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Building a Society Where Freedom and Opportunity Flourish



Interview: Edwin J Feulner, Jr.

Edwin J. Feulner, Jr., Ph.D., is the President of The Heritage Foundation, the prestigious American conservative think tank, which this year celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary. He has written two books, *Conservatives Stalk the House* and *Looking Back*, and, most recently, has edited a third, *The March of Freedom: Modern Classics in Conservative Thought*.

R&L: *The philosophical roots of American conservatism run deep. For example, one major influence has been the classical liberal thought of the nineteenth century. How do you understand the relationship between conservatism and classical liberalism, especially their similarities and differences?*

Feulner: Today, especially, conservatives and classical liberals are more strongly allied against liberals of the left than ever before. They both oppose in principle such intrusions by the left that restrict people's liberty to pursue their own ends and solve their own problems. Where conservatives and classical liberals always differ is on the question of where government can legitimately and

effectively use power. The legalization of drugs is a classic example. Generally speaking, most classical liberals favor it; most conservatives do not.

R&L: *These distinctions have become less clear over the years, have they not?*

Feulner: That's right; such lines dividing the two groups have been blurred recently. Milton Friedman once wrote, "In a society, freedom has nothing to say about what an individual does with his freedom; it is not an all-embracing ethic. Indeed a major aim of the [classical] liberal is to leave the ethical problem for the individual to wrestle with. The really important ethical problems are those that face an individual in a free society—

what he should do with his freedom."

I think that, today, with the wreckage of social engineering all around us, conservatives are more wary of the dangers of seeking solutions to social problems through public policy. At the same time, with the wreckage of civil society all around us, classical liberals are paying closer attention to those moral choices that lie inside the boundaries of the individual's freedom. They are realizing that it is not enough merely to leave moral choice as a problem for individuals to wrestle with; we also need a serious, ongoing public conversation about the standards that guide free people who are acting within their rights.

R&L: *This year, The Heritage Foundation celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary. The American conservative movement has come a long way since 1973. In your opinion, what has been the most significant event for conservatives in the past two and a half decades?*

Feulner: The most significant single event for conservatives in the last

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twenty-five years, in my opinion, was the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. Of course, to achieve this decisive vindication of freedom over totalitarianism, there were many preceding events that were significant. Particularly, I think of Ronald Reagan's address to the British Parliament on June 8, 1982—the Westminster speech—where he, in effect, threw down the gauntlet and changed our way of thinking by leading the Western world to a notion of transcending communism rather than containing it or submitting to it.

R&L: “Ideas have consequences,” as Richard Weaver wrote, and the American conservative movement has been about ideas from the start. Who are the most important and foundational thinkers for conservatives?

Feulner: The most important, fundamental thinkers for conservatives this century are, to my mind, the individuals I profile in my recent volume, *The March of Freedom*. Most are intellectuals, and most are not household names, although they include Nobel Prize winners and a Templeton Prize winner—and, of course, a former President of the United States. Let me mention a few from that list who are especially worth noting.

The term *conservative mind* was con-

sidered by many on the left to be an oxymoron—until 1953, when Russell Kirk wrote *The Conservative Mind*. This book showed conclusively that conservatives have a distinguished intellectual pedigree and, therefore, cannot be dismissed by the left.

F. A. Hayek and Milton Friedman, both Nobel Prize winners, were instru-

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mental in lifting economics from its traditional status as “the dismal science” and integrating it with political, social, and moral philosophy.

R&L: Following Reagan, you often summarize the conservative philosophy in the following five words: family, work, neighborhood, freedom, and peace. Why do these concepts encapsulate the conservative vision?

Feulner: The words *family, work, neighborhood, freedom, and peace* encapsulate the conservative vision because they represent our primary political ideals and operating moral premises.

R&L: Can you elaborate on how they do that?

Feulner: Conservatives, as opposed to modern liberals, believe that the best solutions to most problems are found as close as possible to the problems themselves. So, for instance, when a child is misbehaving in some way, the best solution does not come from Washington or some agency of local government but from the child's own family. When families live in close proximity to each other, they form a neighborhood. Here, again, problems that can be solved among neighbors should be solved that way and not removed to some remote authority.

Work represents the individual's responsibility to earn his own way and provide for his family. When problems arise in the workplace, the best solutions are those worked out amicably between employer and employee.

People who broadly accept and meet the responsibilities of their families, their neighborhoods, and their places of work are people who live freely and in peace. Excepting national defense, those five concepts subsume most of the principles and actions that add up to a free and peaceful existence among people.

R&L: Recently, a few prominent conservatives have made the argument that

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the free-market system, though perhaps efficient, is destructive of the social order—I am here thinking of the kinds of criticisms made by George Soros, for example. What is your response to these kinds of criticisms?

Feulner: I take serious issue with those

who argue that the free-market *system* is destructive of the social order, because they fail to heed Friedman’s warning that I quoted before. To repeat, the freedom to choose does not tell us *what* choices we should make in any context—economic, political, social, or personal.

Soros builds his theory on an un-

sound footing when he writes, “The doctrine of laissez-faire capitalism holds that the common good is best served by the uninhibited pursuit of self-interest.” That needs to be qualified: The common good is best served when the pursuit of self-interest is not inhibited *by the state*. Self-imposed moral constraints that we

Johannes Althusius (1557–1638)

“All power is limited by definite boundaries and laws. No power is absolute, infinite, unbridled, arbitrary, and lawless. Every power is bound to laws, right, and equity.”

Johannes Althusius was born in Diedenshausen in Westphalia in 1557. Beyond a record of his birth, little is known about his early life. Upon receiving his doctorate in both civil and ecclesiastical law at Basle in 1586, he accepted a position on the faculty of law at the Reformed Academy at Herborn. The greatest achievement of his Herborn years was the publication of the *Politica* in 1603. Its success was instrumental in securing for Althusius an offer to become municipal magistrate of Emden in East Friesland, which was among the first cities in Germany to embrace the Reformed articles of faith. Althusius accepted the offer in 1604 and exercised an influence comparable to that of Calvin in Geneva; he guided the city without interruption until his death in 1638.



Much of Althusius’ thought is indebted to the precepts of Calvinism. John Calvin offers Christian political thinkers a sound theological basis to oppose unjust governments. “We are subject to the men who rule over us, but subject only in the Lord. If they command anything against Him, let us not pay the least regard to it,” Calvin writes in the last chapter of his *Institutes*. Althusius, too, contends in his *Politica* that because all power and government come from God, civil authorities cannot use their power to serve their own ends: “[The king] is over individuals in order to administer rightly, to which extent he is the executor, preserver, and minister of the law. Properly speaking, therefore, law is thus over everyone. It is the superior above all.... Therefore, if [the king] governs against the rule of law, he becomes punishable by the law....”

For Althusius, as for other Reformational political thinkers, government power must be limited. All human social institutions, including the state, are gifts of God and are accountable to God for what they do; therefore, the state can never have ultimate sovereignty. It, too, is *sub Deo*. Thus, Althusius can conclude that if the state ever transgresses its divinely ordained authority, it becomes illegitimate. In contrast, the legitimate state is that which “undertakes all actions of its administration according to laws.” Were it not for a code of law that exists outside the purview of state control and manipulation, the state cannot hope to preserve justice. When a state ceases to direct its power toward the common good and attempts to release itself from the power and jurisdiction of God, it forfeits its authority to rule. *A*

Sources: *Politica* by Johannes Althusius (LibertyClassics, 1995), and *Savior or Servant: Putting Government in Its Place* by David W. Hall (The Kuyper Institute, 1996).

adopt as individuals are altogether different; they are not only compatible with laissez-faire capitalism but are also essential to maintaining the social order in a free-market economy.

A second caution I would offer against such critics is that they regard self-interest as including virtually anything one feels like doing. On the contrary, rational self-interest requires us to make choices based on standards of value—and rational values take account of the consequences our actions have for others. Those are among the “really important ethical problems” that Friedman is referring to.

R&L: *Even though central planning has been shown in practice to be economically inefficient, politically coercive, and morally bankrupt, many still question the morality of free enterprise. In your opinion, in what sense is capitalism a morally superior system compared to other economic arrangements?*

Feulner: Fundamentally, capitalism is a morally superior system to central planning because it permits individual

moral superiority of capitalism lies in the freedom it gives us to choose. Humans, as distinct from lower animals, are moral beings because we have the capacity to make choices. Capitalism is the only system that recognizes this distinctly moral component of human nature.

R&L: *Though a majority of Americans profess a belief in God, religious principles are held suspect by those inside the Beltway. Similarly, many modern thinkers feel that a robust public expression of religion threatens freedom. What is the appropriate place of religion in a free society, and what role do religious leaders have in its preservation?*

Feulner: I see some hopeful signs that the elite media are coming to realize the importance of religion and paying it more respect than they have in the past. Religious leaders, of course, should be willing to speak out on the issues of the day, but, even more important, they should remind other believers that real faith is not something only practiced for an hour on the Sabbath. Rather, it is

Feulner: I commend my colleague Bill Bennett for making the virtues central to his two recent books, *The Book of Virtues* and *The Moral Compass*. In the first, he opens with a quotation from Plato: “You know that the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing; for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken.” I do not think it was an accident that the first of the ten virtues illustrated in *The Book of Virtues* is self-discipline. In a free society, in a system of self-government, self-discipline is probably the most fundamental virtue. Courage and honesty also should rank high for people who must deal with one another by voluntary consent and mutual respect.

R&L: *How ought such virtues be promoted?*

Feulner: We can promote virtue, first and foremost, by restoring the traditional family so that children might acquire through example and practice the virtues they need to succeed in life. We can and should promote virtues elsewhere, of course, but the family is by far the most critical institution for cultivating the virtues that will keep us free.

R&L: *As you look to the next twenty-five years, what will be the single greatest challenge for conservatives?*

Feulner: I believe the greatest challenge facing us in the next twenty-five years will be rolling back the liberal welfare state and building an America where freedom, opportunity, and civil society can flourish. My colleagues and I at The Heritage Foundation and thousands of our supporters around the country are dedicated to achieving that objective, and I hope that everyone who calls himself a conservative will join us in this challenge for the future. *A*

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free choice, which is central to all other freedoms that the individual possesses. In a centrally planned economy, for example, the state will allocate newsprint. Is it safe to assume that the government bureaucrat will allocate a fair portion of that newsprint to publications that criticize the government? Of course not. Yet again, I would repeat Milton Friedman’s observation: Capitalism has nothing to say about how we use our freedom. The

something that should infuse the individual in his every action with his fellow citizens and with the institutions with which he is engaged.

R&L: *Much conservative thought focuses on the importance of virtue, that is, being the right kind of citizen and being the right kind of person. What virtues are necessary to sustain a free society?*

Living Responsibly: Václav Havel's View

Edward E. Ericson, Jr.

If you could have one chance to speak to the world's most powerful political body, what would you say? When Václav Havel's invitation came, he told the United States Congress that "the salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart." He told people preoccupied with getting re-elected that they should "put morality ahead of politics, science, and economics" and that "the only genuine core of all our actions—if they are to be moral—is responsibility." Then, as a capper, he explained that our supreme responsibility is "to something higher than my family, my country, my firm, my success"; it is to the transcendent realm above us.

Havel had indubitably earned his right to be heard by the high and mighty. He had put his successful career as a playwright on hold to lead the dissenters against communist totalitarianism in his native Czechoslovakia, had therefore been repeatedly imprisoned, and then—during our turbulent century's most sensational year, 1989—moved within months from prisoner to president of his country. This was enough for America's Most Beautiful People to invite him to a gala reception in New York, where they could have their pictures taken with him, and Barbra Streisand allowed that he could smoke in her presence. The *New York Review of Books*, that bellwether journal of America's elite opinion, regularly publishes his essays. Havel has become as much of an icon as our secular establishment can accommodate.

This appropriation is incongruous. Havel's ideas do not comport well at all with those of our cultural pacesetters in

Manhattan or inside the Beltway or in the Big Academy. They do comport well, by contrast, with those of the many ordinary American citizens who also think against the grain of today's fashions. Havel believes in the old-fashioned concepts of good and evil. He speaks of truth, without quotation marks. He sees individuals as the chief engines of history. Championing human liberty, he warns against the centralization of power, and his plays describe the dehumanizing effects of bureaucracy. Challenging the doctrine of progress, he looks to the past for wisdom. He speaks freely about God and religion. He conjoins these themes in a call for each of us to live responsibly. Personal responsibility is his central theme.

Our Century's Unprecedented Flight from God

As Havel presses this theme, he offers a particularly penetrating analysis of our times. What, would you say, is the distinctive character of the twentieth century? Many, perhaps most, would point out its amazing technological advances. Others call it the American century. Havel says that our century's distinguishing mark is that "we are going through a great departure from God which has no parallel in history." It is no coincidence that "the first atheistic civilization" has produced the bloodiest century in history.

The civic face of atheism is ideology. Havel considers ideology "almost a secularized religion." His exact synonym for "ideology" is "the lie." An ideological regime "must falsify everything"—the past, the present, the future,

statistics, everything. Citizens under such a regime "need not believe all these mystifications, but they must behave as though they did." Havel depicts a greengrocer who puts in his window the slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" He thereby embodies the moral illness of "saying one thing and thinking another."

Were the greengrocer not to put up the sign, he would wordlessly announce that "the emperor is naked" and would show that "it *is* possible to live within the truth. Living within the lie can constitute the system only if it is universal." This, Havel explains, is exactly what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn did. And so did other dissenters, whom he calls "ordinary people with ordinary cares, differing from the rest only in that they say aloud what the rest cannot say or are afraid to say."

According to Havel, ordinary people everywhere can live in the truth only by embracing the "notion of human responsibility." Responsibility is "that fundamental point from which all identity grows and by which it stands or falls; it is the foundation, the root, the center of gravity, the constructional principle or axis of identity." Thus, Havel declares, "I am responsible for the state of the world," and he means a "responsibility not only to the world but also 'for the world,' as though I myself were to be judged for how the world turns out." Citing Dostoevsky's spiritual dictum that all are responsible for all, he points to that "'higher' responsibility, which grows out of a conscious or subconscious certainty that our death ends nothing, because everything is forever being

recorded and evaluated somewhere else, somewhere ‘above us,’ in ... an integral aspect of the secret order of the cosmos, of nature, and of life, which believers call God and to whose judgment everything is liable.”

The Transcendent Reality from Which All Life Draws Its Meaning

Despite his Roman Catholic rearing, Havel does not number himself among the believers. He admits to “an affinity for Christian sentiment,” and he tries “to live in the spirit of Christian morality.” Yet, when queried about a rumor that he had become a Christian, he began ambivalently—“It depends on how we understand conversion”—then said no. No, because “genuine conversion, as I understand it, would mean replacing an uncertain ‘something’ with a completely unambiguous personal God, and fully, inwardly, to accept Christ as the Son of God.... And I have not taken that step.”

Yet the rearing shows. Havel does insist—and this is what matters most for

toward atheists. In his cultural criticism (as distinct from his private life), Havel might as well be a Christian.

This is certainly true in his analysis of the West. Havel and his fellow dissenters took “the traditional values of Western civilization” as their guiding light. He remains wholeheartedly committed to “the ideals of democracy, human rights, the civil society, and the free market”—the values America espouses. As a lay historian of ideas, he particularly praises the “blending of classical, Christian, and Jewish elements” that has created “the most dynamic civilization of the last millennium.”

With the Cold War over, we can now look beneath its surface split in the world and recognize that “the West and the East, though different in so many ways, are going through a single, common crisis,” for both are heirs of the Enlightenment’s legacy of atheism. In both precincts we observe the “arrogant anthropocentrism of modern man, who is convinced he can know everything and

“taken aback by the extent to which so many Westerners are addicted to ideology, much more than we who live in a system which is ideological through and through.” But the West shows “unwillingness to hear the warning voices coming from our part of the world.” So, it misses the real significance of “the end of communism,” which is “a signal that the era of arrogant, absolutist reason is drawing to a close.”

Havel’s Warning to the West

Thus, Havel laments that “the Western way of affirming Western values ... seems to me to have seriously cooled off.” The West has “lost its ability to sacrifice,” he asserts, because its “economic advances,... based as they are on advances in scientific and technical knowledge, have gradually altered man’s very value systems.” We now worship “a new deity: the ideal of perpetual growth of production and consumption.” The American-led West offers the world an “essentially atheistic technological civilization.” It mainly exports not its traditional high ideals but its unsavory “by-products,” such as “moral relativism, materialism, the denial of any kind of spirituality, a proud disdain for everything suprapersonal, a profound crisis of authority and the resulting general decay of order, a frenzied consumerism, a lack of solidarity, a selfish cult of material success, the absence of faith in a higher order of things or simply in eternity.”

Such an indictment could easily turn Westerners defensive. What about democracy? we might ask. Is not that a high ideal? Havel the democrat considers that we promulgate a cut-flower variety of it. He considers the right to vote, freedom of expression, and private ownership of property to be, by themselves, “merely technical instruments,” which can “enable” but “cannot guarantee [human] dignity, freedom, and responsibility.” Electoral procedures are the husk,



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Havel as cultural critic—that there is a transcendent reality from which all of human life draws its meaning. And, despite the impersonal ring of his God-substitutes, such as “the mystery of Being” and “the absolute horizon of Being,” he routinely makes personal references to them, as when he converses with “someone” who “addresses me directly and personally.” He is always approving toward believers and disapproving

bring everything under his control.” This worldview “kills God, and takes his place on the vacant throne,” viewing the world as “nothing but a crossword puzzle to be solved.”

Because “communism was the perverse extreme” of this modern worldview, Havel sees life under communism as “a kind of warning to the West, revealing to it its own latent tendencies.” He once admitted being particularly

not the kernel, of a free society. And do we not ourselves sometimes fear that “the democratic West [has] lost its ability realistically to foster and cultivate the values it has always proclaimed and undertaken to safeguard”?

We might also ask, What about our free-enterprise system, now widely imitated? Havel values its wealth-making ways, as his own policies in the Czech Republic show. However, he also espies “the general unwillingness of consumption-oriented people to sacrifice some material certainties for the sake of their own spiritual and moral integrity.” So, he resists a marketplace without morality. “If [the West’s] own consumer affluence remains more important to it than the laudable foundations of the affluence, it will soon forfeit that affluence.” As we might have learned from another source, we could gain the whole world and lose our own soul.

Our moment in history is, according to Havel, a “watershed” moment “in the history of the entire human race.” Can we come out from under the rubble of our century’s atheism? Michael Novak thinks we can and will. He predicts that “the twenty-first century will be the most religious in five hundred years.” And he cites Havel as one of “the leading spirits of our age [who] have begun to sense that humans are naturally religious.”

Havel’s advice for the future, whether to America or to the world as a whole, is governed by his view that “our very planetary civilization is endangered by human irresponsibility.” In a nutshell, he counsels us to reinvigorate the wisdom of the past. To America, he declares that “the fathers of American democracy knew” what “modern man has lost: his transcendent anchor.” Ironically, it is a foreigner who reminds an audience in Philadelphia that “the Declaration of Independence, adopted 218 years ago in this building, states that the Creator gave man the right to liberty. It seems that man can realize that liberty only if he

does not forget the One who endowed him with it.” Is this what American schoolchildren hear?

The Way Forward Is First the Way Back

To the world as a whole, he also suggests that the way forward is first the way back. As Western technology imposes “the veneer of world civilization” through “informational and economic

sibility, true justice, a true sense of things—all these grow from roots that go much deeper than the world of our transitory earthly schemes. This is a message that speaks to us from the very heart of human religiosity.”

In short, Havel commends, as Christians such as C. S. Lewis before him have commended, the concept we sometimes call natural law. This may not be the whole counsel of the God of the

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globalization,” we need to locate “sources of a shared minimum that could serve as a framework for the tolerant coexistence of different cultures within a single civilization.” Although Havel asserts that “no unbiased person will have any trouble knowing where to look,” his answer is surprising. He looks to ancient religions. He emphatically rejects the familiar modern move to make the Creator “disappear from the world” and “into a sphere of privacy of sorts, if not directly into a sphere of private fancy—that is, into a place where public obligations no longer apply.”

The religions of antiquity proclaim in common what modern humanity has lost: “The certainty that the Universe, nature, existence, and our lives are the work of creation guided by a definite intention, that it has a definite meaning and follows a definite purpose.” Despite our superior information about the universe, our ancestors “knew something more essential about it than we do, something that escapes us.” They knew that “people should revere God as a phenomenon that transcends them.” They knew that “true goodness, true respon-

Bible, but what a sharp contrast it provides to the blandishments of our secular elites.

Think of how our public discourse would change if we drank deeply from Havel’s well. We would talk less about such secondary aspects of our being as race, class, and gender and more about our souls. We would couch our conversations about politics and economics in a moral vocabulary. For every mention of rights, we would mention responsibility. We would stop ignoring God. One need not know Havel to live responsibly, but knowing him can only help. *A*

Edward E. Ericson, Jr., Ph.D., is Professor of English at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His books include Solzhenitsyn: The Moral Vision and, most recently, Solzhenitsyn and the Modern World. His essays have appeared in such publications as The American Enterprise, Books and Culture, The Christian Century, Crisis, Modern Age, and Reformed Journal.

Renewing Our Experiment In Ordered Liberty

Michael S. Joyce

In his breathtaking new book, *A History of the American People*, English historian Paul Johnson writes, “The creation of the United States of America is the greatest of all human adventures. No other national story holds such tremendous lessons, for the American people themselves and for the rest of mankind.... The great American republican experiment ... is still the first, best hope for the human race” and “will not disappoint an expectant humanity.”

It is often noted that outside observers of the American experiment tend to express a more profound appreciation for the remarkable achievements of our nation’s Founders than we do ourselves. Burke and Talleyrand, Gladstone and Tocqueville, Thatcher and Maritain have all marveled at the truth of a proposition that, before the exceptional birth of freedom here, had been considered at best, problematic: that the people have the capacity to govern themselves.

Following this well-trodden path but with a somber note of caution, is Pope John Paul II. When Lindy Boggs, the newly designated United States ambassador to the Vatican, recently came to present her credentials, John Paul took the occasion to remind her that our great experiment in self-government left America with a “far-reaching responsibility, not only for the well-being of its own people, but for the development and destiny of peoples throughout the world.”

John Paul then embarked upon an eloquent review of the fundamental principles upon which American self-government is based. The Founding Fathers, he noted, “asserted their claim to

freedom and independence on the basis of certain ‘self-evident’ truths about the human person: truths which could be discerned in human nature, built into it by ‘nature’s God.’ Thus, they meant to bring into being, not just an independent territory but a great experiment in what George Washington called ‘ordered liberty’: an experiment in which men and women would enjoy equality of rights and opportunities in the pursuit of happiness and in service to the common good.”

The Capacity to Fulfill Our Duties and Responsibilities

It was outrageous enough, to contemporary sensibilities, for John Paul to connect self-government to the notion of eternal human attributes implanted by God. But he then went further, suggesting that self-government did not imply simply freedom to live as one wishes but, rather, the capacity to fulfill one’s duties and responsibilities toward family and toward the common good of the community. The Founding Fathers, he noted, “clearly understood that there could be no true freedom without moral responsibility and accountability, and no happiness without respect and support for the natural units or groupings through which people exist, develop, and seek the higher purposes of life in concert with others.”

In this remarkable discourse, John Paul identified several critical features of American self-government: that it is rooted in a view of human nature governed by self-evident truths that are fixed forever in the human person by “nature’s God”; that the political consequence of

human truth is an irrefutable case for self-government, so long as our freedom is shaped and ordered by moral and civic virtue; and that we come to be fully human, fully moral, and fully free only within “natural units or groupings”—family, neighborhood, church, and voluntary association—which we form to pursue the higher purposes of life.

How does this sophisticated understanding of self-government compare with our own understanding at home? Ours, I regret to say, tends to be a rather superficial, political view. To us, self-government means simply doing whatever we, collectively as citizens, choose to do. We see in John Paul’s message, however, second and more substantial understanding of self-government—that it must mean, as well, our capacities as individuals for personal self-mastery, for reflection, restraint, and moral action. And here is the critical, uncomfortable fact: In a well-ordered republic, government of the self is necessary for government of society to work.

I was reminded recently just how far we have drifted from this second and vital understanding of self-government as personal moral mastery. Several years ago, I was visiting a very good, very famous liberal arts college and was invited to sit in on an upper division honors seminar on the *Federalist Papers* and the American Founding. Sitting around the table were some of the nation’s brightest young people. The professor guided them in their consideration of the principle of republican self-government. Reading to them Publius’s warning that a major danger to democratic self-rule is the human inclination to “irregular

passions” and “temporary delusions,” the professor warned the students to beware especially of anyone with an ardor for or attachment to the truth.

The students took particular pleasure in the ensuing discussion of the concept of self-government, for—with but a little prodding from their professor—they quickly focused on the “self” part of self-government and enthusiastically came to the view that self-government means nothing more than license—a sanction for the utmost latitude in their personal behavior. These students were delighted to discover the Founders as allies in their understanding of self-government as radical moral relativism.

Self-Government Presupposes Moral Self-Mastery

Yet, as the Holy Father reminded Ambassador Boggs, self-government as understood by the Founders meant anything but unlimited personal license based on an unlimited moral horizon. The authors of the *Federalist Papers* are justly famed for their clear-eyed assessment of the weaknesses of human nature and their careful arrangement of governing institutions to minimize those flaws. James Madison nevertheless wrote in *Federalist* No. 55 that “as there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. *Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form* [emphasis added].” If people were as bad as some opponents of the Constitution said, he wrote, “the inference would be that there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government.”

A people deficient in moral restraint or civic virtue, Madison understood, could not long govern itself; unbounded human passions would finally tear the republic to pieces. Utterly undisciplined

peoples are not fit for self-government, he insisted, but require “nothing less than the chains of despotism [to] restrain them from destroying or devouring one another.”

But how are American citizens to acquire the moral self-mastery required for self-government? To be sure, the Founders did not suppose that their new government would seek directly to inculcate those virtues in its citizens. Rather, as *Federalist* No. 55 suggests, American self-government “presupposes” moral self-mastery. Here again, John Paul’s remarks help us understand what this means.

Not only does freedom mean moral responsibility, he insisted, but there can be “no happiness without respect and support for the natural units or groupings through which people exist, develop, and seek the higher purposes of life in concert with others.” Alongside the formal and artificial constructs of American government, in other words, there stand certain “natural units or

social institutions. They take into their bosom the unformed child and, through tireless repetition and reinforcement of the same moral lessons over a lifetime, slowly forge a morally responsible human being. They serve as the first and most important “schools of liberty,” introducing the morally self-governed individual to the broader public rights and responsibilities of the self-governing republican citizen.

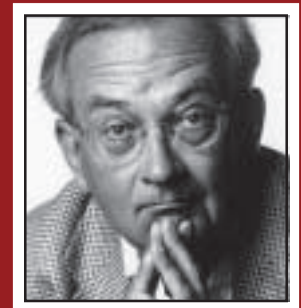
It probably never occurred to the Founders that the centrality of such presupposed, bedrock civil institutions could be forgotten or neglected. But we are now nearing the end of a century that has shown anything but “respect and support” for the institutions of civil society that undergird our noble experiment in self-government.

The Enduring Struggle for Self-Government

It is, perhaps, the defining American experience periodically to revisit the struggle between self-government and

In a well-ordered republic,
government of the self is
necessary for government of
society to work.

—Michael Joyce



groupings,” such as family, church, neighborhood, and voluntary association, that are responsible for the full development of human character through rigorous and sustained moral and civic education.

It was precisely the great efflorescence of these natural groupings in America that Alexis de Tocqueville understood to be the key to the perpetuity of our free and democratic political and

civic virtue, on the one hand, and comfortable materialism and moral cynicism, on the other. Engaging in that struggle, in moments of crisis, may well be the way we come to rededicate ourselves to certain enduring propositions at the heart of our great nation. That was certainly the consequence of the greatest struggle over our national soul, a chapter of which unfolded in that famous political contest between Stephen

A. Douglas and Abraham Lincoln.

Drawing on historian Harry Jaffa's brilliant recreation of the arguments in that 1858 Senate campaign, we recall that Senator Douglas faced the great moral question of his time, the issue of chattel slavery, and famously pronounced that he "[does not] care whether it is voted up or down." Douglas was a proponent of today's hollow, contemporary view of self-government, defined simply as the morally indifferent "competence of the people to decide all questions, including those of right and wrong," as Jaffa notes. In fact, any discussion about absolute right and wrong, any appeal to trans-majoritarian moral values, actually endangered democratic government, in his view, only fueling the fury of moral extremists.

Happily, Lincoln understood the long-term moral effect of slavery on American self-government and denounced Douglas's views as contrary to the principled understanding bequeathed us by the Founders. There are certain divinely inspired "self-evident truths" embedded in the Declaration of Independence, he insisted, according to

no rights of liberty and equality accruing to man as a matter of irreducible moral principle, then any one of us is subject to being enslaved to the man whose self-interest or passion may so incline him and whose force of self-expression is greater than ours.

Thus, Jaffa writes, Lincoln professed that he "hated" Douglas's position because "it forces so many really good men ... into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty—criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting there is no right principle of action but self-interest."

Do we not find in Abraham Lincoln's views the definitive response to those who argue that self-government means simply majority will and who would deny the idea of self-government's moral foundation in self-evident truths and would drive moral discourse from our politics?

A New Birth of Freedom Grounded in Truth and Ordered to Goodness

As we face today's confusions and misconstructions about the American principle of self-government, it may be

had the wisdom and the courage to decide the issue of self-government aright.

So, when we are told that there is no nature's God—and so, no divinely inscribed "self-evident truths" in the human soul—let us reply that without such truths, there is no sure foundation for human freedom and self-government. When we are told that the human being is utterly free to create or express himself without limits, let us reply that "there can be no moral freedom without moral responsibility and accountability," and no political freedom without civic virtue. And when we are told that family, neighborhood, church, and voluntary association are parochial and repressive constraints on our self-expression, let us reply that only through such institutions can we as free people "exist, develop, and seek the higher purposes of life in concert with others," and come to a proper understanding and practice of self-government.

With our past as the foundation of our hope, let us embrace this new struggle over the meaning of self-government as the means by which we may once again refresh our flagging spirits at the wellsprings of our national character. Not daring, at such a critical moment, to rely solely upon our own arguments and devices, let us join Pope John Paul II in his prayer that "our country will experience a new birth of freedom, freedom grounded in truth and ordered to goodness." *A*

A people deficient in moral restraint or civic virtue, Madison understood, could not long govern itself; unbounded human passions would finally tear the republic to pieces. Utterly undisciplined peoples are not fit for self-government.

which, slavery was unequivocally "a moral, social, and political wrong." If we are to remain free, we must firmly guide our conduct by that fixed moral standard.

To do otherwise—to act as if the Declaration's truth did not exist—was not only to leave slaves to their bondage. It was also to deny the possibility of self-government for anyone anywhere, Lincoln understood. If there are

comforting for us to look back at the great contest between Lincoln and Douglas, finding there the assurance that this is by no means the first generation of Americans—nor will it be the last—to be tempted by wrong-headed and relativistic understandings of what self-government means. Even more should we be comforted by the realization that in that great moment of testing nearly a century and a half ago, we Americans

Michael S. Joyce, Ph.D., is the President and CEO of the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This essay is adapted from "Self-Government," an address he delivered at Oak Brook, Illinois, on April 23, 1998, as part of The Heritage Foundation's twenty-fifth anniversary lecture series.

Discovering the Weight of Glory

A Review Essay by Lucas E. Morel

According to C. S. Lewis, “there are no ordinary people.” As he wrote, “it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.” The question is, in which direction are we encouraging them? If Gilbert Meilaender is correct—and he offers plenty to persuade us in this re-release of *The Taste for the Other*—Lewis understood one’s journey to heaven or hell, to becoming a child of God or of the Devil, as one aided and abetted by fellow travelers. No action of ours is neutral; each is fraught with eternal consequences for our neighbor and ourselves.

“Remember, I had always wanted, above all things, not to be ‘interfered with.’” But the Hound of Heaven took the offensive, and soon Lewis found “God Himself, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord.” No longer viewed as an ethereal, impersonal spirit, Immanuel

stretches beyond death’s door. As Meilaender explains: “God is not to be pictured, at least for Lewis, as if he were hard at work setting up requirements which must be met for life in the community of his love. Rather, God is at work building that community, and he may use pains to move some people toward the end he desires for them.” How Lewis squares this with a Day of Judgment, though, is not explained by Meilaender.

Meilaender’s study begins with Lewis’s understanding of earthly goods. As “created things,” earthly goods should be received as a gift from God. Otherwise, through idolatry or self-denial they become obstacles to community. Instead of

serving others with earthly goods, the idolator turns away from both natural and divine community to lustful self-gratification. Surprisingly, while asceticism appears holy for its renunciation of earthly goods, Lewis thinks it is actually worse than idolatry because it paints a dimmer picture of God, who is One to be enjoyed. The idolator-as-sensualist, at least, understands that there are things worth enjoying. Meilaender concludes that we must “learn to delight in things without seeking security in them.” This way we preserve what Lewis called the “taste for the *other*, that is, the very capacity for enjoying good.”

Equality Versus Hierarchy

Turning from things to people, Meilaender spends the second and longest chapter of the book, examining Lewis’s understanding of love, justice, equality, and pride. Interestingly, Lewis

*The Taste for the Other:
The Social and Ethical Thought of
C. S. Lewis*
by Gilbert Meilaender

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company
Rev. ed. 1998. 256 pp. Paper: \$16.00

A Coherent Picture of Man As an Eternal, Social Creature

A former professor of religion at Oberlin College and now Board of Directors Chair in Theological Ethics at Valparaiso University, Meilaender takes Lewis seriously as a theologian in examining his diverse writings for a coherent picture of man as an eternal, social creature. From expository works such as *Mere Christianity* and *The Problem of Pain* to fiction for children and “grown-ups” like *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *That Hideous Strength*, Lewis made the case for civilized society and Christianity. Therein Meilaender discerns what he calls Lewis’s “reality principle”: People were created for fellowship with God, and so “to fall short of this destiny is to fall short of full humanity.”

Ironically, Lewis’s own Christian pilgrimage began with great reluctance:

became for Clive Staples Lewis the “Divine Surgeon,” as Meilaender titles the central chapter of his book. Viewing God primarily as a healer, and not as judge or jailer, Lewis sees the Christian sojourn on earth (and in purgatory) as the process by which human beings are “cleansed and made fit to dwell in the divine presence.” As “God’s patients, not yet cured,” Christians receive not merely absolution for their sins but adoption into His family.

Meilaender sees a logic in Lewis’s emphasis on community as both the means and end of a person’s sanctification. It follows that Lewis had no problem adopting what Meilaender calls an “Anglo-Catholic” view of purgatory. Because “the communion of saints” was central to his understanding of God’s agenda, Lewis saw one’s life on Earth as only part of a continuum of sanctification: What begins this side of the vale,

demoted equality in deference to hierarchy as a vital principle of community. For Lewis, the beauty of community was not in any rigid conformity by fleshly automatons but in its uniting of diverse individuals and relationships. In fact, he thought the individual would be overlooked precisely in those societies that prized sameness over “particularity.” Lewis observed, “Where personality is in question, I will not give up a wrinkle or a stammer.” Driven by envy instead of love, the “I’m-as-good-as-you” mentality erodes community, and its “flat equality” poisons those apolitical communities that form the basis of civil society: namely, family and friends. *Koinonia* knows nothing of “quantitative assessments”; instead, “humility, gratitude, and admiration” point the way.

Regarding political equality, Lewis likened it to medicine or clothing, which is needed only because of our sickly or fallen state. The “real reason for democracy,” he explained, is that mankind is “so fallen that no man can be trusted

from God. True, Lewis commented that he would rather live “under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies”; he was, however, no Lockean. Aristotle and Augustine suited him best.

Lewis admits that his sketch of what a “fully Christian society would be like” will please few on either side of the political aisle. Although he does note it, Meilaender does not discuss sufficiently a related insight of Lewis: “Most of us are not really approaching the subject in order to find out what Christianity says: We are approaching it in the hope of finding support from Christianity for the views of our own party. We are looking for an ally where we are offered either a Master or—a Judge.” Just when we thought we could slip out to play the prosecutor, enlisting the Almighty in our quest to rid society of its non-Christian elements, Lewis throws us back in the dock where God had us all along.

Meilaender’s later discussions of earthly and divine love, as well as ethics and epistemology, will prove heady


tian, also reissued this year. Originally published in 1973, five years before Meilaender’s original study, this survey of Lewis’s theology and cultural commentary is a veritable “C. S. Lewis for Dummies.”

A “Weight of Glory” That Cannot Be Taken Too Seriously

“It is good for us to be cured of the ‘illusion of independence.’” Though Lewis confessed that regular church attendance was, for him, never easy, he affirmed its propriety and entered wholeheartedly into other forms of Christian community: from intellectual jousting with the Inklings, to his late marriage to Joy Davidman, to everyday home life at the Kilns with brother Warren. “Jack,” as his intimates knew him, was not given to luxury and so practiced Christian charity by writing letters with his rheumatic right hand and donating two-thirds of his book royalties with his left. In his brothers and sisters in Christ, Lewis found a “weight of glory” that could not be taken too seriously.

Meilaender’s exploration of Lewis’s social and ethical thought deserves its reprinting in our postmodern age. As G. K. Chesterton put it, “It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one’s own.” Lewis makes it easier, through essays, treatises, and fiction (totalling thirty-five books before his death in 1963) that provide a tonic for mind and spirit. Reissued to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of Lewis’s birth, *The Taste for the Other* invites us “to exist at Aslan’s pleasure and to achieve self-fulfillment only in right relation to him.” As the Great Lion declares in *The Silver Chair*, for those who are thirsty, “there is no other stream.” *A*

Lucas E. Morel, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of political science and history at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas.



Meilaender sees a logic in Lewis’s emphasis on community as both the means and end of a person’s sanctification.

—Lucas E. Morel

with unchecked power over his fellows.” As Meilaender recounts, Lewis also expressed a “genuine reservation about the economic organization of modern Western societies,” especially their promotion of mere buying and selling as a way to make a living. One’s work should be inherently worth doing, and not simply a means to a paycheck. The latter was too future-oriented for Lewis, who preferred that each day be received as a gift

material for the non-philosopher. But the latter chapter, which examines Lewis’s views on the fact-value distinction, moral education, and the difference between desiring to be good and desiring to be God’s, provides timely counsel in these days of moral relativism and spiritual drought. Those who are interested in a more accessible introduction to the Lewis canon should consult Kathryn Lindskoog’s *C. S. Lewis: Mere Chris-*

Freedom and Virtue *The Conservative/Libertarian Debate*

edited by George W. Carey

Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1998. 223 pp. Hardcover: \$24.95

Review by Leonard P. Liggio

The English weekly, *The Spectator*, on July 18, 1998, declared, “the pope has argued that only when individuals give of their own free will are their morals stretched and trained, but most voters adhere to Rousseau and the General Will. They want to give and receive as determined by Parliament.” That the welfare state is the greatest threat to morality and family is a common conclusion of American conservatives. Similarly, they recoil at the social and cultural decay represented by public education and the cultural customers public education has created.

Recently, some traditionalists, newly entered into the conservative movement, in justified reaction to cultural decay, have proposed the simplistic solution of government legislation to cure social ills. However, conservatives—both long-standing traditionalists and libertarians—historically have emphasized the importance of freedom of choice, as the pope has. They only trust habits instilled by parents, schools, and churches to reverse American social and cultural decay.

Long ago the conservative movement demonstrated the fallacy of a division between the traditional and libertarian elements in American conservatism. For those new to the conservative movement, *Freedom and Virtue* will provide the founding texts shared by both branches. Originally published in 1984, this revised and updated edition is comprised of several insightful essays by some of the leading lights of the Ameri-

can conservative and libertarian movements.

Among the additions to the volume are a number of essays selected by Professor George Carey of Georgetown University from the early years of *National Review*, when William F. Buckley, Jr., its masterful editor, drew upon M. Stanton Evans, Frank S. Meyer, and Russell Kirk. The resulting dialogue is a helpful introduction to the primary issues at stake in this debate.

Evans sets the intellectual stage by stating what he thinks is at the core of conservative thought: “The conservative believes ours is a God-centered, and therefore an ordered, universe; that man’s purpose is to shape his life to the patterns of order proceeding from the Divine center of life; and that, in seeking his objective, man is hampered by a fallible intellect and vagrant will.” Further, “this view of things is not only compatible with a due regard for human freedom, but demands it.” According to Evans, the conservative’s primary concern is that individuals make good choices, and such choices can only occur in “circumstances favoring volition.” The role of the state in this process is by necessity limited, for if one “is corrupted in mind and impulse, he is hardly to be trusted with the unbridled potencies of the state.” In this way, “the limitation of government power becomes the highest *political* objective of conservatism.”

In his contribution, Meyer posits the principle that transcendental truth is compatible with individual human free-

dom. As he writes, “the Christian understanding of the nature and destiny of man, which is the foundation of Western civilization, is always and everywhere what conservatives strive to conserve.” Such an understanding, for Meyer, holds two things to be true: on the one hand, “the existence of absolute truth and good,” and on the other, “that men are created with the free will to accept or reject that truth and good.” As he concludes, “Conservatism ... demands both the struggle to vindicate truth and good and the establishment of conditions in which the free will of individual persons can be effectively exercised.”

Meyer affirmed that libertarian/traditionalist philosophy opposed determinism and relativism alongside the “monopoly of power, usually exercised through the state, which suppresses or distorts the exercise of free will by individual persons.” Meyer precedes current historians in emphasizing the religious sources of liberty in the Middle Ages, especially in the separation of powers in decentralized institutions and polity and the balance of powers between the civil and the ecclesiastical. (The necessary companion to Carey’s book is Meyer’s *In Defense of Freedom*.) He added: “That fused position recognizes at one and the same time the transcendent goal of human existence and the primacy of freedom of the person, a value based upon transcendent considerations. And it maintains that the duty of men is to seek virtue; but it insists that men cannot in actuality do so unless they are free from the constraint of the physical coercion of an unlimited state.”

In his essay, Kirk argues that conservatism is a fusion of traditionalism and classical liberalism, which have sources in the natural law tradition starting with Cicero, the moral philosophy of medieval Christianity, and the civil

society that emerged from medieval English law. Kirk identified the libertarians with whom he agreed as those who “perceive in the growth of the monolithic state, especially during the past half-century, a grim menace to ordered liberty,” who “vehemently oppose what Wilhelm Roepke called ‘the cult of the colossal,’” and who “take up the cause of the self-reliant individual, the voluntary association, the just rewards of personal achievement.”

An additional important contribution is the essay by Robert Nisbet, which was also included in the original edition. When he presented it at the April 1979 Philadelphia Society meeting, Nisbet generously stated in his lecture that he took F. A. Hayek to be *the* libertarian spokesman. Nisbet argues persuasively that regaining the rights of society represented by private associations, such as family, neighborhood, and church will protect society against the political power of governments. Nisbet considered the common ground of libertarians and traditionalists to be their “common dislike of the intervention of government” in the economic and social lives of citizens.

Space prohibits a fuller treatment of this fine book’s other essays; suffice it to say that Carey has drawn on his deep knowledge of American political philosophy to bring together this dialogue and has thus assembled an important record of the conservative/libertarian conversation. The arguments presented by these authors show why they are giants of intellect and style and what we can gain from studying them. A

Leonard P. Liggio, Ph.D., is a Distinguished Senior Scholar at the Institute for Humane Studies in Fairfax, Virginia, and teaches the history of Western legal institutions at George Mason University Law School, also in Fairfax.



Book News



Invitation to the Classics: A Guide to Books You’ve Always Wanted to Read

Louise Cowan and Os Guinness, eds.
Baker Book House, 1998
384 pp. Hardcover: \$34.99

The classics have fallen on hard times. They are seen, at best, as irrelevant to our modern age or, at worst, as advocates of sexism and racism. Editors Louise Cowan and Os Guinness seek to rehabilitate the classics as valuable resources that can help illuminate our understanding of “citizenship, civilization, faith and the whole notion of the true, the good, and the beautiful.” Their purpose in doing so is to promote the study of the classic works of Western literature as a means of infusing our public and private lives with greater moral and intellectual reflection. (Indeed, Guinness uses the classics in just such a way in his seminars for business leaders sponsored by the Trinity Forum.)

Invitation to the Classics is a lavishly illustrated and meticulously researched book. It gathers articles written from a Christian worldview by recognized experts on the greatest writers of Western literature from Homer to Solzhenitsyn. Each provides an overview of individual classics, historical background, a list of issues to explore, and—perhaps most helpful—a bibliography of the most authoritative editions and best translations of the work under consideration. In this way, *Invitation to the Classics* becomes a helpful guide for the non-specialist to the most important works of the West.

An additional virtue of this book is its refusal to use the politically correct interpretive grid of race, class, and gender. Rather, it approaches classic texts

with the assumption that, for the careful and dedicated reader, they have something valuable to say about human experience. In truth, *Invitation to the Classics* is a powerful argument that the diligent study of such works is one key to the preservation of a good society.

The Unmaking of Americans: How Multiculturalism Has Undermined America’s Assimilation Ethic

John J. Miller
The Free Press, 1998
303 pp. Hardcover: \$25.00

For John Miller, the greatness of America is the fact that, in the words of G. K. Chesterton, it “is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed,” that creed being the principle that all men are created equal and, as such, endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights. In this way, American citizenship is not dependent on the ties of blood and soil, as in other nations, but on the adherence to the ideal of inalienable rights. Anyone who can accept that ideal is a potential American citizen.

This fact has serious implications for American immigration policies. If Americans are not born but made, the fundamental question is, “How are Americans made?” For an answer, Miller looks back to the beginning of the twentieth century when waves of new immigrants threatened the stability of American society. The solution then was the intentional enculturation and assimilation of immigrants through teaching the responsibilities associated with citizenship. Miller argues that this solution can work today and offers a sensible policy proposal to this end.

—Gregory Dunn



Rev. Robert A. Sirico

Social Security and the Free Society

Social Security has had a profound effect on the way Americans view the government's role in society and on our confidence in the free society's ability to solve difficult social problems. Make no mistake, the care of the aged is a difficult social problem that, in my opinion, cannot be solved through purely market means. To say that it cannot be addressed by means of economic exchange alone, however, is not to imply that public solutions are always preferable to private ones. Once we give the state the power to determine how the generations will relate to each other financially—which is the real issue with Social Security—we lose the ability to conceive of possibilities outside the purview of politics. Such myopia is a disability peculiar to those whose lives are consumed by politics.

A good start toward solving this problem would be to present a clear outline of some of the economic, social, and cultural consequences of Social Security. I offer the following not as a “policy wonk” but as a priest concerned with the moral fabric of our nation and our families.

One economic consequence of our current Social Security program is lower savings. Not only do Social Security taxes reduce how much income people have left over to save, but they also reduce the incentive to save today, based on the prospect of big payoffs down the road. The discipline of thrift does not occur in a vacuum, nor does it occur for purely ethical reasons. People save to overcome uncertainty, and to the extent that the state artificially reduces uncertainty, it reduces the perceived need to save.

A social consequence of Social Security is reduced inter-generational responsibility. It was once well-understood that the middle-aged have a moral responsibility to care for their aging parents, just as parents care for their young children. Such responsibility establishes a crucial social link between the generations, a link essential for continuity of values, traditions, and habits, as well as for estab-

lishing a basic sense of coherence and identity among people. Social Security has gone a long way toward severing such ties, making people feel that they are freed from the responsibility of caring for their parents. Further, it reduces an incentive for couples to have children, since parents no longer see children as a “safety net” for old age. Thus, Social Security devalues our culture's view of the family.

Finally, a cultural consequence of Social Security is the

crowding out of private charity by public welfare—a very old and very serious problem with all state benefits. In brief, why would private associations bother to solve social problems if that is widely understood to be the responsibility of the state? Why should people give generously and sacrificially to charities if they are led to believe that the

needs of the poor are being cared for by the government?

The great tragedy of our age is that we have forgotten how to imagine the practical workings of a free and virtuous society. We have lost faith in our ability to solve difficult social problems on our own and, instead, have transferred our faith to public officials to solve our problems for us. Nowhere is this more true than with our Social Security policies. I realize that having a clearer understanding of the social, economic, and cultural costs of the program will not provide us with a blueprint for a seamless transition from the present system to a private one, but it will take us a very long way toward imagining a clearer path for the future, one more compatible with the American ideal of ordered liberty. *A*

The great tragedy is we have lost faith in our ability to solve difficult social problems on our own and, instead, have transferred our faith to public officials to solve our problems for us.

Fr. Sirico is the co-founder and President of the Acton Institute and a Roman Catholic priest. This essay is adapted from his remarks on Social Security given to the Buchanan Center for Market Processes on July 10, 1998, in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

“The present crisis of authority is only one of a thousand consequences of the general crisis of spirituality in the world at present. Humankind, having lost its respect for a higher authority, has inevitably lost respect for earthly authority as well. Consequently, people also lose respect for their fellow humans and eventually even for themselves.”

—Václav Havel—

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