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FALL 2025

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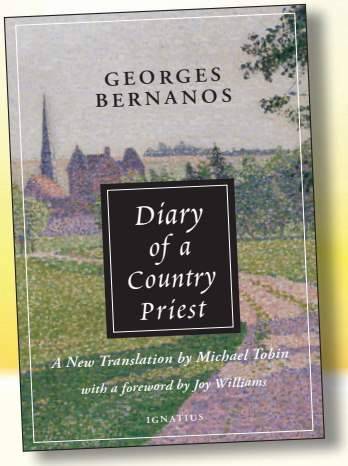

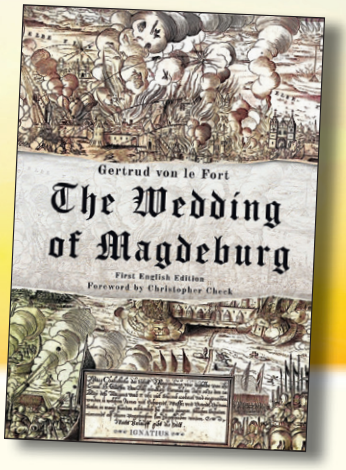

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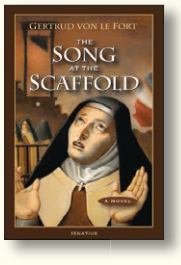

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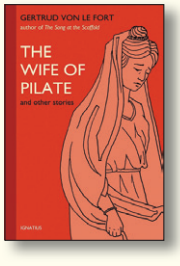

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THE ISSUE THIS TIME

BY ANTHONY SACRAMONE

The political left has never been a big fan of filmmaker Frank Capra, the "Name Above the Title." Which is odd. His heroes typically were individuals of rare integrity fighting for basic humane values against the gormless masses and conniving mass producers. In short: the little guy against the machine. As the multi-Oscar winner put it himself:

> The strength of America is in the kind of people who can plant a seed, sow the grass. I wanted to glorify the average man, not the guy at the top, not the politician, not the banker, just the ordinary guy whose strength I admire, whose survivability I admire. (*Focus on Film* 27 [1977], 46–47)

Yet Capra's brand of populism was disdained, even thought dark and depressing. Part of that leftward critique has been aimed at the filmmaker's refusal to see beyond individual villains and heroes instead of the system in which such people operate.

> Capra did not make intellectual or political sense out of the Depression. ... If there were intellectual premises, they were Christian and vaguely egalitarian in nature. Capra declaimed to his audiences that "no man is a failure," that "each man's life touches so many other lives." For Capra, if there was a class struggle, it existed between the moral and humane, and the greedy and cynical. (Leonard Quart, "Frank Capra and the Popular Front," *Cinéaste*, Vol. 8, No. 1)

Take *It's a Wonderful Life*. The problem isn't the existence of an economy that permits and makes almost inevitable "Pottervilles" and that compels a decent sort like George Bailey to sacrifice his dreams to "save" his people. No, the challenge is a rich man like Mr. Potter—greedy, selfish, spiteful, out to destroy a good man and his business simply to exert power for its own sake. Eliminate him, or replace him with a more congenial and generous type, and the people will flourish, because they'll no longer be under the thumb of a rapacious monster.

But is that how the story plays out? By film's end, Mr. Potter is alive and well. His act of cruelty (and criminality) that has driven George to the brink of disaster has gone undetected. Yet we have our Capra-corn happy ending. How is that possible? There's been no revolution in the streets. No building of a ubiquitous State to ensure the material well-being of every citizen.

In a word—community. The community that was always there and that our hero was key to building through a family business: Bailey Brothers Building and Loan. Yes, it took a literal miracle to make it apparent, but that's only because we are often blind to what's right in front us. It took an angel to help George Bailey see. And what he sees are his *people*.

And so when we come to the issue of, say, homelessness in our own day, the debate is typically between those who blame capitalism—the system—and those who blame politicians who pursue bankrupt policies (rent control, overregulation) that hurt the very people whose fealty they're fighting to retain.

But what if the problem of homelessness isn't so much the unaffordability of housing as a lack of that which is to be found in, with, and around it—and is absolutely free?

If our cover story, "Universal Basic Community Now," shows anything, it's that an individual can do much to ameliorate the sorry conditions of the homeless—to the point of saving a life. But the burden shouldn't be placed on the shoulders of stray strangers. It should be the responsibility of a world within a world that has the resources to make space for the broken, battered, and, yes, reckless—and who desperately need a room.

Where to begin such a reclamation-of-community project? Inspiration always helps. And that's why *Religion & Liberty* exists.

Religion&Liberty

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CONTENTS

Features

6 **Universal Basic Community Now!** ..... RACHEL FERGUSON

16 **Thomas Jefferson and the Virtue of Limited Government** ..... JOHN C. PINHEIRO

22 **To Educate the Whole Child** ..... TESSA CARMAN

32 **A Pope for the 21st Century** ..... DAN HUGGER

40 **American Liberty and French *Liberté*: A Fundamental Disagreement** ..... JOSEF NASR

In the Liberal Tradition

48 **José da Silva Lisboa: Defender of Free Markets in the Tropics** ..... ALEX CATHARINO

Reviews

51 **A Very Christian England** ..... CARL TRUEMAN
God Is an Englishman: Christianity and the Creation of England
By Bijan Omrani

55 **Interrogating the Faith and Work Movement** ..... GENE EDWARD VEITH
Saving the Protestant Ethic: Creative Class Evangelicalism and the Crisis of Work
By Andrew Lynn

59 **We Are *Capax Universi*** ..... JEFFREY POLET
Classical Catechism
By Anthony Esolen

Reviews

63 **American Religion by the Numbers** ..... MILES SMITH
The American Religious Landscape: Facts, Trends, and the Future
By Ryan P. Burge

66 **The Conscience of the Christian Merchant** ..... MICHAEL J. LYNCH
On the Duties of Merchants
By Daniel Souterius

Conversation Starters With . . .

69 **Nadya Williams**

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- LORD ACTON

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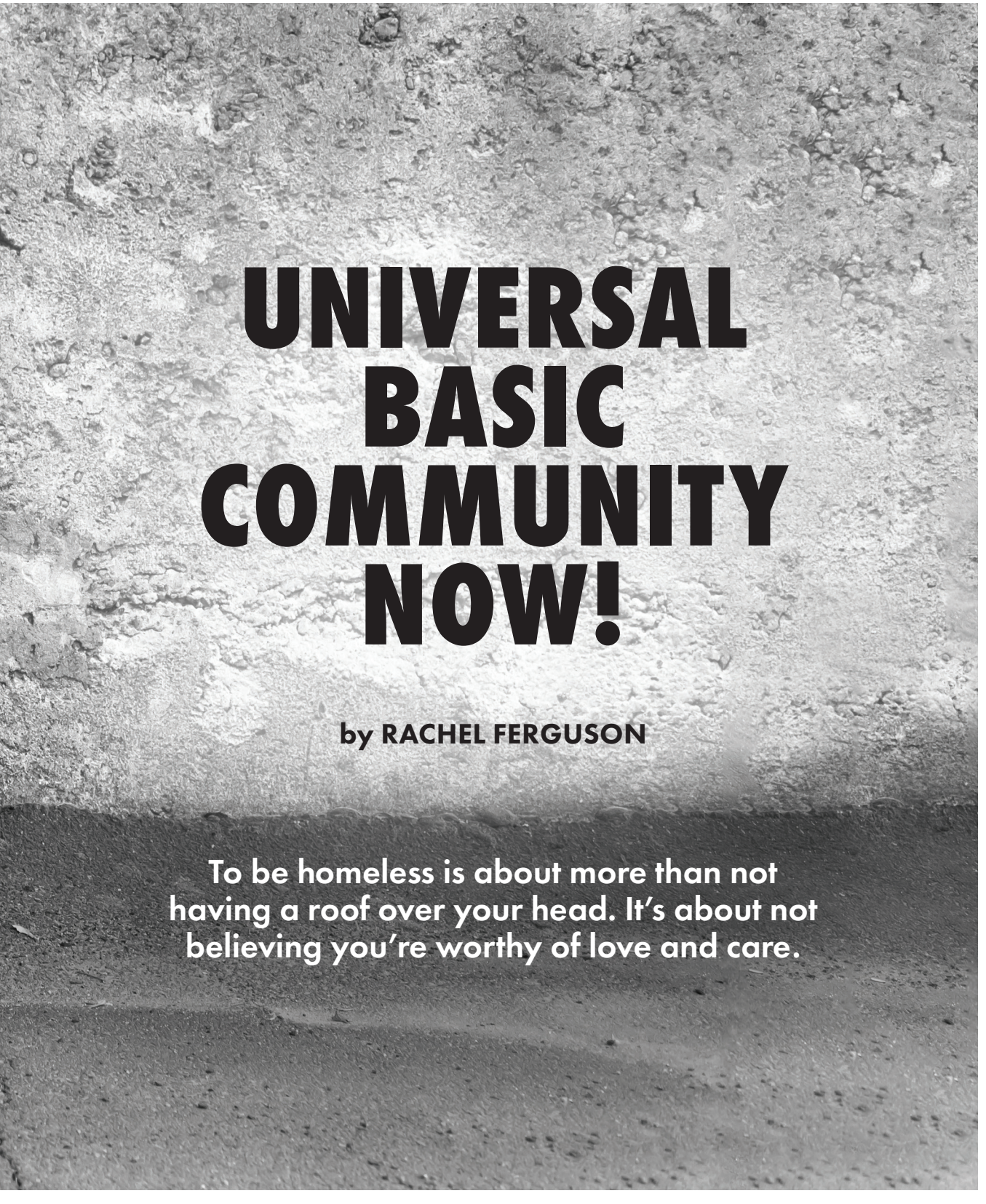


UNIVERSAL BASIC COMMUNITY NOW!

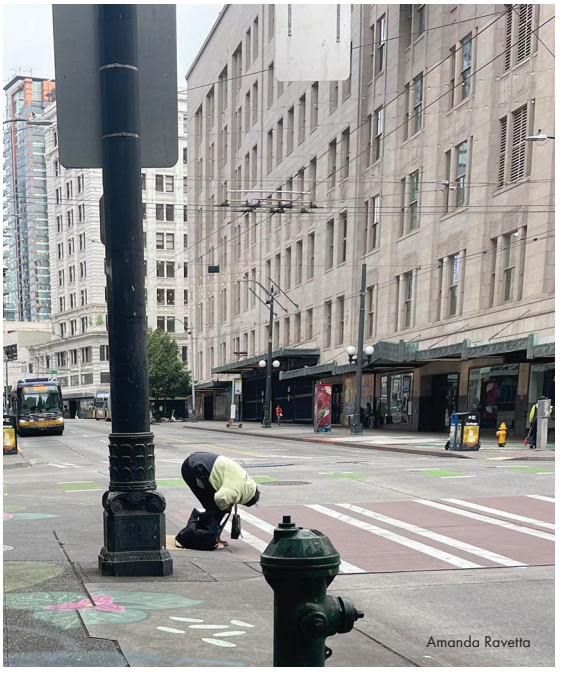
by RACHEL FERGUSON

To be homeless is about more than not having a roof over your head. It's about not believing you're worthy of love and care.

WHEN THEY ARE LAMENTING the excesses of billionaires, anonymous commenters and pundits alike often do the math out loud. Surely, America's 700,000 homeless could be housed for, say, $50,000 each this year, which adds up to a mere $35 billion. Elon Musk alone is worth $413 billion! Musk could solve homelessness, they say, all by himself. We'll set aside for the moment distinctions between income and wealth—Musk's billions are tied up in his businesses, not stored up as a pool of gold coins in his basement, ready to be distributed. We'll even set aside the question of where next year's $35 billion will be found. After, all, the annual federal budget is nearing $7 *trillion* ($7,000,000,000,000), a number with so many zeroes it's hard to imagine its scale. I asked the internet for help, and it said that if one were to spend $1,000 *every second*, it would take over 31,000 years to spend a trillion dollars, and it would take slightly longer to count to a trillion out loud. Is it really too much to ask that a mere $35 billion be set aside to solve one of our saddest and most harmful problems—homelessness?

It turns out that homelessness is rarely what it sounds like—the mere lack of a home. I won't overstate this: With draconian building regulations and municipal meetings full of NIMBYs ("Not In My Back Yard"), many on the financial edge, especially on the expensive coasts, really have been shoved out of increasingly unaffordable homes. We don't solve their problem by redistributing wealth, but by letting people build. Austin, Texas, pulled back on many of its limitations on building, causing rents to fall by 20%. This astounded residents there, who must have been distracted by the usual middle school drama when their eighth grade economics teacher was explaining supply and demand.

With that said, for the past three years the Discovery Institute has published weekly columns by Marvin Olasky on its FixHomelessness.org site. As Olasky demonstrates, at least two-thirds of the homeless are not dealing with anything so pedestrian as high housing prices. Instead, they're in chronic situations. Even those of us safely squirreled away in the suburbs have scrolled through social media long enough to see the devastating videos of homeless encampments, many residents in the infamous "fentanyl flop" of their euphoric highs. We've read the news stories about the mentally ill on the subways, testing the boundaries of what riders will endure before violence ensues. In horror, we've read the stories of abused, abandoned teens, foster care dropouts, exploited in the sex trade, desperate to survive. "Get a job" sounds like a perfectly reasonable first step until you meet some of these precious human beings: men and women who, as children, were beaten, abandoned, raped, and traumatized in ways too evil to recount. We euphemistically refer to these traumas as "adverse childhood experiences,"



Downtown Seattle in 2025

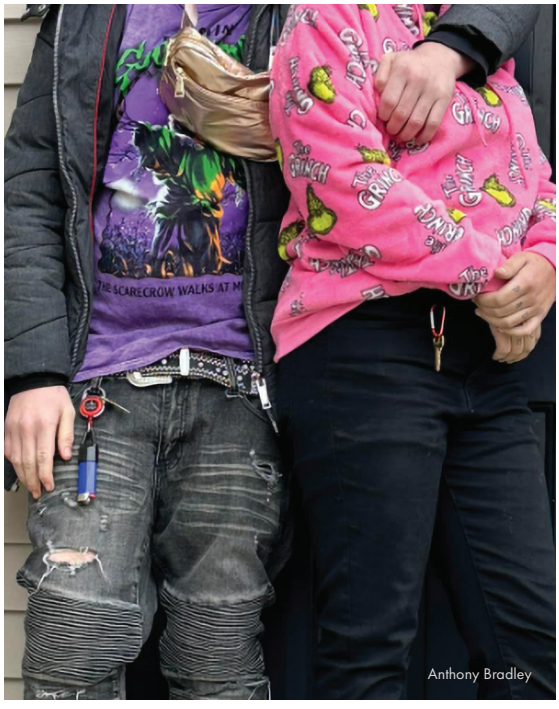
> **“‘GET A JOB’ SOUNDS LIKE A PERFECTLY REASONABLE FIRST STEP UNTIL YOU MEET MEN AND WOMEN WHO, AS CHILDREN, WERE BEATEN, ABANDONED, RAPED, AND TRAUMATIZED IN WAYS TOO EVIL TO RECOUNT.”**

or ACEs, and it’s unusual to run across a person experiencing long-term homelessness who doesn’t have a fistful of these hidden deep in his or her chest. Unsurprisingly, these children grow up into teens and adults ripe for exploitation, addiction, and mental illness, and often become abusers in turn. Their adult experiences only compound their pain, creating a snowball effect of undermined agency and a desperate need for mental and emotional escape.

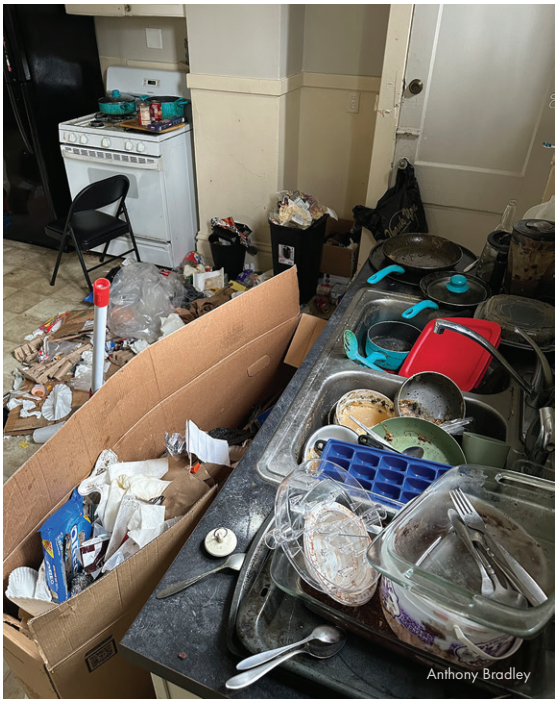
None of this is to say that those who’ve been abused or become addicted, or even some of those who’ve lost their grip on reality, can’t be restored to their full agency and have flourishing lives. If you’re not sure about this, google your local addiction-recovery meeting schedule and look for the word “open.” This means that outsiders can attend the meeting and hear the stories of those who’ve recovered. There are miracles walking past you on the sidewalk every day—miracles so astounding that many of us would find them offensive if we really knew the details. Grace is scandalous. As Bono sings, grace “travels outside of karma.”

For many who have hit the rock bottom of long-term homelessness, the journey from here to there is a web of complications: family dysfunction, friend-groups full of users, missing IDs and birth certificates, systems of assistance both state-sponsored and charitable, run-ins with the law, and medical problems that the emergency room is unable to properly address. These are the lessons Dr. Anthony Bradley learned when he stepped outside the Acton Institute one day and befriended a young homeless couple on the streets of Grand Rapids. We’ll call them Jay and Brie.*

If you are aware of Dr. Bradley’s work, you know he’s a theologian with a broad range of social interests, including the psychology and social decline of fatherhood, healthy masculinity, and healthy eating, as well as the roles of race, economics, and civil society in solving massive social problems such as overcriminalization and mass incarceration. Although Anthony (a friend and colleague at the Acton Institute) is a member of the Presbyterian Church in America and a classical liberal, he is also a famously out-of-the-box thinker, infuriating almost everyone at one time or another by refusing to be intellectually pigeonholed. One of his most fascinating areas of interest is poor whites, whom he’s studied both on regular summer trips to Ireland and on his travels throughout the United States. Fascinating particularly because Anthony is a black man whose middle-class, well-educated family literally purchased the farm on which their ancestors



Jay and Brie



Jay and Brie's apartment

had been enslaved. And yet it's not unusual to hear him defend poor whites who protest the concept of "white privilege." After all, a meth addict at the gas station in a post-manufacturing West Virginian ghost town will simply have no way of absorbing the idea. Whatever privilege she has over black people who hardly even exist in her state, it certainly hasn't done her any good.

> **"WHITE POVERTY TENDS TO BE LESS VISIBLE, MORE DISPERSED, MORE RURAL, ITS CRIMES COMMITTED IN SOME FAR-OFF TRAILER IN THE WOODS."**

Jay and Brie are white. Concentrated urban poverty tends to be flashy: primarily black in many cities and Latino in others, known for gangsta rap and drive-by shootings, and memorialized in box office hits like *Boyz n the Hood*. But impoverished white Americans actually outnumber impoverished black Americans by three to one, which makes sense. Black American poverty runs about 20% of the black population, and white poverty hovers around 10% of whites. With six times as many white as black Americans, that leaves a whole lot of poor white people, even if black poverty is disproportionately high. But white poverty tends to be less visible, more dispersed, more rural, its crimes committed in some far-off trailer in the woods where no one is around to find out. This means that while crime is common in these rural communities, it's not as contagious. It's not run by gangs and won't attract the same attention from police.

Other differences between the two groups exist. While marriage has become vanishingly rare in poor, black, inner-city neighborhoods, it's not unusual to hear about six, seven, and eight marriages per person in the trailer park. My friend Cindy's* mother married six times, although two of the times were to the same man, Cindy's father. She moved constantly from one tiny apartment or trailer to the next,

inspiring her now successful design and home-rehab business. She had a new opportunity to make a place feel as much like home as possible almost every year. Kevin Williamson, the famously acerbic writer for *National Review*, recounts his mother's eight marriages in a harsh condemnation of the culture in which he was reared. J.D. Vance famously recorded his experience with his drug-addled mother in *Hillbilly Elegy*, although he had slightly more well-off relations to help him escape. While Vance used to share Williamson's call to personal responsibility and culture change from within, his tune seems to have changed in recent years.

Jay and Brie are 19 and 20 and live in the small, human-scaled city of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Anthony meets Jay one weekday afternoon when Jay quite literally runs into him with his skateboard. For the sake of understanding the experience Anthony had, I'll reveal what we know about Jay and Brie little by little, just as it was revealed to Anthony in the hundreds of hours of conversations with them that followed. As Olasky has pointed out in his journalistic work, the first story you hear from a homeless person might be true, but it's usually not all there is to it. That's why Olasky stays in a shelter for three or four days and has continued conversations with the same people. Stick with the relationship, and what you heard on day one will get a whole lot more complicated by day four.

A curious social scientist with a strong penchant for pastoral care, and particularly for struggling young men, Anthony boldly asks Jay what he is doing skateboarding down the street at 1 p.m. on a weekday. Why isn't he working or in school? He finds out that Jay is homeless and so takes him to lunch. One lunch turns into regular lunches and small bags of toiletries. Jay isn't hard to find. He lives in a "pod" of homeless folks set up near the Acton Institute's headquarters. These pods are common and create a kind of community, including (usually) a matriarch who bears some authority over the rest of the group. It's a testament to how rare the wandering "hobo" really is, although this type does exist. For most human beings, we at least need a spot, a few friends, and some sort of communication and continuity to survive.

Anthony becomes concerned one week when he doesn't see Jay for a few days. Has he OD'd? Is he OK? Finally, he receives a call from the Ottawa

> **ANTHONY BRADLEY HAS ALWAYS MAINTAINED THAT ANY OF HIS STUDENTS CAN CALL HIM IF THEY ARE ARRESTED AND HE WILL COME BAIL THEM OUT OF JAIL.**

County Jail. After 20 years of teaching students, Anthony has always maintained that any of his students can call him if they are arrested and he will come bail them out of jail. So he goes to get Jay, who is seriously underclothed in the 30 degree weather. He takes him shopping for a few basics. A coat, some underwear. Something about this exchange shifts the relationship. Anthony becomes determined to get Jay housed. It's getting cold in Michigan, and Jay is living under a bridge. He had been sleeping on the floor in the basement of his family's house. After a family fight, Jay's grandfather lit a bed on fire, which set the house aflame, and the house was condemned. As the family members scattered, Jay's mother and her boyfriend moved to a motel, but Jay was not invited—her boyfriend doesn't like him. This means that Jay is someone on the edge; without the house fire, he might still be a member of the working poor.

One day, Jay tells Anthony that he wants him to meet his girlfriend. Since the couple had not eaten all day, Anthony offers them a nice meal at one of his "foodie" restaurants, but they prefer McDonald's. In Grand Rapids, by late October or early November, it's already in the 30s. Brie, oddly, is wearing a Santa suit to stay warm. Brie's stepmother had kicked her out of the house after she fought with her. She's been off and on with Jay since high school, so now they're together on the streets. Fights often lead to 911 calls and even restraining orders, but they always end up back together. This is the same day that Anthony finds out the central fact that will determine what happens over the next nine months. Brie is pregnant.

At this point, Anthony determines that he's got to get Brie out of the cold and into some kind of shelter. Here, his first major obstacle presents itself: Jay and Brie want to stay together. In fact, they want to get married, which Anthony is all for. He's known for telling young men who have impregnated their girlfriends that they should get married, and on one occasion even married a couple the day after he met the man on an airplane. One day, Anthony takes them to the Kuyper College chapel to run through the ceremony for practice. They begin to make plans to get a marriage certificate, a task that will prove more difficult than it sounds. There's also a ban on couples staying together in shelters, which has nothing to do with highfalutin morality or concerns about sex outside of marriage, as Anthony painfully learns. The ban is about violence.

It's frustrating to Anthony that there are programs for single moms and separate programs for men but nothing for families. Why can't these shelters find a way to keep families together? When I challenge Anthony on the reasons these shelters may have for the limitation, he admits that most of these couples do have the concerns I discerned: histories of domestic violence and out-of-control sexual behavior in co-ed spaces. But Anthony maintains there needs to be some sort of third space, a way to coach couples through family-relationship skills. Many of them have never seen a healthy example, and their backgrounds give them a terribly high tolerance for destructive behavior and chaos. The obstacles for shelter workers are real, but we also can't keep kicking the can down the road forever.

Finally, he does find some programs that house couples, but their open slots are months out. The supply of family-based programs is too low. At this point, Anthony is losing sleep over Brie being pregnant in the cold. He admits that if she weren't pregnant and it had been summertime, he may not have intervened beyond referral to some institutions. But they were sharing a one-person sleeping bag in a Michigan November, and on one occasion, when he brought them some food, Brie was shivering in her Santa suit.

By this point, Jay and Brie are contacting Anthony several times a day with a need for food and other basics. (They keep their phones charged by using an outdoor outlet outside a gym.) At Thanksgiving, Anthony's family jokingly refers to Jay and Brie as Anthony's children. "How are the kids?" they ask when he receives yet another text message. One

might ask whether it's foolish to get into a relationship of constant support for a homeless couple, but Anthony has a goal in mind. These kids want to get married, they're having a baby, and Jay seems like someone who would be working if it weren't for a highly dysfunctional family and a condemned family home. Why not help them get on their feet, get this baby to term, and see if their situation can be transformed?

In Jay and Brie's case, only one of these goals would be achieved in any long-term sense. With the help of GoFundMe, Anthony is able to raise $15,000 to get them into an apartment. A Grand Rapids businessman of deep Christian faith offers low-rent apartments to struggling people, knowing that setting them up within walking distance of a grocery store, some job opportunities, and important government offices makes it much more likely to work out. The apartments are very simple, and the rules don't allow any overnight visitors. Anthony co-signs the lease.

This set-up works for a significant amount of time. Anthony has to make them promise not to have any of their old companions over, including family members. He quickly realizes, however, that they don't know how to keep a house or, really, even themselves. He teaches them how to clean, to cook healthy food, and to take a shower each day. Away from bad influences, they were able to stay clean from drugs for three months—a blessing to the baby growing in Brie's womb. Out of the weather, taking good care of themselves, and off drugs, they fare well, although the place sometimes falls back into chaos until Anthony comes by to encourage them to get it cleaned up again. Emotionally, Jay and Brie are less developed than many teenagers, having essentially raised themselves amid neglect and abuse.

As Anthony gets to know the couple better, Jay's and Brie's stories grow darker. Both had been horrifically sexually abused as children, and by their own relatives. Jay already has a few domestic abuse charges against him, brought by Brie herself. This also isn't their first baby. Brie has given birth to three other babies, all of whom have been taken away by the state. Jay has fathered six children (although three of them were triplets).

Jay also resists Anthony's encouragement to find work. Anthony offers help in the process of getting IDs. There are three basic ways to identify yourself: a state ID or driver's license, a social security card, and a birth certificate. Unfortunately, you need two out of three to prove much of anything to the state, and both Jay and Brie have only one out of three each.

Jay and Brie at the grocery store

They have also lost access to government benefits, at least temporarily, due to some violation of the rules. Jay expresses interest in working at FedEx, but that fades quickly. He says that he has a bad knee and is disabled, and that he has too many anger issues to work for a boss. He is also certain that the back payments from their time banned from benefits will be delivered in one lump sum, and they'll be back on benefits after that.

Jay already has a warrant out for his arrest because he didn't pick up the phone to talk to his parole officer several weeks back, another example of his struggle with executive function. Although the apartment lease demands no overnight guests, Jay and Brie invite another couple from the "pod" to live in the one-bedroom apartment. When Jay and the other man get into a fight, the police are called. They call Anthony, who appears on the scene to find Jay's mother there—the one person Anthony had absolutely banned. A crack addict and abuser herself, Jay's mother is deeply toxic.

While Anthony answers the police officer's questions, Brie appears in the door with a black eye. As their stories go, Brie fell down and hit her eye and someone called the police; or Jay's cousin was walking down the street and was angry about money Jay owed him and the cousin physically assaulted Brie and that's how she got the black eye. Neither Anthony nor the police believe any of these stories. In the ensuing melee, Jay bites a cop in the arm, runs, and remains on the run for days. When Anthony encourages Jay to turn himself in, Jay claims to have slept in jail and been released, but no record of this exists. What actually happened is that his mother got a friend to drive him up north to hide. Under all this stress, Brie starts using again, supplied by Jay's mother, the grandmother of the child with whom Brie is pregnant.

Without going into detail, I will simply say that Jay's mother and her boyfriend found a way for Brie to pay for the drugs, since she had no money. What they did to Brie was so evil that I cannot bring myself to type the words. It reminds one of Aristotle's famous commentary on human nature: "When perfected, man is the best of animals, but without law and justice, he is the worst." Human beings will do to one another things that would never enter the mind of the most vicious animal predator.

This series of events means that, of course, both Brie and the baby, named Jay Jr., test positive for cocaine in the hospital. Jay is finally found and sent to jail. The baby is taken away by the state, and the list of requirements to get the baby back will take years of rehabilitation, and maybe even relocation, to achieve. Having violated the terms of the lease—and time being up anyway—Brie moves in with Jay's grandmother, who is also a crack addict. There is one attempt to bail Jay out by Anthony and Jay's father, a solid guy who works as a mechanic. Their plan includes staying away from Brie and his mom, getting tested for learning issues, and pursuing work. Jay swears on various graves that he is ready to do all these things, but on the very day he is bailed out, he returns to the toxic environment he had promised to avoid. Anthony puts it this way: These are people who live at "the intersection of trauma and addiction," and there's no program, short of genuine adoption by some kind of new family, that can break the pattern.

The final outcome is the best we could have hoped for given Jay's and Brie's choices. Baby Jay is born safely and appears to have no major issues. One of the social workers is clear that, without the time in the apartment, the baby would not have made it to full term, and since Brie would have been using the whole time, the outcome could have been devastating for the child. Instead, Brie is safe and warm in a low-stress environment and eating the best she ever has in her life. Baby Jay is in the process of being adopted by a wonderful, solid cousin with whom Anthony had worked closely in the process of helping Jay and Brie. This baby never asked to be born into this level of chaos and perhaps will never even need to know the extent of it. What he may also not know is just how many people, how many hours, and how much money was spent to make sure he made it into this world.

Anthony lists three major things he'd change if he ever worked with a couple like this again:

- Separate them. Brie and Jay were feeding into one another's bad patterns. In fact, Anthony is certain that Jay could have stayed on his feet if he'd been on his own, but that the deep wounds inflicted on him by his mother made him feel that he could not function without Brie. She was his surrogate mother—and he, her surrogate father.
- The PTSD, and the ensuing addiction, has to be addressed first. Every period of progress was undermined through the allure of the addiction. And the addiction is driven by the horrific memories of abuse from which they were always

Dr. Anthony Bradley speaking to students at Pacifica Christian High School in Santa Monica, California, in 2024

running. This is a tough one, though. High levels of mistrust and trauma meant that both Jay and Brie refused counseling, even when it was offered for free.

- Use incentives. Anthony set them up in the apartment with everything they needed, including a TV, internet, and phones. Instead, providing basics but allowing a person to participate in earning extras helps emotionally stunted people begin to develop delayed gratification, executive function, and self-esteem.

In the end, Anthony is even less sanguine about policy solutions than he was before. Getting the policies right simply does not provide the kind of emotional and spiritual support that Jay and Brie needed. Instead of Universal Basic Income, Anthony suggests Universal Basic Community. With over 300,000 churches in this country, one or two individuals or couples could be adopted by the whole community, all of whom are needed to undo the damage of abusive backgrounds and years on the streets. Sometimes people need to be moved to a whole new city to get away from nefarious influences, and denominations and church commitment could help with this, too. It's simply too much for one person to address, but it's not too much for a surrogate family, especially one with enough savvy to know when to include professionals and how to draw boundaries with an emotional middle schooler in the body of a full-grown man or woman. That's not an insult. It's just a fact of human psychology.

Anthony's psychological analysis is helpful here. Having received no real care from their parents, folks like Jay and Brie never have the sense that every child should have—that they deserve to be cared for. Sadly, the only institution in the offing for the Jays and Bries of the world is the state, whose bureaucratic systems they navigate well. But the state cannot help Jay and Brie. The state cannot love them, cannot walk through their trauma with them, cannot drive them to the recovery meeting or coach them through conflict at work. Only people can do that. And what is the church supposed to be in this world, except universal basic people? Universal basic community. RL

**The names have been changed to protect their identities, and dignity.*

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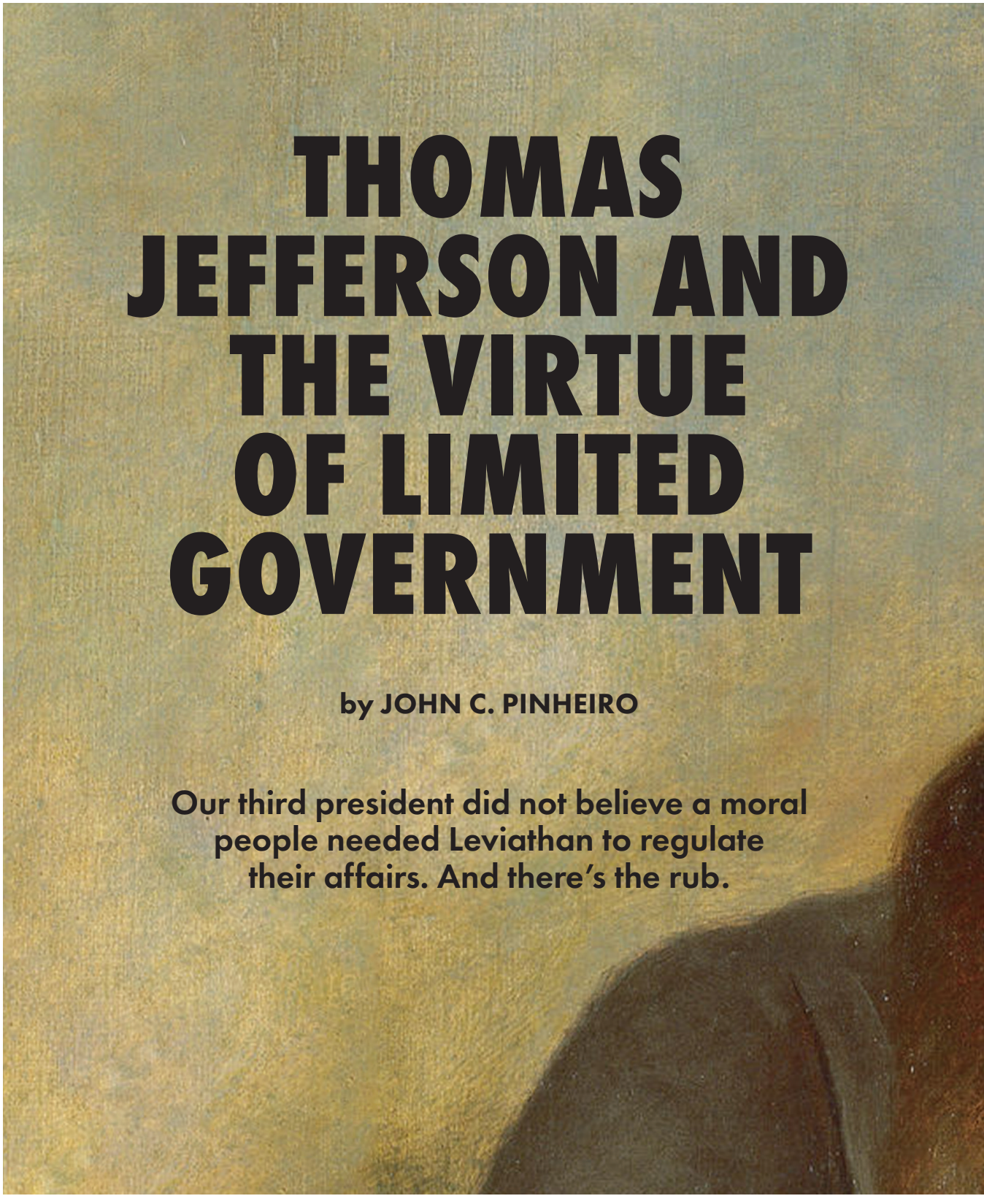
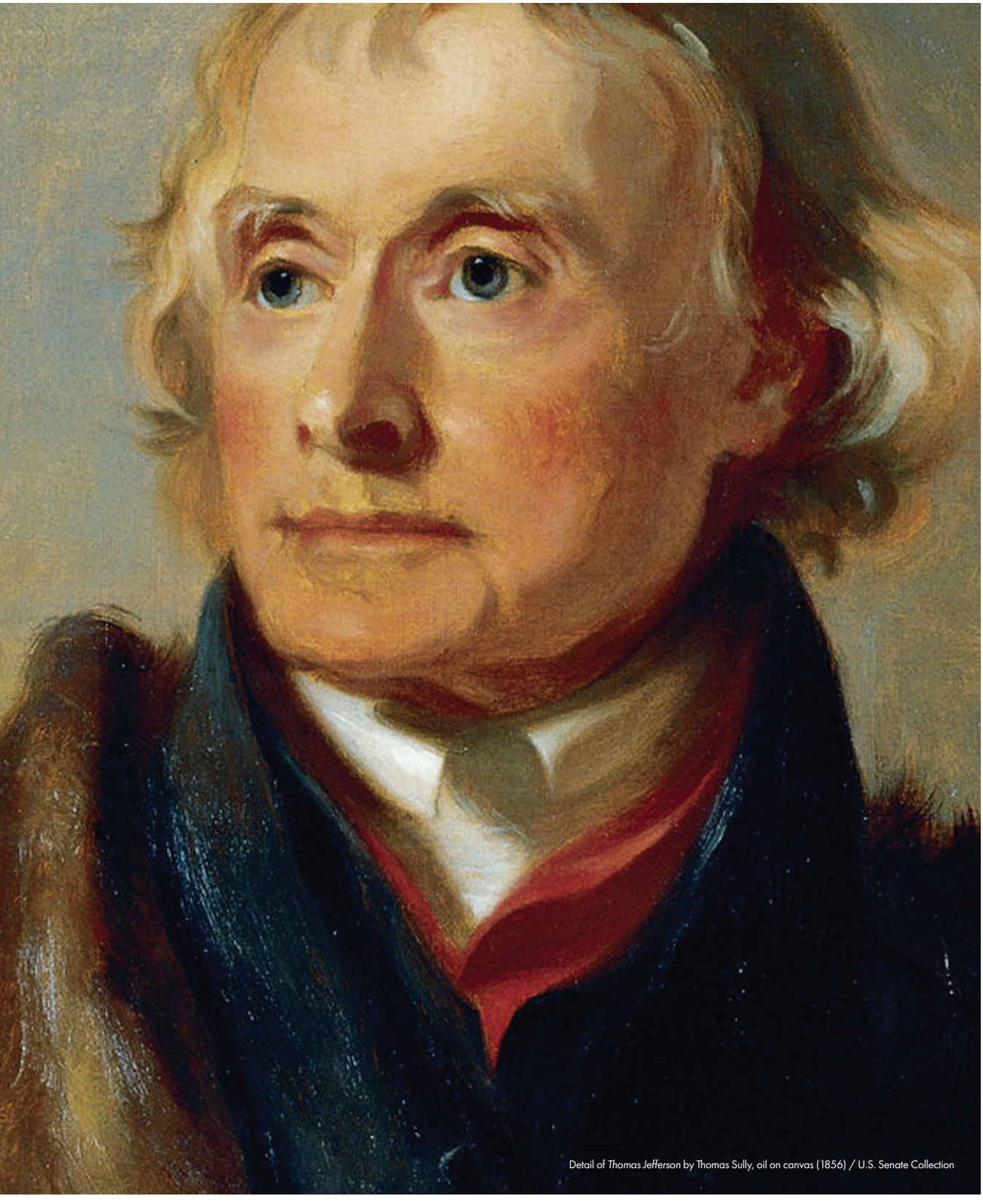


THOMAS JEFFERSON AND THE VIRTUE OF LIMITED GOVERNMENT

by JOHN C. PINHEIRO

Our third president did not believe a moral people needed Leviathan to regulate their affairs. And there's the rub.



Detail of *Thomas Jefferson* by Thomas Sully, oil on canvas (1856) / U.S. Senate Collection

WE OFTEN HEAR THAT Thomas Jefferson got his anthropology wrong, a fact best seen in his dismissal of original sin's effects and his apparent trust in "the people." But is this really a full and accurate portrayal of Jefferson's understanding of the human person? What I suggest we do is consider what he got right. In particular, a close examination of Jefferson's thought reveals that what is now known as the principle of subsidiarity was deeply embedded in his anthropology of man. For Jefferson, man was a free but social and moral creature, and this had important implications for how he viewed the role of the State in human affairs.

Jefferson believed that every human person "was endowed with a sense of right and wrong" and that this moral sense was "as much a part of man as his leg or arm." This interior moral sense could not be measured by scientific means because it was instinctual. Nor was it to be confused with reason. Still, it was obvious to Jefferson that "nature hath implanted in our breasts a love of others." This moral sense could be strengthened or weakened. While its strengthening took centuries, its weakening could occur rapidly.

In most places, the morality and virtue needed for self-government was lacking. This left Jefferson worried over the continued aptitude among Americans for republican government. As he warned in 1781 in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, "Human nature is the same on every side of the Atlantic." Those writing constitutions in the 1770s for the newly independent States, he counseled, should therefore learn from ancient and European history about the corruptibility of virtuous people with good intentions. "Nor should our assembly be deluded by the integrity of their own purposes, and conclude that these unlimited powers will never be abused, because they themselves are not disposed to abuse them." As James Madison warned a few years later in *Federalist* No. 10, "Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm." Thus, Americans "should look forward to a time, and that not a distant one, when corruption in this, as in the country from which we derive our origin, will have seized the heads of government, and be spread by them through the body of the people; when they will purchase the voices of the people, and make them pay the price."

Notice that, for Jefferson, the rulers usually corrupt the people, not the other way around. There is a similarity here to Lord Acton's famous dictum that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Jefferson believed that the human person was born neither good nor stained by original sin. Man's moral sense could, however, be steered toward the good through long practice and education. Jefferson believed that environment—education, upbringing, culture—was the prime determinant in human behavior.

Jefferson trusted most Americans to use their "moral sense" in their decision-making. He was

Portrait of Jefferson by Mather Brown (1786)

confident that there were matters of right and wrong that all people could know regardless of their education. "State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor," wrote Jefferson, and "the former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules." While all ought to submit their moral choices "to the guidance of reason," most men would make the right choice due to their innate moral sense. William F. Buckley Jr. expressed a similar sentiment when he said that he "would rather be governed by the first 2,000 people in the telephone directory than by the Harvard University faculty."

Jefferson recognized that the human person also possesses a social nature. He put it clearly: "Man was destined for society." Jefferson may have thought Aristotle outdated, but he nevertheless agreed that man is a political creature with an end to which he is ordered by his nature. Man could only flourish and achieve this end in society. For Jefferson, society meant both natural society, such as the family, and political society. Unlike John Locke, Jefferson did not think that a preexistent natural society had begotten its own replacement in political society. Rather, like Thomas Paine and heavily influenced by Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Lord Kames, Jefferson thought both had always been present and intertwined. Each was necessary for human flourishing.

Where Jefferson parted ways with Paine is that the Virginian saw government not as a necessary evil but as an irreplaceable institution ordered to the good of human happiness. Government could only achieve its proper end, however, if it was kept limited. In 1801, in his first inaugural address as president, Jefferson recommended "a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement." Along with not taking "from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned," staying within the bounds of this small sphere of action was "the sum of good government." In our contemporary parlance, this would simply be "low taxes and small government."

Having thus laid out just what the limits on "limited government" ought to be, Jefferson went on to declare limited government "necessary to close the circle of our felicities." In other words, the social nature and corruptibility of the human person *require* government. Limited government is not only *not* a necessary evil for Jefferson; it is a crucial guarantor of justice and enabler of human happiness.

What we now call the principle of subsidiarity was deeply embedded in Jefferson's anthropology of man as a free but social and moral creature. Subsidiarity is most identified as one of the four core principles of Catholic Social Teaching. It holds that entities (governments, authorities, etc.) of a higher order should not do for those of a lower order what they can do for themselves. Jefferson expressed this principle as rooted in God's will that man be free:

> I do believe that if the Almighty has not decreed that Man shall never be free, (and it is blasphemy to believe it) that the secret will be found to be in the making himself the depository of the powers respecting himself, so far as he is competent to them, and delegating only what is beyond his competence by a synthetical process, to higher & higher orders of functionaries, so as to trust fewer and fewer powers, in proportion as the trustees become more and more oligarchical.

Over 115 years later, Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* provided the definitive development of this principle, writing, "It is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do."

Over the course of the 20th century, Catholic teaching elaborated upon the principle of subsidiarity. *Gaudium et Spes*, one of the constitutions produced by the Second Vatican Council in 1965, warns that "citizens both as individuals and in association should be on guard against granting government too much authority and inappropriately seeking from it excessive conveniences and advantages, with a consequent weakening of the sense of responsibility on the part of individuals, families, and social groups."

"GOVERNMENT CAN REMAIN LIMITED ONLY WHEN CITIZENS ARE VIRTUOUS: PRUDENT, TEMPERATE, JUST, AND COURAGEOUS."

More relevant to understanding Jefferson is Pope John Paul II's connection of the subsidiary role of government to mankind's social nature: "The social nature of man is not completely fulfilled in the State, but is realized in various intermediary groups, beginning with the family and including economic, social, political and cultural groups which stem from human nature itself and have their own autonomy, always with a view to the common good."

For Catholics as well as for Jefferson, then, subsidiarity's stress on the importance of civil society and limited government is not just about efficiency and the necessity of local knowledge. Rather, it

Russell Kirk at his typewriter (c. 1950s)

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John Adams by John Singleton Copley (1783)

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springs from man's social nature and the rights and duties that come with human freedom. Our liberty transcends the State because, in Jefferson's words, "freedom is the gift of nature." Subsidiary government presupposes a people who not only can but also *want* to do things for themselves. Individual persons have not only the right but the duty to act and deliberate with the common good in mind and to behave ethically in their commercial exchanges with one another.

Government can remain limited only when citizens are virtuous: prudent, temperate, just, and courageous. Vice-ridden people with interior moral disorder invite government from above because they are unable to govern themselves. Virtuous men and women, on the other hand, can act wisely and govern others because they themselves are interiorly ordered in accord with their nature. Jefferson knew this, and he would not have dissented from Russell Kirk's argument that "if you want to have order in the commonwealth, you first have to have order in the soul." When it comes to good republican government, virtue is the necessary condition.

Kirk might have agreed with this sentiment, but he promoted John Adams rather than Jefferson as the "real conservative" among the American Founders. To be fair, Kirk's purpose was to discount the "financier" and "party-manager," Alexander Hamilton, at a time when Kirk thought Americans had been fooled into identifying Hamiltonianism with conservatism.

In Adams, however, Kirk sees a "coalescing of liberal ideas with prescriptive wisdom to which Burke's disciples gave the name conservatism." Adams argued "that freedom can be achieved and retained only by sober men who take humanity as it is, not as humanity should be." This "broader vision" allowed him to fight successfully to keep "the American government one of laws, not of men."

For Kirk, Jefferson was too sophistic, too mechanical, and too given to radical ideas. Kirk does not dwell on Jefferson's views regarding small government, however. He labels Jefferson the "chief representative" of a "levelling agrarian republicanism."

The English philosopher Roger Scruton, on the other hand, argues that Jefferson is the model American conservative precisely because of his devotion to agrarian localism and, along with it, limited government. Jefferson, says Scruton, "believed that the states of the Union should retain the powers necessary for local government and that the Federal powers of the Union should be the minimum required for its maintenance as a sovereign entity."

In other words, the key importance of Jefferson for Scruton was that he joined his limited-government views to an anthropology of man as a social creature. Liberty could exist only in society. It is Jefferson's recognition of the value of community, social life, and customs for which conservatives ought to admire Jefferson, for these are the foundation of the cultures of the several states. In the balancing act of limited government, we should not think only of states vs. the U.S. government. Rather, Jefferson's views on limited government started from the ground up, with homesteads, villages, and private estates.

Jefferson believed the human person was created free with rights and duties. Because freedom transcends the State, the State therefore must be limited and kept in a subsidiary role. He also recognized that human nature and history counsel us to promote limited government as the chief safeguard of our liberty and to protect us against inefficiency, tyranny, and corruption. Jefferson's experience in politics taught him that the temptations that come with power usually corrupt those who govern. Preserving liberty has proved as difficult as Jefferson thought it would be, given the centripetal force exerted by all government but especially by distant, centralized government. As he told a correspondent in 1787, "The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield, and government to gain ground." Constant vigilance by the virtuous was required. RL

"OUR LIBERTY TRANSCENDS THE STATE BECAUSE, IN JEFFERSON'S WORDS, 'FREEDOM IS THE GIFT OF NATURE.'"

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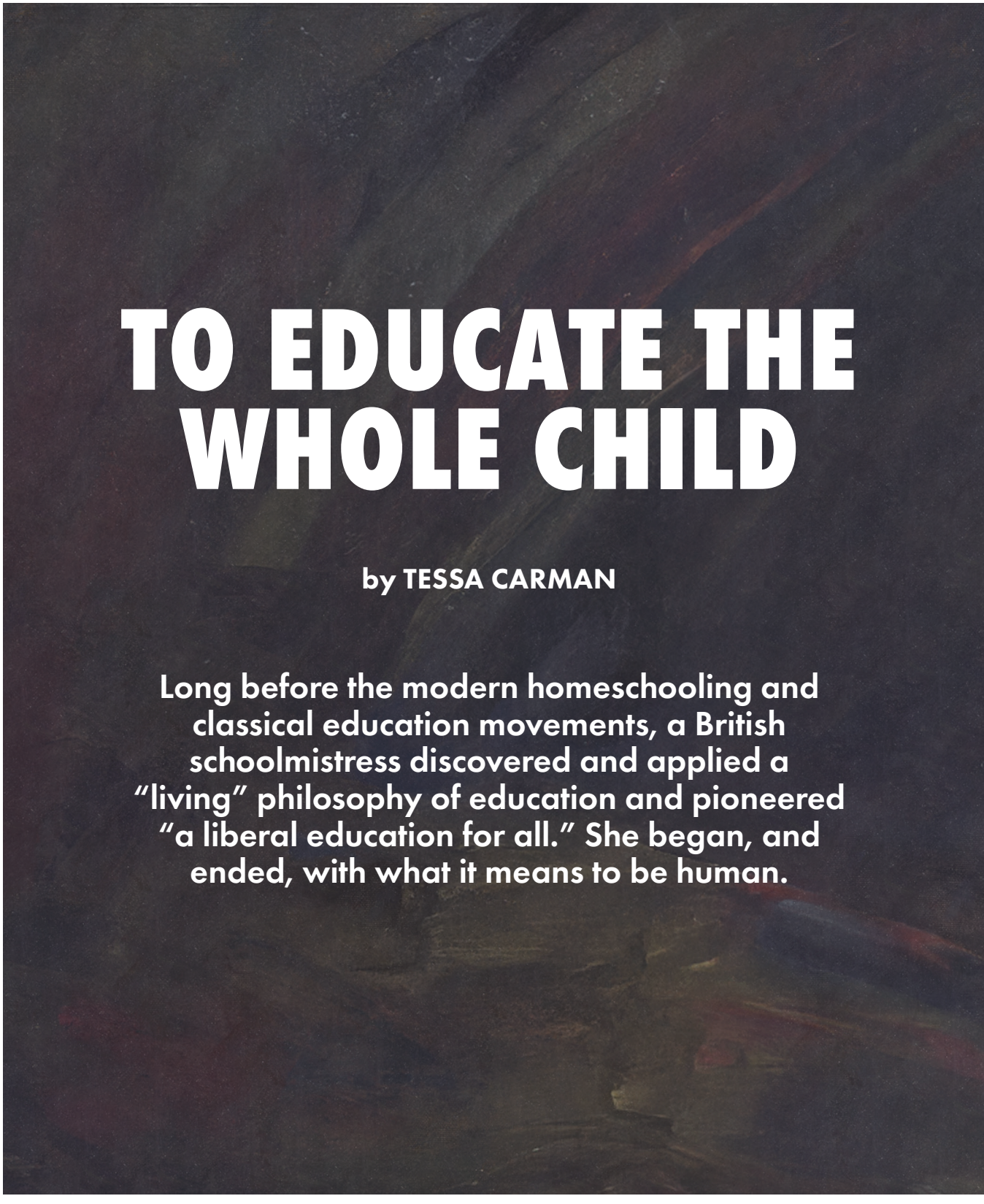


TO EDUCATE THE WHOLE CHILD

by TESSA CARMAN

Long before the modern homeschooling and classical education movements, a British schoolmistress discovered and applied a "living" philosophy of education and pioneered "a liberal education for all." She began, and ended, with what it means to be human.

Portrait of Charlotte Mason by Frederic Yates (1902) / Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

"Like religion, education is nothing or it is everything—a consuming fire in the bones."

—Charlotte Mason

Charlotte Mason (1842–1923)

DURING WORLD WAR TWO, as the Allies endeavored to win the war against the Axis Powers, Christian humanists were looking to the future: If U.S. guns helped turn the tide in the war, how then would the peace be won? How could the Allied nations avoid becoming like their enemies? As French writer and mystic Simone Weil put it during the Nazi occupation of France, "If we are only saved by American money and machines, we shall fall back, one way or another, into a new servitude like the one which we now suffer."

In *The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis*, Alan Jacobs tells the story of five writers—C.S. Lewis, W.H. Auden, T.S. Eliot, Jacques Maritain, and Simone Weil—who concerned themselves with what kind of Christian formation the postwar world would need. They wanted "to reshape the educational system of the Allied societies in a way that would both respect and form genuine persons." Jacobs tells the story of how their task failed; the foundation had already been laid for the rise of technocracy, and modernization quickly squelched any vision of nationwide educational programs based on a Christian understanding of the world.

Simone Weil, for example, endeavored to articulate a vision for France if it was ever freed from German occupation. She wrote *The Need for Roots* in 1943 while working for French headquarters in London, dying before she could finish the work or see the end of the war. In this work, she pushed back against the realpolitik that treated human beings like things rather than persons. The combined effects of what she termed *la force*—that which "turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing"—and affliction, or *malheur*, the uprooting of the soul, provided a dual challenge for her educational vision. Here she paralleled C.S. Lewis's critique of the modern world in his *Abolition of Man*: "We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful," he famously wrote. That is, our modern world still expects virtue from men while removing the means of *formation* toward virtue.

"To show what is beneficial, what is obligatory, what is good—that is the task of education," wrote Weil. But education must also cultivate the habit of

pursuing the good. Jacobs notes that Weil provided a "diagnosis without a prescription—or, to be more precise, a prescription without the delivery system."

Lewis's and Weil's critiques are even more important today than when they were first written. But the project theorized by all five of those thinkers, especially that of Simone Weil, had already been developed by a British schoolmistress who had died in 1923 and counted G.K. and Frances Chesterton as friends.

In 1901 *The Parents' Review*, the journal of the Parents' National Education Union (PNEU), included a notice that Frances Blogg had resigned her position as PNEU secretary. That June she would become the bride of Gilbert Keith Chesterton. Frances and her husband would continue to be comrades-in-arms with the PNEU and its founder, Charlotte Mason, defending the integrity of the human person against a brave new world in thrall to the intellectual fashions of the day, whether they be eugenics, scientific materialism, or totalitarianism.

Charlotte Mason was born in 1842 in Wales to a Catholic mother and a twice-widowed Irish Quaker father. Early in her life she undertook the vocation of a teacher and began a lifelong study of the human person, which she articulated in six volumes of educational philosophy.

When Mason first began teaching, there was not yet compulsory public education (the Elementary Education Act in England and Wales would come in 1870). Children then were educated variously, through parents, governesses, Sunday schools, boarding schools, or a mixture of these—or they had no education to speak of.

Over the course of her life, Mason would found many schools for children and teachers and oversee

Simone Weil in Marseilles

the PNEU—an association of parents and others who carried out her philosophy in their homes and communities. Mason's principles eventually spread to elementary and secondary schools, which were termed "PNEU Schools." She herself ran the House of Education, a school for teachers. The PNEU ran natural history clubs and a three-year mothers' education course (the reading list included Plato, John Ruskin, and Coleridge, as well as Bible commentaries, nature lore, and Mason's own work). It also played host to many talks followed by discussions, often in members' homes. (Sometimes Chesterton himself would lecture at PNEU meetings.)

At the House of Education in Ambleside, England, Mason trained young women to be teachers but also to learn what it meant to be a person themselves. Thus a new student at Ambleside might find herself learning to observe nature more keenly, to take delight in naming the birds that awakened her with their song in the morning, and to brush-paint what she observed. She might find herself studying from perhaps unusual textbooks—not only foundational texts like the Bible and the works of Plato but also newer works like Lord Baden-Powell's *Aids to Scouting*. (Baden-Powell would later honor Mason as a crucial encouragement for beginning the worldwide scouting movement for boys and girls.) A student at Ambleside would also learn to narrate: to make her own what she read and saw and experienced in books, art, music, handicrafts, and nature.

Yet much of Mason's attainments were lost with the modernization of education and societal shifts after the Second World War. In the 1980s, however, her six volumes on education were rediscovered and have since inspired homeschoolers and private schools around the world—including an association of schools named after her own Ambleside, England.

"MASON TRAINED YOUNG WOMEN TO BE TEACHERS BUT ALSO TO LEARN WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A PERSON THEMSELVES."

Indeed, Mason is claimed as a forerunner of both modern homeschooling and the classical education movement. But her philosophy of learning-as-delight continues to offer deeper riches for our time to uncover. In this essay I will focus on three.

In contrast to armchair philosophies and spreadsheet fads, Mason offers (1) a practical, tested philosophy of education based upon decades of experience with children of different classes, abilities, and cultures; (2) an articulation of personhood, rooted in the classical Judeo-Christian tradition, that avoids both reductionism and sentimentality; and (3) a challenge to our society as to how we may better conceive of and live out the complexities of communal and political life—that is, our life together.

Of the 20 principles that sum up her educational philosophy, two are fundamental: "Children are born persons" (her very first principle) and "Education is the science of relations" (which undergirds all the remaining principles).

It is important to note that Charlotte Mason never called her philosophy by her own name. Indeed, she emphasized time and again that she did not create the principles she outlined but rather discovered them. "I have not made this body of educational thought any more than Columbus made America," she wrote in a 1904 letter:

> But I think it has been given me to see that education has a triune basis, to recognize that education is the science of relations, to perceive certain working theories of the conduct of the will and of the reason, to exact due reverence for the personality of a child (I mean the reverence of educational practice, not of sentiment), and some few other matters which go to make up a living, pulsing body of educational thought.

Beginning with the idea that children are created in the image of God, she endeavored to articulate a practical philosophy that truly lived out the idea that every human being is a *person* meant to flourish in this life.

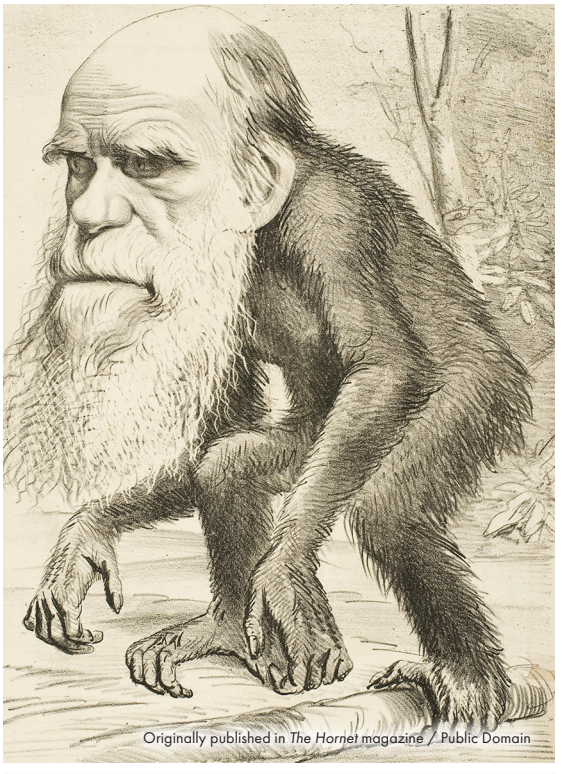
Daria Hurst / iStock

> **AN ESSENTIAL PART OF PERSONHOOD IS TO BE ENDOWED WITH A GLORIOUS *MIND*—THE LIVING, GENERATING SPIRIT OR SOUL OF A PERSON.**

The very idea of the human person and of the uniqueness of human nature were contested ideas at the turn of the 20th century, as they are today. In Mason's own lifetime, Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* was published (1848); Darwin's *Descent of Man* arrived (1871); Lenin led the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II to pursue a revolutionary ideology (1917); and Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* was published in its original German (1899). In addition, the historical-critical method of interpreting Scripture was presenting challenges to the faith of ordinary churchgoers, and the Second Industrial Revolution was remaking ordinary life, introducing widespread electrification, telegraph-quick communication, the continued growth of factory systems, and the motorcar. "Progress" in technology accompanied regress in a coherent appreciation of the human being, in addition to increased uncertainty as to what it meant to be human.

Amid this anthropological, theological, and political upheaval, this single woman began to articulate a philosophy of education for all children—one rooted in the understanding that what it means to be a person was fundamental to any educational endeavor.

An essential part of personhood, Mason believed, is to be endowed with a glorious *mind*—which for her meant not mere intellect but something rooted in what the medievals called *intellectus*, a deep and intimate knowing. *Mind* for Mason is the living, generating spirit or soul of a person. And just as the body needs good food,



Caricature of Charles Darwin as an ape (1871)

Karl Marx as Moses on a late 19th-century French postcard

so the mind must be fed on living ideas. She defined an idea—drawing on "the older philosophers, from Plato to Bacon, from Bacon to Coleridge"—as a "live thing of the mind." The child, then, should feast upon a generous variety of ideas. She insisted, moreover, that every person—child and parent, miner and merchant—was heir to the best that has been thought and said. Hence her rallying cry, "A liberal education for all," irrespective of class, ability, or background.

She admonished her own age for "despising the children"—that is, treating children (and hence, the persons they would grow up to be) as less hungry for knowledge, beauty, and truth than they really are. Children are neither mere sacs for information, machines to be programmed, nor blank slates to be written (and rewritten) upon according to our wills, she argued. In her volume *School Education*, Mason cites a "wise sentence of Coleridge's" that articulates how Plato himself educated:

> He desired not to assist in storing the passive mind with the various sorts of knowledge most in request, as if the human soul were a mere repository or banqueting room, but to place it in such relations of circumstance as should gradually excite its vegetating and germinating powers to produce new fruits of thought, new conceptions and imaginations and ideas.

These words, she writes, "should be always present to the minds of persons engaged in the training of children."

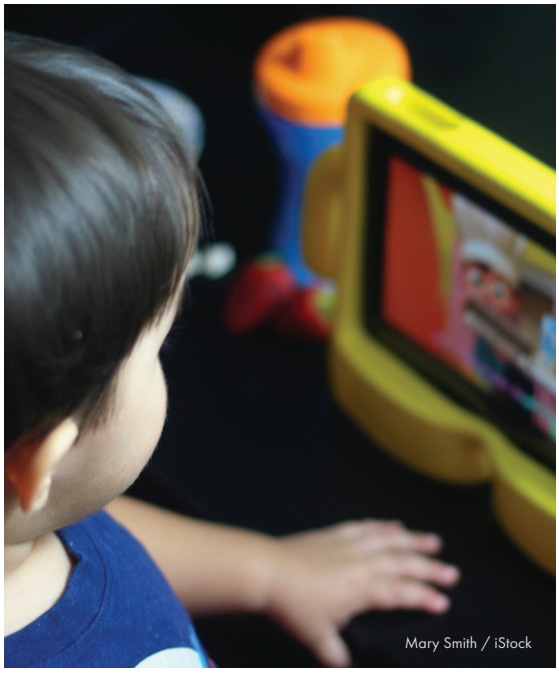
The mind of a human person is unlike anything else in creation—it is, in Karen Glass's phrase, a "spiritual organism." Too often Mason saw children's minds underfed, their spirits shriveled through want of great ideas—and too many dry or condescending textbooks—to feed on. Indeed, her educational method was meant precisely to prevent the soul-deserts C.S. Lewis would write of in his *Abolition of Man*.

And if children are meant to feast intellectually, it is crucial to understand that every child has a *natural* desire for knowledge. An easy demonstration is the multitudinous questions children ask as soon as they're able to put together sentences. Even before language, however, a child is constantly learning, constantly endeavoring to discover more about the world around him. It is this natural curiosity that is the basis for beginning the work of education.

This leads us to a crucial point for Mason: *We do not need to teach children how to learn, just as we do not teach them how to digest*. A full realization of this truth revolutionizes what it means to educate. From the very beginning, children should be fed *good food*—indeed, the best that can be had, physically and intellectually/spiritually (for we cannot separate the intellectual and spiritual when it comes to living ideas). From the beginning of life, a child is searching for truth, is delighted by beauty, and is moved by goodness, and is continually forming relationships with the world around him. This process only grows more intricate as the child grows.

We often mistakenly assume that children are naturally interested in the equivalent of baby food rather than of hearty meals. For example, ordinary children of eight or nine, Mason believed and witnessed, could appreciate Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* as well as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. (My own very ordinary seven- and nine-year-olds appreciate Shakespeare's plays, Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*, and Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*.) What children need, she declares, "is to be brought into touch with living thought of the best, and their intellectual life feeds upon it with little meddling on our part." Just as with food, if a child is given good fare, he responds to it and becomes more and more delighted

Samuel Taylor Coleridge by Peter Vandyke (1795)


Mary Smith / iStock

by it. So, too, a diet of junk food ideas will make a child less capable of appreciating living ideas.

But too often we "despise the children," giving them, in our modern context, too much screen time to make them be quiet (and more controllable), or we crush their natural desire for knowledge by overplaying other natural desires, such as for praise and gain. And it's understandable why we resort to marks, grades, and numbers to provide both motivation and evaluation—they are easy, controllable. "Nothing is so clear and so simple as a row of figures," Mason wryly notes.

It's precisely this desire to control children rather than do the harder work of guiding and instructing each soul into its full potential that we must resist. Rather, we must allow for the cultivation of an immense web of intimate relationships with other persons and living ideas. A child, Mason writes, "has natural relations with a vast number of things and thoughts: so we train him upon physical exercises, nature lore, handicrafts, science and art, and upon many living books." The work of education is to cultivate these relations on every level of the person: body, mind, soul.

Included in this work is the one whom Mason viewed as the first and ultimate educator: the Holy Spirit. This is her "Great Recognition," that parents and teachers educate in cooperation with God. Stratford Caldecott got it right in his *Beauty in the Word* when he observed Mason's "refusal to strip grace away from nature" and her understanding that "children possess a spiritual life and that this is the most important dimension of their being—the source of their freedom and happiness."

Plato famously conceived the ideal city in *The Republic*, and it is commonly understood that what he says of the properly ordered city goes also for the human soul.

Charlotte Mason also treated the human soul as a polis—a kingdom, in her case. Her fourth volume, *Ourselves, Our Souls and Bodies*, was meant to be read by students themselves, starting at age 12. In it she describes the government of the Kingdom of Mansoul. Like Plato, she delineates the cardinal virtues and what obstacles endangered the unity of the soul. And like Plato, she taught her students to be philosophers—and for them to teach budding philosophers in their turn. To love wisdom is not merely to seek out head-knowledge but truly to live *in* that wisdom.

But to understand the soul as a kingdom, with its inherent hierarchy, we must also understand authority—a fraught topic in this age if ever there was one.

Chesterton wrote that he believed Mason's "remarks on authority" to be "the most original and important part of her work." And indeed, with the lines "The family government [is] an absolute monarchy" in the beginning of her second volume, *Parents and Children*, Mason strikes hard against cherished notions of modernity. "No parent," she continues, "escapes the call to rule."

But how to get beyond the apparent paradox that authority and obedience are, as Mason explains, "natural, necessary, and fundamental" on the one hand, while the personality, or personhood, of each individual child is to be respected? How is this to be understood, let alone lived out?

There is always a pendulum swing in societal movements (and perhaps more so nowadays, when we have more experts than ever and fewer knowledgeable elders to draw upon). In Charlotte Mason's day, the flow was toward a theory of child-rearing that reacted against the previous generation's strict "seen but not heard" policy, against a too-stringent bearing of authority. So parents wanted to be gentler, more soft-spoken, more tolerant. (Sound familiar?)

In this context, Mason examined the previous authoritarian regime of parenting with its "arbitrary rule," noting both its good points—it could and did turn out "steadfast, capable, able, self-governed,

gentle-mannered men and women"—and its flaws, which derived from a wrong idea of authority.

Mason distinguished between authority and tyranny, obedience and servility. What makes rule tyrannous or obedience servile depends upon a false idea of authority or an abuse of that authority (which may add up to the same thing). Whereas in an earlier time, "We believed that authority was rested in persons," it made sense for rule to be exercised arbitrarily, and for obedience to be slavish. But God's rule is not arbitrary, and neither is proper human authority. First, human authority is always delegated authority, never ultimate. Only God possesses ultimate authority. Second, proper authority is "vested in the office and not in the person, [and] the moment it is treated as a personal attribute, it is forfeited." It is the respect due the office that we give the person invested with that office, rather than because of any virtue of the person himself; on the other side, when we take up an office, our duty is to fulfill that office properly: Every person in authority is also under authority, and hence "holds and fulfils a trust."

To assert oneself, and to govern autocratically and arbitrarily, is to misuse that trust. "The despot rules by terror," Mason writes. "He punishes right and left to uphold his unauthorized sway." The person "vested with authority, on the contrary, requires no rigours of the law to bolster him up, because Authority is behind him; and before him, the corresponding principle of Docility."

The upshot is that we *will* "encroach upon" the personality of a child—"whether by fear or love, suggestion or influence, or undue play upon any one natural desire"—if we do not get these fundamental principles of authority and obedience right, because *we are built for authority and obedience*. And every authority is answerable to a higher one—and on up to the ultimate Author of all. We must take on the task of ruling well in whatever office we've been given—and this includes our rule of the kingdom of our own souls.

> "WHAT MAKES RULE TYRANNOUS OR OBEDIENCE SERVILE DEPENDS UPON A FALSE IDEA OF AUTHORITY OR AN ABUSE OF THAT AUTHORITY."

> The mystery of a person is indeed divine, and the extraordinary fascination of history lies in the fact that this divine mystery continually surprises us in unexpected places. Like Jacob we cry, before the sympathy of the savage, the courtesy of the boor: "Behold, God is in this place and I knew it not." We attempt to define a person, the most commonplace person we know, but he will not submit to bounds; some unexpected beauty of nature breaks out; we find he is not what we thought, and begin to suspect that every person exceeds our power of measurement. (Charlotte Mason, "Concerning Children as 'Persons': Liberty versus Various Forms of Tyranny," *The Parents' Review*, 1911)

Here is where Charlotte Mason's work is perhaps most pertinent to our day: Every aspect of her philosophy is based upon the irreducible mystery of personhood, and hence is inherently resistant to the idea that humans can, and ought to, be put into a box. At its worst, our education system aims effectively to churn out servile, homeless robots. And even in classical Christian schools and homeschooling cooperatives, we can easily reduce the work of education to producing men and women who can diagram a Latin sentence and score high on tests but who do not love beautiful things and cannot distinguish between tools that ennoble and tools that demean.

But most importantly, Mason outlined *how to live out such a philosophy and then lived it out*. She didn't merely theorize or wander peripatetically with her devotees but tested her theories by the Great Tradition and by decades of practice. As one of her students and colleagues, Miss E.A. Parish, noted when she visited a school of 350 in a poor mining district in Yorkshire that had recently undertaken to experiment with Mason's applied philosophy:

> In the schoolroom I found the most utter peace that I have ever found in my life. It was the

Frances Blogg Chesterton by Alfred Priest (1906)

> realization of the hopes we have been cherishing of supplying the children of the less privileged classes with mental food which they can digest. I realized that the mind is the same thing in every human being, and that the mind of a little child which is born to the most ignorant man is open to the great things of the spirit.

Schools and homes both in Great Britain and overseas took on their own experiments, and as another teacher wrote: "Let us ask ourselves, is it a miracle which has been performed in this little school and in others?—I think it is a miracle" (recounted in Essex Cholmondeley's *The Story of Charlotte Mason*).

Mason was no armchair educator but was always refining in the trenches. And her principles changed not only the children who went through her schools and the teachers and governesses she trained, but also the families and communities of which they were a part. Indeed, they are practices that work for persons of every age *in* every age.

And if the soul is a polity, then a healthy polity will in turn reflect the well-ordered soul.

Here is our challenge, then: If everyone in our society is born a person; if we are meant for a complex web of relationships with other persons, ideas, places, stories; if authority and obedience (properly understood) are natural principles in human life; and if human personalities ought not be violated by manipulation or undue influence, how might we envision political life—that is, how might we better live together? How might we change how we treat our employers and employees, our family and neighbors and descendants? What if we truly lived as if the riches of our inheritance, from birdsong to Bach, were for everyone, at every stage of life?

Indeed, how might we live if we desired the following life for ourselves and our neighbors?

> Life should be all living, and not merely a tedious passing of time; not all doing or all feeling or all thinking—the strain would be too great—but, all living; that is to say, we should be in touch wherever we go, whatever we hear, whatever we see, with some manner of vital interest.…The question is not—how much does the youth know? when he has finished his education—but how much does he care? and about how many orders of things does he care? (*School Education*)

Finally, perhaps the greatest witness to Charlotte Mason's philosophy is Mason herself. The testimonies of her students and friends attest to how she lived out the idea that everyone is born a person and that everyone deserves a feast of living ideas.

A young Frances Blogg Chesterton was impressed with Charlotte Mason upon their first meeting, on "a certain Sunday in Advent" at Ambleside. Frances had just been placed as secretary of PNEU when she attended an afternoon talk by Mason that stayed with Frances for decades afterward. Mason's ideas did not inspire one just for the moment, but took hold in one's life and bore fruit—just as living ideas ought. Central to Mason's work in "true education," Frances noted, was the fundamental principle of the "intense value of every human soul," which led Frances to believe that "nothing of God's gifts given direct by God Himself, or through the instrument of his creatures, could be too good for it."

In closing, I cannot think of a better way to sum up Mason and her work than with this short anecdote. One young teacher came to Ambleside to be interviewed by Mason. When asked why she had come, the young woman answered, "I have come to learn to teach." She never forgot Mason's gentle correction: "My dear, you have come here to learn to live." RL

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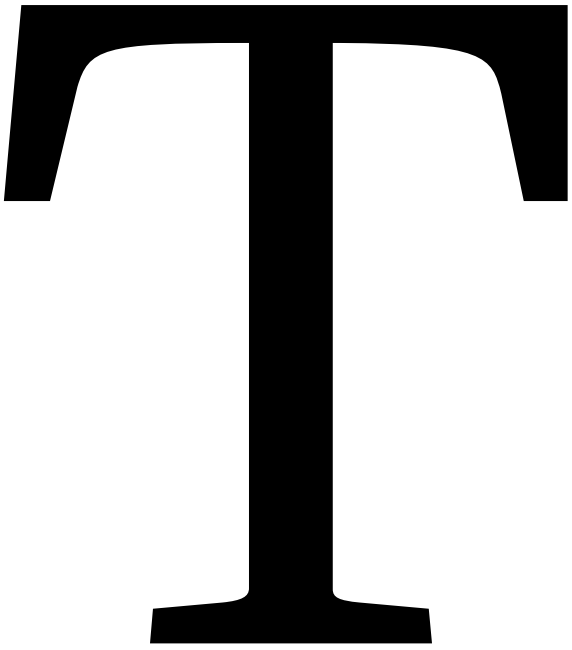
A POPE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by DAN HUGGER

Pope Leo XIV took the name of a 19th-century predecessor much more sensitive to the nuances of the social sciences of his own day than Pope Francis was to those of our own. This is cause for optimism.



THE ELECTION OF Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, who took the name Leo XIV, on May 8, 2025, was greeted the world over with nearly universal acclaim. Pope Leo XIV, born on Chicago's South Side, is the Church's first American pope and has since greeted delighted crowds by wearing a Chicago White Sox cap to an audience and signed baseballs for the faithful. It is not unusual for a pope to be popular, as he is, according to the Church's own understanding, "the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful" (*Lumen Gentium* §23).

Pope Leo XIV's immediate predecessor, Pope Francis, was also popular. A few months before his passing on April 21, 2025, the Pew Research Center found that 78% of American Catholics expressed a positive view of Pope Francis; such high favorability ratings are the envy of temporal authorities. Yet Pope Francis had many critics, as did his predecessors—and as will his successor Pope Leo XIV. Toward the end of his earthly life, Pope Francis suffered from ill health and endured several surgeries and hospitalizations. In the months after an intestinal surgery in 2021, Pope Francis visited with some Slovakian Jesuits. One priest asked how he was feeling, and Pope Francis replied, "Still alive, even though some wanted me dead."

How to reconcile these contraries? The papacy has been seen throughout its nearly two millennia history as not only a visible principle of unity by some but also a visible principle of tyranny by others, either politically, spiritually, or intellectually.

In the late 19th century, as just one example, the pope's temporal authority over the Papal States in what is now central Italy caused a crisis for many Catholics who felt as Lord Acton describes:

> The union of the temporal and of the spiritual authority in the same hand is a bond of union between the enemies of each. That combination of political and religious animosity—of the hatred which is inspired by a legitimate sovereign with the hatred which is felt for the head of the Catholic Church—is the special character of the present movement. As the motives of attack are twofold, so also are the grounds of the defence. The movement cannot be successfully met where its real character is not understood. A religious interest is at stake, but also a political principle. It is the peculiar nature of the crisis that many Catholics are revolutionary, whilst the revolution itself is directed against Catholicism. The opposition offered to the Church on religious grounds has given place to a more vigorous opposition on political grounds. The religious element in a movement originally political is a very significant circumstance, and it is a new one.

The Roman question was settled when the temporal power of Pope Pius IX was removed by force of arms and the Papal States dissolved in 1870. The temporal power of the pope was restored, however, by the 1929 Lateran Treaty, which established Vatican City—a scant 0.17 of a square mile. Only the oddest of oddballs and conspiracy theorists view the pope

Pope Leo XIV at his inauguration

Pope Leo XIV wears a Chicago White Sox hat at the Vatican

today as a *political* tyrant. Popes whose reigns began after the fall of the Papal States, from Leo XIII to Leo XIV, have enjoyed greater esteem as spiritual leaders consequently, and have since sought to influence world affairs by moral force and social teaching rather than force of arms.

While the view of the pope as a political tyrant has been consigned by history to the domain of cranks, the image of the pope as spiritual tyrant lives on both outside and inside the Church. The papacy is at the very heart of the enduring schisms between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox and Protestant churches. The section on the papacy in Martin Luther's *Smalcald Articles* is an extreme but not unique, and thus illustrative, example of just how heated these polemics were, and in some more sectarian churches still are: "The Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above and opposed himself against Christ because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God."

Thankfully there has been some progress made since the 16th century! Pope St. John XXIII sent invitations to Orthodox and Protestant churches to send observers to the Second Vatican Council. In 1965, Pope St. Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras withdrew the exchange of excommunications between earlier churchmen in the Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. During the papacy of Pope St. John Paul II, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation published the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, outlining "a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ."

Pope Francis continued and deepened the recent trend in several important ways. On April 11, 2015, he proclaimed St. Gregory of Narek a Doctor of the Church. Doctors of the Church are saints recognized for their immense learning and contributions to the Church's theology. Pope St. John Paul II, in his 1987 encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, praised St. Gregory as "one of the outstanding glories of Armenia," and Pope Francis hoped to bring more attention to the poet and theologian's contributions by making him a Doctor of the Church. St. Gregory of Narek is the first and currently only doctor who was never in

The Lutheran–Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Augsburg, Germany (1999)

communion with Rome during his lifetime, as he was a member of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Like other Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Armenian Apostolic Church recognizes only the first three ecumenical councils. In making St. Gregory of Narek a Doctor of the Church, Pope Francis cemented the understanding reached in the 1996 common declaration of Pope St. John Paul II and His Holiness Karekin I, then Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, that "because of the fundamental common faith in God and in Jesus Christ, the controversies and unhappy divisions which sometimes have followed upon the divergent ways in expressing it, as a result of the present declaration, should not continue to influence the life and witness of the Church today."

Pope Francis's commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation was similarly groundbreaking. This involved a series of events centered on prayer and dialogue. At an event with the moderator and a delegation from the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Pope Francis said:

> The past cannot be changed, yet today we at last see one another as God sees us. We are first and foremost his children, reborn in Christ through one baptism, and therefore brothers and sisters. For so long, we regarded one another from afar, all too humanly, harboring suspicion, dwelling on differences and errors, and with hearts intent on recrimination for past wrongs.

The Vatican Philatelic Office went so far as to release a postage stamp commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation featuring the Lutheran reformers Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon kneeling before Christ crucified. During an in-flight press conference, when asked about the planned commemoration, Pope Francis said:

> I think that the intentions of Martin Luther were not mistaken. He was a reformer. Perhaps some methods were not correct. But in that time…the Church was not exactly a model to imitate. There was corruption in the Church, there was worldliness, attachment to money, to power … and this he protested.… Today Lutherans and Catholics, Protestants, all of us agree on the doctrine of justification. On this point, which is very important, he did not err. He made a medicine for the Church.

Nearly 500 years after Martin Luther declared the pope to be "the very Antichrist," the pope declared Luther to have "made a medicine for the Church"!

Jointly issued by the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian

Unity, the report *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* places great stress on the fact that *what* is remembered of the past and *how* it is remembered can change. It points to how historical scholarship on the Reformation, by both Protestant and Catholic academics, can serve to give present-day Catholics and Protestants more clarity on the conflict and overcome historic misunderstandings of each other's divergent ways of expressing faith in Christ. Whether those differences should continue to influence the life and witness of the Church today is still an open question, but Pope Francis created new possibilities for reconciliation.

While Pope Francis commendably modeled a spirit of openness and sought to serve as a visible principle of unity to Christians outside communion with Rome, some within the Church found him less open to Catholic conservatives and traditionalists. The 2016 apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* allowed that some civilly divorced and remarried Catholics could receive Holy Communion on a case-by-case basis. When four cardinals submitted a letter containing five questions, *dubia* ("doubts"), worded to require yes or no responses from the pope, answers were not forthcoming. Pope Francis's 2021 *motu proprio Traditionis Custodes* restricted significantly the celebration of the Traditional Latin Mass, which his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI had allowed wider celebration of in his 2007 apostolic letter *Summorum Pontificum*. Vibrant Catholic communities that had grown in the aftermath of *Summorum Pontificum* were thrown into uncertainty by *Traditionis Custodes*, with little or no dialogue prior to its implementation in widely different ways across different dioceses. The 2023 declaration *Fiducia Supplicans* allowing for Catholic priests to bless couples who are not married according to church teaching, including same-sex couples, polarized the Church along the lines of entire national bishops' conferences. By the end of his pontificate, many theologically conservative Catholics felt Pope Francis had not provided needed doctrinal clarity, and many Catholic traditionalists felt their own religious communities to be under siege.

> "NEARLY 500 YEARS AFTER MARTIN LUTHER DECLARED THE POPE TO BE 'THE VERY ANTICHRIST,' THE POPE DECLARED LUTHER TO HAVE 'MADE A MEDICINE FOR THE CHURCH'!"

Pope Leo XIV will have to deal with both Pope Francis's positive ecumenical legacy, which left other churches seeing the papacy as more of visible principle of unity, and his negative legacy, which too often left conservative and traditionalist communities experiencing the papacy as a spiritual tyranny rather than a support.

In July 2025, Pope Leo XIV met with Orthodox and Catholic clergy from the United States at Castel Gandolfo. Addressing the ecumenical audience, he declared, "Rome, Constantinople and all the other Sees are not called to vie for primacy, lest we risk finding ourselves like the disciples who along the way, even as Jesus was announcing his coming passion, argued about which of them was the greatest."

Just days after his election, Pope Leo XIV addressed the participants in the Jubilee of Oriental Churches, telling them:

> The Church needs you. The contribution that the Christian East can offer us today is immense! We have great need to recover the sense of mystery that remains alive in your liturgies, liturgies that engage the human person in his or her entirety, that sing of the beauty of salvation and evoke a sense of wonder at how God's majesty embraces our human frailty! It is likewise important to rediscover, especially in the Christian West, a sense of the primacy of God, the importance of mystagogy and the values so typical of Eastern spirituality: constant intercession, penance, fasting, and weeping for one's own sins and for those of all humanity (*penthos*)! It is vital, then, that you preserve your traditions without attenuating them, for the sake perhaps of practicality or convenience, lest they

be corrupted by the mentality of consumerism and utilitarianism.

Pope Leo XIV's love and affection for Eastern Rite Catholics and acknowledgment of their unique spirituality's contribution to the life of the Church should be an encouragement to traditionalists. The pope's wearing of the mozzetta (a red shoulder cape) and Latin chanting signal also an openness to more traditional elements of the Church's Latin Rite tradition. While it is early days yet in terms of papacies, Pope Leo XIV nevertheless appears poised to continue and extend the ecumenical orientation of the Church to other Christians while at the same time exercising caring for the Church's own theological and liturgical heritage.

The papacy's contributions to the intellectual life of the West and the world are staggering. Its cultivation of the arts and sciences is not, however, without blemish. The Galileo affair and the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (Index of Forbidden Books) still loom large in the public imagination, if not in the life of the Church today. Pope St. John Paul II wished to make amends for the actions of his predecessors' handling of Galileo, arguing:

> Thanks to his intuition as a brilliant physicist and by relying on different arguments, Galileo, who practically invented the experimental method, understood why only the sun could function as the centre of the world, as it was then known, that is to say, as a planetary system. The error of the theologians of the time, when they maintained the centrality of the Earth, was to think that our understanding of the physical world's structure was, in some way, imposed by the literal sense of Sacred Scripture.

While the Church has, in the main, reconciled itself to the natural sciences, the social sciences, especially economics, sometimes still bedevil the papacy. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato si'*, expressed a sincere desire to engage economics constructively and saw its application as essential to solving real-world problems and securing the common good:

> We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision. Today, the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment. There is an interrelation between ecosystems and between

***Galileo Before the Holy Office* by Joseph-Nicolas Robert-Fleury (1847)**

Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

> the various spheres of social interaction, demonstrating yet again that "the whole is greater than the part." (*Laudato si'* §141)

He nonetheless often devalued and dismissed political economy as a mere "technocratic paradigm" out of touch with the real world, and accused economists of acting in bad faith:

> They are less concerned with certain economic theories which today scarcely anybody dares defend, than with their actual operation in the functioning of the economy. They may not affirm such theories with words, but nonetheless support them with their deeds by showing no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations. Their behaviour shows that for them maximizing profits is enough. Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion. (*Laudato si'* §109)

Bad-faith actors exist in the world undoubtedly, and even academia has its fair share of hucksters and confidence men, but as Robert M. Whaples, professor of economics at Wake Forest University, points out in his brilliant introduction to *Pope Francis and the Caring Society*, the pontiff's own blind spots are simply too profound for his critique to be credible:

> Most baffling of these blind spots is his contention that the levels of poverty—absolute poverty—are not diminishing around the world. In *Laudato si'*, he speaks of "growing poverty" and says that "[t]he exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits and we still have not solved the problem of poverty." (Whaples cites *Laudato si'* §25 & §27 in a footnote)

It should be noted that Pope Leo XIV has said that the inspiration for his choice of papal name came from Pope Leo XIII, a predecessor much more sensitive to the nuances of the social sciences of his own day than Pope Francis was to those of our own.

Pope Leo XIII was elected pope in 1878. The papacy's temporal power had been wrested from his predecessor Pius IX a mere eight years earlier. During his quarter-century reign, Leo XIII would write incessantly, trying to give the Church intellectual resources to address the new concerns of a rapidly changing world. He was the first pope ever to have his voice recorded and the first ever to have his movements filmed. He inaugurated the Church's modern social teaching with his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, in which he sought to address the "new things" of the modern economy by employing the Church's perennial moral wisdom to empirical categories of the still young discipline of economics, such as "land," "labor," and "capital."

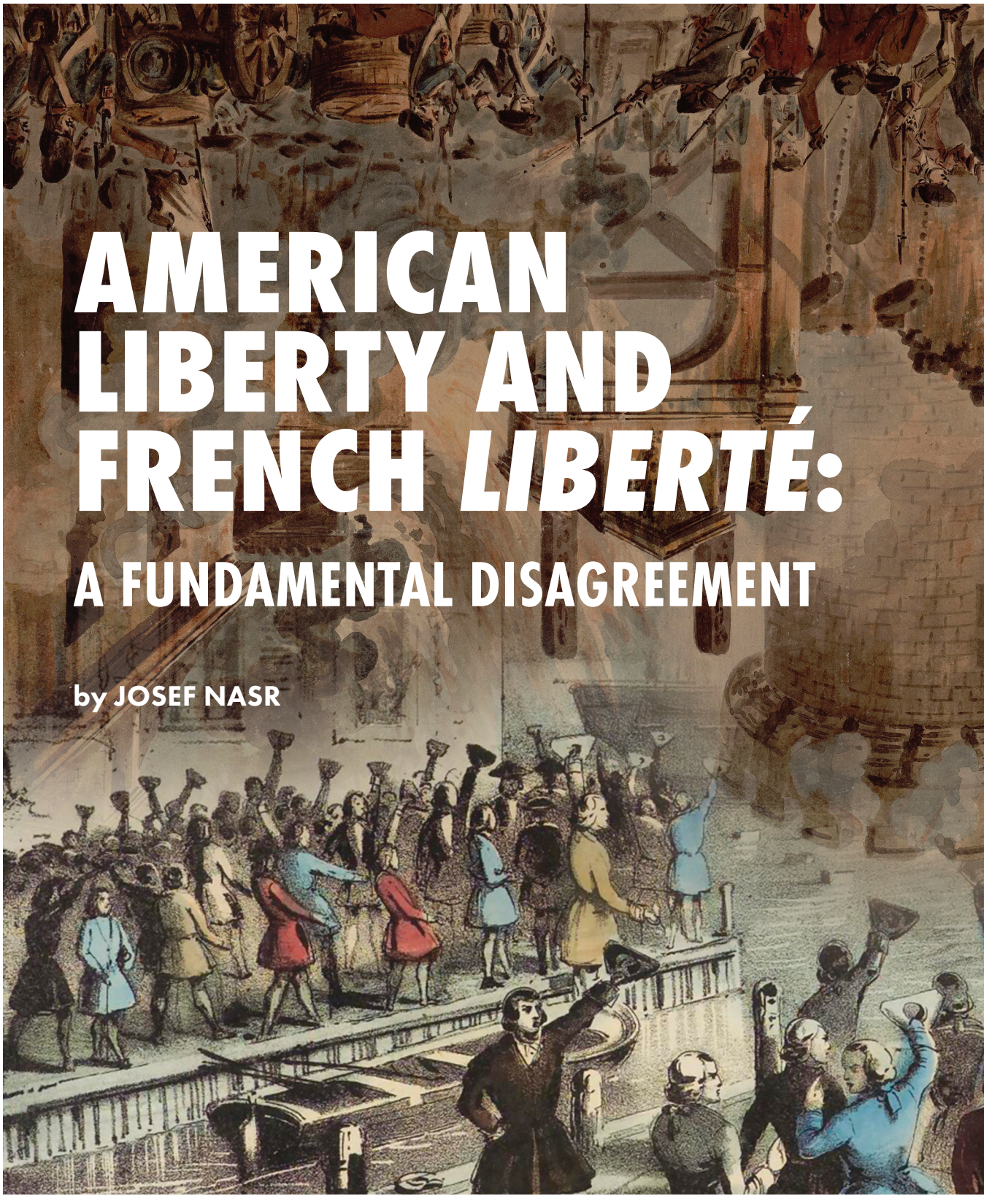
In his first official address to the College of Cardinals, on May 10, 2025, Pope Leo XIV invited them to pray with him, in Latin, the *Paternoster* and the *Ave Maria*. He then turned to new things: "In our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defence of human dignity, justice and labour."

How this new teaching will unfold, as of this writing, God only knows. Pope Leo XIV's careful temperament and degree in mathematics give us reason to be optimistic. For the pope to be a visible principle and foundation of unity for the world as it embraces these new challenges would be a powerful witness, but the danger for intellectual tyranny is one against which the Church must be ever vigilant.

We can all be confident, however, that God in his providence will work it all through his Church, however imperfect an instrument, to his purposes and glory. For as the German theologian Karl Adam explains in *The Spirit of Catholicism*:

> It is quite true, Catholicism is a union of contraries. But contraries are not contradictories. Wherever there is life, there you must have conflict and contrary.…For only so is there growth and the continual emergence of new forms. The Gospel of Christ would have been no living gospel, and the seed which He scattered no living seed, if it had remained ever the tiny seed of A. D. 33, and had not struck root, and had not assimilated foreign matter, and had not by the help of this foreign matter grown up into a tree, so that the birds of the air dwell in its branches. RL

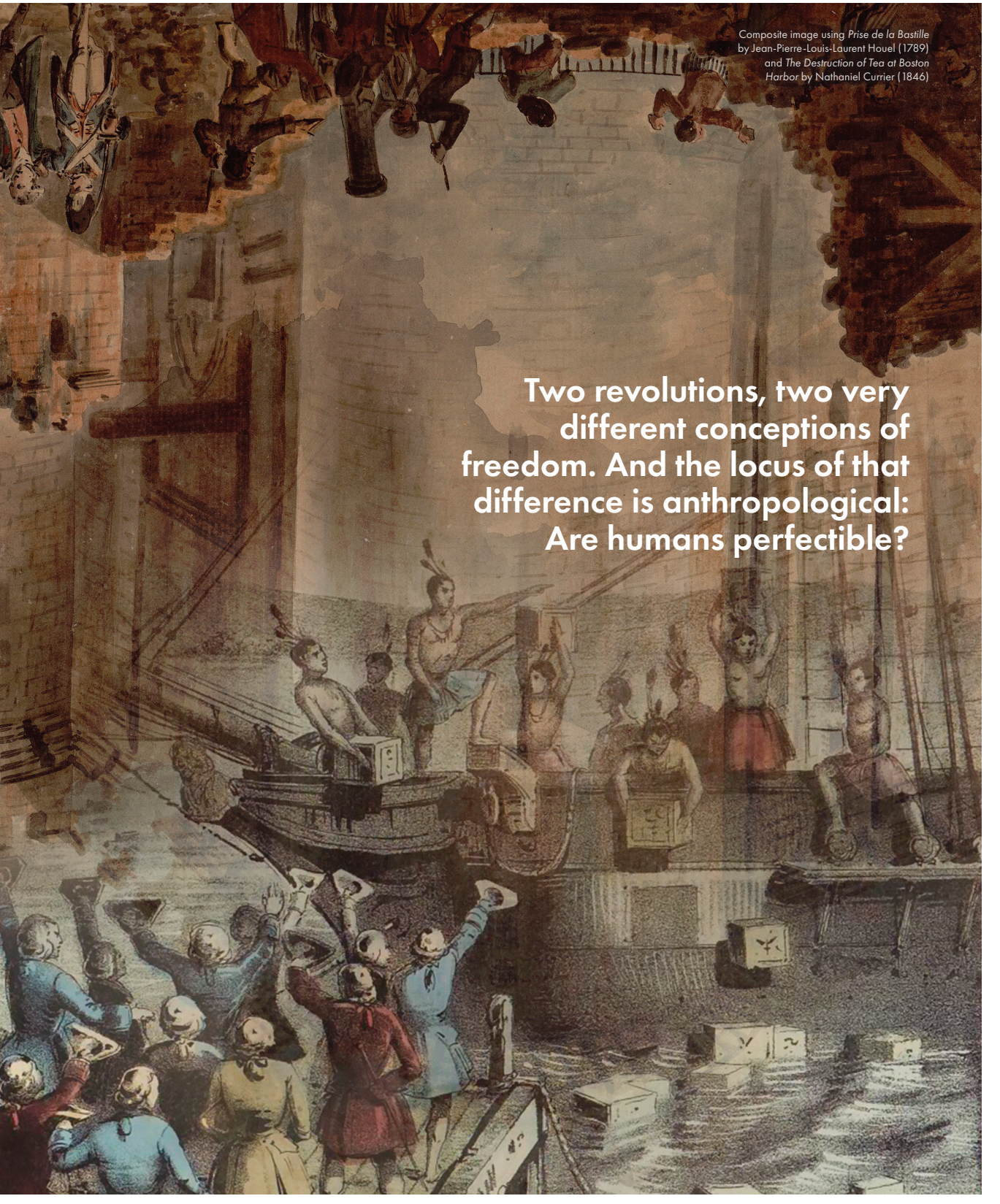
Dan Hugger *is librarian and research associate at the Acton Institute.*



AMERICAN LIBERTY AND FRENCH *LIBERTÉ*:

A FUNDAMENTAL DISAGREEMENT

by JOSEF NASR



Composite image using *Prise de la Bastille* by Jean-Pierre-Louis-Laurent Houel (1789) and *The Destruction of Tea at Boston Harbor* by Nathaniel Currier (1846)

Two revolutions, two very different conceptions of freedom. And the locus of that difference is anthropological: Are humans perfectible?

IT IS WELL ESTABLISHED that the story of the French Revolution and the American founding is largely one of interaction and mutual influence. From Publius's deference to Montesquieu to Jefferson's involvement in the redaction of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, both republics have since their inception proclaimed the same ideals and stretched their roots to the same philosophical sources. However, French-American relations have also been, from the start, underscored by a *malentendu*, a fundamental misunderstanding whose origin goes way deeper than the occasional disagreement on this or that political matter.

This misunderstanding concerns the central ideal from which the American and the French republics respectively derived their legitimacy: liberty and *liberté*.

Since the people of Paris rose against the throne, early American perceptions of the French Revolution have been marked by two historical orientations that have, according to the times and circumstances, in turn found greater or lesser preeminence in the minds of the people and the political leadership. First, that the polity that was rising on the other side of the ocean was an ally and a friend in spirit and ideal. Second, that the methods used to achieve this ideal were, in appearance, so revolting that they could only be the sign of irreconcilable differences. In 1794, Alexander Hamilton observed:

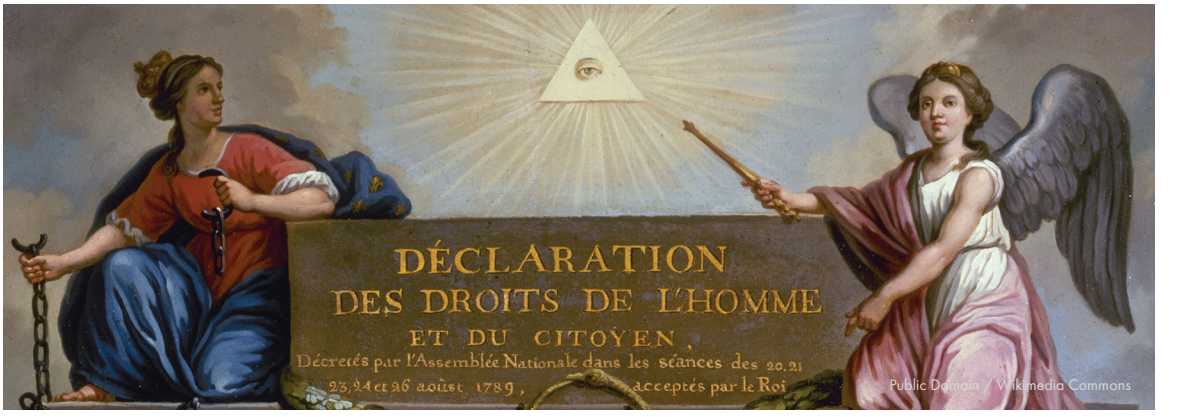
> In the early periods of the French Revolution, a warm zeal for its success was in this Country a sentiment truly universal.…But this unanimity of approbation has been for a considerable time decreasing.…[The American people's] reluctance to abandon it has however been proportioned to the ardor and fondness with which they embraced it.

This malaise was famously expressed by John Adams in a letter to Benjamin Rush: "Have I not been employed in mischief all my days?…Did not the American Revolution produce the French Revolution? And did not the French Revolution produce all the calamities and desolations to the human race and the whole globe ever since?"

A couple of decades earlier, Thomas Jefferson expressed a view to his secretary that described the puzzle the French Revolution represented to the contemporary American observer:

> In the struggle, which was necessary, many guilty persons fell without the forms of trial, and with them some innocent.…But I deplore them as I should have done had they fallen in battle.…The liberty of the whole earth was depending on the issue of the contest, and was ever such a prize won with so little innocent blood?

How then could this ambiguity and resulting uneasiness in appreciating the events of the French Revolution be explained? One could begin by turning to the well-studied tension between equality and liberty, with the French Revolution, it was typically believed, having put greater emphasis on the former, and the American on the latter. However, the founding



Title portion of Le Barbier's *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789)

acts of both republics proclaim ontological equality and natural liberty as joint pillars of the republics to come. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 declares all men "born free and equal in rights," and the Declaration of Independence recognizes the "self-evident truths" that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with…Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." And while several egalitarian provisions are made later in the French declaration, liberty remains by far the most emphasized of the principles of 1789.

Furthermore, as rightfully noticed by Rett R. Ludwikowski in *The American Journal of Comparative Law* in 1990, equality does not, unlike liberty, figure in the enumeration of sacred rights derived from the nature of mankind. Similarly, Wendell J. Brown clarifies that the idea of equality as mentioned by the Declaration of Independence derives its meaning from liberty rather than the reverse, since it is not based on the premise that men are equal in terms of their capacities, but rather of their ontological worth, which gives them an equal right to self-determination and grounds the three basic principles of the gift and right to life, equality of opportunity under just laws, and consent of the governed as the locus of government legitimacy ("Liberty and the Declaration of Independence," 1962). In short, men are equal according to the measure of their freedom, not free in the measure of their equality.

On the other hand, while both republics recognize the preeminence of liberty over equality as a natural right, they begin to diverge from one another in the

Detail of *Declaration of Independence* by John Trumbull (1819)

> **ROUSSEAU'S THEORY BEGINS WITH AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PREMISE: EVIL IS NOT NATURALLY PART OF THE HUMAN CONDITION.**

practical consequences they derive from this recognition—i.e., in their political theory of liberty. The specificity of the French understanding of liberty compared to the American one can thus be ascribed to the former's decidedly Rousseauian character.

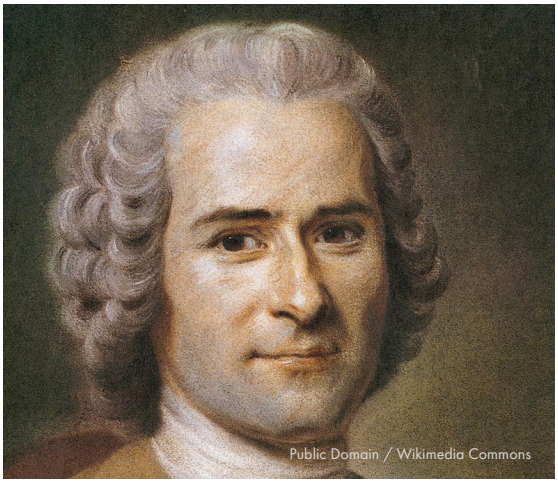
According to Richard Schottky in "La Liberté d'après Rousseau" (1964), Rousseau defines political matters as a mere aspect of the "total" problem of morality. His political theory identifies the State with morals, reason with will, and ultimately abolishes the distinction between "legality and morality." As with every reasoning on political institutions, Rousseau's theory begins with an anthropological premise: Evil is not naturally part of the human condition; rather, it is the result of an alienation brought on man by man himself. As such, it is not a primitive necessity but an artificial perversion that can and should be removed through political institutions. In other words, man is morally perfectible, and it is the raison d'être of political institutions to bring about this perfection through moral education, which is the prerequisite for individual autonomy.

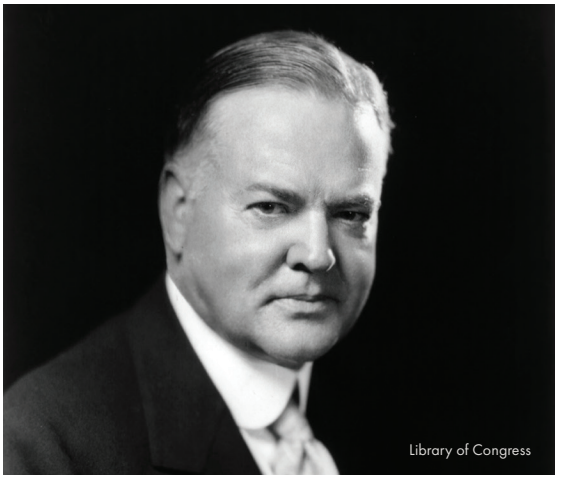
Therefore, the foundation of *real* freedom is the development of political morality, brought forth by the State: It is by participating in political life that man becomes "truly" free, for it is only in and through the State that man becomes a moral being. Outside the State, man is only free in the sense of "a stupid and stubborn animal."

The solution proposed by Rousseau to the problem of the harmony between this political-moral order and individual autonomy is a rather radical one: In *The Social Contract* (1762), the Savoyard identifies the individual with the community, the personal with the "general" will. Using his terminology, the Declaration of the Rights of Man declares that "law is the expression of the general will." Rather than the mere sum of individual wills, the general will is understood by Rousseau as a synthesis of the latter, the organic manifestation of each citizen's participation in the life of the city as part of a greater "body." The destination of the general will is the common good, which, for Rousseau, is synonymous with common morality. Indeed, since man is essentially good and is made so again through his participation in political life, the individual's "true" will, manifested in the general, is necessarily inherently moral. Hence, whatever goes against the general will can by construction never be equal to an individual's "true" will but solely can be a reflection of egoistic interests that are at best residuals of the perversion being eradicated. Therefore, "in obeying the law, [citizens] only obey themselves," and are, therefore, free. It is in this sense that Rousseau's definition of freedom as "the obedience to [a] self-prescribed law" is to be understood, the "self" referring to the political realization of the individual in the general will.

According to Otto Vossler in a chapter dedicated to Rousseau's thought in his book *Der Nationalgedanke von Rousseau bis Ranke* (1937), this "revolutionary" abolition of the conceptual boundary between sovereign and subject through the general will reduces the State to an external materialization of the individual's desire to become a moral being—and therefore

Portrait of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) by Maurice Quentin de La Tour





President Herbert Hoover in 1928

liberate—himself. The immediate consequence is the legitimization of legal constraint as an essential means for the State to accomplish its moral purpose. Constraint and punishment are thus legitimate as long as they serve the necessary suppression of immorality, which entails the preservation of the State as the expression of the general will.

Therefore, for Rousseau, there is no contradiction in affirming that "whoever should refuse to obey the general will shall be…*forced to be free*," supporting a conception of freedom that, in its *fullness*, is essentially a political product. This conception is echoed in Robespierre's description of the revolutionary government as "the despotism of freedom" against tyranny. In the French-Rousseauian paradigm, the measure of freedom lies not in the capacity of the particular to resist the general, but rather in the degree to which the particular is accomplished in the general. The appreciation of this dynamic is sometimes reduced, in Rousseau's thought, to an examination of the will of the majority as a practical expedient. Robespierre again: "As long as the majority demands the preservation of the law, every individual who violates it is a rebel, were it wise or absurd, just or unjust; his duty is to remain faithful to it."

Conversely, in the more classical understanding of natural liberty that inspired the American founding, men are born *completely* free and are naturally prone to both good and evil, including the temptation to encroach on the freedom of others. Since the tendency to yield to such temptation is the result of man's constitution and not of a socially induced perversion, it is not something that can be remedied. As beautifully described by Herbert Hoover in *The Challenge to Liberty* (1934), quoted by Brown, the delegates to the Second Continental Congress accordingly based their actions on a common reckoning of the elements they considered constitutive of human nature:

> Such evil instincts and impulses as shiftlessness, envy, hate, malice, fear, over-pugnacity and will to destruction; selfish instincts and instincts of self-preservation, acquisitiveness. Curiosity, rivalry, ambition, desire for self-expression, for adulation, for power ... the altruistic instincts of courage, love, and fealty to family, and to country, of pity, of kindness and generosity; of love of liberty and of justice; the desire to work and contract, for expression of creative faculties; the impulse to serve the community and nation; and with these also hope, faith, and the mystical yearnings for spiritual things.

This premise provides the basis for an approach to political theory anchored in observable data rather than a priori speculation, and logically leads to the conclusion that any sustainable political system must integrate within itself man's flawed nature rather than attempt to perfect it. It is precisely this approach that Jefferson and Adams, despite their disagreements and divergences regarding the specifics of implementation, shared and employed in devising the philosophical foundations of the American system of government. In his notes on Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), Adams accordingly criticized the latter's method by writing that:

> Reasonings from a State of Nature are fallacious, because hypothetical. We have not facts. Experiments are wanting. Reasonings from Savage Life are not much better. Every Writer affirms what he pleases. We have not facts to be depended on.

Interestingly, this fact-based approach is partly defended by Adams in these same notes as a way to oppose the weakening of the "Reverence to the Christian religion" in political theory induced by the use of concepts such as the state of nature, the "savage life," and what he calls "Chinese happiness." Likewise, in his *Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774), Thomas Jefferson found it proper to reaffirm the divine origin of liberty by declaring that "the God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time," prefiguring the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence.

***Calling Out the Last Victims of the Reign of Terror at the Prison of Saint-Lazare* by Charles Louis Müller (1850)**

It is with respect to the observable characteristics of human nature and the decrees of heaven that the State is to play the role of protector of individual freedom, which comes from above it and finds precedence over it. Its function with regard to freedom is at best that of a *guardian* but not of a *catalyst*. Therefore, the State's action must stop where the prerogatives of the individual begin.

In short, morals and politics, despite some degree of permeability, are not identical, and the former has preeminence over the latter. The more the State gains ground, the less individuality finds the space necessary for its liberty to unfold. Freedom, for the American revolutionaries, was strictly the *limit* of political authority, and its natural completeness did not necessitate its actualization through political intervention.

This conception is made most apparent in its practical implications, particularly when coming to terms with the problem of the diversity of interests. For example, Madison's famous *Federalist Paper* on factions, while acknowledging the danger these may pose to the viability of institutions and the advancement of the general interest, recognizes them as an unavoidable fact, naturally following from "the diversity in the faculties of men, from which the rights of property originate." Therefore, any attempt to repress this natural diversity by force would necessarily imply tampering with property rights and ultimately undermine human liberty, whose protection Madison recognizes as "the first object of government." The solution, rather, was to let factions multiply freely to minimize the probability that one could impose its interests on the others. This is obviously at odds with the ideas of human perfectibility and of constrained liberation of the individual by the majority contained in Rousseau's political thought, which in a classical American perspective is an impossibility.

Therefore, when Adams describes liberty as "a self-determining power *in* an intellectual agent," he restricts the process of self-determination to the individual himself according to the limitative theory of political authority to which he subscribes, as a deliberation within the former's own conscience and interiority. And while Rousseau's definition of freedom as "obedience to a self-prescribed law" can appear similar at first glance, the conceptual identification of subject and sovereign contained in the idea of general will admits an externalization of the process of self-prescription to the level of the communal body, subsequently *transcending* the individual.

This influence of Rousseau on the French revolutionaries and the beginnings of the Revolution did not go unnoticed by many American observers, chief of whom was John Adams. Indeed, his mostly virulent and already mentioned criticism of *Discourse on Inequality*, written 34 years before the fall of the Bastille to the people of Paris, could in part be explained by the fact that he wrote it in 1794, at the height of what would later be known as the Terror. When he composed his famous "I know not what to make of a republic of thirty million atheists " in a letter to Dr. Price on April 19, 1790, Adams had already mentioned Rousseau as one

of the "encyclopedists and economists," along with Diderot, Voltaire, and d'Alembert, whom he insisted had contributed more to this "great event…than Sidney, Locke, or Hoadley, perhaps more," he added, "than the American Revolution."

However, while it is true that Rousseau himself admits at times the possibility of majority rule as a practical expedient for the general will—which as we have seen cannot quite be reduced to the former on a conceptual level—his political theory, whatever its limits, was still initially devised as an antidote to tyranny and should in no way be understood as offering a justification for it in the sense of an authoritarian and unjust government. Rousseau's political theory of liberty shares with that of the Founding Fathers the absolute necessity of morality as a condition for a functioning social and political life. This concern is made evident in the duty of the State to ensure and advance moral education, as well as in the conception of civic freedom as entailing the individual's moral development.

Nevertheless, by describing the French Revolution as one where "privilege was more detested than tyranny," in his essay "Nationality" (1862), Lord Acton, for one, seems to imply that the French revolutionaries were ready to accept the latter if they would have thereby gotten rid of the former, which hardly fits Robespierre's description of the revolutionary government as the "despotism of freedom" over tyranny. However, just as a justification for tyranny, in the sense of an authoritarian and unjust government, is not found in Rousseau's theory, neither was its possibility admitted in the minds of the French revolutionaries: They sincerely believed in the possibility and the necessity of moral despotism. Despotism was thus seen as a necessary but insufficient condition for tyranny, which required the unjust wielding of political authority; contrary to the American liberal tradition, which considered despotism as a sufficient condition for tyrannical government in itself.

Portrait of Lord Acton by Franz von Lenbach (c. 1879)

Indeed, from the American perspective, despotism necessarily implies the abolition of the limits imposed on political authority by divinely granted freedom and is therefore in itself inherently unjust. The upholding of this conception, however, presupposes that the distinction between individual and general, subject and sovereign, is preserved, which, as we have seen, is not the case in the Rousseauian paradigm, which relies on and vindicates the possibility of constrained liberation for moral purposes.

While an explication of the distinctives of liberty and *liberté* can go a long way in explaining centuries of uneasy cooperation between France and the United States, the main point is that *liberty* remains a word of few interpretations but many meanings. In the 1840s, Levi Preston, a veteran of the Battle of Concord, is said to have been asked by a young historian, Mellon Chamberlain, whether he and his comrades had been influenced by figures such as James Harrington and John Locke in their struggle for freedom, to which Preston nonchalantly answered, "I never heard of 'em. We only read the Bible, the Catechism, Watt's Psalms and Hymns, and the Almanack." RL

> **"THE STATE'S FUNCTION WITH REGARD TO FREEDOM IS AT BEST THAT OF A *GUARDIAN* BUT NOT OF A *CATALYST*."**

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IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION

José da Silva Lisboa: Defender of Free Markets in the Tropics

by **ALEX CATHARINO**

CRITICIZING MODERN IDEOLOGUES in his book *The Politics of Prudence*, Russell Kirk (1918–1994) noted that it was "the practical statesman, rather than the visionary recluse, who has maintained a healthy tension between the claims of authority and the claims of freedom; who has shaped a tolerable political constitution." We note that, except for Great Britain, no other country had more conservative statesmen than Brazil during the period of parliamentary monarchy: 1822–89. During the reign of Dom Pedro II (1825–1891), the combination of the wise actions of the monarch, the solid institutional foundations offered by the Constitution of 1824, and the prudent actions of the statesmen who governed the country made for a period of greatest political stability. The challenge faced by Brazilian conservatives, however, was the dual responsibility of safeguarding the traditional monarchical institution of Portuguese origin without adopting patrimonialism, absolutism, and mercantilism, and fostering freedom without descending into the egalitarian and almost anarchic excesses of democratism, as proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) and adopted in both the French Revolution and the independence movements of Hispanic America.

Even before the creation of the Conservative Party in 1837, the spread of conservatism in Brazil was undertaken by the jurist, economist, historian, publicist, statesman and Catholic moral philosopher José da Silva Lisboa (1756–1835), Viscount of Cairu, who, in addition to having defended some principles of late Iberian scholasticism, in the line of the Jesuits Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) and António Vieira (1608–1697), also disseminated in Portuguese the counterrevolutionary thought of Edmund Burke (1729–1797), the moral and economic theses of Adam Smith (1723–1790), and the writings of several other authors aligned with the defense of the rule of law and the free market economy. In 1812, the first edition of *Extracts from the Political and Economic Works of the Great Edmund Burke* was published, translated into Portuguese and with a preface by Lisboa, with the aim that the texts should serve as "an antidote against the pestilent miasma and subtle poison of the seeds of anarchy and tyranny in France, which, insensibly, fly through good and bad airs and through all the winds of the Globe."

In several other works, notably *Principles of Political Economy* (1804), *Studies of the Common Good and Political Economy* (1819), and *Manual of Orthodox Politics* (1832), Lisboa defended the importance of ordered freedom for the political, economic, and social development of Brazil.

José da Silva Lisboa was born on July 16, 1756, in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, the son of an architect, Henrique da Silva Lisboa, and Helena Nunes de Jesus. He began his studies of philosophy, grammar, Latin, music theory, and piano at the Carmelite convent in Salvador at the age of eight. In 1773, he traveled to Lisbon, Portugal, where he continued his training in rhetoric and oratory. In 1774, he entered the University of Coimbra, graduating with degrees in canon law and philosophy, in addition to having studied Greek and Hebrew. (He would go on to teach these two languages at the Royal College of Arts of Coimbra.)

After returning to Brazil in 1780, he held the chairs of both moral philosophy and Greek language—in addition to becoming a pioneer in the teaching of political economy in his country. In 1784, he married Ana Francisca Benedita de Figueiredo (†1811), with whom

he had 14 children. In 1797, he was appointed deputy and eventually secretary of the Board of Inspectorate of Agriculture and Commerce of Bahia, having combined his practical experience with solid theoretical training in such titles as *Principle of Mercantile Law and Laws of the Navy* (1801) and *Observations on the Frankness of Industry, and Establishment of Factories in Brazil* (1810). In these works he proposed the free market as a necessary means for the development of the country, in addition to defending the end of slavery, emphasizing that the use of this inhumane labor force was an inefficient means for generating wealth.

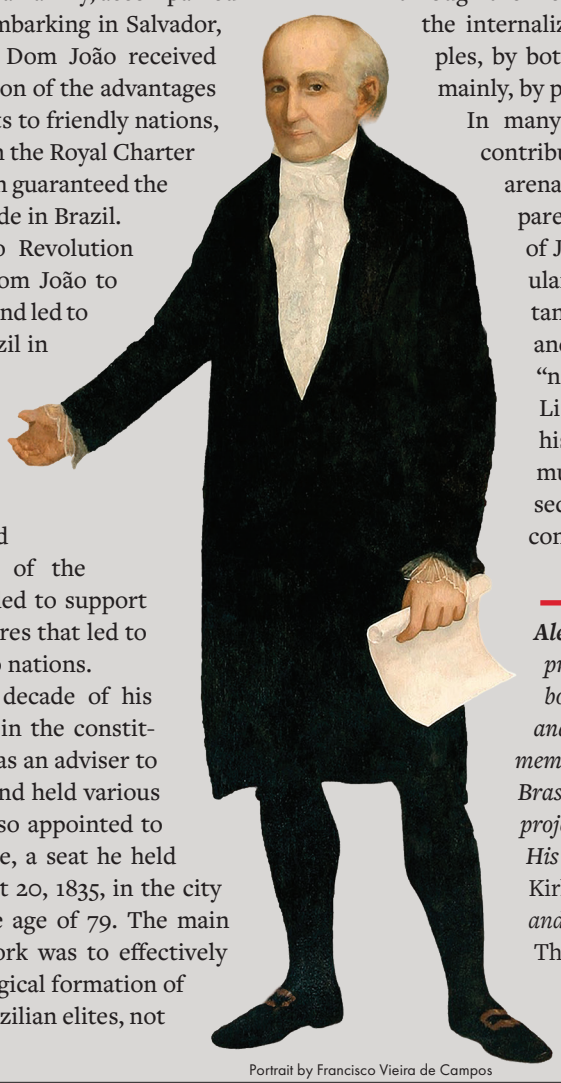
Upon the invasion of Portugal by the troops of Napoleon Bonaparte, the seat of the Portuguese monarchy was transferred to Brazil in 1808, with the arrival of queen Dona Maria I (1734–1816), the future Portuguese king Dom João VI (1767–1826), the future Brazilian Emperor Dom Pedro I (1798–1834), and the other members of the royal family, accompanied by the court. Upon disembarking in Salvador, the then-Prince Regent Dom João received from Lisboa an explanation of the advantages of opening Brazilian ports to friendly nations, which, in part, resulted in the Royal Charter of January 24, 1808, which guaranteed the establishment of free trade in Brazil.

Faced with the Porto Revolution in 1820, which forced Dom João to return to Europe in 1821 and led to the independence of Brazil in 1822, Lisboa defended in some texts the maintenance of a United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil, and Algarves. However, faced with the intransigence of the revolutionaries, he decided to support Dom Pedro in the measures that led to the separation of the two nations.

Throughout the last decade of his life, Lisboa participated in the constituent assembly in 1823, was an adviser to Emperor Dom Pedro I, and held various public offices. He was also appointed to the Senate of the Empire, a seat he held until his death on August 20, 1835, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, at the age of 79. The main objective of his life's work was to effectively contribute to the pedagogical formation of the conscience of the Brazilian elites, not only in resolving the legal, economic, political, and social problems of the nascent independent nation, but also in addressing issues related to a greater understanding of the historical-cultural identity of Brazil, the ethical foundations necessary for life in society, and the orthodox religious principles that should still be instilled in a heterodox Christian environment.

Even though Lisboa was a defender of the representative system and freedom of expression, he nevertheless possessed a lucid understanding of the moral and intellectual failings of the Brazilian elites, a factor reflected in the institutional fragility of parliament, which is why, unlike his liberal contemporaries, he emphasized the need to strengthen the authority of the monarch. In addition, Lisboa never refrained from emphasizing that the existence of democratic institutions would only be possible through the increase of economic freedom and the internalization of certain moral principles, by both the majority of citizens and, mainly, by political leaders.

In many aspects, Lisboa's intellectual contributions and work in the political arena as a statesman can be compared to the conservative trajectory of John Adams (1735–1826), particularly in recognizing the importance of the moral, economic, and political role of the so-called "natural aristocracy." All told, Lisboa's vast bibliography and his robust public life provided much-needed guidance for subsequent generations of Brazilian conservatives. RL



Portrait by Francisco Vieira de Campos

Alex Catharino *is a historian, professor of political philosophy, book editor, business consultant, and political analyst, as well as a member of the directory of the Instituto Brasileiro de Direito e Religião and project director of the Instituto Liberal. His written works include* Russell Kirk: The Pilgrim in the Wasteland *and* Brazilian Conservative Agenda: Theoretical Bases and Historical Experiences of Conservatism in Brazil, from 1812 to 1963.

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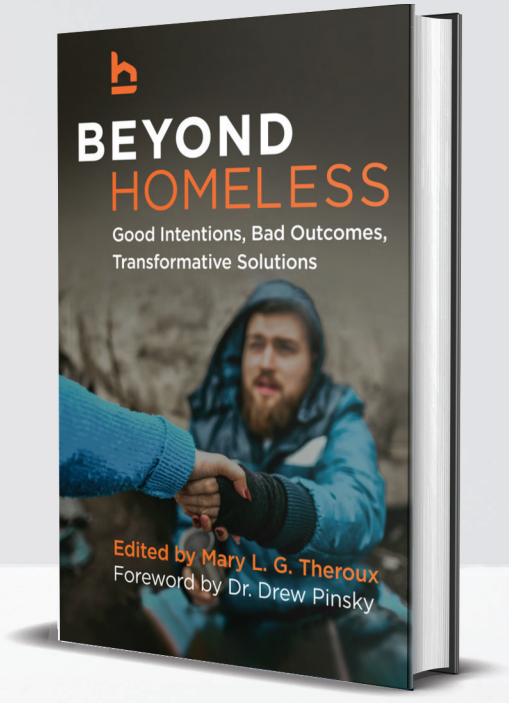

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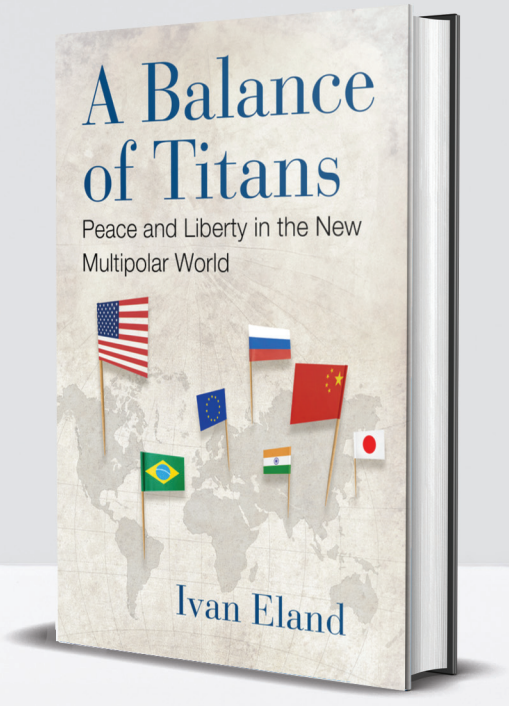

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Canterbury Cathedral in Kent. IVANVIEITO / iStock

A Very Christian England

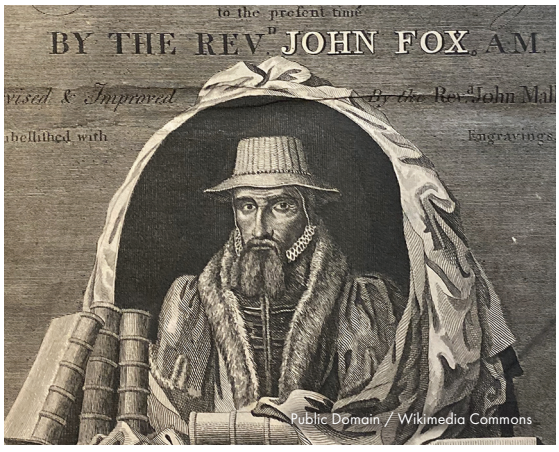
If you have any doubts about the salutary effects of the Christian Faith on English life, culture, and manners, a new book will shore up your faith.

by **CARL TRUEMAN**

FOR MANY YEARS, Christianity was a soft target for critics of Western culture who interpreted its sexual codes as oppressive, its missionaries as agents of imperialism who destroyed indigenous cultures, and its institutions as corrupt. There was certainly evidence to support such claims and, in a West subject to an insatiable cultural Oedipus complex, the ritual slaying of the Christian God became a staple of the secular culture industry. That secularism had nothing of equivalent potency with which to replace him has in recent years come to the attention of a small but (currently) growing group of intellectuals and culture makers.

Perhaps the most significant book to emerge from this cultural moment is Tom Holland's *Dominion*, which points not only to the religious origins of Western culture in general but even to those very things that became the tools of secularism, such as universal human rights and the various schools of feminism. Now, Bijan Omrani has entered the lists on the side of Christianity, at least as a positive cultural force. His latest book, *God Is an Englishman: Christianity and the Creation of England*, in many ways a demonstration of the validity of Holland's basic argument narrowly applied to England and the English, is an engaging read. It is both a concise account of key aspects of English history and culture and a heartfelt plea for the Christianity that the author himself holds dear.

That Christianity, particularly that of the Anglican church, had a formative effect on English culture is indisputable. What is contentious today is whether that influence was positive, benign, or malign. Decades of self-loathing, fueled by academia, pundits such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, and outfits such as the BBC, have rendered any claim

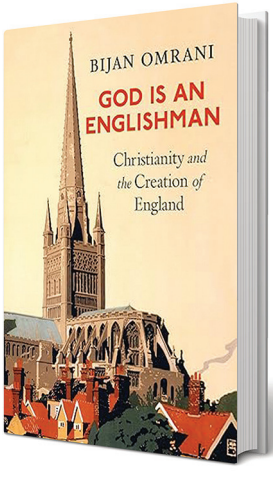


Detail of the title page of *The Book of Martyrs* by John Fox

> **“THE KING JAMES VERSION OF THE BIBLE AND THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER CAME TO SHAPE THE MODERN ENGLISH LANGUAGE.”**

to its being positive or benign countercultural and controversial. In that context, Omrani's careful marshaling of evidence and thoughtful narrative represents a measured and balanced response to the critics. Touching on a variety of topics, such as religion itself, legal theory, music, communal life, education, politics, and literature, Omrani shows how Christianity's influence was pervasive and often in good ways.

Three elements of the book stand out. The first is how Christianity shaped English identity. Non-British readers need to understand, of course, that "British" is really a political construct. No Welshman, Scotsman, or Ulsterman would accept the term as an adequate description of their identity, and the English do so only when convenient (as when a Scotsman wins at Wimbledon). Omrani does a fine job showing how Christianity became a cultural force in the first millennium and was key to the various moves toward the emergence of the monarchy. It also shaped the experience of time, not only through the convention of numbering years from the birth of Christ but also through the rhythm of the liturgical calendar. One might even extend Omrani's analysis here and say that the move from the liturgical calendar to weekly Sabbatarianism under the Puritans paved the way for the disciplined workweek that a production-based, rather than an agrarian, economy requires, thus paving the way for later English industrial success.



God Is an Englishman: Christianity and the Creation of England

By Bijan Omrani

(Forum, 2025)

Omrani skates somewhat lightly over the relative independence of the English church from Rome (an advantage of being an island) and does not spend any time examining the importance of the distinctively Protestant nature of the English monarchy after the Reformation. He does highlight the fear of Catholic plots in the early modern period and Guy Fawkes Day as an important addition to the calendar, along with sporadic anti-Catholic violence. Perhaps oddly, he fails to mention John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, popularly known as *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. This volume did more than any other to shape the anti-Catholic nature of England's church life and Christian imagination. Indeed, at one time it was a legal requirement that a copy be held by all cathedral chapter clergy. That granted it a status shared only by the Book of Common Prayer and the Bible itself. It helped to define English Christianity as particularly anti-Catholic.

The second dimension of Omrani's argument is that of the salubrious influence of Christianity on English culture. For example, it was widely

understood until recent times that English common law took its guiding commonsense principles from Christianity. Christianity also inspired great poetry, from Herbert and Donne to Eliot. Through the King James Version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, it also came to shape the modern English language, particularly in its finest literary forms. Church music was also central to parish life and came to pervade education as well. It was not simply church services but also school assemblies that were marked by the singing of hymns, a practice that has all but vanished from the modern English experience. Omrani was at school in the '90s, I was there in the late '70s and '80s, but our experiences were very similar. Corporate singing at assembly had a lasting effect. Even today, I have a lump in my throat whenever I hear "Jerusalem," the words of which I can recall with ease—scarcely an orthodox hymn but full of deep, nostalgic resonances that provoke in me a longing for those lost halcyon days of youth.

And then there was the well-known connection between English Christianity and humane social reforms. William Wilberforce and Hannah More are well known, others less so but still very influential. Indeed, Omrani does a particularly good job of describing the life and contributions of Dr. Thomas John Barnardo, an Irish philanthropist who founded homes for impoverished children. He also includes the hapless Charles Kingsley, remembered today as the incompetent critic whom Newman demolished in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. In his own day, Kingsley played an important role in raising public awareness of the brutal phenomenon of child chimney sweeps, particularly through his novel *The Water Babies*. In each case, Christianity was central, not incidental, to the motives for reform. It is easy to see why: The Christian teaching that each and every human being is made in God's image provided a framework for treating others as human beings and for doing so as one would wish to be treated. None of this is news to any who know English cultural history, but it is very useful to have it set forth in such a clear and thoughtful manner. The list of reforms wrought by Christianity is particularly impressive and should be pondered by any still intimidated by the tendentious

Charles Kingsley (1819–1875)

An assembly at a girls' school in the East End of London (1910)

histories underlying the claims that Christianity has only ever been harmful to humanity.

Particularly entertaining is the section where Omrani speaks of the notorious eccentricity of many English clerics, something that fed into a taste for national nonconformity. My favorite in this regard is the Rev. John Froude, who would burn down the hayricks of parishioners who were delinquent on their tithes and dig holes in the road to prevent visits from his bishop, and who got his deacon drunk and hanged him upside down to prevent him leading evensong. Those, as one might say, were the days when society produced real characters and not merely the performative transgressors of our social media age.

Not all of Omrani's narrative is relevant to his central argument. The chapter on Richard Rolle, Julian of Norwich, and others typically bracketed together using the later term "mysticism" is interesting enough but does not add to the overall thesis beyond addressing the rather nebulous criticism that English Christianity lacked "spirituality." Some of the theological references are also misleading. For example, the focus on John Calvin as the source of a virtuous work ethic and his connection to Protestant notions of justification is somewhat overstated, as these things were more generically Protestant, perhaps Reformed, than simply the fruit of one Reformer from Geneva. Also the reference to John Calvin's commitment to the principle that the finite cannot contain the infinite (often referred to as the *extra Calvinisticum*) as that which prevented him from seeing how the supernatural could manifest itself in and through the natural is wrong. The principle is a key part of standard Christology, well-established by Calvin's day, and intended to guard the integrity of Christ's human nature, not drive a hard wedge between the natural and the supernatural. Indeed, it is arguable that this principle offered an account of the opposite: how the infinite could be manifest in the finite without either losing its integrity. Yes, Calvin did not think that shrines and particular places had an inherent holiness, but that was based on his understanding of true worship and of the activity of the Holy Spirit, not the *extra Calvinisticum*.

The third part of Omrani's argument is found in Part Two, where he makes his case for what a revival of interest in Christianity could offer to England. He critiques the old secularization thesis as too simplistic and sets the decline of Christianity's cultural influence against the background of both technological developments and shifts in anthropology, the former of which rendered Christian values unnecessary (e.g., Why can't sex be recreational and uncommitted once we have contraceptives and antibiotics to obviate unfortunate consequences of promiscuity?), the latter of which made them oppressive (e.g., If sex is the way to human satisfaction, rules that restrict desire take on a negative, even sinister, appearance). The results, however, have not been good. The nation has lost its shared moral imagination. Solitude has replaced community. Christianity, in offering a moral framework and a community, can answer both these questions. More than that, Omrani, a Christian himself, makes the case in the final chapter for Christianity as answering the human need for the sacred.

This is where I find myself dissenting somewhat. Certainly human beings have a longing for the sacred. And it is clear that an approach to reality that is purely immanent is the source of many of the problems we now face as Western societies lose both their cultural confidence and their consequent ability to grip the imaginations of the populace. Omrani's closing paragraphs are deeply moving, as he quotes from, and then builds upon, the *Meditations* of Thomas Traherne, who points to the glorious transcendent context of this world. But Christianity is not just a religion of transcendence. It is also a religion of grace, grace made necessary by human rebellion against the creator. And the Incarnation is not just an awe-inspiring mystery. It is also a response to sin and death, the only thing that makes the presence of the transcendent, holy God bearable. And it demands a moral, not merely aesthetic, response from us—that of repentance and faith. In short, Christianity is true not simply because it answers man's need for the sacred and offers him a moral universe and a community to which he may belong. It also answers his need—whether or not he is aware of that need—for forgiveness. That is a note we cannot mute in the current discussions of religion and culture without losing something central to the Christian faith.

Nonetheless, this is a delightful book, packed with learning but written with a light, engaging touch. It is a most helpful expression of the current intellectual revival of interest in Christianity. RL

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Interrogating the Faith and Work Movement

Some Protestants and all Marxists oppose the doctrine of vocation. But it's making a comeback anyway.

by GENE EDWARD VEITH

CHRISTIANITY HAS COME TO Silicon Valley, according to *The New York Times* (February 11, 2025) and this publication (Summer 2025), thanks in part to local churches teaching how a high-tech profession is a vocation from God. The last two decades have seen a surge of books, conferences, institutes, parachurch ministries, and Bible studies on the connections between Christianity and the workplace. The so-called Faith and Work Movement has become a major strain in contemporary evangelicalism.

Saving the Protestant Ethic by sociologist Andrew Lynn is an illuminating study of this movement. But it is also a critique of same that gets tangled up in the obligatory left-wing economics of his profession.

As Lynn shows, from its very beginning Protestantism promoted a positive relationship between faith and work. Luther's doctrine of vocation taught that God calls all Christians, not just members of religious orders, to productive labor and relationships through which God works to sustain His creation and in which Christians can live out their faith in love and service to their neighbors. Whereas Luther stressed the multiple vocations that Christians have, not just in the workplace but also in the family, the society, and the church, Calvin focused on economic callings. Calvin's emphasis on the character-forming disciplines of hard work, thrift, and pursuit of the common good inspired

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A Gideon Bible with a Book of Mormon in a Las Vegas hotel

generations of industrious, energetic Puritans whose "Protestant work ethic" would turn former peasants into prosperous members of the middle class and contribute to the rise of capitalism.

But what happened to the Reformation doctrine of vocation and the Protestant work ethic? In the late 19th and most of the 20th century, those topics largely disappeared from the sermons and writings of conservative American Protestants.

Here Lynn makes an important contribution by identifying what he calls the "Fundamentalist Work Ethic." With the Second Great Awakening came Methodist perfectionism, the "deeper Christian life" of the U.K.'s Keswick theology, the dispensationalism of the Scofield Bible, and the premillennial conviction that Christ's second coming is imminent. All these emphasized the inner spiritual life and explicitly played down the significance of our physical existence in "the world"—which would soon pass away. Lynn marshals evidence from the religious writings of the time that warn against the spiritual dangers of money-making, materialism, and "worldly" ambition.

The Fundamentalist Worth Ethic, though, took another turn that did affirm work, sort of. In these end times, the main priority of Christians must be evangelism. Ministers who preached the gospel full time were seen to have a higher calling, but the highest calling of all was that of the missionaries, who took the gospel to all the world.

This "new clericalism," as Lynn calls it, influenced the way laypeople saw their work. In their ordinary jobs on the farm, the factory, and the office, laypeople could earn money by which they could support mission work, whether by their local congregations, individual missionaries, or large-scale mission organizations. In that way, ordinary work could help spread the gospel.

Then laypeople realized that their own workplaces were also mission fields! Secular employment was seen as a way to reach people who might never visit a church. Sharing the gospel on the job became paramount. In fact, the first half of the 20th century saw a number of businessmen's organizations crop up—such as the Gideons and the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship—with the purpose of evangelizing in the business world. A number of books by successful Christian businessmen made the case that God's work could be carried out in the business world.

According to Lynn, much of 20th-century evangelicalism—including the "neo-evangelicalism" of Billy Graham and the parachurch ministries he inspired—approached work in terms of some version of the Fundamentalist Work Ethic, either saying little about it or valuing it for instrumental purposes, such as evangelism or carrying out other functions of the church.

Today's Faith and Work Movement, however, emerged out of fresh Christian attempts to engage with culture, associated with American evangelicals' discovery of the neo-Calvinism of Abraham Kuyper as popularized by Francis Schaeffer. This approach values work *in itself* as a participation in God's creation. Lynn describes an "explosion" of books on this topic over the last two decades, averaging 185 every year since 2000. (Full disclosure: I have written three of them, on Luther's doctrine of vocation and its applications. I honestly did not realize I was part of a movement.)

It should be emphasized that *Saving the Protestant Ethic* is a work of sociology, not theology or history. When Max Weber wrote *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in 1905, he did a good job of analyzing the origins of capitalism except when he drifted off into theological and psychological speculations. Weber believed that the reason Puritans worked so hard must have been to convince themselves that they were of God's elect, thinking that success in business was a sign of God's grace. To his credit, Lynn, citing modern scholarship, dismisses

that motive, which lacks both evidence and coherence. (Calvinists believe they are saved by grace, not works, much less economic work.) But instead of accepting theological explanations or reasons given by the people he is studying, Lynn, like Weber, looks to the social sciences for hidden motives.

According to Lynn's analysis, the fundamentalists who devalued work were largely from the less-educated working class, whose manual labor was deemed meaningless (either by themselves or the larger culture), so they channeled their search for meaning by going within. When businessmen played up their role in evangelism, they were competing for social status with ministers and missionaries. And so we find the real thesis of Lynn's book: "A key part of the story for the emergence of the faith and work movement is white evangelicalism's ascension into the realms of knowledge-economy work and creative-class capitalism."

Lynn stresses that most of the participants in faith and work conferences are well-educated, affluent, successful professionals, as opposed to blue collar workers. Today evangelicals have risen socially, from their unsophisticated rural origins, so that they are now as well educated and affluent as other Americans. Many are in the "knowledge economy" (teachers, researchers, scientists, physicians, lawyers, consultants) and the "creative class" (journalists, engineers, programmers, entrepreneurs, managers, artists). As such, their work is already a source of satisfaction, meaning, and identity. So it is natural for Christians in those fields to want to merge their faith with their work.

In this way of thinking, "vocation" is nothing more than a rationalization for social mobility. But we could ask, how and why are evangelicals *now* going to universities and pursuing professions they used to dismiss as "worldly"? Maybe they are learning to attend to the talents God has given them and to see their lives in terms of vocation.

Worth noting is that *Saving the Protestant Ethic* is itself evidence that sociology is still in thrall to critical theory. Throughout the book, concerns are raised that the Faith and Work Movement is predominantly white, male, and privileged. Worse is the book's quasi-Marxist hostility to free market capitalism.

One section looks at some of the institutions that support the Faith and Work movement, particularly the Institute for Faith, Work, and Economics; the Kern Family Foundation; and (yes) the Acton Institute. Because these organizations are also committed to free market economics, Lynn classifies them as belonging to the "Corporate Right." In his description, capitalists appreciate the Faith and Work Movement because it makes for compliant workers who are easier to oppress. Employees who believe their labor is serving God, Lynn argues, will work harder and be less likely to complain about low pay and bad working conditions.

Implicitly adopting Marx's canard that religion is the opiate of the people, Lynn says that capitalist organizations like the Acton Institute have an interest in promoting a theology that forms workers with "greater docility." (But I thought the Faith and Work Movement consisted of high-level affluent elites, not the oppressed proletariat!)

The inadequacy of this analysis is evident in one of Lynn's own examples. He tells about going to a conference funded by the Kern Foundation. The speakers and nearly all the audience were black. (But I thought the Faith and Work Movement was white!) "Several speakers took the stage to speak to issues of inequality or under-resourced urban neighborhoods," Lynn reports, "but promoted the creation of new businesses rather than structural changes."

How could anyone in the audience create "structural changes" that would solve the admitted problems of inequality and poverty? Critical theorists insist that such problems are "structural" because they are grounded in America's alleged "systemic racism." This implies that, pending a revolution, individuals can do nothing about these problems. Critical theory seeks to raise consciousness, but in practice it dooms disadvantaged minorities to perpetual victimhood. But if these victims are given the tools to create

"***SAVING THE PROTESTANT ETHIC* IS ITSELF EVIDENCE THAT SOCIOLOGY IS STILL IN THRALL TO CRITICAL THEORY."**

new businesses, they have agency, can improve their economic condition, and can potentially dismantle the "structures" that keep them down.

The Kern Foundation conference included workshops on entrepreneurship, with sessions on making pitches to investors. Far from oppressing their participants, the lessons in free market economics were empowering, not disabling, despite what the critical theorists assume.

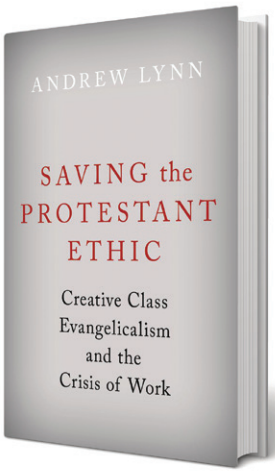
A theology with a providential view of economics—that God works through human labor—will naturally be more favorably inclined to free market economics, regulated by an "invisible hand," than an economic system predicated on class conflict and conspiracies of exploitation. Later, in another context, Lynn quotes a historian on the dysfunctions of fundamentalism:

> American fundamentalism had in the early twentieth century become essentially Manichean, perceiving a conflict between good and evil in all arenas. It embodied the "paranoid style" of politics that saw history itself as "a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power."

That could also be said of critical theory, which perceives a good-and-evil conflict between the oppressed and oppressors in all arenas, and Marxist economics, which sees history itself as a conspiracy of evil forces with transcendent power! Critical theorists and Marxists evidently have a Fundamentalist Work Ethic.

Lynn does have *some* good things to say about the Faith and Work Movement, however. He recognizes that people do need to think their work is meaningful. He appreciates the late Tim Keller's approach in the Center for Faith and Work sponsored by Redeemer Presbyterian Church, addressing high-powered professionals in Manhattan. He is intrigued by "Kuyperian Humanism." He recognizes the importance of recovering "the value of the ordinary." He is especially taken by the work of Amy L. Sherman, a popular speaker at the conferences, who teaches how Christians can exert a moral influence by promoting justice and *shalom* (wholeness, peace) in the workplace. As Lynn admits, overturning his own stereotype, she writes for the Acton Institute.

Some of Lynn's critiques have validity, but they could be met by better theological reflection and delving into the movement's own Protestant heritage. He calls for doing just that, thinking of the Puritans' moral zeal, the 19th-century evangelical social reformers, and the economic populism of early evangelicals like William Jennings Bryan. The Faith and Work Movement would do well to go back even further, however, to do more with Luther, the father of both Protestantism and the theology of vocation.



Saving the Protestant Ethic: Creative Class Evangelicalism and the Crisis of Work

By Andrew Lynn

(Oxford University Press, 2023)

Though Lynn insists that the Faith and Work Movement lacks attention to ethics, Luther teaches not just vocational egalitarianism but that the purpose of all vocations—including employers and political rulers—is to love and serve the neighbors one encounters in each vocation. That imperative can address cases of mistreatment and exploitation and can give to every vocation an ethical, social direction.

Lynn says that the Faith and Work Movement speaks to professionals rather than to blue collar workers. Luther addresses his teaching specifically to peasant farmers, servants, and craftsmen.

Lynn says that the Faith and Work Movement assumes a separation between the workplace and the home, saying little about unpaid work, tasks within a family, and the work demanded in a home. Luther, writing in a preindustrial age, classifies economic labor under the category of the household—how a family makes its living—and so offers a vocational model of an integrated life.

Thus, saving the *true* Protestant Ethic is what will finally save the Faith and Work Movement. RL

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We Are *Capax Universi*

Classical education should do more than enhance the reasoning powers. It should also cultivate the imagination, that "small instance of a God-like power in man."

by **JEFFREY POLET**

ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS, I taught American Government in the state prison. I would enter via the front gate, go through security, then make my way across the prison yard, between the cell blocks, to the flat-roofed brick building wherein resided the classrooms. Since prisons pay little attention to beauty, the utilitarian spaces were ungilded.

One day, on my way home, I drove by one of our large public high schools and was immediately struck by its architectural similarity to the cell blocks and common spaces of the prison. Put some barbed wire around the school and it would be hard to tell it apart from the prison. I recalled my time in high school and college classrooms, even as recently as my time teaching there, and noticed again little difference in the organization of space. No wonder, I mused, I frequently experienced my school years as a form of incarceration. Very little sparked the imagination or engaged the mind.

The mind and heart and hands of a child, of a student, yearn to be free, unfettered by stale routine or confusing ends. Any system may in part be evaluated by its results. Increasingly we see education as a consumer good or, worse, as a large productive apparatus whose "product" is the graduate, typically understood as either an active consumer and producer in our mass economy or a "citizen" in a mass democracy, or the nonsensical "global citizen." If we evaluate our educational systems honestly, however, we will marvel at how naturally curious and frequently amazed toddlers get turned into jaded and cynical adults.

Man is βιος θαυματοσ—the being that wonders, that which prompts humans to search for wisdom, to seek

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the depths and breadths of the reality in which they participate. Sullenness, isolation, rebellion, and anger are not intrinsic features of being a teenager; they are acquired traits that result from the systematic suppression of wonder, the isolation from the fullness of reality. No doubt this is what Nietzsche realized when he opined that a man's maturity consists in recovering the seriousness he had as a child at play.

I recently talked with some friends who proudly boasted that their 13-year-old grandson was reading Shakespeare, his curiosity sparked by an English lesson. Why shouldn't 13-year-olds read Shakespeare? What better time to start? In our system of mass education, we expect both too much and too little from our children, but only because we have decoupled education from that sense of wonder, and such decoupling necessarily results in a disintegration of the educational enterprise and ultimately of the selves who labor in and under it.

In the blacktopped world of education, shoots of life still spring up, none more promisingly and hopefully than in the classical school movement. Unlike much of our public education, the classical school movement treats young people as whole creatures who do not need to be made to wonder or to be curious about the world around them; they only need that instinct properly guided and nurtured. As any parent can attest, young children are inveterate and often exhausting question askers, the mode in which the mind most directly expresses both its engagement in the world and its freedom. Why would we seek to stifle that impulse?

Classical schools arose in part when parents began to despair concerning the direction of the public schools and the concomitant development of their children. Surely there had to be a better, more humane way to teach children. Wittingly or not, the movement predicated itself on Aristotle's teaching concerning causality: the material, formal, efficient, and final causes that make a thing a fully formed version of its latent potential. In education, we might think of the child as the material cause, that upon which (whom) action is taken and from which the student is made. The formal cause—that which tells us what kind of thing a thing is—views the student as a being whose sense of wonder helps it become a creature who knows things. An educated person is, after all, a person who seeks to know all things worth knowing. Nothing human is alien to them. The efficient cause of the educated person is the curriculum as served by the teacher. Too often our colleges see the curriculum as serving the instructor rather than the instructor serving the curriculum, at which point it no longer is a path to be followed but only a series of way stations on the road to nowhere. A

good curriculum keeps the final cause in mind, and the final purpose of a good education should never be subordinate to some other end, such as economic or political activity. The full flourishing of the person is the goal.

All well and good, but how to give these instincts and ideas institutional form so that students experience school as liberating rather than subjugating? For parents and entrepreneurs and churches that seek to create a good classical school, Anthony Esolen provides a brief but excellent overview in his *Classical Catechism*. Why "catechism"? Esolen uses the question-and-answer form to guide readers to a sound understanding of what both a classical education and a classical school look like. I love my children, but I can't help but believe they would be more fully formed as persons had they attended the kind of school Esolen outlines.

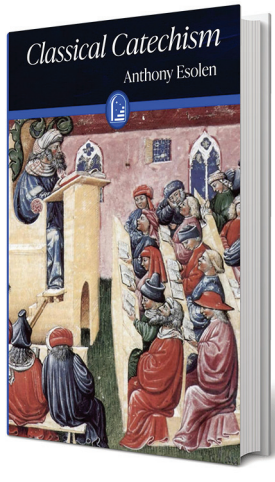
Esolen may reveal his own prejudices in his guide—placing books, literature, and poetry at the center of the enterprise—but his biases aren't necessarily wrong, especially since they address the question posed so many years ago by the Psalmist: "What is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You visit him?" No education worth its salt can or should avoid helping young people get traction on the key questions of any life worth living: Who am I? Where did I come from? Whither am I going? What is expected of me in the span allotted me?

> Too often our educational systems, operating in a fragmentary and often reductionistic fashion, compress the student's experience in such a way as to place that student in a figurative little-ease, whereupon freedom would consist in a joyous stretching outside its bounds. At its worse, it decapitates, placing beyond any consideration the very questions that matter most to us. It becomes technical rather than humane. "The human being," Esolen reminds us, "is not a computing device, not a gear in a machine, not a bundle of political ambitions, not a bed of erotic desires. He is *capax universi*: his mind is open to knowing the truth of anything that exists, both singly and in its relation to other things. He is a world open to the world."

This openness to the world closes upon itself when wonder attenuates. Education should start with the sense of wonder, of miracle, that results from reflecting on one's own existence. Esolen tells us that good instruction always starts with what is nearest at hand and most familiar and then moves outward. St. Augustine's rumination that "men go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motions of the stars, and they pass by themselves without wondering" reminds us of the source and goal of a good education, and also stands as a condemnation of so much contemporary education that does little more than turn people into voyeurs, jaded idlers in a barren garden.

Esolen offers a fecund education, revealed in part on his insistence, undoubtedly controversial to some, that a good education take seriously the differences between the sexes and provide an environment wherein their awakening to one another can find its proper form. Indeed, Esolen's whole approach might be thought of as a proper relating of matter and form. Thus he remonstrates that those creating a school must pay attention not only to the curriculum but also to the buildings where education takes place, warning against mere utilitarian design, stressing proper scale while ensuring that the exterior of the building "should be a place where beauty meets the eye even from a distance." A school's design will give meaning to the sense of "hallowed halls" and engagement with a rich and worthy past.

This, too, relates to Esolen's holistic approach. Certainly a classical education, one that has the humanities at the center but also teaches math and science, develops our capacities of reason but does not neglect the imagination that is "reason come to life." Every act of the imagination, Esolen insists, "is a small instance of a God-like power in man" that enables us "to summon up a world" that is a deeper movement into reality.



Classical Catechism
By Anthony Esolen
(Independently Published, 2024)

Esolen stresses that education involves a proper ordering of things, and this ordering relates to the relationship between teachers and students (authority), students to one another (seniority), students to work (bringing a project to completion), and modes of work to one another (what Esolen calls the "order of excellence" and relates to our ability to develop taste and engage in discriminating judgments). Finally, education should order the student to his or her ultimate purpose, from which alone meaning is generated.

All this is on the affirmative side, but a well-wrought education also attends to what needs to be excluded. St. Thomas wisely observed that distraction is in many ways the most noxious kind of acedia, for it creates a busyness without actual accomplishment. It deceives us. In an age when we are, in Eliot's memorable phrase, distracted from distraction by distraction, the need for focus and attentiveness is more imperative than ever. A good school would eliminate all distractions, especially technological ones. It also encourages a deep seeing, an attentiveness to the world outside the mind and outside the classroom. Classical schools thus encourage students to get their hands dirty, to sensitively examine things in their wholeness, "for the hands to have callouses and for fingers to be smudged with the stuff of things."

A classical education ennobles, it lifts up, and therefore avoids that which degrades or tears down. Rather than "critical thinking," it emphasizes piety; it avoids cynicism with regard to the past and the regnant generous bigotry with regard to present prejudices. It introduces students "to the lost features of their humanity" that results from growing up in a world with no shared culture. Above all, it avoids political indoctrination, "for enmity is not a good soil for learning."

Education at its best is an act of remembering, although Esolen prefers the term "recollecting" because it implies an intentional, rational gathering and ordering of material. It should reestablish our membership both in the overall order of things and alongside others, but also grow again those parts of ourselves we have lost, like an amputee being made whole again. Able to stretch once more, the student will enjoy school as a haven rather than a cell. RL

Jeffrey Polet *is professor emeritus of political science at Hope College and director of the Ford Leadership Forum at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation.*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American Religion by the Numbers

Religion in America has seen its ups and downs throughout the country's history. Recent statistics show that we're experiencing a little bit of both now.

by **MILES SMITH**

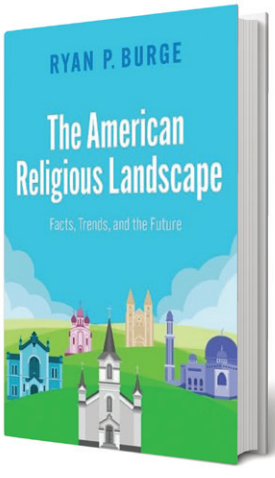
***USA TODAY* ANNOUNCED** in April of 2025 that for "three decades, the percentage of Americans who identify as Christian has steadily declined, a trend confirmed by countless studies. For many believers, it has felt like an inevitable slide into cultural irrelevance." But Zoomers, say the headlines, are headed back to church, and "in a season of overwhelmed news cycles, these religious shifts haven't received the coverage they should, but they are significant, and they keep coming." Younger Americans, particularly Gen Z, or Americans born between 1997 and 2012, "are more spiritually curious. Barna research group reports that most Gen Z teens are interested in learning more about Jesus, with younger cohorts leading the way in the growth of new commitments."

In May, Axios proclaimed that "Christianity is starting to make a comeback in the U.S. and other western countries, led by young people." Zoomers, "especially Gen Z men[,] are actually more likely to attend weekly religious services than millennials and even some younger Gen X-ers, Burge's analysis shows." Young men "were leading America's religion resurgence." Similar articles by *Slate*, the Barna Group, Vox, *The New York Post*, and *The Guardian* propose that a broad resurgence of religion is occurring in the Anglophone world. And almost all of them appeal to the research of Ryan Burge, an ordained Baptist minister and sociologist at Eastern Illinois University who specializes in the study of contemporary religion. Burge's *The American Religious Landscape: Facts, Trends, and the Future* tries to give a glimpse of what is happening in the diverse and nearly impossible-to-quantify lives of religious Americans in various Christian denominations, Islam, Hinduism,

Judaism, and even the surprisingly religious lives of nonreligious Americans. And what is in fact happening is far more complicated, and interesting, than the headlines would have us believe.

The American Religious Landscape is first and foremost a methodologically conventional work of sociology. It has graphs and charts, but these standard and quantifiable measures are not handicaps. Burge rightly sees them as helpful and trustworthy means to move the American religious experience out of sectarian anecdote. Because the "inherent problem with living in the modern world" tends to be that Americans inhabit a "bubble," data can help Americans of various religions see outside their bubble. "The average American hardly ever ventures away from their small and trusted circle of family and friends. Many vacation to the same places every year, and if they do take an international trip, it is fairly rare." Americans, and modern westerners in general, "tend to consume a specific type of media diet that likely confirms their priors, and if they choose to attend a house of worship, they are more often than not surrounded by people who look, believe, and think like they do." Americans don't have the ability, "through their own personal experiences, to even begin to understand the rich tapestry that is American life."

Burge's work is broken into 15 chapters, which focus on various religious groups in the United States. Evangelicals, mainline Protestants, black Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, Jews, Latter-day Saints, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, and "nothing in particular" are all covered, in that order. But even the table of contents tells us we are in for more than your average work of sociology. By separating atheists/agnostics from nones, Burge tells us that he's not letting atheists off the hook; they're religious, too. It's a subtle but important marker that Burge is willing to get creative about when exploring American religion, and his readers are all the better for it.



The American Religious Landscape: Facts, Trends, and the Future

By Ryan P. Burge

(Oxford University Press, 2025)

The fundamentally important claim that Burge makes in his introduction is that there is no country on the planet that has a religious landscape quite like that of the United States. It is by all measures an economically and socially advanced liberal democracy and among the wealthiest countries on the globe. But unlike other wealthy countries—Burge mentions by way of example Australia, Finland, and Spain—the United States is highly and even intensely religious. "Less than 20% of all Norwegians say that religion is very important to them, the same figure in the United States is 52%." In fact, American religiosity

> rivals countries like Paraguay and Armenia, with GDPs that are $6,153 and $7,018, respectively (2024 USD), while the United States GDP per capita was $76,330. It's empirically accurate to say that the United States is, in almost every conceivable way, a religious outlier. It is both incredibly religious and incredibly prosperous.

From the outset, its clear that the United States is not a "normal" Western democracy when it comes to religion. Its history also is not "normal." Burge's evidence for this is an absolute treat for historians, largely because he cuts through tropes that hang around the internet, work watercoolers, and church donut hour. The American South, for example, was historically the least churched part of the United States until the blossoming of evangelical religion in the middle of the 19th century. Perhaps more important for modern historians and sociologists is data Burge uses to show that the United States only became a hyper-religious society at the beginning of the 20th century. Readers looking for a historical golden age of American religion, when a Christian and moral nation flourished untainted by outsiders, will find the reality presented by Burge's work undoubtedly disappointing.

While many more traditional Christians seem interested in reclaiming an idealized Christian past, it is Burge's work on evangelicals that no doubt will drive interest in this book. Burge to his credit is self-aware enough to recognize that interest in

evangelicals is such that he put the chapter on them first in the book. "There may be no more discussed religious movement in the United States today than evangelical Christianity. It's hard to discount the influence that evangelicals have had on every aspect of American culture, society, and politics." Burge documents carefully the intense growth of evangelical churches in the last half of the 20th century. From a marginalized group of Fundamentalist-adjacent Protestant outliers, they became by 2000 arguably the most culturally, socially, and politically influential American religious demographic. The intensity of evangelical churches is matched by the movement's inherent instability. From a high of nearly 30% of the U.S. population, the movement has lost 1/5 of its adherents in the first two decades of the 21st century.

Roman Catholics offer a picture of success and stability in the latter part of the 20th century compared to evangelicals, even if they never reached the same heights of influence. But the 21st century has been harder on Roman Catholics than on evangelicals. While the particular ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church makes their claim to 62 million U.S. members institutionally valid, the number of people attending Mass once a week in the United States has plummeted in the last half century, from nearly 50% of Catholics to 24%. "Simply stated," says Burge, "a Catholic today is half as likely to attend weekly Mass compared to a Catholic in the 1970s." Roman Catholic America is likewise plagued, or blessed, as it were, by the enduring phenomenon of cultural Catholicism that allows nonattending Catholics to admit the importance of Catholic social mores, even if they do not personally attend Mass. "If the Cultural Catholicism phenomenon is true, it's reasonable to assume that there is a bigger share of never or seldom attending Catholics compared to Protestants."

Other chapters in the book will undoubtedly interest social scientists, religious leaders, and educated laypeople. Burge's data is important precisely because it cuts through the sensationalism of headlines, even ones that appeal to his work. There is, for example, and contra right-wing pastors and politicos, no Muslim takeover of the United States. The percentage of the United States that is Muslim is largely stable. What has happened is that Muslim Americans are more geographically diffuse than they were at the beginning of the century, largely because they now participate in sunbelt suburbanization. America Muslims have thus expanded their geographic footprint while simultaneously becoming more like suburban Americans. American Islam is small, stable, and increasingly *American*.

The darkest story in Burge's work is the decline of mainline Protestantism. In 1950, the Protestant mainline firmly controlled almost every major cultural, social, and political institution. But in the 21st century, Burge notes, "the continued existence of mainline Protestant Christianity is very much in doubt. The denominations that provide the foundation for this faith tradition are shedding members at a rapid rate, and the number of young families in mainline churches is shrinking with each year that passes." The only remaining "viable path forward relies on conversion rather than retention—a challenging pursuit in an American climate that is becoming increasingly secular with each year. For decades, the mainline has offered a theological and cultural counterbalance to the conservatism espoused by their evangelical cousins." The scales of American Christianity, Burge argues, "are continuing to tip to the right as the membership of the mainline continues to vanish, while evangelicalism is holding steady."

Readers might knock Burge for a reductionist liberal/conservative or right/left when it comes to the respective taxonomies of theology and politics, but he's not writing a work of history or a theological treatise. He has written a work of sociology and delivered a small masterpiece. The only criticism that might be offered is that Burge never addresses that strange group of Protestants that are neither fully evangelical nor fully mainline. Conservative Anglicans, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, and the NAPARC Presbyterian denominations are not statistically large, but they nonetheless deserve some coverage. That said, Burge's book is excellent, and without a doubt the best book on contemporary religion available to scholars, religious leaders, and laypeople. The charts and graphs interspersed throughout are easy to understand, and the author is a fantastic writer who makes numbers tell a story that is both interesting and important. One hopes for more from Ryan Burge in the coming years. RL

***Miles Smith** is a historian of the American South and the Atlantic World. He has taught at Hillsdale College, Regent University, and Texas Christian University, and is the author most recently of* Religion and Republic: Christian America from the Founding to the Civil War.

Painting by Jacob van Strij depicting the Chamber of Rotterdam yacht for the Dutch East India Company saluting an East-Indiaman and a Dutch warship (1790). Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

The Conscience of the Christian Merchant

Can doing business be a way of cultivating virtue? One minister of the Dutch Golden Age thought so. He has much to teach us today.

by **MICHAEL J. LYNCH**

EARLIER THIS YEAR, in a subcommittee hearing, Republican Senator Josh Hawley called out insurance companies for their alleged fraudulent practices after natural disasters: "At the end of the day, they just won't pay what is due. What is required. What is just." Hawley was not coy about the motivations for such behavior, claiming, "It is a deliberate strategy to maximize profits." Hawley represents a growing contingent of conservatives interested in what Senator Marco Rubio has called "common-good capitalism." In 2019, Rubio gave a lecture at The Catholic University of America, drawing heavily on Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on capital and labor, Rerum Novarum. Rubio argued, in line with the encyclical, that laissez-faire capitalism needs to be bridled by the moral obligations employers owe to employees and, more broadly, to the common good of society.

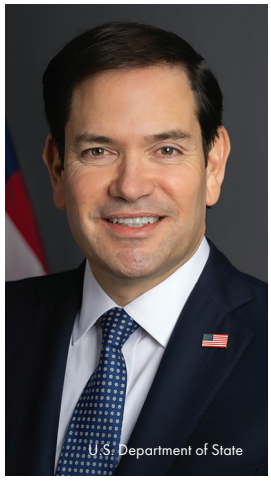
In tone and theme, the recently translated Latin treatise *On the Duties of Merchants* by Daniel Souterius (1571–1634) resonates with this common-good conservatism. Souterius, a relatively minor figure in early modern Protestantism, was born in England of Flemish descent and raised in a mercantile family. He studied at the University of Leiden—a bastion of Renaissance humanism—before becoming a Dutch Reformed minister. A rather prolific author, Souterius published *On the Duties of Merchants* in 1615, dedicating it to the directors of the Dutch East India

Company, which, though founded only a decade earlier, would prove a key player in the so-called Dutch Golden Age of the 17th century. While ostensibly addressed to merchants, the fact that it was written in Latin rather than in the vernacular may suggest an additional apologetical purpose, perhaps aiming to persuade the broader European intelligentsia of commerce's moral legitimacy.

Souterius outlines nine "duties of piety necessary in conducting business": (1) maintain a good conscience, (2) eschew deceit, (3) pursue honesty, (4) love justice, (5) put off pride, (6) provide charity for the poor, (7) cultivate contentment, (8) avoid worry, and (9) love heavenly things. The editors of this translated edition note that the work functions simultaneously as a handbook for Christian merchants, a guide to business ethics, and a humanist defense of commerce itself. This latter purpose might sound foreign to our modern capitalistic sensibilities, but suspicion of trade has deep roots. From the Chinese philosopher Wang Fu to many early Church Fathers, foreign trade was viewed as a breeding ground for avarice, undermining local economies and civic virtue. Professions in commerce and trade have always been morally suspect. Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach) 26:29 bluntly declares: "A merchant can hardly keep from wrongdoing, nor is a tradesman innocent of sin."

Against such pessimism, Souterius presents trade not as a necessary evil but as a divinely sanctioned means of preserving life and fostering community: "Trade preserves human life and supplies clothing and nourishment for oneself…and [for those] we hold dear and ought to protect." In this, he echoes (Pseudo-)Plutarch: "[The sea] has rendered sociable and tolerable our existence which, without this, would have been fierce and without commerce, by making available through mutual assistance what otherwise would have been lacking, and by bringing into existence, through the exchange of goods, community and friendship."

Daniel Souterius (1571–1634)

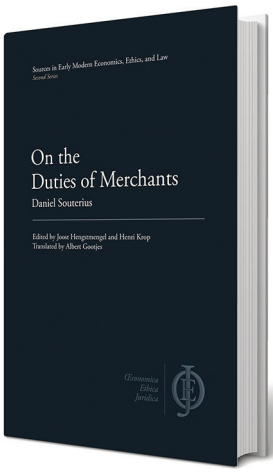


Sec. of State Marco Rubio

Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO)

The title of Souterius's work consciously evokes Cicero's *De Officiis* (On Duties), and indeed, Cicero is his most frequently cited source. One striking feature, at least by modern standards, is the sheer density of quotations relative to Souterius's own words. He likens his work to that of a bee: "Let me therefore pluck the most exquisite little flowers from the books of different writers…and offer you profitable and pleasant libations from them." Souterius quotes such "libations" liberally from a panoply of classical pagan and Christian authors, including Cicero, Seneca, Horace, Plato, and Plutarch, but also Augustine, Lactantius, Bernard of Clairvaux, Boethius, and Ambrose. In typical Scholastic fashion, each chapter begins with a definition of the virtue or vice under consideration, followed by arguments—both theological and practical—for embracing or avoiding them.

Souterius unapologetically writes for Christian merchants—or at least those who claim to be such. While encouraging them to be generous to the poor in their midst, he quotes Colossians 3:12: "As the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies,



On the Duties of Merchants

By Daniel Souterius

(CLP Academic, 2025)

kindness, supporting one another." For Souterius, the virtue of *pietas* (piety or godliness) is the foundation of all moral conduct, the root from which all other virtues grow. Since Dutch merchants professed to be Christians, they were obligated to do business with the full awareness that their actions unfolded under the watchful eye of divine providence. Greed, for Souterius, is not merely one vice among many but the root of all—the fountainhead of deception, fraud, stinginess, and the love of earthly things over heavenly ones.

Still, Souterius is no proto-socialist. He is careful to state that his "intention is not to take riches and other goods away from Christians altogether." Quoting Ambrose, he assumes the maxim *abusus non tollit usum* ("abuse does not take away proper use"): "Guilt is not in the goods themselves, but in those who know not how to use them." The problem is not with wealth or commerce per se but with their misuse. The just merchant sees wealth not merely as private property but as a trust for the common good.

Pliny the Younger is invoked to emphasize that care for the poor must go beyond family or civic obligations: It demands active attention to those truly unable to help themselves. Souterius appeals not only to Christian charity but also to natural law, reminding readers that "we are all made from the same lump and substance, so that every man is the same thing we are, that is, flesh." And he is not above pragmatic arguments: Honesty ensures a good name for one's family; justice avoids litigation; humility guards against the futility of material accumulation. As he reminds the reader, "What are all the things that accrue to us in this life except inconstancies subject to motion?"

Souterius's call is for merchants to take personal responsibility for their commercial activities in light of their dual identity as Christians and neighbors—thus fulfilling the two greatest commandments. Unlike *Rerum Novarum* or contemporary appeals to common-good capitalism, Souterius does not urge civil governments to restrain the excesses of the market. That is perhaps unsurprising: *On the Duties of Merchants* is written not to magistrates but to businessmen themselves. Yet for all its early 17th-century particularity, the work feels strikingly contemporary. In an age when global commerce is both ubiquitous and morally contested, Souterius's insistence on personal virtue and ethical responsibility remains deeply relevant. His vision is not one of technocratic reform, nor of centralized regulation, but of virtue formation, calling each merchant to ask not "What can I get away with?" but "How ought I to live and work?"

This English edition of *On the Duties of Merchants*, translated with clarity and accuracy by Albert Gootjes and helpfully introduced by Joost Hengstmengel and Henri Krop, is a welcome addition to the Acton Institute's Early Modern Economics, Ethics, and Law series. At a time when many conservatives are rethinking the terms of capitalism, seeking a model that serves the good of one's own nation rather than an amorphous global system, Souterius reminds us that commerce, when practiced in the fear of God and love of neighbor, can be not merely permissible but morally ennobled. His little treatise deserves a place on the shelf not as a historical curiosity but as a summons to consider economic life as an arena for the cultivation of virtue. Though aimed at Christian merchants, its insights into honesty, justice, and charity speak just as clearly to any Christian seeking to navigate the moral complexities of economic life.

In the end, Souterius offers no grand policy prescriptions—only the humble conviction that a just and humane economy begins not in legislation or technological advancement but in the conscience and actions of the merchant. RL

***Michael J. Lynch** teaches classical languages and humanities at Delaware Valley Classical School in New Castle, Delaware, and is a teaching fellow at the Davenant Institute and the author of* John Davenant's Hypothetical Universalism.

CONVERSATION STARTERS WITH . . .

Nadya Williams

Q **Your family emigrated from Russia in 1991, just as the USSR collapsed. You've written about how you were given the choice of coming to the U.S. or moving to Israel—or even to stay in Russia. Do you ever imagine alternative Nadya lives—one that was lived out in Israel and one that remained in Russia? If so, what do they look like? Or is an American Nadya all there is and was?**

I wonder if imagining alternative lives is the quintessential stuff of middle age. I hadn't really thought of it until a few years ago, and now it's become this strange hobby, an obsession even, which is why I read (and review) so many new books on contemporary Russia. I loved my childhood in Russia and Israel, where my family lived for five and a half years before moving to the U.S. right as I was about to begin 10th grade. Yet, in hindsight, I can note a lot of trauma and dysfunction in my family, but even more so baked into the social fabric. In Russia, there were generations who still remembered the Stalinist purges, whereas in Israel practically every single citizen had relatives who perished in the Holocaust. The grandfather of one of my classmates had been on Schindler's List.

Still, few forces in the world are as powerful as nostalgia—the sounds, smells, and sights one can still experience so vividly decades later. Our souls are invariably stamped by the love of places we loved first. Like the sight of birch trees, which reminds me of the trees I saw everywhere as a child. (I cried the first time I saw one in America.) Or the beet salad that I occasionally make, which thoroughly freaks out my American children.

But thinking of choice as a child is tricky. On the one hand, sure, I could have put my foot down, in theory, and stayed behind in Russia with my grandparents, for instance. But in reality, what nine-year-old would have done that? And knowing what I know now, life would have been much worse for sure. The level of corruption, insane under communism, is simply unimaginable now. And while God works miracles everywhere, it seems that my coming to Christ was the result of an intricate set of American circumstances, of living in a place where people went to church and talked about God, which made me want to find out what this all was about. Russia, after all, was an officially atheistic state, and in Israel all my friends and classmates were secular Jews.

When we moved into our home in Ohio two years ago (a house we bought sight unseen while still living in Georgia), I discovered that there is this gorgeous brown birch tree on my front lawn. It doesn't look like those Russian snow-white birches, but it is very recognizably their cousin. It felt like a gift from God.

Q **On your website, you write that you are a "former academic . . . and a historian who writes for the church." Was there one moment when you went from one calling to another, or were you always both? How does your grounding in the Classics serve the church in 2025?**

I was an academic for 15 years—the last three of those as a tenured full professor of history. And for 12 of those years, I was a Christian. I came to Christ at age 30, and it took me a lot of time after my conversion to feel confident writing for the church; I really only started five years ago. For one thing, as a new Christian, I didn't think I had anything to offer the church at that point—I needed time to grow as a believer. Besides, my academic job was very teaching- and service-intensive, so I did only minimal writing and publishing, all of it very academic.

Then during the pandemic, for the first time in my life, I asked my husband for his help in carving out one hour a day to write. So he would take the kids outside to play while I wrote. It was then that I realized I really did have ideas that would be helpful for the church, and my first book came out of that period. I wanted to show that the early Christians (including those to whom Paul was writing) are so much like us, deeply relatable in their sins and struggles. But this is good news—we're not worse (and we're not better!) than them. We all desperately need Christ.

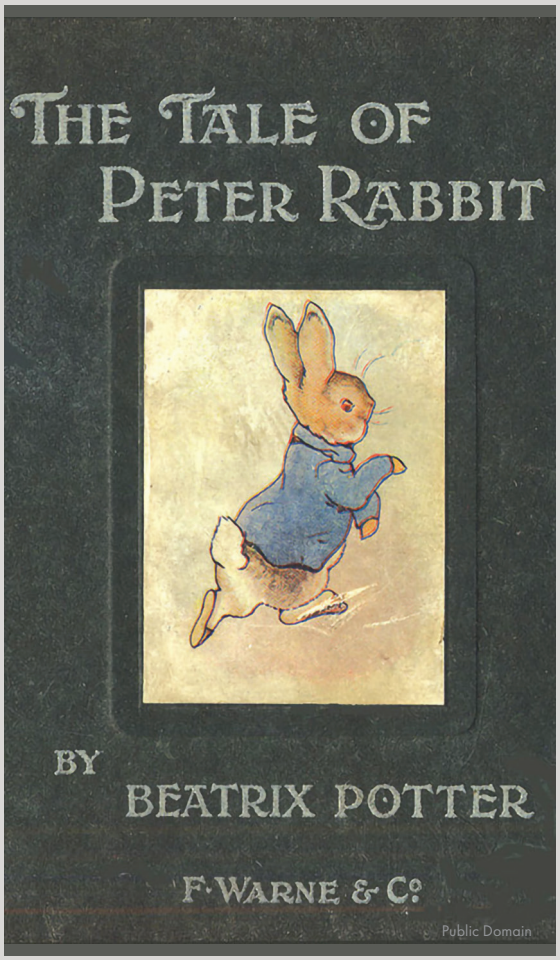
What I realized is that Christians today want to love the Bible and want to love their history, but too often they simply don't know where to start. I use my training in the Classics to show the relevance of the ancient world for our understanding of the Bible and the world that the earliest Christians lived in. It is a fascinating world! Besides, we keep talking (rightly) about our need for the true, the good, and the beautiful—but too often people have no idea that this is a direct reference to Plato and to the love of the ancient Classics that Christians, too, saw as essential for intellectual formation. My latest book in particular focuses on how we can (and should) read the Classics as Christians.

In essence, I see all my work as trying to solve the scandal of the evangelical mind. After all, God calls us to love him with all our mind.

Q **In your book *Mothers, Children, and the Body Politic*, you tackle the subject of the commodification of women and children. Is there any one thing especially responsible for this dehumanization process? Was it an ideological attack on the traditional family? Many on the secular left would say it is owing to capitalism itself. What do you say to the nonreligious who are also concerned about this commercialization of what it means to be human?**

I don't know if we should blame any one thing most of all. Rather, there is a perfect storm afoot that has been gathering for 70-odd years. Yes, we are living amid an ideological attack on the traditional family. But Christians in particular must recognize that all crises we face right now are, first and foremost, theological crises. And so I see this commodification of women and children as a denial that people are

"AFTER ALL, GOD CALLS US TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL OUR MIND."



Front cover of the first edition of Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902)

made in the image of God and that this fact of our personhood matters. If people are not image bearers, then such *Brave New World*–style reproductive tech developments as egg freezing, IVF, surrogacy, and whole-body gestational donation are totally fine.

But so much of this is indeed capitalism-driven as well, or at least driven by a capitalism not grounded in virtue, because we live in a world where we'd like to put a price tag on absolutely everything. This means that we price human life and human beings in all kinds of ways that we don't even think about on a regular basis—consider what is happening with PEPFAR funding, for instance, or other humanitarian funding that is very tangibly saving lives. Or the example I mention in the book about a faulty car model (Ford Pinto)—the manufacturer decided not to recall it because price calculations showed that it would be cheaper to just pay out to the families of the projected victims who would die rather than to recall the car and replace the faulty part. Calculations like these are good business but obviously unethical because they place money over people's lives.

The original title I had proposed for this book was "Priceless," because in God's eyes, every single person is priceless. This is a key point I keep coming back to in this book—*what if we look at people the way God looks at them*? God's redemption, His buying back of humanity on the cross, is a powerful statement on how we should be thinking about all people.

Now this is an argument that doesn't work for the nonreligious, but I think an argument they could agree with is the need to prioritize human flourishing and to protect the vulnerable. So many measures I describe in my book as attacking the dignity of mothers and children are, really, hostile to the dignity of all people. We should all be appalled at surrogacy—it is an outrageous abuse of people. And we should all be horrified at the obvious abuses that occur whenever medically assisted suicide is legalized. But at the same time, I would add, the reason we all—nonreligious and religious alike—are likely to be united in our horror at these abuses is precisely because we live in a world shaped by 2,000+ years of Judeo-Christian teaching on human personhood.

Q **On your Substack, you have an essay that lists "beautiful books" to read to children, including such mainstays as *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and the works of Dr. Seuss. What are some "beautiful books" you'd recommend for college students right now?**

I always recommend going back to the basics—the original beautiful books, in my view, are the Greco-Roman classics. Read Homer, the tragedians, Plato and Aristotle, Vergil, Ovid, Tacitus, Apuleius, and many more. My forthcoming book this fall is a guide for Christians on how to do this sort of reading as Christians.

But we also live in the modern age and have to understand contemporary crises. I just mentioned Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* in answering the previous question. It's not a beautiful book in the same sense as the beautiful books I read to my children or, say, the ancient epics. But reading dystopian fiction like Huxley's is a call to beauty, because it reveals the raw undisguised ugliness of the alternative.

> **I APPRECIATE A FEMINISM THAT SEES MEN AND WOMEN AS GOD SEES US, RATHER THAN TRYING TO REMAKE WOMEN INTO MEN OR MEN INTO WOMEN.**

Perhaps this is why I would also recommend Russian literature—Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov, and the contemporary Russian master Eugene Vodolazkin. Vodolazkin especially is a stunning writer, even as his stories are filled with tragedy. I think for college students preparing for life as full-fledged adults, reading about tragedy and suffering is formational in recognizing the Christ-haunted nature of all life. But also, we can see our own darkest desires reflected in such literature. Who of us wouldn't want to live life entirely on our own terms? But these novels remind that we are not in control, and suffering is a part of life—yet God is on his throne. Always.

Q **The blog you contribute to, *Fairer Disputations*, describes itself as "Sex-Realist Feminism for the 21st Century." For many conservative or traditional women, especially of a religious bent, "feminism" is almost a toxic term, a form of ideology. What does it mean, or what can it mean, in 2025 for those put off by the word?**

I think the key to understanding *Fairer Disputations* is the "sex-realist" part. Yes, there are way too many kinds of feminism today, and many are indeed problematic. In fact, I would argue that the Judith Butler brand of feminism, for instance, is pure misogyny—and the rest of the *FD* contributors would agree with me on this. Indeed, this is one way to summarize Mary Harrington's powerful book *Feminism Against Progress*.

What I appreciate about sex-realist feminism is the emphasis on who we were created to be—women and men, with real embodied differences that are part of God's design for humanity and are worth celebrating rather than denying or denigrating. Writers since antiquity have argued that women's ability to become pregnant was a design flaw—a sign (as Aristotle said) of being a "mutilated man." But this is not true. God made our bodies as they are, and God delights in his creation. I appreciate a feminism that sees men and women as God sees us, rather than trying to remake women into men or men into women.

Q **Fun question: What's your favorite B&W film, and why?**

I'm really not big on movies most of the year. I have no trouble sitting with a book, but I get very fidgety during films, so we watch very few as a family. But every year during Christmas season, my husband is in charge of selecting some good Christmas films for us to enjoy as a family. And the only way to find something that doesn't have anything inappropriate for little kids is to go B&W.

So, we've watched a couple of B&W Christmas movies every year for the past few years, and I have to say, there is something so encouraging about these films—think *It's a Wonderful Life*, *White Christmas*, and *Come to the Stable*. It's become an integral part of our December countdown to Christmas, right along with the very tacky artificial tree (because the kids decorate—and we have too many homemade ornaments they love) and the increased hot chocolate and cookies intake (because this is what good memories are made of).

I guess I read Russian literature for the angst, but I watch B&W Christmas movies for the encouragement, the joy, the promise that even though life truly is tragic at times, there is redemption afoot, too. We all need this reassurance in the stories we read and see. And we need beautiful family rituals that are wholesome and simple. RL

***Nadya Williams** holds a Ph.D. in Classics from Princeton University. She is the author of* Cultural Christians in the Early Church; Mothers, Children, and the Body Politic*; and the forthcoming* Christians Reading Classics (*Zondervan Academic, 2025*). *She is also books editor at* Mere Orthodoxy *and writes a weekly newsletter at nadyawilliams.substack.com.*

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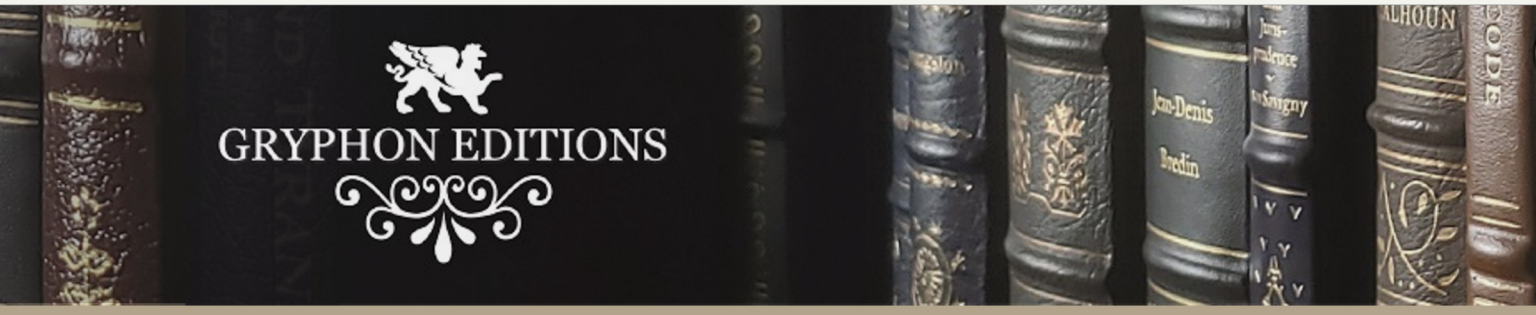


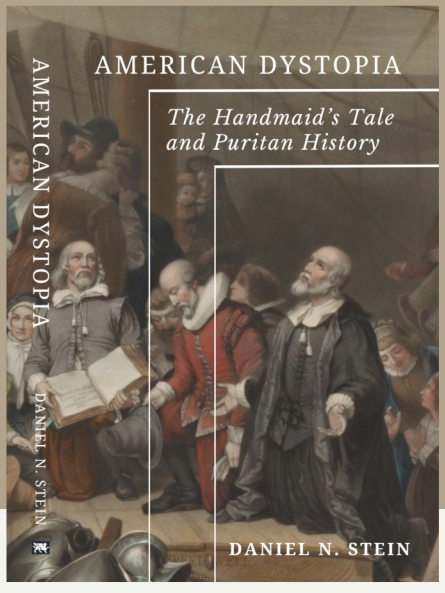
AMERICAN DYSTOPIA

The Handmaid's Tale and Puritan History

by Daniel Stein

NEW

Available in paperback, leather-bound, and e-book editions!



In an era when Americans tend to feel uncomfortable about certain periods of their country's past, no historical group has suffered a greater hit to its reputation than the Puritans who founded New England. Primarily remembered for their role in the Salem Witch Trials, Puritans have become poster-children for regressive tendencies in American history and culture. This is exemplified by the renewed popularity of *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopian novel by the Canadian author Margaret Atwood that depicts a potential American future based on its Puritan past. In this world, religious minorities are hunted down, races are segregated, dissident thinkers are tortured by state police, and women are enslaved as "handmaids" to bear children for the ruling class.

The time has come for a reevaluation of the Puritans and their legacy for modern America. Taking the world of *The Handmaid's Tale* as its point of reference, *American Dystopia* describes how the actual Puritans bore little resemblance to their characterization in this book and contemporary popular culture. Far from representing a backwards and embarrassing historical anomaly that would be better forgotten, Puritans were ahead of their contemporaries in all of the areas referenced by Atwood, including women's rights, racial tolerance, democratic government, and religious freedom. In laying the foundations for later American values, Puritans differentiated America from Old World societies in a positive way. By recovering the Puritans' legacy, this book offers a defense of American origins.

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