

CONVERTING THE RADICALS

RESCUING SOULS FROM THE TOTALITARIAN TEMPTATION

MICHAEL LUCCHESI

The Christian Pioneer of
Person-Centered Medicine

KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR

The Poetry
of Politics

J.C. SCHARL

Making Sense of the
First Christian Socialist

DYLAN PAHMAN

When Hitler Was a
Moral Compass

JOHN PINHEIRO

The Monastery
as Business

FR. ELIAS CARR

The Cities of
God and Man

JEFFREY POLET

AND

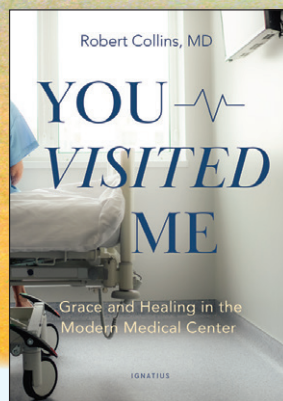
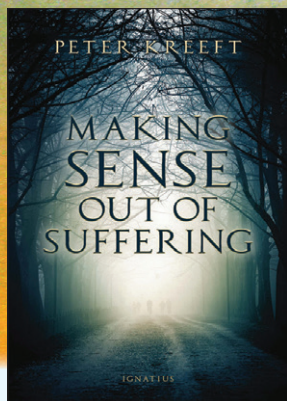
MARCELO RESICO ON ENRIQUE SHAW: BUSINESSMAN AND . . . SAINT?

A CONVERSATION STARTER WITH . . . MICHAEL PAKALUK

\$9.50 US / \$12.99 CAN



SUFFERING, MEDICINE & THE MERCY OF GOD



◆ MAKING SENSE OUT OF SUFFERING

Peter Kreeft presents a philosophical and spiritual exploration of the mystery of pain and suffering, offering insights for those seeking meaning in hardship through personal reflection and Christian theology. It is an insightful guide for those who have had seemingly pointless suffering, combining personal experience with wisdom to address the "why" question from a faith-based perspective. Kreeft's real and honest personal quest on the meaning of suffering is engaging and convincing.

MSOSP... Sewn Softcover, \$17.95

"A book of great clarity and comfort, one that really makes a difference. It gives the real answer to the question why bad things happen to good people."

—**William Kilpatrick**, Author, *Psychological Seduction*

"Kreeft takes up the unanswerable and with lucid and vigorous prose he carries us inexorably to the stunning answer."

—**Elisabeth Elliot**, Author, *Suffering is Never for Nothing*

"Kreeft is all that a guide should be as he tackles the hardest subject in the world. Having made the journey with Kreeft myself, I can say it is a journey well worth making."

—**Sheldon Vanauken**, Author, *A Severe Mercy*

◆ YOU VISITED ME

Grace and Healing in the Modern Medical Center

Dr. Robert Collins, a leading oncologist, relates powerful true stories about God's grace and healing in a major medical center. The book flows from the unfolding of faith in the life of an agnostic physician, to his increasing perception of God's movement in the lives of his patients, and to his understanding medicine as a call to participation in the love of God. He reveals how, in the midst of the seemingly cold, stark medical center, God's love is present. These vibrant stories awaken us to the wonder all around us and to the good news that God visits us wherever we are.

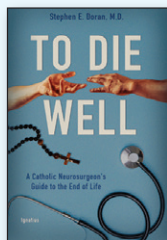
YVMP... Sewn Softcover, \$17.95

"Whether you are facing serious illness, a caregiver to the sick, a physician, or a general reader, this book restores hope in God's promises and tender care for each of us."

—**John Bruchalski, MD**, Founder, Tepeyac OB/GYN; Author, *Two Patients*

"In the highly technocratic world of medicine today, it is refreshing to read a book by a professor at a top-tier medical school who sees medicine as a vocation to share in the mission of the Divine Physician." —**Bishop James Conley**, Episcopal Advisor, Catholic Medical Association

ALSO AVAILABLE



◆ To Die Well: A Catholic Neurosurgeon's Guide to the End of Life

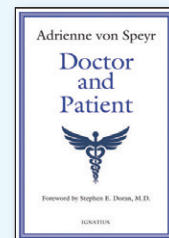
Dr. Stephen Doran draws from his vast experience as a neurosurgeon, a bioethicist, and a permanent deacon to present the Catholic perspective on the art of dying well. The first part focuses on the moral issues that surround death and dying, including end-of-life medical decisions. The second part is devoted to the Catholic spiritual understanding of dying and the rites that accompany the death of a Catholic.

TDWP... Sewn Softcover, \$17.95

◆ Doctor and Patient

Adrienne von Speyr, one of the most original spiritual writers of the twentieth century, draws from her experience as a medical doctor to teach Christian medical professionals the art of treating and loving their patients. Physicians and nurses are called by God to be more than mere custodians of health, but bearers of Jesus' good news, healers who care for the body as well as soul.

DPP... Sewn Softcover, \$18.95



ignatius press

P.O. Box 1339, Ft. Collins, CO 80522

www.ignatius.com
(800) 651-1531

THE ISSUE THIS TIME

BY ANTHONY SACRAMONE

The idea of a lost Golden Age is as old as Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the Hindu *Satya Yuga*, Norse mythology, and of course the Garden of Eden. Most cultures—most people—have a nagging sense that something way back when went terribly wrong and that we must get back there if we're ever to put things right.

You may know this by its other name: utopianism—or the journey to nowhere. Politically, these “nowheres” have resulted in something less than golden—namely, the gulag, the guillotine, and the gas chamber. That trip back to a state of nature usually entails a lot of destruction along the way. This is the ideological trap too many are falling into today—right and left.

Among the utopias imagined by our great mythmakers are Plato's *Republic* with its famous disdain for poets who lie about the gods; St. Thomas More's own *Utopia*, which I insist is really what got him executed; *The City of the Sun* by Dominican Tommaso Campanella, which is now read as often as the end user agreement of Microsoft Word; *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, a priest of the Church of Ireland, full of talking horses and Yahoos (the book, not the church); *New Atlantis* by Sir Francis Bacon and its Salomon's House, that precursor to the research university but without the student loans; *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy, which inspired many a socialist; *Lost Horizon*, which gave us a meh Frank Capra film; and, of course, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*.

Oh, wait. Those last two are *dystopian* novels, examples of utopias that didn't so much go nowhere as go straight to H-E-double hockey sticks. That they were written in the 20th century should come as no surprise, as it was also the century that brought us imperial fascism and communism. The former saw paradise in a pre-Christian pagan past, racially purified and rich in Nietzschean Supermen, while the latter saw glory in a post-Christian future when the proletariat would own the means of production, all religions would be rendered moot, and blockbuster movies would probably feature someone and his tractor.

But really, even communism can't hide its Rousseauian quest for a pre-Fall past, that period before dreaded Capitalism made us invent air conditioning and live long enough to not see George R.R. Martin finish *Winds of Winter*.

If only we had outgrown such childish things. As Michael Lucchese's lead feature, “Rescuing Souls from the Totalitarian Temptation,” demonstrates—here we go again, with our vain striving after wind, otherwise known as gnosis, the attempt “not only to transcend the world but impose an altogether new order on it.”

Which is not to say there isn't always room for improvement. Our world may be fallen but that doesn't mean we shouldn't dust now and again and patch the holes in the roof to keep out the rain. Karen Swallow Prior introduces us to Paul Tournier, who sought to do a little more than that, to heal the whole ailing person—mind, body, and spirit. And Dylan Pahman would like us to understand better the first Christian socialist, who unlike his Marxist counterparts thought we should be a little more godly in our quest to renovate the city of man.

In my humble opinion, our pursuit of paradise on earth is a perversion of the Christian hope that everything doesn't have to stay the way it is forever, only there's something *we* can do about it now, to hurry it along, to immanentize the eschaton as Eric Voegelin would say (remember that name). Well, that's where things go sideways. Unfortunately, we too often fall into the trap of believing that things are bad not because people are bad but because *those* people are bad.

This issue of *Religion & Liberty* seeks to equip readers such that we can all identify and fight the ideological temptation. We may not be able to bring heaven to earth, but we don't have to make it a living hell either.

Religion & Liberty

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Anthony Sacramone

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Cantelon Design

PROOFREADER

Lauren Mann

PUBLISHER

Kris Alan Mauren

OUR MISSION

Religion & Liberty celebrates human flourishing in all its spiritual, economic, cultural, and familial dimensions. It decries the mechanistic, the nihilistic, and the hopeless, while highlighting all of God's good gifts and humankind's ingenuity and creativity.

We seek liberty to pursue our vocations in the highest interest of our families, communities, and nation, as well as freedom from state coercion and centralization.

Our goal is nothing less than the promotion of a free and virtuous society.

TO SUBSCRIBE

Visit acton.org/pub/religion-liberty

Or write to:

Religion & Liberty
Acton Institute
98 E. Fulton Street
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

DISTRIBUTION & CIRCULATION INQUIRIES

J. M. Cappello Associates
610-525-6236

ADVERTISING INQUIRIES

Publishing Management Associates Inc.
815-398-8569
pma-inc.net

© 2026 Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. All rights reserved.

Articles in this quarterly periodical do not necessarily represent the views of either the Acton Institute or the editor. The editor is responsible for the selection and acceptance of articles; responsibility for opinions expressed and accuracy of facts in articles published rests solely with the authors.

CONTENTS

Features

- 6** **Rescuing Souls from the Totalitarian Temptation**..... MICHAEL LUCCHESI
- 16** **Paul Tournier: Christian Pioneer of Person-Centered Medicine**..... KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR
- 24** **“Only a Digger”: The Misunderstood
Story of the First Christian Socialist** DYLAN PAHMAN
- 34** **Persuasion and Propaganda:
How Poetry Helps Navigate Politics**..... J. C. SCHARL
- 42** **Monasticism as Enterprise** FR. ELIAS CARR

In the Liberal Tradition

- 52** **Enrique Shaw’s Path to Holiness as a Business Leader**..... MARCELO RESICO

Reviews

- 55** **When Hitler Was a Moral Compass** JOHN PINHEIRO
The Age of Hitler and How We Will Survive It
By Alec Ryrie
- 59** **The Cities of God and Man**..... JEFFREY POLET
What Is Political Theology?
By Luke Bretherton, Vincent W. Lloyd, Valentina Napolitano
- 64** **Our Technofounder Future**..... TITUS TECHERA
The Technological Republic: Hard Power, Soft Belief, and the Future of the West
By Alexander C. Karp and Nicholas W. Zamiska

Reviews

68 **Natural, Thus Universal, Human Rights** CASEY CHALK

The Christian Philosophy of Jacques Maritain

By Jason L.A. West

72 **Can We Moderate a Politicized Church Without Politics?** STEPHEN O. PRESLEY

The Vanishing Church: How the Hollowing Out of Moderate Congregations Is Hurting Democracy, Faith, and Us

By Ryan P. Burge

Conversation Starters With...

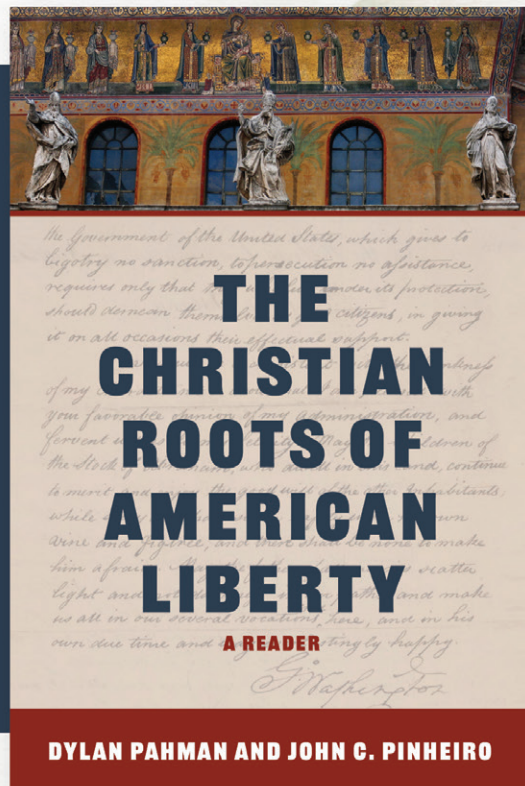
77 **Michael Pakaluk**



Was the American founding an Enlightenment invention or an organic development of liberty? Liberal or conservative? Secular or Christian?

American conservatives traditionally answered “both” to these questions. More recently, new movements on the Right have challenged this conviction. Some even dismiss the founding as hopelessly secular.

Yet centuries of Christian ideas shaped the American founding, and Pahman and Pinheiro provide the sources to prove it in *The Christian Roots of American Liberty*. Along with select American writings, readers can examine historic Christian works that birthed the core principles of liberty. This edited collection, marking the United States’ 250th anniversary, provides the resources to conserve this timeless foundation.



“NEW TAXES SHOULD NOT BE IMPOSED ON SUBJECTS WITHOUT THEIR FREE CONSENT— NOT BY FORCE, CURSES, OR THREATS.” — JUAN DE MARIANA

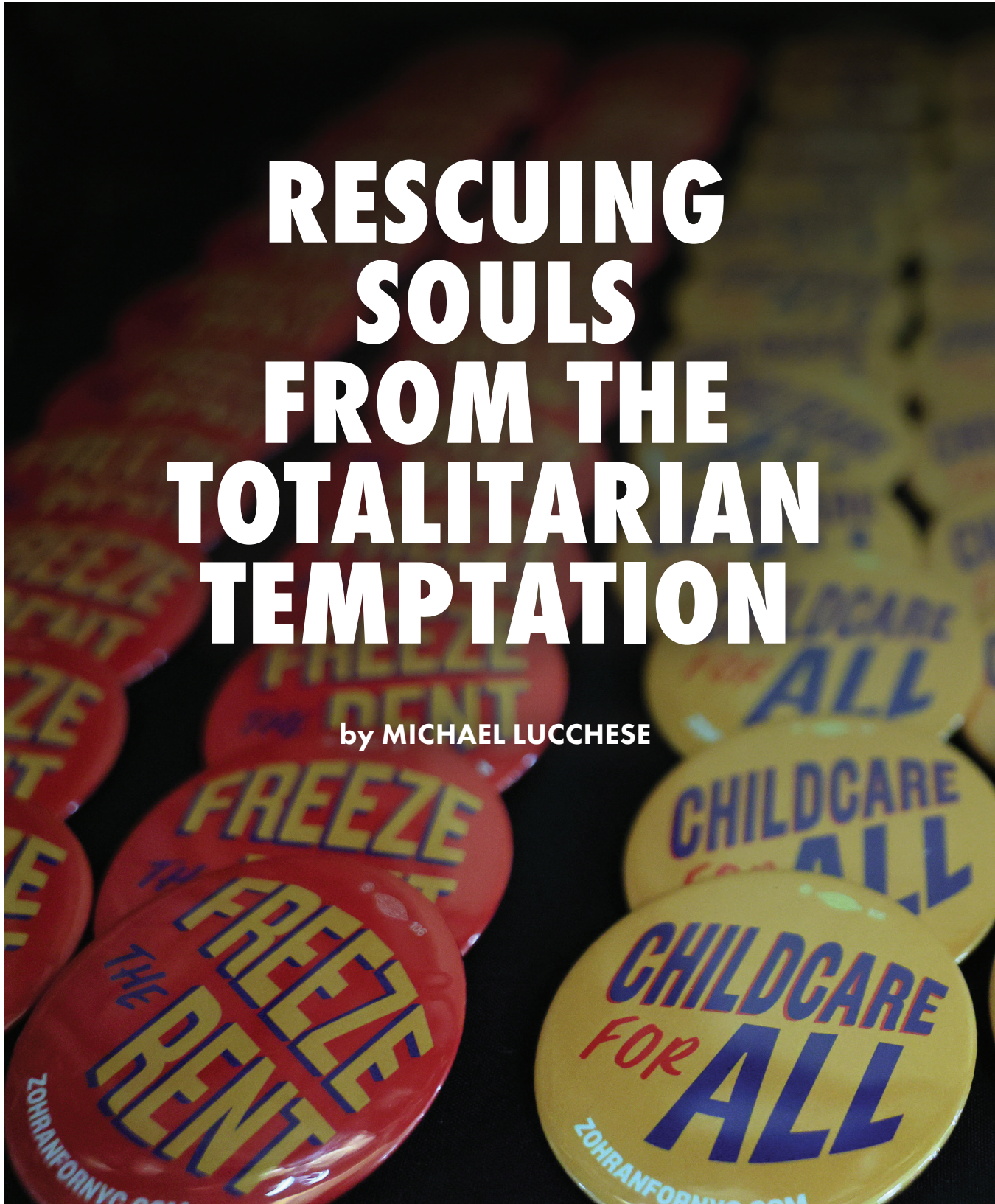
“LET THESE TRUTHS BE INDELIBLY IMPRESSED ON OUR MINDS—THAT WE CANNOT BE HAPPY WITHOUT BEING FREE—THAT WE CANNOT BE FREE WITHOUT BEING SECURE IN OUR PROPERTY—THAT WE CANNOT BE SECURE IN OUR PROPERTY, IF, WITHOUT OUR CONSENT, OTHERS MAY, AS BY RIGHT, TAKE IT AWAY.” — JOHN DICKINSON

Order today from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or

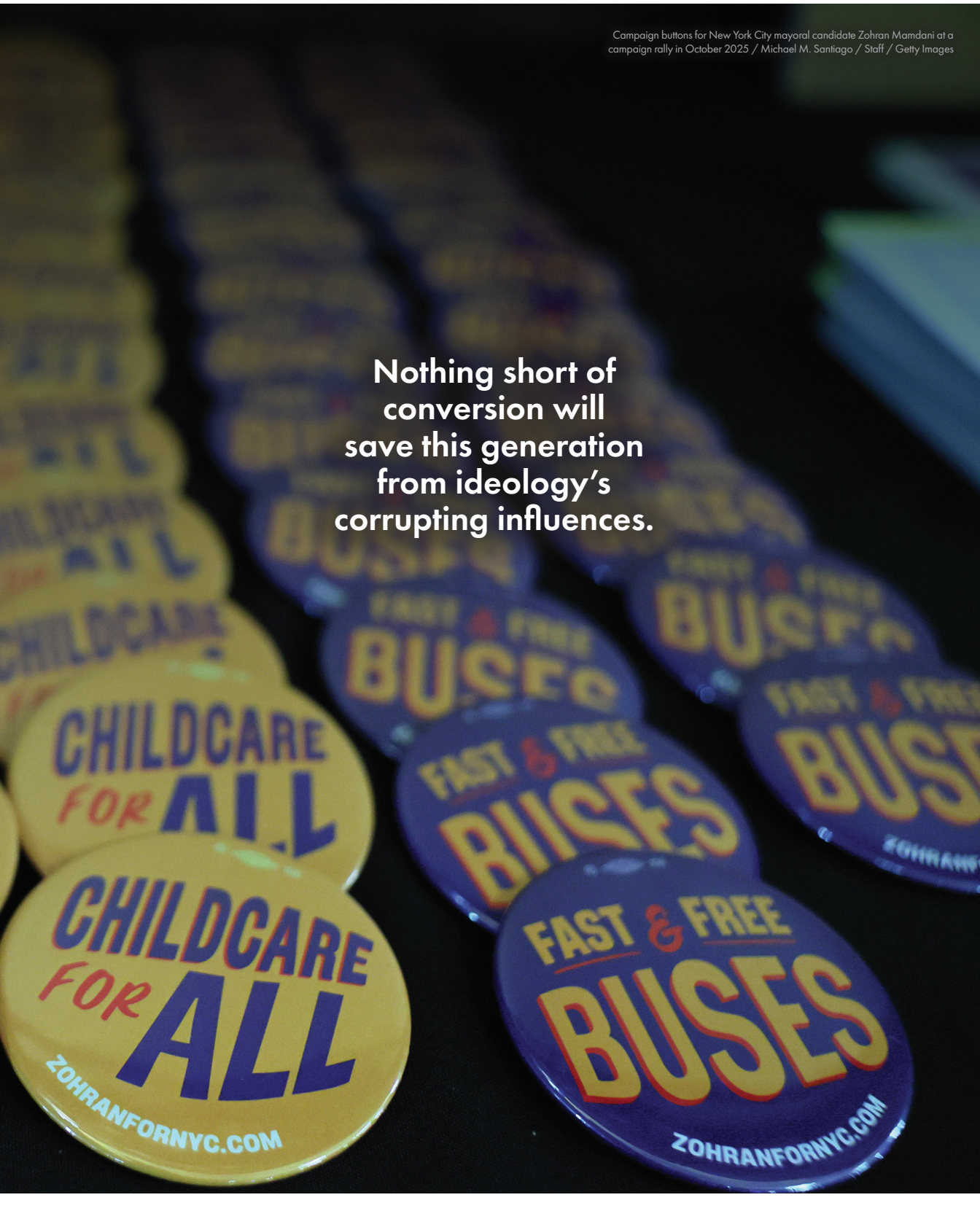
SHOP.ACTON.ORG

RESCUING SOULS FROM THE TOTALITARIAN TEMPTATION

by MICHAEL LUCCHESI



Nothing short of
conversion will
save this generation
from ideology's
corrupting influences.



T

TOTALITARIAN IDEOLOGIES ARE SUPPOSED to be on the ash heap of history. With the apparent triumph of liberalism first in World War II and then in the Cold War, history has allegedly come to an end. And yet discontent simmers just beneath the surface of Western society. Young people increasingly turn to these supposedly discredited ideologies of both the right and the left. So many want to go *beyond* liberalism and answer their hunger for meaning through power politics.

Thus far, very little seems to abate the rise of the new radicalism. New York City's young voters, for example, elected an avowed socialist as mayor



Mamdani supporters during the NYC Primary (2025)

just last fall. On the right, too, large numbers of Conservatism Inc.'s young staffers are adopting increasingly reactionary poses—including noxious anti-Semitism. These trends are, without question, the most troubling in American politics—and they must be stopped. Simply scolding youthful extremists, however, or intoning the old slogans of liberalism will not win over converts to moderation. Nor will technical solutions promising material abundance sate the spiritual longings driving the rise of extremism. In no small measure, totalizing ideology holds such an appeal for the disaffected young because the centrist establishment offers so little by way of a truly moral vision. And, as the Proverb goes, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

George Orwell was among the 20th-century intellectuals who explained why the ideological mode of thinking captivates so many. Throughout his wartime writings, the socialist was very honest about why Nazism came to power in Germany. “Whereas Socialism, and even capitalism in a more grudging way, have said to people ‘I offer you a good time,’” he wrote in a 1940 review of *Mein Kampf*, “Hitler has said to them ‘I offer you struggle, danger and death,’ and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet.” Totalitarians of the left and right alike tell their impressionable followers they are fighting for more than self-interest; they claim to be fighting for meaning in a meaningless world.

Even as we seek to understand the totalitarian temptation, though, we must never appease it.

Conservatism must be the negation of ideology, as the movement’s founder, Russell Kirk, understood. We cannot allow our movement to be redefined by the followers of discredited doctrines, and we must possess the moral clarity to see through the false promises of totalitarianism. Instead of grasping after online influence or centralized power, conservatives ought to advance our own vision of what gives life meaning. Only by inviting the next generation to renew what Edmund Burke called the “eternal contract of society” might we redeem the times.

Two guides for this task can be found in the pantheon of 20th-century conservative minds: Eric Voegelin and Whittaker Chambers. Voegelin was a German political theorist who fled Germany in the 1930s to avoid persecution by the Nazis. Chambers was among the most important ex-communists who urged the United States to stand firm in the struggle against the Soviet Union. Their efforts to combat ideology can inform our own today.

Voegelin was an uncompromising critic of both the left and the right. Late in life, he even refused to be identified as a “conservative” because he feared the American movement bearing that name had become too ideological. It is precisely this intellectual courage that makes him

“
**CONSERVATISM MUST
BE THE NEGATION
OF IDEOLOGY, AS
THE MOVEMENT’S
FOUNDER, RUSSELL
KIRK, UNDERSTOOD.**
”

a vital voice for our time. Voegelin’s call to philosophy can inspire us to rise above the din of incessant partisan squabbling and endless social media posting and resist the siren song of gnosticism.

Born in Cologne at the outset of the 20th century, Voegelin was well positioned to understand the crisis facing the modern West. He perceived that it was not primarily material or even political in nature, but rather *spiritual*. Reaching into the ancient past, he labeled the force behind modernity’s disorder as

Hitler in Vienna (1938)



CC-BY-SA 3.0 / Bundesarchiv



Eric Voegelin (1901–1985)

gnosticism. In antiquity this was the heresy rooted in a hatred of the world and a desire to transcend it. Today, though, it takes on an even more sinister quality as it seeks not only to transcend the world but impose an altogether new order on it. To Voegelin, this is the very essence of totalitarianism.

Perhaps Voegelin's most famous description of gnostic tyranny comes in his 1952 book *The New Science of Politics*. He warned that ideology seeks to "immanentize the eschaton"—that is, bring about the apocalypse and create heaven on earth. In some ways, it is easy to see how attractive this heresy could be; the world is a disappointing place, and we all wish it could be better than it is. But Voegelin saw perceptively that the utopian promise is nothing more than a "fallacy." History does not have an "eidos" or essence, he wrote, "because the course of history extends into the unknown future." The gnostics' confident declaration about the "meaning of history, thus, is an illusion."

The two most dangerous gnostic ideologies of the twentieth century, of course, were Nazism and communism. As David Corey has written, "Ideology designated for [Voegelin] a system of ideas that purports to explain reality and man's place in it, a system with political activism as its goal, but which, in fact, badly misrepresents the human condition by failing

to acknowledge either its limits or its possibilities." The Nazis proposed their sick concept of racial purity as the *eidos* of history for the basis for their political activism. Voegelin saw through the lie: Before they came to power, he wrote incisive books dismantling their race science and defending human dignity. For his efforts, he had to flee Germany in 1938, eventually finding refuge in the United States.

Unlike so many in the liberal West, though, Voegelin's hatred of the Nazi regime did not make him blind to the sickening utopianism behind communist ideology. He held that gnosticism is "the dynamic core in the Marxian mysticism of the realm of freedom and the withering-away of the state." It provided a justification not only for the Nazis' concentration camps, but also the gulag prisons of the Soviet Union. Whenever gnosticism reared its ugly head, Voegelin wrote, "the result was the fall into anti-Christian nihilism, into the idea of the superman in one or the other of its variants—be it the progressive superman of Condorcet, the positivistic superman of Comte, the materialistic superman of Marx, or the Dionysiac superman of Nietzsche."

Gnosticism did not release its grip on the human mind with the passing of the Nazi and Soviet regimes. As my *Law & Liberty* colleague John Grove has pointed out, it remains the motive force of the "woke" extremism sundering the American Republic—in both its right- and left-wing manifestations. He writes that the central gnostic "belief—that the world as we experience it is utterly alien, all-powerful, and destructive of our ability to live a good life—does represent a kind of perverse common ground between some pockets of today's right and the woke." Both sets, therefore, combine "a rigid moralism when it comes to demands on others with a complete lack of self-reflection or self-restraint" that is characteristic of the gnostic revolution Voegelin opposed. These factions may not consider themselves tyrannical, but the moral urgency of their culture war has turned totalitarianism into a bipartisan phenomenon.

But Voegelin did not consider gnosticism's march inexorable. "The spiritual disorder of our time, the civilizational crisis of which everyone so readily speaks, does not by any means have to be borne as an inevitable fate; on the contrary, everyone possesses the means of overcoming it in his own life," he wrote in *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*. "No one is obliged to take part in the spiritual crisis of a society; on the contrary, everyone is obliged to avoid this folly and live his life in order." Voegelin hoped that philosophy

and a philosophic education—not politics as such—might teach the principles necessary for reasserting order in the soul and order in the commonwealth.

Another term Voegelin used for gnostic ideologues came from Greek: “philodoxers,” or lovers of opinions. More concerned with dogma than truth, they obscure the reality of truth. Russell Kirk, explaining Voegelin’s analysis of this pathology, wrote that “men intoxicated with doxa, even famous philodoxers, break up the order in personality when they blind men to the nature of the soul; and they upset the balance in any good society when they conjure up visions of desire satisfied which really are impossible of attainment.” What is necessary, then, in an age ravaged by gnostics and philodoxers and ideologues is a concerted effort to restore order. Philosophy is the great antidote to psychic and social disorder.

Voegelin certainly believed there was a limited political dimension to this mission. At the end of *The New Science of Politics*, for example, he wrote that there is “a glimmer of hope” in “the American and English democracies which most solidly in their institutions represent the truth of the soul.” Ordered liberty—uniting both constitutional freedom and military strength—in those lands, however desiccated, could still resist the ideological empires of Germany and Russia. And yet Voegelin also stated that “it will require all our efforts to kindle this glimmer into a flame by repressing gnostic corruption and restoring the forces of civilization.” And that task, in the main, was not political. Statesmen, Voegelin knew, are not in the end the saviors we most need.

Voegelin instead believed it was the character of the *philosopher* that could renew society. “The term philosophy does not stand alone but gains its meaning from its opposition to the predominant philodoxy,” he said in his *Autobiographical Reflections*. Lovers of wisdom and pursuers of the truth above all, philosophers cut through the lies of ideology and false religion to understand reality itself. Citizens of the Unreal City may consider such action treason, but Voegelin understood that such resistance was in fact a higher patriotism. For this reason, Socrates deserves to be classed among the founders of Western civilization itself.

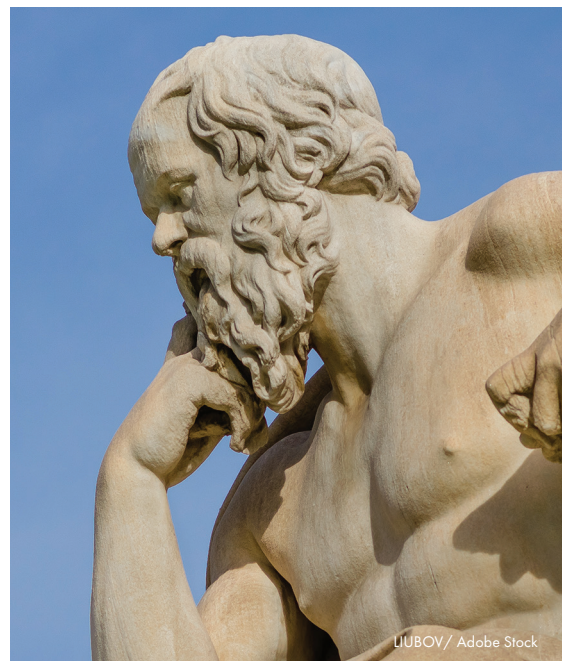
It is important to note, however, that Voegelin’s philosopher is not locked in some Manichean struggle with his gnostic foes, as though they were equal and opposite forces. Indeed, he maintained

a healthy skepticism about even the ability of philosophers to answer the questions they incessantly ask. “Philosophy is not a doctrine of right order,” he wrote in the third volume of *Order and History*, “but the light of wisdom that falls on the struggle; and help is not a piece of information about truth, but the arduous effort to locate the forces of evil and identify their nature.” He did not believe there were any final answers to the perennial problems of political life or civilization.

Nor did Voegelin look to any period of antiquity for social, political, or religious orders to restore. As Michael Federici writes in his brilliant introduction to Voegelin’s thought, he “did not advocate a return to a golden age of the past that can be engendered by a resurrection of great literary texts.” Rather, Voegelin maintained that the “true, the good, and the beautiful must be rediscovered and reconstituted in each historical age.” The transcendental is something each generation—each individual—must experience for themselves.

Reasoning from Socrates’s famous image of the Cave in the *Republic*, Voegelin described this experience as a *periagoge*, or turning-of-the-soul. Especially in the waste land of modernity, human beings desperately need this kind of conversion. But as Voegelin said in his *Reflections*, “One of the typical phenomena

Statue of Socrates outside the Academy of Athens



LVX VENIT IN MVNDVN ET DILEXERVNT HOMINES MAGIS TENEBRAS QVAM LVCEM IO:3:1



Maxima pars hominum cecis immerga tenebris
 Volvitur assidue, et subito letatur inani:
 Alcyon ut ovis: his officina in herat umbrarum,
 Vt VERI simulacra omnes mirentur amantem.

Et si tollit vana ludantur imagine rerum:
 Quam pauci meliore luto, qui in lumine puro
 Secreti à s' tollit vicia, ludibria cernunt
 Rerum umbras rectas, expendant omnia lauce:

Hi postea erroris nebula dignoscere possunt
 Vera bona, atque alios ceca sub nocte latentem
 Extrahere in claram lucem conantur, ut illis
 Nullus amor facit, tanta est J rationis egestas.

CC. Harlemensis Inu.
 Saenredam Sculpsit.
 Henr. Hondius excudit.
 1604.

L. SPIEGEL FIGVRARI ET SCVLPI CVRAVIT. AC DOCTISS. ORNATISS. Z. D. PET. PAAW IN LVGDVN. ACAD. PROFESSORI MEDICO DD.

1604 engraving by Jan Saenredam depicting Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, based on a design by Cornelis van Haarlem

of the twentieth century is the event of spiritually energetic people breaking out of the dominant intellectual group in order to find the reality that has been lost.” George Orwell, for example, achieved something like this when he finally broke with communism during the Spanish Civil War. It is stories of *periagoge* like his that can, he said, restore “lost contact with reality” and “regain the contact that [we] are in danger of losing.”

One of the 20th century’s great stories of conversion is that of Whittaker Chambers. His 1952 memoir, *Witness*, recounts his journey to becoming a communist revolutionary and spy—and then his rejection of ideology and search for life’s true meaning. Aside from the exciting espionage drama, it is also a profound philosophical reflection on the nature of modernity. Chambers ranks among those “spiritually energetic people” Voegelin thought necessary to point us back to order. It is little wonder that his book became one of the founding texts of the

American conservative movement. He showed us the path up out of the underworld.

Chambers was born in 1901—the same year as Voegelin—and did not have a happy childhood. His parents’ marriage was deeply troubled, and his brother committed suicide at a young age. Compounded with the moral collapse of the West after World War I, Chambers was driven by his unhappiness to seek out some cause to give him meaning. He found it in Revolution. Communism, he wrote, “offered me what nothing else in the dying world had power to offer at the same intensity, faith and a vision, something for which to live and something for which to die.” Furthermore, Chambers looked to Revolution to solve the crisis he saw everywhere around him. “The Communist Party presents itself as the one organization of the will to survive the crisis in a civilization where that will is elsewhere divided, wavering, or absent,” he wrote. “The revolution is never stronger than the failure of civilization. Communism is never stronger than the failure of other faiths.”



Public Domain / Fred Palumbo / Library of Congress

Whittaker Chambers (1901–1961)

In other words, Chambers embraced communism precisely because he was attracted to the gnostic heresy Voegelin described. He found in its utopian promise a simple faith that the world can be changed, and he wanted to bear witness to it. And yet, as he put it in the letter to his children which serves as the memoir's foreword, this was not a new faith. "It is," he wrote, "in fact man's second oldest faith. Its promise was whispered in the first days of Creation

“
**CHAMBERS EMBRACED
COMMUNISM PRECISELY
BECAUSE HE WAS
ATTRACTED TO THE
GNOSTIC HERESY
VOEGLIN DESCRIBED.**
”



Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

***The Garden of Eden* by Rubens and Bruegel the Elder (c. 1615)**

under the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil: "Ye shall be as gods." Chambers felt that there was something morally compelling about the vision of absolute freedom and universal equality at the back of this faith—although he ultimately came to reject it.

At the start of his revolutionary career, Chambers was merely a left-wing propagandist. But his devotion to the cause quickly drew the attention of agents for the Soviet underground who recruited him to commit acts of espionage against the United States. For a long time Chambers was utterly devoted to the mission. But in the course of his life as a spy, he began to see through the lies on which communism relied. For one, he was horrified by the brutality of Stalin's purges and his willingness to ally with Hitler to partition Poland. But there were several other moments that helped redeem Chambers from the unreality of ideology.

Throughout the memoir, Chambers recounts several moments that led to his conversion, his break with communism. The first and most moving came when his daughter, Ellen, was an infant. He observed her eating in a highchair when, he recollected:

My eye came to rest on the delicate convolutions of her ear—those intricate, perfect ears. The thought passed through my mind: "No, those ears were

not created by any chance coming together of atoms in nature (the Communist view). They could have been created only by immense design.” The thought was involuntary and unwanted. I crowded it out of my mind. But I never wholly forgot it or the occasion. I had to crowd it out of my mind. If I had completed it, I should have had to say: Design presupposes God. I did not know that, at that moment, the finger of God was first laid upon my forehead.

This moment and others like it gradually forced Chambers to turn away from ideology altogether. It was not an easy process for him; he eventually had to betray some of his closest friends in the underground and deconstruct a faith that had given him purpose throughout his adult life. But these encounters with reality—a chain wrought by divine providence—rescued Chambers from the totalitarian temptation.

Like Voegelin, Chambers came to understand that the major problem of modernity was not political or economic, but rather spiritual. “The crisis of the Western world exists to the degree in which it is indifferent to God,” he wrote. “It exists to the degree that the Western world actually shares Communism’s materialist vision, is so dazzled by the logic of the materialist interpretation of history, politics, and economics that it fails to grasp that, for it, the only possible answer to the Communist challenge: Faith in God or Faith in Man? is the challenge: Faith in God.” Chambers would go on to devote the rest of his career as a writer to meeting exactly that challenge.

Writing was not the only way Chambers resisted

the follies of the time. He and his wife, Esther, also bought property in rural Maryland, Pipe Creek Farm, and committed to the reality of agricultural life. Farming became for Chambers a kind of Platonic link between the visible and invisible worlds. In his posthumous and fragmentary final book, *Cold Friday*, Chambers wrote that the farm was to be “a witness against the world.” “By deliberately choosing this life of hardship and immense satisfaction,” he declared, “we say in effect: The modern world has nothing better to give us.” This commitment to the life of the land demonstrates that attaining faith through an encounter with reality need not be a merely intellectual endeavor. This kind of mysticism is available to all people, from farmhands in the fields to professors in the ivory towers.

In a 1987 *Modern Age* article, Princeton University’s Russell Nieli ably sums up the similarities in both Chambers’s and Voegelin’s thought. “At the heart of Eric Voegelin’s and Whittaker Chambers’s views of Western modernity is the belief that Western culture has reached a stage of acute crisis that has been brought on by an overemphasis on science and technology to the neglect of man’s spiritual dimension,” he writes. Both rejected all forms of materialism and condemned demonic ideologies that “cut man off from his rootedness in the divine.” Nieli went on to label both men “mystics” of a sort. Their task, as writers and intellectuals, was to restore a perception of reality—and the God who created it—to Western civilization.

2019 photo of Whittaker Chambers’s Pipe Creek Farm in Carroll County, Maryland



Voegelin and Chambers were both too wary of mass politics and stifling orthodoxies to ever truly support movements based on their ideas. Perhaps no “movement” can ever really be the vehicle for genuine social renewal—and yet, at its best, the conservative movement has always incorporated their mystical insights. The institutions founded by their students once focused on teaching this kind of humble political philosophy. Statesmen such as Ronald Reagan, flawed as they may have been, tried practicing prudence according to the wisdom they learned from Chambers, Voegelin, and others like them. This is the highest kind of conservatism.

But now it seems that the American right has lost its sense of spirituality. And as a result, it is losing ground to the extremists who believe there is nothing left to conserve. The hatred and anger of the new ideologues is a dead end for the American Republic. “Man without mysticism is monster,” Chambers wrote. Passionate intensity will never bring heaven to earth, let alone solve the manifold practical problems before us.

The new generation of extremists—and young men particularly—are bored with the “end of history.” The so-called neutral public square leaves them uninspired, and like Chambers they feel a pervasive sense of impending doom. The decline of community continues apace, and young people are left adrift. When these extremists turn to the culture war and gnostic ideologies, what they really are seeking is a home.

The task ahead of conservatives, then, is not so much to forcefully condemn these lost souls (though we should never compromise with ideology in any form) but to give them the homes they’re looking for. In part, this must be achieved by safeguarding the traditional liberties, through political action that these would-be revolutionaries themselves can take up, that make community possible. But as Voegelin and Chambers would remind us, this can only conserve civilization from external threats; we must also resist the internal spiritual decay of meaning. That means teaching and educating about the deeper significance of our communities. Schools do not merely exist for career training, and churches are not social clubs. “Christ is the head of the *corpus mysticum*, which includes all men from the beginning of the world to its end,” Voegelin wrote in a book condemning the Nazi appropriation of Christianity. “He is not the president of a special-interest club.”

Edmund Burke, the forerunner of all modern conservatism, understood that this defense of free

“
**VOEGELIN AND
CHAMBERS WERE
BOTH TOO WARY
OF MASS POLITICS
AND STIFLING
ORTHODOXIES TO
EVER TRULY SUPPORT
MOVEMENTS BASED
ON THEIR IDEAS.**
”

community was the only thing that could arrest the march of radicalism. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, he set out to articulate what he called the “latent wisdom” of the institutions our ancestors bequeathed us. “To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections.” “It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind.” The love of constitutional patriotism—not the rage of nationalism nor the fury of socialism—is the principle by which young people might find the principles that can help them restore order in their souls and order in our commonwealth.

What may begin to help, in other words, is a conservative movement dedicated to providing a truly philosophic education. Above all, we must reject gnosticism in all its forms and teach the rising generations of citizens how to love wisdom. There is no precise roadmap to that sort of social renewal, of course, but in the writings and lives of Eric Voegelin and Whittaker Chambers we may see a glimmer of hope that our culture might still experience the conversion it so desperately needs. **RL**

Michael Lucchese is founder of Pipe Creek Consulting, an associate editor of Law & Liberty, and a contributing editor to Providence.



PAUL TOURNIER:

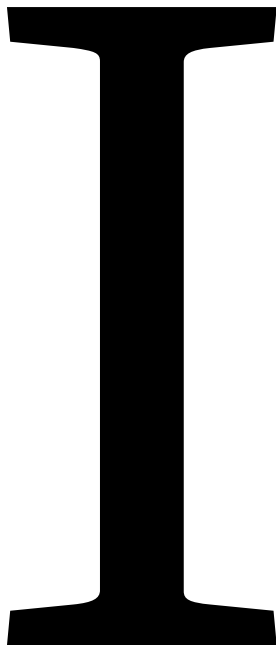
CHRISTIAN PIONEER OF PERSON-CENTERED MEDICINE

by KAREN SWALLOW PRIOR

If one malady can be called a particularly modern disease, it is fragmentation—the breaking into pieces what was meant to be whole. One man sought to put the pieces back together again in the field of medicine and mental health. For that he relied on both a personal touch and the sovereignty of God.



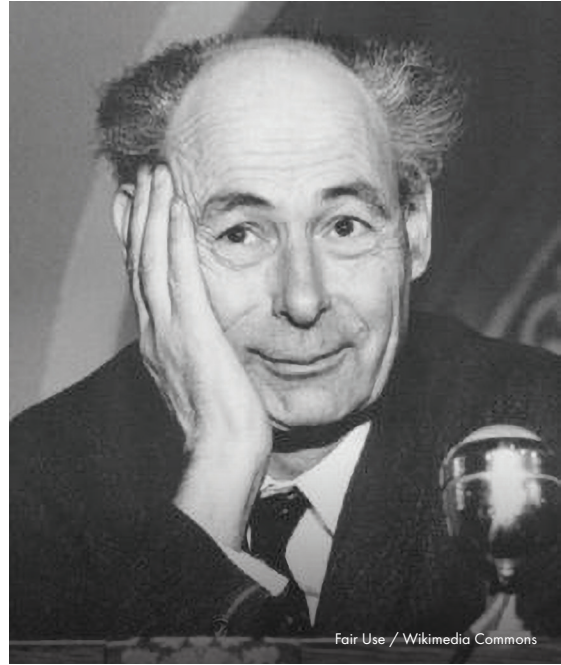
BillionPhotos.com / Adobe Stock



IN 2006, CHRISTIANITY TODAY PUBLISHED

“The Top 50 Books that Have Shaped Evangelicals.” Listed at the number 24 spot is Paul Tournier’s *The Meaning of Persons*—ahead of Charles Colson’s *Born Again*, John Piper’s *Desiring God*, Mark Noll’s *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, James Dobson’s *Dare to Discipline*, and even Frank Peretti’s *This Present Darkness*. Of all these influential writers, only Tournier no longer remains a household name among evangelicals.

Like these other authors, Tournier was a Christian and an evangelical (at least as the term was broadly defined in the mid-20th century). But unlike them, he



Paul Tournier (1898–1986)

wasn’t American; he was Swiss. And unlike many of evangelicalism’s most celebrated authors, he wasn’t a “professional evangelical”; he was a medical doctor. Yet, in some ways, Paul Tournier’s influence—both inside and far outside evangelicalism—was deeper and wider than that of the others. His major contribution has, in fact, become axiomatic, one we can hardly imagine today having not always existed. Tournier’s contribution to his field was what we now call integrative medicine, an approach to health that recognizes the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit.

If indeed we no longer imagine a world that lacks an understanding of holistic health, we have Tournier to thank. While questions around the relationship between mind and body go back to ancient philosophers, modern Western medicine has until relatively recently tended to focus primarily on the body. But Tournier, who was born in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1898, lived and worked during a time when the compartmentalization and systemization that had, since the Enlightenment, characterized most spheres was easing toward greater synthesis and integration. The materialism and mechanization that characterized the later modern age was becoming exhausted. Indeed, it would soon culminate in two devastating world wars. In the wake of the depersonalizing and dehumanizing aspects of industrialization, a

yearning grew for meaning, wholeness, and overarching purpose—personally, professionally, socially, and spiritually. Thus, an impetus toward unity and integration found expression in numerous ways and areas of life.

In the arts, playwright Luigi Pirandello with *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (whom Tournier cites in his work) exposed the fractured modern self in search of a unified identity. Poet T.S. Eliot expressed the fragmentation and soullessness of the modern age in *The Waste Land*, “The Hollow Men,” and other poems. In public life, efforts in the American courts and in the broader culture strove to integrate the races and to advance civil rights. In the field of psychology, Carl Jung sought to integrate the conscious and unconscious minds around a sense of self that was whole and meaningful. In the church, ecumenical institutions such as the World Council of Churches were established to foster greater unity among Christian communities. In evangelicalism, Francis Schaeffer modeled the integration of biblical truth into all of culture and life. The Lausanne Covenant brought together Christian leaders from around the world to express common cause in global evangelism efforts.

It was in this broader context, as well as in the field of psychology more narrowly, that Paul Tournier founded “person-centered medicine,” an understanding of health that emphasized the integration of the psychological and the physical. And it is owing in large part to Tournier’s work—work that drew deeply from his Christian faith—that what today is called integrative or holistic medicine is so well-known and widely accepted.

“

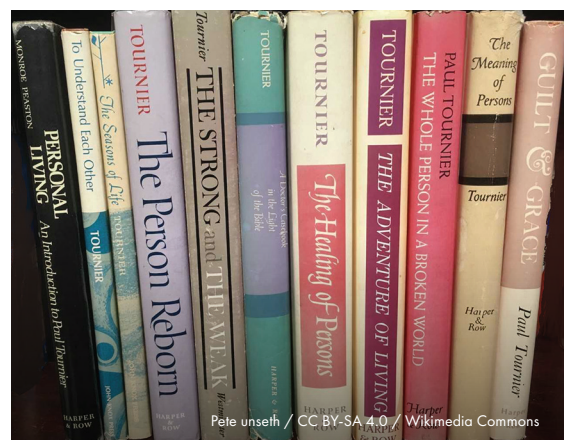
IT IS OWING IN LARGE PART TO TOURNIER’S WORK THAT WHAT TODAY IS CALLED HOLISTIC MEDICINE IS SO WIDELY ACCEPTED.

”

It shouldn’t be surprising to learn that Tournier’s own life experiences led him to this transformative understanding of medicine that emphasizes the whole person. Tournier’s father served as pastor of St. Peter’s Cathedral in Geneva but died in Tournier’s infancy. His mother died a few years later, leaving the young, orphaned Tournier in an emotionally fragile state that affected his life for many years. In *The Christian Psychology of Paul Tournier*, Gary R. Collins describes how isolated and withdrawn Tournier was as a boy, even after he committed his life to Christ during an evangelistic sermon around age 11. When Tournier was 16, one of his teachers, noticing the boy’s loneliness, took him under his wing, helped him discover his intellectual giftedness, and built up his confidence significantly. From 1917 to 1923, Tournier studied medicine at the University of Geneva. Even as a student, he demonstrated a humanitarian bent, serving with the International Red Cross in Vienna and eastern Europe to repatriate Russian and Austrian prisoners of war and undertaking efforts to raise funds for famine-struck Russian children.

In 1924, Tournier married a fellow Sunday school teacher who shared his Christian commitment. After spending a period out of church, the couple returned following the birth of their first child. There, Tournier became an outspoken advocate for orthodoxy in the face of encroaching liberalism, only to grow disillusioned by the institutional church. However, a few years after beginning his private practice as a physician in 1928, he was introduced to a vibrant religious movement called the Oxford Group through a patient of his who had undergone a radical personal

Books by and about Paul Tournier



transformation. Because of Tournier's encounter with the Oxford Group, Collins writes, the entire trajectory of Tournier's life changed.

The Oxford Group (later re-named the Moral Re-Armament Movement, then Initiatives of Change), a Christian fellowship founded in 1921 by an American Lutheran pastor (and that would later become a model for Alcoholics Anonymous), emphasized personal and spiritual transformation through the Christian practices of reflection, meditation, and confession to one another. This dialogical approach that integrated the emotional and the rational aspects of a person was for Tournier a radically different approach to life. Up to now—in his family life, in his church life, and in his medical practice—Tournier had approached everything intellectually, as Hans-Rudolf Pfeifer and John Cox recount in *Medicine of the Person*. Later, reflecting on those early years of establishing a career and a family, Tournier recognized that he had used this intellectualism to shield himself from the pain and vulnerability of emotions. Opening himself emotionally also opened him up to God in a way he had never experienced before. As he became more involved with the group, participating in meetings across Europe, the physician was, as Collins writes, undergoing “the process of becoming a psychotherapist.” Notably, the Oxford Group and

its methods earned the praise of psychiatrist and fellow Swiss Carl Jung, who was also a significant influence on Tournier.

These experiences taught Tournier not only a new way of living out his faith and his family life but a new way of working as a physician, too. “In the early years,” Collins writes, Tournier “had concerned himself only with treating disease, making no attempt to know his patients on a personal level.” He changed his medical practice by taking more time to listen and talk to his patients, considering not only the physical dimension of their being but also the psychological and spiritual dimensions. He soon discovered that talking and listening to his patients helped their physical health to improve. Tournier discovered a new calling on his life, and he believed it came from God. He dedicated his life, as Collins puts it, to “developing a Christian view of medicine.”

In 1940, Tournier published his first book, *Médecine de la Personne*, later translated into English as *The Healing of Persons*. The book was so well-received and its influence so great that in 1947 Tournier founded an international organization of the same name, one that continues to bring together medical professionals and philosophers from an array of specializations. Today *Médecine de la Personne* advocates a view of the patient “as a physical, mental and emotional unity in his family and other social surroundings.” The organization is defined by a characteristic “attitude towards the patient,” regardless of the specific discipline or role of the practitioner, a characteristic that carries out the integrative nature of Tournier's lifelong vision.

It is *Le Personnage et la Personne*, however, published in 1955 and translated into English in 1957 as *The Meaning of Persons*, that would eventually find its place in that list of the most influential books in evangelicalism. *The Meaning of Persons* clearly demonstrates the influence of the Oxford Group on Tournier's thinking and practice, along with his turn to counseling as a central component of his practice as a physician. In *The Meaning of Persons*, Tournier argues that the methods of modern psychology, particularly forms of talk therapy such as dialogue and free association, reflect essential Christian practices such as prayer, confession, meditation, and fellowship. These practices help us to discover truths about ourselves that go beyond historical fact or objective knowledge. These more personal truths lead to an understanding of ourselves and others. For Tournier, understanding is a form of truth that “has healing

Carl Jung (1875–1961)





and human value.” Crucial to personal understanding, Tournier posits, is recognizing and overcoming the behaviors and ways of thinking that become by force of habit merely automatic, rather than conscious and intentional and therefore authentic to the person. Personal resolve and determination alone are not sufficient to overcome complex psychological habits, Tournier explains. True understanding, which is not merely intellectual but also “subjective and intuitive,” is also necessary.

In *The Meaning of Persons*, Tournier explores the relationship between expression and understanding that culminates in a specifically Christian application. The Christian life, he writes, is a path that opposes the merely self-willed approach of secularity. Christianity offers the “path of the trusting personal encounter.” The exchange that takes place in a personal encounter (as in therapy or, ultimately, with God) allows the expression necessary to bring forth more total understanding. Tournier explains: “We become fully conscious only of what we are able to express to someone else.”

Nearly a century later, in the throes of what some refer to pejoratively as a “therapeutic culture,” it is important to contextualize Tournier’s work and to distinguish between *therapy* and a *therapeutic worldview*. If, as some argue, therapeutic language and the over-psychologizing of every aspect of experience and identity have come to

characterize our current culture, the overcorrection is evidence that a correction was needed in the first place. In recognizing the limits of physicalism alone, Tournier countered one aspect of the materialism of the late 19th and early 20th century. To encounter Tournier’s ideas today is to find a refreshing and increasingly rare balance—not only a balanced view of mind and body but also balanced views of the claims and applications of both the Christian faith and modern medicine, and of appreciation for both the specialist and generalist alike.

Indeed, Tournier was not only a general practitioner in the field of medicine; he was also a counselor who had no academic training in psychiatry. Yet he did not pretend to be other than what he was trained to be. He did not claim expertise he did not possess, nor did he disdain the specialists he worked with, admired, and drew from. He believed in and

“

**CHRISTIANITY OFFERS THE
‘PATH OF THE TRUSTING
PERSONAL ENCOUNTER.’**

”

advocated for the efficacy of science and medicine but also states in *The Healing of Persons* that his aim was “to help our nation to discover a new physical, psychical, and spiritual health through submitting itself afresh to the sovereignty of God.” He was, after all, of the Reformed Christian tradition.

Guilt and Grace, originally published in Switzerland in 1958 and appearing in English in 1962, made a significant contribution to both the developing field of Christian counseling and to theology. Despite not being a theologian (nor claiming to be one), Tournier stakes out in this work an essential and important distinction—one of continuing relevance—between false guilt and true guilt. False guilt derives from social disapproval, Tournier explains, while true guilt arises from recognition of disobedience to God. True guilt is resolved by the gospel. “Our privilege as Christians,” Tournier says, “is to know that we are forgiven, and that forgiveness reaches us through Jesus Christ.” In a later work, *Escape from Loneliness*, Tournier expands on these two kinds of guilt:

Many people confuse the conviction of sin with such feelings as inferiority, scrupulousness, lack of self-confidence, and so on. Yet, whoever observes people closely can see that these feelings and the conviction of sin are not only different from each other, but are in certain regards mutually exclusive. A diffuse and vague guilt kills the personality, whereas the conviction of sin gives life to it. The former depends on men, on public opinion, while the latter depends on God. The former is related to our social formalism and its marks of esteem, which have nothing to do with the true value of

“
**FALSE GUILT DERIVES
FROM SOCIAL
DISAPPROVAL, WHILE
TRUE GUILT ARISES
FROM RECOGNITION OF
DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD.**
”

a person. Hence a guilt feeling leads to self-contempt. Conviction of sin, however, is linked to the respect of oneself as a creature of God.

Guilt and Grace is addressed primarily to the Christian counselor (or reader), but Tournier drew important connections between psychological confession and religious confession that the secularist can appreciate. Characteristically, Tournier integrated Christian faith into the discipline of psychology, showing how each reinforces the other:

Everything is mingled in life, and the Bible continually depicts life in its unity and its complexity. It does not set the religious life apart like a specialty reserved for theologians, it constantly links the most concrete events of physical life—meals, tiredness, illness—to the highest spiritual experiences.

Guilt and Grace demonstrates this very unity: Its endnotes are replete with references to academics, theorists, theologians, and critics, and includes an index full of biblical references. Every page of *Guilt and Grace* is characterized by compassion, depth, and, well, *grace*. And every point cites Scripture in support. It is no wonder that Pastor Ray Ortlund listed Tournier’s *Guilt and Grace* among the books that “most profoundly shaped” his “view of gospel ministry” in a 2016 interview at *The Gospel Coalition*.

Over a career that spanned nearly five decades, Tournier wrote about 20 books, and these were translated into multiple languages. He spoke at venues and events around the world throughout those years. His books garnered praise from Christian leaders and secular publications alike. *Guilt and Grace* received positive reviews from *Cambridge Review* and *Times Literary Supplement*. *Learn to Grow Old* was republished in 1983 by Westminster/John Knox Press, which described Tournier as someone who “effectively blended the insights of modern psychotherapy with the Christian gospel.” A 2010 article on Tournier in the *International Journal of Integrative Care* records that Viktor Frankl, the renowned psychiatrist, Holocaust survivor, and author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*, considered Tournier to be “the pioneer of person-centered psychotherapy.” In honor of his 75th birthday in 1973, *Christianity Today* published “Paul Tournier at Seventy-Five.”



This article noted some of the recurring criticisms of Tournier's work and his theology: among them, absence of psychiatric training, lack of doctrinal precision, undisciplined prose, and overreliance on anecdotal evidence. It then went on to offer insights into his popularity and influence:

Psychological research has shown that counseling effectiveness depends more on what the counselor *is* than on what he *does*, and people who know Paul Tournier realize that he is an unusual man. His life radiates:

- a deep concern for other people;
- a willingness to listen patiently to others, without jumping to premature conclusions;
- an intense desire to yield himself completely to God and to seek divine leading in everything he does;
- a respect for the Scriptures and a continual effort to understand how the Word of God can have a practical relevance for one's daily and professional life;
- a concern for society's ills accompanied by a conviction that the elimination of social injustice requires a transformation of individual men;
- a healthful respect for science, but a respect tempered by the realization that science alone

cannot understand and change the universe or mankind;

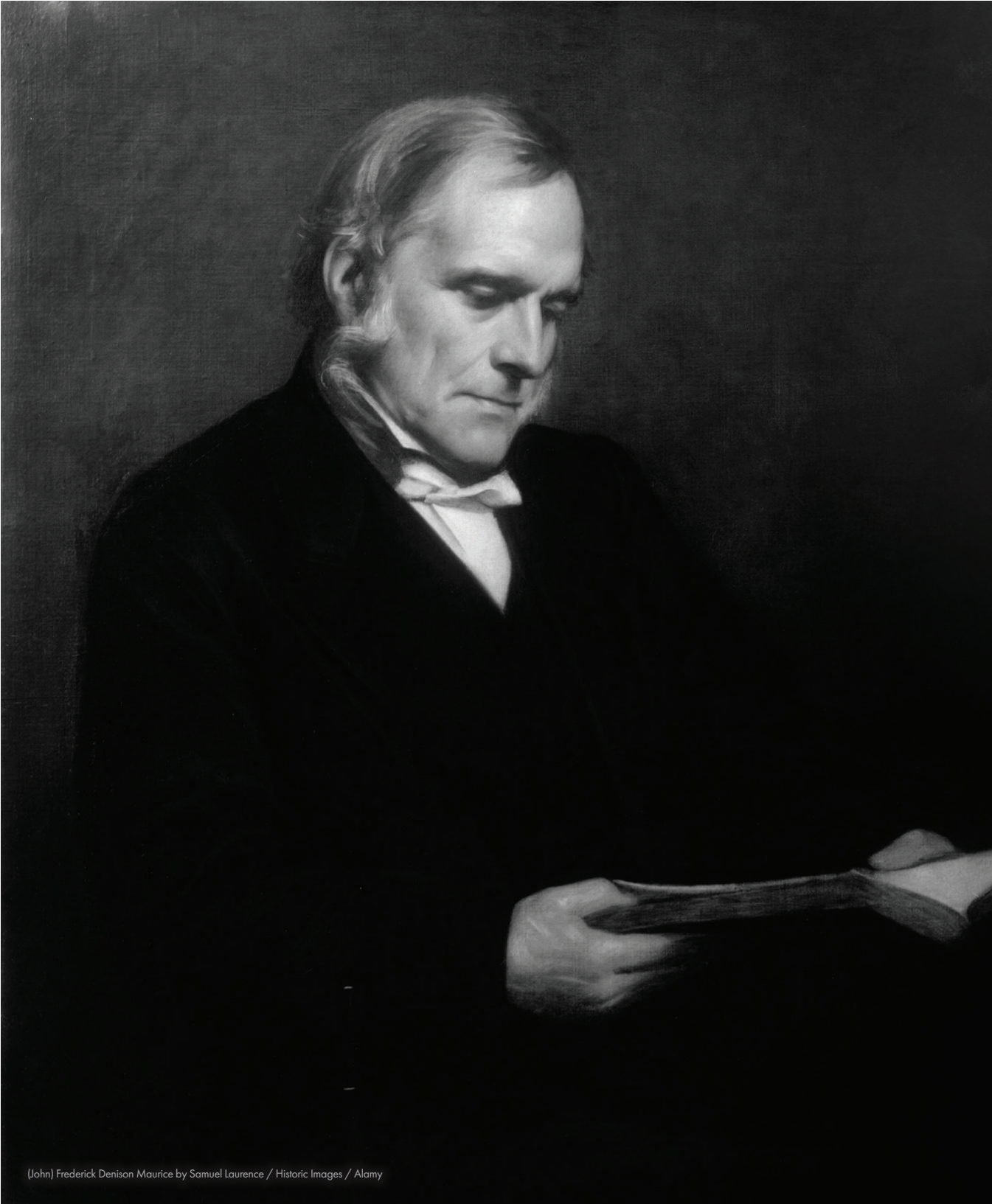
- a bold willingness to give witness to what he believes and to urge others to submit to Christ;
- an awesome awareness of the power of sin, the existence of the devil, and the divine influence of the Holy Spirit in men's lives; and
- an honesty about his own spiritual struggles.

Tournier died in 1986 at age 88. His may no longer be a household name, but in an age in which celebrities are known for anything but their ideas, it is refreshing to be acquainted with someone whose legacy has surpassed name recognition. Medical professionals from a variety of specializations and faith traditions attribute to Tournier's influence the growth of Christian counseling, a continuing emphasis on the whole person in other religious traditions, greater understanding of the connection between spirituality and mental health, and holistic approaches to care for the aging.

In one of his later books, published in English in 1972 as *Learn to Grow Old*, Tournier concludes by writing about the resurrection of Christ, which, he says, offers "as many difficulties for our intellects as it solves for our hearts." He continues: "But in spite of everything it is still by corporeal reality that the mind will be convinced." Moreover, in Christ's resurrected body, there "could be no clearer expression of the great truth that the person is identified through the body."

As Tournier had devoted his life to saying, and says once more, it is in the connection between mind and body, between spirit and truth, where we find the meaning of our own lives and the meaning of the gospel. And the body, as Tournier eventually discovered for himself and showed the world, is not confined to the physical or the intellectual, but is spiritual and emotional, too. In their interconnectedness, one finds and becomes a whole person. **RL**

Karen Swallow Prior, Ph.D., is the author of *The Evangelical Imagination: How Stories, Images, and Metaphors Created a Culture in Crisis and On Reading Well: Finding the Good Life through Great Books*, among other titles. Dr. Prior is also a columnist for Religion News Service, a contributing writer at The Dispatch, and a senior fellow at the Trinity Forum. She and her husband live on a 100-year-old homestead in central Virginia with dogs, chickens, and lots of books.



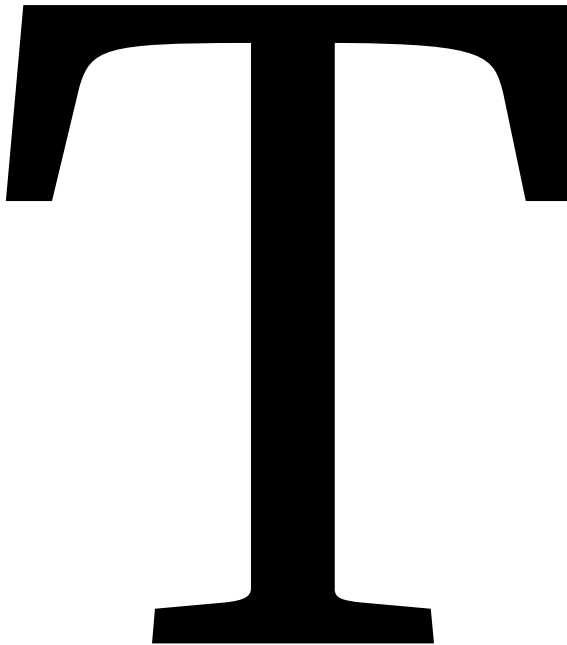
(John) Frederick Denison Maurice by Samuel Laurence / Historic Images / Alamy

“ONLY A DIGGER”

THE MISUNDERSTOOD STORY OF THE FIRST CHRISTIAN SOCIALIST

by DYLAN PAHMAN

Anglican priest and theologian F. D. Maurice preached a version of socialism that was both too radical and too conservative for the 19th century. Even as socialism is making a comeback in the 21st century, it's doubtful he would have found a home on the left or the right today. He remains a singular, and singularly fascinating, figure.



THE YEAR 1848 MARKED a watershed for Europe. On February 21, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels proclaimed in *The Communist Manifesto*, “A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism.” On February 22, the streets of Paris erupted in revolution, culminating in the abdication of Louis-Philippe on February 24. The wave of uprisings that swept across Europe in the wake of the Paris Revolution—infused not only with a demand for liberty, equality, and fraternity, as in 1789, but now also for socialism—would seem to have confirmed Marx and Engels’s clairvoyance. Democracy and labor reforms spread. But the story of socialism has too often been told



Statues of Marx and Engels in Berlin

from a Marxist perspective. Marx had little influence until the Russian Revolution in 1917, after which the Soviet Union started printing and propagandizing his works. In the 19th century, however, socialists came in many varieties, including a Christian one.

The story of Christian socialism in its “first wave” in England from 1848 to 1854 starts with the Anglican priest and theologian F.D. Maurice. The Paris Revolution broke out while Maurice was preaching a series of sermons on the Lord’s Prayer at Lincoln’s Inn, where he served as chaplain while professor of theology at King’s College, London. Maurice’s theology rested on a concept of “divine order.” In short, *fatherhood* grounded Maurice’s worldview—fathers (and mothers) over families, monarchs and aristocrats over nations, and God above all and in all through the Church. As Maurice put it, “A Fatherly Will is at the root of Humanity and upholds the Universe.” From this perspective, Maurice’s sermon on the words “give us this day our daily bread,” preached March 12, 1848, on the first Sunday of Lent, contain a surprising affirmation for a socialist: “Property is holy.”

Why is property holy? “Beneath all distinctions of property and of rank,” says Maurice, “lie the obligations of a common Creation, Redemption, Humanity.” The holiness of private property comes



The People in the Tuileries by Victor Adam & Jean-Baptiste Arnoux

from our obligation to our neighbors as part of God’s divine order in society. This contrasts sharply with the French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, for example, who claimed, “Property is theft!” Maurice came to call himself a socialist, but he was never a communist, still less an anarchist. Within his focus on the fatherhood of God, he saw the early Church’s sharing of resources in Acts 2 as an expression of familial love, not a mandate for legal institutions. So what did socialism mean to Maurice?

“

THE HOLINESS OF PRIVATE PROPERTY COMES FROM OUR OBLIGATION TO OUR NEIGHBORS AS PART OF GOD’S DIVINE ORDER IN SOCIETY.

”

In 1848 in England, socialism had not yet become political. Socialists stressed the need for organized labor, profit sharing, and cooperation between workers rather than competition over the same jobs, driving down wages and reducing benefits. The Chartists, by contrast, wanted legal reforms to uplift the working classes and were concerned about expanding the franchise. Maurice, skeptical of democracy in general, first brought together the other two leaders of Christian socialism, the young barrister J.M. Ludlow and the young Anglican minister Charles Kingsley, in response to a planned Chartist rally in London soon after he concluded his series of sermons on the Lord’s Prayer. Thus, when Maurice suggested the label “Christian socialism” for a proposed new publication for their movement in 1850, it was a self-consciously *non-political* label.

“Tracts on Christian Socialism’ is, it seems to me, the only title which will define our object,” wrote Maurice, “and will commit us at once to the conflict we must engage in sooner or later with the unsocial Christians and the unchristian Socialists.” Maurice hoped that adopting this title would clarify the nature of their movement. In hindsight, it did far more to obscure than to clarify, in no small part due to misperception among the movement’s leadership.

Maurice was 14 years older than Kingsley and 16 years older than Ludlow. They looked up to Maurice as a mentor and father-figure due to his charismatic personality, pastoral care, and theological insight. So did many others who attended Maurice’s weekly Bible studies at his home. “It was not long,” writes Christian socialism scholar Torben Christensen, “before the young men rallying around Maurice called him ‘the Master’ or ‘the Prophet.’” This generational gap is key to unlocking the story of Christian socialism’s “first wave” in England. Often Kingsley, Ludlow, and others would come to Maurice with radical ideas that he would recast or even veto.

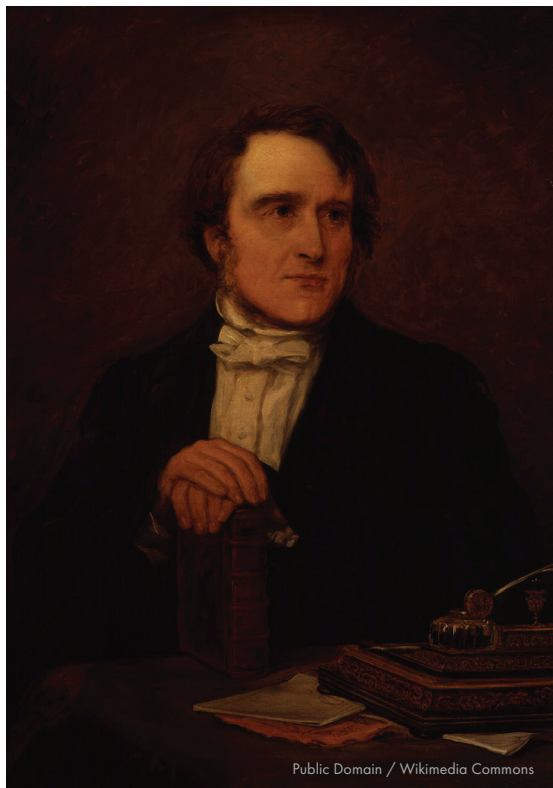
For example, inspired by the Anti-Corn Law League, by which the classical political economists advocated for free trade, the younger members of the movement drew up a plan for a national Health League to combat the epidemic outbreak of cholera in London. “All the young friends entered heartily into this plan,” writes Christensen. “It seemed as if the small brotherhood had arrived at a policy of social action by which the appalling [sic] conditions of the working classes could be improved, thus giving a practical demonstration of the social implications of their Christian faith.” Having drawn up a program for this Health League,

“

WHAT MANY COMMENTATORS HAVE FAILED TO REALIZE IS THAT THE CHRISTIAN SOCIALISTS WERE THEMSELVES MAURICE'S MISSION FIELD AS MUCH AS THE WORKING POOR IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF LINCOLN'S INN.

”

F. D. Maurice, portrait by Jane Mary Hayward (1854)



Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

they enthusiastically presented it to Maurice. “To their surprise, he flatly refused to give his consent.” To Maurice, “These self-elected human societies were a denial of the order of fellowship and fellow-work which God had already established among men.”

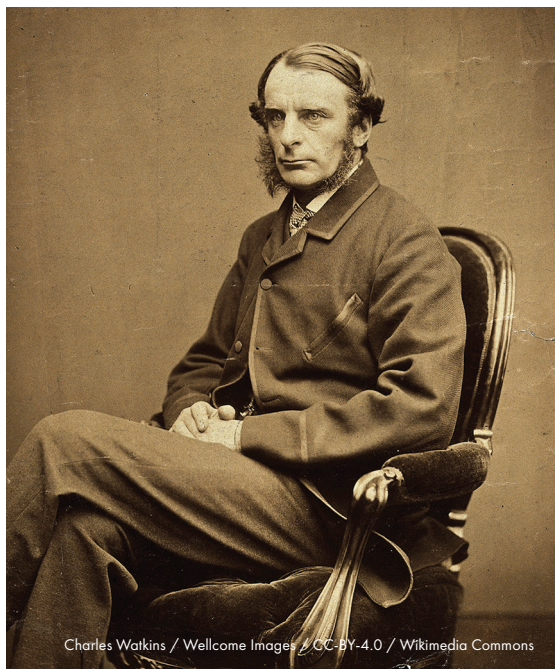
Again and again, Maurice vetoed the expansive and often radical ideas of his younger coworkers in the Christian socialist movement. Part of this, certainly, derived from his belief in a divine order, through which concerns like sanitation should be either dealt with on the national level by the state or on the local level by families and local parishes of the Church of England. But Maurice’s biography sheds further light on his hesitations. He turned 43 in 1848, while Ludlow and Kingsley were still in their 20s. They did not see, and could not appreciate, the generational gap between them.

According to Florence Higham, Maurice and his first wife Annie’s “first child, a girl, was stillborn and in April [of 1840, his sister] Elizabeth died, whose courage and vigour of mind had often helped him greatly.” Then, “in the spring of ’41 Maurice’s elder son was born and christened Frederick after his father.” In 1843, while pregnant with their second son, Annie cared for his close friend John Sterling, who nevertheless died of tuberculosis in 1844. Higham goes on to relate:

While nursing Sterling [Annie] had caught the tubercular infection and she failed rapidly. In the spring she was ordered to Hastings. Sadly she said good-bye to the home where she had been so happy, but down by the sea, making the most of every moment with the little boys, she began to think she might recover. If not, she told Maurice, he must marry her friend Georgiana Hare...; she could not bear to think of Frederick and the children without anyone to look after them....She died on Easter Tuesday, and once again at that season he faced the agony of the Cross.

In the next few years,

all [Maurice] wanted was a chance to serve: joy he did not hope to find again. His new home was at 21 Queen Square. As he walked across the “quiet and antiquated square,” the little rush with which he started sobering to a quieter step, as he read aloud to his children or buried himself in his study with no one now to help him write, or as he faced the unruly students at King’s with a new sense of



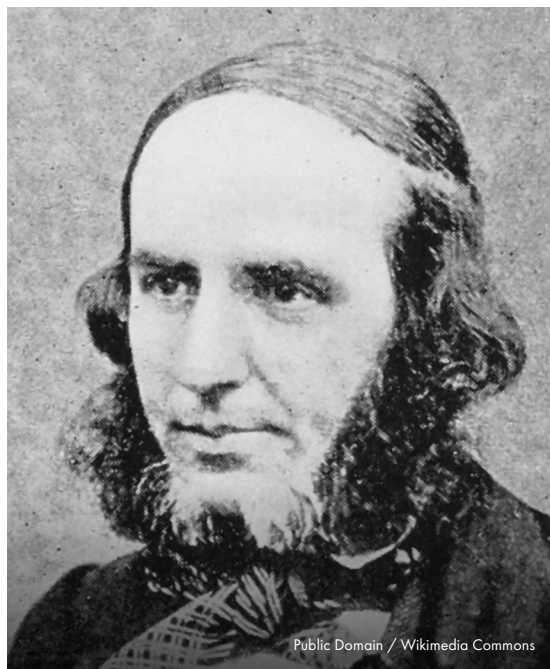
Charles Kingsley (1819–1875)

insufficiency, it may well have seemed to him that the best of his life was over.

Such was the biographical backdrop leading up to Maurice's involvement with Christian socialism, struggles a younger man like Ludlow could not understand or, it seems, even notice. At their first meeting, the radical Ludlow went away disappointed by the "quiet, shy, very good, [and] obviously unpractical" Maurice. Higham continues:

Ludlow did not know at that first encounter how recently Maurice's wife had died, a loss that left him maimed, unable for a while to do more than work at the routine jobs on hand—and pray. Only very gradually did vision and resilience return as he worked hard, too hard, writing, lecturing, organizing the new department of Theology at King's and trying very gently and rather awkwardly to be mother as well as father to the two little boys, gaining thereby new insight into the meaning of the Fatherhood of God.

Maurice's opposition to leading organized social action for the Christian socialists in the coming years was certainly consistent with his opposition to parties and systems, but all this seems to me to overlook



J. M. Ludlow (1821–1911)

the life of the man, through which, as Maurice notes of St. Augustine, "all his knowledge was purchased by the fiercest personal struggles."

In 1849, Maurice became engaged to and married Georgiana, as Annie had wished, "trusting that in her his boys would find the mother's love they needed, and discovering in his tender care for her delicate health and in sharing with her his hopes and disappointments a new serenity in mind and heart." Working two jobs, with two young boys and a chronically ill new wife at home, could not but have conditioned Maurice's involvement with the Christian socialists. For the most part, he turned down their invitations to lead big projects, focusing instead on mentorship through intimate and local gatherings.

What they—and many commentators since—have failed to realize is that the Christian socialists were themselves Maurice's mission field as much as the working poor in the neighborhood of Lincoln's Inn. As he wrote to Archdeacon Julius Hare in 1843, "I think that some time or other my vocation will be...generally among all that are in distress and are in debt and are discontented—Quakers, Unitarians, Rationalists, Socialists, and whatever else a Churchman repudiates, and whatever repudiates him....It is a dream

“

MAURICE SAW TRYING TO BUILD GOD'S KINGDOM ON EARTH AS A GRAVE ERROR: GOD HAD ALREADY BUILT HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH.

”

which is worth something to me, and out of which, at any rate, I cannot wake myself.”

Indeed, Maurice did not limit his publications to Christian socialism. His 1838 work, *The Kingdom of Christ*, was alternatively titled *Hints to a Quaker*; one could view his *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy*, originally published in 1847, as directed toward “Rationalists”; and his 1854 *Theological Essays* focused explicitly on answering Unitarian objections to Anglican orthodoxy (perhaps too charitably, getting him sacked from King’s College for his universalism, the belief that all are ultimately saved). In the case of the last of these, we see that Maurice’s outreach to socialists through Christian socialism did not distract him from still reaching out to others whom “a Churchman repudiates” at the very same time.

In none of these works will one find much if any mention of the condition of the working classes he served in the Christian socialist movement. He also published his *Lectures on the Ecclesiastical History of the First and Second Centuries* in 1854. Thus, by comparison to his other works published at the time, his writing on the topic of Christian socialism was marginal—a few tracts and articles and several private letters. His major writings focus largely on historical theology, applying it in various ways to the concerns of “all that are in distress and are in debt and are discontented.”

This contrast between the more mature perspective of Maurice and the young Ludlow comes to full relief in a series of Maurice’s letters. In response to Ludlow’s frustrations over Maurice constantly rejecting his grand proposals (in particular expanding the franchise to working class people), Maurice wrote,

I do hope that I may be of some little use, not in my own person but in giving a foundation to the minds of some who have materials for building, and a knowledge of order which I am utterly wanting in. That is my vocation....I fear I shall always seem to you only an obstructive....I would not willingly burn up any of your wood, hay or stubble; but for my task neither that nor your gold and precious stones are of much avail. I am only a digger. God bless you.

Ludlow did not take this well, expressing alarm that a brilliant mind like Maurice would so limit himself.

To Kingsley, Maurice expressed his sympathy toward Ludlow: “He complains of me sadly for professing to be merely a digger. He says a Christian ought to build and not to be always looking after foundations, which I doubt.” Then, to Ludlow, Maurice again tried to explain himself:

My business, because I am a theologian, and have no vocation except for theology, is not to build, but to dig, to show that economy and politics...must have a ground beneath themselves, that society is not to be made anew by arrangements of ours, but is to be regenerated by finding the law and ground of its order and harmony, the only secret of its existence, in God.

Maurice worried the Christian socialists would simply amount to socialists who happened to be Christian. Aware that this likely sounded too idealistic to Ludlow, he continued:

This must seem to you an unpractical and unchristian method; to me it is the only one which makes action possible, and Christianity anything more than an artificial religion for the use of believers. I wish very earnestly to be understood on this point, because all my future course must be regulated on this principle, or on no principle at all. The Kingdom of Heaven is to me the great practical existing reality which is to renew the earth and make it a habitation for blessed spirits instead of for demons.

Maurice then makes clear that his aim is and always was evangelistic: “To preach the Gospel of that Kingdom, the fact that it is among us, and is not to be set up at all, is my calling and business.” For

Maurice, “society and humanity [are] divine realities, as they stand, not as they may become.” “This is what I call digging,” Maurice concludes, “this is what I oppose to building.”

We see this in Maurice’s contribution to *Tracts on Christian Socialism* in 1850. Opposing his view to secular socialists’, he writes, “I assume that to be the only possible condition of society which they wish to make the condition of it.” Maurice saw trying to build God’s kingdom on earth as a grave error: God had *already* built his kingdom on earth. To presume it needs to be built denies Christ’s proclamation, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matt. 3:2). People need to be awakened to this reality and welcomed into God’s divine family through the Church.

None of that is to say, of course, that Maurice attached no economic views to Christian socialism. But ultimately, he believed evangelism and Christian education to be the most important solution. That said, he did oppose cooperation to competition and did not clearly understand the latter. As John Stuart Mill wrote of socialists in general, “I do not pretend that there are no inconveniences in competition, or that the moral objections urged against it by Socialist writers, as a

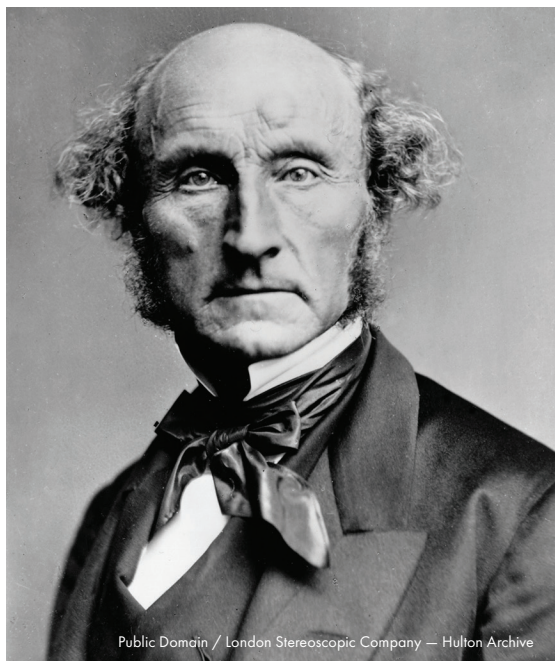
source of jealousy and hostility among those engaged in the same occupation, are altogether groundless. But if competition has its evils, it prevents greater evil,” of which he lists monopoly and poverty.

To be fair to Maurice though, he certainly did understand the problem with monopoly, even praising Adam Smith, noting in his 1847 *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy*,

Adam Smith’s doctrines at once roused against them what seemed the obvious self-interest of a multitude of monopolists who traded with different commodities, who traded also in the bodies and souls of men. He proclaimed that these supposed interests of theirs clashed with everlasting laws. He averred, for instance, as strongly as any man, that the cultivation of the soil by slaves is not good for a land—not good for those who buy or sell the slaves any more than for those who are bought and sold.

Indeed, Maurice was a measured admirer of Smith, also commending Smith’s support for free trade, and a longtime, friendly acquaintance of Mill. True, he only saw in competition a destructive struggle between workers, failing to consider that employers will also compete for the best qualified workers,

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873)



Statue of Adam Smith in Edinburgh



driving up their wages and benefits. But the mid-19th century featured genuinely harsh and unsafe working conditions, long hours, and no child labor laws. Some employers undoubtedly twisted the language of economic competition to justify the maltreatment of their workers.

In any case, while many later Christian socialists would appeal to Maurice's legacy, it is safe to say that his overall perspective on the importance of "digging" got buried at some point along the way. His economics seemed too often to justify classical political economy rather than challenge it. And his educational and evangelistic focus seemed too narrow. In 1854, the working poor of Lincoln's Inn, in their love for him, compelled Maurice to become first president of the Working Men's College, London. As Ludlow put it, reflecting years later on the founding of the college, "So Mr. Maurice had his way, and the comparatively broad stream of Christian Socialism was turned into the narrow channel of a Working Men's College."

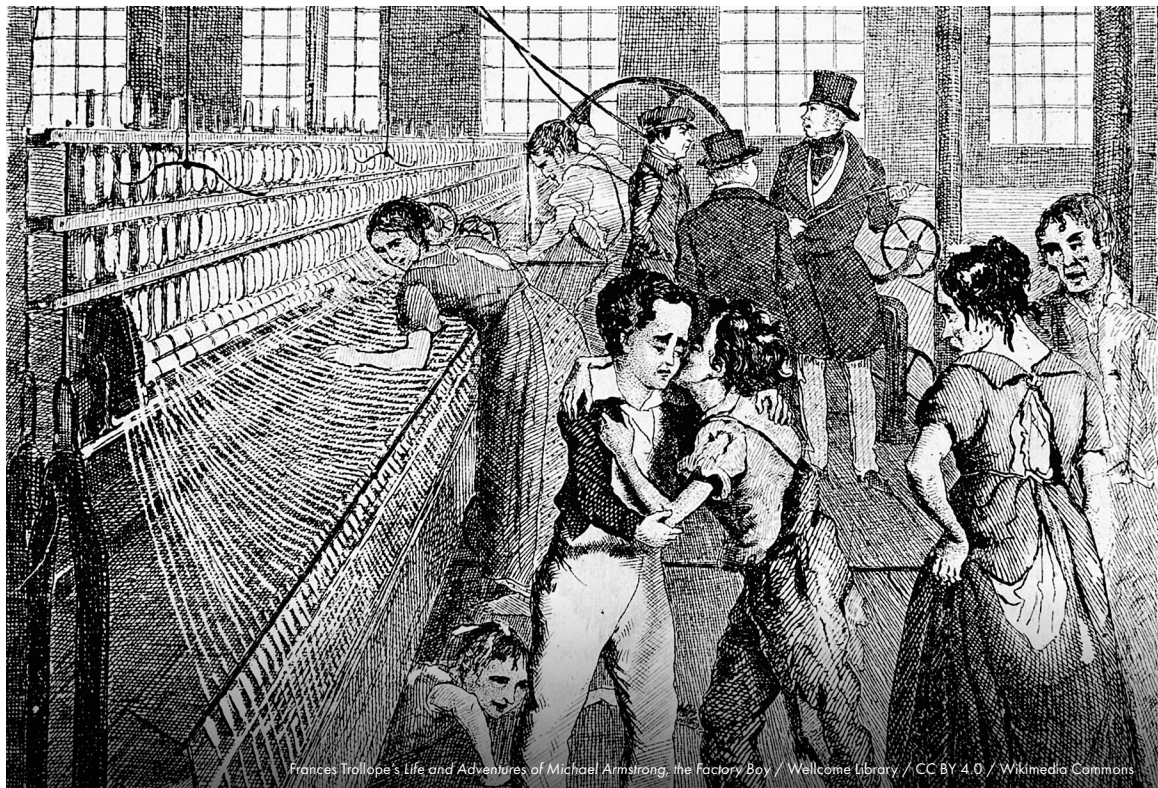
Maurice, however, did not see it that way. Indeed, from Ludlow's perspective, Maurice was not only the

founder but the *ender* of the first wave of Christian socialism in Britain. Nevertheless, Maurice never stopped digging, never gave up on his dream of ministering to the rejected and outcast. In a series of lectures to promote the new college, Maurice made clear the value of humane learning for the lower classes: "We must aim in all our teaching of the working classes, at making them free." He continued:

If the distinction between a freeman and a slave... is identical with the distinction between a Person and a Thing, you will seek above all things to make our working people understand that they are Persons, and not Things. Whatever teaching contributes to that end must be good for them, and, as they have shown in the instance of Music, they will by degrees feel that it is good for them.

The Working Men's College was the first institution of humane higher learning for the working classes in Europe, offering courses on evenings and weekends. We may even say that its work counteracted the fear of Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* that

1876 lithograph depicting child apprentices in a textile factory



Frances Trollope's *Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* / Wellcome Library / CC BY 4.0 / Wikimedia Commons



Working Men's College (2013)

the man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, of which the effects are perhaps always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur. He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.

Despite Maurice's aristocratic sensibilities and opposition to democracy, he never limited his vision of education to people of upper-class backgrounds like himself. Indeed, he even supported women's education throughout his life, acting as cofounder of Queen's College, London, in 1848. We might even charitably say, as did Maurice scholar Jeremy Morris, that Maurice did, in his own paternalistic way, support a more democratic future for Britain: "The working classes should certainly be admitted to the Constitution, but only when they had been educated into the means of making proper choice."

Maurice saw Christian socialism as a fundamentally educational project, too, and from that point of view the Working Men's College was the culmination, not the end, of the movement to him. Looking back, in an 1866 letter to Ludlow, Maurice even claimed outright that it had been a good thing for them to step back from "meddl[ing] with the commercial part of the business," that is, the business of workers' associations. He continued to explain: "A college expressed to my mind...precisely the work that we

could undertake, and ought to undertake, as professional men; we might bungle in this also; but there seemed to me a manifestly Divine direction towards it in all our previous studies and pursuits." Far from a "narrow channel," Maurice saw in the Working Men's College, which still exists to this day, a deep well struck for the flourishing of "all that are in distress and are in debt and are discontented."

Frederick, Maurice's son, records Georgiana's account of his final days. Maurice had cared for her in her bouts of chronic illness, and now she returned the favor. His illness took a turn for the worse on Ash Wednesday, stretching through Lent, and he died on Easter Monday, 1872. To the end, Maurice held onto his convictions that what people of every class needed most of all was to understand the love of God already present in the world for them. Georgiana recorded his last words to that effect: "The knowledge of the love of God—the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost be amongst *you*—amongst *us*—and remain with us for ever."

According to Frederick, "He was on April 5th buried in a vault at Highgate, where already father, mother, sisters, had been laid. Nothing could have been simpler than the funeral itself, but it was followed by crowds, which filled up the roads to the cemetery on many sides." Many tourists of a more radical bent pay to visit the grave of Karl Marx at Highgate today, but there among the departed rests a man with a far more humane—and genuinely Christian—vision: not the endless conflict and strife between social classes to establish a future utopia, but the blessing of God's kingdom present even now, the invitation to find in God himself the Father for whom our orphaned hearts long, and in each other the truest brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. **RL**

(Short sections of this essay appeared previously in issues of the Journal of Markets & Morality 26, no. 1, and the Journal of Economics, Theology and Religion 4.)

Dylan Pahman is a research fellow at the Acton Institute and founder and president of the St. Nicholas Cabasilas Institute. He earned his Ph.D. from St. Mary's University, Twickenham, London, on the basis of his published works on Orthodox Christian social thought and asceticism. He is the author of *The Kingdom of God and the Common Good* and *Foundations of a Free & Virtuous Society*.

PERSUASION AND PROPAGANDA:

HOW POETRY HELPS NAVIGATE POLITICS

by J. C. SCHARL

Reading, reciting, and even writing poetry can help shape us into better, more responsible citizens. But how do we distinguish between rightly and wrongly ordered speech, between high rhetoric and sheer manipulation?

Composite photo incorporating photos from Adobe
Stock by BrAtB2, Natalie Board, and fotofabrika



“
**WIDESPREAD
CULTIVATION IN THE
POETIC ARTS IS A
NECESSARY ASPECT OF
POLITICAL STABILITY
AND FLOURISHING.**
”

P

PHILOSOPHERS AND COMMENTATORS have recognized for millennia that rhetors (political speakers) and poets occupy a similar corner of society and, by extension, that rogue rhetoric and rogue poetry pose similar threats to an established political order. The Socrates of the *Republic* banned the poets, the makers of myth, from his ideal state, illustrating in dramatic fashion the close and fraught relationship between political order and poetry.

Many people today, particularly conservatives, have followed in Socrates's footsteps in trying to keep these two spheres—art and politics—separate. There is a worry that putting the two in conversation with

each other will pollute art and compromise politics. The reality, which conservatives have ignored for decades to their own peril, is the opposite. Thinking of poetic and political speech as entirely separate or antithetical forms of expressions impoverishes both fields.

The argument I want to make is this: Because of the close rhetorical similarities between poetic and political speech, widespread cultivation in the poetic arts is necessary for political stability and flourishing. As we grow in our ability to read, memorize, perform, criticize, and write poetry, we are developing intellectual, imaginative, and spiritual discernment and skills that also make us better citizens and statesmen. Conversely, neglecting the art of poetry or indulging in careless or manipulative poetry makes us more susceptible to abusive and manipulative political speech.

At this point, many readers are probably saying, “But political poetry is so often just propaganda! How is that at all conducive to stability and flourishing?” If that's your impulse, you're right; there is a fine line between rightly ordered speech and wrongly ordered. But I want to explore what lies on both sides of that line and encourage readers to cultivate their own poetic sensibility and more confidently evaluate “good” or “bad” political speech and poetry.

There is no art form that has had to justify the value its own existence quite like poetry has. No one seems to be quite sure what it is or why anyone bothers to write it, yet it lives on (and proliferates!). Poetry, like faith, tends to blossom in the worst of circumstances; consider, for

example, the explosion of excellent poetry in Soviet-bloc nations like Poland and Czechoslovakia.

There is a quote attributed to W.H. Auden that I cannot find in his work but I like anyway. Allegedly Auden described poetry as “turning noise into music.” I like this because it gets to the core of what I believe poetry ought to do: Through the clear and imaginative use of language, it should transform, into an accessible and comprehensible form, something that previously was incoherent, inaccessible, or senseless.

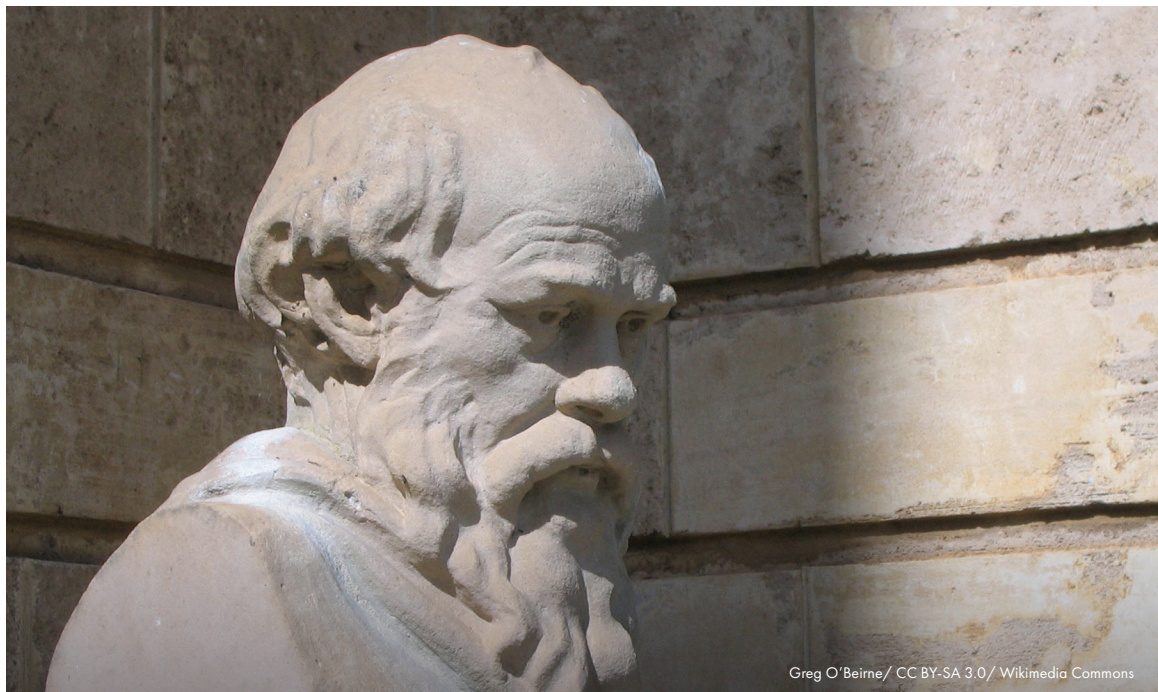
There is this idea that artists, particularly poets, are people who exist outside society, people with very little connection to what we call “real life.” Poets are perceived as dreamy and distracted, obsessed with wildflowers and breakups. Nothing could be further from the historical reality. The best poets throughout history have been deeply and actively involved in their communities, societies, and nations—often at their own peril. Tu Fu, the father of Chinese poetry, was an administrator in the Tang Dynasty for his entire career. Virgil wrote at the behest of Caesar Augustus. Dante was famously up to his eyeballs in political intrigue, to the point that even today cities battle over the right to be called his hometown. Shakespeare’s verse is shot through with sly political innuendos that give us a glimpse of

the dangerous dance of art in Elizabethan England. William Wordsworth underwent an extreme political and creative crisis during the French Revolution, when his beloved England entered a conflict with the French revolutionaries he admired and supported. William Butler Yeats’s poetry is inseparable from his Irish-independence politics. Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks both wrote poetry steeped in the Civil Rights–era call for racial justice and equality. For all these artists, political conviction and poetic practice were mutually clarifying.

In 1945, Langston Hughes spoke directly to this difficult reality: “Art in its essence is a path to truth. Propaganda is a path toward more to eat. That the two may be inextricably mixed is not to be denied. That they may often be one and the same is certainly truth.”

Hughes’s admission here is that poetry, in its pursuit of truth, may push us in certain partisan directions. What the honest poet—and the honest politician—needs to recognize is that when this occurs, it is more or less a fluke; just as a stopped clock is right twice a day, a particular political party is right now and again, usually entirely by accident. It is not the poet’s fault when a political party manages to land on something true, and this strange occurrence does

Bust of Socrates carved by Victor Wager from a model by Paul Montford (1932)



Greg O'Beirne / CC BY-SA 3.0 / Wikimedia Commons



Langston Hughes, portrait by Carl Van Vechten (1942)

not automatically mean that the poet can no longer speak about that truth simply because it is temporarily associated with a party.

However, even in the throes of a political passion, a poet cannot neglect reality—lived experience in *all* its fullness. In fact, a poet has what amounts to a moral responsibility to reality, the whole scope and range of it; in his work, he must constantly be open to the disrupting force of reality and its paradoxes.

With this in mind, it is probably clear now what the cardinal sin is for a poet: ignoring inconvenient parts of reality for the sake of a “message.” Poetry that is intended, designed, or composed specifically to serve a particular political or partisan goal, or to further a particular political or partisan message, has ceded its claim to art and become *solely* propaganda.

This might make it seem impossible for a reader to discern when a poem is solely propaganda and when it happens simply to align with a political aim. Fortunately, language is not easily deceived. When we learn to read carefully and well, we will inevitably find little slips, tiny cheats and skips in even the most skillful propaganda, revealing that the poet has betrayed his calling.

The truth is revealed in the particulars: *how* a poet deals with truths that are connected to political realities, claims, and movements. To frame this, I want to offer a principle, one that can be used to evaluate any poem by any poet that touches on any political issue. The principle is this:

A poet has the right to speak about any part of reality. When a poet twists, compromises, or denigrates language, even to the slightest degree, in

order to accommodate or serve a particular narrative about reality, he has trespassed against his art and must make amends, for a poet is beholden only and utterly to what is real.

There is a lot here in this principle. I want to explore each element and then offer an example of a poem that violates this principle. To begin, by “real” I do not mean merely what is literal or observable. Unicorns are, in a significant imaginative sense, real: They are a clear, luminous, and illustrative allegory for Christ that has a fixed place in literature and tradition. Similarly, quantum theory is “real” even if it should one day be disproved or displaced like Euclidean models of the universe have been. It is nevertheless a real theory that was suggested as a possible explanation for some observable and mathematical quirks of electrons. Flat-earth theories are real. They exist, and a poet with a wonderful imagination could do something marvelous with them.

Now, clearly, not every poem (and not every poet) has to write even implicitly about every single element of reality—that is, the entirety of human experience: the physical, the intellectual, the social, the spiritual, and the political. But every poet has nevertheless a *responsibility* to reality.

Imagine this: A poet writes a poem about, say, his children playing beneath the pomegranate bush in his backyard, and it is lovely, technically impressive with stunning language and a great conclusion in which the tree becomes an image for the Tree of Life as described in Genesis. He’s very happy with it. Then he realizes (see that word—*realizes*) that in his zeal for his poem, he’s utterly forgotten that the Tree of Life is forbidden now, cut off from us by an angel with a flaming sword. Now he has a choice to make: Is he going to rewrite his poem to accommodate this reality, even with just a word or two? Or is he going to stick with what he’s written, and elevate the reality of what he’s written over and above the language of reality? A poet could be damned, at least as far as writing poetry goes, by making the wrong decision.

Socrates’s ideal regime in the *Republic* is, as he says, a city in *speech*, a city composed entirely of words. The truth Plato recognizes, as do the poet and the politician, is that language, far from being merely an indication or description of reality, is part of reality itself. Words *are* real, and they have the power to change and shape the other forms of reality they interact with.

This was common knowledge for millennia. Among the Medes and the Persians, the word of the king *was* law; when a king spoke, he literally changed the texture of the kingdom. Shakespeare's kings in the *Histories* are acutely aware of the weight of their words, and of the terrible consequences of a word misspoken. The bedrock of Western thought, the Bible, begins with a spoken Word that is the instrument of creation.

Even Socrates's condemnation of the poets in the *Republic* alludes to this truth. Poets, he says, have distanced themselves from reality and become manipulators of the shadows. Poetry "feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled, if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue." In a later dialogue called *The Sophists*, Plato applies a similar condemnation to rhetoricians who use language to convince people of what is false, whether in politics, law, or ethics. The word "sophist" was sometimes used to mean "poets" in Plato's time, so what we see here is a parallel condemnation of poetic speakers and political speakers who lead people away from virtue and a true perception of reality.

Plato is far from the only person to recognize the potential harm that imaginative and forceful language can cause to a political state. Well over 2,500 years after the *Republic*, George Orwell said in his 1946 essay "Politics and the English Language":

One ought to recognize that the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language....Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.

What Orwell doesn't say, however, is that due to the peculiar power of language, if enough speech gives an *appearance* of solidity to "pure wind," that wind becomes a real and solid political force, with real-world consequences. One need look no further than the endlessly escalating rhetorical violence in American politics today, rhetoric that is rapidly altering society to match itself.

Here is the truth that Plato tacitly, and ironically, admits at the end of his *Republic*: There is no banning of poetry and its power over the passions.

In 1991, Dana Gioia argued in his seminal essay "Can Poetry Matter?" that poetry is not merely

pretty; rather, it is bulwark against sophistry, and ignoring it has grim consequences for a society. Gioia writes:

Poetry is the art of using words charged with their utmost meaning. A society whose intellectual leaders lost the skill to shape, appreciate, and understand the power of language will become the slaves of those who retain it—be they politicians, preachers, copywriters, or newscasters.

Gioia's argument here is that this poetic force that Socrates so fears, this "charge" of utmost meaning, will inevitably continue to be part of a political body's existence. It cannot be eliminated. It can be repressed, humiliated, subdued, manipulated, but it will not go away—not as long as there is language and humans to use it. Repressing poetry does not destroy it; it simply stunts it, turning it inward until it is misshapen and crooked, but still alive and still powerful. These are the poets who violate the principle I established above, the poets and politicians and others who twist, compromise, or denigrate language in order to accommodate or serve a particular narrative about reality. By ignoring poetry and not cultivating poetic awareness in our own lives, homes, and communities, we hand it and its power over to whoever chooses to use it to shape our imaginations and our world—whether for good or for evil.

The great Irish poet Seamus Heaney, whose life was marked by political turmoil and personal political activism, believed that poetry could provide a kind of map through what he called the *metaxu*, a Greek term for the "in-between-ness" of human existence. What Heaney meant is that life feels as though we are constantly caught between

“
**THE WORD 'SOPHIST'
WAS SOMETIMES USED
TO MEAN 'POETS'
IN PLATO'S TIME.**
”

incompatible realities: the reality of grace and the reality of truth, for example, or the reality of mercy and the reality of justice. Perhaps it is something as mundane as the reality of your mother's right to your time and attention and the reality of your wife's right to your time and attention. How do you balance this? How do you navigate this in-between-ness, which can feel like being torn open?

In the essays published as *The Redress of Poetry*, Heaney spoke about his experience of conflicting loyalties: As an Irishman, he was committed to the political cause of his homeland in the 20th century, but as a leader of English letters, he moved freely through the upper echelons of English intellectual life. He describes a particular moment during the Troubles when he was in Oxford receiving a poetry prize while his near neighbors in Ireland mourned the death of a son in the fighting. "It was a classic moment of conflicting recognitions, self-divisions, inner quarrel, a moment of dumbness and inadequacy...it felt like a betrayal," he says. "Poetry," he suggests, can be "an adequate response to conditions in the world" or even "a principle of integration within such a context of division and contradiction."

Poetry that engages with political situations can, in the right hands, be profound and clarifying. But, returning to our principle, poetry cannot shirk its duty to respond "to conditions in the world"; it cannot ignore its fraught situation "in-between" and lazily choose one loyalty over another that is equally real.

Now I want to offer a political poem that shirks its duty to reality. I chose an example from the work of one of the greatest poets of the 20th century, where the failures are far subtler than in, say, the pages of a current issue of *Poetry Magazine*.

The poem is W.H. Auden's famous, or infamous, "Spain." Auden wrote this during the Spanish Civil War. He was enthusiastically in support of the left-wing Republican government and spent seven weeks in the war-torn nation before writing the poem. Just a few years later, however, Auden disavowed the poem completely and refused to allow it to be included in future collections of his work. The entire poem is worth reading; portions of it are deeply moving. Why, then, did Auden repudiate the poem so fiercely?

Let's focus on two stanzas, where the poem "turns" from the future to the present. For the sake of this exercise, it would be best if you read this stanza at

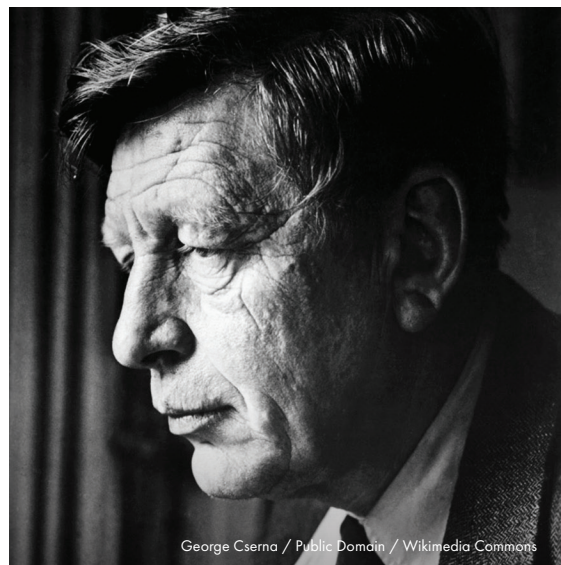
least twice. The first time, pay attention to the literal meaning of the words and try to grasp on the lowest, most straightforward level what Auden is saying. Then, the second time, read through the stanza line by line and think about it in terms of claims: What is the poet trying to persuade you of?

To-morrow for the young the poets
exploding like bombs,
The walks by the lake,
the weeks of perfect communion;
To-morrow the bicycle races
Through the suburbs on summer evenings.
But to-day the struggle.

To-day the deliberate increase
in the chances of death,
The conscious acceptance of guilt
in the necessary murder;
To-day the expending of powers
On the flat ephemeral pamphlet
and the boring meeting.

These stanzas are imaginatively vibrant and interesting, full of images and good sounds. There is a glaring problem with them, however, one not technical or poetic, but moral. Reread these lines: "But today the struggle. / To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death, / The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder." I am willing to bet

W. H. Auden in 1956



George Cserna / Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

that when you read these lines, you experienced a vague confusion or dissatisfaction, a sense of being jarred out of the poem. Perhaps, if this is the first poem you've read in a very long time, you did not quite notice that confusion because you were focused on the words. But even for new readers of poetry, I suspect you experienced some kind of friction, a little "buzz" somewhere in your imagination. What you are feeling in that moment is *recognition of poetic failure*.

Opening, as they do, with the phrase "today the struggle," the lines that follow take on a sense of urgency, even of command; what the speaker is commanding is "the conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder." There is a way to write that line and make it ironic; to use the voice and the tone of other lines to indicate that even though this is morally horrible, it is what some leaders say; that isn't how it's written in "Spain," however. There is no indication here or elsewhere that the "today" portions of the poem are intended to be ironic or self-critical or anything but exemplary and touching: "To-day the makeshift consolations: the shared cigarette, / The cards in the candlelit barn, and the scraping concert"—these are moving, motivating images. Auden, swept up in a politically motivated fervor, used poetry to bolster morally suspect political talking points—namely, the Republicans' attempt to justify the murder of countless Spanish citizens, including thousands of clergy and religious.

These lines from "Spain" are pretty weak stuff compared with the polemical railing we find in most major poetry journals today, but just a few years after "Spain" was published, Auden came to view the poem as a profound betrayal of his calling. He denounced it as "trash" and, as noted, refused to include it in poetry collections.

This look at "Spain" will hopefully help you see what I mean when I say that a poet must not twist, manipulate, or denigrate language to serve a political cause. Auden's failure here is not that he chose to write about a contemporary political conflict; it is that he allowed a political party's talking points to impose between him and reality—the reality that any attempt to defend a cold-blooded murder as "necessary" is an indefensible descent into tyranny.

Let me return to my original claim: that a deep engagement with poetry—reading, memorizing, reciting, critiquing, and even writing it—can help shape us into better, more responsible citizens. It does this in two ways.

First, by engaging with poetry and studying, alongside Matthew Arnold, "the best that has been thought and said," we become accustomed to the *metaxu*, to the experience of conflicting loyalties. We begin to develop the imaginative strength to embrace these conflicting loyalties more fully, and to place ourselves in situations that stretch us more than we might have thought possible.

Secondly, when we have immersed ourselves in great poetry, poetry that does *not* manipulate language, it becomes much easier to recognize when someone—a politician, a preacher, a journalist, a poet, anyone—does so. Identifying language used in fidelity to reality, even difficult and conflicting realities, makes it all the more noticeable when someone uses language falsely or tells only part of the story. This is an essential skill for a citizen, especially today, as our political rhetoric in America has become almost entirely divided, so that people from one part of the political spectrum might never hear the arguments of another part. It is almost as if we inhabit utterly different worlds right now; studying poetry deeply and immersing ourselves in it gives us the best tools to recognize when an argument or claim (whether poetic or not) is partial, misleading, or subservient to a political cause.

Incidentally, Plato, via Socrates, agrees with me (or I with him!). His assertion that the poets have no place in such a city is not intended to be a blanket prohibition of poetry. Interestingly, the *Republic* concludes with Socrates's poetic retelling of a myth—precisely the kind of language he claimed has no place in the ideal city. Instead, the proscription of poets illustrates the fundamental role that language and imagination play in political order and disorder.

Plato's choice to have Socrates close with a poetic myth is his ironic admission that even in the ideal city, poetry cannot be kept out of politics. It will always make its way in. As a result, every person has a responsibility to become skilled at recognizing rightly ordered poetic speech from wrongly ordered poetic speech. If we cannot do that, we stand no chance when it comes to discerning between rightly and wrongly ordered political speech. **RL**

J.C. Scharl is a poet and playwright. Her work has appeared on the BBC and in many poetry journals on both sides of the Atlantic. She is the author of the collection Ponds and the verse plays Sonnez Les Matines and The Death of Rabelais.

MONASTICISM AS ENTERPRISE

by FR. ELIAS CARR



The monasteries of Europe were much more than places of prayer and contemplation—they provided a wide variety of social services for their surrounding communities. But they were also often thriving businesses that laid the foundation for the entrepreneurial success of the West. Here’s a look at one that continues that tradition today.

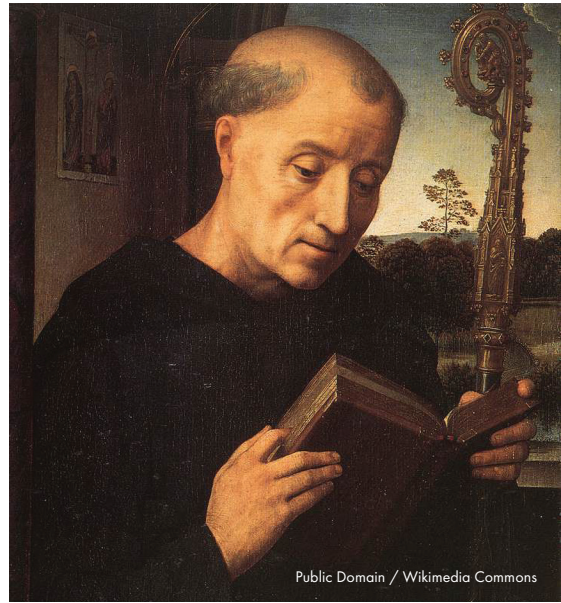


Stift Klosterneuburg in Austria / travelview / Adobe Stock

B

BY TAKING THE NAME LEO, the first American pope, Robert Prevost, put the social doctrine of the Church front and center. With his encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (May 15, 1891), Pope Leo XIII drew upon recent pastoral experience and scholarly research to articulate a Catholic social vision for rapidly urbanizing and industrializing societies. It would be incorrect to imagine, however, that the Church did not always have a social teaching.

As the Catholic faith is incarnate and sacramental from its very founder, the Word made flesh, it attends not only to the care of souls but also to the needs and indeed joys of life. The lay, religious, and clerical



St. Benedict of Nursia, portrait by Hans Memling (c. 1487)

paths manifest the Church's commitment to this claim. Each must navigate the demands of its particular state of life while never losing sight of their common goal of sanctity as each contributes to the Church's mission.

Just as Pope Leo XIV has drawn attention to artificial intelligence as a challenge to human dignity, Pope Benedict invited us to consider the long-standing tradition of monastic businesses as a response. Joseph Ratzinger chose Benedict as his patron because St. Benedict of Nursia helped bring Europe into existence. Following his example, countless men and women became monks and nuns living according to his famous rule. These monastics, along with other forms of conventual life such as canonesses and canons, formed a network that not only evangelized the inhabitants of the continent but also brought with them a new vision of human dignity.

The example of Jesus himself and the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42), as well as the hope for the new heavens and new earth (cf. Rev. 21:1), have inspired two millennia of monastic business practices. Thus, life on this earth and the life to come after the resurrection forms the two poles of tension in which Christians live, affirming the good of each without denying the good of the other. While addressing the subject in broad-brush strokes, I will be drawing upon examples from the local context in which I work, namely, Stift Klosterneuburg in Austria.



Stift Klosterneuburg near Vienna, Austria

“Idleness is the enemy of the soul,” wrote St. Benedict, “and therefore the brothers ought to be occupied at fixed times in manual labor, and again at fixed times in *lectio divina*” (Rule of St. Benedict 48). In designating idleness a danger, St. Benedict was not merely criticizing vice; he was calling into question the values of his society. In Greco-Roman antiquity, *otium*, leisure, was the preserve of the elites. Freedom from the drudgery of work, which was the domain of slaves and the lower classes, left them free for public business (*negotium*), religion, art, and philosophy. That Cicero recommended in *Pro Sestio* (96–104) that one exercise leisure with dignity (*otium cum dignitate*) suggests that idleness or less noble pursuits proved more attractive to many. This lack of dignity in the practice of *otium* not only connoted a personal failing but also posed a danger to the Roman republic by the abandonment of public affairs for private pleasure.

In a sense, Benedict translated Cicero’s *otium cum dignitate* into *ora et labora*. Manual labor disciplines the monk’s temptation to idleness, thereby

conferring on him virtue and providing for the needs of the community. Through the quotidian rhythms of prayer (*ora*) and manual labor (*labora*), monastics grow in holiness, a path of holiness that influenced the canons as well. (Just as monks more and more were ordained priests, so the canons more and more adopted monastic practices.) Thus, the practice of

“
**IN DESIGNATING
IDLENESS A DANGER, ST.
BENEDICT WAS CALLING
INTO QUESTION THE
VALUES OF HIS SOCIETY.**
”

the gospel redefined work, rendering what was once a privation of leisure (*nec otium*), labor, into a means of achieving personal tranquility (another meaning of *negotium*) through virtue.

This transvaluation of labor from demeaning to dignifying brought about a new appreciation for the nobility of business. The English word *business* derives from “busy-ness,” as in preoccupied with cares and concerns. The active sense of doing something, being busy, eventually replaced the original (now obsolete) passive sense of being occupied with worries. Might this semantic shift be a result of the gospel, which redeems and elevates this state of existential anxiety by giving agency to human beings and their labors? If that were the case, the dignifying of work came about in the so-called Middle Ages, when over centuries the gospel through the Church reshaped waves of migrants and the classical inheritance to give rise to Europe. Through the monastic and canonical vocations and their labors—whether manual or liturgical—they forged a new world.

While Americans are familiar with religious communities operating hospitals, schools, and social services, medieval abbeys often operated a wide portfolio of enterprises. Monasteries were not only places of prayer, pilgrimage, and worship, but also education,

industry, and innovation. As some monastic and canonical orders internationalized (Cistercians and Norbertines) and the transnational mendicant orders (Dominicans, Franciscans, etc.) arose, these networks coincided and intersected with the new universities. There, what the late Oxford medievalist Richard William Southern calls “Scholastic humanism,” espousing an optimistic vision of human potential, provided a robust and demanding intellectual framework that canon law translated into practice.

Now widely recognized as entrepreneurs, the Cistercians turned remote and difficult wilderness into gardens. In *The Engines of Our Ingenuity*, a radio program written and hosted by John H. Lienhard, we learn:

By the middle of the 12th century the order rode the cutting edge of hydropower and agriculture. A typical Cistercian monastery straddled an artificial stream brought in through a canal. The stream ran through monastery shops, living quarters and refectories, providing power for milling, wood cutting, forging, olive crushing. It also provided running water for cooking, washing and bathing, and finally for sewage disposal.

Monastic business not only improved the lives of its members but also provided the wealth to patronize

Nonnberg Abbey in Salzburg, Austria



the arts, learning, and research; to build churches and monasteries; to celebrate festivities of liturgical and life cycles; and to relieve human misery. A short list includes care for travelers, the sick, the poor, the orphaned and widowed, victims of natural disasters as well as the education of children, both girls and boys. Lay coworkers were commonplace in monastic businesses, providing the expertise and skills that the community lacked. For example, the Stift of which I am a part requires not only a convent of canons but also more than 200 employees to achieve its many goals in accordance with its ethical vision.

Between the 10th and 13th centuries, local rulers such as St. Leopold established monasteries of the old orders, i.e., Benedictines, Cistercians, Augustinian, and Norbertine canons, to care for their people. Indeed, the sheer number of monasteries in *Österreich* (Austria's name in German) gave rise to the moniker "Klosterreich"—"rich in abbeys." The monk St. Rupert founded the oldest monasteries at St. Peter in 696 and at Nonnberg in 714 in Salzburg. Despite wars, Protestant, Maria Theresian, and Josephinist reformations, and financial and social crises, many abbeys not only survived but also thrived. Indeed, to this day, the Austrian church relies heavily on religious clergy for pastoral work; in 2024, there were 1,691 diocesan priests and 1,193 religious priests. Moreover, the Austrian monasteries are important bearers of memory and culture as well as vital civic partners and generous patrons thanks to their firm commitment to love of God and neighbor.

Wealth, however, also poses challenges. Often the management of wealth and property tempers the fervor of the founding generation. Hagiographical and devotional literature often judge this as decadence. However, it need not be so. The monastic and canonical tradition are prior to the Franciscan vision of evangelical poverty. Benedictine monks and nuns vow obedience, stability, and *conversio morum* (pursuit of holiness). In Austria, Augustinian canons vow common property without private property. In both cases, the community possesses and manages wealth to care for its members, its obligations, and its mission.

By contrast, many equate a vow of poverty with a total lack of property. This doubtless stems from the powerful and deeply appealing personal charism of St. Francis of Assisi. While the example of *Il Poverello* has inspired countless people in the course of history (including most recently Pope Francis), it is, however, laden with an ambivalence that even the first Franciscans could not resolve. (In fact, they

split into two orders over the issue.) How poor is poor enough? It should be noted also that Franciscan theologians contributed mightily to the development of economic thought through their reflection on the concepts of capital, industry, market, labor, fair interest, economic value, fair price, discount, and exchange rate.

Moreover, while poverty is an evangelical virtue, the Church teaches that destitution is an affront to human dignity. God had already condemned social injustices often and vehemently in the Old Testament while commending care for widows, orphans, and strangers and promising a future reign of peace and justice in the New. Beginning in Galilee, Jesus declared, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). God was fulfilling his promise in Jesus, a promise that every generation of Christians not only announces but also must practice. Since the beginning, the Church has not only relieved human suffering and need but also witnessed to their root

16th century depiction of Elijah raising the son of the widow of Zarephath by Simon Bening



cause—sin. Thus, St. Paul’s admonition that “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10) is a call to awareness of the ease with which money becomes an end instead of a means, and to a careful consideration of its proper handling. With wealth comes responsibility.

This shift to prudential handling of wealth provides the opportune moment to turn to the concrete example of Stift Klosterneuburg (or Neuburg, New Castle). The widowed Margrave Leopold III of Austria married the widowed Princess Agnes, daughter of Emperor Henry IV and sister of Emperor Henry V. They decided to found a collegiate church, the largest in the country at the time, in 1114 at the site of their residence. (In German, a *Stifter* means a founder, a *Stiftung*, a foundation, and a *Stift* refers to a corporation of persons, property, and buildings.)

With aspirations to found the first diocese in Austria, Leopold sent his most talented son, Otto, who was the first provost of the new Stift, to Paris, the hub of Scholastic humanism, to study with a group of 15 companions. Unfortunately for Leopold’s plan, Otto encountered austere Benedictine reformers, whereupon he elected to become a Cistercian monk in Morimond in 1132. (He did, however, become a bishop, but elsewhere he is remembered as Blessed Otto of Freising.) Urged by Otto as well as by the nearby bishops, Leopold decided to entrust the care of the Stift to the Augustinian canons in perpetuity in 1133. Indeed, we are actively planning the celebration of the 900th anniversary in the Jubilee Year of 2033.

The reformed canons adopted the Rule of Saint Augustine with its strong emphasis on common property: “Call nothing your own, but let everything be yours in common. Food and clothing shall be distributed to each of you by your superior, not equally to all, for all do not enjoy equal health, but rather according to each one’s need. For so you read in the Acts of the Apostles that *they had all things in common and distribution was made to each one according to each one’s need* (4:32, 35).” The rule gives the superior the authority and the mandate to safeguard the well-being of the community and the welfare of each member simultaneously. The effectiveness of the rule, therefore, depends on the quality of the leadership.

The oldest records confirm Leopold and Agnes’s generosity to the double monastery of canons and canonesses. Under the unified leadership of the provost, the canonesses under their own superior, the



16th century portrait of Leopold III of Habsburg by Anton Boys

Magistra (Mistress), enjoyed considerable autonomy in both their daily lives and their businesses. Like the canons, the canonesses observed the Rule of Saint Augustine. They sang the Divine Office and the Mass in Latin, composed texts and chants, cared for the sick and the poor in their hospice, and educated girls in Latin, theology, music, and handicrafts in their school. The professed canonesses shared their home with other women, such as widows or married women whose husbands were away for a long period;

“
**SINCE THE BEGINNING,
THE CHURCH HAS NOT
ONLY RELIEVED HUMAN
SUFFERING AND NEED
BUT ALSO WITNESSED TO
THEIR ROOT CAUSE—SIN.**



their students; lay sisters; and servants. Unlike many other double monasteries that ceased to exist by the 13th century, the canonesses enjoy such financial stability that they were able to extend their church, St. Jakob, in 1261 to accommodate 30 canonesses.

With the arrival of the Protestant reformation and the ongoing incursions of the Ottomans, both the canons and canonesses suffered financially and spiritually. The last canoness, Magistra Apollonia Katzler, died in 1568, leaving all the goods, books, artworks, and property to the Stift. Meanwhile, even as the financial situation improved, the greatly reduced convent of seven canons (and the surrounding population) remained firmly Lutheran until the arrival of the Catholic reformer Kaspar Christiani. Having pensioned off the Lutheran canons, Christiani and his successors turned their attention to the spiritual renewal of the parishes and to securing the economic foundation of the Stift. By the mid-17th century, the local population was again firmly Catholic. Large baroque building projects at Melk, Klosterneuburg, St. Florian, and beyond, and their stunning artworks, attest to their spiritual and financial flourishing in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Until 1848, central European economic relations operated within the manorial system (*Grundherrschaft*) that defined the relationship between the owner of property (the *Grundherr*, “landlord”) and those who lived and worked on it. This system regulated the rights and duties of both parties. Property owners such as an abbey or noble families awarded the use of their lands to farmers in exchange for labor, money, or goods. The property owner also maintained the peace, heard first-instance court and justice cases, and acted entrepreneurially. The oldest entries in the *Traditionskodex* (a manuscript that records just over 800 records of legal transactions handed over to the Stift) report the possession of land and tenants from the start of the Stift to the mid-13th century.

The fusion of administration and ownerships underwent significant changes under the enlightened despots Maria Theresa and her son, Joseph II. As absolutism took hold, these liberal reformers transferred judicial and policing functions to the state, allowed farmers to pay cash instead of providing labor, and granted farmers freedom of movement, freedom to marry without their lord’s consent, and freedom to pursue trade and crafts. The imperial government abolished the manorial system in response to the revolution of 1848, one of several nationalist

uprisings in Europe that were also reactions to working conditions imposed by the Industrial Revolution.

Excepting for the Nazi expropriation (1941–1945), the canons governed the Stift for over nine hundred years. Legally, the Stift is a public corporation. This concept emerged in medieval canon law to refer to institutions, such as dioceses and monasteries, that enjoyed self-governance. As they did with many ecclesiastical innovations in law, governance, finance, administration, and education, early modern European kingdoms imitated these church practices to modernize the state and transfer private competences, as we just saw in the reform and abolition of the manorial system, to the state.

The Austrian republic recognizes not only the federal government, federal states, and municipalities as public corporations but also, for example, universities, churches, and religious communities. A public corporation is a juridical person that performs sovereign duties according to its own rules. It defines its membership, its modes of governance, and its public tasks. In the case of the Stift, the solemnly professed canons constitute the membership. The existing members approve of new members. The solemnly professed constitute the chapter, the supreme governing body, and are called capitulars. Carrying the responsibility together for the Stift, the capitulars gather in the plenary chapter at least twice a year to approve budgets and large purchases and admit new members among other things.

Since it is not practical for the chapter to make decisions for day-to-day operations, the capitulars elect a chief executive officer, the provost, and his principal co-worker, the dean. In the Augustinian spirit, the provost is the one whom the brothers “set forth,” the *praepositus*, who rules as a brother among the confreres, rather than a father, abbot. (The Holy Father’s family name, Prevost, is a French variant of *praepositus*.) The provost oversees the entire operation, whereas the dean is mainly responsible for the care of canons and their common life. Assisting them is a chapter council that meets monthly. Additionally, the provost appoints officials such as the novice master, who oversees the formation of future canons, and the *Kämmerer*, who oversees the businesses with his own team.

The Stift’s enterprises are composed of those that earn income and those in which the income is invested. The former includes the winery, forests, organic farming, a wood-burning heating plant, real



Klosterneuburg vineyards in Austria

estate, the museum, and events. The latter consists of the convent, household, gardens, construction office, library, archives, research institute, art collections, music program, management, IT, personnel, and upkeep. Its income-generating enterprises, therefore, not only finance the Stift but also support the 24 Austrian parishes as well as the canons serving in Bergen, Norway, and Glen Cove, New York, and its social and charitable activities. (The Stift does receive a small contribution from the church contribution system, *Kirchenbeitrag*, for the pastoral work of the canons in the archdiocese of Vienna and St. Pölten.) Let us now take a closer look at the income-generating enterprises.

Located in one of the most fertile regions of grape cultivation in central Europe, the Stift has had from the start a close connection with wine. The demand for wine for both consumption and sacramental use upriver in Bavaria gave Danubian vintners a competitive advantage due to the ease of transportation on the river. Although its economic importance has varied, in the 18th century, for example, the winery earned over one third of the Stift's total income, making it the most successful of its enterprises. Seeking innovation and greater productivity, the Stift cofounded the Klosterneuburg Viticulture Institute, the first of its kind in the world, under the leadership of Provost Adam Schreck in 1860. With 271 acres

of vineyard in four locations, the winery cultivates a variety of grape sorts according to their micro-climates that results in over 50 wines and fruit juices. Additionally, the Stift works with local partners to farm organically 960 acres of land.

The Stift has also undertaken forestry since its founding. Forests play an important role in the portfolio of Austrian abbeys since they reliably produce income even in difficult times. Currently managing 22,800 acres of forest in several locations, the forest office operates in long time spans, planting and harvesting trees over centuries. Thus, by its nature, such work requires patience and planning with an eye to future generations. Today, besides timber, forests can generate income through the leasing of ground for electricity-generating windmills and solar-panel farms.

Moreover, forests can also serve pastoral goals due to societal changes in burial practices. Since many Austrians are choosing cremation over burial, Stift Klosterneuburg, the Cistercian monastery Stift Heiligenkreuz, and the archdiocesan rent office Erzbistum Wien launched Klosterwald in 2019. With the approval of the Austrian bishops, the "forest cloister" inters cremains in biodegradable containers at the foot of a tree within a Christian framework. In 2024, a start-up national funeral home, Benu, merged with Klosterwald. The hope is that as forest burials gain popularity, religious communities, parishes, municipalities,

and dioceses can earn income with their forests while accompanying families when a loved one dies.

Lastly, real estate management has always been an important pillar for the Stift. Currently, the Stift leases around 700 apartments, offices, and commercial premises in 73 buildings in Vienna and Lower Austria. The Stift also manages around 4,000 leasehold and building lease agreements for properties. The regulation of the banks of the Danube in 1870–75 transformed floodplain into permanently habitable land in the 21st district of Vienna in Floridsdorf (named after Provost Floridus Leeb, who rebuilt 26 homes after a flood) and Donauefeld. Since fire could also destroy homes and lives, Provost Gaudenz Dunkler directed the Stift to join other civic leaders in the founding of the Reciprocal Imperial and Royal Private Fire Insurance Company in 1824. The rebranded Vienna Municipal Insurance Company remains a close partner of the Stift to this day.

Since innovation necessarily entails risk-taking, the Stift has favored more conservative strategies for wealth generation and management. This takes the shape of a diversified portfolio of enterprises and investments as well as an active and constructive cooperation with numerous external partners, including local municipalities, businesses, social services, and the archdiocese. The social engagement of the Stift extends beyond local partners to include religious communities, churches, and charities across the globe. Since 2000, the Stift

“
**SINCE INNOVATION
NECESSARILY ENTAILS
RISK-TAKING, THE
STIFT HAS FAVORED
MORE CONSERVATIVE
STRATEGIES FOR
WEALTH GENERATION
AND MANAGEMENT.**
”

has donated more than \$23 million in its commitment to fostering human dignity.

The breadth and depth of Stift Klosterneuburg's enterprises is attracting the interest of scholars who wish to understand the relationship between monastic businesses and institutional longevity. In 2025 the Stift initiated the multiyear research project *Jenseits Ökonomie* (Beyond Economy). The chief researchers, Martin Haltrich and Anna Vierlinger, explain that its title deliberately conveys a double meaning:

On the one hand, it examines how economic practices in this world (Diesseits) were linked to expectations of salvation in the afterlife (Jenseits)—through indulgences, foundations, pastoral care, charitable works, pilgrimages, and donations for the benefit of the soul. On the other hand, the project seeks to reconceptualise the economic agency of ecclesiastical institutions by viewing them as multifunctional organisations...that simultaneously acted as economic enterprises, social welfare providers, political stakeholders, and cultural producers.

The project therefore contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on monasteries as centers of innovation and entrepreneurship. Shifting the focus of economics from production and exchange to the management of material and immaterial resources as an integral component of economic life furthers the articulation of the social doctrine of the Church today.

In his address to the Centesimus Annus Foundation on May 17, 2025, Pope Leo observed a growing demand for the Church's social doctrine to respond to the “widespread thirst for justice, a desire for authentic fatherhood and motherhood, a profound longing for spirituality, especially among young people and the marginalized.” Greater familiarity with the example of monastic business transforms the social doctrine into incarnated practices: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). **RL**

Fr. Elias Carr is canon regular of Saint Augustine of Stift Klosterneuburg. Ordained in 1999, he has served in parishes and schools in Austria, Norway, and the U.S. He earned his doctorate in theology at the JPII Pontifical University in Kraków in 2022. Word on Fire published his first book, I Came to Cast Fire—An Introduction to René Girard, in 2024. He now serves as the Kämmerer of Klosterneuburg.

IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION

Enrique Shaw's Path to Holiness as a Business Leader

by MARCELO RESICO

ON DECEMBER 18, 2025, Pope Leo XIV signed the authorization for the beatification cause of the notable Argentine businessman Enrique Shaw (1921–1962). In the event Shaw continues his path to the altars, he would be the first businessman saint in the history of the Catholic Church. To support this beatification process, testimonies were heard from people who knew him as he lived out his various vocations during difficult times: from business colleagues and employees, to family, friends, and the faithful who trust in his intercession. We believe that in addition to this important recognition of his path of holiness, Shaw's life and work provide much instruction for Catholics and non-Catholics alike today.

Shaw received a careful Catholic education at the special request of his mother, Sara Tornquist Altgelt, when she was near death (she passed away when he was only four years old). After finishing school,

Shaw decided on a naval career, ignoring the expectation that he would dedicate himself to the management of some of the numerous family businesses. At the Naval Academy and in his first responsibilities as an officer, he soon stood out for his high qualifications and leadership skills. Through his visible concerns for his subordinates and colleagues, it became evident that, despite coming from a prominent social position, Shaw always had a singular empathy for those who were in a different condition, a sensitivity inclined toward fraternity and helping others, which was clearly associated with a deep Christian conviction.

Toward the end of the Second World War, Shaw was sent by the Argentine navy to Chicago State University to study meteorology. Despite this somewhat narrow academic focus, Shaw was a man of vast culture and extensive readings and reflections, including in Catholic Social Doctrine, all of which he recorded in notebooks (now archived at the Catholic University of Argentina). Despite his college major, he thought about becoming a factory worker so he could spread the faith among other laborers. But Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Hubbard Woods, Illinois, suggested that the place to best develop his vocation was in one of the companies to which members of Shaw's family frequently invited him to join. He finally decided to accept one of these offers, resigned from the navy, and returned to Buenos Aires to work in the Rigolleau glassworks, a company founded by an uncle of his wife, Cecilia Bunge, whom he married in 1943.

Shaw worked intensely for the glassworks company, holding several positions until he became its CEO; in addition, he created or helped found other businesses and became a member of the boards of directors of many others. Through all these responsibilities, Shaw strove to create a community between owners, managers, and employees and was driven by ideas and experiences broadly in line with postwar Christian humanism, such as the democratic neo-Thomism of Jaques Maritain and the concept of the social market economy, which combined free market capitalism with a socially conscious welfare state.

This meant, in a way advanced for his time, promoting workers and supporting them to grow in autonomy. In this way he was able to combine business efficiency—through innovation and technological advances—with concern for the well-being



Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

of workers and their families. As just two examples: He created a pension fund and a healthcare plan to provide medical services and financial support in the event workers experienced severe illness or enjoyed the birth of children. And in several cases he promoted the creation of new businesses for workers who were destined to become unemployed due to Rigolleau restructuring. Thanks to Shaw's support, these new firms grew to become new suppliers for the glassworks company, creating in the course of time a cluster of vibrant businesses in the area where the main plant was located in Buenos Aires.

And so Enrique Shaw became an example of a form of leadership that fostered team spirit, but not without difficulties and conflicts due largely to the polarization evident in Argentine politics and economics of his time—namely, support for President Juan Perón (1895–1974) by the workers, who received the social benefits he granted, and those who opposed the president's authoritarianism and statism. At the height of this confrontation, Perón broke off relations—which initially had been close—with the Catholic Church, and Shaw was imprisoned for 10 days on suspicion of an alleged conspiracy that could not be proved.

This naturally created tensions and conflicts within the companies Shaw was associated with as well. One of Shaw's biographers, Ambrosio Romero Carranza, quotes from Shaw's notes at the time: "How lonely I found myself then in my work as a company leader, I felt alone, misunderstood."

This goal to bring together, despite contrasting views, the members of the company to fulfill a joint mission was also by Shaw's lights a contribution to the common good of the nation. In this regard, Shaw advanced the cause of what today we would call "corporate social responsibility"—improved consumer service, healthy but fair competition, and good treatment of employees. In addition, he tried to collaborate with civil society and to improve Argentina's institutions within a subsidiary vision of the state. To cite some examples, he actively participated in the Argentine Industrial Union (UIA), was the main promoter of the Family Wage Law, collaborated in the creation of the Catholic University of Argentina (as its first treasurer), and was founder of the Christian Association of Business Leaders of Argentina (ACDE).

While pursuing these manifold tasks, to which he dedicated his short and fruitful life, Shaw faced down all obstacles and challenges. As mentioned above, the

“
**HE WAS ABLE TO
COMBINE BUSINESS
EFFICIENCY—THROUGH
INNOVATION AND
TECHNOLOGICAL
ADVANCES—WITH
CONCERN FOR THE WELL-
BEING OF WORKERS
AND THEIR FAMILIES.**
”

Rigolleau glass products company underwent a major restructuring. The measure was considered necessary to come to terms with a major shift in the business—the movement away from glass and to plastics. The reconversion plan (or what we could call “downsizing”) meant the dismissal of a significant portion of the workers. What no one knew at the time was that Shaw was battling cancer. Yet despite this, he traveled to the United States to meet with majority partners such as the Corning Glass company to persuade them of an alternative to letting workers go. Unfortunately he died before he was able to put his plan into action. He was 41.

Enrique Shaw left us the example of a man of action rooted in prudence and wisdom, deep prayer, and assiduous religious practice. He was a businessman who sought efficiency, innovation, and fair remuneration among all participants in the company, but always with an eye toward the eternal and oriented to the common good. It should be noted that when his cancer became common knowledge, the number of workers who lined up to donate blood astounded medical workers! Whether or not he is finally declared a saint, Enrique Shaw remains a model for anyone seeking both to do good and to do well. **RL**

Marcelo Resico earned his doctorate in economics from the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina and is its director of the Shaw Institute of Business Studies.



Recent Guests Include:

Andrew Abela

*Founding Dean of the
Busch School of Business and
Ordinary Professor of Marketing at
The Catholic University of America*

John Wilsey

*Professor of Church History and Chair
of the Department of Church History
and Historical Theology at Southern
Baptist Theological Seminary*

Peter Lipsett

Vice President at DonorsTrust

Anne Bradley

*Vice President of Academic Affairs
at The Fund for American Studies
and Professor of Economics at
The Institute of World Politics*



We're Now on Video!

Watch Full Episodes & Subscribe at

ACTON.ORG/PODCASTS



Hitler declaring war against the United States in 1941 / Bundesarchiv / CC-BY-SA 3.0 / Wikimedia Commons

When Hitler Was a Moral Compass

Once upon a time, everything was measured by whether it resembled Nazism, the worst thing one could think of. Now more and more wonder whether it was really so bad. How did we get here? And can we forge another, better cultural myth?

by JOHN PINHEIRO

ALEC RYRIE, PROFESSOR OF the history of Christianity at Durham University, admits that, as a Reformation scholar, he “has no business straying into modern times.” Like a good academic, however, he has done so anyway. The result is *The Age of Hitler and How We Will Survive It*. What does Ryrie mean by this provocative title?

The book is “not really about Hitler” or “even a book of history.” Rather, *The Age of Hitler* argues that the Nazi atrocities of World War II replaced the story of Jesus Christ as the foundational cultural myth by which Western civilization lives. It is both our Trojan War and our *Paradise Lost*, the most important source of our shared values. And for Ryrie this is visceral, subjective, and personal: “I feel in my bones that Nazism is the embodiment of evil.”

Ryrie asserts that whereas the story of Christ once moved people emotionally as a tale of heroic love, it no longer has as strong an effect on him as do stories of Dunkirk and D-Day. He thinks this is true for most people, making World War II “our culture’s true religion.” Thus, since 1945 we have been living in the “age of Hitler.”

Wars always produce propaganda and usually involve the dehumanization of one’s enemies. In the case of WWII, however, the Allies’ insistence on the evil of the enemy turned out to be true—and worse. The wartime propaganda against Germany fell so far short of the horrible reality that even the battle-hardened Allied troops who liberated the concentration camps were shocked.

The Allies entered the war to save what President Franklin D. Roosevelt called “Judeo-Christian



*The Age of Hitler
and How We
Will Survive It*

By Alec Ryrie
(Reaktion Books, 2025)

civilization.” Afterward, they wanted to safeguard their victory against fascism by creating a postwar order in which fascism’s evils could never recur. So ever since, “our public morals have come to be defined with reference to the Nazis.” As Ryrie puts it, while most consider Jesus to be good, they do not believe this “with the same fervour and conviction that we believe Nazism is evil.”

This sentiment, though historically conditioned by World War II, is what led the victors in the war to proclaim the universality of their values in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). There was a problem, however. The UDHR was a compromise document, and as such it lacked a philosophical or theological foundation for the principle of dignity. As Jacques Maritain, who had participated in the writing of the UDHR, quipped at the time, “We agree about the rights, so long as no one asks us why.”

When C.S. Lewis wrote about universal anthropological truth in *The Abolition of Man*, he feared that the secular West “would be engulfed by anti-humanist scientism.” Instead, Ryrie claims, secular progressivism “rushed to embrace and to define itself by the concept of *human rights*.” This amounted not to a belief in human dignity founded on faith in a common Creator and truths knowable through reason, but rather faith in the inviolability of the human person as such. Humanity itself became mankind’s common faith.

Because of the lack of a real anthropological foundation, the UDHR proved malleable for those wanting to manufacture new rights, the so-called human rights that really are entitlements without duties to

the common good. Some of these, like abortion, are matters of life and death. Pope Benedict XVI recognized the danger when he warned that “it is a mistake to fall back on a pragmatic approach, limited to determining ‘common ground,’ minimal in content and weak in its effect.”

There are no universal human rights, Ryrie says, and certainly not “self-evident” ones. “Nazism is our chief and perhaps our only absolute. In a relativist, pluralist age, it is our one fixed reference point.” The problem is that “a value system based around rejection of Nazism...was never quite up to bearing the weight placed on it and it is cracking under the strain”—so much so that Ryrie’s purpose in writing *The Age of Hitler* is to declare that the age is fast coming to an end.

After World War II, one was free to promote all manner of kooky conspiracy theories, wear a T-shirt with the image of the murderer Ernesto “Che” Guevara on it, or even sport hammer-and-sickle jewelry and tattoos. One could even praise Stalin’s architectural tastes or Mao Zedong’s intention to help Chinese peasants make a Great Leap Forward. But denying the Holocaust or praising Hitler was off the table, the “modern equivalent of blasphemy.” No longer. Anti-Semitism is back in vogue on both the political left and the political right, in Europe and in the United States.

In Ryrie’s telling, “older crimes” have weakened the hold of Nazi atrocities on the moral imagination. Chief among the older crimes is the Atlantic slave trade. It is when Ryrie wades into history that he gets into trouble. For instance, in one of several generalizations, Ryrie simplistically says that the Confederacy “fought for slavery” during the American Civil War. True, sort of, but the war and its

“

**IN RYRIE’S TELLING,
‘OLDER CRIMES’ HAVE
WEAKENED THE HOLD OF
NAZI ATROCITIES ON THE
MORAL IMAGINATION.**

”

causes were complex. After all, Maryland, Delaware, and (some of) Kentucky also fought for slavery, though they did so for the Union. The same goes for Abraham Lincoln, at least between 1861 and 1863.

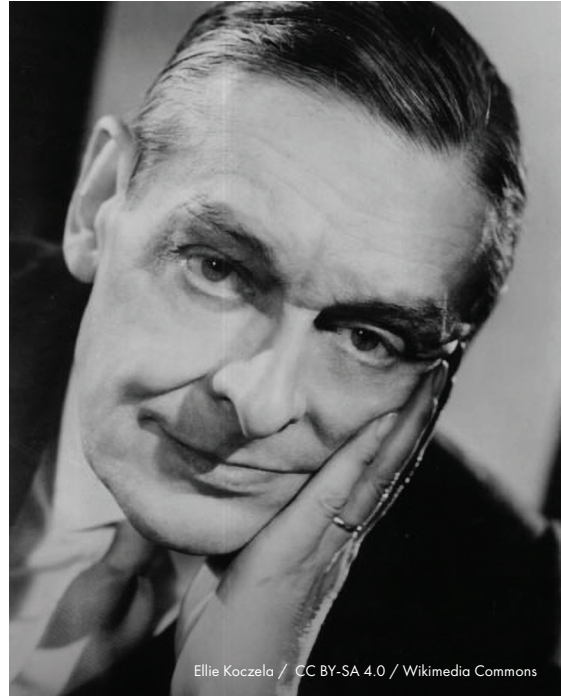
Next in the reduction of history into easy moral categories or equivalencies comes the Cold War, which, in Ryrie's view, saw the United States support awful regimes as long as they were anti-communist. But it is really race that is at the center of Ryrie's history. He concludes that one nail in the coffin of the "age of Hitler" has been the realization that "Nazism now appears simply as an extreme example of a long, continuous history of racial persecution and genocide."

So what to do? As Western culture becomes "two broad, mutually antagonistic, mutually exclusive and almost mutually incomprehensible value systems," Ryrie urges us to adopt "a new synthesis of values" acceptable to both conservatives and progressives. And his synthesis reads like the *via media* of Queen Elizabeth I. And like hers, it will please few. It is a lukewarm concoction that may satisfy those who don't firmly hold to absolute truths but will appall those who do.

Ryrie wants a "rooted civilization," but rooted in what, he cannot say. Indeed, in an unintentional mimicry of Dwight Eisenhower's praise of religion, Ryrie says "it does not matter very much what your roots are. It matters very much that you have some." Here, one ought to consult the Parable of the Sower.

Truth matters because, as Thomas Aquinas wrote, it is the conforming of our minds to reality. This does not mean all are in agreement about what constitutes reality. Allan Bloom thought the academy was the best home for this kind of debate. Universities can be communities where diversity is a foregone conclusion and civil disagreement is common, but only if all are seeking the *truth* of things and not merely social harmony. "The real community of man," wrote Bloom in *The Closing of the American Mind*, "is the community of those who seek the truth." This is an admittedly small group. It includes only "true friends, as Plato was to Aristotle at the very moment they were disagreeing about the nature of the good. Their common concern for the good linked them; their disagreement about it proved they needed one another to understand it."

Along with its epistemological skepticism, another failing of this book is that it calls T.S. Eliot's suggestion of a renewed Christian civilization "sinister."



Elle Koczela / CC BY-SA 4.0 / Wikimedia Commons

T. S. Eliot (1888–1965)

Apparently, some roots are indeed worse than others, and the Christian roots of the West are the worst of all. Ryrie could have learned a valuable lesson from Eliot if only he had understood him better. He equates Eliot's Christian culture idea, however, with an ill-defined "Christian nationalism." This is an unfair reading of Eliot.

In 1931, Eliot warned that the

World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization and save the World from suicide.

Recognizing the role of Christianity in the formation of Western culture as a means of redeeming it is hardly "sinister." The historian Christopher Dawson, though he disagreed with Eliot on the relationship of culture to religion, had a similar project. Each knew that the West was operating on the intellectual and moral fumes of Christendom, and each wanted somehow to preserve the truths about the human person in that tradition.

Ryrie does not think there is anthropological truth about human dignity that is knowable and therefore compelling enough to be believed by all people. The problem is not, as Ryrie thinks, that humanity has become mankind's common faith. Rather, the problem is the primacy of a false understanding of who the human person is. Specifically, Ryrie accords great weight to a "plastic anthropology," one of what my Acton Institute colleague Michael Matheson Miller calls the five false anthropologies.

"These visions of the human person," Miller argues, "dominate much of our discourse and are creating anxiety, loneliness, cultural and social disorder, contribut[ing] to the decline of Christian belief, and ultimately to a culture of death." This is particularly true of a "plastic anthropology" that sees the human person as malleable. It is this plastic anthropology, says Miller, that led to the weaponization of the UDHR's cause of human dignity.

And as Pope Francis argues in *Laudato Si'*, a false view of the human person leads inevitably to environmental degradation because it is rooted in the same willfulness when it comes to creation. "The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas in thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation."

Ryrrie does have one thing in common with Eliot, though: a deeply Eurocentric view of what "the World" is. Indeed, his use of the first person throughout the book assumes that his subjective sense of the shared values in the "age of Hitler" are, well, shared. But are they?

Ryrie's WWII is one that doesn't include the Pacific Theater and the Empire of Japan. For many people, including Americans, World War II was not only about defeating the great evil of Hitler and Nazism. The 1.4 billion Chinese do not live in an "Age of Hitler." Indeed, it was not long ago that Chinese demonstrated outside the Japanese embassy in Beijing to protest the interpretation of World War II found in Japanese schoolbooks.

Neither do the citizens of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh find themselves in the age of Hitler. Each of these nations owes its independence in part to the demise of the British Empire following World War II.

But never mind. We are talking about a mere 3.5 billion people.



Eleanor Roosevelt holding a poster of the UDHR (1949)

The best part of *The Age of Hitler* is Ryrie's encouragement that we ought to talk to one another. He has a chapter in which he tells progressives what they should do, and another in which he tells conservatives what they should do. True, his solution is a watered-down *via media* where conservatives and progressives hold hands while agreeing that they don't really believe in anything other than getting along and being "rooted." But at least Ryrie is proposing (though he doesn't use these terms) that we act with virtues like magnanimity and temperance when we engage those with whom we disagree.

The Age of Hitler reads like one side of a late-night conversation over a few drinks. That's a compliment. It's interesting and occasionally provocative in the best sense. Unfortunately, it is also filled with historical generalities that wash over the complexity of human events. In the end we are left with a recommendation for a synthesis on how to get along that amounts to agreeing to disagree, because we can't know the truth anyway. If that's the case, perhaps the age of Hitler wasn't so bad after all. **RL**

John Pinheiro is director of research for the Acton Institute and author of *The American Experiment in Ordered Liberty* and *Missionaries of Republicanism: A Religious History of the Mexican-American War*.



The Cities of God and Man

A recent effort to join the millennia-long discussion of the relationship of authority, sovereignty, religion, and politics is as often confusing as it is illuminating.

by JEFFREY POLET

THE TERM “POLITICAL THEOLOGY” took an unfortunate turn in the early part of the last century. Prior to then it had a rather august history. Saint Augustine’s *City of God* and Hobbes’s *Leviathan* are manifestly works of political theology, carefully tracing the ways in which theological judgments form political commitments and also the ways in which political exigencies might alter our theological dogmas. Both writers occupied themselves with the question of how political societies get constituted and on what basis, with Hobbes bringing greater conceptual clarity by borrowing Jean Bodin’s conceptions of “sovereignty.” Since then, we have organized our politics on the basis of the problem of sovereignty: its sources, nature, and operations.

I said that the term “political theology” fell into disrepute about a century ago. In 1922 a 34-year-old

jurist by the name of Carl Schmitt published in Germany a book by that title. It is undoubtedly a brilliant work of political analysis, the slim volume taking a place among the canonical works of 20th-century theory. Schmitt deftly demonstrated that many political problems have their analogues in theological ones; for example, just as miracles reveal to us the true nature of the deity, so also decision-making in times of crisis reveals to us the nature of the decision-maker. Like Max Weber, Schmitt feared that politics had become technocratic and bureaucratic, the reliance on rules and procedures occluding the human elements of politics. He resisted seeing the state “as a huge industrial plant” and emphasized instead the possibilities and dangers of human action.

Which might have been fine had Schmitt not, in the summer of 1933, joined the Nazi Party. He

remained a party member until the end of the war, at which point he was detained but never tried by Allied authorities. Still, a pall was cast over his reputation. Just as with his compatriot Martin Heidegger, scholars became skittish about his work; if they engaged these thinkers at all it was in the effort to prove that Nazism was not extrinsic to their philosophy. In the case of Schmitt this became especially tempting since he talked so much of power. Here, too, Schmitt thought analogically: The primordial use of political power was modeled on the exercise of divine power in creation, in bringing order out of chaos.

A second element of Schmitt's political theology involved his famous use of the friend/enemy distinction. The sovereign act formed individuals into a people, a unity, one whose identity could be both constructed and maintained dialectically in opposition to an existential threat. The friend/enemy distinction is thus one of high stakes, where unification against the enemy is necessary for survival. Schmitt saw the distinction as essential to taking responsibility "to preserve one's own form of existence." It is, as Samuel Huntington might say, a clash of civilizations, or at least a clash of faiths.

A third element of Schmitt's political theology involved what we might think of as the kingly and priestly function of the leader. Law ultimately emerged from the "common consciousness" or "spirit" of "the people." The leader articulated and administered this common mind; one might think of Lincoln's expression of civil religion in the American context. The people were already so constituted, but someone had to express it and turn it into law.

At the core of this analysis is Schmitt's claim that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the

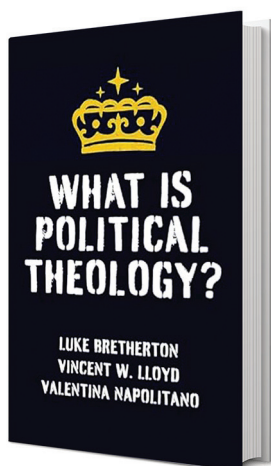


Carl Schmitt (1888–1985)

state are secularized theological concepts." Even if the idea of an omnipotent leader could be traced back to the idea of an omnipotent deity, theological concepts still underwent transformation over time. The most consequential development occurred in the classical liberal tradition with the fracturing of Hobbes's notion of the indivisibility of sovereignty. Liberals emphasized adherence to rules and procedures and thus obviated the human element in politics. Schmitt believed the inevitability of conflict and the persistence of existential threat required resolute action that could operate outside rules and procedures. The rule of law was a fine thing but not in exceptional circumstances.

As I said, Schmitt's relationship to Nazism made him a pariah, and I suspect that subsequent writers avoided him to avoid any association. He seemed to be regarded more as a Nazi theorist than as a theorist who was a Nazi. Contemporary Integralists, sharing his rejection of liberalism, often refer to him, spurring suspicions of their own authoritarian ends. However, Schmitt had withdrawn active participation in the Nazi Party by 1936, and in his postwar interviews with Allied authorities he expressed disgust with Hitler. His initial enthusiasm for Hitler seems to have resulted from the fact that he regarded sovereign decisions as "miracles" in the sense that they had no references except for the fact that they happened, and he believed that Hitler's exercise of sovereign power had that miraculous quality. But neither should we discount Schmitt's own anti-Semitism.

It is hard to discern a man's motives, especially when he writes in difficult times. Schmitt was



What Is Political Theology?

By Luke Bretherton,
Vincent W. Lloyd,
Valentina Napolitano

(Columbia University
Press, 2025)

exceptionally fond of Melville’s novel *Benito Cereno* and associated himself with the title character. The lesson Schmitt apparently drew from the book is that individuals have to compromise with evil when their safety is at stake, and this view would square with his own construal of politics: Leaders have an obligation to maintain the people and the nation. The central question is whether the relationship with Nazism is incidental to his thought or central to it. One hesitates to answer because if one allows for an essential connection, it then makes it most difficult to endorse anything Schmitt wrote. Granted, one is playing with dark forces here, but I don’t think arguing that Schmitt deepens our understanding of “the political” commits me to authoritarian principles any more than listening to Wagner commits me to anti-Semitism; nor does the fact that Plato worked for the tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse mean I should no longer read or teach him.

If Schmitt believed that liberalism devalued “the political,” he also worried that liberalism made religion in the modern world a recurring problem. In Germany in the middle part of the century, Karl Löwith and Hans Blumenberg engaged in an extensive debate over the idea of secularization itself. Blumenberg’s *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* vigorously argued that modernity had to be understood on its own terms and not simply as either an extension or rejection of the Christian centuries that preceded it. In Blumenberg’s analysis, secularization was an argumentative term but not a scholarly one.

Oliver O’Donovan in 2023



Henry Center / CC BY 3.0 / Wikimedia Commons

“

THE LESSON SCHMITT APPARENTLY DREW FROM *BENITO CERENO* IS THAT INDIVIDUALS HAVE TO COMPROMISE WITH EVIL WHEN THEIR SAFETY IS AT STAKE.

”

Those who reinvigorated political theology in the latter decades of the last century and the early part of this one aligned themselves more closely with Löwith’s argument—namely, that modernity could only be understood in reference to its Christian, theological roots: either as a rejection of them, a heretical reforming of them, or an extension of them. A great deal of the most interesting political theory of this century has resulted from analyzing the religious relationship between the modern and the premodern world.

The most important book in the genre (for my money) was Oliver O’Donovan’s *The Desire of the Nations*, an exceptionally profound work that O’Donovan wrote based on his study of Hobbes. O’Donovan largely defended the modern conception of sovereignty, arguing that “the legal-constitutional conception is the essence of Christendom’s legacy,” political sovereignty being compatible with divine sovereignty. Whatever else political thinking requires, it involves careful reflection on the nature of authority, which we may think of as power made legitimate.

Other writers see political theology as fundamentally opposed to secularization, including its derivative ideas of sovereignty. One recent example is *What Is Political Theology?*, written by Luke Bretherton, Vincent W. Lloyd, and Valentina Napolitano. The authors co-wrote the introduction, which is followed by individual chapters whereby each author tries to make his or her own distinctive contribution to political theology. The ghost of Schmitt is in the background of the book,

and while the authors don't come right out and say that Schmitt's analytical work necessarily results in authoritarianism, that is very much the spirit of the work. I also think it's unfair.

If Schmitt's work was animated by German failure in the First World War and the corrupt formalism of the Weimar Republic, these authors clearly respond to contemporary events in America, although in their case they believe "authoritarian and proto-fascist movements...captured the White House." No fans of liberalism because of the way it "obscures questions of life and death," they nonetheless do not want it "conceded to reactionaries and fascists." At the same time, their analytical framework self-consciously derives its categories from critical theory, which, too, emerged from the chaos of the middle part of the last century and largely results in analyses that emphasize oppression and domination, holding out the possibility of liberation. While the first critical writers were serious thinkers engaged in substantive analysis, all too often their epigones find themselves handling tools clumsily. The resulting lack of refinement can't be compensated for by highly stylized language.

The introduction is reasonably clear, however. The authors acknowledge that "in the background of each chapter is the critique of secularism, an ideology entangled with forces of mastery." Since political theology alone has the conceptual tools to critique secularism and its offspring—capitalism and liberalism—it alone has the means at its disposal to liberate individuals from oppressive forms of domination, which is the practical aim of the authors. How expansively they conceive such forms varies by author, although their defense of democracy results from the fact that "the ordinary, everyday world is the site at which forms of domination, and the precarity and oppression they produce, are most acutely displayed." Even so, systems remain their main concern; maybe that's because things don't look that bad up close.

Luke Bretherton's chapter largely avoids jargon and is, in my estimation, by far the most successful effort of the three. Unlike the other authors, Bretherton has an actual theory of politics: the craft of forming and sustaining a common life with others over time in a particular place. I think that's actually a pretty good way to think about politics, even if some important elements are left out of the definition. The most important omission in his chapter is the lack of attention to the issue of authority, which plays a central role in Christian renderings of political theology

(although the authors commit themselves to a pluralized notion of political theology, not wanting to exclude other religions).

One potential problem in the book is that with the occasional exception by Bretherton, the authors substitute the vague "religious beliefs and practices" for actual theology. Bretherton avoids this by doing some interesting work on how eschatology operates politically. He writes:

Theologically understood, an apocalyptic orientation is neither pessimistic nor optimistic, nor does it represent a form of catastrophizing. Rather, it entails trusting that history is open to change, that a new creation is coming, and that the Spirit can bring into being a radical, surprising, and unanticipated newness, often in response to the cry for justice and love by those on the underside of history.

This rubs against arguments made by Eric Voegelin and others that eschatological ruminations are always destructive; Bretherton, however, fails to provide us with constructive examples.

Lloyd pays more attention to political outcomes, but the chapter cannot for that reason be considered a success, especially since he takes the rather contrary view that politics is the art of the impossible. It is poorly written, often in a mannered style that twists and turns and leaves the reader confused. What I was not confused about is what Lloyd understands to be the stakes involved in political theology because he repeats, and repeats, the claim that "the stakes are life-or-death." While Bretherton hesitates to tip his hand about his specific political commitments, Lloyd is unabashed. Any authentic political theology must of necessity come from the political left. "Ultimate concern," he writes, is "what distinguishes left politics—today and as a tradition. Leftists see politics as rooted in matters of life and death, of *my* life and death." And later he claims that the belief in "An End of the world [of domination] is possible, a world beyond this world," the destruction of all sovereignty, and that these beliefs are "defining features of the Left, which necessarily thinks on a scale both personal and grand: existentially motivated urgency, a refusal to tolerate domination even one more day, a realization of the depths of that domination, and an imagining of a world wholly other, with no discernible path from

“

I HAVE LESS TO SAY ABOUT NAPOLITANO'S CHAPTER BECAUSE I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND IT.

”

here to there.” Some might find a path welcome as they venture into this unknown.

Lloyd makes it clear who the primary victims of oppression are: homosexuals, transgendered persons, women, racial minorities, and so forth, all of whom live under the constant threat of an untimely death. The most interesting part of his analysis occurs when he discusses prison abolition. “Political theology makes prison abolition left, not liberal.” It is about “purging a moral abomination,” and just as abolitionists considered slavery bad in the 19th century, so prison abolitionists consider prisons morally objectionable in the 21st. The idea is not necessarily to tear down walls but to rethink the very ideas of security, safety, and punishment, particularly the latter since, as Lloyd argues, the overcrowding of prisons “obviously...has nothing to do with crime.” The key is to shrink the whole system, but here, too, Lloyd’s theology seems absent a sensible view of authority, or of sin, other than one that locates sin completely and exclusively among the oppressors.

I have less to say about Napolitano’s chapter because, quite frankly, I didn’t understand it. I did get out of it that she wants to revivify the Weberian project of “reenchanting” the world against the forces of secularization, but I have little idea what the payoff is, other than eliminating oppression. She peddles frequently in abstractions and just as frequently assigns agency to them. Granted, she discusses immigration and race issues, but I’m not sure how this ties in to “a political theology of the guts that rests in the intricate relationship between fetish imagery, God’s work, commodities and money, desires, and potency,” nor how “the impersonal, as that which overcomes a mechanism of discontinuity and separation between who are, are not yet, are no longer, or will never be persons becomes part of a doing and an undoing of justice, beyond a sovereignty

of possession and dispossession.” I suppose those who “will never be persons” will be the ones who do the “posthuman scholarship” of which she speaks. I could give even more egregious examples of her tortured prose. The margins of her chapter are filled by my question marks, and the fact that she is either unwilling or unable to write a clear English sentence makes me think she’s up to no good.

What might that “no good” be? Napolitano seems especially wary of exercises of authority and its tendency toward exclusion or domination. An anthropologist by training, she advocates for an anthropological political theology. Yet the head-scratching elision of anthropology and theology makes me wonder why she needs theology at all. I think she tends to equate theology with religious studies, taking an ethnographic rather than a dogmatic approach. Imposed on the ethnographic research is the oppressor/oppressed scheme. Trying to cut through her rhetoric, it seems to me that she is especially concerned with what happens at the margins of sovereignty’s reach, and this analysis brings the whole concept of sovereignty into question. This tracks with her emphasis on apophasis: We know something only in terms of what can’t be said about it. I suppose the most charitable way of characterizing her style is that she’s trying to say what can’t be said, but the result neither quickens the pulse nor stirs the mind.

To circle back to Schmitt: He believed that theology could buttress and illuminate his political concerns. It was *political* theology in the sense that he had a clear idea of political purposes and the structure of authority. I’m not sure to what degree *What Is Political Theology?* counts as either politics (unless understood simply as structures of domination) or theology (unless we understand that as religious studies generally). The occasional forays into categories of theology are interesting enough, and the book would have been much improved by following that instinct. It would also have been greatly improved by focusing on principles of authority and the relationship between authority and institutional functioning. If the authors accomplish nothing more than getting people to think seriously about Schmitt’s work, they will have done enough. **RI.**

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.



Our Technofounder Future

Is the solution to an increasingly consumerist and ideologically conformist culture rule by a technocratic elite?

by TITUS TECHERA

ONE OF THE STRIKING facts of the 21st century is that J.R.R. Tolkien's stories became blockbuster movies and pretentious TV soap operas, even as the primary use of his more famous symbols was to bless or brand the major technological corporations of our time. The latest is Durin, a mining company founded in 2024, which fittingly uses a dwarvish name. In 2023, Valar started building nuclear reactors, named for an angelic race. Back in 2017, Anduril was founded to create new weapons systems, labeled after a legendary sword. But before all these, in 2003, when the last film in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy was released, Palantir was founded to solve intelligence problems, whence the reference to a seeing stone.

The thought comes to mind that technology replaces magic as part of the larger phenomenon of disenchantment, to use Max Weber's word from a

century ago. There is considerable ambiguity in this naming. On the one hand, the magical powers in Tolkien's stories are admirable, though not without danger; on the other, Tolkien never reconciled himself to industry or corporations—instead, he wished to remind his readers of an older world that's somehow more natural. Those fictional powers are now interpreted as moral powers, primarily because these technological corporations are serving patriotic purposes, aiming at peace and prosperity by way of war and labor.

Even if it is worth entertaining these thoughts, one might still dismiss the phenomenon as a cynical exercise in advertising after condemning it as bragging. Yet one cannot reasonably hurry to such conclusions without first considering the implicit argument of these various enterprises: that in 21st-century

America, as in *The Lord of the Rings*, our confidence in humanity has been broken, and it is necessary now to restore it if we are to defend ourselves, that we need inspiration to take tools and weapons to hand.

To entertain seriously the promise held out by these enterprises, let us turn to the only major statement they have offered the reading public by way of a justification, Alexander C. Karp and Nicholas W. Zamiska's *The Technological Republic: Hard Power, Soft Belief, and the Future of the West*. Karp is the CEO and one of the founders of Palantir, alongside Peter Thiel, the major writer among our techno-lords, and Joe Lonsdale, another techno-lord and one of the founders of an already famous yet brand-new academic enterprise, the University of Austin, Texas. Moreover, Karp is, unlike most figures in tech, a man with an education, having graduated Stanford Law and earned a Ph.D. in social science at Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. His coauthor, Zamiska, is Palantir's head of corporate affairs and legal counsel to the office of the CEO.

Karp and Zamiska call their work a “political treatise,” which falls into four parts comprising 18 chapters. The major themes are obvious from the titles of the four parts: “The Software Century,” “The Hollowing Out of the American Mind,” “The Engineering Mindset,” and “Rebuilding the Technological Republic.” I will focus on the second part in this review, since it is, properly speaking, the intellectual part. But first I will try to establish the context.

The major claim of the work is the prediction that AI technology will transform life to such an extent that it is already necessary to rethink our principles and our organization. Everything will have to change

The Palantir from Peter Jackson's *The Two Towers*



Fair Use / Wikimedia Commons

“
**THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN WEAPONS
AND OTHER TOOLS HAS
LARGELY DISAPPEARED
IN THE ERA OF 'DUAL
USE' TECHNOLOGY.**
”

in order for everything to stay the same, to recall the famous phrase from Giuseppe Lampedusa's *The Leopard*. Prosperity and peace—recall the Declaration's ends of just government: safety and happiness—are both dependent on technological innovation, but now, for the first time in our history, the two are very close to convergence. The difference between weapons and other tools has largely disappeared in the era of “dual use” technology, as the difference between peace and war is harder and harder to detect when we talk about digital attacks on digital property. We must make a digital America in order to defend America. As the authors write: “The ability of free and democratic societies to prevail requires something more than moral appeal. It requires hard power, and hard power in this century will be built on software.”

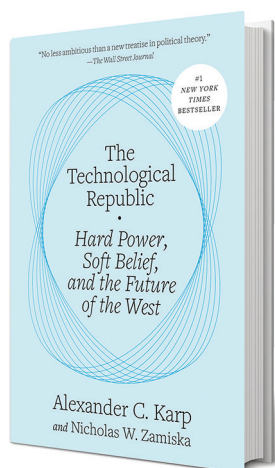
Some change in our virtues is also needed. Since the man of peace and the man of war are increasingly hard to distinguish—for example, we can have children pilot drones in battle like in the novel *Ender's Game*—we have to focus on one kind of man, the engineer, that is, the software engineer, who will digitize America. He will be held accountable by popular demands expressed in political choices but will also hold to account the politicians, media, and academics of America as culpably negligent. Witness such works as *The Technological Republic*:

Indeed, the legitimacy of the American government and democratic regimes around the world will require an increase in economic and technical output that can be achieved only through the more efficient adoption of technology and software. The

public will forgive many failures and sins of the political class. But the electorate will not overlook a systemic inability to harness technology for the purpose of effectively delivering the goods and services that are essential to our lives.

Ours is an age of mistrust in elite institutions, public and private. The people are blaming the elites for our recent failures. Karp and Zamiska focus that blame on the core of our regime, which is the higher education system. Hence the allusion to Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* in the title of part 2 of the "political treatise." The purpose of the argument laid out over five chapters is to explain the unusual combination of conformism and entertainment that has made for a brainless society in the 21st century, one now vulnerable to systemic crises in national security, global finance, etc.

The design of *The Technological Republic* is largely historical, looking at the transformations of academia and of elite opinion since the 1960s, with a focus on the collapse of that opinion as it once informed engineering, education, and entertainment. The America that won WWII, the subject of the first part of the essay, was forced to face certain contradictions in victory, because the demands of a Cold War abroad and of freedom at home were in tension—what kind of victory leads to the threat of nuclear annihilation? A loss of confidence in science among liberals, a loss of confidence in industry and technology, and a loss of innocence about mankind all occurred together. American elites lost their innocence once the enormity of the world war dawned on them.



The Technological Republic: Hard Power, Soft Belief, and the Future of the West

By Alexander C. Karp and Nicholas W. Zamiska

(Crown Currency, 2025)

Chapters 5, "The Abandonment of Belief," and 7, "A Balloon Cut Loose," deal with this civilizational problem in terms of freedom of speech and academic freedom of inquiry, respectively, and they have the very unusual character of focusing on problems of belief. The authors' academic culprits are figures like Edward Said, whose *Orientalism* (1978) is shown to have been a match in a powder keg of extraordinary resentment against "Western Civ." A full-scale attack on Enlightenment, from the putative point of view of "the Other," was mounted from the very precincts of Enlightenment. A "free speech" liberalism that had previously understood itself as superior to and victorious over Nazism turned incredibly censorious and punitive,—indeed, self-destructive. In short, belief in Progress, and hence in the superiority of Western Civ over other ways of life, collapsed.

Karp and Zamiska detail the abandonment of rationalism in academia and among the liberal elites it fosters because they are interested in the project of liberal individualism. The authors are extremely sensitive to shifts in rhetoric and association among liberal elites because they are outsiders looking for ways to protect people like themselves from ideological corruption or punishment. And so they propose a return to the Enlightenment project, which allows quite a bit of eccentricity to unusual men so long as they prove themselves in practical or technical ways to be reliable and useful to the majority—a majority that is itself unlikely to be punitive or overly censorious so long as it enjoys a decent and pleasant way of life. Such unusual men can even become leaders and prove their patriotism in serving the country in moments of crisis, when ordinary opinion is suspended by natural necessities, opening the way to innovation and even offering celebrity to the intelligent among us (think Oppenheimer and Einstein in days of yore).

Chapters 6, "Technological Agnostics," and 8, "Flawed Systems," spell out the consequences for technology of that abandonment of principle, whether philosophic or patriotic. The authors fear a certain kind of market worship among technologists, because it implies something deeply unnatural: the focus of incredible intellectual powers on satisfying the most demeaning desires of the largest numbers of people, putting together software and popularity to create mindless entertainments. That way lies stagnation and decadence, consequent to the collapse of Enlightenment, which left clever people nothing but money and popularity to pursue, instead

of national projects or inventions that hold the promise of improvement to our way of life. In short, the distinction between the trivial and the important, or between humanity and nothingness, is frittered away in endless plebiscites on what's new and exciting.

The most interesting or distinctive part of Karp and Zamiska's argument is their explanation of the consumer internet as a consequence of the anti-patriotic ideology of the 1960s. They make a persuasive historical and psychological case that the great technological founders, including Steve Jobs, and their apostles were too often mired in a skepticism of the state, if not outright hostility, which left them only one way to prove helpful to the American people, or the world as a whole: the satisfaction of private concerns through ever more exquisite consumer identities organized around corporate brands and ecosystems. People who could no longer believe in American exceptionalism turned to a more individualized form of exceptionalism, somewhere between conspicuous consumption and a new oligarchy bent on imposing its tastes on the world, whether as founders or early adopters, through designing the digital experiences available to us all. The Great Society liberals who wanted to control the state were replaced by engineers who wanted to control the "users," albeit with more subtlety, but at the same time at a much more intimate level, again, making it harder and harder for interesting individuals to emerge.

Finally, chapter 9, "Lost in Toyland," offers a thematic criticism of the market, focusing on the dotcom bubble, described as the epitome of '90s nihilism: lots of money chasing bubblegum ideas and ways of life. "The market" is blameworthy because it prefers entertainment to serious endeavors, thus raising flatterers above patriots. True, the bidding competitions that make up voluntary exchange are a great invention of modern liberalism and are at the basis of our peaceful prosperity. Nevertheless the market still poses a threat to self-interest rightly understood, since both the power of getting what you want through expenditure of money and the competition for power with other spenders can derail the original purpose of distributing needful things that are somehow scarce. That's a failure of patriotism, which then leads to the twin evils of major corporations getting in bed with, among others, China, which is in effect, if not intention, tantamount to treason. Moreover, market speculation on frivolous things distracts attention from and disheartens the

few innovators actually trying to offer Americans a better life.

Technical rationality and patriotism are the cures Karp and Zamiska propose for both the limits of markets and the narcissism that describes most of the software economy. The former is proved in the creation of products ratified as useful and therefore valuable by the markets—it is only the making and designing of products that is supposed to be judged by serious people, engineers. The latter is primarily a matter of public figures disputing vigorously the options for improving the lives of most Americans such that the people may finally decide for themselves instead of having their lives managed by media, academia, and regulations.

Academic Enlightenment is thus to be replaced by technical enlightenment. The former is oriented to Progress understood as the promise of perpetual peace, which has turned out to mean stagnation, an end to science, and eventually a tyranny over thought itself—that is, ideological conformity. The latter involves the emergence of a new kind of rationalist, one who reminds us of the origins of modernity, indeed a new kind of ruler, the techno-founder, surrounded by the engineers who work on urgent problems to the satisfaction of the people. Thus, the contours of a new mixed regime emerge, with one, few, and many balanced against each other. One would want to reread Bacon and Descartes to consider whether their revolutionary scientific project can be restarted four centuries later.

As a political treatise, the major thing missing in *The Technological Republic* is religion; somehow it is involved in both the insistence on belief and the criticism of market worship and the confidence in popular opinion, but it is not discussed thematically. A sequel to the work would have to show how Christian faith can measure up against the challenge of an AI society. So also an analysis of this human type, the engineer, would have to include religion. An explanation is necessary of engineering philanthropy, literally love of human beings, as a motive, as well as the soul as a power of withstanding or opposing conformism and decadence. Moreover, since the politics under discussion is American, that religion will be Christianity as the religion of the majority. **RL**

Titus Techera is a Visiting Fellow in the European Center for Political Philosophy at Mathias Corvinus Collegium, Budapest, and managing editor of the European Journal of Political Philosophy.



Saint Thomas Aquinas by Carlo Crivelli (c. 1476) / Public Domain / Wikimedia Commons

Natural, Thus Universal, Human Rights

Whence our rights as human beings? Are we beholden to government or to God? What did the Founding Fathers think? One of St. Thomas's most celebrated interpreters has answers.

by CASEY CHALK

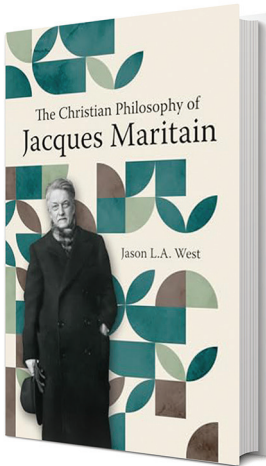
IT WAS ADMITTEDLY a surprising circumstance for a debate on natural rights. On September 4 of last year, Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) was speaking during a Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing interview of Riley M. Barnes, nominee for assistant secretary of state for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor for the U.S. Department of State. Responding to Barnes's opening comments that "our rights come from God our Creator, not from our laws, not from our government," Senator Kaine declared that he found Barnes's statement "very, very troubling."

Kaine then offered an articulation of his own opinion on the origin of rights:

The notion that rights don't come from laws and don't come from the government but come from the Creator—that's what the Iranian government

believes. It's a theocratic regime that bases its rule on Sharia law....And they do it because they believe that they understand what natural rights are from their Creator. So the statement that our rights do not come from our laws or our governments is extremely troubling.

As Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) subsequently noted in the same hearing, the notion that our rights come from God is found, among other places, in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." Thus, by repudiating this idea, Kaine had effectively placed himself in opposition to the founding document of the very nation he serves.



*The Christian
Philosophy of
Jacques Maritain*

By Jason L.A. West
(Catholic University of
America Press, 2025)

Of course, the great Virginia statesman Thomas Jefferson is far from the only thinker to argue that rights derive not from laws or governments but from God; half a millennia earlier, Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* discussed natural right as originating from the divine. That influence—mediated through such English legal theorists as Sir Edward Coke and William Blackstone—would be felt indirectly on that American founding generation. But it would also find a champion in the political theory of French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, a Thomistic defender of natural right who for a few decades of the 20th century was, as far as Catholic intellectuals went, “the leading representative of the Catholic Church in the mind of the general public.” So writes philosophy professor Jason L.A. West in *The Christian Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*.

West’s project is somewhat ambitious. As he explains in the introduction, it is the only book in English to present Maritain’s thought on the full range of topics his writings discussed: epistemology, the philosophy of nature and science, metaphysics, natural theology, revealed theology, moral philosophy, political philosophy, the philosophy of education, aesthetics, and the philosophy of history. Though Maritain’s life work was, in West’s words, “the creative retrieval of Aquinas for the world of today,” this book intends to present the French thinker primarily as a 20th-century philosopher rather than only as an interpreter of Aquinas.

This review in turn focuses attention on Maritain’s political philosophy, though I would very much commend the other chapters to interested readers, particularly the chapter on the philosophy of history, in which West presents Maritain in dialogue with such

philosophers of history as Hegel, Marx, and Comte. This section also features an excellent, if brief, discussion of the recently deceased Peruvian Dominican theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez and his criticism of Maritain in *A Theology of Liberation*, published two years before Maritain’s death in 1973.

Curiously relevant to the debate between senators Kaine and Cruz, there is an irony in the divergence between Maritain and Gutiérrez, both Catholic philosophers schooled in Thomistic thought. For, as West explains, a central objective of liberation theology—to engineer political liberation through socialist revolution—brings about the “cardinal sin associated with Marxism, namely, seeking to bring about the kingdom of God within history.” Thus, *pace* Senator Kaine, natural right theory operates not as a threat to human freedom but as a means of protecting it, including from ideologies that, in William F. Buckley’s memorable phrase, “immanentize the eschaton.”

There is a certain prescience to Maritain’s warnings regarding what’s at stake if we fail to identify the proper foundations of government. “A time will come when people will give up in practical existence those values about which they no longer have any intellectual conviction,” he writes in *On the Use of Philosophy*. “Hence we realize how necessary the function of a sound moral philosophy is in human society. It has to give, or to give back, to society intellectual faith in the value of its ideals.” It is that absence of intellectual conviction, one might argue, that explains why about half of young Americans believe that speech that offends minority groups should not be allowed, as a 2025 report by The Future of Free Speech discovered.



The value of natural right becomes especially salient in Maritain's attempt to resolve the tension between the person and the common good epitomized by the Thomistic principles that each individual person is related to the entire community as part to the whole, and that man is not ordained to the body politic according to all that he is and has. For Maritain, the key is to recognize that the self exists as both a material and spiritual reality. Every individual is a member of a society, and that membership means the body politic has a claim over him such that he may be coerced, for example through taxes or conscription. Yet the individual is also a person oriented toward a higher order, namely God, and cannot be merely subordinated and instrumentalized to serve the interest of the political community, because he has ends that transcend that community. Thus is Maritain able to appeal to certain universal human rights upon which the political community cannot impose.

In his book *The Rights of Man and the Natural Law*, Maritain elaborates on this thesis: "The human person possesses rights because of the very fact that it is a person, a whole, master of itself and of its acts, and which consequently is not merely a means to an end, but an end, an end which must be treated as such." Moreover, since the natural teleology of the human person entails obligations under the natural law, that person must have the rights commensurate with fulfilling these obligations. He explains:

The notion of right and the notion of moral obligation are correlative. They are both founded on the freedom proper to spiritual agents. If man is morally bound to the things which are necessary to the fulfillment of his destiny, obviously, then, he has a right to fulfill his destiny; and if he has a right to fulfill his destiny he has the right to things necessary for this purpose.

This distinction between the individual and the person enables Maritain to argue that there are aspects of his or her life grounded in the ontological order—most preeminently that the person is ordered to God as an end that transcends the political order—that are not the province of the state. In *Man and the State*, Maritain argues that human rights are "only valid and rationally tenable if each existing individual has a nature or essence which is the locus of intelligible necessities and necessary truths." And that nature or essence that demands man's freedom to live and work derives from his possessing "a spiritual soul and



THE INDIVIDUAL IS A PERSON ORIENTED TOWARD A HIGHER ORDER, NAMELY GOD, AND CANNOT BE MERELY SUBORDINATED AND INSTRUMENTALIZED TO SERVE THE INTEREST OF THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY.



a free will." He continues: "Every human right possessed by man is possessed only by virtue of the right possessed by God, which is pure Justice, to see the order of His wisdom in beings respected, obeyed and loved by every intelligence." This is not a theological claim but a philosophical one, intended to repudiate modern theories stemming from a Rousseauian rejection of nature in favor of an inviolable human will.

What, then, are these rights, according to Maritain? They must correlate to the first principle of moral reasoning, to do good and avoid evil. Thus the right to follow one's conscience in religious matters, to choose one's own vocation for work, to form a family, and to educate one's children are all rights of this order. Beyond these are rights that belong to one as a citizen, or to use Maritain's language, a civic person. These are political rights that come directly from the positive law and depend only indirectly on the natural law. Maritain also identifies rights of the social person, particularly the person as a worker: a just wage, to organize and form a union, etc. These latter examples, Maritain acknowledges, will be ordered according to a certain prudence dependent on the character and circumstances of a given society.

Of course, it is inevitable that individual citizens will disagree over the origin of their rights. Thus Maritain argues that while philosophical consensus would be ideal, all that is needed is a consensus of practical principles and a respect for fundamental human rights. He writes:

It [the body politic] has no right, as a merely temporal or secular body, enclosed in the sphere where the modern State enjoys its autonomous authority, to impose on the citizens or to demand from them a rule of faith or a conformism of reason, a philosophical or religious creed which would present itself as the only possible justification for the practical charter through which the people's common secular faith expresses itself.

Democracy only requires acceptance of practical conclusions that are shared by all, while leaving open

Jacques Maritain (1882–1973)



for debate the various philosophical or religious justifications for those conclusions.

The political concept of the consent of the governed naturally flows from Maritain's defense of natural right. This is because, as he argues in *Christianity and Democracy*, once people are born with the right to conduct their lives by themselves, as beings responsible for their acts "before God and the law of the community," they can only be expected to obey those who govern if "the latter have received from the people themselves the custody of the people's common good." Rightly then does West observe that Maritain adopts "traditional Aristotelian and Thomistic concepts, such as the common good and the natural law, and adapts them to support very modern notions of human rights and democracy."

That Maritain's political thought so nicely aligned with classical liberalism as exemplified in postwar Western Europe and the United States opened him up to attacks from fellow Catholics, such as the Quebec professor Charles De Koninck, who questioned Maritain's attempt to incorporate a classically liberal and Lockean notion of pre-political universal human rights into a Catholic conception of the common good. Maritain, his critics argued, attempted to accommodate Thomist natural law theory to modern political presuppositions in ways that undermined Catholic teaching.

West argues that such attacks fail because they do not take into account the distinctive philosophical anthropology that Maritain presents. Moreover, "while these generally traditional Catholic critics fail to mention the point, this is at least indirectly a critique of the Catholic Church's social teaching, which has largely taken up a strong defense of universal human rights as following from natural law in a manner similar to Maritain and is not merely a coincidence." In other words, whatever one's opinion of Maritain's political philosophy—which West notes was by no means monolithically pro-liberal, given, for example, his critiques of the free market—the institutional Catholic Church has decidedly sided with Maritain. And Maritain, it would appear, has in many respects sided with the Founders. **RL**

Casey Chalk is a senior contributor at The Federalist and an editor and columnist at The New Oxford Review. He is the author of three books, including most recently *Wisdom from the Cross: How Jesus' Seven Last Words Teach Us How to Live and Die Well*.



Can We Moderate a Politicized Church Without Politics?

The mainline churches are collapsing and evangelical churches are splitting, ostensibly because of politics. The moderates all seem to have fled. Can those churches win them back? But weren't they part of the problem to begin with?

by **STEPHEN O. PRESLEY**

“I HAVE BEEN ON PAID STAFF at three Baptist churches,” writes Ryan P. Burge in his latest book, *The Vanishing Church: How the Hollowing Out of Moderate Congregations Is Hurting Democracy, Faith, and Us*. “At this moment,” he continues, “two of the three [churches] have closed their doors and the third is about 80 percent smaller than when I was attending services there two decades ago.” As a seasoned social scientist and former pastor, Burge has spent his career analyzing the critical state of the church in America. But this has been no mere academic exercise; Burge’s work has been part of his personal journey. Many pastors can identify with his struggles. Across America,

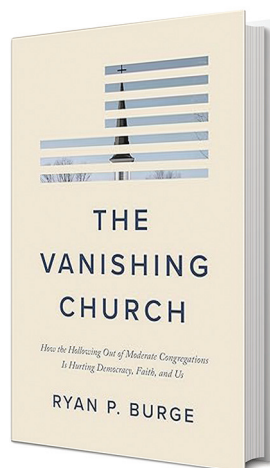
a great ecclesial restructuring is happening as older mainline congregations are dying and evangelicals are sorting themselves into churches that share their personal convictions. “American religion,” Burge argues, “has become an ‘all or none’ proposition—conservative evangelical religion or none at all.” This zero-sum conservative religious turn has, in his view, pressed evangelical churches to the fringes, leaving “tens of millions of theological and political moderates with no place to find community and spiritual edification, or to work collectively to solve societal problems.”

As a former pastor among mainline communities, Burge is nostalgic for this vision of the church

that was open and welcoming of diverse views. The churches where he served always emphasized “the middle path,” one that refused to take strong positions on ecclesiology or controversial social issues. In the mainlines, every believer got to “make up their own mind about how to interpret the Bible” and appreciated that it was not the pastor’s job “to tell them what to think.” The mainline moderates were “sensible, pragmatic, and unifying,” the place where reasonable people held positions of ecclesial and political influence. Among the mainline, “pastors didn’t yell about eternal damnation every Sunday but instead focused on encouraging congregants to love their neighbors and make the world a bit better for those around them.”

But Burge recognizes that in today’s cultural climate, the “ideological diversity” of the mainline has left its denominations on the verge of collapse. The dramatic decline of the mainline churches is remarkable. In 1987 the “seven sisters,” as Burge terms the seven denominations that make up the mainline, were 24 million strong; as of 2022, only 13.2 million remain. There are no signs that these mainline churches will be able to recover in any meaningful way. He acknowledges that these denominations accelerated their own death by charting the very middle path he speaks of, by “trying to reject the extremes of evangelical Christianity on the one hand while also resisting the pull toward no religion on the other.” The center, even in the mainline, could not hold. “Striving for a tradition that welcomes all viewpoints and political proclivities may represent a deeply held conviction for many proud members of the mainline,” Burge writes, “but it has not proven to be a viable pathway for organizational vitality.”

Meanwhile as the mainline churches are dying, evangelical churches are turning to the right. Evangelicals, Burge argues, are more unified than ever around conservative political views. The percentage of evangelicals that support Republican presidential candidates, for example, has steadily increased in recent years. The loudest voices in evangelicalism “have become convinced that the only way to maintain the movement is by cloistering in an increasingly conservative brand of right-wing politics.” Burge is never exactly clear about what constitutes conservative right-wing politics, as most of his statistics speak generally about support for presidential candidates or political parties. He occasionally mentions issues such as



The Vanishing Church: How the Hollowing Out of Moderate Congregations Is Hurting Democracy, Faith, and Us

By Ryan P. Burge
(Brazos Press, 2026)

abortion and sexuality and gender, and sometimes criticizes specific positions such as seeking an end to in vitro fertilization. But he also couples these political positions with ecclesial perspectives such as a “literalist” interpretation of the Bible or his belief that conservatives desire to bar women from any type of pastoral role. He blends all these theological and political views together and concludes that “evangelicalism has become a shorthand for a specific political worldview” rather than a house of worship for all people. The rightward turn among evangelicals “has made it even more difficult for the movement to engage the average American.”

In one important section, Burge discusses the differences between religious “belief, behavior, and belonging.” Though religious behavior and belonging have fallen in recent years, religious belief is still pervasive, which means that “for an increasing number of Americans, religion seems to operate as little more than a tribal identity.” He also points to statistics that indicate that weekly worship attendance among evangelicals has dropped in recent years, which signals the rise of the “non-churchgoing evangelical.” There are even some statistics that show a growing number of people in many different religious traditions who identify as “evangelical.” All these studies suggest that the term “evangelical” is becoming more of “a shorthand for people of all faith groups to say, ‘I’m a political conservative.’” If Burge’s assessment is right, this would indicate a growing cultural Christianity among conservatives whose religious commitments are secondary to their political views.

Burge finds the same conservative turn among American Catholics as weekly Mass attendance has declined, an indicator of a fall in religious

commitment among Catholic congregants. While the 1970s was the golden age for American Catholicism in terms of Mass attendance (a contention that will baffle many traditional Catholics, who tend to regard the 1950s as the peak of American Catholicism), by 1990 weekly Mass attendance had dropped below 40%, and by 2022 it was sitting at 23%. But this collapse has not stopped the “growing number of very conservative Catholics [from] seeking to push the church to the right on theological and social issues.” Burge notes that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has made it clear where it believes its members stand on issues related to politics (read: abortion): “Catholicism is going the way of evangelical Christianity—to the right.”

The death of the mainline and the move to the right among evangelicals and Catholics has left the “nones” caught in the crosshairs. The “nones” are those who acknowledge that they have “no religious preference” on various surveys. Throughout the 1970s and ’80s, the percentage of the population that were “nones” remained consistent—about 5%. But in the past 30 years that percentage has steadily increased to the point that in 2022, 28% of the population identified as nones. Burge pinpoints the 1990s as the time when everything began to shift. In the years between 1991 and 1998, “the share of

eighteen- to thirty-five-year-olds who said that they had no religious affiliation went from 8.1 to 20.5, while the share of the population that identify as Christians dropped from 87 to 73 percent.”

Burge suggests that the reason for the rise of the nones is political; the “nones” are coming from the population that identifies as “moderate or liberal.” These political moderates and liberals eventually had no home because conservatives chose political affiliation over religious commitments and church membership. “In essence,” he writes, “the public is sorting itself into camps based not on theological convictions but on partisan affiliation.” The “nones,” then, “feel cast off by the increasing conservatism of American religion.” Burge argues that the church’s ecclesial sorting originates from the work of the Religious Right that “led to a surge in the share of Americans who aligned with an evangelical tradition,” while at the same time “a rapid weakening of other major Protestant denominations...pushed a growing number of Americans, especially young adults, to no longer align with any religious traditional at all.”

Burge does not spend much time reflecting on why the mainline traditions failed. He argues against the “stereotypes of ultraprogressivism” and paints a portrait of the mainline as a “politically diverse religious tradition, with Republicans and Democrats sitting side by side on Sunday morning.” His only substantive assessment for why those denominations failed was that “mainline churches tend to elevate concepts like openness, toleration, and diversity as opposed to narrow dogmas and uniformity,” so they “made it incredibly easy for many members to ‘free ride.’” Conservatives, on the other hand, stressed “strictness” and expected more from their people as a way to screen out “those free riders.”

In sum, the death of the mainline churches, the right-hand turn among evangelicals and Catholics, and the growing population of the nones is emblematic of a larger crisis facing American society: “There is no place for moderates.” Burge believes that “the American church can (and should) be one of the primary drivers of depolarization in the United States.” He remarks on the strength of religion to provide social cohesion and bring people into close contact who would never interact in any other setting. But while the church is perhaps the most important institution for threading the civil bonds, its current iteration is injecting significant polarization.

A Methodist church in New York City (2020)



Burge fears that if trends hold, polarization will become more entrenched and moderates will increasingly be pressed to adopt a conservative political viewpoint or abandon the church altogether. He uses the illustration of a high school evangelical who sits next to one student in class that identifies as bisexual and another who is going through a gender transition. As Burge sees it, the only two options for the Christian is to “leave the faith behind entirely” or “dig in your heels and become more steadfast in your resolve to defend your religion to your peers.” Most Americans, according to Burge, exist between the “remnant of religious people” and the “increasing number of zealous nonreligious Americans,” or the nones, and they “don’t fit neatly into either camp.” So Burge calls the modern American moderates to action, encouraging them to learn to “spot fringe beliefs” and to go to church even among those people with whom they have sincere disagreements. He does not, however, make any appeals to moderates to help resurrect the mainline denominations, nor does he challenge the progressives to appreciate the perspectives of conservatives.

Above all, Burge asks his readers to stop dehumanizing one another as they learn to worship alongside all kinds of people. “The pursuit of the ideal church is an exercise in futility,” Burge reminds his readers, as the church is the place where we should gather with people who have a range of political viewpoints. He believes that the average American is often more pragmatic, sensible, and open-minded and that “most religious people are proponents of religious diversity,” so churches that are sensitive to this political diversity will be poised to maintain social stability. If the moderates can rise, perhaps the vanishing church will reappear.

I have followed Burge’s work for many years and always appreciated his analysis. His constant output of charts and graphs provides rich opportunities for reflection on the state of the church in America. Burge’s work, on one hand, serves as a warning about a growing cultural Christianity that adopts conservative political positions without the theological and moral framework for principled reasoning through the practical realities of those positions. Even among conservatives there are prudential disagreements on a host of political issues and Christians should turn back to catechesis so that our theological and moral commitments are shaping our political postures. A mere cultural Christianity also lacks the regular church involvement in the liturgical life of the church

Bold Ideas Start Here

Every issue of *The Independent Review* delivers fearless analysis and debate on today’s most pressing issues in politics, economics, and culture. Whether you’re a longtime reader or just discovering us, don’t miss what’s next.



Subscribe or renew today and get

10% off

your print subscription.

Digital subscriptions and single issues start at just

\$2.99

GetTIR.org/save10



For a limited time. Cannot be combined with any other discounts or offers.

“

PASTORS SHOULD NOT BE FOCUSED ON MAINTAINING POLITICAL DIVERSITY BUT LEADING THEIR CONGREGATIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES.

”

that sustains the worshipping community, reinforces the mores that guide the spiritual lives of Christians, and promotes healthy visions of citizenship.

On the other hand, Burge's call for the church to embrace a patent political moderation is not really a helpful perspective either. For all of Burge's nostalgia, we are living in the world created by the moderates whom Burge laments: They were once the elites who held positions of cultural prominence. As he himself admits, "The mainline used to be the loudest and most influential voice in American Protestant Christianity," but now "that voice has largely been silenced." Burge argues that the church is too political—but only in the conservative direction. There is no call for the remaining mainline churches to consider how they might steer their congregations away from "fringe" beliefs to salvage what few churches remain, nor any discussion of the way that progressive views have contributed to the polarization.

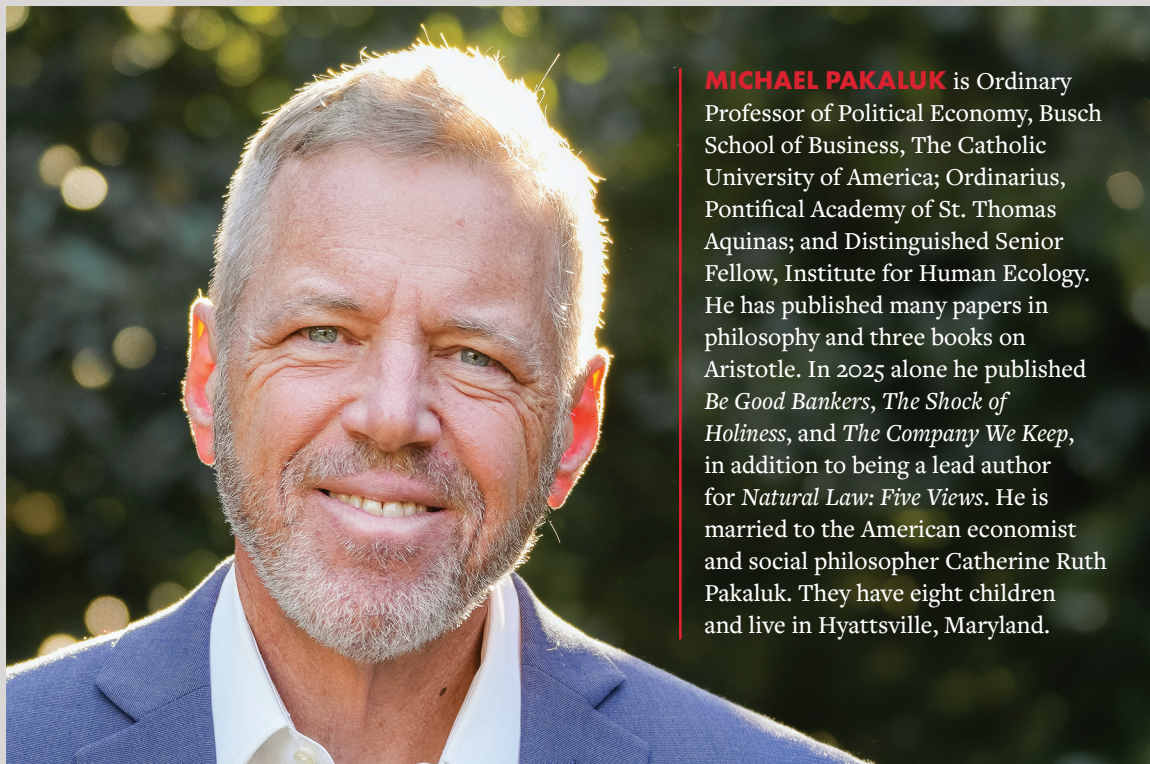
The larger issue is that true religious pluralism and social unity cannot be found in shedding our sincerely held religious beliefs but in learning to cooperate with all people and perspectives and seeking solidarity through and with those very theological and moral convictions. I pray for more catechesis, not less, and more Christians active in the public square, always seeking to love their neighbors and investing in their communities and institutions in ways that promote civility.

Nowhere in the book does Burge take issue with any progressive Christian leaders, but he reserves special critiques for conservatives who have failed

to promote an openness to a range of political viewpoints in their congregations. Members of evangelical and Catholic clergy "have staked out increasingly conservative positions," which has pushed out the average moderate American. But pastors should not be focused on maintaining political diversity but on leading their congregations in accordance with the Scriptures and the church's teaching. In this regard, the tone of the book feels odd; a social scientist with a pastoral background admits that he might be "the least successful Baptist pastor in history," but then proceeds to offer advice with a "pastoral tone" to help readers grasp how they can "tangibly respond to the concerning trends." If Burge is offering pastoral counsel, one would expect some appeal to Scripture and the Christian tradition for a way forward, yet I found only one Bible verse in the whole book and little to no reflection on the history of Christian political thought. Any pastors facing their congregation are accountable to God and must appeal to other sources of authority besides social scientific data. The charts and numbers can be a helpful resource to diagnose some cultural trends, but any vision-casting for the people of God needs faithful Christian clergy who lead through the Scriptures with humility and conviction.

Burge's book reflects the work of a seasoned political scientist trying to grapple with the dramatic shifts in the religious temperament of the country. Things have changed fast. The mainline denominations are dying, evangelicals and Catholics are sorting, and the nones continue to opt out of any ecclesial commitments. I'm not sure where this story goes, but Burge's book provides a helpful analysis of these important social trends. Whatever happens, I pray that the church can remain faithful to the Scriptures and that the citizens of the city of God living in the city of man can pursue the welfare of the city by building coalitions and seeking solidarity wherever possible...as their theological and moral vision guides them. **RL**

Stephen O. Presley serves as Director of Education and Engagement at the Center for Religion, Culture & Democracy. He completed his undergraduate work at Baylor University and earned a Th.M. in historical theology from Dallas Theological Seminary. He also received a Ph.D. from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, where he carried out his research in patristics. Presley is the author of Cultural Sanctification: Engaging the World like the Early Church and Biblical Theology in the Life of the Early Church.



MICHAEL PAKALUK is Ordinary Professor of Political Economy, Busch School of Business, The Catholic University of America; Ordinarius, Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas; and Distinguished Senior Fellow, Institute for Human Ecology. He has published many papers in philosophy and three books on Aristotle. In 2025 alone he published *Be Good Bankers*, *The Shock of Holiness*, and *The Company We Keep*, in addition to being a lead author for *Natural Law: Five Views*. He is married to the American economist and social philosopher Catherine Ruth Pakaluk. They have eight children and live in Hyattsville, Maryland.

CONVERSATION STARTERS WITH . . .

Michael Pakaluk

Q What I find fascinating about your work is how you draw from the well of ancient wisdom to address contemporary challenges as if the Apostles and Aristotle and Cicero were still writing today. One example is *Be Good Bankers*, which mines the Gospel of Matthew for insights into personal economics. Many people assume that if you're turning a profit, you're in danger of losing your soul. Yet you argue that we were designed by God to do business. Help the "otherworldly" understand how this can make sense since Christ seems to threaten the salvation of rich men.

Samuel Johnson said that a book you haven't yet read is just the same as a recent publication. Philosophy,

as I understand it, concerns enduring realities, so that the mere passage of time makes no difference to it. If Aristotle, say, in the 5th, 13th, and 18th centuries, was appraised by highly educated persons as a great genius, perhaps the greatest, "the Master of those who know," then I think one would need to be deeply familiar with his work in order, responsibly, to maintain otherwise. But how many who dismiss him have studied him well? So, yes, I begin by regarding Aristotle and Cicero as on an equal playing field with anyone alive today, and if I find that they have superior insight, then they win the day, so to speak. Of course, it requires a little bit of work to understand them.

One way to understand *Be Good Bankers* is that it aims to use business analogies, which derive from Jesus, Paul, and the very choice by Jesus of a tax collector to be his main chronicler, to develop a good account of what self-love amounts to for a Christian.

This is to say, what prudence (*phronēsis*) amounts to, because prudence is construed classically as the pursuit of one's own genuine best interests in a clever way.

All the great Fathers and theologians of Christianity taught that self-love is of the highest importance. It comes second after love of God. The first precept of charity is to love God; the second is to love oneself for the sake (that is, the good) of God; and the third is to love one's neighbor as oneself. But the second is typically left out, these teachers say, because we have no need of a commandment for self-love. We love ourselves as a matter of course. And yet self-love still needs instruction, which those other commandments, when articulated, provide.

That self-love is of the highest importance is clear if you consider the following contrast. Two heads of households are living in two houses side-by-side. The one takes care of his house and yard; the other's house is a wreck, and the lawn has gone to seed. The one exercises and eats moderately; the other sits in a chair all day and eats junk food, becoming obese. The one tries to learn new things constantly, like languages and geography; the other plays video games. The one works hard to make life comfortable for himself and his dependents; the other is lazy and seems not to care. In sum, the one who loves himself more is living a life much more pleasing in the sight of God than the other.

Someone who loves himself improves himself and increases his wealth over time. What we call "profit" is, most basically, the gain in good that comes from his efforts. If, for instance, he starts exercising several times a week and he gains stamina as a result, then this gain in stamina is his "profit" from his exercise.

In sum, there cannot be self-love without the pursuit of "profit." Therefore, if self-love is praiseworthy, then so must be taking profit.

Q **Economics and business ethics loom large in your academic focus, but you also have written extensively on friendship and holiness. Is there a connection between being a friend and being "holy"? What would "holy" mean in this context?**

I have many interests. For instance, I've been working on a book on the philosophy of music; another on spirituality and golf; another on courtship. As I pursue these, I do not worry about the connections among them. There will be connections inevitably, because

the same person is pursuing these different things. But meta-questions like that are not my concern.

However, you have asked a meta-question! About holiness: traditionally, to be holy meant to be set apart for God. The "sacred," the things so set apart, were one thing, and the "profane" were something else. But Christianity changed this conception. "The Word became flesh." As a consequence, there becomes a distinct manifestation of holiness to be sought in Christianity, especially by laypersons, which is for holy things to inform, penetrate, and enter into profane things.

On this conception of holiness, every human good and every human reality is something that can be so "informed." One might even wish to claim that a lay Christian does not succeed at this new project unless he has so "informed" every human reality in his life. Friendship is such a reality, and therefore it permits of being so "informed."

What does this amount to practically speaking? Fundamentally friendship for a Christian will be undergirded by prayer; it will be assisted by divine action, which in the tradition is called "grace." Its matter will be different; for example, the conversation and manners of the friends and the sacrifices they elicit will be more total.

Q **Despite failed socialist experiment after failed socialist experiment, we now have self-described socialists as mayors of NYC and Seattle. Ignorance on the part of the electorate may be a factor, but what role does simply punishing "billionaires" or "white privilege" play in this resurgence, if any?**

Envy has always been the fuel of socialism. Envy, defined as "sorrow at another's good," in the tradition is regarded as one of the Seven Capital Vices. They are called vices, rather than sins, because they stick inveterately in someone's character and mar it. They are called "capital" from the word for "head" and "leader" because they are thought to elicit in the person who has one of these vices many more vices (referred to in the tradition as the "daughters" of the vice). Envy elicits self-righteousness and a twisted sense of justice, which leads people to steal from others and declare it to be right.

An atomized population is a seedbed for the particular envy that finds expression in socialism, because the individuals in such a population regard

political society as their main society. It is their *ersatz* family. But fathers in a household are accorded freedom to take goods away and to determine who has care of the goods of the household. Members of an atomized society therefore easily assign to political authorities wealth-transfer powers that amount to theft. Needless to say, the younger residents in New York City form an atomized population.

Meanwhile, the macro-economy of the United States operates on principles of *de facto* socialism. Therefore, no principled relief is to be found there. Fiat currency has made the federal government the sole owner of all money. No one recognizes any *de jure* limits on the government's taxing power. And Social Security overrides the obligations of generation to generation within the family.

I do not think it has been often observed that for a single man to claim authority, by arbitrary decision, to set down tariffs for an entire economy, which inflict immediate losses on businesses because the changes could not have been planned for—such an authority presupposes socialism. Theft takes different forms.

Q **It's popular also to talk of the common good, and not only among socialists. Is it possible to pursue a "common" good without falling into a collectivist trap?**

Yes, of course. People who talk about the common good today typically fail to give a coherent definition, and they neglect the two most common formulations of the common good in the tradition.

In the tradition, the common good of political society was taken to be either: (1) God and communion with God, or (2) the virtue of its citizens. You can see the first operative in Aquinas, *De Regno*. The state's job is to make citizens such that they can be "handed off" to higher religious authorities who have care of their eternal souls. You can see (2) in Aristotle: The state's job is to provide the conditions of *eudaimonia*, but *eudaimonia* (true well-being or happiness) requires the virtues.

Q **You received all three of your degrees from Harvard, which has come under fire recently for everything from ignoring rampant anti-Semitism on campus to activism in the classroom to eliminating Western Civ as a focus of study. If you could walk into a room of Harvard**

trustees and offer one piece of advice to right its ship, what would it be?

Make space for the proper religious education of students who want it, by giving credit for sufficiently rigorous courses in a religious tradition, offered by a university-affiliated religious organization. For example, concretely, permit the Catholic Student Center to offer a course on Aquinas's *Summa* so that students can take it for credit at Harvard in philosophy or liberal education; or a course on *The Story of a Soul* by St. Thérèse of Lisieux—and not taught "as literature." And so on.

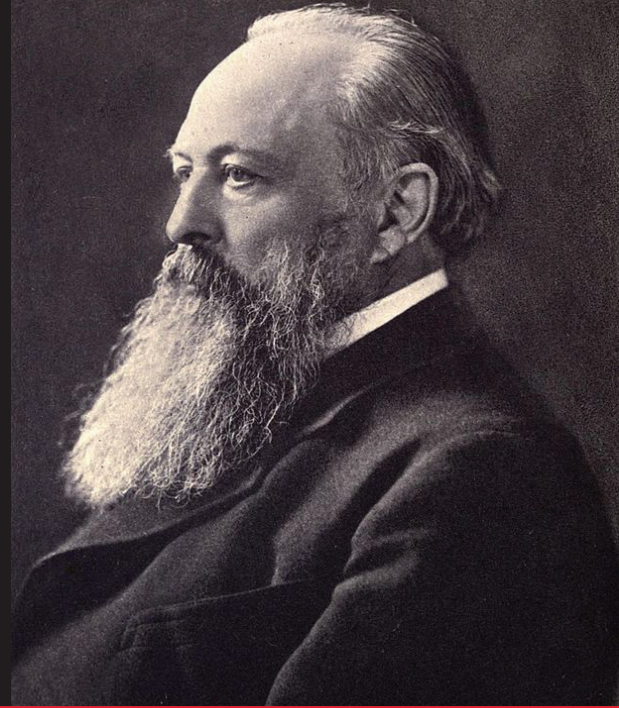
Q **Now for some fun questions: (a) What book(s) have you read at least three times, and why? (b) If you could blow up one public building, à la Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead*, without endangering life or risking imprisonment, which one would it be? (c) What's your favorite B&W film, and why?**

- a. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*; Plato, the *Republic*; Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Each of these books if studied properly gives a near complete and basically sound conception of the world and human life. Moreover, the discipline of mind acquired in mastering them is not easy to acquire elsewhere.
- b. So many choices! In the spirit of Roark, I would pick the Kennedy Center. It is a disgrace as a concert center for a world-class city. It looks as good as, and has aged as well as, everything else from the 1970s. The acoustics are poor besides. Time to start over. Demolition is in order.
- c. All my favorite films are B&W. I will pick one that is serious and one that is a comedy. My serious pick would be Theodor Dreyer's *Ordet* (1955). The atmosphere, characters, composition, and storyline are very powerful. I can say no more! The ending must remain a surprise! My light-hearted pick would be *Midnight*, a 1939 screwball comedy starring Don Ameche and Claudette Colbert, directed by Mitchell Leisen. Screenplay by Billy Wilder. Supporting roles by John Barrymore and a stunning Mary Astor. (Great depth of talent.) It has so many hilarious turns! I guarantee you will fall out of your chair laughing. It is very charming besides, painting a lovely picture of Parisian manners in the 1930s. **RL**

LORD ACTON LEGACY SOCIETY

“Liberty is not ...
the power of doing what we like,
but the right of being able to do
what we ought.”

- LORD ACTON



ACTON INSTITUTE

BE PART OF SOMETHING TRULY EXTRAORDINARY!

By including the **Acton Institute** in your estate plans, you will play a crucial role in recruiting, training, and equipping moral leaders from around the world to stand up and defend the necessity of both markets and morality, freedom and virtue.

VALUED MEMBERS RECEIVE:

- A complimentary lifetime subscription to all Acton publications
- Recognition on our headquarters' legacy wall
- Invitation to private receptions and VIP events across the country
- Opportunity to share the story and intent behind your gift
- Annual personal update from our team

Learn more or join the Lord Acton Legacy Society today by visiting:

[ACTON.ORG/LEGACY](https://acton.org/legacy)



ACTON UNIVERSITY



JUNE 22-25, 2026
GRAND RAPIDS, MI

Come *build the foundations* of freedom and explore the intersection of *faith and free markets* at Acton University!



LEARN MORE AND REGISTER AT:

UNIVERSITY.ACTON.ORG

Registration deadline is Friday, May 15.

SPACE IS LIMITED • SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

AMERICAN DYSTOPIA

THE HANDMAID'S TALE AND PURITAN HISTORY

BY DANIEL N. STEIN

Did America's Christian founders create a blueprint for totalitarianism? Were the Puritan colonists of New England religious fundamentalists who oppressed women, blacks, and religious minorities based on literal readings of the Bible? Were they early communists who abolished the free market and stifled commerce in the name of morality? What was their legacy for later Americans?

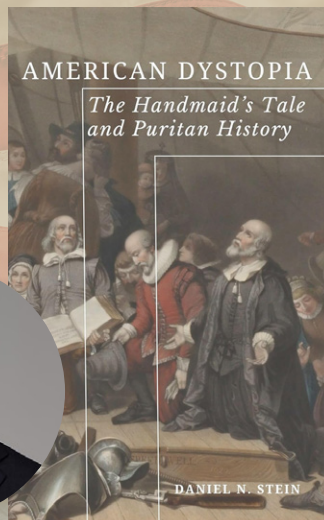
The Handmaid's Tale is a dystopian novel which is taught as an accurate representation of America's Christian origins in high schools across the country. It imagines a future United States where Christian fundamentalists, inspired by their Puritan ancestors, establish a theocratic regime resembling George Orwell's *1984*. Margaret Atwood's book and TV show have inspired a modern protest movement based on fears that a society like *The Handmaid's Tale* is emerging in America today.

Is she right? Is our society in danger of reverting to its Puritan roots? What is the real legacy of this much-maligned religious group?

Watch Daniel Stein
on Dr. Phil.



Scan here



Scan to purchase



Visit **GryphonEditions.com**, or call (888) 655-0134 to order by phone.