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## Molding Men, Shaping Futures:

### An Interview with Bert Smith

A Journal of Religion, Economics, and Culture

# Editor's Note



The Houston-based Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP) treats convicted criminals as if they were “raw metal in the hands of a blacksmith—

crude, formless, and totally moldable.” PEP puts prisoners through a rigorous character training and business skills regimen to prepare them for a productive, even flourishing, reentry to life after incarceration. Ray Nothstine took part in PEP’s “pitch day” presentations where prisoners present their start-up dreams before a panel of business people and investors. In the main feature of this Spring 2015 issue of *Religion & Liberty*, Nothstine describes his day at the Cleveland Correctional Center near

Houston and interviews Bert Smith, PEP chief executive.

Also in this issue, Rev. Gregory Jensen reviews *Free Market Environmentalism for the Next Generation*, a new book by Terry Anderson and Donald Leal. Rev. Jensen reminds us to pay attention to policy decisions that can help or hinder “our pursuit of the ethical goals that so many of our religious leaders recommend.”

In the Liberal Tradition profiles Isabel Paterson (1886-1961) a journalist, philosopher, and literary critic who is credited with being “one of the three women (along with Rose Wilder Lane and Ayn Rand) who launched the libertarian movement in America.” Not many people remember her today even though her 1943 book *The God of the Machine* was highly influential on its publication. You’ll want to read this profile and learn why Paterson had a major falling out with Rand.

In this issue, we excerpt *Christ and Crisis*, the 1962 book by the Lebanese diplomat, philosopher, and theologian Charles Malik. Writing for Acton Commentary in March 2015, Dylan Pahman said that “despite its Cold War context, *Christ and Crisis* (in just 101 pages) offers a nuanced approach to Christian social thought and action, acknowledging the unique tasks of practitioners and theorists in their own competence in each realm of life, while never losing sight of the Cross of Jesus Christ.”

In the Acton FAQ, Acton executive director Kris Mauren offers some help on getting more deeply engaged with Acton’s work— even if you’re not able to attend the institute’s many events and lectures in Grand Rapids. For those who can travel to West Michigan, Acton president Rev. Robert A. Sirico offers some thoughts on what to expect at Acton University in June.

— John Couretas

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# Molding Men, Shaping Futures:

An Interview with Bert Smith

*The vast majority of prison ministries focus on evangelism and engage with inmates much as they would with any other mission project. The Houston-based Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP), which receives no state funding, is receiving national and international accolades for its unique integration of entrepreneurial skills and character transformation. Prisoners who come to the program are treated much as a blacksmith takes a “crude, formless, and totally moldable” piece of metal and turns it into something useful, even beautiful. (See related feature story in this issue, Prison Entrepreneurs: From Shark Tank to Redemption.)*

*Bert Smith has been actively involved in PEP since 2005 and CEO since 2010. Smith has a business background in power plant engineering and energy technology. He holds an AB in economics from Princeton University and a Juris Doctor from the University of Texas at Austin School of Law. He recently spoke with Ray Nothstine during a “pitch day” event for prisoners at the Cleveland Correctional Center in Cleveland, Texas.*

**R&L:** Any time we read about the prison industry, we are told about record numbers of incarcerated Americans. Why do you think so many Americans are in prison? And why do the numbers seem to only increase?

**Bert Smith:** A little over two million are incarcerated, and about five million are in some other way entangled in the criminal justice system. The U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, which is very distressing to me. As to why that's the case, there are several possible reasons.

Let me start by saying there's a lot of discussion recently about excess criminalization. Starting back in the 1980s through maybe the 1990s, many crimes weren't considered criminal or weren't involved with charges that resulted in felonies. Combine that with the rise in minimum sentencing policies. I know those things may have contributed to the higher rates of incarceration and the situation we have today, but I don't want to focus on that. I believe that there are deeper reasons. One is the failure of fathers in the United States. I'd estimate that about 80 to 90 percent of the guys that PEP serves either didn't know their father or wish they hadn't. I don't know if those percentages are exact, but I'm sure it's not far off. When a boy grows up in a vacuum like that, not knowing his father or wishing he didn't know his father, he will feel alienated.

He will feel lonely. He will feel insignificant. There will be a hole in his soul. He will be angry and scared. And he's going to seek out affirmation or medication or both from sources that are not going to prosper him, but harm him. That will obviously suppress the talents God embedded in him to flourish.

I believe men of every socioeconomic level need to man up. All of us. This is the main reason why PEP includes a series called The Quest for Authentic Manhood, developed by Pastor Robert Lewis out of Little Rock, Arkansas. Every one of the PEP guys goes through it. And we bring in volunteers to sit and work through this study alongside the men. The feedback I get from them is tremendous. It is a biblical perspective on



Inmates at Cleveland Correctional Center, Cleveland, TX.

what it means to be a real man in the 21st century. We don't hear enough of that kind of truth. I'm hoping in some small way to begin to change the outcomes of the criminal justice system by changing the perspective and the hearts of these men. We hope through that there will be

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# Prison Entrepreneurs: From Shark Tank to Redemption

By Ray Nothstine

Shortly after the day's guests arrive at the East Texas prison, and well before they begin to mix with the inmates, they hear a low rumbling noise in the distance. As they make their way closer to the prison gymnasium, the low rumbling grows into a constant and thunderous clamor. For those making their first visit to the Cleveland Correctional Center, located 45 minutes north of Houston, the roar of the inmates' husky voices is disconcerting—maybe even intimidating—as they wonder what awaits them. The energy inside the prison is relentless, almost palpable. When the doors swing open to the gymnasium, the day's guests walk single file through a sea of shouting inmates. One hundred and twenty-six prisoners to be exact.

But this is no angry riot. This is a victory celebration. Visitors are greeted with deafening applause and pats on the back from the inmates as they walk through what can only be described as a celebratory hand-slapping gauntlet.

The fist-pumping reception sets the tone for the day in what feels like a pep rally. It signifies that something behind the bars of the 520-inmate prison, indeed within the hearts of many of its prisoners, has changed.

Welcome to "pitch day," where inmates practice and prepare for an upcoming business plan competition managed by the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP), a Houston-based nonprofit that turns incarcerated men into aspiring business owners.

During this important dress rehearsal as they prepare for their final examination, inmates receive feedback from mostly local business leaders. At a later date, the men in the program deliver a 30-minute oral business plan presentation to a judging panel of business executives and venture capitalists from across the nation. But before inmates make it this far, they must successfully complete PEP's three-month character development program called Leadership Academy. Then they move into PEP's core program, the six-month business plan competition that leads to a Certificate in Entrepreneurship from Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business.

Jay Wall, a Houston-area real estate developer, says the program "is all about changing the trajectory for these young men." They can succeed and fairly quickly. "They just need to be willing to listen," Wall says. "We come here because we want to help, and we believe in what is going on inside these walls."

Bert Smith, CEO of the PEP program, begins the day by bringing the people in the gymnasium to silence. He speaks about Gideon, an Israelite judge, and the amen choruses from the assembled prisoners begin. "I have always thought of Gideon as a hero, but when God came looking for a leader, Gideon's response was, why me?" Smith tells them. Gideon, who thought of himself as nothing special, is a reminder to those assembled that he was divinely selected to free the Lord's people.

Before I even arrive at Cleveland Correctional, Smith tells me that PEP doesn't really do ministry at the 40-acre minimum security prison. "It's not a faith-based program," he declares. But coming inside these walls makes me think of the celebration of the Prodigal Son's return in Luke's Gospel, which is clearly a picture of the embrace believers can expect from their heavenly Father. Several times during the day Smith jokes with volunteers and inmates that the prison is "our own private gated community." He tells the visitors, "Whoever came in here looking for caged animals will be sorely disappointed."

Smith will lead and help instruct prisoners on pitching their entrepreneurial ideas and start-ups to the "venture panels." Smith describes it as something akin to the hit television show "Shark Tank." He tells me the inmates, in putting together their business plans, become virtual experts in important concepts, such as what competitive advantage their start-ups bring to the marketplace. Inmates are critiqued fairly, but with little patronizing or sympathy for their plight.

The program, which launched in 2004, addresses the huge need for positive reintegration of convicts into productive civilian life. When most inmates are released, they can't find a job. A felony conviction is devastating in any job market. Almost 75 percent of PEP graduates are employed within 30 days of release, and 100 percent are employed within 90 days. Many inmates choose to live in transition homes provided

by the program when they are released so they are fully plugged into a community and network that provides opportunities to succeed. The program's three-year success rate is as high as 95 percent. In 2013, Baylor University determined that PEP delivers a 340 percent return on investment for every dollar donated to the program.

PEP also boasts of a low recidivism rate. After three years, less than six percent of PEP graduates are repeat offenders, compared to 23 percent of non-PEP graduates. To be eligible for the program inmates must not be incarcerated for a sex crime, must be within three years of release, and must possess a high school diploma or GED, all while making a commitment to change.



Inmate at Cleveland Correctional Center, Cleveland, TX.

Natalie Baker, executive relations manager for PEP, oversees an ice breaker exercise that helps inmates and visitors connect. She lines up prisoners and volunteers face-to-face. The two groups take a step forward if they have something in common, such as coming from a broken home, experiencing a history of being incarcerated, or having used illegal drugs. For the most part, the similarities are evident. The exercise is a reminder to inmates that success is not out of their reach and to volunteers that the inmates aren't unlike them.

Baker, who has a law degree and MBA, spent four years in prison when she seriously injured two motorists while driving drunk in Florida. She admits her transition out of prison was much more difficult than her actual incarceration. Baker was harassed and turned down for jobs despite holding two advanced degrees.

Otis Rogers, a 33-year-old inmate from Cleveland, Mississippi, was apprehended while transporting drugs from Texas to his home state. Rogers says the PEP program has been critical for pointing out the flaws in his character. "It's a great program, and I really like it," he told me. Rogers pitches the idea of a barbershop named "Picture Perfect Haircuts," which would also special-

ize as a dry cleaning service. The business panelists who review his pitch aggressively challenge the notion of a joint barbershop and dry cleaning shop, suggesting Rogers commit to one or the other.

Being from out of state, Rogers's story differs a little than some of the others in the program. When I caught up with him later in the day he says he is due to be released later this summer. He seems unsure as to whether he will open a barbershop and appears more excited about an opportunity in Mississippi working as a

truck driver, a job he previously held. "I will be released before the graduation day from this program, but I plan on coming back with some of my family for the ceremony," says Rogers.

Thirty-four-year-old Stevon Harris pitches the idea of a welding business, an industry in which he seems to have considerable experience and skill despite initially seeming a little shy or unsure of himself.

Inmates in PEP are given "sweet names" to help shed former gang nicknames and their rough reputation. Harris is also known as "Chris Tucker," presumably named after the Hollywood actor and comedian. He says the program has taught him character, self-discipline, and brotherhood. "It really took the people around me in PEP to bring certain issues to my attention," he says.

Character assessments are a big part of PEP, and most of the inmates I talk with admit this is the most challenging part of the program. One inmate describes it as akin to standing in front of a mirror all day while others give you constant correction. Another inmate says it's essential because "you need to have somebody covering your blind spot." Inmates are confronted with their faults and what they need to do to not only make changes but also be held accountable for their words and actions.

I ask Harris, who is scheduled for release in 2017, if the program is what he expected, and he freely admits it is a lot different. "Honestly, at first, I was looking for something that I thought was going to be much easier and a handout," he says. "But through PEP now I can visualize my own business plan, and I see others who are released from here but come back to share their success stories." Eligible inmates from all over Texas can apply for a transfer to the Cleveland facility for the program. Not all who apply will be admitted.

I question a 40-year-old inmate from South Texas about the ones that drop out, a topic I haven't seen addressed in any of

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the media coverage or PEP testimonials. “A lot of people do leave the program,” he confides. “They simply can’t handle the homework, and there is a lot of after-hours work and preparation they are not willing to embrace.” The business plan competition requires 1,000 hours of classroom time over six months. That works out to several hours of homework per night. Inmates study college textbooks and read novels like *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

One of the best and most animated venture plans comes from a young and very personable inmate named Joshua Moore. He looks younger than his 30 years, and he tells me he was sent to prison for bringing drugs into a school zone. “I’ve seen some people come out of prison like a broken down Vietnam War vet,” Moore says. “I didn’t want to live like that. That’s why I got involved in the PEP program.”

Moore’s “sweet name” is Marvin the Martian, and his business is “Ooh-La-La Auto Spa.” He even has a jingle ready for the pitch and has clearly thought extensively about how to market the auto cleaning and detailing business. The competition judges give him largely positive feedback and offer further suggestions such as tips for servicing vehicles while clients are at work. The name of the business, with its sexual overtones, is catchy. And after Moore’s presentation, I am fairly convinced it has a legitimate chance at success in part because I can’t help but be drawn in by the infectious personality of the “Ooh-La-La” mastermind.

Moore, who writes me a short letter along with some of the other inmates after my visit, personalizes his note with something I told him about my life and our conversations at the facility. Some of these guys really know how to network.

Joshua McComas, 27, says his favorite part of the program is the way volunteers come inside to give entrepreneurial instruction and critique. “The effort these volunteers put forth is important for us,” he

says. “That feedback is essential, and I actually use it to improve myself. I mean all these people come in and smile at us, and my own family won’t even smile at me.”

McComas says PEP “is actually going to give me a chance to support my family.” He talks about vowing to “have something of substance to show my son, once my son allows me back into his life.”

It is easy to forget you are inside a prison while attending a PEP event, but in the afternoon we are interrupted several times



Inmates at Cleveland Correctional Center, Cleveland, TX.

by guards for inmate roll call. The steady interruptions seem a little out of the ordinary, even for prison. While there is no violence at Cleveland Correctional while I am there, I find out later that day that a serious prison riot broke out at the Willacy County Correctional Facility near Harlingen, along the border with Mexico.

After more inmates are grilled on their business plans, state regulatory laws, and start-up costs, everybody settles back into the gymnasium for a celebration, testimonials, and dancing. Volunteers who are first-time visitors to the program are required to dance for whooping inmates and offer up their own testimonial of the day’s experience.

A PEP skeptic might feel like some elements are carefully choreographed for maximum buy-in and emotion. But it’s hard to argue with the authenticity of many of the inmates and the entrepreneurial skills and knowledge that have been ingrained in more than 100 participants. PEP’s successful statistics are not going unnoticed by politicians either. Texas’s senior U.S. Senator John Cornyn lavishes the program with praise, saying it is “reforming lives” and “strengthening Texas communities.” There are plans to expand the program in Texas and possibly across the nation.

There’s a common feeling that many of the inmates have been changed more by the character assessment side of the program, rather than the rigorous academic work required to participate and graduate from PEP. It’s clear that inmates understand that if they are going to receive a shot at redemption, it will require much more than entrepreneurial and financial success. Many, but not all, speak freely and openly about their Christian faith and credit that for their transformation and success.

At the end of what could be described as a prison revival, Smith shouts to the assembled, “These men are determined not to let past outcomes determine the future.” This reminds me of something similar written by the Apostle Paul, when he was hopelessly wrapped in chains. He told the Church at Philippi, “What has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.”

*Ray Nothstine is a graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary and lives in Jackson, Mississippi.*





# Nature, Markets, and Human Creativity

Review by Rev. Gregory Jensen

A review of *Free Market Environmentalism for the Next Generation* by Terry L. Anderson and Donald R. Leal. (Palgrave Macmillan, January 2015).

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in his statement for the 2015 World Water Day makes a number of assertions that, while inspired by morally good ideals, are morally and practically problematic. Chief among them is his assertion “that environmental resources are God’s gift to the world” and so “cannot be either considered or exploited as private property.” While certainly not absolute, the Orthodox Christian moral tradition doesn’t reject the notion of private property. In fact, property is valued “as a socially recognized form of people’s relation to the fruits of labour and to natural resources.” Included here are the “basic powers of an owner”, such as “the right to own and use property, the right to control and collect income, the right to dispose of, lease, modify or liquidate property” (The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church, VII.1).

On a practical level, Bartholomew’s concern for “sustainability” reflects what George Will calls an idea whose “premises are more assumed than demonstrated” and which “as a doctrine of total social explanation, transforms all ills and grievances into environmental causes, cloaked in convenient science.” When embodied in public policy, sustainability empowers “government planners and rationers to fend off planetary calamity while administering equity” allowing them “to supplant markets in allocating wealth and opportunity.”

These are not insignificant shortcomings. Nevertheless, the substance of the patriarch’s statement that “any abuse of our earth’s resources—and, above all, of water as the source and symbol of life and renewal—contradicts our sacred and social obligation to other people, and especially those who live in poverty and on the margins of society” is beyond serious moral dispute. As is so often the case in ecclesiastical statements on public policy, what is left unexamined is the practical means by which we seek to achieve morally good ends. *Free Market Environmentalism for the Next Generation* by Terry L. Anderson and Donald R. Leal of the Property and Environment Research Center (PERC) can help Orthodox Christians and “all people of good will” reflect in a critical and appreciative manner on how well public policy decisions can help (or hinder) our pursuit of the ethical goals that so many of our religious leaders recommend.

For example, the patriarch’s call to “find ways of protecting water—rivers, lakes, and oceans—so that communities and industries no longer pollute without being held accountable” is a central concern for Anderson and Leal. Like Bartholomew, they say that “government regulation has the potential for improving environmental quality and resource stewardship.” At the same time they are critical of the “command and control” approach since it “requires ... that centralized planners ... accurately account for all costs and benefits and act to improve efficiency.” They argue this is not only “unfeasible” on *anthropological* grounds, but it is also a demonstrable failure empirically. This latter

argument is made in chapters on land management, energy, water rights, and fishing.

Though aware of the limitations of a centralized response, Anderson and Leal do say that “to the extent that ... redistribution can be accomplished without other [adverse] consequences, redistribution is a sensible approach to environmental injustice.” This is especially the case when, as they argue in the chapter on water rights, property rights “can[not] be well defined and enforced.” In these circumstances it is unlikely that market forces alone “can encourage efficient water use, conservation, and the movement of scarce water to higher valued uses” however these might be defined.

Nevertheless, the authors’ preference is for “free market environmentalism” with clearly defined, legally enforceable “property rights [that] compel owners to account for the costs and benefits of their actions and facilitate market transactions that create efficiency-enhancing gains from trade.” Property rights are important because while “some people may act with enlightened self-interest ... good intentions are often not enough to produce good results.”

At the heart of their argument is the elegant parallel they draw between the dynamic character of both the environment and the marketplace. Given this, “connect[ing] self-interest to resource stewardship by establishing private property rights to environmental resources” is a necessary element of the kind of rational and responsible stewardship that Bartholomew calls for in

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his Water Day statement. The parallel the authors have drawn in this book between “both markets and ecosystems” as “bottom-up systems that cannot be managed from the top down” holds great promise for a free market approach to the environment that is consonant with the moral tradition of the Orthodox Church.

The authors begin by offering reasons why we should reject the assumption common to both “ecologists and economists” that the world is (or ought to be) “an equilibrium system.” Such models “are analytically appealing” but are “inconsistent with how nature and markets work in reality.” Our “focusing on equilibrium conditions” leads us to “overlook the dynamic human and natural processes that shape market and ecosystem phenomena,” write Anderson and Leal. This last point is important not only for the environmentalist and the economist but also the moral theologian. Human “actions and human values exert a significant influence on natural systems.” This means that “environmental problems cannot be solved by simply separating natural systems from human influence; rather, they are an inevitable part of life.” But neither can they be solved on merely a technical or scientific basis. Environmental questions are also moral problems and so reflect the virtue or vice of the human heart.

As I and others have argued, the Orthodox ascetical tradition has a role to play in helping craft just and prudent responses—market-based and regulatory—to environmental questions. However, if asceticism is to be more than a mere mechanical response, the Church needs to understand the dynamic nature of both the environment and the market as arenas of human creativity. This means a more engaged, evangelical response that takes seriously the anthropological dimension of ecosystems and markets and sees them as arenas of spiritual combat and moral formation. Anderson and Leal’s work can help us understand these arenas.

*Rev. Gregory Jensen is a priest in the Orthodox Church in America. He is a social scientist specializing in religion and personality theory.*

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

## John 19:33-34

*But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.*

One of the remarkable things about the risen and ascended Christ is that he still bears the marks of his death and suffering for humanity. Christ has truly made the Cross eternal with his physical body. Even when our bodies are fully restored at our own resurrection, Christ will still bear the wounds of his crucifixion. This powerful and physical seal points directly to the centrality of the Cross.

It was routine for those who were crucified to have their legs broken to speed up death. This was done so it was nearly impossible for them to lift themselves up to keep from suffocating.

Jesus, who had already died, was stabbed in his side so the guards could confirm his death. His legs weren’t broken, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecy that no bones of Christ would be shattered. Furthermore, Zechariah 12:10 reveals another wonderful and important prophecy:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

In this passage, the Lord makes known that it was Him incarnate who was crucified. This verse also offers a glimpse into the future, telling us that Christ will return in his second coming with his visible wounds. The whole world will see the firstborn over all creation who has been crucified and pierced.

The blood and water from his side depicts the cleansing and forgiveness for humanity. The *Anima Christi*, a popular prayer in the medieval Church declares, “Blood of Christ, inebriate me; Water from the side of Christ, wash me.”

The Cross is a reminder not only of our cleansing and forgiveness from sin but also that despite whatever agony we face, Christ faced an even worse agony. It is not a promise of temporary deliverance from our suffering, but it is a promise that God shares in that suffering. It’s a reminder that despite every anguish, pain, and rejection we face, the Triune God has a plan and purpose to reconcile us and raise us up. It’s a comfort to know that the sacrifice and blood of Christ is perfectly sufficient, and one day we will see the marks for ourselves.





# The Burden of the Christian

By Charles Malik

Charles Malik is not a household name among educated Christians who stand for a free and virtuous society. Some may vaguely recall his name from his involvement in the formative period of the United Nations and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But his name is often overshadowed either by more familiar personages, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, or by the way in which the Universal Declaration was used to justify a 1974 charter “to promote the establishment of the new international economic order, based on equality, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest and co-operation among all States, irrespective of their economic and social systems,” which is an intentional compromise with Communism that runs counter to Malik’s own thoughts on the matter. “The classical Western values of freedom, personality, excellence, rank, objective truth, faith in God, and the primacy of the spirit,” he writes in *Christ and Crisis* (1962), “are subverted both by Communist infiltration from without and by doubt and criticism by some of the best Western minds from within.”

Malik was not late in coming to these convictions; he was the foremost defender of individual rights and conscience during the

drafting of the Universal Declaration in 1947. Yet, even more than his insistence that defenders of freedom must not compromise with Communism, Malik insisted that Christians could never compromise their faith for ostensibly easy solutions to the crises of their day. Thus, in the following selection from *Christ and Crisis*, which will be

take a stand against the forces of evil that threaten man’s inviolable dignity “within the one and unique world into which he has been flung.” This is the Christian’s burden, and Christians today can be thankful for the guidance Malik offered by faithfully carrying that burden in his own day.



reprinted in full as the third volume of the Acton Institute’s *Orthodox Christian Social Thought* monograph series, he insists that though “every man lives in his own age and in no other,” yet “man and the devil and Christ are the same in every age.” The Christian, then, must first transcend the crises of the present through resting in the eternal love of Jesus Christ by faith, and only then

He has done for him in his own life. On the basis of this knowledge and faith he seeks to understand and to adjust to the terrible questions and uncertainties of the times. He knows it is unworthy of him as a Christian to bewail his fate and exaggerate the challenges in the midst of which he is thrown. Dangerous world?—yes. Unprecedented difficulties?—certainly. Tremendous challenges?—of course. But

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Excerpt from *Christ and Crisis* by Charles Malik

The Christian finds himself today thrown into a strange and difficult world, full of peril and anxiety. He knows Christ, he believes in Him, and he cannot forget what

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God does not love him less, nor has He singled him out for trial in a special furnace beyond his power to bear or to subdue. He remembers what Paul told the Corinthians and he understands it to be meant exactly for him: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:13). Every age has its own problems, every age its own burdens and complexities, and throughout man is fundamentally the same, able to know and rest in the truth or to rebel, and the devil precisely the same old adversary, with his sweetness and his wiles, and of course "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

But if man and the devil and Christ are the same in every age, still every man lives in his own age and in no other, and faces his own problems and carries his own cross which no other man can possibly face or carry for him. We have this one life to live which is absolutely unique and absolutely our own. This is not the decaying Athenian world in which Socrates would rather die than adjust to, nor the Roman world at its highest splendor which Paul had to contend with and utilize in the service of the Gospel, nor this same world at its last gasp for which Augustine wrote the epitaph in his magnificent *City of God*, nor the Hellenistic world at Antioch to which Chrysostom preached his inimitable homilies, nor the rotten world of the eleventh century at the time of the Great Schism between East and West, nor the exuberant world of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when limitless horizons began to beckon the energies of men, nor the world of the nineteenth century when Western Europe held under its sway virtually all mankind. We are not called upon to live in any of these worlds, although our indebtedness to the great scholars who actually live in thought in them and lovingly reproduce them to us is

incalculable. But even these our benefactors see and interpret the past from the only vantage point accessible to them, namely, from this one common world to which they and we belong. Every man must work out his own destiny, meet his own fate, carry his own burden, come to terms with himself and with God, from within the one and unique world into which he has been flung.

"The Christian is defined by a kind of love: the Christian loves Jesus Christ above everything else. This love is not an ordinary act of the will on his part, as for instance when we decide to read a book..."

What, then, is the burden of the Christian today, the Christian who, as a man, shares the same humanity with David and Socrates and Paul and Augustine, this very humanity over which the devil and Jesus Christ are engaged in eternal combat, and yet who must carry on this warfare of the soul in this very age, the age of the cold war and the nuclear bomb, the age of the infinite wonders of science, and the age in which every people on earth is demanding as never before the right to some place under the sun?

Before I endeavor to answer this question I must first say one word about the essence of the Christian, for we are speaking here, not of the burden of the American or the European or the capitalist or the wage earner, but the burden of the Christian. We are assuming the existence of a distinct being called "the Christian."

The Christian is defined by a kind of love: the Christian loves Jesus Christ above everything else. This love is not an ordinary act of the will on his part, as for instance when we decide to read a book or to take a trip abroad or to attend a meeting or to pay a visit to a friend. The dawning of Christ's love is not something we conjure up ourselves. We love Jesus Christ only when we realize how much He loved us, and indeed loved us without first seeking or receiving our consent. Thus our love of Jesus Christ is a pale reflection of His love for us.

Beyond every burden and care, the Christian has his own soul to worry about. Oh yes, he is honest and upright, he works hard, he reads the Bible, he meditates on the saints, he has his times of profound prayer and retreat to the depths, he lives an active Church life, he takes an humble part in the stirring spiritual movements of the day, he is alive to the problems of the world, he is as good and solid a citizen as any other person, and, above all, he develops ulcers, those peculiar *stigmata* of our age! But, is he the master of his own passions? How much does he know the living power of God in his own life—that power which is much more than the *daimon* of Socrates which only warns and forbids, that power which also directs and constitutes and provides? Is he at peace with himself? Is he true to himself? Is he true to Christ? How much does Christ come to his rescue exactly in time? In his daily wrestlings with the devil, does he spit in his face and trample his head under foot—not in his own power, but always in the power of the Cross? Has he forgiven his brother—really forgiven him? Is all rancor and resentment washed away by the blood of Christ? How else can he hope for the forgiveness of God of which he stands in such desperate need?

Beyond every other care and worry, the Christian carries these questions on his

mind all the time, and with them he transcends his turbulent age and becomes one with all ages in which the same ultimate questions tormented the saints. It is reconciliation and peace with God that he craves for more than anything else. It is that life of closeness to God, that intimacy of living with Christ, that mighty infusion of the Holy Ghost, which is absolute light, absolute certainty, absolute power. In this state which he craves for, which he believes in, which he confidently expects, having been promised it by One who does not lie, the Christian attains that divine *sophia* in which the tongue is untied and from which everything else flows. The Christian has a foretaste of this even in this life. There is then courage, there is communion, there is peace, there is the fellowship of the pure, of those who have seen God.

“And all I know is that I am told and I believe that ‘this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent’ (John 17:3).”

Now our present life is interesting and let no one belittle its duties and challenges and excitements. Moreover, these are great days and what is being decided in them is absolutely historic. But all these things are going to pass, and with them life itself. What, then, is the life that does not pass, what, then, is life eternal? This is the first and last question. And all I know is that I am told and I believe that “this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

## *How can I more deeply engage with Acton if I don't live in West Michigan?*

Acton has been blessed with a wonderful building in the heart of downtown Grand Rapids where we host dozens of events each year. Despite our presence in this community, most of Acton's constituents live outside of West Michigan. If you're one of those individuals, there are plenty of ways to engage with the institute or share Acton's mission and message in your own community.

Our online PowerBlog ([blog.acton.org](http://blog.acton.org)) features new blogposts daily, but you can also keep up with Radio Free Acton, a podcast featuring engaging videos and interviews about current events dealing with the intersection of faith and economics. There are videos of nearly every Acton Lecture Series and evening speaker, as well as videos of Acton analysts appearing on local and national news broadcasts. You can also subscribe to Acton at [subscribe.acton.org](http://subscribe.acton.org). There, you can sign up to receive our bimonthly publication, Acton Notes, our weekly email, Acton News and Commentary, an RSS feed to Acton's PowerBlog, or if you haven't already, this quarterly magazine. Thanks to our generous donors, these subscriptions are free. If you're familiar with our work and want to introduce a friend, you can do that at [acton.org/webform/refer-friend](http://acton.org/webform/refer-friend).

Seminarians and pastors might also be interested in the *Journal of Markets & Morality*. This peer-reviewed academic journal is published twice a year—Spring and Fall—and promotes the intellectual exploration of the relationship between economics and morality from both a social science and a theological perspective.

If you're interested in live events, Acton hosts lectures and gatherings nationwide featuring nationally recognized experts on faith and policy issues, including Rev. Robert Sirico. Be sure to visit our events page online or at the back of the latest issue of Acton Notes.

If you're familiar with an Acton-produced documentary or video series and want to share it with your peers, consider hosting a screening in your hometown. For information about screening the PovertyCure Video Series or Poverty, Inc., you can email [info@PovertyCure.org](mailto:info@PovertyCure.org). To learn more about hosting *For the Life of the World*, you can email [events@letterstotheexiles.com](mailto:events@letterstotheexiles.com), or if you're interested in leading a bible study and want to purchase leadership products, email [products@letterstotheexiles.com](mailto:products@letterstotheexiles.com).



Kris Alan Mauren  
Executive Director



a powerful ripple effect for their sons and grandsons.

I would say another reason for this increase in incarceration that we've experienced over the last 25 years is a lack of education. The men who wind up in prison are overwhelmingly undereducated. As a result of that, they have limited opportunity. And that fact often results in poor decision-making skills. I really doubt that this is entirely the fault of our school systems. Parents and other family members have to bear a big portion of the blame for not setting, modeling, and enforcing appropriate educational expectations.

A third reason may be economics. With limited legitimate legal opportunity through education and even less through family and personal connections, the possibility for even the hope of success is very limited. With no hope down one path, we're more likely to walk down another path, even if we know that it is more dangerous or morally wrong. At PEP, we do not by

any means encourage our men to look for excuses, but in trying to answer your question, I have to put economic circumstances up there as a critical factor.

*What reforms do we desperately need in the prison system today?*

We don't get involved much on the policy front, but from my business experience I know that you usually get the results that you incentivize. I'm not aware of any penal system that really incentivizes the operators based on the success or failure of the inmates that leave prison. We need to identify the metrics and correctly identify

who gets rewarded. The system is geared toward punishment and lock up. We are not incentivizing rehabilitation and successful reentry. You get a guy out and he does well, but there is no reward for those who helped him succeed. I think that would be a radical change in the way we pay for and oversee the prison industry. We can and should do this in private and state-run facilities.

*What can prison ministries do better, and why does PEP receive so much attention?*

I believe PEP is successful partly because we're nonconventional. For most tradi-

people to be involved. It allows the Spirit to do more work. Everybody is not here for a faith-based ministry. Many of them are, of course, Christians, so they have an extra layer to their engagement. A lot of PEP's success stems from engaging the community outside of the prison. The person-to-person connection between inmates and business leaders is essential.

*How has the involvement been with the business community in helping with the venture panels? What is the draw?*

The opportunity to make a difference in the life of another person is the draw. There are millions of people in the world who are eager to serve with no expectation of a tangible reward. People love to be a part of a positive outcome that is much bigger than themselves.

*I talked to a few inmates who said that their perception of the program changed after enrolling. Some initially felt they might be getting a handout and obviously that is a lot different from what PEP is about. Is this a common occurrence,*

*and do you often see an evolution in what inmates expect from PEP?*

Sure. It is not at all uncommon for guys to have a misunderstanding about what PEP really is intended to provide—being a hand up, rather than a handout. When they first get a postcard that basically says, "So, you want to be an entrepreneur?" their immediate thought, in some cases, leans towards entrepreneurs who are fabulously wealthy. It's almost like they think they're being asked, "Do you want to be a millionaire?" They think it's going to be all about business and how to



Inmates at Cleveland Correctional Center, Cleveland, TX.

tional prison ministries, the core mission is Christian evangelism and conversion to make disciples of Christ. That's wonderful, but that is not the primary mission of PEP. The board and staff of PEP and most of our volunteers are committed Christians, but we choose to show God's love through service, to empower inmates for vocational and business success. We often try to model St. Francis of Assisi's advice: "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words."

We don't do a lot of preaching, and some people recognize that more than others. It lowers the barriers and expectations for

become not a millionaire, but a billionaire. But that's not the case. And what they find out pretty quickly is that our program is about far more than business. It really has much greater emphasis on both character assessment and development, rather than on business.

It's really much more about how their words and actions reveal their heart and contribute either to building positive relationships or to the destruction of relationships. We use business as the context within which to explore all of that and to identify the character traits they have that are either contributing to or limiting their growth as a person and, therefore, as a businessperson.



*What is the biggest challenge for you as CEO leading this program, and what's the biggest challenge you see in the next few years?*

My biggest challenge personally has been remaining faithful, maintaining a Christ-centered view and remaining Spirit-dependent. I say this, I hope, without any false humility. I am trying to remain a truly humble servant in all that that entails.

We're not a traditional faith-based ministry, where evangelism is obvious and is the core of our mission. But that's true for me, and it's true for many of the people who are on staff and many of our

volunteers. PEP is really hard work. It's difficult emotionally, and it's even hard physically at times, just because we're

*"We're called to respond to need where we see it with whatever we have, to move toward the fray, rather than backing away from it."*

such a high-touch organization requiring long hours. While I believe that what we are doing is God's work and that all things are possible through Him, whether that's sustainable sources of funding or sustainable sources of reliable volunteers, whatever the need is, the challenge for me is just not to forget that God is in control. If I can keep focused on that personally, I know I'll be fine and that PEP will benefit. But what is the biggest challenge for me as CEO? I actually don't believe it is chasing the money or chasing the people; it's just maintaining that focus and that mindset.

*Is there anything concrete you can point to in terms of how this program has brought about a spiritual change in you?*

I made a decision after I'd gone through law school and had been working for a couple of years that I wanted to become much more intentional as a Christian. It has been a gradual process of deepening my understanding of God.

When I started volunteering for PEP about 10 years ago, I began to see a new possibility of serving God by integrating my business experience into the lives of these men who have so little in the way of experience. That was just very exciting. I volunteered for about five years and then five years ago was given the opportunity to be a part of the leadership.

One of the things I've realized in this part of my work and my journey is that, obviously, none of us are perfect, and we're

not called to be perfect in what we do to serve. I'm called to be present. I have been broken many times in life and remain broken, but that's not the point. We're called to respond to need where we see it with whatever we have, to move toward the fray, rather than backing away from it.

*We have a lot of CEOs and business leaders who read Religion & Liberty. Speaking to that audience, why should somebody give their time and resources to these inmates and the PEP program?*

I think people are motivated more by mission than by money. I think that's been shown to be true in a number of different contexts. And we know for a fact that PEP's mission is profound. I think we can also show that our impacts are phenomenal, multi-generational, and far-reaching. A Baylor University study affirmed the low recidivism and high employment rates of our graduates, and estimates the social return on investment to donors' cash investments to be 340 percent. I've done volunteering for other non-profits over the last 25 years. I've sat on foundation boards and been on church mission teams and had a fair amount of exposure to a lot of different non-profits. I don't know very many that can even calculate a return on investment, much less demonstrate one of that magnitude. And that's just on the measurable financial outcomes from our activity. It does not capture the extraordinary nonfinancial benefits of restoring family relationships in one household at a time, improving communities that are desperate for light.

Entrepreneurs and most business people generally are very interested in outcomes. They're very interested in impact. It's extraordinarily appealing and rewarding for a seasoned businessperson to be able to use what God has given to them in the way of meaningful and successful business life experiences and invest those experiences into the lives of our men and then see these profound impacts and know that their work and their money is having tremendous results. That's the feedback we get from donors and volunteers routinely and repetitively. So I think we're hitting the mark there. ■■■■

## Isabel Paterson [1886 – 1961]

*Whoever is fortunate enough to be an American citizen came into the greatest inheritance man has ever enjoyed. He has had the benefit of every heroic and intellectual effort men have made for many thousands of years, realized at last.*

Journalist, philosopher, and literary critic Isabel Paterson may have faded into obscurity in the last few decades, but she is one of the greatest classical liberal thinkers of her time. She is lauded as one of the three women (along with Rose Wilder Lane and Ayn Rand) who launched the libertarian movement in America.

Paterson is probably most well-known for her 1943 book *The God of the Machine*, a treatise on political philosophy, economics, and history. Ayn Rand said this book “does for capitalism what *Das Kapital* does for the Reds.” This book is especially significant because it was not written by a rich industrialist looking to justify their own wealth accumulation, but rather, it was written by a passionate, struggling writer. Paterson was deeply appreciative of Lord Acton’s work. Toward the end of *The God of the Machine*, she calls him the “most profound scholar of the past century.”

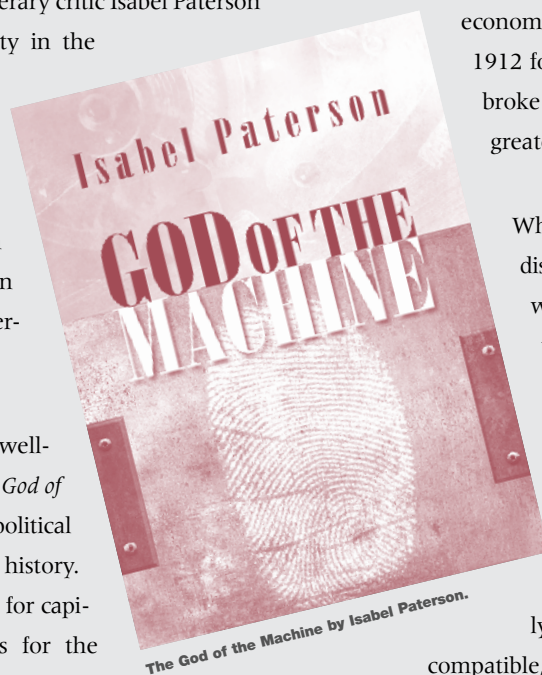
Born Isabel Mary Bowler in Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Paterson and her struggling family relocated to the United States when she was young. She became a U.S. citizen when she was 42. She received no formal education, but taught herself by reading prolifically and spent her early life working various odd jobs. This time instilled in her a sense of self-sufficiency and a strong work ethic.

In 1910, Paterson married Kenneth B. Paterson. While the two quickly separated, she did keep his name. She moved to New York City after World War I and began writing frequently, becoming the literary editor and a columnist for the *New York Herald Tribune*. Paterson’s column “Turns with a Bookworm” featured any topic she felt like writing about—often economics and politics. She also gained prominence in 1912 for riding in a plane with Harry B. Brown while he broke the American altitude record. She called this “the greatest experience of [her] life.”

While working for the *Herald Tribune*, she often held discussions with young writers. Paterson is credited with shaping Rand’s thoughts on government and teaching her American history; however, by 1948 the two had a falling out. While Paterson was not a Roman Catholic, she was sympathetic to Catholic philosophy and believed that morality was necessary for an economic foundation. “The Christian idea,” she said, “was necessary to the concept of freedom.” Rand, who famously believed that religion and capitalism were incompatible, strongly disagreed with Paterson and the two no longer saw enough overlap in their beliefs to work together.

In her later years, Isabel Paterson was profoundly influential on American conservatism, most notably on Russell Kirk and William F. Buckley. She contributed to the *National Review* for a time. Paterson and Kirk kept up a correspondence after he read and was inspired by *The God of the Machine*. After she retired, she notoriously did not claim any social security and, supposedly, kept her social security card in an envelope marked “Social Security Swindle.”

While her name may not gain much recognition today, her influence on classical liberalism in America is important to remember, and anyone interested in free market economics can benefit from becoming familiar with her work.







## What to Expect at Our University

*For an adequate formation of a culture, the involvement of the whole man is required, whereby he exercises his creativity, intelligence, and knowledge of the world and of people. Furthermore, he displays his capacity for self-control, personal sacrifice, solidarity and*

*readiness to promote the common good. Thus the first and most important task is accomplished within man's heart. – Pope John Paul II, Centesimus Annus*

In about a month, we will be enjoying Acton's annual assemblage, Acton University. We chose to call it a university rather than simply a conference because of its rigorous intellectual nature. Attendees are asked to attend foundational courses their first year, to be present at every session they have chosen, and to delve into truly substantial topics.

Looking back at our plenary speakers over the years, there is a sense of profound gratitude for all that they have shared with us. Immaculée Ilibagiza spoke passionately about forgiveness after the Rwandan genocide that took the lives of most of her family members. Eric Metaxas, with warmth and humor, told of the heroic life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Diet Eman reminded us, through her harrowing experiences in World War II, that we must protect religious liberty at all costs. My friend Jeff Sandefer told of the great debt we owe to entrepreneurs and why free markets are so important. Makoto Fujimura, through eloquent words and extraordinary art, spoke of the great need we humans have for culture, and why we must protect and support those who create beauty through art.

Our faculty is just as impressive. They represent many major world faiths and Christian denominations. The depth and breadth of knowledge available to our attendees is truly world-class, and I am genuinely thankful to the Acton staff that works year-round to obtain such a marvelous faculty.

While the faculty and plenaries are the "brains" of Acton University, those who attend are the heart. From school

teachers to seminarians, entrepreneurs to grad students, those who lead churches to those who lead non-profits: these are the people who make Acton University the great experience that it is. Again, Acton University is not a conference; it's an in-depth experience of learning, debate, and thoughtful discussion focused on creating a free and virtuous society.

Some people come to Acton University not knowing exactly what to expect, but they know they want to help mend a culture that is in trouble. Others have come for many years, but return again and again, knowing that a new experience awaits them every time.

I know many of you reading this have participated in Acton University. However, I know many of you have not. I urge you to do so, if at all possible. I guarantee you an experience like no other. I hear every year from participants how truly grateful they are to have some place to come and learn things no one else is teaching. This knowledge is taken back to communities, schools, businesses, and families around the world. It is this final part that is the real test of what Acton University is about. What we share must be viable in the real world; it must resonate with people in their homes, their churches, their work, their communities. "A little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough" (Galatians 5:9).

We strive to give our participants not only the very best teaching but also practical ways to change their lives and the lives of those around them as we seek to build a free and virtuous society. Whether you are a farmer (as is Joel Salatin, one of our plenaries this year), a priest or preacher, an artist, a stay-at-home parent, or a CEO, Acton University will speak to your creativity, intelligence, knowledge, and heart.

*Rev. Robert A. Sirico is president and cofounder of the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*



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