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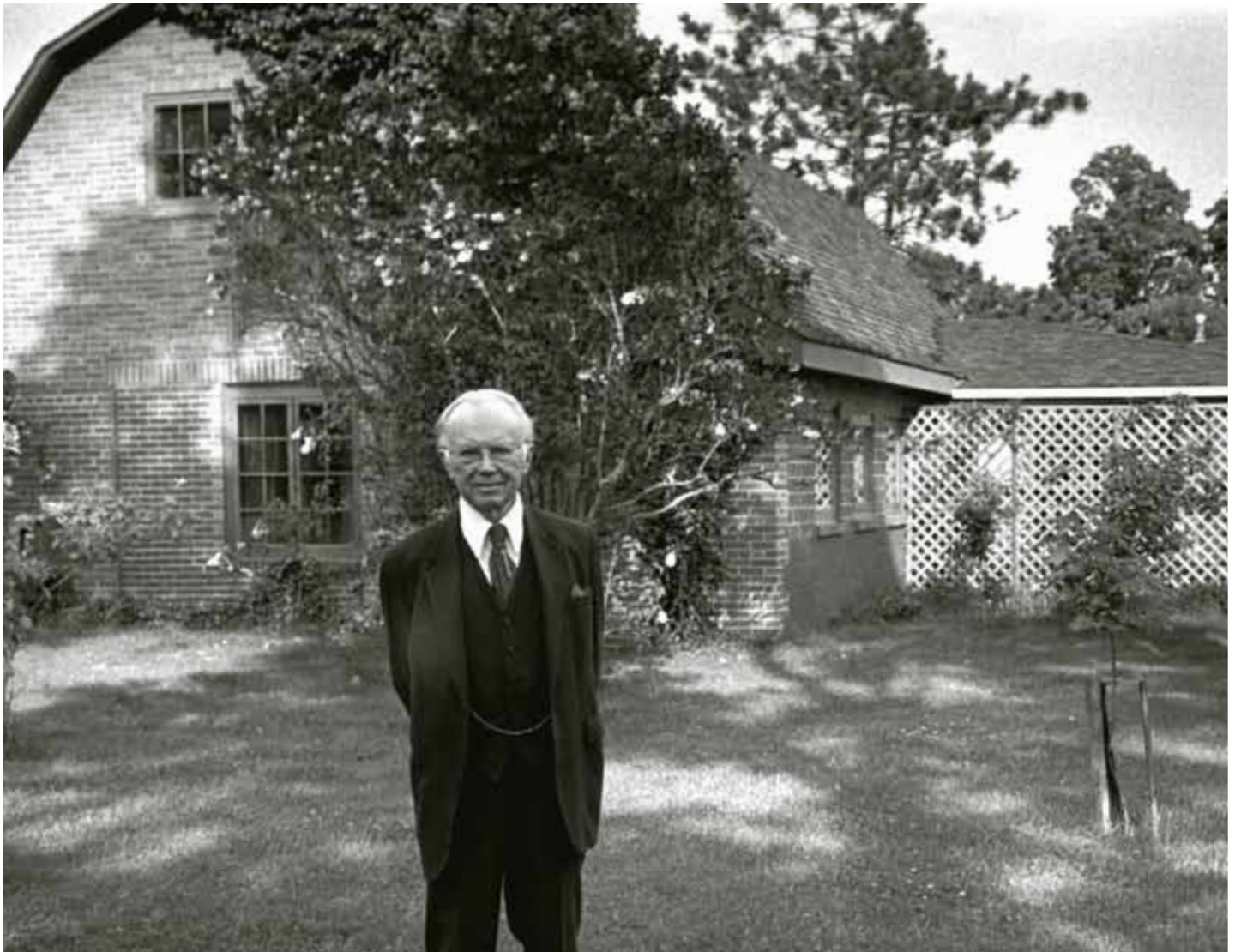
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Religion & Liberty

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Inside the Conservative Mind:

An Interview with Bradley Birzer

A Journal of Religion, Economics, and Culture

Editor's Note



To kick off this special Summer/Fall double issue of *Religion & Liberty*, we talk with scholar Bradley J. Birzer whose new biography of Russell Kirk examines the intellectual development of one of the most important men of letters in the twentieth century. We discuss the roots of Kirk's thought and how it developed over time, in a characteristically singular fashion. Kirk, the author of *The Conservative Mind*, was not easily pigeonholed into ideological categories – fitting for a man once described as “the most individual anti-individualist of his day.”

We review two new books. Economist David Hebert tells us that Russ Robert's *How Adam Smith Can Change Your Life – An Unexpected Guide to Human Nature*

and *Happiness* is a helpful reminder about the “limits of pure economics.”

Even though the books and film adaptations of J.R.R. Tolkien's mythic fantasies are phenomenally popular today, John Zmirak points out that his “bourgeois virtues were widely sneered at” by his contemporaries. He reviews *The Hobbit Party: The Vision of Freedom that Tolkien Got and the West Forgot* by Jonathan Witt and Jay Richards.

Acton Research Director Samuel Gregg, the author of *Becoming Europe*, weighs in with an essay on the surprising scope of America's welfare state in “Our Competitive Entitlement Economy.” He reports that almost 30 percent of America's annual GDP is devoted to welfare-spending of one form or another. The “competitive entitlement economy” in his title points to the way in which this parallel culture feeds off the wealth creating economy.

In the *Liberal Tradition* looks at the life of Leonard Liggio, the man affection-

ately known as the “Johnny Appleseed of Classical Liberalism” for his tireless efforts to sustain and build the free market movement all over the world. Acton Executive Director Kris Mauren, in his FAQ feature, reports on the progress of Acton@25 Capital Campaign. The Institute, founded in 1990, has a number of exciting new projects planned for the near term. The Double-Edged Sword feature looks at John 6:40, one of the most familiar passages in the New Testament. It begins with Jesus Christ feeding the five thousand and includes one of the seven “I am” statements.

In his closing essay, Rev. Robert A. Sirico uses the celebration of the New Year to examine how joy is often confused with happiness. In light of the work of C.S. Lewis, Rev. Sirico talks about the close relationship of joy and faith.

– John Couretas

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Cover Photo: Russell Kirk in front of his Mecosta, Michigan, library in 1993. Photo credit: The Russell Kirk Center.

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Inside the Conservative Mind

An Interview with Bradley Birzer

Bradley J. Birzer says that being a conservative “has little to do with politics, but instead has much to do with identifying and preserving excellence in art, culture, literature and scholarship. It means to identify and conserve the particular talents, dignity and freedom of each individual and, where possible, to connect all persons across time from the beginning of things to the end.” If that sounds more than a little Kirkean, it is no accident. Birzer, who holds a Ph.D. in history from Indiana University, is the co-founder of The Imaginative Conservative and holds the Russell Amos Kirk Chair in History at Hillsdale College in Michigan. He is at work on a new book titled Russell Kirk: A Conservative Life (Fall 2015, University Press of Kentucky), which traces the writer’s intellectual development through its various phases and the massive influence that he had on the post-war American conservative movement.

In the 2014-15 academic year, Birzer is Visiting Scholar in Conservative Thought and Policy as well as Scholar in Residence at the University of Colorado-Boulder. Among other works, he is the author of American Cicero: The Life of Charles Carroll; Sanctifying the World: the Augustinian Life and Mind of Christopher Dawson; J.R.R. Tolkien’s Sanctifying Myth: Understanding Middle-earth; co-editor of The American Democrat and Other Political Writings by James Fenimore Cooper, and co-author with Larry Schweikart of The American West. He talked about his new book on Russell Kirk with Religion & Liberty Executive Editor John Couretas.

R&L: Your new book *Russell Kirk: A Conservative Life* looks at the writer’s intellec-

tual development, the roots of his thought. Did the writing of this book offer any surprises about the man, or change your perception of Kirk in any significant way?

Bradley Birzer: Thank you so much for talking to me. I’ve been a faithful fan of Acton since its founding, and being a part of it is always an honor. I went to the first or second Acton student conference back in the early 1990s (in North Bend, Washington), and I proudly wore one of my two beige “Power Corrupts” t-shirts for years. I’d still happily wear them, but they finally gave out, entering clothing heaven.

As to your question. Over the past five years, Russell Amos Augustine Kirk has never ceased to surprise me. I’ve been reading him consistently since my senior year in college (ND, Class of 1990), and I had a very good grasp of his published materials. These, of course, are enough to overwhelm any reader. The sheer amount of words and ideas seemingly never ends. But, then, Annette Kirk, Russell’s widow, graciously opened up the unpublished material to me. From the moment I began to read Russell Kirk’s diaries, his letters, and other unpublished ideas and materials, I found myself humbled over and over again in ways even the published material hadn’t affected me.

The breadth of his knowledge, the growth of his wisdom over his lifetime, and extent of his own reading and understanding of things made sure the project never became in any way, shape, or form boring. First, there was the quantity of it all. How Kirk found so much time to write what he

did still amazes me, and I often pictured him as having some kind of third arm, itself linked to a permanent typewriter. As the late Wesley McDonald once wrote,



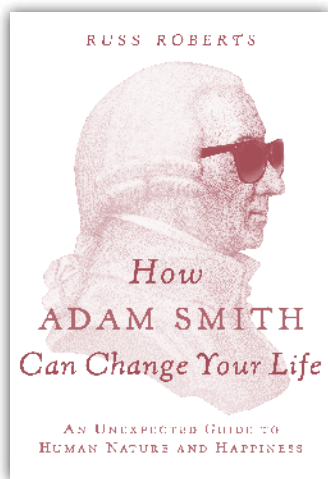
Russell Kirk speaking at an Acton Institute event.

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Kirk probably wrote more in his lifetime than the average intelligent man reads during the same. But, second, is simply the quality of those ideas. Kirk grasped nearly everything around him, near and far, and that which he couldn’t digest perfectly as knowledge and facts, he mythologized.

Russell Kirk said that “ideas, well or badly apprehended, rule the world.” Yet you say that Kirk “had little original” to contribute to the fields of politics or economics, even though

continued on pg 12



We Are Not the Center of the Universe

Review by David J. Hebert

Review of Russ Robert's *How Adam Smith Can Change Your Life – An Unexpected Guide to Human Nature and Happiness* (Portfolio, October 2014) Hardcover, 272 pages, \$27.95

Adam Smith is conventionally thought of in a very specific manner: He is the “father of economics,” the man who gave birth to the very idea that self-interest is a good thing and that seeking profits was among the most socially productive endeavors a man could undertake. But what many people are unaware of is that Adam Smith was also a moral philosopher and social psychologist (and one of the greats). In fact, it was his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* that first brought Adam Smith to fame, not his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Russ Roberts of Stanford University's Hoover Institution seeks to remind us of this in his latest book, *How Adam Smith Can Change Your Life*.

The book's subtitle – *An Unexpected Guide to Human Nature and Happiness* – hints at the two themes of this book: 1) why are humans good to each other and 2) how can we apply these insights to our own lives and be happier? The answer to the first comes from what Smith calls the “impartial spectator.” This spectator is an imagined figure with whom we converse that exists outside of our situation and is able to accurately assess the morality of our decisions and actions. The major insight here is that we are not being judged by God or by our own principles when we act, but rather by an imagined fellow

human being looking over our shoulder.

Roberts provides several contemporary examples of this to illustrate the point – when presented with an opportunity to steal something and get away with it, many of us still refuse to do so. In fact, we may wander the store in search of a cashier to pay for an item. One answer that is commonly given is that God is always watching and would know if you sinned against your fellow man. While true, Smith's point is that you are also watching, and you do not like stealing.

“ His inner self, the one that the impartial spectator could see clearly, did not match his outer self.”

As Roberts says, “ ... as you contemplate committing the act, you imagine how an outsider, an impartial spectator of your crime, would react to your moral failure. You step outside yourself and view your actions through the eyes of another.”

This spectator goes further than this, though. He also “speaks to us in the voice of humility, which reminds us that we are little and the world is great.” We as human beings tend to believe that, because we are the center of our own universe, we must therefore be the center of the universe. Roberts calls this “The Iron

Law of Me.” Stated simply, I think more about myself than I do of you, or anyone else. The impartial spectator, by virtue of being a person separate from us, serves to remind us that there are other people in the world who matter just as much as we do. We are not the center of the universe.

The second theme of this book is a sort of self-help book on how to be happy. In this respect, this book is quite simply amazing. Roberts reminds us that Smith says that we all “naturally desire, not only to be loved, but to be lovely.” Unpacking this simple sentence, Smith is saying that we all want to be appreciated, desired, and praised. We want people to take us seriously and pay attention to the things that we say, to want our presence, and to enjoy our company. Second, we want to be worthy of being loved honestly by “being respectable, honorable, blameless, generous, and kind.” In other words, we want to have a good reputation – a good rapport, if you will. But how do we do this?

Again, we can turn to the impartial spectator. Roberts recalls the story of Bernie Madoff and his investing strategy. For years, people touted Madoff as a financial genius, but inside, Madoff knew that he was a fraud or to put it in Smithean terms, while thousands of people loved Madoff, he knew that he wasn't lovely. His inner self, the one that the impartial spectator could see clearly, did not match his outer self. The tension between our inner self and our outer self, Roberts says, transforms that undeserved love

into a harsh reminder of how we have failed to be lovely.

So the answer lies in keeping our inner self in line with our outer self. This can be difficult because while we are capable of understanding our own actions better than anyone else, we are also capable of deceiving ourselves better than anyone else. Roberts moves on to discuss how best to earn love – through fame and fortune or wisdom and virtue? While many of us love the rich and famous, that love is short and fleeting. It is better, Smith says, to be loved for being wise and virtuous. In addition to being longer lasting, it is earned by being lovely to those you know well rather than zealously pursuing the love of those you do not know at all.

The impartial spectator is clearly a powerful figure and discerner of character, but where do his morals come from? Roberts describes Smith as saying that, at a minimum, we must behave “appropriately,” which means that we must meet the expectations of those around us. In this sense, “appropriateness” is not an objectively defined set of behaviors but is instead contextual. This is not to say that there are no higher truths, but Smith seems to be concerned more with the day to day affairs of man amongst men. In this, the impartial spectator understands both your own motives and beliefs as well as the contextual standards of behavior that are unique to your current location and acts to judge you accordingly.

Roberts concludes the book with one piece of advice – love locally, trade globally. This piece of advice and understanding its implications is invaluable for everyone in today’s society, and so I wholeheartedly recommend this book to everyone. But I would especially recommend this book to students of economics, who have a tendency to forget the limits of pure economics.

David J. Hebert teaches in the Department of Management at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Mich.

Double-Edged Sword: *The Power of the Word*

John 6:40

For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

The sixth chapter of John is one of the most familiar passages in the New Testament. It starts with Christ feeding the five thousand and includes one of the seven “I am” statements. Christ declares, “I am the bread of life,” who comes to feed the multitude (John 6:35). The chapter concludes with many disciples deserting him. The declarations of Christ and his teaching proved too difficult for many, just as it does today.

John 6:40 is one of the most important passages in the New Testament. The verse has proven to be an essential evangelistic message preached throughout the world. It’s a simple statement about the will of the Father, our salvation, and our eternal purpose in Christ.

Many of us have periods of struggle with faith, belief in the Bible, and our eternal destiny after this life. We often rebel or reject the Word of God. The Lord knows this and has planned for humanity’s problem and disobedience. Jesus is simply saying that God, our Father, wants his children back. This is reflected wonderfully in the parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32). Though we have strayed or fallen away from him, his eternal purpose is to reclaim us. Christ wasn’t a backup plan to get us back to the Father, but the eternal plan to join us in fellowship with the Triune God. That’s comforting to know that from all eternity there was a plan to keep us united to and with God.

There are a lot of people in the world and even within the Church that think God wants to punish them, but Christ is declaring that God is throwing the doors of heaven open to those who believe in the Son. The amazing thing about Christ is that he is not relaying this message as something he was told by a messenger or something he read, but he is himself from heaven.

Another one of Christ’s “I am” statements is when he declares that he is the “resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). As creator and sustainer, he has the power to give life and raise the dead. The resurrection is not just an event but it’s a person. Christ has already raised us up with him. He has clothed himself in our humanity and united himself to us. At our death he promises to raise us up physically, so we can be eternally included in the life of the Triune God. John 6:40 is wonderful news and it’s a great verse to return to and meditate upon when we experience fear or doubt. Never forget, it is simply the will of the Father to be with us.



Our Competitive Entitlement Economy

By Samuel Gregg

Rights obsessiveness has made us the world's second-largest social spender.

It's not unusual for non-Americans, and many Americans of a center-left disposition, to portray the United States as a dog-eat-dog society: one in which the poor are left to fend for themselves and where a night-watchman state doesn't intervene, save in extreme circumstances and often not until it's too late. It's a mantra that's endlessly repeated, from the academy to the pulpit, from Congress to your local council.

Judging, however, from the latest update on global social expenditure released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—hardly a den of infamous “neoliberal” bogeymen—this portrait simply isn't true. In fact, as the *Washington Post's* Robert Samuelson notes, it turns out that America is the world's second-biggest social spender, right after that global exemplar of fiscal rectitude and economic prudence: France.

How so? On the one hand, there is what the OECD calls “public social spending.” This includes things like old-age assistance, unemployment insurance, disability payments, government-provided healthcare, etc. What, however, needs to be added to this, the OECD states, is what's called “private social expenditure.” This is defined as “social benefits delivered through the private sector... which involve an element of compulsion and/or inter-personal redistribution.”

One example would be government subsidies to employer-provided healthcare.

By these measures, almost 30 percent of America's annual GDP is devoted to welfare-spending of one form or another. Let me say that number again: 30 percent. How much more, we might ask, could possibly be spent, especially given the sub-optimal results? One suspects that, for most liberals and the left more generally, the sky's the limit. But they should at least concede that America is hardly tight-fisted in such matters. Alas, I, for one, am not holding my breath.

More significantly, the sheer amount of spending on public-delivered-by-the-state-welfare and public-delivered-by-private-means-welfare should raise questions about some of the underlying dynamics driving a situation whereby one in three Americans in August 2014 were living in households receiving some form of means-tested welfare. No doubt, it owes something to the Great Recession's lingering effects. But it's also indicative of the emergence of what might be described as a “competitive entitlement economy” that operates alongside, and feeds off, the wealth-creating economy.

On one level, this development reflects something that can't be emphasized enough: the power of incentives. If 30 percent of an economy is devoted to the welfare state in one form or another, no one should be surprised that large num-

bers of individuals and groups—aided, enabled, and encouraged by lobbyists—gravitate to making state-mandated wealth transfers the primary focus of their efforts to improve their economic circumstances.

Success in that sector of the economy depends upon your ability to compete against everyone else who's trying to secure laws and regulations that result in wealth transfers to them or which accord them economic privileges. A small number of highly organized unions or businesses able to exert direct pressure on a key group of legislators to secure preferential treatment in the form of, for instance, subsidies for a particular industry is much more competitive in this environment than, for instance, taxpayers. By definition, taxpayers are scattered, disorganized, and can't bring the same degree of influence to bear, despite their vastly greater numbers.

What's further complicating matters, however, is the way in which the language of human rights is increasingly used as a rhetorical tool to enhance peoples' competitiveness in this part of the economy.

It's no secret that America, and the West more generally, is awash—if not drowning—in rights-claims today. That which Harvard's Mary Ann Glendon famously described in the title of her book *Rights Talk* (1993) has swept aside or subsumed most other moral concepts such as obli-

gations, duties, responsibilities, and virtues when it comes to public deliberation about political, social, legal, and economic questions. This process has been going on for decades, but the impact has been accentuated by two more recent developments.

The first is a virtual disintegration of any consensus about where rights come from. Not so long ago, people from disparate religious and political backgrounds held that rights were grounded in God, or natural law, or both. This mattered because it generated relatively tight philosophical and legal frameworks in which various rights-claims could be discussed, debated, and adjudicated with a certain degree of coherence.

The second development has followed in the wake of the gradual collapse in the public square of such frameworks. Rather than arguing that X is a right *because* it is grounded in some element of human flourishing, or human nature, and/or because it's divinely ordained, rights to something are now simply asserted. The difficulty is that, without some common framework grounded in reason for deciding whether something is a right, the discernment process becomes a matter of who is the loudest, more aggressive, or most powerful. Coherent argument is out. Assertions based on sheer will are in.

That, I'd argue, helps to explain the explosion of rights-claims in the economic sphere. We're told, for example, that everyone has "a right to a pension." Apparently it doesn't matter if one person has behaved prudently with their finances all

their lives; if another has lived a hedonistic lifestyle he nevertheless has an *expectation* that he's *entitled* to live off everyone else in his old age. But to even make that point amounts, some believe, to "disrespecting" the hedonist's "right" to a pension.

Or take the claim that people have a right to a job. Who, one may ask, has the responsibility to provide the demanded employment? What if one person is a work-shy so-and-so? Are the rest of us supposed to provide him with a salary, regardless of his disinclination to work? Are governments, to use another exam-

act to give them and their constituents what they're owed as a matter of right.

That's a recipe for the potentially endless expansion of welfare in whatever form it takes—social security, health-insurance, unemployment benefits, public sector jobs, labor-market regulations, subsidies, specific services—far, far beyond the 30 percent of the American economy it currently occupies. Remember: if you question whether a person has a right to a secure job, a right to a certain income, or a right to whatever, then you effectively leave yourself open in today's climate to the charge of neglecting (or, worse, potentially violating) someone else's rights. That's not a great incentive for anyone, let alone a legislator, to say "No."

The problem, regrettably, is not going to be addressed until we face up to the fact that, for increasing numbers of people, rights are just another weapon to be deployed in an endless competition of wills to get

what you want via the state. The noble idea of human rights is of course integral to the American experiment in ordered liberty and the broader Western tradition of moral and legal reasoning. In many instances, however, rights-discourse today is now undermining many of the very protections against government overreach that rights, in their classic form, were supposed to uphold.

And for that we will continue to pay a very high price, not least of all in the economy.

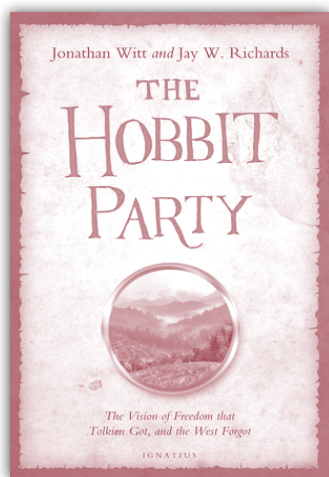
This article first appeared at the American Spectator.



Activists Protest Bank Of America's Involment In Chicago Factor. NEW YORK - DECEMBER 10, 2008.

ple, expected to implement protectionist measures to prop up one inefficient uncompetitive industry so that it continues to promote one group's right to a job at the expense of, say, impoverished Africans who simply want the liberty to compete in a global economy?

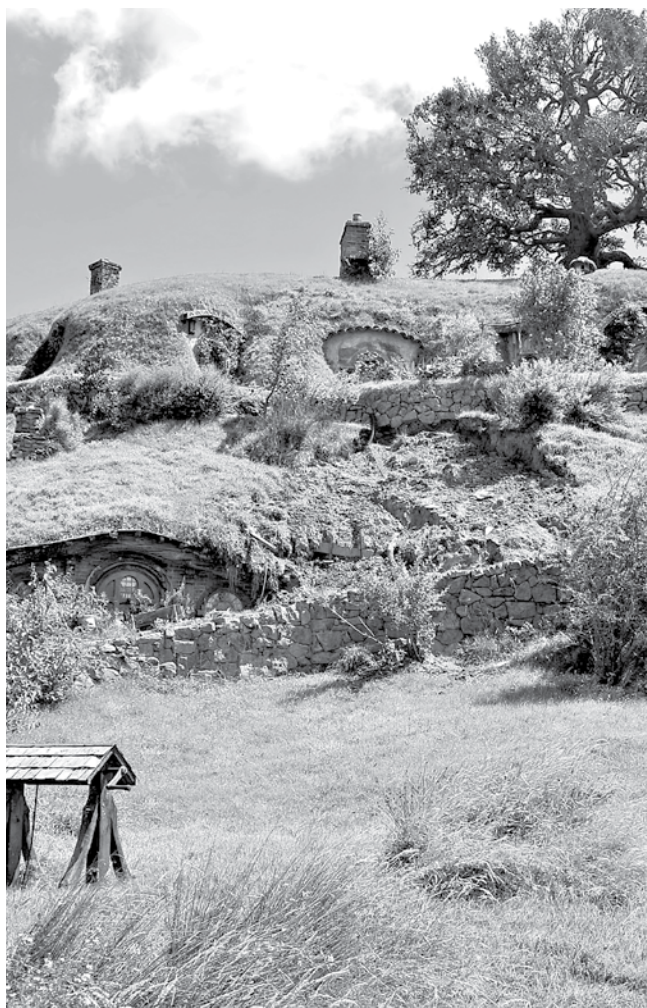
This last example underscores that the organization usually expected to realize such rights in the economy turns out to be the government. Just watch the way in which welfare lobbyists, unions, and businesses testifying before Congress refer endlessly to rights to this or rights to that when insisting that the government *must*



In Praise of the Bourgeois, Liberty-Loving Race of Hobbits

Review by John Zmirak

Review of *The Hobbit Party: The Vision of Freedom that Tolkien Got and the West Forgot* by Jonathan Witt and Jay Richards, (Ignatius Press, 2014). 232 pages. \$21.95.



Hobbiton © MawardiBahar, istock.com

"First they ignore it, then they ridicule it, then they willfully misunderstand it, then it becomes a classic." Mohandas Gandhi

never said that about great works of literature, but it does describe the trajectory of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. We are long past the days when critics could

lightly sneer at the book as "escapist," or convince people that it is secretly "militarist" or "racist." Too many tens of millions have actually read the work to swallow such poison pills. So readers of Tolkien who profoundly misunderstand the book and reject its central message have taken another tack: They have tried to misconstrue the work as a plea for radical environmentalism, Marxist revolution, or the use of the violent force employed by the state in the service of other agendas (such as Distributism) that were utterly alien to Tolkien. *The Hobbit Party*, by Jonathan Witt and Jay Richards does a brilliant job of exposing these crass or crafty misreadings of Tolkien, presenting in plain English and scholarly detail the true com-

plexity and beauty of Tolkien's epic, and more honest applications of his insights.

The Hobbit Party is an easy and pleasurable read, deeply informative and grounded in a fundamental sympathy with the vision of the good that Tolkien wove through all his works. If you only bought one book on *The Lord of the Rings*, this would be an excellent choice. It's especially worthwhile as a gift for students who are already fans of the book, since it will connect them to Tolkien's intellectual roots and moral aspirations.

The Lord of the Rings reawakened in post-modern Westerners a wistful esteem for ideals at which their parents and teachers had learned to sneer. These "Gods of the Copybook Headings" include heroism, self-sacrifice, loyalty, prudence, wisdom, duty, courage, honor, and chivalry—virtues so abused by warmongers in 1914 to recruit young men for death by gas on the Somme, that they seemed besmirched beyond redemption. As a veteran of that war whose closest friends had died all around him, Tolkien possessed what we might call the "trench cred" to rescue these household gods from the muck of No Man's Land, and return them to us cleansed and numinous once again. Rejecting the easy if understandable cynicism of the postwar generation, Tolkien used his vast imagination and detailed learning to fight his way through to the far side of disillusionment.

Tolkien did not write a brittle, uplifting allegory for boys. His work also saves for us, from the acid bath of reductionism, ideas and images that are not abstractly

moral, but instead incarnate moral aspirations and insights: the shrewd but honest peasant, the courteous soldier, the wise but fearsome wizard, the rightful king in exile, the glorious kingdom under the sea that was drowned for its hubris, the conscious soul of the forest, the virginal mother and queen. Tolkien does not follow Jung or Wagner by invoking these to reject reason and history; instead he finds the power and resonance of such images in history and historical literature—and sifts them through his baptized, Christian reason to re-present the elements of enduring human value, and hence imaginative power.

Tolkien the scholar had mastered the great body of Germanic literature which played a decisive role in shaping Western civilization and politics. Hard as it may be for us in the long wake of the Third Reich to accept it, the Teutonic love of freedom and resistance to arbitrary rule were the font of English common law, the Magna Carta, and the American Bill of Rights. The admixture of Germanic, feudal customs and the Christian idea of the person transformed the surviving autocratic Roman law into the mixed, balanced, free governments that would arise throughout the West. Or so Montesquieu and the American founders believed.

The bureaucratic autocracies and the racist dystopia that would emerge in modern Germany were appalling overreactions to the chaos that had engulfed the German nation for centuries—from the High Middle Ages, when the popes broke the back of the Holy Roman Empire, right up through 1815, when Napoleon was defeated. Almost 600 hundred years of seeing their nation as the playground of petty princes and the prize of foreign conquerors nearly snuffed out the Germans' fear of tyranny—which survived across the sea in England, and over the mountains in Switzerland.

Tolkien loved the old Germanic (or as he called it, "Northern") spirit, and saw it as our source of ordered liberty. So even as

these Nordic myths and images were being grossly perverted in Bayreuth and Nuremburg, Tolkien began his quiet, massively powerful act of resistance—the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*. It should not surprise us that Tolkien's most distinctive and loveable creation, the race of hobbits, combines the traits of an honest English yeoman and a thrifty, hard-working Swiss burgher. Tolkien aspired, as Tom Shippey reports in *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, to replace the Arthurian legends with another, more properly English, national myth. It was fitting, then, that Tolkien chose as protagonists creatures that displayed the classically English "shopkeeper" virtues: modesty, tolerance, prudence, and re-

"...they convince us that Tolkien had a much grander ambition: to depict in heroic form the value of human freedom, the dignity of the person as the image and likeness of God, and the morally poisonous..."

spect for contracts and private property. Witt and Richards extensively analyze both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* to reveal these recurrent qualities in Bilbo, Frodo, Sam, and the other hobbits, and to show how the author approved of them. They likewise show Tolkien's respect for honest trade, thrifty stewardship, and the enterprising, innovative use of resources.

These bourgeois virtues were widely sneered at in Tolkien's place and time—by leftists who dismissed them along with religion as "epiphenomena" of an unjust economic structure, and rightists who fancied themselves the heirs of a vanished aristocracy whose guaranteed

and inherited wealth had freed them to cleave to "higher" values. Rightist scholar Thomas Molnar wrote approvingly in *The Counterrevolution* of the convergence of far right and radical left in their hatred for bourgeois mores. Tolkien's fellow English Catholic and contemporary, historian Christopher Dawson, wrote in "Catholicism and the Bourgeois Spirit" that the Gospel itself condemns any form of economic prudence, planning, or foresight. (So much for Bilbo's respect for his contract with Thorin Oakenshield, Sam Gamgee's concern for the prosperity of his garden—or Tolkien's dogged battles to preserve his royalties as an author.)

To view the essential hobbit qualities through a purely national lens is to diminish both Tolkien's intention and his achievement—as Witt and Richards show. In *The Hobbit Party*, they convince us that Tolkien had a much grander ambition: to depict in heroic form the value of human freedom, the dignity of the person as the image and likeness of God, and the morally poisonous side-effects of the craving to dominate our fellow man. The driving force of the plot of *The Lord of the Rings* is this very truth; the Ring was created by Sauron for the purpose of overriding the free wills of other creatures and bending them to his purpose. It is useless for any other goal, and every attempt to employ the Ring will corrupt the user in Sauron's image. The noblest characters in the novel are those who reject the temptation to use the Ring, to enslave their fellow creatures even in the service of noble ends: Gandalf, Aragorn and Galadriel, while those who succumb to the Ring's allure end up like Boromir, Denethor, and Saruman. We may not, we by our human constitutions simply *cannot*, avoid profound moral corruption if we presume to trample on the rights of our fellow men, in the service of any project (social, economic, or religious) however "good" it seems to us.

One such project much beloved by certain readers of Tolkien is Distributism, a movement developed in the face of the

Great Depression, and led by men like Hilaire Belloc who shared key economic errors with Karl Marx—as Witt and Richards document. (They also expose the lasting flirtation of several key Distributists with fascism.) Distributists dream of expropriating large businessmen and landowners, redistributing their wealth more widely through the population, and preventing through the threat of policemen and prisons the growth of any large businesses or farms. Chain stores such as Hobby Lobby would be simply and flatly illegal.

Some Catholics pretend that Distributism is the “official” economic system of Tolkien’s own Church, which faithful believers are bound by religious obedience to advocate. Witt and Richards cite the plain words of Pope John Paul II to refute such a suggestion, which if followed would make of the Church an international political party imposing a detailed agenda dictated by an autocratic, unaccountable leader—something eerily

like the Soviet Communist Party that haunted Tolkien’s era. Others pillage Tolkien’s work selectively to suggest that he shared the radical right’s contempt for honest trade, economic foresight, and prudent stewardship of resources—in favor of the aristocratic stance toward wealth which spends it (in Dawson’s words) “lavishly, recklessly and splendidly.” Witt and Richards gracefully highlight characters whom Tolkien clearly favors—the Dwarves who constructed Moria, the elves who settled Rivendell, the hobbits who people the Shire—who

behave like honest burghers carefully planning for their own and their children’s future. Tolkien also portrayed worthy aristocrats, such as Aragorn and Eomer, who displayed the martial virtues proper to their calling. Not one of these noble leaders shows contempt for the bourgeois aspirations of the hobbits. Nor should we.

The good that Distributists hope to achieve through the massive and ongoing use of coercion is a society of small, sturdy, independent farmers and businessmen—which sounds alluringly like the Shire. The means that any Distributist system would have to use, the trampling on property rights, personal freedom, and



J. R. R. Tolkien, author of the classic high fantasy works *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

economic initiative—evoke those employed by Saruman’s agents to “gather and share” the Shire’s wealth before the novel’s heroes return to “scour” it. Witt and Richards are too tactful to suggest it, but Distributism is a system that a hobbit might well conceive, after long years spent alone in a cold room, while wearing the Ring.

John Zmirak is co-author of *The Race to Save Our Century: Five Core Principles to Promote Peace, Freedom, and a Culture of Life*.

The Hobbit Party (excerpt)

As every lover of Tolkien knows, The Hobbit begins in a hobbit hole, not a nasty, dirty, bare hole, but a comfortable home that—except for its being underground and round of door—feels a lot like a Victorian middle-class home. And yet The Hobbit isn’t set in Victorian England or any other part of nineteenth-century Europe. It seems to be set in some ancient period before the advent of Christianity. Or is it the Middle Ages with its swords and horse lords and chain mail? Maybe—but that wouldn’t account for some of the technological conveniences that didn’t arrive until well after the Middle Ages.

Where we are, of course, is in the fantasy realm of Middle-Earth—and more specifically, the Shire of Middle-Earth, and even more specifically, in the thoroughly comfortable, thoroughly bourgeois home of hobbit Bilbo Baggins. (Hobbits, remember, are a sturdy,

sociable folk about half the height of men, conservative by taste and temperament, with hairy, leathery feet, a fondness for pipe tobacco, and a custom of eating six meals a day.) Mr. Baggins will soon be swept away from his comfortable home and into various uncomfortable adventures involving dwarves, elves, dragons, and various other creatures pleasant and unpleasant. We will follow him on his way. But while the bachelor gentleman is still idling about making tea and imagining that his life is going to continue on in its sensible rut, let’s duck out of the round front

door of his hobbit home, take a stroll up and down the lanes, and see if we can get a feel for how Hobbiton and the larger Shire are run.

Having ambled around enough to digest the exquisite mix of farmland, pasture, and grove; having taken in the charming homes with their round windows and doors set into the slopes of the valleys of the Brandywine and its tributaries; and having strolled over to the Green Dragon pub and caught up on the latest gossip as the sun is easing toward the western horizon, something almost as peculiar as the size and hairy feet of the hobbits should begin to dawn on us: this gentle civilization appears to have no department of unmotorized vehicles, no internal revenue service, no government official telling people who may and may not have laying hens in their backyards, no government schools lining up hobbit children in geometric rows to teach regimented behavior and groupthink, no government-controlled currency, and no political institution even capable of collecting tariffs on foreign goods. "The Shire at this time had hardly any 'government' ", we eventually learn." Families for the most part managed their own affairs."

We do not have to search far and long for an explanation as to why the author might have wished to create a society of this sort. Tolkien, as we have seen, said that his "political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs)." As he went on to add, "The most improper job of any man, even saints, is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity." With the Shire, Tolkien had created a society after his own heart.

Excerpt from 'The Hobbit Party' by Jonathan Witt and Jay W. Richards. Available from Ignatius Press.

What's left to accomplish in the Acton@25 Capital Campaign?

Very soon, Acton will arrive at its 25th Anniversary and the conclusion of the Acton@25 Capital Campaign. In response to a burgeoning demand for our work, we launched a capital campaign in 2012 to support Acton's physical expansion and programmatic growth. Since moving to our new workspace, we have been able to plan larger-than-ever conferences, produce a DVD curriculum and documentary, and situate our unique collection of 13,000 books. Perhaps most encouraging, nearly 2,000 people have attended our in-house lectures to learn more about free enterprise, individual liberty, and personal responsibility!

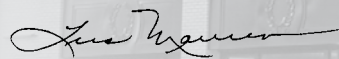
We are just under \$1 million away from reaching our \$12.5 million campaign goal, which we are determined to accomplish by our twenty-fifth anniversary next year.

Some of the projects that we hope to complete:

- **Finishing our television studio** will permit our scholars to accept the growing number of interview requests we receive, and to impart their knowledge through live and delayed television appearances;
- **Outfitting our media center** will bolster the number of podcasts and range of syndicated radio programming we produce;
- **Purchasing cutting-edge cameras** for our auditorium will give our online supporters the opportunity to "attend" Acton events virtually;
- **Installing a rooftop garden** will result in a unique event space that boasts a beautiful view of the city.

We have been blessed with a beautiful building in which we've been able to display art, screen fascinating documentaries, and hear from some truly talented speakers. The success of the capital campaign will improve Acton's commitment to serving the Grand Rapids community as well as lovers of liberty throughout the nation and the world.

Thank you to our many supporters that have placed confidence in Acton as the organization to promote the free and virtuous society.



Kris Alan Mauren
Executive Director

his writings touched on these areas frequently. In what areas would you say that Kirk made his greatest contribution as a journalist and scholar?

Kirk understood politics and economics quite well, taking most of what he knew from the statesmen, experiences, and movements of the late 18th century Irish and Scots. But, in neither field, did he innovate during his own writing career. Instead, he synthesized and offered criticism of some of the end results of each. As a very young man, he cherished the economics of Friedrich Hayek, though he soon came to adore Wilhelm Röpke. In the last decade of his life, Kirk wrote a textbook on economics. His views in that book amount to: yes, the economics of Adam Smith and other free market theorists are absolutely right. But, no matter how true the laws of supply and demand, self interest, etc. are, the seven virtues trump them all. So, no matter the pull of self interest, charity remained higher.

Throughout his life, however, Kirk despised utilitarianism in whatever guise it appeared. As to political theory, he drew most upon Cicero and Burke, and he favored a type of political prudence, “the art of the possible,” as he put it. He was, for all intents and purposes, an American patriot and a small “r” republican, never a nationalist.

Indeed, it would be impossible to imagine Kirk as anything other, really, than a true citizen of the world. Kirk believed in a continuity of past, present, and future and a connection of all persons from the first to the last. Indeed, perhaps the central point of all of Kirk’s writing is the interconnectivity of humanity at every level. Kirk was a citizen of Piety Hill (his ancestral home), of Michigan, of the United States, of the Catholic Church, of western civilization, and of the world.

Kirk enthusiastically embraced the Goldwater presidential run in 1964. Did he live to regret that decision?

No, Kirk certainly never regretted his decision to help Goldwater. At the time of the 1964 campaign, Kirk believed him to be the great hope of conservatism. They

admired each other deeply. A number of other conservatives—those labeled by the press and sometimes by themselves as “New Conservatives”—denounced Kirk as a pretender. That is, they thought he betrayed the conservative movement by going into the political realm. Kirk, however, remained dedicated to helping conservatives (and some libertarians, such as Larry Reed) in politics throughout his career. While he didn’t believe a conservative should only work in politics, he knew politics was a vital sphere.

At a practical level, Kirk consulted a number of politicians, sometimes openly and sometimes quietly. Though, he especially liked Goldwater and Reagan, he also supported Norman Thomas, Hubert Humphrey, and Pat Buchanan. As was the case with economics, Kirk sought the humane rather than the ideological or utilitarian in politics.

Would it be fair to say that Kirk had mixed feelings about free market economics, especially given his frequent jibes about the “uglification” of modern American life, its consumer excesses, and his famous rants about TV and radio? His support for conservation, tree planting, organic farming, midwifery and “natural” living tends toward the broadly communitarian, does it not?

Kirk never expressed reservations about true free markets in as much as he believed that freedom allowed us to choose the good and the true. In this as in many other things, he was rather Pauline. What is liberty? Liberty, Paul told the Galatians, is the right to do what is right. What Kirk disliked was the use of freedom as a thing or end in and of itself or the use of freedom to make things ugly, tacky, and false. He believed, however, that the very same freedom that allowed one to create something ugly gave him the right to criticize that act.

Certainly, though, Kirk would never espouse what is often today called crony capitalism. He noted more than once that he feared that the communists, socialists, and capitalists all wanted to conform us, to make us less than God intended us to be. Kirk had feared what’s now crony capitalism in the 1940s and 1950s already.

His love of conservation came from his own Stoic and Christian appreciation of creation. He agreed completely with the opening chapters of Genesis that man served as a steward and, as Tolkien would put it, a sub-creator. He was not himself a god, nor did he have the right to treat fellow creatures as such. As a descendent of Adam, he could name, plant, and leaven.

Kirk did have an appreciation – and was influenced here by Harvard literature professor Irving Babbitt – that the “the economic problem blends into the political problem, and the political problem into the ethical problem, and the ethical problem into the religious problem.” Would it be fair to say that Kirk was well aware economic questions were often at the root of problems more central to his concerns?

Kirk feared that materialism—in any way, shape, or form—determined or attempt to determine all things in life. As such, he disagreed with John Stuart Mill as much as he did with Karl Marx. With Christopher Dawson and T.S. Eliot and others, he believed that all things vital in this world flowed from the root of culture, the *cultus*, the manifestation of the divine around which a people coalesce. The root of every culture, therefore, is spiritual. The material serves as a means to extend the spiritual. The two are not in opposition, but the material serves the spiritual, as Kirk saw it. When economic problems, then, were at the root of the problem, they were so because of a misunderstanding or misperception of the spiritual, as Kirk believed.

“The modern world is Leviathan,” Kirk wrote in 1977. But he also included big corporations as well as government in his indictment. Would he find anything to change his mind today, do you think?

Probably not. Almost certainly, the power of corporations and the power of the military, especially abroad, would shock Kirk. He predicted that George Bush’s New World Order would lead to an American replacement of the Soviet empire, but even Kirk would not have likely foreseen the extent to which his prophecy would prove correct.

I think the size of the debt, the size of impe-

rial outreach, and the size of government-business-banking collusion would sadden him profoundly. As he argued time and time again, every person is a principle of proliferating variety, a unique reflection of the Infinite. Such colossal structures in government, business, and education served only to lessen and demean, not leaven.

Kirk asserted that conservatism was not an ideology but "rather a drift, a movement, a loose league of people who prefer the devil they know to the devil they don't." Some who knew him said he was more of a Christian humanist than a conservative. Is that a fair assessment?

This proved a serious problem for Kirk. In the summer of 1953, after his incredible success with *The Conservative Mind*, he hoped to move conservatism toward a set of principles, rooted in eternity. Though no one would mistake the Kirk of 1953 for an orthodox Christian, he read widely and considered orthodox Christianity one of the most important allies conservatism could have. He read carefully Christopher Dawson, Gabriel Marcel, Josef Pieper, and other Christian Humanists of his day. For conservatism to have a real go, it would need to blend with the American Humanism of Irving Babbitt with the Christian Humanism of Paul Elmer More, T.S. Eliot, Dawson, and others. Kirk also saw each form of 20th century humanism as rooted in Stoic ethics and an Augustinian theory and philosophy of history.

In the fall of 1953, Kirk had outlined a huge book to be called *The Age of Humanism*. Based on Plutarch's *Lives*, it would begin with Socrates and end with Eliot. Kirk never finished it, though he seems to have written several chapters of it by the end of '53. Parts of this never-completed book ended up in *Program for Conservatives*, *Beyond the Dreams of Avarice*, and *The Intelligent Women's Guide to Conservatism*.

As much as he was a conservative, Kirk was a personalist, an existentialist, and an Augustinian as well as a Burkean. Just as *The Conservative Mind* had tied all together from the French Revolution to the present, *The Age of Humanism* would tie together the entirety of western civilization.

Didn't Kirk's writings on the moral imagination, as it came down from Burke, Babbitt, and

Eliot, and his writings on "ethical perception" in art and literature, contribute to this perception of him as a Christian humanist?

Certainly. But, he was also a Judeo-Christian Humanist, having been deeply influenced by Jewish scholars such as Leo Strauss, Ludwig Freund, and others. As I've tried to explain in the book, Kirk hated any form of discrimination based on the accidents of birth, and he was, for all intents and purposes, an anti-anti-Semite. I stress this only because he saw "Christian" as a very broad and inclusive—non-sectarian—term.

As to the intent of your excellent question, Kirk had not only the firm belief in humanistic education and endeavors, he also believed his own humanistic side should manifest itself creatively. While in graduate school at St. Andrews, he found a true love of writing fiction.

Those who have written on Kirk have often divided his non-fiction from his fiction. This, I believe, is a serious mistake, as many of his best and most interesting ideas manifest themselves in his fiction. He began publishing his horror, ghost, and supernatural stories in the late 1940s and really began a fiction career around 1950. He became quite the sensation in London and British horror circles. Though the eeriness and creepiness of his fiction waxed and waned—his 1979 novel, *Lord of the Hollow Dark*, being the darkest by far and dark, indeed, by any standard—he maintained a successful reputation in such literary circles throughout his life. Ray Bradbury as well as Stephen King loved Kirk's stories, and Kirk often published in anthologies with King, Robert Bloch, and other horror writers.

You say that Kirk had "deeply romantic notions" about certain aspects of life, and he admitted to having a "Gothic mind" as opposed to one shaped by Enlightenment values. Did he in some ways idealize the past?

One of the most intriguing aspects of Kirk was his ability to mix the classicism of Babbitt and Eliot with the romanticism of Poe and Hawthorne. He admired and sought order, but he also loved and cherished spontaneity. He had a deeply mischievous side as anyone who knew him can attest.

So, yes, he certainly had the ability to ide-

alize the past. In part, though, this poetic insight allowed him to understand the deep currents of the past in ways many social scientists simply could not.

His love of all things Gothic came from his respect for dogma (good little truths) as opposed to system (ideology). Any person looking for consistency in Kirk's ideas about things in this world will probably find him or herself rather frustrated. With the Scottish and Irish thinkers of the late eighteenth century, Kirk believed history to be a discovery of timeless truths with each person a new revelation(s) of the face of the Infinite. To demand comprehension and conformity of one in the past is as silly as demanding such things in the present. Each person, complicated to the nth degree, cannot be understood by mere logic. Kirk possessed a strong mystic side.

Of all the important and influential conservative books published in the early 1950s, you say that "none could match Kirk's The Conservative Mind in terms of widespread respectability and outreach." What kind of influence does that book wield today?

When *The Conservative Mind* appeared on May 11, 1953, it shook the English-speaking world as it attempted to understand itself in a post-World War II era. As with many scholars of the day, Kirk looked to Burke and de Tocqueville for answers, but he did so in a way that was accessible to academics as well as non-academics. One of Kirk's favorite moments that summer came when he checked in at an out-of-the-way inn in rural Scotland. The clerk took a moment to stare at the signature and then said, "You're not the Dr. Russell Kirk of America, are you?"

Every periodical and serial worth anything reviewed the book, sometimes twice. While many disagreed with Kirk, almost no reviewer dismissed him or his argument.

The Conservative Mind went through seven editions during the author's lifetime, never going out of print. One can also practice a form of literary archeology reading through the seven editions, as one can trace the sometimes profound and subtle changes and evolution of the author's thought.

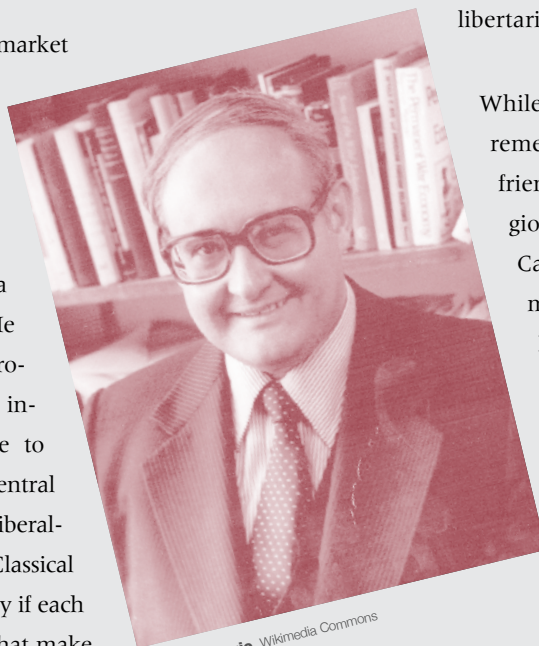
It is and will remain one of the foundational texts of the twentieth century. ■■■■

Leonard Liggio [1933 – 2014]

Mankind has survived by moral customs and by law, and has been undermined by momentary decisions and by legislation. Based on change over time and by the test of standards by trial and error, traditions and law provide guidance for success in contrast to momentary decision and legislation.

On October 14, 2014, the free market movement lost a great friend with the passing of Leonard Liggio (1933-2014), affectionately known as the “Johnny Appleseed of Classical Liberalism.” Liggio was a thinker, a doer, and a giver. He was known not just for his profound thought and powerful influence, but his great service to other people. He played a central role in the revival of classical liberalism, famously saying that “Classical liberalism will be sustained only if each generation develops scholars that make an over-arching case for the philosophy of freedom.” Not only was he a giant in the free market and conservative movement as a whole, he is fondly remembered by friends of Acton as someone who played a crucial role in founding the Institute. In 1990, he helped organize a panel and invited Rev. Robert Sirico to speak on religion and liberty. This panel discussion and subsequent conversation was the spark that led to the creation of the Institute.

Liggio’s work for the advancement of liberty was immense; he worked directly or indirectly with nearly every free market institution in the last 60 years. To name just a few of his achievements, he was Executive Vice President of Academics at Atlas Network, he served as President of the Philadelphia Society, the Mont Pelerin Society, The Institute of Humane Studies, as a research professor of law at George



Leonard Liggio. Wikimedia Commons

Mason University, a visiting professor at the Universidad Francisco Marroquin, the Institute for Political and Economic Studies at Georgetown University, and at the University of Aix-en-Provence, France. Although the United States has been blessed with his good work, he travelled throughout Europe sharing his advice and knowledge, spreading the libertarian movement beyond political borders.

While he was profoundly a man of ideas, he is also remembered as being deeply spiritual. Whenever a friend or colleague seemed troubled or hurting, Liggio shared his faith and encyclopedic knowledge of Catholicism with him or her. He was greatly committed to his Catholic faith, a member of the Knights of Malta, and unapologetic in his beliefs yet wholeheartedly working with people from all faith traditions, cheerfully embracing philosophical ecumenism in order to advance the cause of freedom. His expansive knowledge of Church history contributed to his economic thought, inspiring an entire generation of Catholics to take economics and the concept of limited government more seriously. He was also famous for encouraging leaders to avoid planning events on holidays of any religious tradition.

Deep thinkers and intellectual giants like Liggio can be susceptible to narcissism, but Liggio was known by all for his humility and generosity. Rather than create devoted followers, Liggio encouraged young people to pursue ideas of liberty and form their own conclusions. While he never wrote a book of his own, he often helped others with theirs. He happily wrote hundreds of letters of recommendation, and offered editorial insights to dozens of academic journals.

As time passes, Liggio’s work won’t be forgotten. His ideas about liberty will long be a part of the history of freedom.



Joy in the New Year

On the cusp of a new year, it is human nature to spend time looking to the past and anticipating what is to come. January, of course, is named for Janus, the Roman god of two faces, one looking back and one looking to

the future.

We wish the best for the coming year. We hope and pray for goodness and peace, but we know that humans often choose otherwise. I suspect it is part of the melancholy that settles in for some people this time of year.

God willing, Pope Francis will visit the City of Brotherly Love in the U.S. in 2015. Philadelphia is a fit setting for a pope who so embodies an openness to all people. In my mind's eye, I see Pope Francis embracing the handicapped, the disfigured, the young, and the old: all who gather in St. Peter's Square, hoping just to catch a glimpse of him.

For Catholics, Pope Francis has declared 2015 the Year of Consecrated Life. This is meant to encourage prayer, support, and education about those who choose the religious life: priests and religious brothers and sisters. It is interesting that in proclaiming this, Pope Francis calls upon those in the religious life to "radiate joy." I propose this is an excellent ideal for all of us.

It would be helpful here to consider the word "joy." Our culture tends to equate joy with happiness, but for the Christian, this is not so. C. S. Lewis is likely the best modern writer to explore the idea of joy. He wrote *Surprised by Joy*, an autobiography of his early life; truly, about his search for God. Lewis came to faith in a methodical and scholarly manner, befitting the English schoolboy he was. His search for faith, he writes, was a search for joy, a longing for something, a something he could not quite name for a long time. He eventually learns that joy and faith in God are inexorably intertwined.

Lewis says this, "All Joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still 'about to be.'" It seems to me that this is another way to view faith. Our faith in God is not a possession, not something we cling to. It is not meant to be kept to ourselves. Faith should instill in us a longing for something beyond this world. Our faith keeps us rooted in the past, in historical events and those people who have guarded and guided the Church through the centuries, but our faith must also propel us forward. The faith is always ancient, ever new.

Two thousand years ago, on a night where men kept watch over their sheep and weary travelers hastened to



Abstract Nativity with Madonna and Jesus Art Painting. Artist: Pattie Calfy; istockphoto.com

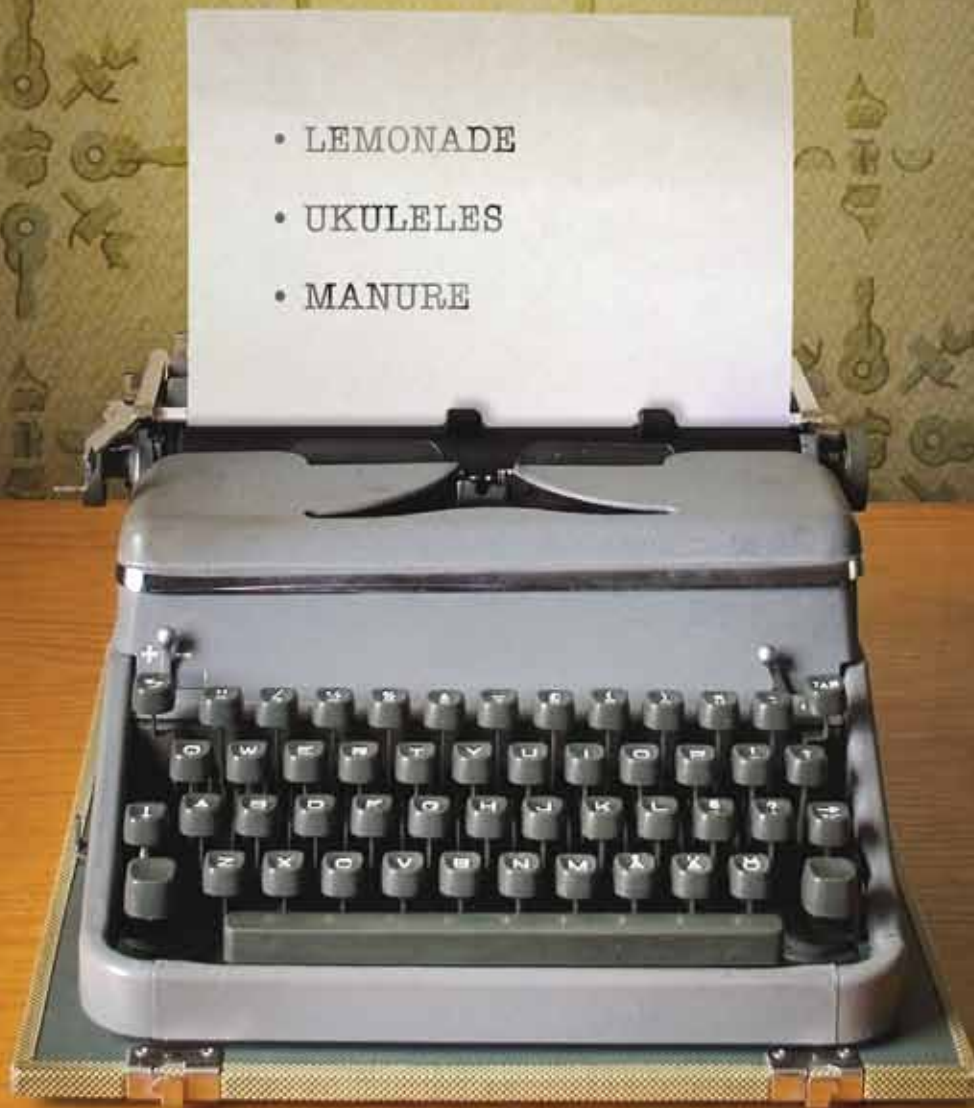
the call of the Roman Empire, a baby was born. A baby's birth is always a good thing, but this ... well, this required more than just a mere birth announcement. It required an angelic proclamation: "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

That something that Lewis searched for, that we all search for, is a Someone. Let us greet the New Year with the joy we have in Christ our Savior.

Rev. Sirico is president and co-founder of the Acton Institute.

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