

ACTONINSTITUTE

Religion & Liberty

Spring 2012 | Volume 22 | Number 2

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Defending Religious Liberty

An Interview with Eric Metaxas

A Journal of Religion, Economics, and Culture

Editor's Note



Eric Metaxas has raised the profile of two significant figures in the history of Christianity and the history of freedom in the West. His biographies of William Wilberforce and Dietrich Bonhoeffer garnered international attention and helped to remind people of the importance of living out faith in society. Metaxas, who was the keynote speaker at this year's national prayer breakfast, challenged the president on the life issue asking, "Whom do we say is not fully human today?"

In this cover story, Metaxas focuses on religious liberty, which undoubtedly faces serious threat today. Speaking on the HHS mandate he declares, "The idea that a canny and powerful government

almost instinctively looks to pick off minorities is frightening." People are listening to his words. That is essential because, as Metaxas says, "our existence hangs in the balance," and in his view, "that is not overstating the case." Metaxas will be the keynote speaker at Acton's annual dinner in October.

Rev. Johannes L. Jacobse reviews an exceptional book by Leon Aron titled *Roads to the Temple: Truth, Memory, Ideas, and Ideals in the Making of the Russian Revolution, 1987-1991*. A standard view by many in the Western World is that outside political and military pressure fatally weakened the Soviet Union, leading to the downfall of the communist system. Aron has written a masterful account that focuses rather on a reawakening of moral clarity and the courage of Russians to once again speak the truth.

Jonathan Witt offers his thoughts on *The New York Times* bestseller *Abundance: The Future is Better Than You Think*. Rev. Gregory Jensen reviews *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* by Ross Douthat. It's no surprise to many that Christianity

in America faces a crisis and deeper thought and theological orthodoxy is needed. This book fully addresses the problems of Christianity in America.

The "In the Liberal Tradition" figure for this issue is Charles W. Colson. Colson was a longtime friend of the Acton Institute and collaborator with Rev. Robert Sirico. Colson's notoriety skyrocketed for being the first Nixon administration official incarcerated because of the Watergate cover up. He was once maligned by the media as a person "incapable of humanitarian thought." Colson, who experienced a spiritual transformation, went on to launch Prison Fellowship ministries in 1976. It is the largest ministry to prisoners in the world today and has a reach in over 100 countries.

He was a significant cultural commentator and was instrumental in bringing evangelicals and Catholics together for the renewal of society. Colson said it best when he called his legacy simply "the living monuments of God's grace."

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Cover: Eric Metaxas

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Defending Religious Liberty

An Interview with Eric Metaxas

Eric Metaxas is a popular author and speaker. He is the author of the New York Times #1 bestseller, Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy, which was named "Book of the Year" by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Bonhoeffer also won the 2011 John C. Pollock Award for Biography awarded by Beeson Divinity School and a 2011 Christopher Award in the Non-fiction category. Metaxas was the keynote speaker at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington DC this year. He is also the author of Amazing Grace: William Wilberforce and the Heroic Campaign to End Slavery and Everything You Always Wanted to Know About God among others. Metaxas, who delivered one of the evening talks at Acton University 2012, recently spoke with Religion & Liberty's managing editor Ray Nothstine

R&L: *What interested you in Dietrich Bonhoeffer and William Wilberforce?*

Eric Metaxas: In the summer of 1988, I came to faith dramatically. That summer, the man who led me to Christ gave me a copy of *The Cost of Discipleship* by Bonhoeffer and said, "Have you ever heard of this guy?" He told me how he was a German pastor and theologian and got involved in the plot to kill Hitler.

I said, "What?" He told me because of his faith in Jesus, Bonhoeffer stood up for the Jews, and was killed in a concentration camp. I was stunned at this story. Because of his vibrant Christian faith, he stood against the Nazis. I was annoyed I had never heard it before. My mom is German

and grew up in Germany during this time. I was amazed to hear that a German had done the right thing, because I have always been perplexed about what happened in Germany.

All my mom's family were there and lived through this dark time. And so, somehow Bonhoeffer answered some of those questions, that there were people doing the right thing. But why hadn't I heard those stories?

Many years later, somebody asked me if I would like to write a biography of William Wilberforce. I wrote the biography of Wilberforce and then people kept asking whom I would like to write about next. I thought if I were to write one other biography, because I'm not interested in writing biographies, but if I were to write one other, I

think it would have to be about Bonhoeffer. Because in the same way that Wilberforce, because of his faith in Jesus, stood up for the slaves of Africa, Bonhoeffer stood up for the Jews of Europe. Both stories are picture of Christian heroism and

courage that few people knew about.

You believe Bonhoeffer was shaped by a natural law ethic. Why is that important today?

Bonhoeffer was asking that question as a Lutheran minister and he saw in the Catholic natural law tradition that there was something from which he could draw upon. He was intellectually confident enough and open minded enough to explore that. And that was, to some extent, intellectually courageous for him to do. He was primarily concerned with what is true. And if the Catholics have

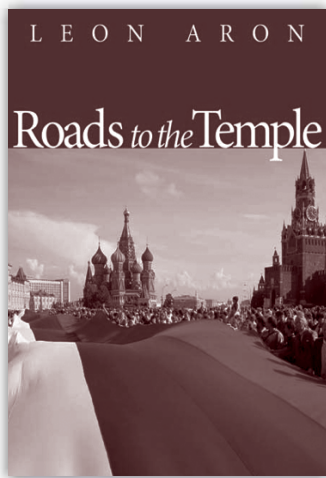


William Wilberforce by John Rising, 1790.

something that could have helped him figure it out, then of course he wanted to explore that. That is what makes him delightful as a thinker.

Why is Christianity so central to our freedoms today?

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Roads to the Temple: Truth, Memory, Ideas, and Ideals in the Making of the Russian Revolution

Review by Rev. Johannes L. Jacobse

Review of Leon Aron's *Roads to the Temple: Truth, Memory, Ideas, and Ideals in the Making of the Russian Revolution, 1987-1991* (ISI, June 2012) ISBN: 978-0300118445. Hardcover, 496 pages; \$40.00.

Review: The Second Russian Revolution (1987-1991)

"There are different ways to understand how revolutions work," writes Leon Aron in his new book *Roads to the Temple: Truth, Memory, Ideas, and the Ideals in the Making of the Russian Revolution, 1987-1991* that chronicles the collapse of Soviet Communism during Glasnost from 1987-1991. The most dominant is structuralism, an approach that draws from Marxist thought and sees the state as the central actor in social revolutions. In the structuralist view, revolutions are not made—they happen.

Aron explains that structuralism has some merit because of its chronological linearity. It can reveal the events that lead from point A to B to C; an important function because the historian's first step is to grasp what actually happened. But structuralism also has a grave flaw: the materialist assumptions ("objective factors") informing it are deaf to the "enormously subversive influence of ideas."

Structuralism, specifically, is subservient to Marxist dogma, particularly the relegation of the ideas into the category of idealism (non-being). It defines man as a passive actor in the fixed and impersonal

currents that drive history that renders the historian blind to man's moral character, particularly constituents such as "truth, memory, ideas, and ideals" that shape purpose and meaning and by them drive events.

Glasnost was a social revolution of the first order, driven by these moral constituents, Aron writes. It arose not by the will of the Soviet state but because the state was already weakened. Aron quotes Tocqueville who first described how

"Glasnost quickly took the shape of a national repentance in the full sense of that term."

weakened states till the soil that leads to their dissolution:

It is not always that when things go from bad to worse that revolutions break out. On the contrary, it oftener happens that when a people ... suddenly finds the government relaxing its pressures ... Thus the most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seems to mend its ways ... Patiently endured for so long as it seemed beyond redress, a grievance appears to become so intolerable once the possibility of removing it crosses men's minds.

Glasnost arose out of Perestroika, the effort to revive the moribund Russian economy by introducing market-based reforms and foster an increasing openness to the West. Internal progress was stymied by the moral rot that pervaded all levels of Russian society (alcoholism, cronyism, abortion, waste, fraud, despair, censorship, food shortages, murders, exiles). Perestroika could not succeed until the rot was first confronted.

Dry Tinder

Although Glasnost officially began in 1987, an event one year earlier lit the fuse. Unlike earlier Soviet rulers, Mikhail Gorbachev had a visceral dislike of the brutal terror that forced the compliance of Russian subjects to centralized economic planning. He chose instead to relax the restraints of the state on its subjects. After heated debate in the Politburo, the anti-Stalinist film *Pokoyanie* or *Repentance* was released and the floodgates opened. Russians were about to breathe the air denied them since Lenin first seized power.

Glasnost quickly took the shape of a national repentance in the full sense of that term. Censorship disappeared, not by state decree (the leadership had originally hoped to limit debate) but because millions of Russians sensed the shackles being broken and joined in to expunge the lies that held the terror state in place.

The discussions took place in journals

and newspapers, on television, in homes and marketplaces. A flood of written material was produced, much of which Aron studied to shape his historical narrative, selecting that which that illustrated with great clarity the radical nature of this second revolution.

The recovery of the past is laborious and often painful because the loss of historical memory creates the loss of individual identity. The *New Man of the Collective*, that febrile illusion of materialists everywhere – be it Jacobin, Soviet, Nazi or any other incarnation – was the first lie that needed to be named and repudiated.

The loss of historical memory created what Aron calls the “deafened zone,” a place in the national consciousness that contained no memories, that was enforced by an exhaustive policy of censorship that not only concealed facts but by the “hourly construction and mainte-

nance of a ‘parallel,’ ‘brilliant’” reality created a history that never existed. Orwell’s 1984, *Huxley’s Brave New World*, and Grossman’s *Life and Fate* were published for the first time during Glasnost and did much to define what the “deafened zone” actually was.

One develops moral self-awareness first by hearing truth and then seeing and acting on it. Once the “brilliant” history was revealed as the continuous cascade of lies that it was, the voices of those muted by the cacophony of the state-controlled media began to be heard, faintly at first but louder as more witnesses stepped forward. First up were those who recalled seeing friends and relatives of the millions murdered by the barbarous regime.

It is difficult to grasp the scope of Soviet brutality. The best we can do is examine the individual stories and multiply them again and again until the limits of imagination are reached. The suffering is too great for any one person to perceive although people who value truth will see that the ideas driving the regime were conceived in the fetid bowels of hell. Nothing else explains such abject depravity.

Myths Shattered

This was only the beginning. “Any lasting polity espouses and propagates essential beliefs by which it lives,” writes Aron, and the Soviet Union “spawned a powerful mythology that legitimized political, economic, and social arrangements.” Sustained daily by constant propaganda and censorship and the restriction on travel except for the elites, it imposed severe penalties on any new version of the Soviet past and present. Yet, between 1987 and 1989, “virtually every constituent myth of this tale was shattered by uncensored truths.”

Legitimizing myths were becoming “unraveled” -- a very dangerous development for the leadership because delegitimizing of the regime was a direct challenge to its power. Aron chronicles in considerable

detail the unraveling that, in historical terms, happened in the blink of an eye. Here too Russian intellectuals began to weigh in. Economists pored over the “official” economic reports and pointed out they were riddled with lies; military analysts revealed the war in Afghanistan was a defeat (Russians believed they won) and unearthed the truth behind the Great Patriotic War, particularly Stalin’s enthrallment with Hitler and the

“ The Soviet Man forgot how to work, was driven by envy, sloth, lying, and stealing, driven to drink, both humiliated and humiliator.”

millions fed as fodder to the Nazi war machine because of his inept leadership.

Aron describes too the damage that forced collectivization imposes on the soul. Glasnost enabled the Russian to see that *Homo Sovieticus* was both a “symbol of a spiritual crisis and its epitome.” The *Soviet Man* forgot how to work, was driven by envy, sloth, lying, and stealing, driven to drink, both humiliated and humiliator. The virtue necessary for stability and progress was methodically and mercilessly ground out of almost everyone. Despair left the soul and the nation bare.

Moral crises are healed by repentance. In Greek, repentance (metanoia) means “a turning or change of the mind;” literally a new way of seeing. Although Aron does not mention it, the call to repentance was made years earlier. In 1975, *From Under the Rubble*, a book by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and six other dissidents (all living in Russia at the time) was published that outlined with uncanny accuracy the steps necessary



Stone at historic Alexander Nevsky Monastery that houses graves of Russia’s cultural giants.

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for the Russian restoration.

Glasnost, like every modern revolution, “was about reclaiming and extending human dignity ...” At first it imposed on the Russian leadership a new definition of socialism (Gorbachev sought to meld the newfound freedom with socialist ideas) and foreign affairs. As time went on however, it became increasingly clear that the great collectivist experiment needed to be scrapped altogether. New ideas emerged that proclaimed that the quality of domestic and foreign policy were indissolubly dependent on the moral health of the citizenry. Universal values were to be recovered and implemented. A new democracy had to be crafted that was “based on deep-rooted morality



The Transfiguration Cathedral in Russia.

and conscience.”

Aron’s masterful work may also contain a prophetic warning. Russia repudiated the materialist ideas that eroded the barriers against the tyranny while the nations of the West are embracing them. If Russia’s history proves moral renewal breaks the shackles of darkness, then our moral corruption may be blinding us to an enslavement coming our way.

Double-Edged Sword: *The Power of the Word*

Hebrews 7:25

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

The entire life, death, and resurrection of Christ was an intercessory act for humanity. It continues to this day, where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. All of eternity is encompassed by the priestly act of His intercession. “The expression ‘at the right hand’ must therefore be understood in this sense: to exist in a state of perfect blessedness, where there is justice, peace and joy,” said Augustine. The great joy is that his intercessory work is an effectual and permanent work in saving us because Christ is the once and final sacrifice. The Lord in the 110th Psalm promised us a priest forever. He is not a priest with imperfections nor does his priestly office ever end. He always has the will and ear of the Father.

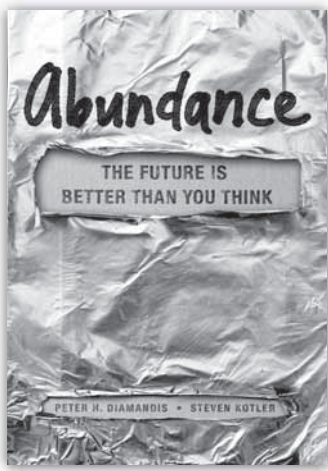
It is reassuring that Christ joined our flesh to be our advocate. That same flesh, our big brother, reigns at the highest, most exalted point in the heavens. He is not just a mere observer of our trials and failings but he bore that all up in Himself because of Holy Divine Love. He intercedes for us because he is “touched with the feelings of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15)

The entire character and ministry of Christ is interceding for us on our behalf. It is a blessed assurance during our trials, sin, and shame. From all of eternity he saw the wickedness of humanity but His love triumphed over all evil.

How would we then feel if our salvation depended on us? What If we had to toil hour by hour to make ourselves right and acceptable before our Father? It is much more reassuring to leave the work to Christ and put our trust in Him. The good news is that our salvation does not depend on our work and our holiness but His work and His holiness.

Simply put, His deepest desire is to advocate for us. Hanging on the cross with torn and broken flesh, suffering immensely, still he advocated for those who sent our Savior there and persecuted Him. He advocated and remembered the dying thief who hung beside Him (Luke 23:34).

Our world today is plagued with fear, loneliness, and despair. Economic times are discouraging to say the least. Our national leaders have failed us. Often the people closest to us fail us. However, when we look up to the King of Kings, we can always see the true covenant of love, devotion, and intercession.



O Brave New Abundance!

Review by Jonathan Witt

Review of Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler's *Abundance: The Future is Better than You Think*. (ISI, February 2012) ISBN: 978-1451614213. Hardcover, 400 pages; \$26.99.

Technological innovation can grow the pie, but it can't love you

We have come through the Occupy Wall Street movement's long winter of discontent, its iconic protestor clutching an iPhone in one hand, an "Eat the Rich" sign in the other, and not a single one of his comrades willing to pose the simple question: *Who would create the next good thing if the Steve Jobses of the world have all been gobbled up?* So it was refreshing to see an unapologetic exercise in grow-the-pie optimism blossoming onto the *New York Times* bestseller list this year—*Abundance: The Future is Better than You Think*.

In the book, Peter Diamandis, a high tech innovator, and his co-author Steven Kotler limn a vision of creative civilizational fer-

"The book, however, will not heal another illness of our age, for the book is itself infected with it."

ment that could extend America's standard of living to a planet of 9 billion people.

Building on Diamandis' trailblazing work

with the Ray Kurzweil-inspired Singularity University, the book explores a host of reasons to be optimistic about everything from clean water and food supplies to energy, education, and healthcare, provided we encourage rather than suffocate the creative capacity of our bottom-of-the-pyramid entrepreneurial leaders.

The book either accepts, or strategically chooses not to counter, the view that human-induced global warming is a grave danger. What's refreshing here is the authors' emphasis on for-profit, market-driven innovators for supplying affordable alternative energy in the future.

As little as four months ago, I was inclined to view solar energy as a permanently niche market held up, at least in the United States and Europe, almost purely by petroleum haters and government subsidies. After visiting an indigenous solar energy company in Haiti in January, I came to realize what now seems obvious: In sunny regions that lack an established power grid, solar power is already quite competitive. After reading *Abundance* and learning about the impressive efficiency gains in solar energy technology over the past several years, I am even more optimistic about its future.

I now suspect that these developing regions are where solar power will go to mature into an energy source that will successfully go head-to-head in the developed world with oil, coal, and nuclear power, not replacing them but expanding

into a much larger segment of the global energy market—provided solar entrepreneurs are able to compete unhindered from either suffocating regulation or infantilizing government funding.

At the heart of *Abundance* is a faith in for-profit entrepreneurs to go boldly where no government program has gone before so cheaply, cleverly, or effectively. For Diamandis, this isn't just a pretty theory. As he describes in an engrossing chapter on DIY innovation, he lived it through his now famous Ansari X Prize contest, which succeeded in fast-forwarding Western civilization to the threshold of private-enterprise space flight.

With a success like that, it isn't surprising that Diamandis is similarly upbeat about the prospects of solving a variety of developing-world resource problems through the wealth-generating power of private enterprise. Perhaps the book's infectious optimism and non-partisan tone can penetrate and cure the virus of fixed-pie economic thinking that has crippled the thinking of so many on the left.

The book, however, will not heal another illness of our age, for the book is itself infected with it. Rather than label the malady at the outset, allow me to illustrate it from a short passage in the book's chapter on health care. The authors are looking at the problem of an aging population and exploring how emerging technologies could help older people extend their period of independent living. So far, so good. But

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in the next moment, we move from a utopian vision to something out of Aldous Huxley, and what's most disturbing is that the authors don't even seem to register the shift.

One minute they're talking about specialized devices to make cataract removal more affordable; the next they're quoting with approval Dr. Dan Barry's comments about a brave new world of mechanical in-home nurses:

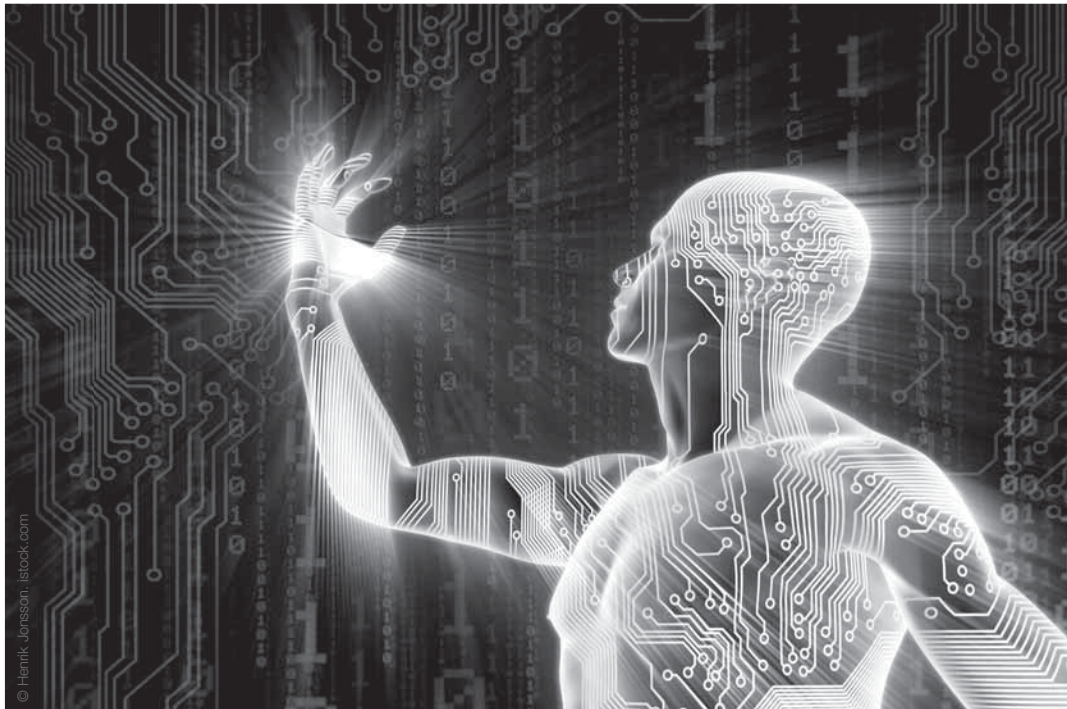
"These robots will extend the time they [seniors] are able to live independently by providing emotional support, social interaction, and assisting them with the basic functional tasks like answering the door, helping them if they fall, or assisting them in the bathroom. They will be willing to listen to the same story 25 times and respond appropriately every time. And for some with sexual dysfunction or need, the robots will also play a huge role."

The technology for all of this will arrive only gradually, Barry notes, but within 25 years "we'll be delivering robotic companions that will have real, nuanced conversations, making them able to serve as your friend, your nurse, perhaps even your psychologist." Diamandis and Kotler conclude by arguing that as prices for the requisite technology drop, the economics of it will grow irresistible: "we can either spend (at today's costs) trillions of dollars on nursing

homes or we can, as Barry suggests, let robots do the work."

Wow, this gives a whole new meaning to the name "Nurse Ratched." In Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Nurse Ratched is a human who seems to have the emotional range of a sadistic robot. What *Abundance* celebrates, instead, is the possibility of a robotic Nurse Ratched with the seeming emotional range of a Mary Poppins.

In all fairness to Diamandis and Kotler,



the flesh-and-blood healthcare option for many old people in the future is likely to be pretty grim and loveless—a warehouse full of enfeebled octogenarians tended by a skeleton crew of orderlies stretched too thin to serve as anything more than a harried life-support system. The authors are suggesting a possible alternative to that grim possibility.

At the same time, Diamandis and Kotler didn't write a book called *Faking Abundance: How a Billion Old People Can Spend their Last Years Pretending Another Person Really Gives a Rip*. They wrote a book called *Abundance*. And I plead

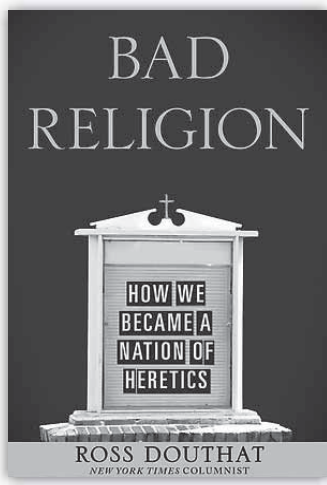
with any techno-utopian who will listen: The flatland of philosophical materialism is not the whole of reality any more than running out the clock while being cared for by a soulless droid is human flourishing.

This is a realization for today as much as it is for tomorrow, because this process of substituting the synthetic relationship for authentic human relationship is already well under way. According to a Nielsen study, the average American watches five hours of television a day, with more and

more of them consuming their favorite niche TV shows and video games alone. The son is in one room, the daughter in another, the grandparent in still another, and the latter probably many miles away. This is not abundance. If it were, recent headlines would

not be warning, "High Internet Use Linked to Depression."

For the old as well as the young, for the present as well as the future, abundance means more than the glow and hum of the latest technological marvel or the bountiful flow of information along a fiber optic river. Abundance also means stepping out of the cave, finding the beautiful faces of kith and kin new and old, all of them made in the image of God, and being able to say without irony or cynicism, "O brave new world, that has such people in it!"



Asceticism and Bad American Religion

Review by Rev. Gregory Jensen

Review of Ross Douthat's *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics* (ISI, April 2012) ISBN: 978-1439178300. Hardcover, 352 pages; \$26.00.

Among other things, Ross Douthat argues in his new book, *Bad Religion: How We Became a Nation of Heretics*, that Americans have become a "nation of narcissists." He sees the evidence for this in our becoming a "nation of gamblers and speculators, gluttons and gym obsessives, pornographers and Ponzi schemers, in which household debt rises alongside public debt, and bankers and pensioners and automakers and unions all compete to empty the public trough" (p. 25).

Looking around, it is hard to dispute this. The free market is no longer really and truly free but distorted by crony capitalists who collude with government regulators to further their advantages at the expense of their neighbors. Likewise under the guidance of a materialistic anthropology that merely seeks to throw money at the tragedy of human suffering, our social safety net is no longer safe or social for the poorest and most vulnerable among us.

And yet, while I appreciate his analysis, I'm not sure I agree with Douthat that we have become a nation of narcissists. It isn't that I don't agree that narcissism is a problem in America, it is, but it is not an American problem as such. Much less is it unique to our era.

Self-absorption - one of my professors in graduate school referred to it as self-aggrandizement, is constant temptation in our fallen state. The central struggle of our life in both its personal and social dimensions is precisely to resist the lure of our self-centered and self-aggrandizing desires.

The danger of misdirected desire is a central theme in the Orthodox Church's ascetical and mystical tradition. For example, in the Canon of St Andrew the Great that the Church sings during Lent, we hear:

"Be watchful, O my soul, lest while searching for/thine animal desires thou shouldst overlook the Kingdom of Christ" (Ode 7).

We hear variations of this theme throughout not only the Eastern Church's celebration of Lent but in the classical spiritual writings in both the Christian East and West. This life of self-watchfulness and struggle against my own "uncontrolled desires" (Ode 8) which "have disfigured the beauty of my mind" (Ode 2) is at the heart of Gospel's true therapeutic method, a method that stands in marked contrast to the merely palliative goals of the Moral Therapeutic Deism (MTD) that Douthat and others have so ably discussed.

In Christ we have true and lasting healing because we are restored to a life of communion with God and, as St August-

tine reminds us, in God to a wise and true love for each other. Just as MTD is a distorted image of what we are offered in Jesus Christ, narcissism is a distortion

"Just as MTD is a distorted image of what we are offered in Jesus Christ, narcissism is a distortion of that virtuous self-love that, as St Bernard of Clairvaux says, is possible for us because we have first been loved by God."

of that virtuous self-love that, as St Bernard of Clairvaux says, is possible for us because we have first been loved by God. Whether of neighbor or of self, love is only truly and fully itself when it is rooted in obedience to God.

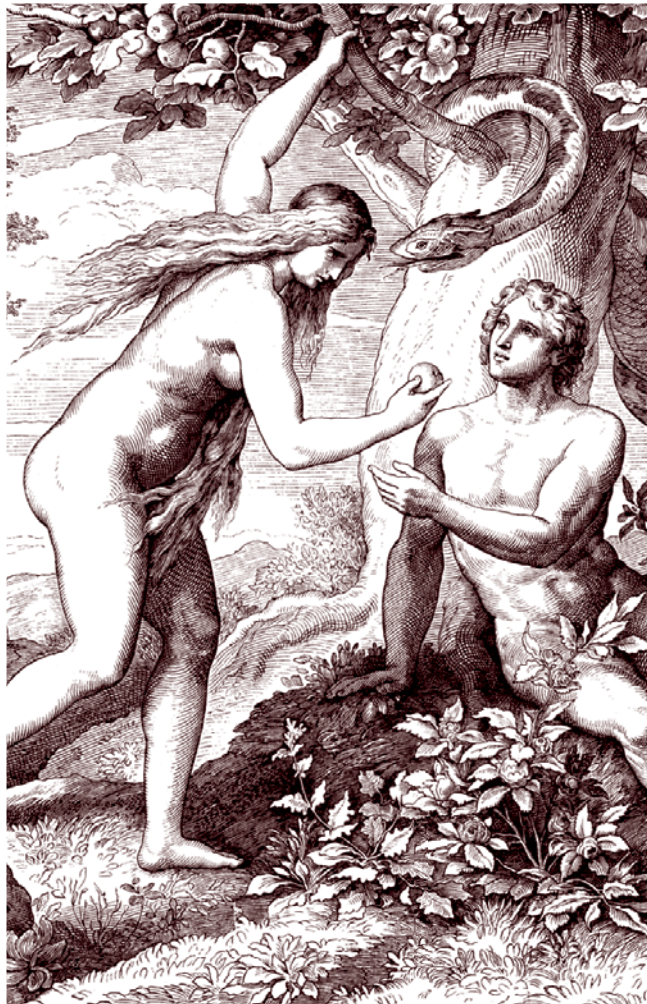
It isn't a surprise—and this is the heart of Douthat's argument—that I justify theologically my self-absorption. As with narcissism and self-aggrandizement, heresy, and I would add idolatry, are anthropological constants for fallen humanity. So yes, it is also no surprise that we have become, as the book's subtitle has it, "a Nation of heretics."

Going back to the passage I cited above,

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Douthat makes an observation that I think needs to be more fully explored not only by public intellectuals and commentators concerned with the moral health of American society, but more broadly by our various Christian Churches and communities.

The narcissist may find it easy to say no to others, but he's much less likely to say no to himself—and nothing defines the last decade of American life more



Forbidden Fruit. Engraving by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld © Ivan Burmistrov. istock.com

than our inability to master our own impulses and desires (p. 25).

Douthat's words resonate deeply with me as an Orthodox Christian and as a priest. If the more remote anthropological foundation of our culture's embrace of narcissism is original sin, the more proximate source is our loss of

what I would call our personal and cultural ascetical sensibility. By asceticism, I mean those habits of thought and action that fosters the "inner transformation of the human person, in his being" so that he becomes willing and able to live a life that is "progressively conformed to Christ" (see, *Compendium of Catholic Social Teaching*, #42).

Historically, Christians of various traditions have embraced what I'm calling here the ascetical life. Yes, we have disagreements among ourselves as to the exact methods by which we conform ourselves to Christ, but we have all agreed that such conformity is necessary (see Romans 8:29). The tragedy of contemporary American Christianity is not simply that we have lost our ascetical sensibility but, having lost our commitment to self-denial, we more and more are losing our commitment to living according to the image of the invisible God (see Colossians 1:15, 2 Corinthians 3:18) and our taste for theological orthodoxy.

Asceticism, at least as a way of life, is not uniquely Christian; it is foundational to human life. While the goal of asceticism is radically

different, ascetical struggle is central to both the other Abrahamic religions: Judaism and Islam. Likewise, though again with different goals, it is central to the great religions of the Far East: Hinduism and Buddhism. Indeed, at least in its popular etymology, the word religion itself has an ascetical connotation (*religare*

"to bind fast.")

Just as sin is a human constant, so too is the life of ascetical struggle. This is why St Paul can so easily draw a parallel between the shadow boxer and the unrepentant sinner, on the one hand, and the victorious runner and salvation in Christ on the other (see 1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Looking more broadly, is there any human excellence—in the trades or professions, in business, the arts, athletics, academia or marriage and family life—that is NOT the fruit of saying "no" to our transitory desires in pursuit of what endures?

In the Garden, we are given specific charges by God. We are to "be fruitful and multiply," that is to marry and procreate. Likewise we are called "to fill the earth and subdue it," (Genesis 1:28). We are passive stewards of creation but in the Creator, creators of wealth and beauty call to make of the creation what Pope John Paul II called "a fit home for humanity" (compare, *Centesimus annus*, #31). But all of this is marred, though not wholly undone, by our refusal to hold to one other commandment: "of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" (Genesis 3:3).

Then as now, in America as in the Garden, the refusal to live ascetically corrupts human life and radically distorts our relationship with God, His creation, our neighbor and ourselves. Asceticism is not an afterthought, a mere response to human sinfulness. It is rather the prerequisite for a life of human flourishing. If as Douthat observes, Americans have lost sight of this, we ought not to despair. Why? Asceticism is intrinsic to our nature and it is something which we can come to value once again. ■■■■

For good or for ill, the Christian faith is the one faith, more than any other that encourages intellectual and religious freedom. True Christians throughout history have stood in the vanguard, protecting the religious liberty, not just of Christians, but of non-Christians too. That is not something that we can ignore. We can always caricaturize Christianity, but here I'm speaking of true Christianity, and the tradition of true Christianity has always been that true Christians have understood the idea of freedom of conscience, have understood the idea that actual faith is something that's between an individual and God, and this is something that must be safeguarded and you cannot force it. If you understand this fundamentally Christian idea that faith can't be forced, then you understand that you have to protect it, that you have to allow people to freely choose what they will believe in and will not believe in. This is central to the Christian project. It is also the genius of the American experiment and we as a nation have understood this from the beginning. This is not something that is natural. This is something that we have to fight for and guard. When I say natural, I mean in the fallen order, it is not natural. It is something that we have to recognize and have to fight for, and it is a fragile thing. It needs protection.

There is a lot of debate right now about the role of the state – some would say the over-reach of the state – especially on this issue of religious liberty. What lessons did Bonhoeffer, or even Wilberforce, offer to us?

Well, both of them offer valuable lessons, Bonhoeffer more than Wilberforce. What stands out with Wilberforce is the basic idea that here you have a man, a politician, a devout Christian, who sees that the state, with all of the power that it has, is using that power to crush human beings.

Wilberforce sees that there is something in the English legal and government tradition that allows him to appeal to the Christian conscience of the nation to say that we must do something about the state operat-

ing for evil ends. What a beautiful thing that he was able to convince people to rise to the better angels of their nature and to do the right thing. However, it took doing something and it took a great effort.

In the case of Bonhoeffer, it is similar but even more dramatic. You have a state that

“ The government is making a mistake, a terrible mistake which threatens America itself, not just religious freedom.”



is not just doing evil, but also consciously doing evil. The parallels to today with Bonhoeffer are unfortunately, dramatic. Bonhoeffer's ability to see the threat is what makes him a prophetic and an important figure. Almost no one saw what Bonhoeffer saw. What he saw was real. Somehow others were not seeing it and it fell on him to try to get others to see it and point out the evil. He was trying to wake

his fellow citizens up to see that these threats were threats to everyone, not just to the few people who were specifically threatened, in this case the Jews, but to all. When the state uses its power to oppress an individual or to decimate an individual's freedom, every individual is threatened. The idea that a canny and powerful government almost instinctively looks to pick off minorities is frightening.

So in the case of the HHS Mandate, it is as if the Obama Administration is asking: how many divisions does the Pope have? Who are these hyper serious, ridiculous Catholics who care about contraception? The administration doesn't care about them. These faithful Catholics do not matter to the state. They act as if they don't need their support. They are probably not going to vote for us anyway, so we can pick them off, and we can confuse the theologically ignorant Catholic population and the Protestant population into thinking that this issue does not matter to them.

This is where we have to say no. The government is making a mistake, a terrible mistake which threatens America itself, not just religious freedom. We have to do what Bonhoeffer said is the role of the church. We have to hold the state accountable and say to the state, this is what it means to be a state and if you are not doing your job, we have to call you into account. We have to say that there is a line here and if you cross this line, you are over-stepping your legitimate bounds as the state. This is encroaching on things that are God's, that belong to the individual who has freedom of conscience, and they're making a terrible mistake. The church has to wake up and has to say that everyone needs to be concerned about religious freedom. In this case of the HHS Mandate, this is a minority that represents all of us, because this is one case where you may not agree, but what about the next thing that's going to come up? If we do not stand as one, we will certainly hang separately, to quote the founders.

At the National Prayer Breakfast, you talked about dead religion, which is the subject of your

continued on pg 12

new book. What does the phrase "dead religion" mean to you?

Dead religion is the default mode of fallen human beings. Since the fall, mankind has tried to find a way to God that avoids God. We want to find a way to Heaven that avoids the cross. Dead religion is any religion, including bastardized counterfeit Christianity, of which there has always been plenty, in which we, through our own acts, can earn our way to Heaven.

Moreover, what that does is it inevitably sets up a pecking order where some of us are morally superior to others. That is not true Christianity. True Christianity is where we recognize we are fundamentally unable to get to Heaven, to connect with God. Therefore, we must humbly ask Him to come to us. We must ask Him to do what He wants to do, which is to bridge the gap between humanity and the divine. So dead religion is any time you have something that is counterfeit. I would say that

which is counterfeit of God's real desire for us is opposed to humbling ourselves and asking Him to save us.

Why is a free economy important and what are a few ways proponents of a free market can strengthen their case?

I think that a free market is essential to other kinds of freedom. The two are inextricably intertwined. We must never forget that. People who are passionate about free markets better know that freedom of religion is fundamental and crucial to free markets. Likewise, people who are passionate about socially conservative issues ought to know that economic freedom is inextricably intertwined. You cannot sep-

arate one from the other. The enemies of either will try to divide the proponents of both and we will all lose.

What is the most effective way to reach people today?

For me, without a doubt, humor is a big part of how I communicate. That has a lot to do with how I am naturally, but I know that there is more to it. I think that honesty, transparency, and humor are a big part of that.

We have to be transparent and honest about what we know and what we don't know. It gets to the heart of what we were talking about with true religion and dead

policy, as a speaker, to be transparent, to be clear and to enjoy that.

There is tremendous freedom in transparency and honesty. There is a great freedom, peace, and a joy that comes with that and I think the audience recognizes that. For me, that is paramount.

What concerns you most about our society today? What is America's biggest challenge?

America's biggest challenge is surviving. We are a fragile experiment and survival is in no way guaranteed. I think that some of the threats that we have seen recently, to who we are as a free people, are some of the most serious threats we have had in our nation's history.

Understanding who we are is central to being American. We are an idea. If American citizens do not understand what that idea is and don't buy into that idea, there is effectively no America. At that point, we become a cut flower society where every-



Eric Metaxas with R&L's Ray Nothstine

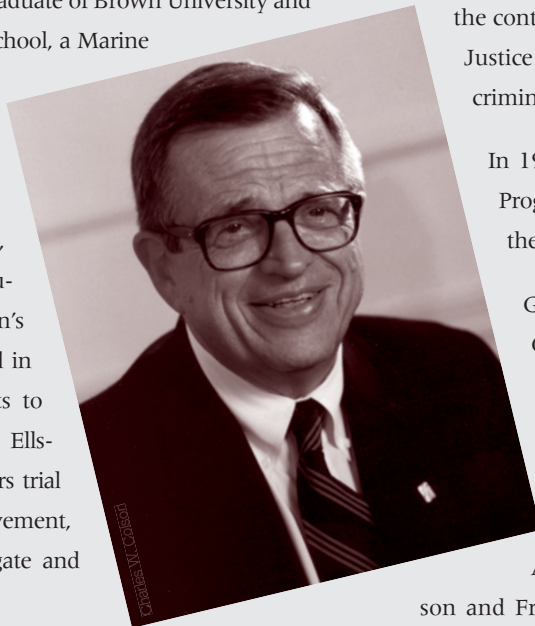
thing looks fine, but it's only a matter of time before we vanish. Americans have to educate other Americans on who we are, what these ideals are, why they are exceptional, why they are important, why they are vital to the rest of the world. If we don't do that, if we do not know who we are and fight to maintain our identity, then we will inevitably cease to be. Suddenly these things are more serious than they have been in a long time and I would warn my fellow Americans to take these things seriously and to understand that our existence hangs in the balance. That is not overstating the case. ■■■■

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Charles W. Colson [1931 – 2012]

One of the most wonderful things about being a Christian is that I don't ever get up in the morning and wonder if what I do matters.

Charles W. Colson was one of the most remarkable leaders of the evangelical world. An honors graduate of Brown University and the American University Law School, a Marine captain, and a successful lawyer, Colson first achieved fame (or notoriety) as Special Counsel to President Nixon. As a member of Nixon's inner circle, Colson quickly developed a reputation for ruthlessness as "Nixon's hatchet man." He was involved in leaking confidential FBI reports to the press to undermine Daniel Ellsberg during the Pentagon Papers trial and to discredit the antiwar movement, and was involved with Watergate and the subsequent cover-up.



Although he left the administration for private practice in 1973, Colson was indicted in connection with Watergate in March 1974. As Colson watched his life begin to unravel, a close friend gave him a copy of C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity*. After reading it, Colson gave his life to Christ and converted to Christianity. His conversion was roundly mocked by many in the press, but nonetheless it moved him to make a deal with prosecutors. He told them that he was not guilty of what they were charging him with, but that he was guilty of obstruction of justice and he was prepared to plead guilty to that. The prosecutors accepted his offer, and Colson went to prison.

Colson spent seven months in Maxwell Correctional Facility in Alabama. While there, he was struck by the dehumanizing conditions in the facility and determined to do something to help those in prison. In 1976, he founded Prison Fellowship, which has grown into the largest prison ministry in the world. Prison Fellowship hosts Bible studies, sets up aftercare

programs, and in some prisons, runs entire wards under a program called the InnerChange Freedom Initiative. A study by Dr. Byron Johnson of the University of Pennsylvania concluded that IFI cut the recidivism rate from 20.3 percent of the control group to 8 percent. In 1983, Colson also set up Justice Fellowship to work on bipartisan legislation for criminal justice reform.

In 1993, Colson was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, which he donated along with all of the royalties from his books to Prison Fellowship.

Given the high recidivism rate of released prisoners, Colson became interested in the causes of crime. Ultimately his research led him to the importance of worldview in shaping society and individual behavior. Much of the last period of his life was spent writing and teaching about this topic.

Another important venture spearheaded by Colson and Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, founder and editor of *First Things*, was *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, a 1994 document that identified important areas of common ground between the two traditions. This helped lay the foundation for the 2009 Manhattan Declaration, which brought together Evangelical, Catholic, and Orthodox leaders in a joint statement on the sanctity of life, the dignity of traditional marriage, and religious freedom. He continued to focus on this to the end, falling ill at the "Breaking the Spiral of Silence" conference intended to move people to action to support the causes promoted in the Manhattan Declaration.

Colson was a prolific writer, authoring or co-authoring some 30 books. He was also responsible for developing curricula for worldview and for ethics, creating an initiative to bring together and informally to coordinate the work of worldview ministries, setting up a training program for worldview teachers, and a host of other projects. Even into his 80s, Colson had enormous energy and a tremendously fertile mind. His leadership will be sorely missed.



Desiccated Christianity

It's important to emphasize this Christological dimension of Christian charity because many Christian agencies and even whole religious orders of consecrated men and women, originally founded on the basis of this original Christian inspiration, appear to have settled for a

kind of Christian gloss over charitable work that is secular at its core. These religious communities have unwittingly allowed themselves to be guided by a kind of materialist framework for helping the poor. Such groups would do well to understand that Mother Teresa's words are not an expression of mere sentiment or outdated piety. They are a reflection of a core Christian idea, one that inspired those armies of missionaries who sought out "the lost"—so as to tend their material needs, certainly, but also to share the message of eternal life in Christ. Their great sacrifice, heroism, ingenuity and generosity flowed from their understanding of their mission—they were more than social workers; they were bearers of the eternal Good News.

They were bringing that good news to human beings whom they saw as more than a bundle of unmet needs. They knew that the poor they served had eternal souls more valuable than the most prize possessions of the rich. The English writer C.S. Lewis captures the spirit of their anthropology with a striking image: "Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses."

When Christian institutions attempt to mitigate or compromise this understanding of their mission—often as the result of political pressure—they morph into shadowy versions of their former selves. Often instead of a passion for the Faith, a substitute passion comes into play—a passionate political agenda which attempts to bring the kingdom of God to earth through political means. Dissent if you like from any proposition of the Nicene Creed, but not from any piece of legislation cutting welfare budgets. That, to their minds, is the *real* heresy!

The reasons for the secularization of religious institutions are undoubtedly many, but among them one can identify the loss of confidence in the message of the Gospel in the face of secu-

lar social science. In the popular imagination one sees the budding of this mindset in Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* (1965), followed by other corruptions of orthodox Christianity by the secularist ideological premises that underlined, for example, most forms of Liberation Theology and Feminist Theology. These movements called into question the whole manner in which theology had been done over the preceding 2000 years, introducing a skepticism about traditional faith, which their adherents believed needed to be corrected by Marxist social analysis or feminist critiques of "patriarchy" in the church. What all this boiled down to in the pew was a sense that somehow religion had to "get with it" in order to 'be relevant' to what was going on in the culture.

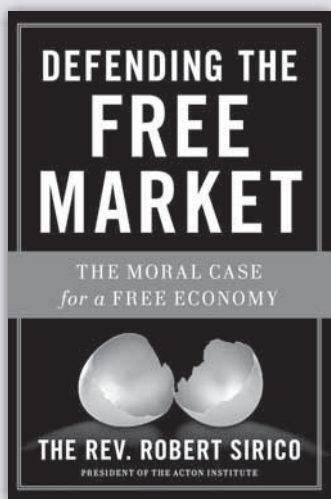
By the 1990s, the decline of mainline Protestantism was obvious—and documented by Thomas Reeves in *The Empty Church*. The sad irony is that the very churches most willing to compromise in pursuit of being "hip" or "culturally relevant" were the very ones that suffered the greatest decline in membership among the young. The Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Methodist denominations, known in recent decades for their ardent pursuit of "relevancy," barely managed to retain 50 percent of their minor members into adulthood." The situation has not improved in the years since. Instead decline has spread to other churches, most noticeably the single largest religious body in America, the Catholic Church. Regular Mass attendance has fallen from more than 60 percent in 1960 to less than 30 percent today. Some 10 percent of *all Americans* are ex-Roman Catholics.

These figures are not of interest only to churchgoers; the decline in religious life has had pernicious effects on American culture more broadly. At the same time that most nuns were abandoning their habits and some priests their collars, when overtly Christian terminology and symbols were dropped from the names and descriptions of various Christian organizations in an attempt "not to alienate anyone," and when ministers began focusing their attention on liberal political causes rather than preaching the Gospel message of repentance and salvation, a widespread cultural decline also emerged, one marked by growing hostility toward parental, political, and religious authority; a rise in drug use; and skyrocketing rates of divorce

and out-of-wedlock births.

What I find remarkable is that this trend should surprise anyone. The heart of a healthy Judeo-Christian culture is that locus of unifying ideas that sustains and inspires respect for the divine and the beings made in His image. If core sets of ideas are somehow called into question or secularized, it follows that the culture will change.

That decline has been particularly hard on the poor in America. Climbing out of poverty and staying out of poverty involves a measure of good fortune, certainly, but it also requires hope and confidence, along with a sense of responsibility, a work ethic, honesty, temperance and all the other virtues that enable individuals to thrive. This isn't to say there aren't hard-working and virtuous poor people. Of course there are - I grew up with many of them. But when the institutions that teach, model and reiterate the importance of these virtues are weakened or absent, then, all other things being equal, poverty becomes easier to fall into and harder to climb out of.



This article is drawn from Rev. Robert A. Sirico's new book, *Defending the Free Market: The Moral Case for a Free Economy*. (Regnery, May 2012). ISBN: 978-1596983250. Hardcover, 256 pages.

How does the intern program advance the mission of the Acton Institute?

We have always been fortunate to attract talented and religiously diverse interns at the Acton Institute. The talent we are able to bring in spans the globe and consists of students from some of the best universities and seminaries in the world. It is a privilege to introduce these students and young scholars to Acton's understanding of Christian anthropology and the morality of free-market economics. Interns have been invaluable to assisting our staff and expanding our operations and reach across the world.

Acton interns are vital to launching and operating programs like Acton University. Without their help and contribution, not only would it be difficult to manage this growing event, but also it would subtract from the overall experience for participants. The hospitality interns show and the hours they put in at the conference inspires us and renews our commitment to the work we do.

Many of our interns are able to contribute timely content to the Acton PowerBlog, author weekly commentaries, and publish articles with outside publications while they are here. For example, we have had interns recently publish their work in *Crisis Magazine*, *The Detroit News*, *The Washington Examiner*, and *Grand Rapids Press*.

Interns help with vital research for PovertyCure, write press releases, and take initiative with a host of translation projects. They have done tremendous work in helping to promote Rev. Robert Sirico's new book *Defending the Free Market*.

Another project interns are immersed in is the management of the Lester DeKoster library. After his death, DeKoster donated well over 8,000 books and interns are instrumental in helping us to preserve and catalog this collection.

I am constantly awed with just how many of our interns are committed to a free and virtuous society and have decided to make it a calling in their own life. Very often, they go on to professional careers in law, politics, the ministry and other fields where they put Acton's "market and morality" synthesis to work in the real world. It is exciting to see educational growth, lifelong friendships formed, and for young people to grow in their own moral formation while at Acton. There is little doubt that all of them can be successful and help to turn the tide against encroachment on our liberties and an over-secularization of the culture.

We would like to thank our donors for their response to our intern appeal letters over the years. So many of you have made it possible for us to care for and further develop young talent and minds.

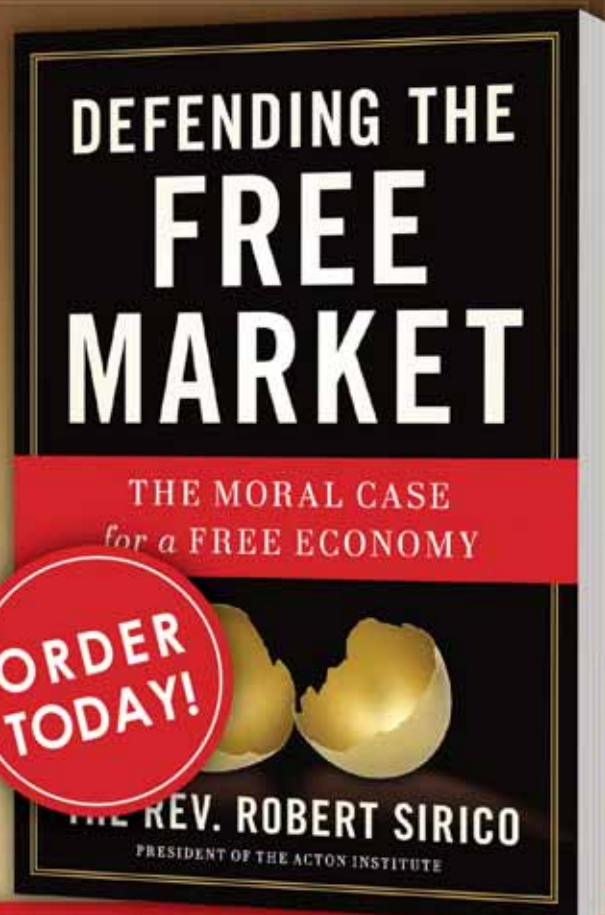
A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Kris Alan Mauren', is written over a faded background image of a group of people.

Kris Alan Mauren
Executive Director

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—CHUCK COLSON, founder of Prison Fellowship® and the Colson Center for Christian Worldview

Socialism has been discredited. The totalitarian states of the twentieth century have collapsed. And we beneficiaries of the globalized world economy are grateful that we enjoy plentiful food, clothing, shelter—and cheap electronics. But can any moral person really be *for* capitalism? Consumerism is an appalling spectacle, with Americans glutting themselves on all kinds of excess, while people in the developing world starve. The rich seem to be hogging far more than their share of the world's resources. Free markets may be efficient, but are they fair? Aren't there some things—life-saving health care, for example—that we can't afford to leave to the vicissitudes of the market? Now, in *Defending the Free Market: The Moral Case for a Free Economy*, Father Robert Sirico—a Catholic priest, former leftist associate of Jane Fonda, and now a longtime champion of the free market—answers all these objections.



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