

# Religion & Liberty

ACTON INSTITUTE'S INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RELIGION,  
ECONOMICS AND CULTURE



## Black balloons for the lost orphans

A government bailout  
of newspapers?

CEO, OSB: The Rule  
of St. Benedict and  
entrepreneurial culture

The pitfalls of ethnic  
pay gaps



## EDITOR'S NOTE

Rev. Ben Johnson MANAGING EDITOR

Charles Dickens wrote in *Great Expectations* of days “when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade.” That description applies metaphorically to many of the stories in this issue of *Religion & Liberty*, as people of faith struggle to let their light so shine that it can melt the world's icy indifference. Along the way, they face the countervailing winds of secularism, statism, and even their own misunderstanding of fundamental principles.

Well-funded NGOs pressured the government of Guatemala to crack down on private, religious orphanages. Fr. Gregory Jensen writes of the tragic results, and the nuns' demands for justice, in his in-depth portrait of Hogar Raphael Ayau. Like last issue's cover story, his article comes from Acton's longform journalism project.

Laurie Morrow, Ph.D., highlights how enterprising monks and nuns launched a rich variety of businesses to fund their monastic pursuits, drawing both spiritual and temporal inspiration from the immortal *Rule of St. Benedict*. Her story illustrates why even those living the heavenly life cannot ignore the laws of economics.

Ibrahim Anoba describes their mirror image: An influential African archbishop has called on his government to impose a “church tax,” withholding a tithe from every believer on behalf of Holy Mother Church.

We're happy to welcome Doug Bandow back to the pages of *Religion & Liberty* after a long hiatus. He examines a plan for the government to pass laws economically benefiting newspapers over other forms of media in Canada.

Hunter Baker asks probing questions of democratic socialism.

This issue's “In the Liberal Tradition” features Manasseh Cutler, a little-known Revolutionary War chaplain who brokered a (far-from-perfect) business deal with one non-negotiable demand: It banned slavery from an entire region of the country.

Fr. Robert Sirico reveals the line of *The Godfather* trilogy that should resonate with everyone actively engaged in the cause of liberty.

We pray these and the other stories in this issue will bring light and warmth to all those who read them, share them, and seek to create a new springtime for humanity by acting on their principles.



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## The \$15 minimum wage is pushing New York's car washers to the margins

Joseph Sunde

ACTON INSTITUTE

As cities such as Seattle and Minneapolis, and states including California and New York, have adopted a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, the negative consequences have hit small businesses and low-skilled workers the hardest.

Take New York City's car wash industry.

Unions and politicians have spent the last decade trying to fix prices and pressure shops to unionize. The result: a flurry of closed businesses, a spike in car-wash automation, decreased consumer options, and a black market in hand car washing services.

"After six years, organizers have unionized 11 businesses, or about four percent of the city's registered car washes," writes Jim Epstein in *Reason* magazine. "Two of them have since closed down, and the union withdrew three more because of a lack of support from the workers."

The reason for the lack of traction? Workers seem to be largely content with their situation and struggle to see the value of union membership.

"Protection from whom?" asks Ervin Par, a car washer, who emigrated from Guatemala. "If I don't like working here, I'll go find a job at a different place. There are many places to work where they pay the same."

Ultimately, the union's efforts to champion the \$15 minimum wage succeeded through politics, and local businesses began adapting — by closing their doors or laying off workers following automation.

One of those is Best Auto

Spa, located at 810 Pennsylvania Avenue in Brooklyn. "The \$15 minimum wage means that this business model is no longer viable," Epstein writes. "Two years ago, [the owner] installed \$200,000 worth of equipment, which allowed him to lay off eight workers."

Automation can be good and productive, both for workers and consumers. But when the driving reason is not consumer feedback, the delivery and quality of services shift based only on the whims of the policymaker.

The material pains include increased unemployment and shuttered businesses. And the poor bear the brunt.

## Americans are more likely to find their 'meaning in life' in money than in faith

Joe Carter

ACTON INSTITUTE

What makes your life meaningful? For Christians the answer should be some variation of our faith in God. But if that's your answer, you are distinctly in the minority in the U.S.

The Pew Research Center conducted two separate surveys asking Americans to describe what makes their lives feel meaningful.

Americans are mostly likely to say family is an important source of meaning (40 percent) and to report they find "a great deal" of meaning in spending time with family (69 percent). About a third (34 percent) said they found meaning in their careers, and almost a quarter (23 percent) find meaning in money and finances.

Only one in five (20 percent) said their religious faith was the most important source of meaning, and only about one in three (36 percent) said

it gave them "a great deal" of meaning.

Evangelical Protestants are the group mostly likely to mention religion-related topics (43 percent). Among members of the historically black Protestant tradition, 32 percent mention faith and spirituality, as do 18 percent of mainline Protestants, and 16 percent of Catholics.

Evangelicals are also the most likely (65 percent) to say it provides "a great deal" of meaning in their lives. Among members of the historically black Protestant tradition, 62 percent say it provides "a great deal" of meaning, as do 41 percent of Catholics, and 39 percent of mainline Protestants.

Mainline Protestants are the most likely to say family is the most important source of meaning (54 percent), as do half of Catholics (50 percent), a third of all members of the historically black Protestant tradition (37 percent), and a third of evangelicals (31 percent).

Americans who identify as conservative or very conservative say they find "a great deal" of meaning in their religious faith (62 percent and 50 percent), while those who are liberal or very liberal are more likely to say they find a great deal of meaning in arts and crafts and social or political causes (30 percent and 34 percent).

Liberal Americans are also more likely than conservatives to say that social or political causes provide them with "a great deal" of meaning (19 percent versus 10 percent). And among those identifying as "very liberal," three in ten (30 percent) say they find a great deal of meaning in social or political causes, almost three times the rate seen in the general public.

## Four good news stories you might have missed

Joe Carter

ACTON INSTITUTE

Death, destruction, and divisiveness tend to dominate the news cycle, but there were also many positive trends in 2018 that you may have missed.

**Half the world is middle class or wealthier:** "For the first time since agriculture-based civilization began 10,000 years ago, the majority of humankind is no longer poor or vulnerable to falling into poverty. By our calculations, as of this month, just over 50 percent of the world's population, or some 3.8 billion people, live in households with enough discretionary expenditure to be considered 'middle class' or 'rich.'"

**Less than a billion people live without electricity:** "[O]ver 120 million people worldwide gained access to electricity in 2017. This means that for the first time ever, the total number of people without access fell below one billion, according to new data from World Energy Outlook 2018."

**Black men are succeeding in America:** "[T]he share of black men in poverty has fallen from 41 percent in 1960 to 18 percent today. ... [T]he share of black men in the middle or upper class — as measured by their family income — has risen from 38 percent in 1960 to 57 percent today. In other words, about one-in-two black men in America have reached the middle class or higher."

**Nearly six-in-10 countries are now democratic:** "A Pew Research Center survey conducted earlier this year in 38 countries [found] the number of democratic nations around the world is at a postwar high."



ESSAY

# A government bailout of newspapers threatens free speech and morality

Doug Bandow

Anyone alive before the internet – a time difficult to grasp by anyone in school today – remembers getting information by reading newspapers. In today's parlance, they are the “dead tree” edition of a publication usually viewed online. The Sunday editions of newspapers then were particularly wondrous: multiple sections, thick want ads, extended essays, big comics in color. The added weight was a particular challenge for kids (it was almost always kids, then) who delivered papers in darkness, rain, and snow.

In that ancient world, papers were filled with *news*. There were stories, lots of them, the writing of which was overseen by editors. Accuracy was a virtue. Top reporters at major publications were influential enough to bring down the titans of business, culture, and politics. Even then the media was liberal, to be sure, but the Fourth Estate also helped hold the powerful accountable.

That world has disappeared. Newspaper circulation has collapsed. Papers have folded, merged, diminished, and otherwise compromised on missions and resources. Published magazines have followed their lead. Online sources have diversified and expanded the voices available, but net surfers resist paying, even for what purports to be serious journalism. For many publications an online presence only complicated the financial challenge, which leaves even the most widely read and oldest publications searching for a sustainable economic model.

These problems appear to be worldwide. Hundreds of publications have closed in Canada. Even those which survive have sold off property, reduced activities, and laid off staff. Overall, about one-third of journalism jobs have disappeared over the last eight years.

Now from Ottawa, Canada, comes the cry: We are from the government, and we want to help you! Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal administration is offering public support for private publications. In late 2018, officials began exploring “models that would allow private giving or philanthropic support for nonprofit journalism and local news.”

The government advanced a set of proposals estimated to cost \$675 million Canadian dollars, or about \$600 million U.S. First would be a tax credit for online subscribers. The objective: to create a “more financially sustainable business model.” Presumably, more people would spend more money for news if Ottawa bore part of the cost.



Photo: NewspaperRecycling-Monthilary-CCBYSA2

Second, journalism nonprofits could become “qualified donees,” allowing their benefactors to take a tax write-off. Moreover, charitable foundations would be able to offer support, as well.

Third, enterprises that “produce a wide variety of news and information of interest to Canadians” would receive a refundable tax credit for the cost of labor engaged in creating “original content.” That is, the government would pay newspapers for hiring journalists even in the event that no tax was owed. An industry panel would decide who was eligible for this lucrative deal.

The idea of rescuing presumably valuable news agencies has obvious appeal. So does saving the jobs of talented writers. However, a government bailout raises important issues. Advocates point to existing taxpayer-supported media, which, alas, is not reassuring. For instance, National Public Radio in the U.S. might be editorially independent, but that doesn’t mean it is objective and nonpartisan. Why taxpayers should be forced to fund an agency arrayed against their beliefs has never been clear.

Indeed, that is one of the objections to the Trudeau proposal. Culturally and politically, the government plans a taxpayer rescue of friendly journalists, who are likely to return the favor in future reporting. “Justin Trudeau and this system he’s setting up will determine whether your mortgage gets paid. And you say that will have absolutely no impact on the nature of your coverage?” complained Conservative MP Pierre Poilievre. “I think you can forgive us for being just a little skeptical about that claim.”

Increased bias is likely to result not so much from flagrant *quid pro quo* as reinforcement of shared assumptions and beliefs. The media generally lean left. As a left-leaning government transfers public resources to left-leaning journalists, the latter are unlikely to shift right.

That raises perhaps the most significant objection to the scheme yet: This exercise would be fundamentally unfair to those dispossessed of their money. Taxpayers obviously are forced to fund many programs which they do not believe in. However, in most cases the activity, such as care for the poor, is not intrinsically contrary to their beliefs. Here, however, they are expected to underwrite someone


who may attack their personal, political, moral, and religious beliefs. Forcing taxpayers to fund a media assault on their deeply held views, informed by faith, is unjust and immoral.

Whatever the argument about presumed public benefits of quality journalism, the cash would most directly enrich the media, publications and journalists alike. Already the latter have started battling over the booty. Martin O’Hanlon, president of press union CWA Canada, insisted his union has “to make sure that the money goes to the newspaper,” and that politicians “are not funneling it to go to their owners, to their investors. It’s got to go to quality journalism,” by which, of course, he means to his union members.

Moreover, hooking journalists on public funds and turning them into quasi-public servants undermines innovation and creative business planning within the industry. Journalists will simply have less incentive to search for private solutions to their financial dilemmas. If Ottawa is going to make it easy, why put in extra effort? That in turn creates a danger for the industry’s future survival. Another government, presumably not headed by the undoubtedly virtuous Trudeau, might threaten to end support if news coverage did not “improve” its tone.

Nor does the regulatory role accorded the industry offer protection from abuse. In fact, the U.S. has a history of professional regulation, starting with doctors and lawyers, in which the rules inevitably are written to advantage incumbents and limit competition. Publications which exist have greater clout than those which have not yet been created. A subsidy scheme could both discourage innovation and encourage favoritism.

Journalism is in trouble. However, government subsidies are not the answer. They aren’t fair to everyone else, many of whom may face their own economic and employment challenges. And such benefits offer multiple opportunities for abuse. Having spent years insisting that they are all that stand between people and tyranny, media organizations should resist the Sirens’ call of government support.

*Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. A former special assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is author of The Politics of Plunder: Misgovernment in Washington.* 

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ESSAY

# The pitfalls of ethnic pay gaps

Philip Booth, Ph.D.

British Prime Minister Theresa May is obsessed with measuring pay gaps between social groups. She championed the requirement for companies with more than 250 workers to measure the so-called “gender pay gap.” Now she wishes companies to measure the “ethnic pay gap.” Yet these measurements, hailed by champions of intersectional theory, produce deceptive statistics that create social animosity and harm those they are intended to help.

My own university’s gender pay gap report makes interesting reading, because it demonstrates how ridiculous the whole business is. We have, in common with most other organizations, a pay gap in favor of men. But any thorough review will find no signs of sexual discrimination. Women are well represented in the senior leadership and paid as well as men. In addition to the large number of female professors, many if not most of the senior administrators are women. So, why did we have a pay gap? The reason is simple. The university employs large numbers of women in cleaning and catering functions. The pay in these roles is lower than the pay for senior managers and academics. This means that, when you calculate the crude average pay of men and women, it is less for women, even if they earn exactly the same in every individual role.

The university’s gender pay gap has to be published, and the implication is that a high pay gap indicates invidious discrimination. How might a university respond to the discovery that it has a high gender pay gap arising from

employing a large number of women in catering functions if it wishes to avoid public opprobrium? One possibility would be to contract out our catering to a separate company; then the catering staff would not be included in our own calculations. As it happens, as a Catholic university, our governors believe that we should employ all our staff directly. So, effectively, with the publication of gender pay gap statistics, the university is being penalized for refusing to outsource to companies that may offer these women lower pay or fewer benefits. The second course of action would be to employ more men in catering – that is, to solve perceived anti-female discrimination by discriminating against women and in favor of men. In both cases, the reaction to gender pay gap reporting would be to reduce working conditions or opportunities for women.

It is widely believed that gender pay gaps within different companies indicate discrimination or that men and women are paid differently for the same jobs. Recently, for example, the *Telegraph* (a broadly Conservative paper) wrote: “The

difference between male and female earnings has quickly become the hottest topic in employment, with the gender pay gap of BBC stars, easyJet pilots, and Google engineers all in the headlines.” However, there is no evidence that male and female easyJet pilots are paid differently. EasyJet’s corporate pay gap arises because the number of female stewards it employs dominates the data, so that when average male and female pay is calculated, the average for females is brought down. There is no evidence of discrimination.

Measuring ethnic pay gaps would export this absurdity into a new social relationship. The proposal is that companies with more than 250 staff will have to produce figures for ethnic pay gaps. Given the wide ethnic diversity of the UK, this would involve at least the 18 different ethnic groups defined by the UK government’s Office for National Statistics if the statistics are to be meaningful. Once again, the administrative burden will be huge, and the data produced will be meaningless at best – and, if misused, it will be dangerous.

In all but two regions of the UK, more than 85 percent of the population identify as white. In an organization of 500 people (and there are far more small companies than large companies), in most regions we might find an average of 75 non-white employees spread across 17 ethnic groups. Given the stratification of a typical employer by age and seniority, like-for-like comparisons between the pay of different ethnic groups might involve zero, one, or two people from an ethnic minority in the majority of cases. No generalized conclusions can be drawn from such tiny samples.


If we look at the data we already have on ethnic pay, we may well find that most ethnic groups are paid less than white British workers on average. However, the non-white population is much younger than the white population. The Fraser Institute found that, as people age, they advance in seniority and pay – something the group calls the Life-Cycle Hypothesis – so perhaps the ethnic pay gap is not surprising. However, people of Indian or Chinese heritage earn more than white people. Interestingly, Bangladeshi heritage women earn more than Bangladeshi men, and Black African British women

earn 21 percent more than white British women. It is highly unlikely that these patterns resulted from discrimination.

And this is the problem with the production of these pay gap statistics. They promote envy and manufacture a sense that some groups in society are being wronged and suffering from injustice. The publication of ethnic pay gaps and its inevitable misinterpretation will encourage resentment, which is a sin against the virtue of kindness, as well as misinformation, which is an offence against prudence. It is immoral for politicians and bureaucrats to encourage feelings of acrimony, which debase public discourse. Measuring such pay gaps without proper nuance encourages people to break the Tenth Commandment. For those interested in virtue in public life, these are not good outcomes.

Research into pay differences between different ethnic groups might yield some interesting information. However, this would need to involve proper academic research using rigorous research methods. There is no question that both government and charitable bodies would fund such research. There is no justification for new pay gap calculation impositions on organizations employing more than 250 people. Fulfilling these regulatory requirements is not a trivial imposition. My university operates on a fixed budget and, as a result of having to calculate, analyze, publish, discuss, and undertake press work around our gender pay gap statistics, resources have to be taken away from student services.

Indeed, misleading measurements of putative pay gaps are contributing to the wholesale dehumanization of business life and institutions in general. Managers are becoming functionaries of government regulatory codes instead of being able to treat employees as individuals and make appropriate judgments in each instance – and the development and practice of human relationships and good judgment are the hallmarks of what it means to be human.


*Philip Booth is Professor of Finance, Public Policy, and Ethics at St. Mary’s University, Twickenham, which is the UK’s largest Catholic university. He is also a senior academic fellow at the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA). *



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ESSAY

# CEO, OSB: The Rule of St. Benedict promotes entrepreneurial culture

Laurie Morrow, Ph.D.



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Many of today's philanthropists are entrepreneurs who use their business instincts and skills to achieve their philanthropic goals with great efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. As good business people, they do considerable research to identify the business models and leadership strategies most likely to result in success. Yet even the most diligent may overlook one of the most influential and successful guides to creating a sustainable, effective charitable organization: *The Rule of St. Benedict*. The few who recognize this title today are apt to dismiss the *Rule* as a document of interest only to scholars of Catholic history, given its importance as a seminal document in the history of European monasticism.

This is unfortunate, for St. Benedict's is a highly entrepreneurial and decentralized vision. The *Rule* was revolutionary in its insistence that each organization founded on its principles be financially self-sustaining, dependent on neither the Church nor the government, and in its assertion that labor was a noble enterprise that benefits the soul. Organizations adhering to his *Rule* must generate revenue sufficient to cover their operational costs and fund their charitable efforts. Moreover, the *Rule*'s lack of central planning regarding product selection and production has enabled monasteries over the centuries to adapt remarkably well to changing market conditions, expanding, diversifying, or reorganizing as necessary. Long before the term "niche market" was coined, Benedictines were producing high-quality, niche-marketed specialty goods.

Initially, Benedictine monasteries sustained themselves and funded their charitable work through landholding and agriculture. They became famous for their vineyards and wineries – for producing Benedictine, Chartreuse, and champagne. (The Benedictine monk Dom Pérignon is remembered fondly for perfecting the production of champagne.) Benedictine

monasteries, with their pragmatic bent, have always been technologically innovative, and, until the Industrial Age, were the source of most technological advances. Where viniculture was impractical or unprofitable, Benedictines – both monks and nuns – opened breweries. It was Benedictine monks who refined the use of hops to make beer. Even today, the best ale in the world is said to be made by the Trappist monks at the Westvleteren Brewery in Belgium. Trappist monks, a branch of Benedictines, are also famous for their fruitcakes, candy, and jelly. Other products produced by Benedictine monasteries include cologne, bourbon-laced chocolates, cheese, bread, jam, lace, recorded music, books, dog biscuits, caskets, pews, and candles. The Benedictine nuns of Howton Grove Priory in England, led by prioress Sr. Catherine Wybourne (known on Facebook as "Digitalnun"), have employed such digital platforms as [easyfundraising.org.uk](http://easyfundraising.org.uk), MyDonate, and Facebook to support their diverse endeavors.

But just having God on their side does not exempt monks from the laws of economics. The story of LaserMonks.com offers a cautionary tale of the dangers of a monastery's business efforts being too successful too quickly. LaserMonks.com was an internet retailer launched as the for-profit subsidiary of the Cistercian Abbey of Our Lady of Spring Bank,

his printer cartridge ran out of toner, he had an epiphany:

All I wanted was a little bit of black dust for one of our monastery printers. In my search for a toner cartridge, I was suddenly struck with how incredibly expensive this black dust and a few squirts of ink were. "There must be a better way," I said to myself. And so began my foray into the world of imaging supplies. What I discovered was a revelation. Simply stated, the mark-up on ink supplies is sinfully high, reaching in some instances into the 1,000-2,000 percent levels. I also discovered that there were many companies that manufactured either new compatible cartridges or remanufactured cartridges at a fraction of the cost of the big name brands. My thoughts started racing. Imagine the money we could save schools, churches, and other organizations if we could negotiate some deals with the manufacturers directly and cut out the middlemen.

During the first year of operations, LaserMonks made \$2,000. By 2006, sales were in excess of \$5 million. After the abbey deducted its \$200,000 operating budget, all revenue went to the abbey's charities.

Fr. Bernard, whose annual salary held steady at \$0 a year, happily called himself "the worst-paid CEO in the country."

"We have taken the mundane, day-to-day secular market experience of buying black dust and paper clips, and turned it into a positive, feel-good experi-

ence," he said. "It's purchase for a purpose. It's what Cistercian monks have always done, but now I'm using that part of our tradition as a marketing tool."

Fr. Bernard called the business "a case study for social entrepreneurship." He noted, "Nine hundred years ago my brothers were making ink, making their own paper,

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## **Benedictine monasteries, with their pragmatic bent, have always been technologically innovative, and, until the Industrial Age, were the source of most technological advances.**

in Sparta, Wisconsin. As Steward of Temporal Affairs, Father Bernard McCoy bore the responsibility of earning enough money to sustain its six monks and support the abbey's charities. He explored the idea of starting a Christmas tree farm, growing Shiitake mushrooms, and building a convention center. But when

and copying manuscripts. We were the original social entrepreneurs. We were the first multinationals."

LaserMonks expanded its product line to include printers, cables, surge protectors, cell phones, and Blackberries. "We could develop a franchise system for other abbeys," he said. "I think we could become the Amazon.com of social entrepreneurs."

This embracing of the free market and entrepreneurial attitude came, according to Fr. Bernard, not merely from pragmatism but grew organically from Benedictine thinking. "There's a certain amount of religious thinking in the American Christian world that says money is kind of tainted – that there's something kind of evil about it – and I think that's wrong," he said. "What I've come to realize is that [money] is a tool, however I make it, whether it's selling ink and toner, or beer, or investing in stocks. It's a commodity that can be useful for doing a lot of good for others." He told a reporter in 2008 that "Cistercians back in the twelfth century were catalysts for development of a market economy within the world."

Fr. Bernard is not alone in this thinking: The Acton Institute's Managing Director, International, Alejandro Chafuen, Ph.D. argues that the roots of free-market capitalism are evident in the thinking of Jesuit and Dominican Late Scholastic philosophers, especially the School of Salamanca. Their writings showed that monks had plumbed the depths of economic truths, something that would prove to be in short supply for Fr. Bernard's monastery.

LaserMonks.com achieved enormous success quickly, thanks to a clever concept brilliantly marketed. Suddenly, the six monks and a handful of volunteers found themselves running a \$3.5 million dollar business. With a rate of growth beyond the monks' wildest expectations, they were overwhelmed by the need to scale up their business and, more significantly, found themselves distracted from their primary reason for joining the monastery: their wish to serve God. "The Benedictine way is all about balance," said one former monk. The strain of overwork led to a "life out of balance." The monastery soon dwindled from six monks to three. Ultimately, the monks dispersed, and the monastery sold all its goods at auction in October 2011. In business terms,

LaserMonks.com had grown too fast for its capacity. No amount of good intentions can overturn the laws of economics.

But for every LaserMonks.com there are countless artisans, bakers, and brewers quietly thriving by living out their vocation. In monastic communities that continue to rely on the Lord to guide customers to their store for their daily bread, commerce is better able to retain its contemplative aspect. It is a form of active prayer, something the secular world might call a state of "flow," which generates the capital necessary to relieve poverty. Properly construed (and admitting that a monk's reach did not always exceed his grasp), the commercial and the

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## **No amount of good intentions can overturn the laws of economics.**

philanthropic are inseparable, two sides of a single coin – or, as Yeats might have asked, "Who can tell the dancer from the dance?" St. Benedict's *Rule* – his system of order – created the conditions that give rise to the business, and the business, in turn, generated the funds that make charity possible. What begins in a mystical, intimate, individual devotion to Christ becomes, through the community and its *Rule*, a syncretic, transcendent force, unimpeded by individual desire, not eradicating but completing the self. The work the monks do, the wealth they generate, and the welfare of those whom they benefit stand as a testament to the order's founder, and to the One he sought to honor.

*Laurie P. Morrow, Ph.D., holds the designation of Chartered Advisor in Philanthropy® from the American College of Financial Services. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in English summa cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, from the University of Vermont, and her M.A. and Ph.D. in English from the University of Kansas.* **R&L**



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# Don't export Germany's 'church tax' to Africa

Ibrahim Anoba

**T**he archbishop of Kampala believes that churches should not have to depend on the generosity of their members; instead the government should fund his congregations.

Archbishop Cyprian Kizito Lwanga has called on the government of Uganda to institute a compulsory "church tax," modeled on the German system. "Catholics just pick whatever they get from their pockets and give it, but the tithe the Bible talks about means that you pay 10 percent of your monthly salary," he said. And he wants the state to rectify this.

Under the German system, government officials deduct a tax from all registered members of religious communities, regardless of whether they attend services. This revenue funds religious leaders and institutions.

But this arrangement cannot be justified morally or biblically. While the majority of Uganda's population – an estimated 85 percent – is Christian, this is no reason for the church to become another taxpayer-funded entity. Even God did not make payment of a tithe compulsory. The Apostle Paul instructed believers, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (II Corinthians 9:7).

If this apostolic exhortation is not enough reason to convince the archbishop, he may want to dwell on the policy's likely consequences.

Archbishop Lwanga may be tempted to believe that state deductions will mean that churches will receive their funding in predictable government allotments. But people always react to incentives. Any tax based on voluntary self-identification

tempts the faithful to opt out and declare themselves agnostics.

The remaining members will assume that the church has all its needs met and will have little impetus to make free-will donations or do *pro bono* work for the church. If something (say, bureaucratic corruption) keeps some churches from being adequately funded, its clergy will find themselves with no resources.

The fact that this proposal comes from an authority like Archbishop Lwanga makes it more worrisome. His involvement would do little more than give President Yoweri Museveni's authoritarian government cover to meddle in church affairs.

A church tax funding mechanism gives government officials unwelcome power over the proclamation of the Gospel. Consider that President Museveni has taxed the use of social media to stamp out what he has classified as "gossip." The government could as easily withhold funds from churches spreading any message not favored by the current administration.

All this assumes that the churches receive the full amount of the taxes raised. Politicians around the world find raiding every available revenue source for their own purposes irresistible.


That raises another potentially harmful policy promoted by some in response to government subsidies to the church: taxing churches. Already, a groundswell of supporters argue that churches should be taxed, because some churches have as much revenue, or more, than some private corporations. Credible reports of mismanagement of church funds only add fuel to this fire. Even if claims of financial irresponsibility are true, the proposed tax system will not end the problem but only

create an unnecessary financial burden on innocent church members.

The idea that expanding the government's tax base would benefit the economy in the long run is wrong. In fact, the more a government taxes its people, the less they can afford basic needs. This is one reason economies remain stagnant, especially as Ugandan families already struggle to provide education, healthcare, even food for their children.

Humanitarian and social services provided by non-governmental organizations have prevented the poverty rate from triggering the same level of social disintegration in Uganda as it has in neighboring nations. At the center of this effort, as one might predict, is the church. As with their counterparts in most of sub-Saharan Africa, Ugandan churches provide better education than the alternatives, and they teach social responsibility and inclusivity better than the government. Unlike the brutal regime of Yoweri Museveni, which is guilty of creating social division and disregarding his citizens' fundamental human dignity, the church has remained at the heart of everything good in Uganda.

The twin proposals of taxing or funding churches would only deprive people of their right to peaceful association. With Uganda already dealing with cases of religious intolerance and extremism, the government needs to start treating everyone as equals – not taking their money in the name of God.

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# Black balloons for the lost orphans

Rev. Gregory Jensen

**G**UATEMALA CITY—The protesters were mostly high school and university students. They carried black balloons, dozens of them — one for each teenaged orphan girl who died while in police custody in a March 2017 schoolroom fire. Walking in solidarity with hundreds of other protesters down Guatemala City's 6A Calle was a small group of Serbian Orthodox Christian nuns. The abbess of the monastery, Madre Inés, told me that she and the nuns of Holy Trinity Orthodox Monastery in Villa Nueva, Guatemala, came to the crowded Constitution Square in front of Palacio Nacional de la Cultura to demand that those in the Guatemalan government responsible for the girls' death be held responsible.

Advocating for the well-being of Guatemala's orphans comes naturally to the nuns. For many years, they operated the Hogar Rafael Ayau. The shuttered establishment — named in honor of Madre Inés' great-great-grandfather Don Rafael Ayau, who in the 1850s founded the first orphanage in Guatemala City ("The Home of Mercy") — is less than a 30-minute drive away from the peace and quiet of the nuns' rural monastery. But the *hogar* (Spanish for "home") is located in the noise of Guatemala City's crime-infested Zone 1. Changes in Guatemalan law led to the end of the *hogar* as a sanctuary for orphaned girls and boys.

But changes in the law did not change the nuns' commitment to children. Even while their ownership of the Hogar Rafael Ayau was at risk, the nuns were offering job training programs, online education, schooling for children, and help for local merchants. So, when 19 girls (the final number would later climb to more than 40) died in an inferno at the Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asunción in San José Pinula, it was only natural that the nuns would make their voices heard.

Sadly, no one heard the girls when they complained of abuse and intolerable conditions in the state-run orphanage. Frustrated with the lack of improvement, the girls ran away from the facility, only to be rounded up by police and confined under lock and key. It was while confined that the girls died in the fire. Although circumstances were chaotic, by most accounts the girls themselves started the fire.

Together with the other protesters, the nuns came to Constitution Square to demand government officials acknowledge their part in the girls' death. The nuns wanted to see the government take steps to correct the deeper, more pervasive social problems that plague Guatemala. Indeed, they say, the country suffers from a nationwide lack of personal responsibility.

In a public letter released after the fire, Madre Inés pointed to "fiscal centralization" as the root of the problem. Through its use



of tax money, she wrote, the Guatemalan government is creating "monstrous cities" that attract "people from the countryside" in search of "better jobs" and more economic opportunities. As in other parts of the world, the unintended consequence of these policies is that newcomers to the city "sever ties with the families" and "lose their sense of belonging," all while never finding the economic success that inspired their move in the first place. From her point of view, families are destroyed and "thousands of children 'displaced.'" It was these displaced children who died in the fire in a state-run home for minors on the outskirts of Guatemala City.

And so those black balloons ask, "Who is to blame? Who is responsible?" I went to Guatemala to find out.





### Shared responsibility, limited blame

First, blame must be placed on the girls themselves. They ran away from their institutional home. But acknowledging this should not blind us to the culpability of the adults who put the girls in this situation.

Then there are the parents, though not all should bear blame. Some were simply unable to care for their daughters financially. Others “felt that their daughters were in need of discipline” they could not provide, reported Francisco Goldman in his March 2017 *New Yorker* article. Other parents sent their daughters to the orphanage “to protect them from the notorious mara street gangs that terrorize poor urban neighborhoods.” Still other girls were there by court order, “because they’d been abused by family

members, or because they were living on the streets.”

The immaturity of the girls and the good intentions of parents, social workers, and courts seeking to spare children from the effects of poverty and crime all played a role in the events leading up to the fatal fire. But as Madre Inés suggests, outside NGOs who lobbied to change government policy also had a central role in the deaths.

### UNICEF and the naked public square

In our conversations, Madre placed the blame for the girls’ death in large part on the shoulders of UNICEF representatives who lobbied Guatemala to abolish “all volunteer” (that is, private religious and secular) residential care homes, even though these homes “cost the government nothing.” Their rationale was to protect children from illegal adoptions by “corrupt, privately run, international adoption agencies.”

While the abuses are real, researchers such as Harvard Law School professor Elizabeth Bartholet have argued that shutting down international adoption programs in Guatemala deprives thousands of children a year of the chance to grow up in nurturing homes, rather than life-destroying orphanages.

In 2007, the National Center for Adoptions (Centro Nacional de Adopciones, or CNA) took over all adoptions in Guatemala. This is how the girls would eventually come to live, and die, at Hogar Seguro.

Madre Inés says even though she and others sounded the alarm that government orphanages were “mismanaged and abusive,” those in charge “turned a deaf ear to the warnings.” This combination of “good intentions and the irresponsibility of UNICEF” and the Guatemalan government “produced a macabre outcome, a fire that devoured” teenage girls in the government’s care.

One hopeful sign is that in the aftermath of the fire the Guatemalan government is turning to private, religiously affiliated groups to care for orphans. But the government’s willingness to at least consider partnering with evangelical Christians does not extend to ministries associated with the Roman Catholic Church, the country’s largest religious tradition, much less Eastern Orthodox Christians like Madre Inés and her nuns.

Orthodox Christians make up only a tiny portion of Guatemala’s religious believers. Although she represents a small community with few resources, on the day of the fire, Madre Inés contacted President Jimmy Morales, offering to care for the children “displaced by the fire.” At the same time, “at the insistence of Guatemalan citizens, a petition to the government was developed to demand that the government change back to the original civil law to allow adoptions.” The petition would also “restore the oversight of abandoned children to the judges of the juvenile court in order to stop the abuses” that led to the fire.

Instead, the attorney general of Guatemala filed a lawsuit against the nuns in what would ultimately turn out to be an unsuccessful attempt to confiscate Hogar Rafael Ayau. Rather than taking steps to correct the factors that contributed to a national tragedy, the government tried to punish its critics.

The government’s action is based on the fact that, legally, the nuns do not own the orphanage. Instead, the nuns have what is called in legal jargon a “usufruct,” which gives them the right to use the property “to do works of mercy” for a term of 50 years. Unlike outright ownership, the usufruct describes a



situation in which a person or group of persons is allowed to use the real property (often land) of another without any legal claim of ownership.

Though the nuns eventually won their court case, all is not well for them. The usufruct was not given to the monastery but *personally* to Madre Inés. This was 20 years ago and, while the usufruct is good for another 30 years, it is not outside the realm of possibility that the nuns will lose their property with Madre's death.

This would also prevent the nuns from performing new works of mercy. But even while facing legal challenges to their ministry, the nuns did not stop caring for the youth of Guatemala.

### **Mercy outlawed but not undone**

As the lawsuit worked its way through the courts, and threatened the long-term viability of their ministry, the nuns continued to care for underprivileged or abandoned children at Hogar Rafael Ayau. To understand the importance of their work, and the odds they face daily, it helps to keep in mind where the *hogar* is located.

Guatemala City's Zone 1 an extremely dangerous part of the old city. I slept there my first night in the country. My room was spartan. One of my parishioners, who was born in the former Soviet Union, saw the photo I posted on Facebook and said it looked like "a Soviet hotel." I'm a light sleeper, so it was no surprise that I woke up about 3 a.m. to the "pop, pop, pop" of gunfire just outside my room. Suddenly my "Soviet hotel" – with its cinderblock walls and steel, roll-down shades over the windows – seemed a much nicer, and safer, place to spend the night.

It is in this crime-infested neighborhood that the nuns operate First Special Education Public School, for children with developmental and intellectual challenges. Like my room, the school is basic by American standards. But the children are joyful, sweet, and affectionate. They were also forgiving of my bad Spanish (though somewhat incredulous that an adult, and a priest at that, had such trouble expressing himself).

Along with the special school, the nuns also train in the trades at the Municipality Workshop School. More than 100 students who find themselves outside the formal education system – more and more of whom each year are young women – are learning the skills necessary to find employment in the construction trades as carpenters, electricians, and landscapers.

The school is not simply concerned with providing vocational education. The teachers and administrators also care for the physical health of the student. In addition to onsite medical and dental clinics, the students receive nutritional counseling to correct the unhealthy eating habits that frequently plague the poor. In addition, the schools are run in cooperation with the municipal government. This is more than a little counterintuitive, because the very libertarian Madre Inés half-jokingly describes herself as an "anarchist."

Given this and her criticisms of the Guatemalan government, the monastery's partnership with the city surprised me. Madre's political criticisms are pointed. "The education we receive is to be slaves," she says. The state-sponsored school "teaches us to be government employees," to exchange the freedom of moral responsibility over our own lives for the security of being on the government "payroll." These comments though are leavened by the Gospel. The nuns understand, as Madre told me, that the



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people of Guatemala grew up in a “system that makes slaves.”

But the *hogar* focuses on serving children, not ideology. None of Madre's antipathy for government bureaucracy and dependency keeps her from collaborating with anyone who is willing to work with the school to help kids. This is more than the nuns being pragmatic or sentimental. This public-private partnership teaches students the skills they need to participate in a free and virtuous society. Madre and the nuns, in a very real way, subvert the system from within by educating people for self-reliance.

Madre's actions flow from her commitment to the Gospel and her personal history.

### Her father's daughter

Madre Inés is the daughter of Manuel Ayau, the founder, former rector, and professor of economics at Universidad Francisco Marroquín (UFM). The private university, based in Guatemala, exists “to teach and disseminate the ethical, legal, and overall economic principles of a society of free and responsible persons.”

Building on the foundation of the Gospel, her father's free-market economics have influenced how Madre and her fellow nuns live the common life. They also guide the way the nuns minister to the larger community through cooperative relationships rooted in comparative advantage and free exchange.

“God,” Madre told me, “does not give material wealth.” It is rather the case that individuals “create the wealth” based on the gifts God has given each of us.

Wealth creation is not an entirely individualistic process, from the nuns' point of view. Generating value, whether material or social, depends on the correct understanding and concrete application of comparative advantage. Each human person contributes unique talents, experiences, and gifts, and their comparative advantage contributes to a flourishing society based on the freedom to trade, to build, to earn, and to collaborate.

For Madre, human beings create wealth “naturally” through our work. “God allows us to create wealth,” she observes. “Now, when we become obsessed with what we have created, of course, we make our idols.” We create our idols when we forget that everything we have comes from God, she adds. “I did not make my hands. I did not make my brain. The instruments to make wealth – I did not make them.”

Madre Inés says her vocation, like that of every other human being, is “to make wealth. It is my obligation, if I can say that.” However, she engages in wealth creation, not for herself, but for the sake of others.

### Receiving the gift God's given

The nuns' embrace of the free market is not an end in itself but, like everything in their lives, is placed at the service of the Gospel. Free exchange, comparative advantage, and cooperation all

find their meaning in the harmony that Christ brings out of all this activity. That harmony begins in the monastery and flows outward. This happens through their myriad cooperative projects.

For example, the monastery rents commercial property, at below market value, to small business owners. This is not a subsidy but an investment the nuns undertake for the economic re-vitalization of Zone 1. It's also a practical education for merchants in entrepreneurship and free-market economics, and a formation in the virtues that freedom requires.

Another project is the Rafael Ayau Institute of Interdisciplinary Studies (IEIRA). The online school provides a “private, apolitical” education in “the principles of freedom, truth, justice, and harmony.” True to its commitment to personal freedom, IEIRA students study at their own pace, taking as much time as necessary to master the content before moving on to the next level. Coursework includes, not only economics, but also natural and environmental sciences, conflict resolution, education, the history of Mesoamerica, and sacred Scripture.

Overseeing these different projects and running the schools while remaining faithful to their monastic vocation “is not easy,” Madre says. “But it's not hard either. It's just a matter of where you're going to focus” your time and energy. The nuns draw strength from the God Who “made everything. He's there before us. We

come into the world to discover Him presently.”

The nuns are so willing to cooperate, Madre Inés explains, “because the world is a gift from God for us. So, we're not going to go and say, ‘No, I just want this little piece.’ No. He gave

us everything. So, we have to enter into that gift that He has given us and find the Holy Trinity present here, and there, and there....”

### Teaching freedom and responsibility

It was not until we left behind our discussions of the monastery's myriad projects and the challenges the nuns face, and focused on monastic life itself that I understood what Madre meant by “responsible.” What sounded to my ears like something heavy and even oppressive became, in Madre Inés' telling, something very different: Being responsible is the first step in learning to be free, and freedom is the wellspring of happiness. We are born with the potential to be free, but freedom itself “has to be taught.” And we teach freedom, Madre told me, by holding people responsible for their decisions.

What I heard as something potentially negative, something to shy away from, was in fact a kindness. In calling people to be responsible, Madre was extending an invitation to freedom and a happy life. “We do not live that many years. So, the time God gives us here, we have to be happy,” Madre says. “But if we're irresponsible, if we are not free, if we do not live in harmony, how can we be happy? It's impossible!”

I asked Madre how this works in the monastery. What does it

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**Being responsible is the first step in learning to be free, and freedom is the wellspring of happiness.**

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mean for the nuns to be responsible and free? How, in other words, does she help the nuns become happy? The answer is her unique understanding of a word most Westerners shy away from.

Most of us think of *obedience* as someone telling us what to do. But this is not what Madre Inés means by obedience. For her, obedience is the gateway to a life of responsibility, freedom, happiness, and – ultimately – salvation.

In the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition, she explained, obedience takes the form of the nun asking for and receiving a blessing from the abbess, the superior of a community of nuns. A blessing, though, is not “permission.” When Madre Inés talks about “blessings” for monastics or laity, she means confirming the personal discernment that a person is “mature enough and responsible enough to make the decision.” For a nun to ask for a blessing means to ask the abbess to acknowledge that “you have to decide,” and accept responsibility for your action. That person asks that God bless the decision and sustain the work now freely undertaken.

#### Dialogue with a deeper tradition

To say that the girls’ tragic death in the

school room inferno would not have happened if they were cared for by a private secular or religious orphanage is unfair. Incompetence and malice are not exclusive to government bureaucracies. And while there are some significant differences, both private and state-sponsored social service agencies can – and frankly, do – coerce compliance. This is certainly the case when dealing with a vulnerable population like orphans.

What Christians do have, however, is a long history of working with children who do not have parents. It was not UNICEF or some NGO that invented orphanages; it was the early Church. This represented a revolution in child welfare at the time. “From liberal and conservative politicians, to psychologists, social workers, and progressive social planners, almost no one considers the past as a source of practical experience,” writes historian Timothy Miller in his 2005 book *The Orphans of Byzantium: Child Welfare in the Christian Empire*, “recording successes and failures, brilliant reforms and costly setbacks.” Miller goes on to say that it is “imperative not to ignore the vast fund of information that the past has to offer concerning social programs, and no ancient or

medieval state was more inventive in the field of social welfare than the Christian empire of Byzantium.”

The nuns of Holy Trinity Monastery have a direct, living connection to this ancient, deeper, broader mode of care which Miller would have us adopt. Practically and theoretically, the nuns have brought this ancient tradition into dialogue – in a frankly ecumenical spirit – with anyone willing to partner with them in caring for those in need.

In a way, the government closing the orphanage has broadened the ministry and influence of Madre Inés and the nuns. And in 30 years, when the monastery and the government once again turn to the question of property rights, God willing it will again renew their ministry.

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# MANASSEH CUTLER (1742–1823)

Rev. Ben Johnson

**I**t is not possible, in the nature of things, that human laws, or principles of honor, can be adequate substitutes for religion. ... Infidelity is a formidable enemy to the true principles of liberty. It erases from their foundation the main pillars that can support a free government. Freedom deigns not to dwell with general immorality: It cannot be enjoyed without virtue, nor can virtue be maintained without religion.

—Manasseh Cutler

Manasseh Cutler filled the pulpits of New England with calls for liberty, closed the Northwest Territory to slavery, helped establish two colleges, and made significant contributions to multiple fields of science.

Cutler was born on May 13, 1742, in Killingly, Massachusetts, to a long line of clergy. Though he studied law at Yale, he became minister of the Congregational Church in Ipswich (now Hamilton), Massachusetts, on September 11, 1771. He would maintain that position with periodic interruptions until his death, but his insatiable curiosity (and the low pay of clergy) kept him active well outside the vestry.

Cutler supported American independence and became a Revolutionary War chaplain the instant hostilities commenced, marching with local minutemen in time to see British troops retreating from Cambridge.

After he served two regiments and received an award for gallantry, he returned home. The nearest doctor had joined the war effort so, alongside his ministerial duties, Cutler studied and practiced medicine proficiently. During the 1779 smallpox outbreak, he cared



for 40 patients at a time.

Profit-generation produced Cutler's greatest contribution to humanity. After the war, his friend General Rufus Putnam and a group of Revolutionary War veterans formed the Ohio Company of Associates and enlisted Cutler to purchase rich, fertile land west of the Alleghenies with the debt certificates they received as payment. The investors intended to sell tracts to settlers, and Congress coveted the much-needed funds, but the speculators would agree only if the territory's laws were settled in advance.

The sometimes unseemly (if neither illegal nor uncommon) behind-the-scenes maneuvering produced a landmark of liberty: the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Two years before the composition of the Bill of Rights, the Northwest Ordinance safeguarded freedom of religion and habeas corpus, while banning cruel and unusual punishment.

Historians ascribe at least one of its clauses specifically to Rev. Cutler's intervention: "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory." Cutler presented the Congress of the Confederation with an ultimatum. "Make the land worth having," he said. "Exclude slavery forever from the territory northwest of the Ohio River, and we will buy your land and help you pay your debts. Allow it to enter, and not a penny will we invest."

Speaking a generation later, Daniel Webster said this prohibition "fixed, forever, the character of the population" by excluding "involuntary servitude. It impressed on the soil itself, while it was yet a wilderness, an incapacity to bear up any other than free men."

Cutler promptly set out to survey the land, visiting Marietta, Ohio, on the Muskingum River. While there, he played a pivotal role in the establishment of two universities: Ohio University and Marietta College. His love of learning led him to make significant contributions to botany and astronomy, documenting 350 different species of plant life. His detailed and wide-ranging studies earned him a place in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

President George Washington named Cutler a judge of the U.S. Court for Ohio, but he declined. Cutler represented Massachusetts for two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Federalist, retiring in 1805 to supply his church's pulpit and tend to the boarding school he began in his home. He maintained the indissoluble bond between religion and liberty until the day he died on July 28, 1823. **R&L**



ESSAY

## 9 big questions about democratic socialism

Hunter Baker, J.D., Ph.D.

**D**emocratic socialism is hot in the United States right now. Both the American media and young people seem to be enamored of the thought of steeply progressive, redistributive tax rates designed to achieve some vision of justice.

As with most public policy ideas, we tend to get pretty far down the road before we ask basic questions related to the project. In other words, we imagine a result that appeals to us before we've really considered whether other effects are likely and whether the proposal is morally right in the first place.

Accordingly, I encourage anyone thinking about democratic socialism to ask the following questions:

**1. What is the moral basis for taxing some incomes at higher rates than others?**

**2. Do we imagine that incomes are entirely the result of some random process?** While John Rawls makes an argument along those lines – essentially, that no one really deserves their money because they didn't control the family they were born into, their genes, etc. – there is a reasonable argument to be

made that many people with such advantages seem to fail, while others who lack those advantages seem to succeed. In other words, attributes such as determination, hard work, the willingness to delay gratification, conscientiousness, and others may well matter more than whether one was born into a family of means.

**3. Do we understand that people with high incomes are the most mobile people on earth and that such persons are most able to leave one tax regime for another?** Countries that impose high taxes often find that they end up losing individuals who pay the highest amount of tax, as those people move elsewhere. The same is true of corporations that seek to preserve capital from taxes. There will always be nations that offer more competitive rates of taxation.

**4. Related to question number three, do we realize that governments exist in a competitive landscape, very much like businesses do?** If one government offers a bad deal – high tax rates, inadequate value for taxes, etc. – then citizens and companies that can move *will*. They will select a friendlier sovereignty. Unless you want to be a nation that builds walls to keep people in rather than out, you have to give citizens good incentives to stay. There is a reason the toughest places to leave are also the places many people would most like to leave. They have been captured and effectively enslaved.

**5. Do we have a right to treat wealthy individuals and organizations as a resource for our benefit?** In other words, while it sounds good to impose a wealth tax that its advocates estimate will bring trillions into the treasury, do we have a right to do it? The right cannot be created simply by the fact that a majority votes for it. We should all recognize that majorities do not automatically vote for just results. So, let's double down a little: Why exactly are we entitled to a large share of someone else's earnings? Is it the mere fact of someone else's need? If so, then we should authorize on-the-spot confiscations whenever an immediate need is obvious.


**6. Will democratic socialism damage**

**innovation and economic growth?** Steeply progressive tax rates provide a substantial disincentive to earn income above a certain level. The natural result would be for companies to opt for more conservative returns from known methods and products. There is little reason to take risks for breakout success which, even if realized, will see its profits subject to a confiscatory rate.

**7. Why do we prize many other kinds of freedom more than economic freedom?** For example, Americans live in a culture that attaches a tremendously high value to sexual autonomy. The result is that we have high numbers of abortions, children born without married parents, generations who live in cycles of poverty, and other negative effects. To paraphrase a professor friend of mine, "Why do we place such a high value on consensual sexual acts, but such a low value on consenting acts of capitalism?"

**8. Do we really need higher taxes, or do we need to rethink the way we spend our money now?** Should entitlements be reconsidered? Should the defense budget find a lower level as the United States seeks to share responsibility for international order, rather than being the primary nation to shoulder it? Should we make greater use of local governments as centers of experimentation, where citizens can make choices for either more or less government and we can judge the effects in the great laboratories of democracy?

**9. Are we getting taxation wrong? Isn't taxation really about funding the government rather than redistribution or some kind of social realignment?** Are we looking to the tax system as a substitute for individual morality and stewardship? Is the tax system actually alienating in the sense that it applies some kind of automatic transfer to an arena that should entail real connections among people in communities?

*Hunter Baker, J.D., Ph.D., is an associate professor of political science at Union University and an affiliate scholar in Religion & Politics at the Acton Institute. He is the author of The End of Secularism and Political Thought: A Student's Guide.* 





BOOK

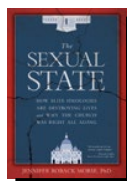
## The libertine road to serfdom

*The Sexual State: How Elite Ideologies Are Destroying Lives and Why The Church Was Right All Along* | Jennifer Roback Morse, Ph.D. | TAN Books | 2018 | 406 pgs

Reviewed by Rev. Ben Johnson

**K**een-eyed analysts have probed every ideological trend threatening liberty – from socialism and fascism to the Alt-Right – with one glaring exception: the revolt against personal responsibility. Jennifer Roback Morse, the founder of the Ruth Institute, capably fills this void in *The Sexual State*. Building on her previous book *Love and Economics*, Morse summarizes the sexual revolution in just a few propositions: It separates children from sexual activity and marriage, and eradicates all differences between men and women. This apparent personal freedom expands government by creating new avenues for regulation, increasing the need for means-tested welfare programs, and breaking down the “little society of the family.”

No public program can care for children as fully, selflessly, or naturally as two parents in a lifelong, committed union. From a social standpoint, Morse writes, the genius of marriage as a social institution is that its “extremely minimal legal structure” creates “a largely self-regulating, voluntary system of long-term cooperation between parents.”



Thus, we should not be surprised to learn that totalitarians of all stripes have sought to control the family. Inside the family, people develop loyalties to real people, not the Dear Leader. They develop habits that may not further the interests of the totalitarian State, with its all-embracing designs on every person. Inside the family, people may commit to ideas other than the state-sanctioned ideology.

The new ideology coopted Marxism’s dialectic of inevitability, now known as standing on “the right side of history.” However, this ideology finds advocates across the political spectrum.

Certain factions of the liberty movement embrace the Liberationist Narrative – something she calls “the Walmart theory of sex” – which celebrates changes to family life for giving us greater choice and agency. “Under a no-fault legal regime, we are freer on the front end” of a divorce or paternity settlement, Morse writes. “But we are less free on the back end, as the State steps in to manage the consequences.” Divorce courts dictate the time and money parents spend on their children, the language spoken in the home, even such mundane decisions as a child’s prom dress. This degree of intrusion into an intact family would be “unthinkable.”

Family breakdown, whether through divorce or illegitimacy, strongly harms children and beckons the government to fill the void left by absent parents. “Increases in the likelihood of poverty, physical illness, mental illness, poor school performance, and crime have all been associated with being separated from a parent,” Morse writes. Such pathologies usher them into the welfare system where, once inside, a matrix of laws holds them in place. Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, and WIC eligibility guidelines disfavor marriage. The cost of family breakdown to the U.S. government alone totals an estimated \$100 to \$112 billion. “The ordinary tax-paying citizen faces a greater tax burden than otherwise would be the case as a direct result of what, by the Liberationist Narrative, is an increase in sexual freedom,” Morse writes.

Similarly, gender ideology “creates a separation between children and their parents and inserts the State between them,” as the “State sets itself up as the public enforcer of their new identities.” In Minne-

sota, a school district facilitated a minor's gender transition without parental notification. Laws now police the permissible use of pronouns.

"Civil libertarians, fiscal conservatives, and open-minded liberals should all be troubled by the actual results as opposed to the supposed benefits of this 'freedom,'" Morse writes.

References to "class warfare" and "class analysis" may lead some reviewers to caricature the book as a rejection of a free society. Nothing could be further from the truth. Morse, who highlights her "affiliations with all three of the major schools of free market economics," ascribes changed cultural mores to excusing the libidinous excesses of "the managerial elite": the nexus of academics, lobbyists, government bureaucrats, thought leaders, and mass media sharing the same narrative. Yet she defines the term by noting:

The managerial class goes beyond the purely class designation in this respect: it's built upon the idea that society is something that needs to be managed. ... Seldom have the privileged classes taken it upon themselves to "nudge" their neighbors and fellow citizens about their eating habits, sex lives, spending habits, personal safety, and even their thoughts. ...

Legal historian Joseph Dellapenna observes that the rise of the managerial class was not unique to the United States in the twentieth century. "The managerial class rose to dominance in the U.S. with the New Deal in the 1930s, and has continued to dominate ever since. ... Evidence of the transition to social domina-

tion by a managerial class can be traced back to the nineteenth century, particularly in England. Nor was this transition limited to western or capitalist nations. In a real sense, the rise of Communism and Socialism was nothing more or (less) than a rise of the managerial class."

"Ponder that last sentence for a while," Morse writes.

Somehow, an ahistorical breed of Christian — especially Roman Catholic — intellectual believes he will capture, sanctify, and redirect the vast apparatus of the State toward theologically approved ends. Assuming an entrenched bureaucracy will simply acknowledge defeat and implement an opposing viewpoint seems

common heritage of all Christians." And she remembers the victims of the sexual revolution in each chapter, showing the very real toll that comes from shunning self-restraint and refusing to deny instant and perpetual gratification. True liberty rests on the foundation of personal responsibility or sinks into the quicksand of the paternal state.

Morse concludes with a 15-point "Manifesto for the Family," two-thirds of which consists of asking the government to "stop doing things it never had any business doing in the first place." Virtually unique in political literature, the last three proposals can be adopted only by individuals. Building a "civilization of love" literally begins in each human heart. That private sanctu-



naïve, albeit less so than the notion that the State's coercive power will forever remain in holy hands. Revolutionaries yearn to control the levers of power more than those who believe in natural law, if only because the State need not compel actions that occur naturally.

Morse roots her hope for the future in nature and culture. An entire chapter defends the notion that differences between men and women are real, biologically based, and ineradicable. Each section ends by presenting the relevant Catholic teaching, which she describes as "the

ary, the link between the individual conscience and the fiery flame of divine love, kept the spark of civilization alive after the barbarian sack of Rome, times of plague and pestilence, and through the dark night of atheistic Communism. That flame can outshine the strange fires of fallen passions and realign society according to its light again.

*Rev. Ben Johnson is an Eastern Orthodox priest, managing editor of Religion & Liberty, and senior editor of the Acton Institute's Religion & Liberty Transatlantic website. [R&L](#)*





BOOK

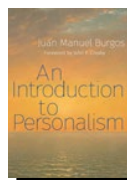
## Till we have faces

*An Introduction to Personalism* | Juan Manuel Burgos (translated by R.T. Allen)  
The Catholic University of America Press | 2018 | 233 pages

Reviewed by Josh Herring

If it is true that “nature abhors a vacuum,” then we ought to expect new ideas to arise in place of those which have proven false. Juan Manuel Burgos contends that personalism is the philosophical framework to revitalize Western thinking in the aftermath of the twentieth century, and his *Introduction to Personalism* is a readable introduction to a fruitful philosophical conversation.

Burgos defines personalism between two extremes. On the one hand, there are “collectivisms” like socialism and Communism that reduce humans to infinitesimally small players within a system. Materialist determinism fits on this end of the spectrum, reducing the significance of human actions by denying individual agency. This philosophy, best articulated by Hegel and applied by Marx, gave rise to various twentieth-century Communist regimes responsible for much suffering. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Burgos shows that other philosophies articulate an extreme individualism, proclaiming the absolute autonomy of each individual. Figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Ayn Rand developed such a radical view of individualism that



relational connections become difficult; postmodernity inherited this radically autonomous view, and when applied to language and metanarrative, postmodern philosophy erodes an understanding of humans living together as contingent beings.

Having shown these two extremes, Burgos examines the Catholic response. Following a papal directive, Catholic scholarship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries doubled down on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas as the way to articulate a rational faith in modernity. Burgos explains the dilemma: In developing his philosophical union of Aristotelian philosophy and Catholic faith, Aquinas drew much of his cosmology and metaphysics from Aristotle and Plato. Inasmuch as philosophy is tied to physics, chemistry, and biology, Aquinas’ philosophy was limited by his temporal context. While there is much to admire and gain from Thomism, Burgos contends that contemporary philosophy cannot return to a pre-Scientific Revolution context in terms of metaphysics and cosmology. We need instead a philosophy that blends the truth in Aquinas and the truth in modern science.

Burgos argues that Christianity (and other faith expressions, Judaism in particular) requires a new philosophy that begins from true knowledge and reckons with the existence of distinct human beings. Burgos writes there was an urgency to awake from a “comfortable nap,” intellectually speaking. The modern recognition of the *psyche* as subjective for each individual (a “who” which can think of himself as an “I”) is not compatible with Aristotle’s philosophy; the contemporary traditionalist needs a different philosophical foundation for life and action. “Christianity, as an intellectual framework, needed a philosophy,” Burgos wrote. “What should, or more simply, what could this philosophy be?”

It is this philosophical conundrum, Burgos contends, that personalism solves. Rejecting Aristotle’s definition of man as “a rational animal,” personalism begins with viewing each human as a “person” who subjectively experiences an objective reality. Drawing on developments from Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, and Edmund Husserl, Burgos highlights a philosophical dialogue concerned with

explaining the human experience and uniqueness. Persons have the ability to dialogue with other persons, and recognize their own infinite value and the infinite value of other persons.

As Burgos explains in the first chapter and demonstrates throughout the book, personalism is complex because it developed organically in response to the horrors unleashed in the first half of the twentieth century. In doing so, personalism resembles the first philosophies of ancient Greece: Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, the early Stoics all dialogued with each other as they developed their intellectual frameworks. Rather than being solely academic, personalists are interested first and foremost in the ethical and political implications of their philosophy.

If it is true that we are persons, and that each person is an infinitely valuable individual, how ought we to live? How ought society be structured towards individual flourishing within a community? Personalism does not require a theological position, though Burgos shows that (so far) the significant personalists have all been theists. We are persons, because God is a Person; Buber's dialogue ultimately works, because God dialogues with us. Here is a philosophy seeking to answer the timeless questions: Who are we, and how ought we live?

While much work remains to be done applying the principles of personalism to contemporary life, some applications seem apparent. Rather than envisioning humans as solely rational or economic creatures, a personalist perspective would begin by thinking about humans as bearers of the divine image. A society influenced by personalism would seek to encourage institutions integral to human flourishing: the church, the school, the local association. Such a political outlook does not align with a specific party; some personalists sounded virtually Communist in their emphasis on community, while others resembled libertarians in their focus on individual choices. What binds them together is an overarching prin-

ciple valuing the human person and his relationships with other persons as crucial for pursuing the common good. If the principles are sound, then the application of personalism could bring positive change to the trajectory of Western civilization.

Personalism has its roots in nineteenth century America; fourth century theology; and postwar academia in France, Spain, Italy, and Poland. It is a diverse philosophical expression rooted in the primacy of the human person. Personalism takes on a variety of unique complications based on which personalist philosopher one reads. Pope John Paul II (then Karol Wojtyla) developed personalism as a foundation for ethics, rooting it in latent Thomism and calling it "Thomistic Personalism." Martin Buber drew on personalism for his famous *I-Thou* dialectic. Italian, Spanish, and French strands of personalism all developed across the late twentieth century, with Jacques Maritain and Charles Mounier both standing as giants within personalist discourse.

While this complexity makes personalism difficult to define, Burgos does an admirable job of explaining the nuances of various schools of thought within the movement. He focuses greater effort on what unifies personalism, leaving internal divisions for those who mine his footnotes. This work reflects mature scholarship. While accessible to the educated layman, it also advances the disciplinary discussion of personalism through clarification and definition.


reader understand the philosophical and historical context within which personalism developed; the second portion examines key personalist thinkers organized through national dialogues. Burgos' rich footnotes reveal a scholar whose lifework consists of deep reading and clear explication. His descriptions of nuanced conversation help the introductory reader understand the discussion without getting lost in the weeds of philosophical jargon.

The final chapter draws together various concepts outlined in the previous chapters to propose a synthesis of personalist thought, forming a coherent philosophy. In his most concise definition, Burgos summarizes personalism as "an attitude or movement of which the strong point is the vindication of the person against his many enemies and the correlative transformation of society in this direction."

The twenty-first century is off to a rough start in the West. Postmodern philosophy has failed. Rather than delivering a constructive vision of society allowing humans to flourish, postmodern critiques destroy the very foundations of human life. Perhaps personalism is the answer to postmodernism's failures, allowing the traditionalist to recognize the capacities of the individual within his community and reject the extremes of communal or radical autonomous philosophy. Personalism still needs much work: It requires systematization for clarity, specificity in application, greater appreciation of

the dignity conferred by individual choice, and extension beyond the Catholic intellectual world. Juan Manuel Burgos has done an admirable job bringing the personalist conversation to a wider audience, and in

that he shows the importance of careful scholarship for human flourishing.

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## Here is a philosophy seeking to answer the timeless questions: Who are we, and how ought we live?

This book also avoids the academic formula. To understand this *Introduction*, one needs to read the whole work. While each chapter stands alone, reading the first and final chapters will not produce as much value as reading the whole.

Burgos spends the first third of *An Introduction to Personalism* helping the



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COLUMN

## THE GODFATHER, ACTON, AND THE PRICE OF LIBERTY

Rev. Robert A. Sirico



As a proud first-generation American of Italian descent, it is incumbent upon me to consider the *Godfather* films cultural canon. One line resonates with me on a daily basis: Michael Corleone's lament, "Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in." It should be a daily mantra for all of us who are working against any abrogation of ordered liberty throughout the world. Our work is never done. In fact, in many ways our efforts are more important in 2019 than they were 30 years ago.

Thirty years: The Acton Institute began its mission shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which reunified East and West Germany and precipitated the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, less than 30 years later members of the rising generation find themselves united with politicians in their seventies, a coalition that has either forgotten or never grasped the perils humanity faced not so long ago. The defeated evil we celebrated in the 1990s is ascendant once again.

Our task at Acton has been always a battle of incremental inches against the encroachments of statism. We are founded on the first principle that human flourishing to its fullest extent relies on liberty. This is what our Creator inscribed, not only on our hearts and minds, but also in our souls.

Once again, our collective failure to recognize the tremendous benefits made possible by maximizing freedom has resulted in class envy and cavils that capitalism has not completely eradicated poverty. Despite the fact the World Bank reports extreme poverty has fallen to 8.6 percent of the world's population since 1990, when it was more than twice that number, the rise of those suffering from short-term memory loss seems to have risen in tandem.

The World Bank also reported recently that more than 93,000 humans rose from poverty every single day between 2013 and 2015. For those keeping score, that's approximately 68.5 million people. Child mortality has fallen by 58 percent since 1990. The World Health Organization reported that the average life expectancy increased to 72 years in 2016, up 5.5 years since 2000.

The reappearance of far-left political and economic ideology is not terribly shocking. It never really went away. It is only reemerging after a hibernation that was both too short and too shallow. Some aging figures have found popularity they never enjoyed as socialism entered its waning phase.

But more worrisome is the rise of a younger generation of socialists as energetic as they are telegenic. Their misguided idealism, which I once shared, presents long-term challenges to our country at large. These young men and women advocate for "free" college tuition, universal health care, and wide-ranging and expensive climate-change programs – all with no plan for how to pay for any of it. Furthermore, should their programs become reality, they are clueless as to the unforeseen social and economic consequences.

Those of us at the Acton Institute, however, know full well those costs and consequences. We have seen the results historically in the USSR and Eastern Europe, and more recently in Nicaragua and Venezuela. It's up to us to prevent such devastation in the United States. Our historic undertaking demands that we continue cheerfully fighting the good fight for the hearts and souls of our young people as we close out our third decade and look forward to our fourth. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

*Rev. Robert A. Sirico is president and co-founder of The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, located in Grand Rapids, Michigan. [R&L](#)*

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