RELIGION & LIBERTY

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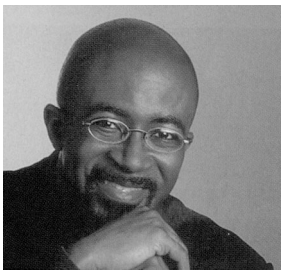
Responsible Individual Liberty and the Moral Maximization of Wealth



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***R&L:** Why was* Black Enterprise *magazine started? How has it grown?*

Edmond: The first issue of *Black Enterprise* magazine came out in August of 1970. It was started by our chairman and publisher Earl G. Graves, Sr. who was a former aide to Senator Robert Kennedy. In the early seventies, Nixon was president, and he introduced this whole Black Capitalism initiative. This resulted in the creation of the Office of Minority Business Development, which we now know as the Minority Business Development Agency, and a whole bunch of other programs that we take for granted now. Mr. Graves' original idea was to create this newsletter that was going to be a kind of resource to African American business people around the country, most of whom wouldn't necessarily know how to negotiate the bureaucracies and the red tape in Washington. This newsletter was supposed to help African American business people get connected with all these new agencies and programs that the Nixon administration was rolling out. When Mr. Graves was trying to promote his idea for a newsletter, somebody said, "Hey, have you sold some advertising? You could make some money off of this." Voila! *Black Enterprise* was born.

***R&L:** What are your circulation numbers and sales numbers today?*

Edmond: Our guaranteed rate base as of this year is half a million, and that's come a long way because when the magazine started out in 1970, it was a controlled circulation publication. I'd be surprised if it was more than 100,000. It went on newsstands, for the first time, in 1980. I'm in my seventeenth year here, but when I came here the circulation was at 230,000. We more than doubled that in the last five years.

***R&L:** Why has it grown so fast in the last five years?*

Financial empowerment has to do with maintaining good stewardship over your resources. In America, even for most African Americans, we really don't know poverty. Our poverty is not one of lack. It's one of poor stewardship.

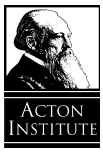
Edmond: I think it was because of a shift in focus. From day one we've covered three core areas: entrepreneurialship and small business, African American professionals and corporate executives, and money management and investing. We started as a resource for African American entrepreneurs. During the '80s, everyone wanted to get the corner office and climb the corporate ladder, so our focus shifted heavily toward African Americans in corporate America. During the '90s, African Americans were finally growing into the idea that they should be investors. Around that time Earl "Butch" Graves, Jr., my boss and Earl Graves' oldest son, was made president of the publishing company. He really challenged us to become a great personal finance magazine and not just a business magazine that happened to cover personal finance. Once we really decided we wanted to make a name for ourselves in our third area of expertise—personal finance, money management, and investing—you no longer needed to be an executive climbing the corporate ladder to think *Black Enterprise* was for you. You could be a recent college graduate. You could be a single mom. You could be a divorcee with four kids. You could be about to plan for your retirement. You could be a blue collar professional. No matter what your life goals are, everyone needs to be able to manage money, plan for retirement, and buy homes. This opened a door to a whole bunch of people who had previously overlooked the magazine.

R&L: *So what is the core message of* Black Enterprise*?*

Edmond: We identify everything we do under the umbrella of wealth building and helping our audience manage multigenerational wealth. In the year 2000, we launched the Black Wealth Initiative, which was our big initiative to get African Americans focused on principles of wealth building. These are the same principles that everyone who is wealthy follows, but we really needed to identify that for all of our audience.

R&L: *You have a "Declaration of Empowerment" that you promote in* Black Enterprise*. What exactly is financial empowerment?*

Edmond: Financial empowerment has to do with maintaining good stewardship over your resources. In America, even for most African Americans, we really don't know poverty. Our poverty is not one of lack. It's one of poor stewardship. We think poverty is, "I can't buy Air Jordans. I can only buy regular Nikes. I can't buy name brand jeans. I can only buy regular jeans." Whereas in other parts of the world, poverty means the shirt that you're wearing is the only article of clothing you own. You're going to get one meal a day if you're fortunate. That's true, absolute poverty. That doesn't mean that in America everything is right, good, and fair, but we have far greater resources, even among disadvantaged African Americans. I was born and raised by a single mom on welfare. I can look back and we didn't have much, but we had enough to work with, and that idea that you have enough to work with is kind of an anchor of our whole wealth build-



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ing initiative. We stress this thing that you can't really build wealth unless you really commit to saving at least five percent of whatever income you get. Spending more than you make, which the vast majority of all Americans do regardless of their ethnicity, is poverty. I don't care what kind of car you have in your garage, how big your house is, what kind of clothes you wear on your back, the definition of wealth is you have something leftover when you're done spending. Financial empowerment results from being wealthy, and that only comes through good financial stewardship.

R&L: *What moral reasons, if any, do you have for promoting financial empowerment?*

Edmond: Our goal is a crusade to close what we call the "black wealth gap." People talk about the digital divide. They talk about the African American gap in education and all

In The Liberal Tradition

St. Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444)

"And the devil answered that having goods that belong to someone else is a sin worse than homicide because it is this sin which sends more people to Hell than any other."

St. Bernardino of Siena, the "Apostle of Italy," was a missionary, reformer, and scholastic economist. He was born of the noble family of Albizeschi in the Tuscan town of Massa Marittima. After taking care of the sick during a great plague in Siena in 1400, he entered the Franciscan order. He became a well-known and popular preacher, traveling throughout Italy on foot. He was offered bishoprics three times during his ministry, which he refused because he would have had to give up what he felt was his primary calling, that of a missionary.

Bernardino was the great systematizer of Scholastic economics after Aquinas, and the first theologian since Jean Peierre de Jean Olivi to write an entire work devoted to economics. This book, titled *On Contracts and Usury*, dealt with the justification of private property, the ethics of trade, the determination of value and price, and the usury question.

His greatest contribution to economics was the fullest discussion and defense of the entrepreneur written at the time. He pointed out that trade, like all other occupations, could be practiced either lawfully or unlawfully; all callings provide occasions for sin. Furthermore, merchants provide many useful services: transporting commodities from surplus to scarce regions; preserving and storing goods to be available when consumers want them; and, as craftsmen and industrial entrepreneurs, transforming raw materials into finished products.

Bernardino further observed that the entrepreneur is endowed by God with a certain and special combination of gifts that enable him to carry out these useful tasks. He identified a rare combination of four entrepreneurial gifts: efficiency, responsibility, hard work, and risk-taking. Very few people are capable of all these virtues. For this reason, Bernardino argued that the entrepreneur properly earns the profits which keep him in business and compensate him for his hardships. These are a legitimate return to the entrepreneur for his labor, expenses, and the risks that he undertakes.

Sources: Economic Thought Before Adam Smith *by Murray N. Rothbard (Edward Elgar, 1995),* Christians for Freedom *by Alejandro A. Chafuen (Ignatius, 1986), and* The Lives of the Saints *by S. Baring-Gould (John Grant, 1914).*

What we're saying is whatever wealth you accumulate is a reflection of your own behavior. You have to understand your behavior. We aren't saying you should always deprive yourself. Our point is you have to decide what your priorities are.

types of different gaps. Our belief is that if we solve the black wealth gap that will give us the resources to deal with some of these other disparities. But individuals must actually change the way they do things. They need to be committed not to buy yet another pair of shoes. They need to pass on the five-dollar Starbucks coffee if they are really struggling to pay debts and buy a home. They have to be willing to do something different with their resources if they want to get something different out of those resources than they have in the past. This would be better for these individuals and for society as a whole.

R&L: *So you're trying to form people's understanding of consumerism so that they can properly manage their freedom to consume?*

Edmond: Yes. What we're saying is whatever wealth you accumulate is a reflection of your own behavior. You have to understand your behavior. We aren't saying you should always deprive yourself. Our point is you have to decide what your priorities are. We try to inform, and then we try to inspire. If you have the information but you're not motivated to use it, you'll be very knowledgeable, but the situation won't change because knowledge unused is worthless. You can be the best-educated person in the world but if you don't use what you've learned, nothing happens.

R&L: *Some critics might say that essentially you are encouraging greed on the part of African Americans and that you're promoting greed as a primary motivator for transactions in the market place. Would you agree with that?*

Edmond: There are people who are motivated by greed. I'm not naïve. But greed doesn't manifest itself in how much money you have. It manifests itself in how you got the money. Did you get the money immorally or illegally? Or did you get it in fair and legal transactions that benefited both parties? Greed also manifests itself in the reason for obtaining wealth. Are you are accumulating wealth just to indulge yourself? That's no good. Not everyone who accumulates wealth uses it just to indulge themselves. Look at Bill Cosby. Look at Oprah Winfrey. They've done all kinds of altruistic things with their money and resources. It's not how much you make and how much you have. Again, it's how those resources are used. Again, it's stewardship. You could be very wealthy but if you're a poor steward with that wealth, you will still lose it. There are plenty of lottery winners who use the money just to buy a big house, fifteen cars, and a bunch of clothes and then go bankrupt. I would say that greed has proven again and again not to be profitable in the long run. The top entrepreneurs that I've talked to over the past seventeen years, including Mr. Graves himself, don't spend all of their time figuring out how they're going to spend their money on themselves. Most successful and wealthy people that I've had the chance to come across measure their wealth by what they can do with that wealth, not by how many zeroes are on their checks, or by how much money they have sitting in the bank, or by how big their house is, or by how big their car is. They may have nice houses and big cars but that's not the point.

R&L: *Do you see a relationship between a virtuous lifestyle and economic prosperity?*

Edmond: Absolutely. If I teach you behaviors that get you what you want, you automatically assign positive attributes to those behaviors. If your dream is to be able to own your own home, and we provide information that actually helps you get there when you thought it wasn't possible, then that almost automatically creates an aura of goodwill. We simply stress that there are certain rules to building wealth. There is a certain way to make money. There is a certain definition to what success is, and it is tied into how you live your life.

R&L: *Do you see a relationship between religion or faith and free enterprise?*

Edmond: I think free enterprise is morally neutral. There are people who use free enterprise to do very evil things. There are people who use free enterprise to do very godly things. But free enterprise in itself has no magical or divine morality. An evil person or institution that does not have a right spirit within it can take free enterprise and do terrible things with it and still be successful by industry standards in terms of how big it is, how much money it makes, and how dominant it is. We can't confuse might with right. At the same time, just because a company or business is successful

doesn't mean it's wrong. Unfortunately, in many African American communities and some African American churches there is this idea that if someone is wealthy, there is something wrong. They get that whole thing confused about the root of all evil. It's not the money that's the root of all evil, but the love of money. It's what a person brings to this morally neutral marketplace that decides whether it's going to be used as a tool or a weapon.

R&L: *In the coming years, what role will African American entrepreneurs play in being national and local leaders? Some have argued that African American entrepreneurs represent a new paradigm in African American leadership. Is this statement accurate?*

Edmond: People who say that don't know what people like John Johnson have been doing. They don't know what Arthur G. Gaston did in his over one hundred years of life. They don't know about all of the African American business owners and business leaders around the country who were and are always kind of the backbone of the African American communities and political movements. We recognize the role that such well known people like Dr. Martin Luther King have had within the African American community, and someone like Dr. King deserves everything he gets in terms of how he is perceived and the tributes he receives. Arthur G. Gaston, who is probably not nearly as well known, was one of the African American entrepreneurs that put Dr. King up in hotels. In fact, the Lorraine Motel where Dr. King was killed was an African American owned hotel. You remember we couldn't stay in white hotels. There has always been this tradition of African American entrepreneurs providing leadership, providing guidance, providing the money that is still the fuel of many grass roots efforts. Somebody has to feed people. Somebody has to put people up in shelter. Somebody has to provide transportation. Somebody has to bail people out of jail. The legacy of African American entrepreneurship didn't start in 1970. *In the Black*, a book we published as part of our book series, indicates that there were even African Americans involved on Wall Street dating back before the Civil War. It's not new that African Americans have played a vital role in leadership in America. What is new, thanks to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, is our ability to enter into mainstream society. Now African American businesses can sell to people other than African Americans. Under segregation, we could only have commerce with ourselves, and we were only twelve percent of the market. Now the largest African American owned businesses don't just sell to African American people. African American entrepreneurs have become more visible because the African American community isn't isolated anymore.

R&L: *Overall, as a Christian, how does your faith really motivate you in your current vocation?*

Edmond: I was called to journalism in the way that people talk about being called to ministry. I believe that we are all called to a purpose. We don't have to be ministers to be called. If you answer that call, you'll never work another day in your life. You'll be doing work. You'll be laboring. You'll be productive, but it won't be burdensome to you. It won't feel like work. I didn't study journalism in college. I wanted to be in art. I never took one journalism course. When I was called, I didn't respond necessarily willingly. My experience was that I was dragged, kicking and screaming, into becoming the editor-in-chief of a college publication that was for African Americans and Latinos at Rutgers where I went to college. The year after I ran that newspaper on campus, even though I had no intention of changing my major, I knew what I was going to do for a living. I view being a journalist and an editor as my calling, and my calling is to get people the information they need and to give them the encouragement to use it, to tell them the truth and to give them honest, truthful information that they can use to enhance their lives. When I got to *Black Enterprise*, I felt as if I had found my ministry, and I consider my work here to be my ministry. Once again, I didn't know this is where I was going to end up. I wasn't interested in business at all before I came here. I was not a business journalist when I came here. Through no planning on my part, I got put in the right place at the right time to do what I needed to do. It'll be seventeen years this coming March. I'm doing just what I need to be doing. I believe in the company. I believe that I'm doing good work. I don't mean good only in terms of my proficiency, but good in terms of being pleasing to God in God's sight. That's extremely helpful when you get frustrated, when you have discouragement, when you face crises in confidence. I don't pretend to have all of the answers in terms of how I get through the day. I was taught how to pray a long time ago, and I never forgot that lesson.

"Is it on the Test? Teaching Christianity and the Humanities in a Secular Environment"[1]

Bruce C. Brasington

Recently, I asked the following on a quiz in introductory American History: "What did Winthrop mean when he said that the Puritans would build a "city on a hill" in New England?" One student replied: "They would build a better city up away from floods and problems." This remarkably literal answer demonstrates the continuing cultural and spiritual decline so many have eloquently critiqued in the United States. The supposedly "value-free" education offered by the state is anything but morally neutral;[2] it excludes values, faith, even figures of speech. The following argues for a counterattack at a point that may surprise many conservatives: the standardized tests increasingly pushed by both state and federal government as measurements (and guarantors) of "accountability" for both teachers and students.

The mess we are in has been long in the making. In the late nineteenth century, with public pre- and post-secondary education barely begun in England and the United States, Richard Simpson could prophesy the following about bureaucratic, state-run, education:

> ...he (the teacher)...attaches himself more and more to the government which awakened his intellectual ambition by its competitive examinations, and which holds the purse on which he chiefly depends: then he begins to regard himself as a member of the class of functionaries—as a government employee...Here, then, is an organisation, wide-spreading, influential, pedantic; a ready tool of government interference...[3]

I admit my discomfort here. Educated by this system and now a teacher in it, I owe my fellow citizens a great debt for their willingness to create and support a public educational system. Yet that system constantly works against the values and objectives I believe are essential. Its heavy hand works tirelessly to control how and what I teach. I am a medieval historian; every year, the liberal arts, above all Christianity and the Humanities, do not figure in its plans. To the state, ideas, unfortunately, have consequences only insofar as they are testable in some supposedly objective fashion.

Modern, state-run education is dedicated to new and better ways to drill, mold, and prepare for the future. That future is, of course, defined by the state, whose enormous, bureaucratic power was already clearly perceived by Simpson:

> Bureaucracy...is essentially revolutionary, because it is logical...In interests and in condition the functionaries form a class apart, whose business is to classify the rest in the way that gives itself the least trouble, and at the same time to multiply its duties towards them so as to have more claim upon them for pay and an excuse to multiply its numbers. It always keeps changing the people along arbitrary lines of an artificial classification, on arithmetical, not on human principles...[4]

A glance at a contemporary illustration of his point, the homepage of the Texas Education Agency, is instructive.[5] Education is "preparing for success"; what that "success" is and how it might be "prepared" will be determined and redetermined by the state's bureaucracy.

Behind this creed stand several assumptions. The first is that public education is aimed at material success. Long before our local community college chose the slogan "give yourself a raise, education pays," it had become a commonplace that education was useful only insofar as it led to economic results. These results are, however, tied to a materialistic agenda, with no sense of stewardship or responsibility. In recent decades, they have been increasingly confined to mastering skills and blocks of information; subjects of transcendent value have been pushed to the margins. What matters has been the production of more and more specialists every year.[6] This technocracy assumes that students should be educated for the purposes of competition, which means continual examination, examination in the most scientific ways possible: planned, consistent, and objective.[7] The humanities and, particularly, the subject of religion, find little place as well.

Since the 1980s, the system's watchword has been "accountability." Education has been reduced in the eyes of the state and its supporters to a commodity for which the producers (teachers) are responsible. Accountability emerged in the jargon of educationists and politicians as early as the 1980s, as Texas had pioneered standardized finishing exams for high school students that would mirror the exams teachers had to take to be accredited. More recently, the federal government's "No Child Left Behind" act of 2001 has added additional power and weight to the establishment.

Now many believe that standardized teaching and testing

will produce the best-educated student. We would expect the educationists and their lobbyists to be enthusiastic; likewise, politicians of all descriptions have no trouble leaping on a bandwagon of reform. The public has also embraced "scientific" teaching and testing, with their ever-diminishing interest in transcendent values. A striking example appears in an article by a middle school teacher who recently wrote in the *Perspectives of the AHA* how parents, not his students, disapproved of his "unconventional" teaching of history and demanded that he stick "to facts."[8] And facts are essential to accountability, for there cannot be ambiguity or value. Finally, many conservatives have also pledged their allegiance to this system, convinced that the only way to counter the secularist stranglehold on public education—embodied by the NEA—is to define and rigorously test "basic knowledge."

As a conservative, Christian scholar, I can appreciate the frustration many feel when confronted with an educational establishment whose agenda has promoted points of view directly contrary to our heritage. But the way to challenge and reclaim that heritage and its meaning for our day is not through the standardized test. For it is exactly what that establishment favors the most as the means to accomplish its objectives. What we must do is fight against those who have determined the "results" of education as being facts and regimentation.

In 1954, Mortimer Brewster Smith warned: "And as the art of pedagogics has developed into the science of education, it has also become a vested interest, supported by a gigantic interlocking bureaucracy..."[9] Consider the enormous growth of that bureaucracy in the intervening fifty years. From the moment a child enters its maze, he is a ward of the state. His or her teacher must be accredited, which necessitates a certification in education that carries as much—indeed more—weight than any degree in a "content" field. These teachers have passed through the gate guarded by the educationists, the gate of iron first forged by Dewey and his pragmatists, on which is stamped: how one learns is more important than what or why.

Learning is then the means to the end of a job in the system. The education faculty trains students interested in teaching to pass the professional test that will allow them to teach. They then teach under the supervision of educational administrators, who also owe their positions to the system. The future of teacher and administrator are thus tied to the authority of the system, and its symbol, the test. And the cycle repeats, repeats without pause for consideration of transcendent issues. For they are not on the test.

We who believe in the enduring value of the humanities face a considerable challenge. What matters to the system is factual information, classification of that information, and clear results. The "bureaucratic revolution" proclaimed by Simpson and—of course—Weber over a century ago has created an inhumane education, one concerned with "outcomes" and their "assessment." There is no time for values or questions that have no clear answers. What we study, what we believe, what we consider vital for education, is not included.

A closer look at scientific testing is essential if we are to begin to figure out how to subvert it with ideas. It is the "tyranny of a construct,"[10] the core assumption that all knowledge worth knowing is already available, can be scientifically classified, and can be tested objectively. The instrument of that tyranny is the multiple-choice question. As one high-school teacher noted, "Normally you would have a child read a book and make inferences...The TAAS test reading passages are not complete reading passages, they are sections. The confines of a multiple-choice test do not allow for alternative thinking."[11] No wonder, then, how, for example, the history of Christianity is treated here in Texas. There is no point in dwelling on any one subject or exploring the subject of faith and values. For the multiple-choice questions they will have to take to be certified, regardless of how well they have done in my classes, stand between them and their future. What is the point of reading Augustine's *Confessions*, discussing the rise of dialectical argumentation in the twelfth century, exploring heretics and their opponents in the later Middle Ages—indeed, kneeling beside Luther as he wrestled with the "righteousness of God"—if the test will never consider such "unempirical" subjects!

We who believe in the enduring value of the humanities face a considerable challenge .... The "bureaucratic revolution" proclaimed by Simpson and ...Weber over a century ago has created an inhumane education, one concerned with "outcomes" and their "assessment." There is no time for values or questions that have no clear answer.

I have no solutions to this problem, only suggestions to provoke, hopefully, further discussion. We should not assume any basic knowledge of Christianity among our students. It is unlikely that they have received any meaningful discussion in their education. I make it clear that our secular environment does not preclude the study of any aspect of human life, including religion. Thus, Christianity is part of my program, and a major one at that. What students encounter, however, is something generally foreign to their experience. Even if they are Christians, there seems to be relatively little emphasis on understanding their faith—let alone its historical dimensions—in modern, American churches. "Christianity" seems, for most, to be a remarkably plastic faith, one based on morality, the avoidance of certain behavior, right thinking, and good, hard work. I relish the moment in my Church History survey when I demonstrate to them that they are, by and large, Pelagians.

We need to find an evangelical zeal in teaching Christianity and the Humanities. I do not mean this in a narrowly sectarian sense; rather, we should make it clear to our students that we will continue to explore values and the arts of the human experience in spite of the testing system they confront. Most of my students utterly detest the testing system that they endured before the university and now face if they are to become teachers themselves. I make it clear that I see our classroom as something like a revolutionary cell. If they are to fight the system, they must become part of it; thus, they have to pass the test. But they must also never, ever forget to go beyond its mechanistic requirements. Values, faith, beauty—all of these must be encountered, despite—or perhaps better put, precisely because—they are not on the test.

We need to find an evangelical zeal in teaching Christianity and the Humanities. I do not mean this in a narrowly sectarian sense; rather, we should make it clear to our students that we will continue to explore values and the arts of the human experience in spite of the testing system they confront.

One approach to raising this "revolutionary" consciousness is to take a diffuse approach. From the beginning of the semester in my classes, I emphasize that I will continually address three themes: economic and social life/institutions/culture and values. I do my best to spread discussion of Christianity throughout the curriculum. Helping students understand how Christianity was not isolated in some "private" sphere but, instead, a part of everyday social, political, cultural life is essential. Sometimes it is as simple a question as "why do Joseph and Mary wear contemporary clothes" in a Renaissance painting. We can also use faith-oriented historical sources in unexpected places. A favorite example for me is using excerpts from Pascal's *Pensées* when discussing the "scientific revolution." That this gifted mathematician was also a deeply religious man often challenges students' comfortable assumption that science and faith are at war; that he also worried about the "empty spaces" the new cosmology was uncovering demonstrates his own personal struggle with doubt, a struggle that more students have than are likely to admit. Pascal is an excellent ally in countering the scientism of the educationists. Others are available to join us in the fray.

An even better approach to teaching Christianity and the Humanities is direct engagement with a classic text such as the *Martyrdom of Felicity and Perpetua*, Augustine's *Confessions* or Luther's *On the Freedom of a Christian Man*. The student must learn context and content in order to grasp the text, and these provide ample opportunities for discussing basic historical and theological issues. Ideally, the text also then engages the student on a personal level and raises questions that cannot be easily answered. I will never forget explicating the passage in the *Confessions* where Augustine wrestles with the death of his friend. I had just gotten out of the hospital and several of my students, as it turned out, had also faced the tragedy of losing a friend. No multiple-choice test or pragmatic curriculum could have comprehended what we discussed that day.

An alternative approach in this "direct" method is to have the students read a more contemporary work that addresses the subject of how religion and the humanities bring meaning to life. Two of my favorite texts in this respect are, not surprisingly to readers of this journal, Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences* and Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*. When Weaver calls for a return to *pietas* in society, I ask students to define the term for themselves. The idea that modern people might have a debt to the past can provoke some interesting reactions. I generally also like to throw in Jaroslav Pelikan's remark that "traditionalism is the dead faith of the living; tradition is the living faith of the dead." Frankl, while not discussing the history of religion, is, nevertheless a powerful exponent of humane, transcen-

dent values. I ask them what sustained him at Dachau and then remind the class that it was certainly nothing he had learned for any test. Frankl's continual declaration that life itself is the test can often provide a good forum for discussing those things the state would never expect them to learn for a test.

In the classic science-fiction movie, *Rollerball*, the world has come under the domination of great corporations which amuse the masses by sponsoring the Rollerball teams. In the year 2018, the corporation and its technology control all. This technology, however, is not only unreliable, but destructive, as Jonathan E., the veteran player, discovers when the keeper of the computer archives remarks "We've just lost the entire thirteenth century. Still nothing much there apart from Dante and a few corrupt popes."[12] This dystopian vision does not seem all that far-fetched to me. A bureaucratized, impersonal educational system dedicated to "outcomes" and increasingly reliant on technology, not frail, unreliable people, has precious little interest in apparently irrelevant subjects such as history, let alone Christianity and the humanities. The "irrelevant" can easily be discarded. The system is dedicated to regimentation and exactitude. Ignorance and irrelevance are its supposed enemies. I take a different view.

Confessing that we cannot know everything or anticipate what we should know in its totality must be our starting point. Only those subjects beyond "objective testing" can teach us that essential humility, that the freedom to think can never be standardized. The government cannot prepare us for progress; we, even those of us who teach in its schools, must teach freely, including—indeed above all—those subjects that promote liberty and inquiry. A multiple-choice test may be rational, but it will not promote the birth and exercise of reason, which come only from the freedom to reflect on all disciplines, above all history and the humanities, without the pressure of a standardized test. If that freedom is sometimes used irresponsibly by teachers, that is still, in my mind, a small price to pay if we can save at least some in a generation trained merely to "pass a test" created to serve the ends of educationists. Surely its recovery in public schools is a vital goal. For from that freedom comes more than "accountability," even "knowledge." It is the first step toward wisdom.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this was presented at the thirteenth annual meeting of the Texas Medieval Association, Baylor University, on 26 September 2003.

2. On which see Ronald H. Nash, "The Myth of a Value-Free Eduation," *Religion and Liberty* 1 (1991), cited at http://www.acton.org/publicat/randl/article.php?id=18 on 29 September 2003.

3. Richard Simpson, "Bureaucracy" in *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, v. 1: Essays in the *History of Liberty*, ed. J. Rufus Fears (Indianapolis 1985) 518–530 at 522–523.

4. Ibid., 528–529.

5. http:www.tea.state.tx.us, accessed on 14 October 2003.

6. Randall Collins, *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification* (New York 1979), chapter 1.

7. Ibid., 30–31.

8. Christopher L. Doyle, "Teach these Boys and Girls Nothing but Facts: History in the Public Schools" *Perspectives* (April 2002) 33–36.

9. Mortimer Brewster Smith, *The Diminished Mind: A Study of Planned Mediocrity in our Public Schools*, (New York 1954) 76–77.

10. A classic phrase coined by E. A. Brown, "The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe," *American Historical Review* 79.4 (1974) 1063–1088, on which see recently my essay "Avoiding the 'Tyranny of a Construct': Structural Considerations Concerning Twelfth Century Canon Law" in *Das Eigene und das Ganze. Zum Individuellen im mittelalterlichen Religiosentum*, ed. G. Melville and M. Schürer (Vita Regularis 16, Münster 2002) 419–438.

11. Quoted in Smith, "Hard Lessons."

12. Cited at http://www.dvdtimes.co.uk/reviews/region1/rollerball.html, accessed on 9 September 2003.

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The Economics and Morality of Caring for the Poor

Antony Davies

Today, social programs account for about 50 percent of the federal budget—including Social Security and Medicare, which comprise the lion's share of social programs (public housing, public schools, unemployment benefits, job training programs, food stamps, etc.). Total spending on social programs in the United States exceeds $1 trillion annually.

That massive social spending has done fabulous things. Americans provide some aid and assistance to people who are poor, but living above the poverty line. Social spending then kicks into full gear for those who are at or below the poverty line. Further, what is defined as "poverty" in the United States is a standard of living that is more than 40 percent higher than the average standard of living of the rest of the world.[1] Social spending in this country provides care for the aged, the infirmed, single parents, orphans, the chronically ill, the chronically poor, the temporarily poor, the unemployed, the underemployed, the uneducated, the undereducated, and even for the overeducated. As a society, we go to great lengths to identify and care for those in need and we are extremely generous in defining "need."

Within the next generation, social spending as we know it will cease to exist. Under current rules, Medicare is estimated to become insolvent by 2020, and Social Security by 2040. Already, Social Security represents an unfunded liability of $11 trillion. As this and the next generation look for viable alternatives to our current social spending, we should consider the moral implications of how we care for the poor.

In the four Gospels, the poor are mentioned on twenty-one separate occasions: four times the poor are mentioned as a fact; six times they are called "blessed" or are singled out as a special group who will receive the Gospel; eleven times, Jesus instructs the listener to give to the poor, or points out someone who has given to the poor, or talks about giving to the poor.

But, at no time, do the Gospels say one should "take" in the name of the poor.

Therein lies an interesting question. Whence comes the holiness of "feeding the poor?" Does it come from the food? Does it come from the poor? Does it come from the rich? I submit that the holiness lies in the communion—the coming together—of rich and poor and that the "feeding" is simply a catalyst for something much bigger. Understand that "food" and "feeding" and "poor" are metaphors for "need" and "aid" and "needy." Anyone who "needs" is poor. And anyone who can provide for the need is "rich." Our pattern of social spending reflects this understanding. Social spending in the United States not only benefits the materially poor. It also benefits the uneducated (via public schools), the sick (via Medicare and veterans hospitals), the aged (via Social Security), the spiritually needy (via tax exemptions for churches), and a host of other social needs (via tax deductions for contributions to nonprofit organizations that, collectively, espouse an entire spectrum of causes).

Whence comes the holiness of "feeding the poor?" Does it come from the food? Does it come from the poor? Does it come from the rich? I submit that the holiness lies in the communion—the coming together—of rich and poor and that the "feeding" is simply a catalyst for something much bigger.

We say that Jesus hung out with "sinners." That's probably not the best translation because he isn't mentioned hanging out with Pharasies and Sadducees (at least not as a group)—and it's those folks he actually calls sinners. Meanwhile, the people with whom he did surround himself—tax collectors and prostitutes being noteworthy for that time—he doesn't call sinners.

Better than saying he hung out with "sinners" one should say that Jesus hung out with the "marginalized"—the folk

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whom society deemed unworthy, the folk who were disenfranchised. Think today of the drug addicts, the drunks, the mentally ill, the fat, the ugly, and the socially awkward. When Jesus talks about loving one's neighbor, what he's talking about is building community—which means bringing in the disenfranchised and recognizing and responding to the divine in them. The church uses the terms "humanize" and "de-humanize." To "humanize" is to enfranchise a person, to recognize Christ in the person. To humanize is to build community.

The economist, always on the lookout for motivations and behaviors, is interested in why more than half of the references to the poor use the word "give" and none of them use the word "take." A reasonable possibility is that the holiness in providing for the poor requires giving—the willful act of re-enfranchising, of building community. Further, the giving is not a one-way relationship in which the rich freely give to the poor. The poor also freely respond to the gift so that the resulting dynamic is not the rich bringing the poor back into community; rather the rich and the poor welcome each other into mutual community via the giving of gifts and the giving of thanks. When Jesus calls on the rich to feed the poor, it's because both of them are hungry. Jesus' "poor" are poor because they lack food. Jesus' "rich" are poor because they lack love.

When we rely on the government to "feed" the poor, we dehumanize the poor by regarding them principally as needs to be met. Rather than encourage the poor to see "gift through the eyes of thanks," mandated social programs teach the poor to see "food through the eyes of entitlement."

When we rely on the government to "feed" the poor, we dehumanize the rich by regarding them principally as revenue sources. Rather than encourage the rich to "give out of love," mandated social programs teach the rich to resent "the government's hand in their wallets."

The Christian economist will tell us that in relying on government to provide for the poor via taxation and social programs, we de-humanize both the rich and the poor by breaking the bond between them that poverty forges.[2] But, when the rich freely give gifts to the poor, and the poor freely give thanks to the rich, and both recognize that both the gifts and the thanks ultimately come from God, then the rich and the poor humanize each other—transforming the bond forged by poverty into a bond maintained by love. This relationship has its model in the Eucharist. The word "Eucharist" means "thanks," and when we come together to celebrate the Eucharistic meal, we are both receiving food and giving thanks, and recognizing that both the food and the thanks that we share ultimately come from God.

As we, as a society, contemplate the great change that is coming in social spending, let us keep in mind that the goal of providing for the poor is inferior to the goal of building community. While governments can feed the poor, only individuals can build community.

Notes

1. In 2003, the U.S. Bureau of the Census defined the poverty level for an individual as an annual income of $9,573 (cf. http://www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/threshld/thresh03.html). Excluding the United States, worldwide per-capita GDP (purchasing power parity) was $6,600 in 2003 (cf. http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook).

2. Putting the moral arguments aside, from a practical standpoint, evidence suggests that reducing the government's share of people's incomes increases charitable giving. Following Reagan's 1981 tax cuts, total private charitable giving rose by sixteen percent more than inflation. Following the 1986 tax cuts, total private charitable giving rose by eight percent more than inflation. Cf. Chao, Elaine, "The Flat Tax: A Charitable Assessment," *Philanthropy*, May/June 1999.

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Exit Truth, Enter Tyranny

Eduardo J. Echeverria

Os Guinness, speaker of international renown, was born in China, educated in England, graduated from Oxford University, and authored several books, one of the most recent being a brief but lucid and powerful meditation on the crisis of truth in our contemporary Western world. The book is entitled *Time for Truth: Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype, & Spin* (Baker Books, 2000). Guinness' central thesis is that "truth matters supremely because in the end, without truth there is no freedom . . . not only for individuals who would live a good life but for free societies that would remain free." Indeed, "truth . . . is freedom," Guinness adds, "and the only way to a free life lies in becoming a person of truth and learning to live in truth." Nowadays the belief in objective truth is dead, argues Guinness. Truth is historically, culturally, or individually relative, all a matter of interpretation and perspective, or so some claim, and truth has nothing to do with the notion of an objective reality that determines the truth or falsity of belief. What is the nature and extent of this crisis of truth in the Western world that has undermined one of its most vital foundations? What are its consequences for us, for Western civilization, especially the United States, and for human freedom?

Time for Truth: Living Free in a World of Lies, Hype, & Spin

Os Guinness

Baker Books 2000
128 pp. Paperback: $10.99

In reply to the first question, Guinness argues that the crisis of truth has caused two companion crises-the crisis of ethics and the crisis of character. For all the scientific and technological advances of the Western world, ethically we have regressed. This regression is not marked simply by the moral gap between knowing the good, but knowingly doing what is bad. That has been going on since the Fall. Also, this crisis is not only marked by the gradual loss of a common, shared understanding of what is right or wrong. Worse, it is the crisis of doubt as to whether there even is a moral right or wrong at all, an objective truth about the moral good, knowable by human reason. This crisis strikes at the very heart of moral responsibility because we now seem to have arrived at the point where no one seems to know whether anyone has done anything wrong. Instead, people are charged with "judgmentalism," which amounts to the view that it is wrong to say that anyone is wrong or holds false beliefs. As Guinness says, "When nothing can be judged except judgment itself—'judgmentalism'—the barriers between the unthinkable, acceptable, and doable collapse entirely."

Regarding the crisis of character, Guinness especially highlights the rise in the modern world of a "culture of image." A person's whole moral identity or character now seems unimportant. Rather, the "striking personality" is all-important, says Guinness, "and the door is opened to the 'makeover era' of spin doctors and plastic surgeons. Image makeovers through lifestyle changes, face lifts, hair implants, creative resumes, and stage-managed confessions are all minted from the same coin." Impression management and the glamour of surfaces are our all-important preoccupations because we all live for effect. In short, with the death of truth and character and with the newly won freedom of self-invention, says Guinness, "we're all actors and spinmeisters now."

Yet, there is more to this crisis of truth. The very foundation of the American experiment that the framers laid has been radically shaken. The framers believed that liberty requires virtue and virtue requires faith. They held that a moral order supports the possibility of free government because they understood well the ethical nature of self-governance. They understood, in Lord Acton's phrase, that freedom is "not the power of doing what we like, but the right of being able to do what we ought." Essentially, they didn't confound authentic liberty, what George Washington called "ordered liberty," and license. As John Paul II has said, "The Founding Fathers of the United States 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'." This ordered freedom is, argued the Founders, endangered when a nation loses its moorings in these moral and religious truths, because it is the shared possession of

these truths upon which the interior self-discipline and governance of a free people rests.

By contrast, for many in the modern world, "there is no need for order, only liberty. Experiment therefore means open-ended experimentation. Nothing is fixed, everything is fluid and free; nothing is given, everything is up for grabs . . . [But] if everything is endlessly open to question and change, then everything is permitted, nothing is forbidden, and literally nothing is unthinkable." Thus, when moral freedom is untethered from truth, freedom degenerates into license, becoming debased. Guinness is right to argue that the greatest threat to human freedom is a relativist view of truth because it sabotages our ability to discern right from wrong, making it more likely that we will abuse our freedom.

Os Guinness defends the practical importance of a high view of truth. This contemporary crisis is not simply of academic interest. "Truth," says Guinness, "because it is our basic human handle on reality, is vital to us all—teenagers as well as teachers, mothers as much as judges, cab drivers and school janitors no less than journalists and university professors." In what sense does truth consist in our basic grasp on reality? Quite simply, if what I believe is true, then what makes it true is that objective reality is the way that the belief says it is; otherwise, the belief is false. And if I believe something that is false, then I have lost my basic grasp on reality, and this has practical consequences.

... truth matters infinitely and ultimately for biblical religion because it is a matter of the trustworthiness of God himself. The biblical view of things frees us from the lack of confidence in the truth-attaining powers of human beings ....

For example, you may know someone who believes that we live in a world without God and without objective meaning. Perhaps he is a naturalist, believing that God doesn't exist, nature is all there is, basically just matter-in-motion, indeed the entire universe, man included, is the product of this matter plus time plus chance. But if man is the chance product of matter-in-motion, then his moral aspirations, his aspirations for significance, communication, love, beauty, truth, righteousness, mercy, and justice make no sense in this ultimately impersonal and indifferent universe. "For those who find themselves without faith in God and who conclude that the world they desire does not fit with the world they discover," says Guinness, "life is fundamentally deaf to their aspirations. And in fact, it is literally absurd." In other words, we are a queer entity in this world. Francis Schaeffer, Guinness' mentor, put it this way, "By chance, man has become a being with aspirations, including moral motions for which there is no ultimate fulfillment in the universe as it is . . . Here is the ultimate cosmic alienation, the dilemma of our generation."

Some have sought to avoid this dilemma by claiming that whatever meaning things have, including people, is up to us to find it—implying that we determine what is significant, either by choice, or perhaps just by feeling that way. On this view man can define reality for himself. Rather than resolve the dilemma of cosmic alienation, however, this view has brought anguish, a boundless bewilderment, as human beings individually confront the enigma of their personal destiny. Thrown back upon himself, he experiences ethical despair, indeed, a spiritual sickness, which is an awful loneliness because there is no final purpose to his existence. This is the consequence of the doctrine that the self is the measure of all things. "If man is the measure of all things," Giussani adds, "he is alone, like some friendless god."

Guinness says that the alternative to this meaningless, indeed, literally absurd, view of the universe is to hold that "truth, like meaning as a whole, is not for us to create but for us to discover." This is a high view of objective, nonrelativist truth, and Guinness offers several arguments in its support.

The first set of two arguments is addressed to the adherents of biblical religion—traditional Jews and Christians who hold assumptions about truth but are careless or reluctant to defend them. In the first place, the orthodox Christian, limiting myself to him, is intellectually committed to the truth of certain beliefs, and the reason why he believes them is because they are true. Of course his believing them is not what makes them true. Says Guinness, "We can say that a . . . belief is true if what it is about is as it is presented in the statement. Belief in something doesn't make it true; only truth makes it true." In other words, a belief is true if and only if objective reality is the way that the belief says it is; otherwise, the belief is false. Without this understanding of what it means to believe the Christian cannot answer the fundamental objection that faith in God is untrue, irrational, and illegitimate. "With such a rock-like view of truth, the Christian faith is not true because it works; it works because it is true. It is not true because we experience it; we experience it—deeply and gloriously—because it is true. It is not simply 'true for us'; it is true for any who seek in order to find, because truth is true even if nobody believes it and

falsehood is false even if everybody believes it."

In the second place, truth matters infinitely and ultimately for biblical religion because it is a matter of the trustworthiness of God himself. The biblical view of things frees us from the lack of confidence in the truth-attaining powers of human beings because "we know that our intellectual powers and our very disposition as truth-seekers are underwritten by the truthfulness of the Creator of the universe." Our truth-seeking desire fits the world and life is not fundamentally deaf to its aspiration all because "truth is that which is ultimately, finally, and absolutely real, or the 'way it is', and therefore is utterly trustworthy and dependable, [is] grounded and anchored in God's own reality and truthfulness."

There is also a whole group of people who do not embrace biblical religion with its assumptions about truth. Guinness has arguments showing the importance of a high view of truth for them too.

Some of these people claim that agnosticism and skeptical relativism about truth best protects human freedom. If we can't be sure of the truth or if truth is culturally, socially, and individually relative, nothing but a matter of interpretation and perspective, then everyone's freedom is best protected from manipulation, coercion, and deception. The very opposite is true, according to Guinness. In a world without truth in the objective sense, might makes right. Without transcendent truth, which provides a foundation for human rights and basic freedoms, we actually open the door to totalitarianism, and man is vulnerable to the violence of manipulation, coercion, and deception. In short, argues Guinness, the dignity of the human person cannot be inviolable unless it is objectively grounded in truth about human nature.

Our culture is in a severe crisis of truth. This is at root a rejection of an objective vision of the truth. But this view ultimately clashes with reality, because it cannot be lived consistently. Consider the charge of judgmentalism, which amounts to the view that it is wrong to say that anyone is wrong. A moment's reflection can show that this idea is not livable. Suppose I hold the belief that racism is wrong. To hold this to be true implies also believing that its denial is false. This is no more than simple logic, because this proposition cannot be both truth and false. I think the absurdity of denying this point becomes clearer by considering the following. Suppose I said, "I think it's wrong to be a racist (torture children, own slaves, beat my wife, etc.), but then went on to say, "but each of us should decide for himself as to whether he agrees, according to his own personal morality, because I can't force my personal view on others." The presupposition here is that each individual sets the standards of right and wrong for himself, and hence he is obliged to be true only to the standard that he has set for himself.

If this view made sense, we should have to cease making moral judgments. Indeed, living consistently with this view would mean to cease showing moral outrage about the smallest wrongdoings like being cheated at the grocers to the most massive evils like state-sanctioned racism, genocide, torture, religious persecution, forced abortions, and so forth. Of course we would instinctively retreat from such a conclusion, and thus from the logic of our presupposition that morality is a subjective matter. Says Guinness, "When heads collide with the wall they will have reached the limits of their position and will be open to reconsider. In this sense, reality is what we run into when we are wrong, for when we are right, we don't run into it." Thus, reality forces us to reconsider the truth claim that there are moral absolutes founded in the objective order of truth, because denying this removes the basis for making moral judgments about things that are objectively and universally good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust. We must bring the standard of absolute truth back into the picture.

Finally, Guinness points out that human beings are by nature *truth-seekers*, but they are also *truth-twisters*. Human reason as it actually functions in a fallen state causes this duplicity within us. At the root of our truth-twisting nature is the desire to be autonomous; we seek to be the sole arbiter of life and truth. The human mind wants to set itself up as the measure of truth. Guinness' biblical solution to our truth-twisting nature is the same as that of John Paul II's, who writes: "The coming of Christ [is] the saving event that redeemed reason from its weakness, setting it free from the shackles in which it had imprisoned itself." God wants to restore our human nature, and thus our human reason, to its proper functioning state. Thus, we are called to the strenuous discipline of "living in the light that is God." This involves two things: first, "living in truth as 'living in the light' is the secret of the deepest integrity that seeks to overcome the personal distortions in our dealings with the truth"; and second, "we face the challenge of practicing the truth before God. To become true we must live bathed in the full floodlight of the one Who is the Light of the world—Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life." Or as the Fathers of Vatican II incisively stated: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light" (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22). Guinness' lucid and compelling meditation on the contemporary crisis of truth should help us to live a transformed life in Christ.

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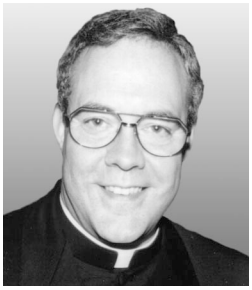
The Culture of Life, The Culture of the Market

Rev. Robert A. Sirico



What devalues human life? Our times are undoubtedly characterized by a lack of respect for the dignity of the human person. Many who proclaim the culture of life fault the free market for devaluing human life. It is thought that the market reduces people to mere economic actors, valued only for their earning potential or their productive capacity. However, this misunderstanding of the market economy hinders our allies against the forces that degrade the human person. Let us reflect on the interaction, tension, and ultimate reconciliation of the culture of the market and the culture of life more deeply.

I want to be clear about definitions. The culture of life is the recognition that this life is a temporary stage of our eternal existence and that life itself is a gift entrusted to us by our Maker that should be preserved with the utmost responsibility and care. Life carries a sacred value from its inception to its end, and every human being has the right to have his life respected to the fullest extent possible. The market is not a mere abstraction of economic production and distribution, but, rather, people themselves—people who save and invest, keep contracts and watch markets, take risks and make dreams. In their economic lives as producers and consumers, they are cooperating in a vast network of exchange in which people half a world away buy their products and make products for them.

The market strengthens the culture of life and its moral order in three important ways. First, the market promotes peace among people. From the simplest to the most complex market exchanges, they all have one thing in common: people trading voluntarily with each other to their mutual self-satisfaction. Second, the market offers people the best opportunities to employ their creative gifts and become full participants in society, thus obeying God's command to work and create. In contrast, legal barriers and perverse incentives erected by government prevent people from entering the workforce and keep many from perfecting their abilities and becoming a vital part of society's division of labor. Third, the free market promotes the material betterment of humanity. For example, it has brought modern medicine, electricity, running water, and, now, information access to an ever-broadening segment of the world population.

The market, imbued with freedom and virtue, is a necessary ally for a social order that respects human dignity.

It is unfortunate and highly dangerous that many of the market's most eloquent advocates often overlook the moral foundations of freedom. To those who might be tempted to think that society can revolve around the bank statement, the culture of life delivers a message: Base motives can also exist within a market economy. There are values higher than profit and market success, among which is the preeminent value of life itself. What we propose, then, is a free economy that puts the human person at the center of economic actions because the human person is the source of all economic initiative. The market, imbued with freedom and virtue, is a necessary ally for a social order that respects human dignity.

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Among a people generally corrupt liberty
cannot long exist.

—Edmund Burke—