sit well with economists because the primary economic and political problems underlying the increasing burden of external debt would not be corrected.

Clinton has pledged his support to the Jubilee 2000 Coalition and has proposed to cut debt payments by \$70 billion over the 1996 imf-World Bank Program. To fund a portion of the debt relief, Clinton suggested that the imf sell off ten million ounces of its gold holdings.

Republican Representative James A. Leach from Iowa and Democratic Representative John LaFalce from New York have put forth a bill to give more debt relief to developing countries than is currently being offered by the 1996 imf-World Bank Initiative. The Leach-LaFalce bill would reduce debt payments to 10 percent (half that of the Clinton proposal) of Gross Domestic Product for qualifying nations. Similar to the Clinton proposal, debt payment savings would be required to be channeled to education, health, and other social programs.

Jeffrey Sachs, an economics professor at Harvard University, believes that the Clinton, Leach-LaFalce, and g-7 plans do not go far enough and states that there should be complete debt forgiveness for the world's twenty-five poorest countries. Like Clinton, Sachs opines that the imf should sell off about one third of its gold to eliminate \$8 billion in debt for forty countries. Sachs also states that the United States should write off approximately \$6 billion in loans to the poorest countries. Sachs points out that the United States' burden from his debt relief plan will be minor because realistically only 10 percent of the total amount on these out-

standing loans is collectible.

### **The Crucial Question: Who Will Bear the Burden?**

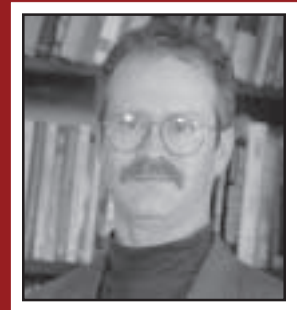
In our analysis, to the extent that loans are nonperforming, government creditors should write off the debt. These loans were ill-conceived in the first place, for a successful loan would have generated the income necessary to repay the debt. The stock of non-performing loans held by industrialized

agencies (imf, World Bank, the g-7).

Should governments write off loans that are performing but oppressive in that they absorb a large percentage of gdp? Writing off these loans would have morally hazardous consequences; countries would have an incentive to borrow, no matter what the cost, from official sources and hope for more debt relief in the future. Another problem would be convincing the citizens of industrialized countries to absorb the burden of the

There is no disagreement among economists that such a burden inhibits growth, but it is naive to simply erase it without consequence.

— Gary M. Quinlivan



countries and owed by developing countries bears witness to the billions of dollars these governments have collectively wasted. In this sense, developed nations are as much to blame for the current external debt mess, and perhaps Jeffrey Sachs's proposal is not as extreme as it may appear. Lawrence B. Lindsey furthers this argument by comparing current attempts to collect on the nonperforming loans of developing countries to a "Debtor's Prison" where "debtors are expected to shrink their own consumption enough to allow them to repay their creditors over time." As a consequence, the poorest countries and those in financial crisis become mired in a long-lasting economic depression. Lindsey argues that the world would be better off in the long run if the external debt of the poorest developing countries and the debt of those developing countries in extreme financial distress (Russia, Laos, and Nicaragua, for example) would simply be written off by official

foreign loans that are written off; the income flow from the outstanding performing loans would cease, and these countries would have to compensate for the lost income by burdening their own citizens with increased taxes or reduced services.

### **A Modest Proposal: The Free Market**

For a long-term solution to the problem of outstanding third-world debt, official sources need to set into motion market reforms that prevent future problems. External debt problems are strongly linked to financial crises (banking and currency crises), which, in turn, are the product of closed markets, civil unrest, capital controls, a lack of a rule of law, virtually no transparency with respect to financial matters, bad regulatory policies, government-run monopolies, government subsidization of state-run industries, diminished flexibility in labor markets, government-

sponsored corruption and nepotism, unwise government borrowing, poorly planned loans given by the *imf* and industrialized countries, and onerous fiscal and monetary policies, to name only a few. As a consequence, there are a number of free market and political reforms that are necessary for markets in developing countries to operate efficiently.

Furthermore, if developed countries are *truly* concerned about the plight of developing nations, they need to free up their import/export markets. Increasing developing countries' access to Western markets will create jobs, encourage foreign direct investment and portfolio capital flows, and promote growth. All the external debt recommendations recently proposed by the *g-7* include no substantial proposals to open up their markets. Admittedly, the World Trade Organization has provided a forum to initiate the opening of markets, but, in our opinion, they have not gone far enough.

#### A Promising Millennium to Come

Based on the United Nations' survey

rates, and a decrease of child labor.

Such improvements to world welfare are direct results of increased trade and capital flows. In those regions (especially South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa) where trade and capital flows have been severely restricted, welfare changes over the last fifteen to thirty years have been stagnant or negative. The improvement in world welfare has also been primarily a free-market initiative—as a percent of Gross National Product, from 1985/86 to 1996 industrialized countries across the board reduced their official development assistance. Furthermore, past government borrowing by developing countries (especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia) has left domestic residents saddled with a large external debt and little if anything to show in terms of positive improvements in their standard of living.

Based on the above analysis, debt relief should be given to eliminate the problem of the “Debtor’s Prison” that is faced by low-income developing countries, but to prevent the moral hazards

assets and seek to deregulate their economic systems to promote the emergence of competitive enterprises.

The current external debt problems of developing nations are the result of misdirected government borrowing and poorly conceived government loans. Market discipline is necessary to prevent future crises. If developing countries desire improvements in their standard of living, they must make honest efforts to attract the foreign capital they so desperately need. This would make it necessary for developing countries to develop freer economic and political systems.

#### The One Thing Needful: Market Discipline

The prevention of future large-scale debt crises requires the private sector to become the sole source of loans and direct investment to developing countries, and the *g-7* countries, World Bank, and *imf* need to serve notice to private investors that, from now on, there will be no more bailouts of governments in financial distress. Since markets are more demanding of economic performance than governments, better quality loans will be made, which, in turn, will create more jobs and improve standards of living in developing countries. *A*

---

*Gary M. Quinlivan, Ph.D., is the executive director of the Center for Economic and Policy Education and chair of the economics, political science, and public policy departments at Saint Vincent College. He has either coedited or authored eleven books, including Toward the Renewal of Civilization: The Political Order and Culture (coedited with T. William Boxx), For Liberty and Freedom: Philip M. McKenna and the Gold Standard League (coauthored with Brian Surkan), and Public Morality, Civic Virtue, and the Problem of Modern Liberalism (coedited with T. William Boxx).*

---

The stock of nonperforming loans held by industrialized countries and owed by developing countries bears witness to the billions of dollars these governments have collectively wasted.

---

of 174 countries, there has been great improvement in the welfare of developing countries from 1960 to 1995. With the exception of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the good news for developing countries is reflected in strong improvements in real income growth, life expectancy, number of live births per thousand, adult literacy, gross enrollment ratios, food production, caloric intake, fat consumption, protein consumption, cereal consumption, health care, reductions in malnutrition

that will predictably follow, it will be necessary to disengage governments and international agencies from the market process. Some government regulation (for example, regulations that support private property rights, banking regulations that promote stability without harming competition, and the like) will still be necessary, but, as witnessed, government intervention in markets generally leads to economic distortions and financial crises. Therefore, developing countries must privatize government

# “We Were Wrong!” Yes: Hook Then, Slice Now

A Review Essay by John Bolt

My love for the game of golf is, alas, not matched by an equivalent level of skill. Like many duffers, I tend to overcorrect. If I hook a shot, I am just as likely to slice the next, and my journey up the fairway reminds any spectator brave enough to watch of a drunken sailor tacking. Or I may push my putt past the hole only to follow by leaving the next one short. A good golfer learns from each minor mistake, makes the appropriate adjustment, and improves his game; I am happy if my mistakes occasionally compensate for each other and give me a break.

Cultural and political trends often exhibit similar patterns of overcorrecting. People and societies often zigzag from one extreme to another. Permissive eras are followed by repressive ones, and vice versa. We embrace big government one day; we cynically despise it the next. The volume under review, coauthored by Ed Dobson, a respected, inspirational evangelical pastor and Cal Thomas, a nationally syndicated columnist who never hides his Christian light under a politically correct bushel, is, in this reviewer's judgment, a classic example of cultural and political overcorrecting.

Pastor Dobson and journalist Thomas were key architects of and players in the Moral Majority movement led by Baptist clergyman Jerry Falwell. *Blinded by Might* argues that conservative evangelical Christians adopted a flawed strategy when they embraced a political solution to fix America's social ills. The authors confess they once believed “that we could make things right through the manipulation of the politi-

cal system” (8). Now they realize that politics cannot save America; the biblically directed path to “political and societal restoration” is renewed hearts that the Holy Spirit creates through the gospel, not political activism.

## The Authors' Lament

Evangelical Christians, they say, have erred in attempting “to achieve suc-

*Blinded by Might:  
Can the Religious Right  
Save America?*  
by Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson

Zondervan Publishing House  
1999. 282 pp. Cloth: \$19.99

cess by shortcuts through the dark and deep political jungle” (8). Not only are most evangelicals politically “in unfamiliar territory and lack the necessary survival skills,” but more important, if we rely “mainly on politics to deliver us, we will never get that right because politics and government cannot reach into the soul. That is something God reserves for himself” (89). The authors also find distasteful the arrogance implied in names such as “Moral Majority” or “Christian Coalition,” the latter being particularly offensive since it implies “that disagreement with their political positions is, in fact, disagreement with Jesus” (80).

The authors insist that they have not changed theologically or politically, that they continue to “support much of what

the movement upholds ... [and] respect Jerry Falwell for the good he has done as a pastor, a civic leader, a mobilizer of politically docile Christians who had withdrawn from their civic duties” (9). They are also “emphatically not calling for retreat or surrender by conservative Christians, or anyone else on the ‘right.’” Rather they are insisting on a reordering of priorities. In Thomas's words: “Our beliefs about God and the Bible have not changed. Neither has our politics. What has changed is that we no longer believe that our individual or collective problems can be altered exclusively, or even, mainly, through the political process” (15). In fact, the authors contend, even after twenty years of evangelical activism, “today very little that we set out to do has gotten done. In fact, the moral landscape of America has become worse....

[Our] hopes of transforming the culture through political power, it must now be acknowledged,... have failed” (23). A different set of priorities is needed; politics must be subordinated to gospel proclamation. According to Dobson and Thomas, “too many religious conservatives have not learned from twenty years of attempts to fit the square peg of the kingdom not of this world into the round hole that is the kingdom of this world” (139). Hence, this book. The authors' “zeal,” says Thomas, is “proclaiming a better way to transform society” (117).

There is much in this book that is wise counsel for Christian political activists and for concerned Christian citizens. A triumphalism that puts too much faith in political solutions is a Christian

eschatological heresy that prematurely seeks to herald the full salvation of God's kingdom as a present reality. It is no less a heresy when it comes from the right of the political spectrum than when it came from versions of Christian Marxism or other forms of the Christian left. In particular, the warning about ministers becoming politically engaged and thereby losing their voice as authentic and credible messengers of Christ and the gospel is well taken. Politicizing the pulpit is a major mistake. Bad politics in the name of Christ is a scandal to the gospel; evangelical zeal mistakenly poured into a political movement rather than bearing witness to the gospel of reconciliation can produce an apocalyptic zealotry that destroys all hope for a genuinely civil political society. When God is marshalled as a partisan in ideological, political debate, true political society disappears. In addition, the temptation to exert political influence and power is a seduction for church lead-

ers that takes them away from their real calling. All this and much more is salutary, wise counsel that evangelical political activists ignore at their peril. The authors rightly call on the church to be the church and plead with its ministers to remain faithful to their real calling.

discussion about American public life—the proper role of religion. To begin with, the authors give us conflicting messages. They oppose retreat and withdrawal from politics by Christians yet describe it in terms so polarizing—politics is about compromise, having enemies; the gospel is about truth, reconciliation, compassion—that the subliminal message decidedly encourages distance rather than involvement. They judge American public education to be a basket case, favor education choice via vouchers *and* muse out loud about a better, more loving strategy of infiltrating public schools with dedicated Christian teachers instead of setting up alternatives. They maintain a traditional moral stance against homosexual behavior, yet use the code language of gay activists—compassion, love and tolerance instead of hate and “gay bashing”—in critique of “judgmental” Christians. They judge compromise to be a necessary political evil, insist that abortion is

along with the interviews with Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell at the end of the book, provide overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

It is clear, from Thomas's and Dobson's own accounts, that evangelical political activism arose in *reaction* to hostile secularism that threatened religious freedom. If so, then the strategy of “preaching instead of politics” leads to cultural pacifism, to a political posture that will not fight back when attacked, will not seek redress from constitution, legislature, or court, but will only turn the political cheek and respond with kindness and love. This is a curious and confusing conclusion for columnist Thomas to make especially since he remains an active journalistic warrior in the culture wars of our time. It is also at odds with the *cri de coeur* eloquently expressed by Thomas only five years ago in his book *The Things That Matter Most*.

[You] are aware, as perhaps never before, that something has gone wrong in the last three decades, and ... may at last be ready, under the right leadership, to launch a second American revolution aimed at taking [your] country back and again creating a government of the people, by the people, and for the people—not government in spite of the people.

Actually, the book's impact may be worse than sowing ambiguity and confusion. As a call to eschew politics for a more spiritual way of changing America, *Blinded by Might* fails. Whether intended or not, this book itself *is* a political tract. Receiving significant media attention, it has been exploited by enemies of the faith and of freedom to discredit the conservative religious presence in the public arena. The response of secularists in places of influence and power was unanimous and triumphant: “See, we were right. Religious conservatives are dangerous when



*Preaching before politics, yes. However, preaching instead of politics, no. Instead, preach and send church members out into the public square.*

— John Bolt

ers that takes them away from their real calling. All this and much more is salutary, wise counsel that evangelical political activists ignore at their peril. The authors rightly call on the church to be the church and plead with its ministers to remain faithful to their real calling.

### A Disappointing Contribution

And yet this volume disappoints as a contribution to what is arguably the most important issue in contemporary

a great evil that requires a constitutional pro-life amendment, *and* then proceed to urge American Christians to slow down their political efforts on abortion in favor of changing hearts first. The authors repeat many of the familiar calumnies coming from critics of the Christian right—Christian political activists are closet theocrats seeking to impose their religion and morality on freedom-loving Americans—while their own account of the Moral Majority's founding,

they enter politics. Now two of their own even say so! Keep them out! Keep them out!” What is true and important about the book’s message will, I fear, get lost in that firestorm of gloating.

If Dobson and Thomas hooked then, they slice now. This volume overcorrects a mistake but still does not take us straightly and cleanly up the fairway. A reader cannot help but wonder why Dobson and Thomas did not encourage a better *political* strategy along with their call for spiritual renewal and letting the church be the church. A religious culture that provides a foundation for social renewal must begin with preaching, but it cannot exclude all political activism. In 1988 Dobson coauthored another book with similar themes (and title!) to the volume under review, *The Seduction of Power*, a book that Dobson still cites with approval in *Blinded by Might*. The earlier book, so Dobson now reports, expressed the need for an evangelical public theology because

“the Moral Majority lacked a long-term vision for its political involvement ... [and] called for a philosophy of political involvement ... [including] a theological and philosophical basis for our involvement ... [such as the awareness arising from] a Christian being a citizen of two worlds—one earthly and one heavenly—[and having] an obligation to both.”

Though Dobson repeats this call in *Blinded by Might*, one wishes that the book itself had made a greater contribution to it.

### Lessons from a Victorian Dutchman

Both authors could learn from the public theology and public career of the Dutch neo-Calvinist theologian, educator, journalist, and statesman Abraham Kuyper. A minister in the Dutch Reformed church, he took his ecclesiastical calling as seriously as does Pastor

Dobson. For Kuyper, the church must be the church, and the preacher’s calling is to proclaim the gospel and not to confuse pulpit and parliament. Yet, in a context of cultural, social, and political chaos—in Kuyper’s nineteenth-century Netherlands, like in America one hundred years later, the dominant public issue affected by religious conviction was freedom of education—Kuyper also realized that in addition to proclamation by the church, political action by citizens was also badly needed. So he started a Christian newspaper and fired up his journalistic pen with a vigor and passion that would do Cal Thomas proud. Later, Kuyper also started the first Dutch political party, wrote its platform, ran for a seat in the Dutch Parliament, and was eventually elected and even served for four years as the Dutch Prime Minister from 1901 to 1904. However, and this point is important, he resigned as a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church *before* he ran for public office. This was, admittedly, a requirement of Dutch law, but it was also a matter of principle for Kuyper. One’s credibility and influence in politics, Kuyper believed and practiced, do not come *ex officio* as a minister of the gospel but by persuasive political rhetoric and successful grass-roots political activism. In politics, motivation and mobilization are key.

Kuyper’s thought and life do illustrate the main point made by Thomas and Dobson in *Blinded by Might*: Let the church be the church, and let ministers of the gospel be ministers of the gospel. Kuyper’s many volumes of biblical meditations as well as his theological writings—notably his major work on *The Holy Spirit*, all testify to his profound conviction that real national, cultural, and social change comes through the renewing, transforming work of the Holy Spirit and not through politics. At the same time, the duties of Christian citizenship add further responsibilities

for actively promoting freedom and public well-being—responsibilities that begin with, but are not exhausted by, preaching. Thomas and Dobson unfortunately do not overcome the problem of setting as stark and mutually exclusive alternatives two different tasks that must be distinguished and not confused but also not separated. For Christian believers, preaching *before* politics, yes. However, preaching *instead* of politics, no. Instead, preach *and* send church members out into the public square to fulfill their callings as Christian citizens. Unfortunately, Dobson and Thomas have overcorrected to earlier mistaken passions and emphases. Hook then, slice now.

### Hook and Slice

What keeps us duffers from giving up the game altogether, even when we hardly ever break one hundred, is that one great drive, that one remarkably well-played hole, that one spectacular chip shot landing a foot from the pin. Dobson and Thomas get in many great shots in *Blinded by Might*. We need another contribution from them that corrects both the initial hook and the slice of their overcorrection. *Blinded by Might* says: “We were wrong then; now we show you a better way.” In the judgment of this reviewer, it would be more accurate and helpful to say this: “We were wrong (and partly right) then; here is a correction that addresses what was wrong (but is also incomplete and therefore partly wrong)—a more complete vision still awaits.” Yes, wrong then, still not right now, but to both authors: Do not quit. The subject is too important to leave it here. Now drive it straight down the fairway. A

---

*John Bolt, Ph.D., is professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

# Chronicle of a Modern Christian Radical

*A Review Essay By Rev. Robert A. Sirico*

George Weigel's remarkable biography of a remarkable pope closes with G. K. Chesterton's description of Saint Thomas More: "He was above all things, historic: He represented at once a type, a turning-point, and an ultimate destiny. If there had not been that particular man at that particular moment, the whole of history would have been different." This is an apt description of the life and times of Karol Wojtyla, the poet, actor, and philosopher who would become Pope John Paul II, the most enduring and consequential person of the last quarter of our century and certainly one of the great popes in the history of the church.

As George Weigel notes, John Paul II caused the century to end differently from how many intellectuals supposed it would. After the loss of the papal states in 1870 and the steady march of communism and secularism from first two decades of the century forward, the Roman Catholic Church was expected to be continually reduced in stature until the triumph of secular collectivism, informed by science and led by a new class of intellectuals, became evident to all. At the end of the millennium, however, it turns out that the Catholic Church retains its status and influence in both spiritual and worldly affairs, and, in Weigel's words, "the most compelling public figure in the world, the man with arguably the most coherent and comprehensive vision of the human possibility in the world ahead, is the man who is best described as the complete Christian."

*Witness to Hope* sets out to demon-

strate that John Paul II is both the focus and the cause of the change, the witness to hope in our times and the voice of hope to hundreds of millions. In making this case, and in a range of other areas, the book must be considered a spectacular success. Weigel's approach is not simply to assemble the public record but, rather, to examine the mind of Karol Wojtyla "from the inside": the

*Witness to Hope:  
The Biography of  
Pope John Paul II*  
by George Weigel

Cliff Street Books  
1999. 992 + xiv pp. Hardcover: \$35.00

pope's motivations, goals, and methods from his own point of view and from the theological perspective that has been the core of this papacy. To make this possible, the author was granted access to Vatican archives—access no previous papal biographer has ever been granted. He makes excellent use of this access, providing the reader an inside account of the pope's role in the fall of communism and the collapse of dictatorships, the theological controversies over liberation theology and dissent, and the emergence of a new Europe and a new America. Weigel had eleven extended conversations with the pope and interviewed thousands of people who have had close contact with John Paul II in all his dealings.

While the end result is a biography

that heralds the life of its subject, the biography in no way feels "authorized"; indeed, it was decided at the outset that the book would be Weigel's own and its subject would have no veto power over the content. This surely will not be the last attempt to write the "definitive" biography of this pope, but it is difficult to imagine a book that could surpass it. In its astonishing scope, attention to detail, and balance of analysis, this book provides everything one could hope for in a biography of such a significant figure.

## **A Pope Without Precedent**

How is it possible even to begin to assess this pope's impact on the church and the world? Let us recount the facts. John Paul II has been pope for longer than all but ten men in the history of the church.

He has made 84 pilgrimages and 134 pastoral visits, traveling a total of 670,878 miles—2.8 times the distance between the earth and the moon. In his trips outside Rome, he has delivered 3,078 addresses and homilies and has spoken to hundreds of millions of people. No human being in the history of the world has spoken to so many people in so many cultural settings. The printed record of his teaching covers ten feet of shelf space. He has promulgated a new canon law and a new catechism, beatified 798 men and women, and canonized 280 new saints. He has appointed 159 new Cardinals, and 101 of the 115 members of the College that will vote on the next pope are his appointees.

Summing up his biography, Weigel lists eight main achievements of this

pope: a renovated papacy, the full implementation of Vatican II, the collapse of communism, the clarification of the moral challenges facing the free society, the insertion of ecumenism into the heart of Catholicism, the new dialogue with Judaism, the redefinition of inter-religious dialogue, and his personal inspiration to millions.

This list is somewhat surprising because it makes clear that this papacy has turned out very differently from how its early detractors predicted it would. I remember being in seminary and observing the emerging opinion among many that this pope should be considered a very simple reactionary attempting to repeal the Second Vatican Council, keep women in their place, and close the window that church had opened to the outside world in the previous decade. Weigel calls this the “conventional critique” of this papacy, and his refutation of it is withering. Anyone who still holds that view has been willfully blind to the core of this papacy, which has marched steadily forward, undeterred by critics from all sides.

There are two new insights that Weigel has brought to his subject, ones that have not been covered in the more journalistic treatments to which Pope John Paul II has been subjected over two and a half decades.

First, Weigel understands this pope to be a “Christian radical” who is always centered on understanding the roots of the spiritual, cultural, and political difficulties experienced by the modern world. The use of the term *radical* here is quite brilliant, because it implies not heterodoxy but its opposite. Given the present state of the culture in most parts of the world, what proposition could be more radical than to assert the absolute truth of orthodox Christianity?

The pope’s root theme is summed up by Weigel as follows: “Christ, the redeemer of the world, reveals the astonishing truth about the human condition

and our final destiny; self-giving love is the path along which human freedom finds its fulfillment in human flourishing.” In pursuit of this theme, the pope has been the most consistent champion of the dignity of all human life, and he has advanced this view regardless of the political fallout. His celebration of rightly ordered sexuality within the family and his opposition to euthanasia and abortion cut against the grain of current thinking in secular society. Despite all attacks, he has never wavered from his position, advanced everywhere with compassion and drama. His “radicalism” is also evident in his willingness to challenge entrenched institutions, from communism in Poland to state-education in Cuba to consumerist materialism in the West.

The second new insight Weigel presents is his understanding that this pope has been an outsider in Rome. He had not been acculturated to be a pope. He had known next to nothing about the

Christ in the world.

It goes without saying that Weigel’s treatment is deeply sympathetic, but it notably manages to avoid hagiography. Indeed, it might surprise the reader to discover that, in places, Weigel offers measured criticism of several aspects of this papacy (for example, on the Vatican opposition to the Gulf War and the limitations of the pope’s management style in securing his theological legacy within the Curia).

### But a Farther-Reaching Project

In that same spirit, I might suggest that Weigel has not appreciated the full scope of the pope’s teaching concerning economics. The pope has not set out merely to embrace the productive and moral power of the market economy and to restrain it within a juridical and moral framework, as Weigel argues. His project concerning economics has been more intellectually far-reaching: to revive the late-scholastic continental tra-

Weigel understands this pope to be a “Christian radical” centered on understanding the roots of the spiritual difficulties experienced by the modern world.

—Rev. Robert A. Sirico



“ins” and “outs” of the Roman Curial bureaucracy. He has never shown much interest in the never-ending political controversies that vex ecclesiastical politics. As a consequence, his papacy has been primarily evangelical rather than bureaucratic in character. Furthermore, this evangelism has meant not only speaking truth to the world but also exhorting the Catholic Church to become ever more faithful to its divine calling to be an example of the light of

dition of economic thought and to demonstrate its compatibility with the insights of modern economic science, particularly that of the “humanistic” Austrian school approach. But this is a small quibble in what is clearly a triumph. Weigel has captured this extraordinary man like no other writer. *A*

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

“The Church renders service to human society by *preaching the truth about the creation of the world*, which God has placed in human hands so that people may make it fruitful and more perfect through their work; and by *preaching the truth about the Redemption*, whereby the Son of God has saved mankind and at the same time has united all people, making them responsible for one another.”

—Pope John Paul II—

## RELIGION & LIBERTY

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

161 Ottawa Ave., NW, Suite 301  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
Grand Rapids, MI  
PERMIT NO. 986

Forwarding and Address  
Correction Requested