

ACTONINSTITUTE

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# Religion & Liberty

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From cuneiform to Kindle:  
Scripture for a digital age

An Interview with Bob Pritchett

A Journal of Religion, Economics, and Culture

# Editor's Note



Few industries have evolved quite as quickly and fundamentally in the last few years as publishing. Leading the way in this changing landscape is Bob

Pritchett, CEO of Faithlife Corporation. This summer issue of *Religion & Liberty* begins with an interview with Pritchett, who discusses how Faithlife sets trends in the publishing industry rather than simply responding to them.

It's the 35th anniversary of the "Miracle on Ice" this year, and while Americans look back fondly on the 4-3 victory of the U.S. men's Olympic hockey team over the Soviet Union, the players from behind the Iron Curtain went home devastated and determined to improve.

It's fitting that in this issue, Jordan Ballor reviews *Red Army*, a recent documentary about the Soviet Union's hockey team during the 1980s, focusing on one of the best Russian players ever, Viacheslav Fetisov, who went on to play for the Detroit Red Wings.

Are economists inherently immoral? Is the study of economics a noble pursuit? Dylan Pahman wrestles with these questions in his essay "The higher calling of the dismal science."

It's a common pronouncement that the United States was, and some say still is, a Christian nation. Kevin M. Kruse's new book *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* makes a different claim. Joseph M. Knippenberg reviews this book and discusses these implications in a historical context.

In the FAQ, Kris Mauren, executive director of the Acton Institute, discusses

the Acton@25 Capital Campaign: what's left to do and when the campaign will officially wrap up.

In the Liberal Tradition takes a look at human rights advocate and former slave Sojourner Truth (1797–1883). Truth's speeches on social issues, tireless work for the most worthy causes, and great faith should not be forgotten. Double-Edged Sword deals with the issue of unity (or lack thereof) in the church and reflects on Ephesians 4:1–3.

Faith and freedom are not only two foundations in Acton's mission, but they're also gifts for all humankind. In "Illuminating gifts," Rev. Robert Sirico reflects on faith and freedom. "These gifts offer us illumination," he notes, "to see and know the truth, and the ability to carry out that truth each day in our lives."

– Sarah Stanley

## Editorial Board

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# From cuneiform to Kindle: Scripture for a digital age

An Interview with Bob Pritchett

*In the early nineties, Bob Pritchett made the decision to leave his then employer, Microsoft, and enter the risky world of entrepreneurship. More than two decades later, it's safe to say that this risk has paid off. The company he founded, Faithlife, now employs nearly 500 people and is on the forefront of digital publishing. Headquartered in Bellingham, Washington, Faithlife creates digital tools and resources for Bible study and publishes ebooks. While this company primarily creates content for the digital world, that's not all they do. The Acton Institute is working with Faithlife's imprint, Lexham Press, as part of the Kuyper Translation Society project. Lexham will be publishing the forthcoming Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology.*

*Glassdoor, an employment review site, recently featured Pritchett on its "2015 Highest Rated CEO List." That's no small feat. "I celebrate the leaders appearing on this list," said Glassdoor CEO Robert Hohman. "They've managed to inspire and engage their employees, as proven by the feedback shared on Glassdoor around the clock and around the world."*

*Pritchett is the author of Fire Someone Today: And Other Surprising Tactics for Making Your Business a Success and the soon-to-be-released Start Next Now: An Action Plan for Getting Ahead. In the following interview with Religion & Liberty's associate editor Sarah Stanley, Pritchett discusses Faithlife's innovative approach to publishing, what it means to be a for-profit company in the Bible market and more.*

**R&L:** *What inspired you to leave Microsoft and embark on this uncertain entrepreneurial path? Do you ever regret leaving Microsoft, a company where so many employees became stockholders and fabulously wealthy?*

**Bob Pritchett:** I grew up in a family of entrepreneurs, so I had always wanted to have my own business. That's what my grandfather had done and my dad had done. I grew up seeing that modeled. I don't regret leaving Microsoft. We have a fantastic business, and we built a product that is really important and really useful.

*constantly tweak and refine these approaches. Is that how you avoid being squashed by the likes of Amazon?*

Sure. At one level, being in the Christian space, it's good and bad, right? It's a smaller market, but the religious connection keeps some large companies and competitors out of the space. But that's not to say we don't compete with them. We think of ourselves as competing with Amazon all the time because they're just so big and have such an imprint in digital publishing and publishing in general. Even without intending to focus

on the Christian market, they sell a huge amount of content in that space, just like they do in all the different categories. So one thing we're constantly doing is trying to educate people about why a specialized tool is much better for doing Bible study than, let's say, buying a Bible commentary on your Kindle. You can't easily navigate a Kindle to John 3:16, but Bible software is designed for the way the Bible is referenced. Amazon is so big in the market that you're constantly

competing with them.

*Can you discuss your innovative prepublishing and community pricing models? How do they work, and what is their history?*

Prepub basically came out of an internal argument. We wanted to do an \$80,000 project to build an electronic edition of a ten-volume book. And we debated whether or not we could afford to do it. So we

*continued on pg 12*



Faithlife is headquartered in Bellingham, Washington.

We serve people in the church. We serve a lot of pastors and, of course, anyone who wants to study the Bible. It's a blessing to work with such great people and build a product that helps people and that they really enjoy using.

*Faithlife has won wide respect in the Christian and secular publishing industries for its innovative merchandising and pricing models. You*



# The Cold War and the soul of Soviet hockey

By Jordan Ballor

*Review of the 2014 documentary Red Army.*

This year marks the 35th anniversary of the “Miracle on Ice,” the stunning 4-3 victory of the United States men’s hockey team over the Soviet Union at the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York. The new documentary *Red Army* provides the broader context of this seemingly singular event as it traces the career of one of the most decorated Russian players of all time: Viacheslav Fetisov. Fetisov was a young member of the 1980 Soviet national team who would go on to international fame. But even then he was a star. The 21-year-old defenseman grew up playing hockey in Moscow, and while his impoverished family scrimped and saved to pay for his youth programs, Fetisov was eventually accepted into the national training program. Vladimir Pozner, a famed interpreter of the Cold War period who is featured in the documentary, describes the Soviet plan to dominate hockey on the international stage as involving a nationwide system to pick out “the best of the best of the best.”

As the young boys would advance through the ranks of the training program, the pinnacle achievement was to become a member of the Red Army hockey team. According to the film, “The Red Army Hockey Club was created under Joseph Stalin,” with the idea that, as the film puts it, “to demonstrate Soviet superiority, Stalin would create athletes to dominate the West.” The Red Army would draft the best prospects and, in this way, make up the

bulk of the national team playing in international competition.

## Sports and the Soviet Union

In the context of the decades-long Cold War, the hockey rink became a battlefield, a testing ground for the validity of competing ideologies and worldviews. Thus, says Pozner, “Hockey was the most popular sport in the Soviet Union because the Soviet hockey team represented the peak of what the Soviet Union had achieved and was proof that the Soviet system was the best system. So it was politics, really.”

The ice of the hockey rink was a venue uniquely suited to act as a crucible for the competing ideologies of capitalism and socialism. The individualism of the West was pitted against Soviet collectivism, and the scoreboard would show the winner to the world. The Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev once boasted to the West, “For the moment you are ahead of us. We still have a lot of work to do to catch up with you ... But when we overtake you, we’ll wave our hands and say ‘Capitalists! Good bye. Our train is going ahead. Catch up if you can!’”

“To the Soviets, sports were, in a way, a kind of warfare,” Pozner says. “The game to them wasn’t just a game. It was also

part of what you would call propaganda, actually. Making it very clear that we’re the best, and we’re the best because of the Soviet system, because of socialism: that’s why we’re the best.”

Both sides undertook this kind of sloganeering. When talking to President Jimmy Carter after the 1980 Olympic win, U.S. coach Herb Brooks said that the victory “proves that our way of life is the proper way to continue on.”



Back row (left to right): Alexei Kasatonov and “Slava” Fetisov. Front: Sergei Marakov, Igor Larionov, and Vladimir Krutov.

## Individualism and collectivism, true and false

A great virtue of *Red Army* is that it takes us beyond such simplistic propagandizing. The success that the Soviets enjoyed on the ice was due in large part to the work of Anatoli Tarasov, “the father of the Soviet system,” as Fetisov puts it. In Tarasov’s philosophy we see a much more complex understanding of the relationship between the individual and the collective, the player and the team, than we might otherwise expect.

A war waged within the confines of an ice rink is limited in scale and scope. Hockey, as a proxy and even replacement for actual conflict, in this sense becomes the coldest of cold wars. As Tarasov wrote in a preface to Canadian readers in a 1969 book, the image of sport as warfare would hopefully give way to the reality of sport as a catalyst for peace. "I believe hockey could accomplish much in the way of aiding young people of various countries to know each other better so that they could live in peace and harmony, work and study and, of course, take an interest in sports," writes Tarasov.

Tarasov was an innovative genius. He looked to things like chess and ballet for inspiration and applied the lessons learned in these other contexts to hockey. Hockey, for Tarasov, was an art, an art that required creativity and flexibility. We see footage of Tarasov, who passed away in 1995, encouraging young players with the challenge, "Where's the smile? You're playing hockey!"

"Tarasov, who was an extremely creative man, he saw hockey as this amazingly intricate game of passing the puck," Pozner says. This emphasis was one of the key distinctions between Soviet and Western, largely Canadian, styles of hockey. Thus, writes Tarasov, "Our school of hockey differs from the Canadian school in that Soviet hockey players pass much more frequently than do the Canadians." A truism of football, for instance, is that only three things can happen with a forward pass, and two of them are bad. For Tarasov, however, the pass represented a way to keep all of the skaters involved and active. Each pass was an opportunity to probe the defense, to put pressure on the opposition, and to exploit any weaknesses.

Tarasov explained an aspect of this in his 1969 book: "Someone has to mastermind a pass. Among overseas players, this function is usually performed by the man who has the puck. But among Soviet players it is the man without the puck—the man who has taken the best position. This

means that among overseas hockey players four men depend on one man, while in Soviet hockey one man depends on four. That is why it is more difficult to play against us, because it is harder to look after four men than it is to look after one man." The Western style of play was characterized by a far more rigid division of labor, with defined roles for scorers, passers, and defensive players, whereas the Soviet style required flexibility and fluidity.

For Tarasov, the individual player and the collective team were not engaged in a kind of zero-sum scheme, where the person had to be subsumed and erased by the coach's personality or their circumscribed role. Rather, as Tarasov puts it, "The essence of hockey, in our opinion, would lie in a sensible balance between team work and individual play." The individual must be able to develop his own unique and personal talents within the context of the team. This was the soul of Soviet hockey under Tarasov. "Such is the logics of life," wrote Tarasov. "That is why the principles of team work form the groundwork of our history. This is the kind of team work we are for—team work which does not preclude, but on the contrary, provides for the complete and free development of talents."

Tarasov's dynamic personality eventually earned him disfavor in the regime, and Leonid Brezhnev removed him from his position. Tarasov was replaced by Viktor Tikhonov, a protégé of the KGB chief who put him in position as head.

### **From Red Army to Red Wings**

Tikhonov embodied a far more rigid and authoritarian approach than Tarasov. It's true that Tarasov was difficult to please and demanded excellence, but from Fetisov's perspective, Tikhonov did not earn or deserve the personal respect of his players. Tarasov was Fetisov's mentor, while Tikhonov presided over the Lake Placid debacle in 1980. The Soviet team had decisively beaten the U.S. team 10-3 in an exhibition game just a few weeks prior. It

had been two decades since an American team had beaten the Soviets, and after the first period ended with a 2-2 tie, Tikhonov made the audacious move to bench the consensus number one goalie in the world, Vladimir Tretiak.

After the loss, the pressure on the Soviet team was enormous. The veterans were largely released, while Fetisov was one of the small group of younger players who remained on the team. But Tikhonov pursued a harsh program of training and control, keeping the players at the hockey training camp 11 months out of the year, with rare opportunities to visit family or friends. "You win by being merciless in training. The coach must perpetuate this tradition," Tikhonov said.

The new coach had inherited a talented team, however, and a system flush with talent. Despite the challenges presented by the coach's personality and approach, Fetisov flourished on the ice. He became the youngest captain ever of the Soviet national team, and along with forwards Sergei Makarov, Igor Larionov and Vladimir Krutov, Fetisov partnered with fellow defenseman Alexei Kasatonov to comprise the top line up of the Russian team and perhaps of all time: the Russian Five. As Canadian journalist Lawrence Martin describes it, "The skill level of that team was astounding. They elevated hockey to an art form."

Following the Olympic defeat, the Soviets crushed a Scotty Bowman-coached Canada Team 8-1 in the 1981 Canada Cup. They continued to dominate throughout the 1980s, with Olympic gold medal wins in both 1984 (Sarajevo) and 1988 (Calgary). The "Miracle on Ice" was beginning to look more like a small bump in the road to Soviet dominance.

But Tikhonov's approach was beginning to wear very thin, and the fate of the Soviet hockey team would be tied to the broader fate of the nation. As for Tikhonov, Fetisov increasingly wondered, "Why play for a guy who doesn't respect

*continued on pg 6*



us as a human being?” This became the worry of the Soviet people more broadly, as the socialism that had promised prosperity and success was increasingly unable to deliver and the inhumanity of the system became undeniable. When promises to allow Fetisov to play in the National Hockey League following the 1988 gold medal were continually deferred and denied, Fetisov eventually quit the team and refused to play. As a Reuters report described it at the time, “Fetisov accused the coach of regarding his players as ‘ice robots’ to be used at his personal whim.” Fetisov held Tikhonov, who passed away in 2014, personally responsible for much of the opposition to his release to the NHL.

Fetisov wasn’t the only player dissatisfied with his treatment. The young Alexander Mogilny, who played on a line with future NHL stars Sergei Fedorov and Pavel Bure, defected in 1989 to play for the Buffalo Sabres. Contrasting America and the USSR, Mogilny said, “Here people live for themselves. There I lived like a homeless dog.” Such high profile defections were a major threat to the Soviet regime. “Politically, every time something like that happened it was used in the media, so it was a victory for the West and a loss for the Soviet Union,” says Pozner. The Soviets eventually recognized the prudence of negotiating rights for their players to play in the NHL, in most cases with the Soviet government claiming large shares of the players’ salaries.

Fetisov, however, refused to negotiate such an arrangement. He met with the minister of sport and was offered a similar deal, but Fetisov refused: “I want my contract.” In a meeting with Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov, Fetisov remained staunch. At the conclusion of the meeting, Fetisov said, “Mr. Minister, if you don’t do what you promised to me, you’re not a minister. You’re not an officer. Release me from the army. Thank you very much.” A short time later Fetisov was granted the first multiple working entrance visa to the

United States, and he made his NHL debut in the 1989–1990 season.

After an inauspicious stint on the New Jersey Devils, Fetisov was traded to the Detroit Red Wings in 1995 at the age of 37, where he was reunited with his countrymen to form a new Russian Five: Fetisov, Vladimir Konstantinov, Vyacheslav Kozlov, Sergei Fedorov, and his former teammate Igor Larionov. The Red Wings Russian Five helped lead the team to Stanley Cup victories in 1997 and 1998.

### Collectivism and consumerism

Fetisov retired after the 1998 season. He had visited Russia with the Stanley Cup for

More than 500 players have been drafted into the NHL since 1989, a steady flow of talent that is increasingly able to more easily adapt and transition to a new style of play. The adjustment was difficult for players like Fetisov and Krutov, the latter of whom had a short and disappointing NHL career. But new players are more thoroughly Westernized, to both good and bad effect. One of the more disturbing elements of the documentary involves one of the NHL’s current stars, the Russian-born Alexander Ovechkin. The forward for the Washington Capitals is doing some sort of promotional video in which he is asked to shoot pucks and destroy a series of Russian nesting dolls filled with Russian salad dressing. He gladly obliges.

The temptation when coming West, says Fetisov, involves precisely this kind of fetishizing of consumption and fortune. “We forget about patriotism,” says Fetisov. “We are ashamed of what we were before. We lost something. We lost pride. We lost our soul.” Since his retirement, Fetisov has returned to Russia at the invitation of Vladimir Putin in 2002 to work as minister of sport in an attempt to revive Russian hockey. But as Pozner observes, the Soviet history of hockey is equally relevant for the country’s political future: “Much of the problems are still anchored in that past.”



Promotional poster for *Red Army*.

a visit in 1997 and saw the changes that had occurred since his departure. He had left the USSR to play in the NHL and had returned victorious to a different country. The Russia that Fetisov came back to, he said, has “no heroes. It’s got no system. No structure. Nothing. Everybody runs around trying to get something. It’s not the way I want to live.” As Alexei Kasatonov put it, “Everything is about the material side of things: money, finance. Our country’s crisis is now reflected in hockey. Teams have very little money to keep players from leaving.”

*Red Army* makes clear that the history of Russian hockey does indeed have something to teach us, not only about the Russia of today, which is so much rooted in the Soviet past, but also for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of Western societies. “An outstanding athlete cannot belong solely to himself,” says Anatoli Tarasov. This is as true for the athletes on the ice as it is for the producers and consumers in the broader marketplace and, ultimately, the residents of civil society.

*Jordan J. Ballor is a research fellow at the Acton Institute and executive editor of the Journal of Markets & Morality.*



# The higher calling of the dismal science

By Dylan Pahman

Economist and theologian Paul Heyne once asked the question, “Are economists basically immoral?” He asked this because economists have a frustrating tendency to interrupt the high moral aspirations of others with complications about how, in the real world, life is not so simple. When other people are concerned with social justice and love, they have a knack for focusing on things like costs and logistics, seemingly putting a price on doing the right thing. Is this just an annoying habit of a small subset of social scientists, or might it be a moral calling? It is common today, especially among economists, to conceive of economic science as “value-free” in a fairly radical sense. Often this conception is credited to Milton Friedman, who wrote in a 1953 article, “Positive economics is in principle independent of any particular ethical position or normative judgments.” To be fair to Friedman, in the same article he admits there is a place for normative or morally-informed economics. But his characterization of positive economics has become a standard way of understanding economics as a whole. Economists just run the numbers. What people do with them is up to them and their own value systems.

Conversely, some people maintain the opposite, insisting that economics is not and cannot be value-free at all. In Christian circles, this is a common stance among social justice activists, distributists and so-called “radical orthodox” thinkers, though it is not limited to them. The basic idea is that the discipline of economics

i.e. under a different rule (*hetero + nomos*) than its own.

The first group tends to conceive of economics as purely positive or “value-free,” while the second tends to view it as purely normative. But who’s right? Both sides have good arguments in their favor.

The positivist can rightly point out that one does not need to read Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, to be able to understand supply and demand. Many of the basic concepts of economics are accepted by all or nearly all major economic schools and require no moral training to intellectually grasp and empirically observe. The heteronomist, however, can rightly point out, as Anthony Randazzo and Jonathan Haidt put it in their recent *Econ Journal*

*Watch* article on bias in economics, that “‘value-free economics’ is no more likely to exist than is the frictionless world of high school physics problems.”

We live in a world of right and wrong, and we all have views about morality that cannot be debunked by any amount of statistical analysis or conceptual modeling. In his essay “Economics and Ethics,”



Ark of the covenant being captured at Eben-Ezer, 1640. © Wikimedia Commons

assumes a whole anthropology and ethics, whether or not economists admit it. As such, it should not be considered a science and should not have any independence from ethics at all. Economist Wilhelm Röpke characterized this perspective, which he rejected, as “heteronomous” in a 1942 article because it denies the autonomy of economic science in favor of subsuming it under ethics or philosophy,

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Heyne said, “Scientific knowledge grows by testing, but it is scientists who do the testing, not ‘objective reality.’” All reality has a subjective, and thus value-laden, aspect to it. Scientists, and thus also economists, are people too, and they cannot escape the moral aspect of their nature. Can this debate be settled? Is there some other way that we could conceive the relationship between ethics and economics? I think there is, and I’m not the only one. As I’ve already noted, Friedman was not a strict positivist, and Paul Heyne certainly was not a heteronomist. In fact, from its very beginnings, modern economics, then called political economy, was understood to be both moral and autonomous, combining “value-free” empirical observation with ethical, social and political concerns in a way that no other science could. For example, the classical economist Richard Whately, who, according to Ross Emmett, professor of political economy and political theory and constitutional democracy at Michigan State University, was “probably the only person who has ever gone straight from economics professor to archbishop,” wrote in his 1840 *Lectures on Political Economy*,



If we really are convinced of the truth of Scripture, and consequently of the falsity of any theory ... which is really at variance with it, we must ... believe that that theory is also at variance with observable

phenomena; and we ought not therefore to shrink from trying that question by an appeal to these. It is for us to “behave ourselves valiantly for our country and for the cities of our God,” instead of bringing the Ark of God into the field of battle to fight for us.

This last reference is to the story of Hophni and Phinehas, the crooked sons of Eli, the priest of Israel in 1 Samuel. They brought the Ark of the Covenant to war with them as if it were a magical charm to give the soldiers of Israel good luck in their fight against the Philistines. “And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp,” reads the Scripture,

all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook ... So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, “God has come into the camp!” And they said, “Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before ... Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you.

Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!”

(1 Sam. 4:5, 7, 9)

Did God grant the Israelites good fortune? Sadly, no.” So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent ... Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died” (vv. 10–11). Similarly, contends

Whately, knowledge of the Bible or the moral teachings of the faith cannot magically replace knowledge of economics, and it is at our own great peril that we presume otherwise.

Yet Whately, for that, did not believe that economics lacked a moral calling. In fact,

he is known to have used his economic expertise to bolster his moral arguments against the slave trade. Indeed, economics earned the appellation “the dismal science” not because economists were so greedy and pessimistic. Rather, as David M. Levy and Sandra J. Peart write,

“... the endeavour to accumulate the means of future subsistence and enjoyment, is, to the mass of mankind, the great source of moral improvement.”

[Thomas] Carlyle attacked [J. S.] Mill, not for supporting Malthus’s predictions about the dire consequences of population growth, but for *supporting the emancipation of slaves*. It was this fact—that economics assumed that people were basically all the same, and thus all entitled to liberty—that led Carlyle to label economics “the dismal science” (emphasis added).

So faith and morals are no substitute for economics, but economics still needs to serve ethics. And at its best, that is what it has sought to do.

William Nassau Senior, Whately’s friend and colleague and first professor of political economy at Oxford, even believed that economics would one day be ranked “among the first of moral sciences in interest and utility.” Senior had good reason for this conviction. “The pursuit of wealth, that is, the endeavour to accumulate the means of future subsistence and enjoyment, is, to the mass of mankind, the great source of moral improvement.” He continues,

When does a labourer become sober and industrious, attentive to his health and to his character?—



as soon as he begins to save. No institution could be more beneficial to the morals of the lower orders, that is, to at least nine-tenths of the whole body of any people, than one which should increase their power and their wish to accumulate: none more mischievous than one which should diminish the motives and the means to save.

We might think of psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, in which he argued that most people need basic provision before they can be expected to attend to higher aims of life. But Senior is saying something more. Arthur Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute, has shown that happiness correlates with "earned success" rather than "learned helplessness." A person struggling to get by lacks the opportunity to (materially) give, which, according to Brooks, also correlates with happiness. Giving is also a moral duty of all who are blessed with wealth. As Christ himself put it, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Thus, if freedom from subsistence-level living correlates strongly with happiness and offers the opportunity to plan for the future and help others in hardship, isn't it certainly a moral calling to discover the principles and policies conducive to those ends, such as private property, industry, credit and trade? And that is precisely what economics, even ostensibly conceived as "value-free," is meant to do. It's a high moral calling if there ever was one, inconvenient and annoying as it may sometimes be. Though supply and demand curves may still elicit eye rolls from those concerned with moral matters, I daresay there is yet something sacred even there.

*Dylan Pahman is a research fellow at the Acton Institute, where he serves as managing editor of the Journal of Markets & Morality. He is also a fellow of the Sophia Institute: International Advanced Research Forum for the Study of Eastern Christian Life and Culture.*

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

## Ephesians 4:1–3

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, which taught on church unity and behavioral issues, while he was imprisoned in Rome. Dissension in the church is harmful not only for the church, but also the wider culture, where unbelievers often revel in accusing the church of hypocrisy and judgment.

Earlier chapters in Ephesians teach on salvation and the merits of Christ, but in Ephesians 4, Paul writes that salvation leads us to a spirit of love and unity. Our ultimate purpose here on earth is to reflect Christ and preserve unity to strengthen the power and witness of the church.

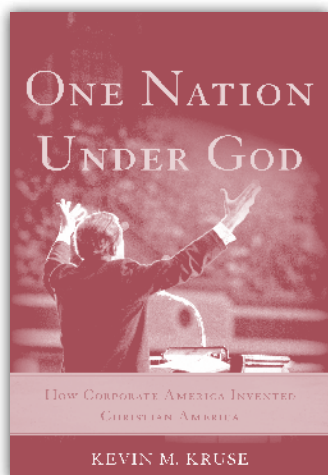
Unity does not mean we must compromise concerning false doctrine, Scripture or important traditions. Unity and the spirit of peace simply mean having a humble and teachable spirit. Unfortunately, some churches and pastoral leaders today often cite this verse to capitulate to or appease culture rather than uplift what Christ, Scripture and the church teaches.

Anybody who has been a part of a church or served in leadership knows that church division is toxic and paralyzing. Unfortunately, some attendees and members possess a spirit of division and work hard to destroy God's instrument for deliverance, peace and love in the world.

It's for good reason that the New Testament writers spend a lot of time writing about the importance of unity. Paul writes in Titus 3 to warn conflict agitators in the church, warn them again if necessary, but remove them from the body if their spirit of disunity continues. It's that important.

Sadly, so many churches and Christian organizations don't live up to their potential because of the lack of a united spirit. Ultimately, only Christ can give us that spirit of unity and equip us with the gifts required to grow in grace and flourish.

Finally, some casual readers might read this passage and be inclined to think Paul is bragging or boasting about his imprisonment. Rather, he is reminding his audience of his chains to reinforce the spirit of humility. Moreover, while Paul was imprisoned by the Roman authorities, he believed his imprisonment was for the sake of the Gospel and Jesus Christ. It's a beautiful reminder to all of us that it is more important to be made low and humble for the sake of the Gospel than to advance ourselves at the expense of others, especially over the ministry of Christ and his church.



# Was America ever really a Christian nation?

By Joseph Knippenberg

Review of *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* by Kevin M. Kruse. New York: Basic Books, 2015.

In *One Nation Under God*, Princeton historian Kevin M. Kruse offers yet another deconstruction of the claim, made quite vehemently in some conservative Christian circles, that America is (or at least was) a “Christian nation.” But unlike those who largely insist on the heterodoxy, rationalism, skepticism or separatism of some leading members of the founding generation, countering one kind of “originalism” with another, Kruse offers a different sort of genealogy, taking its point of departure in the 1930s, when a few religious and business leaders developed what he calls a kind of “Christian libertarianism” to counter the statism of FDR’s New Deal.

Drawing a thread from Rev. James W. Fifiield Jr.’s creation of the anti-New Deal Spiritual Mobilization organization in the 1930s through Abraham Vereide’s National Council of Christian Leadership and Billy Graham’s crusades in the forties and fifties to Richard Nixon’s White House worship services, Kruse tells a richly detailed story. While it is somewhat of an oversimplification and (as I shall suggest shortly) outruns the evidence he provides, the book’s subtitle—“How Corporate America Invented Christian America”—indicates the thrust of Kruse’s argument. Much of the God-talk, or rather, much of the *conservative*

God-talk, in the first half of the last century was deployed on behalf of those who resisted the growth of national government. That growth was to be resisted, the “Christian libertarians” asserted, on behalf of our God-given freedoms.

These efforts bore a certain kind of fruit in the Eisenhower Administration, during which “under God” was added to the Pledge of Allegiance and “In God We Trust” inscribed on our currency. But, as Kruse rightly notes, these were in a sense

“As aforementioned, his point is that, while the pretense and purport of our “Christian nation” talk is historical, that understanding is of relatively recent provenance.”

Pyrrhic victories, as their effect was less to roll back the state than to consecrate it. Christian libertarianism seemed to have given birth to Christian nationalism, which has ever since, in Kruse’s view, been a favorite trope on the political Right.

We might thus read Kruse’s story as a cautionary tale warning us that those

who use words and ideas in the public arena cannot always control how they are received and then redeployed by others. Ideas have (often unintended) consequences. In this case, even if we were to credit the simplicity and sincerity of men like Fifiield, Vereide, Graham and their allies (as Kruse by and large does not), we might still tax them with playing with fire, permitting the powerful moral language of faith to be sullied by its all too intimate connection with merely temporal ends.

But while he certainly permits us to draw those conclusions (indeed citing many liberal religious commentators to that effect), Kruse has what he regards as bigger fish to fry. As aforementioned, his point is that, while the pretense and purport of our “Christian nation” talk is historical, that understanding is of relatively recent provenance.

Well, yes and no. “Like most scholars,” Kruse says, he believes that “the historical record is fairly clear about the founding generation’s preference for what Thomas Jefferson memorably described as a wall of separation between church and state.”

If we accept this misleading and oversimplified premise, if there indeed were long-standing and widely—not to say almost universally—accepted scruples about mixing religion and politics, then the novelty of the Christian nation talk and the worldly agenda behind it would indeed be striking. But one does not



have to believe American historians like David Barton to argue that the picture of the first 150 years of American history is more complicated. Setting aside the fact that prominent and influential founders comprised both sides of the separationism issue and that the argument that the Establishment Clause was more about limiting the federal government than about separating church and state, we can also consider the assumption, taken for granted in the Northwest Ordinance, that schools were meant to teach religion and one of the principal battlegrounds for the argument over slavery—the issue of our first century—

Indeed, Kruse himself observes the close connection between the Social Gospel movement and progressivism and the quite heavy use of religious language in FDR's speeches. While America may not have been a Christian nation in the same sense people mean today, neither did it have the kind of secular public square apparently preferred by unreconstructed Rawlsians. Our common moral language owed—and still owes—much to the Old and New Testaments. And even the more secular philosophies favored by some of our elites presumed (for rhetorical purposes at least) a basically Christian audience. As George Washington said in his farewell address, “[L]et us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”

It might be safer to say that, throughout American history, political leaders have found that God-talk rolls trippingly off our tongues and that, inevitably, they have adopted the cadences that we the people understand and love. Given our fallen natures, it is not at all surprising that some (and not just the central figures of Kruse's history) have either cynically cloaked their selfish

designs in religious costumes or honestly mistaken what they want for themselves and their fellows for what God wants for his people. Treating all reli-

gious language cynically or eschewing it (or demanding that we eschew it) altogether would be to deprive our country of the richest source of inspiration and moral energy available to it. Not only would our political and moral vocabulary be impoverished, but our hearts would be as well.

To be sure, I don't think Kruse wants us to go that far. He certainly doesn't seem

“By deconstructing the symbols and slogans we adopted in the 1950s, he points us in the direction of something deeper—the longing and popular understanding that gave them their force to begin with.”

to be troubled by religious language when it is deployed in the name of what is fashionably called “social justice.” But when it is offered on behalf of conservative views, he describes it as problematically divisive.

Nonetheless, regardless of the conclusions Kruse would have us draw (and that I will not), he has done us a service. By deconstructing the symbols and slogans we adopted in the 1950s, he points us in the direction of something deeper—the longing and popular understanding that gave them their force to begin with. America may never have been a Christian nation. Indeed, no nation should be or could be. But it was a nation of Christians who could not help but respond to what they believed and felt most powerfully.

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Richard M. Nixon with Billy Graham at a “Billy Graham Crusade”  
Oliver F. Atkins, 1916-1977 (NARA record: 8451334)

was Scripture. If religious arguments were out of bounds, someone forgot to tell most Americans.

basically internally agreed that if we could get enough users to commit with a credit card, that they really would buy it to cover the cost, that we would go into production. That model was such a success that we tried it with the next project and the next and eventually started running most of our new projects through it.

Nowadays everybody's familiar with that as Kickstarter, right? But we basically did Kickstarter for electronic books back in the '90s. I wish I'd had the sense to take it to other business models earlier. We should have been doing Kickstarter. But it's actually an ancient model. In the early days of movable type printing, that's how books were published. A book would be written longhand on paper, but it was very expensive to typeset it. And, of course, you had to break down the movable type after you printed each set of pages. You couldn't go back and make 10 more. So they actually used the same kind of preorder model in the 1700s before putting a book to press so they knew how many copies to print. We just kind of reinvigorated that model for the digital world.

And then community pricing I'm really proud of because we just kind of invented it. Maybe it's been done elsewhere, but in community pricing, we basically exposed the price demand curve to the customers. We show a chart, and we show how much revenue would be generated at each different price point based on the number of orders we'd have at that price point. We show people what our costs are, and as soon as that price demand curve breaks the cost line, we do it at the lowest price that will cover our costs. So if it costs \$10,000 to produce, and if one person paid \$10,000, that covers all of our costs. Or if 10 people paid \$1,000 or if 10,000 people paid \$1. We let the users tell us where the sweet spot is.

It's fun because users get to see that we're not trying to get the most out of them. We're trying to put more product into production. It also kind of turns into a game, right? When users really want to see a book get produced, they rally in our forums and say, "Hey, if everybody gets on board, we can drop the price of this by \$5 or \$10 per per-

son." And we've seen users cut the price in half on something, kind of evangelizing other people to place an order.

*Talk to us about Faithlife's philosophy of selling the network, not the specific book.*

Bible study is a multibook exercise, right? The Bible is always at the core, but people are often consulting. They want to go back to the Greek and Hebrew, so they need a Greek or Hebrew lexicon. They might want a commentary to help them understand the history of its interpretation or to put it into cultural context. You don't do Bible study by opening one book. I mean, obviously, we start by opening the Bible, but most sermon preparation and paper writing is done with all this content. And that is essentially a big network. All those books ... link back and connect to Bible verses.

Scripture itself is interconnected, as verses in the New Testament are quotations of verses in the Old Testament. You buy a book on a Kindle, and it generally stands alone. You buy a novel, you read it front to back, and you're done. In Bible software, you're adding continually to a library of materials that gets richer as it grows. And all of those things cross reference inside of one another. Many people have read a book full of footnotes and cross references at the bottom of the page that they never really pursued. In theory, maybe some scholar looks at that book and does that. But in digital, we can make that really easy. We can make it where you just hover the mouse over the reference to the original article, and it pops up on the screen. If somebody in this commentary cites this Greek dictionary, you just click on it, and you're reading that dictionary article. So the more books you add, the more valuable this platform becomes.

*What sort of religious texts and books have had the most surprising market response? Faithlife offers the full gamut across Christian traditions, including Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox content.*

The core of our market has been the North American Evangelical market. That's where we sell the most and have the most customers. But we decided a long time ago that we weren't going to let the company just reflect

our denominational background or our particular beliefs. We wanted to serve everybody who studies the Bible. The only thing we're sure about is God's Word. And everything else we might have wrong. So we serve everybody who wants to study the Bible.

I think some of the surprises are that there are some very narrow interest areas that digital makes easier to support. We have done an Ugaritic library of digital books for studying ancient Ugaritic, which is a language that was in cuneiform. Cuneiform being when you press the little wooden wedge into clay tablets. There's not a huge audience for that. But we actually made a profitable project that delivered Ugaritic text and resources because there's a few number of people who really value the digital tools to help them work with that. The Internet can help you find those people even though they're scattered all over the world. That is one of the fun things we do. While the majority of the business is selling to pastors who need tools for sermon preparation, we actually work in some very interesting academic and niche specialty areas that are sometimes amazingly obscure, but they're important feeders into the scholarship that leads to better Bible study down the road.

*Do you consider Faithlife a Christian workplace that is doing real mission and evangelism or simply a workplace where a lot of Christians work?*

Well, we've certainly won some awards from organizations such as Christian Workplace Institute and things like that, but I don't think companies have souls. I think people have souls. I'm sometimes uncomfortable with the phrase "Christian company" or "Christian workplace," because it's the people who are Christians. We're a for-profit company. We're not legally allowed to discriminate. I'd say we're probably, I'm guessing, 95 percent believers, because there's a strong affinity in knowledge that fits well with the job. So it's a place that does employ a lot of Christians. Our business is to serve the Christian church. That's what we do. But within the company, it's a diverse group of people. If we ran a snowboarding shop that sold snowboarding gear, we'd probably have a lot of snowboarders on staff. They know



about it, and they care about it. In the same way, most of our people are very passionate about Bible study and helping people with those tools.

*Do you ever hear criticism for turning Christian texts into money-making projects?*

All the time. There's always somebody who thinks everything should be free. And there's always somebody who thinks everything that's connected to the church should be free. I try to listen to those people and understand their perspective, but I often point out that they probably paid the carpenter who built their church, right?

They probably paid the publisher who printed their hymn books and their pew Bibles. They probably pay the pastor a salary. Even if that's done from gifts or donations, that's the pastor's income and how they're supported. If they buy communion wafers and grape juice, they buy them from a store.

And we're providing a tool that people use in the study. We definitely agree the Bible should be free to everyone. And we're supportive of free Bible efforts. We give Bibles away digitally. We recommend some really nice open-source and free Bible software on the Internet. No one is unable to get good Bible study tools for free. And we point people to those tools, and we can provide them. But what we do is provide power tools for people who want to go deeper. We have to pay the publishers and the authors and the software developers. Most people understand that and appreciate the value we deliver.

Personally, I like being a for-profit company instead of a nonprofit, because it creates a form of accountability. I have to build a product that people find useful. They have to be willing to open their wallet and buy a copy or we don't get to stay in business. We have to earn every dollar we make. And we do that by delivering a really useful product. If we go the wrong direction or deliver something people don't like, they're quick to tell us. And one of the ways they tell us is by not buying it. The big thing about being for-profit is accountability. And I think accountability is a good thing. ■■■■

## *How can I help with the final matching challenge of the Acton@25 Campaign?*

Currently celebrating our 25th year in operation, this fall we hope to announce the completion of our Acton@25 Campaign to launch our next 25 years!

The capital campaign began 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 two dvd video curricula and a documentary, and display our unique and rare collection of close to 15,000 books. Over 2,000 people have attended our in-house lectures to learn more about free enterprise, individual liberty and personal responsibility! Many partner and community organizations have used our beautiful building for their own activities. The focus of the final phase of the campaign is seizing new opportunities.

We are \$300,000 away from reaching our \$12.5 million campaign goal, which we are determined to accomplish by our annual dinner this October. Two generous donors have also agreed to match all donations in this final phase of the campaign to help us reach our goal.

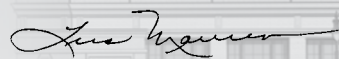
All new or additional gifts between now and the end of the campaign will be matched 2-to-1. All donors to the campaign will be listed in a special commemorative book documenting the building's transformation, and all contributions of \$1,000 or more will be forever recognized in a beautiful etched glass commemorative plaque in our lobby. Thanks again to everyone who has participated.

This final phase of the campaign will allow us to outfit our media center, bolstering our number of podcasts, television interviews and syndicated radio programming. It will also allow us to start live-streaming events in our auditorium and expand our internship program, educating and offering valuable experience to future business and religious leaders.

We have been blessed with a beautiful building in which we've been able to display art, produce and screen fascinating documentaries, and hear from many 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.

To help us reach our goal, please contact Charles Roelofs at [croelofs@acton.org](mailto:croelofs@acton.org) or 616.454.3080. You can also contribute online at [www.give.acton.org](http://www.give.acton.org).

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



Kris Alan Mauren  
Executive Director

## Sojourner Truth [1797 – 1883]

*Truth is powerful and it prevails.*

From slave to fearless human rights advocate, Sojourner Truth is one of the most inspirational figures of the 19th century. In 1797, or thereabouts, Truth was born Isabella Baumfree in the state of New York to James and Elizabeth

(some accounts say her mother's name was

Betsey), two slaves of Colo-

nel Johannes Harden-

bergh. Truth married an-

other slave, Thomas, when

she was in her late teens and

eventually had five children.

She had several different own-

ers, many of whom were ex-

remely cruel, until 1826. Grow-

ing support for emancipation and

abolition of slavery prompted

Truth's final owner to promise that

he would set her free long before it

became the law. After it became

clear that her owner had lied and she

would not be freed, she decided to lit-

erally walk away. "I did not run off," she said. "For I thought that wicked, but I walked off, believing that to be all right."

Immediately after her escape she became a devout Christian. Isaac and Maria Van Wagenen took her in after she found her way to their home, which was not far from her former slave master in rural New York. Their kindness and faith profoundly affected Truth.

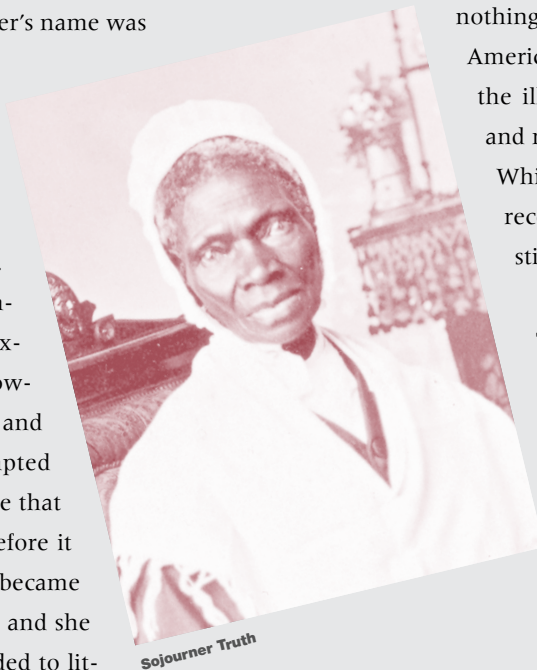
In 1826, she officially changed her name to "Sojourner Truth" to represent her mission of traveling throughout America to preach truth and fight injustice. Despite being illiterate, she became a huge national figure, taking part in many social movements and befriending countless aboli-

tionists and reformers. Her most famous speech "Ain't I a Woman?" makes the case not only for racial equality but also for equality for women. She refutes a common argument that since Christ was not a woman, women should not have equal rights to men. "Where did your Christ come from?" she asked. "From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with Him." During a later speech to the American Equal Rights Association, she brought up the illogicality of her owning a home, paying taxes and making her own living but being unable to vote. While she was pleased that rights were starting to be recognized for black males, she knew a fight was still to be had.

Truth is also notable because she was one of the first black women to win a legal case over a white man. In 1828, she learned that her five-year-old son, Peter, had been illegally sold to a slave owner in Alabama where he was abused and mistreated. After many months of legal proceedings and the help of the Van Wagenens, justice was served and Peter was set free.

Truth, who was unusually tall at nearly six feet, used her stature and low voice to command even the most hostile crowds. She often adapted and changed her lectures, depending on the audience's reception, and incorporated religious themes, Biblical stories and anecdotes from her own life. Having experienced it herself, Truth was able to give accurate and emotional depictions of the demeaning and horrific nature of slavery, as well as the redeeming power of faith.

Truth died on November 26, 1883, and was buried at Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek, Michigan. According to her tombstone, she died at 105. It's more likely that she was closer to 86. Truth allowed speculation about her age to go on because she enjoyed the reputation of being the "world's oldest lecturer."







## Illuminating gifts

Faith. Freedom. These words are not used thoughtlessly or carelessly at the Acton Institute. The 25th anniversary of the Acton Institute is a good time to reflect on these ideals, especially as they relate to our Faith & Freedom

Award. Faith illuminates the road—our lives—before us. We are free to journey anywhere. Isn't the freedom of the open road a quintessential American tableau? It's us in a sharp-looking, sunlit convertible with music blasting and wind in our hair. The world is ours! Freedom!

But we must also ask what freedom is, because without knowing the parameters of freedom, we can drive off a cliff.

I am reminded of the classic novel *Les Misérables*. One character, Jean Valjean, is basically a good man who was imprisoned for stealing bread to feed his family. Valjean attempts to escape many times but remains imprisoned for 20 years, ultimately allowing his suffering to take the faith and light of his soul, which are then replaced with bitterness and anger.

Upon his long-awaited release, a bishop hosts Valjean for dinner, and Valjean promptly steals the man's silver. He is caught, and when police officers bring him and the missing silver back to the bishop for identification, the bishop says the silver was a gift from him to Valjean. The confused Valjean stands before this man, who easily could have sent him back to jail, but instead colluded with Valjean to fool the police. Why?

The bishop: "Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I buy from you; I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God."

Our freedom means we belong to good, to God. Our free will is his gift to us, and our use of that gift—in goodness—is our gift to him.

Over a decade ago, we established the Faith & Freedom Award to celebrate Acton's 10th anniversary. We wanted to honor Lord Acton's understanding of the societal need for both faith and freedom, and to underscore that neither faith nor freedom are obsolete or outmoded. We have awarded it to eight individuals who, through outstanding leadership in civic, business or religious life, have modeled faith and freedom most excellently. These men and women (Sir John Templeton, Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, Rocco Buttiglione, Chuck Colson, Mart Laar, William F. Buckley Jr., Rich DeVos Sr. and Lady Margaret Thatcher) are not perfect. Later this year, we will honor Diet Eman, a member of the Dutch Resistance during World War II. We could argue over the virtues of each of these people. Some shouldered enormous criticism regarding their running of nations or corporations. But they all acted in a profound and real way to remain timeless champions of liberty, virtue, faith and freedom.

What each of these people understood, what Victor Hugo understood and what we must understand is that faith and freedom are cherished and inestimable gifts. They offer us



illumination to see and know truth and the ability to carry out that truth in our daily lives. Faith and freedom mean "we belong to good, to God." May this vision of faith and freedom form all our lives.

*Rev. Robert A. Sirico is president and cofounder of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty.*

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