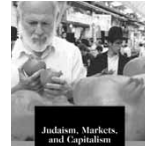


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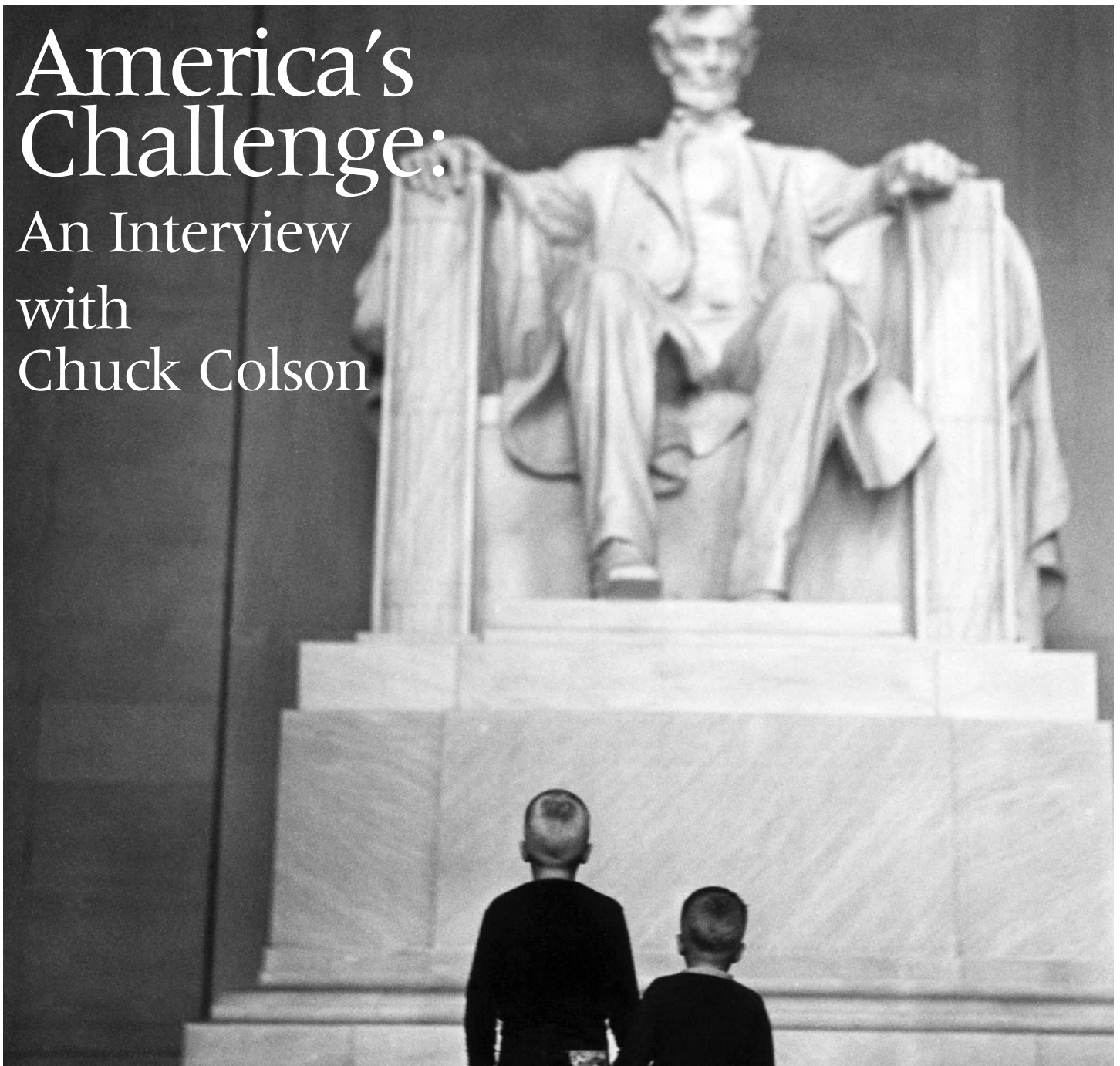
Judaism, Markets,
and Capitalism



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America's Challenge:

An Interview
with
Chuck Colson



A Journal of Religion, Economics, and Culture

Editor's Note



In our feature interview in this issue of *ReL*, Chuck Colson makes reference to the now-famous lecture Pope Benedict XVI gave at Regensburg last September. The heart of that lecture was the relationship of faith and reason. In the course of arguing that each needs the other, Benedict raised questions about Islam which garnered worldwide attention.

But Benedict's point was not principally about Islam. His point was that religious faith, when not purified by reason, can lose its way, even to the extremes of fanaticism and violence. He reminded his

listeners that the temptation to neglect reason has been faced in the history of Christianity - mentioning by name the Catholic philosopher Duns Scotus and some currents of thought animating the Protestant Reformation.

One of the areas where faith meets reason is in the encounter between religion and science. The work of the Acton Institute is part of that encounter, as we bring together the insights of science and natural philosophy (both of which animate economics) with the truths of revealed religion.

This issue of *ReL* is a good example of that encounter. Corinne Sauer and Robert Sauer have an article on that topic directly, namely the encounter of Jewish theology with economic theory. We also include also an installment from our *Centesimus Annus* lecture series: Lord Brian Griffiths examines the facts about poverty and the response of the church.

We are proud at *ReL* of our Acton colleagues and we highlight two recent

books, both of which are fine examples of careful scholarship applied to questions treated by both reason and faith.

Dr. Samuel Gregg has a new book, *The Commercial Society*, and we feature an excerpt in this issue about the role of creativity - reason applied to new circumstances - in the economy. And Dr. Stephen J. Grabill has just published an exceptionally learned book, which we excerpt in this issue. It's an important book - and I elaborate on that in my own review of it.

Our regular features round out this issue's offerings. Lord Ralph Harris's work emphasized the importance of ideas in influencing politics, while Father Sirico reminds us that politics offers good order, but not salvation.

I think Chuck Colson would find the encounter between reason and faith that he favors manifest in this issue - and in the ongoing mission of the Acton Institute.

Father Raymond

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The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty promotes a free society characterized by individual liberty and sustained by religious principles.

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The views of the authors expressed in *Religion & Liberty* are not necessarily those of the Acton Institute.

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Chuck Colson

America's Challenge

An Interview with Chuck Colson

Charles Colson, former aide to President Nixon and founder of Prison Ministries, is one of the foremost Christian voices today. He spoke with Religion & Liberty's David Michael Phelps this last fall.

What intellectual tools do Christians need to effectively protect the truth in a post-Christian world, and do Christians have those tools?

The first part of the answer is more complicated, so I'll answer the second part first. First, no, Christians do not have the tools today. Most people don't realize what a central issue this is. And Schaeffer used to preach about this a generation ago, and he would say, "The issue is truth! Flaming truth! True truth!" And people listened to him. Typical of all evangelical churches, they say, "Oh, that's great he's doing that," but nobody takes him seriously. Through the Centurions Program, I'm trying to teach people how to teach truth. I think it can be done, and I think Christians have to learn, but it takes some rigorous effort on our part to do it. But we can learn the ways in which truth is knowable. It's knowable through nature, through conscious reason, and through the Bible. I think we have to learn how to apply this, and it's not hard. First it requires recognition of the problem, and then some discipline. I think we can do it. That's what I'm devoting myself to with the Centurions. We've got one hundred senior adults every year. It's terrific and the results have been very successful so far. Centurions go through it, they get educated in this, and then they go out and they have to teach it

to other people. So the more they teach it to other people, the more they learn it.

What has Christianity given to society that is most often overlooked by Christianity's critics?

I think the critics of Christianity are looking at the modern ideas of liberalism and believing that freedom from all restraints and the desire to do anything you desire to do is sort of the *summum bonum*, the element of virtue and life. And what they're missing is that that undermines the very protection they themselves enjoy the most. It is like somebody sitting on a branch and sawing off the branch they're sitting on. The ideas that you can determine for yourself the meaning of life, that there are no restraints, that you have absolute autonomous control over yourself, that all of the world revolves around you, [these ideas] leave you vulnerable to all the various scientific assaults upon human life, whether it's abortion, assisted suicide, genetic engineering, or cloning. You yourself become vulnerable. The price of your freedom is human vulnerability. I don't think the postmodernist has figured out yet how self-refuting his own belief system is.

I was with a bunch of newspaper reporters once and the publisher was bragging he had taken the Ten Commandments off the classroom walls in his city. And then about five minutes later he is complaining about all the stealing in the classrooms. It's like putting a sign up, "Someone Steal!" I'm very optimistic that postmodernism is running its course because it's not intellectually sustainable and it's build on internal

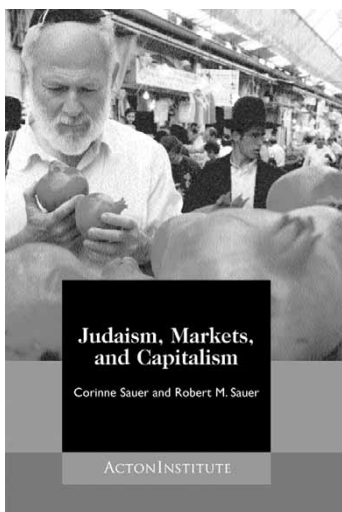
"You yourself become vulnerable. The price of your freedom is human vulnerability. I don't think the postmodernist has figured out yet how self-refuting his own belief system is."

contradictions that will ultimately cause it to crumble.

So on one side Christians have this secular humanism and postmodern thought. On the other side is Islamic fundamentalism. In this conflict of cultures, what hope is there to be reasonable with people who have no interest in being reasonable?

Well, I don't think we do. I don't think there's any real basis for dialogue, at the moment, with Islamo-fascism, as opposed to, say, moderate Muslims. What Pope Benedict XVI was trying to point out to them [in his Regensburg address] was that their blind reliance on their faith, being unwilling to subject it to the examination of reason or self criticism, makes it impossible for them to deal with us. But I think that he was also saying that in the West, we've lost our religious understanding. We can't make heads or tails out of what's going on in their minds. So what our job is as Christians, it seems to me, is to reinvigorate the moral structure of our own

continued on pg 12



Jewish Theology and Economic Theory

by Corinne Sauer and Robert M. Sauer

This article has been excerpted from the upcoming monograph, Judaism, Markets, and Capitalism: Separating Myths from Reality.

There has been very little work by orthodox Jewish scholars on the relationship among socialism, capitalism, and Judaism. Careful reading of the relevant literature, however, suggests that it is possible to posit five basic axioms of Jewish economic theory from which many economic policy implications can be deduced. Although not exhaustive, our five axioms represent, to the best of our knowledge, the first attempt to formulate a parsimonious list of basic principles that help systematize the foundations of what we are calling Jewish economic theory.

Participation in the Creative Process

The first axiom of Jewish economic theory that we posit is: “Man is created in God’s image.” In Judaism, this statement is interpreted as meaning that God is the creator of the world, and man is the creator in the world. Man was given a divine essence in order to be a partner with God in the act of creation (Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 10a). The Midrash says, “All that was created during the six days that God created the world still requires work” (Genesis Rabba 11:6). God gave man an incomplete world, and man is supposed to help perfect it through domination of material resources, work, and innovation.

Along these lines [from Genesis], the Midrash recalls the story of Rabbi Akiva, who placed grain and bread before a

general and asked him which one he would prefer to eat (Tanhuma Tazriah 19). In Judaism, work, creative activity, and innovation are the avenues through which the divine image is expressed.

Protection of Private Property

The second axiom of Jewish economic theory is that private property rights are essential and must be protected. Man was given the potential to create, but the Jewish sages clearly recognized that man will only dominate the material world and will work and innovate if there is the ability to appropriate the fruits of one’s labor. To motivate man to fulfill the commandment to participate in the act of creation, the granting and uncompromising protection of private property was recognized to be essential.

Note that two of the Ten Commandments directly relate to the safeguarding of private property: “you shall not steal” and “you shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.” The prohibition against stealing includes outright robbery, but also various forms of theft by deception and unethical business practices, such as the use of false weights in a transaction. The second prohibition goes further and prohibits Jews from coveting the possessions of others, even if there is no unlawful acquisition of property. The punishment for violation of the commandments is quite harsh, demonstrating the overriding importance of private property in the Jewish tradition. In fact, the flood in the time of

“Income redistribution aims at reducing income inequalities because income disparities are seen as unfair or immoral—this is not the Jewish view.”

Noah is understood by the Rabbis as a punishment for sins against private property.

The Accumulation of Wealth

The third axiom of Jewish economic theory is that the accumulation of wealth is a virtue not a vice. Man is obligated to participate in the creative process, should not be demotivated by inadequate protection of private property, and is blessed when the outcome of honest labor is the accumulation of wealth.

The Talmud teaches, “One who benefits from his own labor is greater than one who fears heaven” (Berachot 8a, Avot 4:1). In the Torah, productive and virtuous workers are repeatedly rewarded with great wealth. The Torah describes in great detail the riches of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Wealth, accumulated honestly, is a signal of great effort, skill, and success in partnering with God in the creative process. The wealthy individual has been unusually successful in elevating the material world and in expressing the divine image.

Jewish Theology and Economic Theory

The Talmud sages regard the refusal to attempt to benefit from one's labor and accumulate wealth as dangerous behavior that can lead to madness. A particularly strong statement against idleness can be found in the writings of Maimonides. Maimonides claims that "whomsoever has in his heart that he shall indulge in the study of Torah and do no work but rather be sustained from charity, defames the Lord's name, cheapens the Torah, extinguishes the light of faith, causes himself ill and removes himself from the world to come" (Mishneh Torah Laws of Oaths and Vow 8:13). Maimonides' statement is aimed at individuals who choose religious learning over working. Considering that learning Torah is itself a religious obligation, one can easily infer how much stronger his words would be for someone who chooses only leisure, whether that individual be rich or poor.

The praiseworthiness of wealth accumulation in no way implies that Judaism is not interested in the plight of the poor. All individuals are required to help the poorest members of society through charitable gifts. However, the gift-giving obligation, called Tzedakah, is more subtle than, and should not be confused with, income redistribution. Income redistribution aims at reducing income inequalities because income disparities are seen as unfair or immoral—this is not the Jewish view.

Caring for the Needy

The fourth axiom of Jewish economic theory that we posit is the obligation to care for the needy through charitable giving. Meir Tamari's study of Jewish economic thought makes it clear that a compassionate concern for the poor is a powerful Jewish theme as it was not for the pre-Christian Greeks and Romans. The Torah mentions the commandment to give charity

(Tzedakah, literally justice) in parashat Re'eh: "You should not harden your heart or shut your hand from your needy brother" (Deut. 15:7–8). The role of Man in the world is not only to work, create, innovate, accumulate wealth, and elevate the material world but also to care for those in need. As Maimonides explains in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, "we do perform an act of Tzedakah when we fulfill those duties towards our fellow men which our moral conscience imposes upon us; for example, when we heal the wounds of the sufferer."

To understand the Jewish view of charity, it is useful to recognize that behavior is regulated by two kinds of commandments in Judaism. First, there are the commandments that fall under the heading of man to God. Second, there are the commandments that fall under the heading of man to man. Dietary restrictions are commandments in the man to God category. These are moral principles. Regulations on proper business transactions are examples of commandments in the man to man category. These are considered to be legal principles. Charity belongs to the first category of commandments, making it a moral principle rather than a legal one.

Limited Government

The fifth axiom of Jewish economic theory that we posit is the inefficiency of government and the dangers of concentrated power. The Torah repeatedly warns about the evil nature of government and bureaucracy. The main warning is issued in the first book of Samuel when the Israelites request a king:

"These will be the rights of the king who is to reign over you. He will take your sons and assign them to his chariotry and cavalry, and they will run in front of his chariot. He will use them as leaders of a thousand and leaders of

fifty; he will make them plough his ploughland and harvest his harvest and make his weapons of war and the gear for his chariots. He will also take your daughters as perfumers, cooks, and bakers. He will take the best of your fields, of your vineyards and olive groves and give them to his officials. He will tithe your crops and vineyards to provide for his eunuchs and his officials. He will take the best of your manservants and maidservants, of your cattle and your donkeys, and make them work for him. He will tithe your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out on account of the king you have chosen for yourselves, but on that day God will not answer you"

(1 Sam. 8:11–18). Rabbi Sacks has compared these words

to Friedrich Hayek's warning in *The Road to Serfdom*. Simply stated, when governments play an important role in allocating resources in society and/or map out

a detailed plan for the workings of an economy, we risk the prospect of ever-increasing degrees of oppression in order to meet the plan's goals.

Robert M. Sauer is chair of the department of economics at the University of Southampton in the United Kingdom and founding president of the Jerusalem Institute for Market Studies. Corinne Sauer holds a master's degree in economics from the University of Aix-Marseille III and is co-founder and director of the Jerusalem Institute for Market Studies.



Robert M. Sauer



Samuel Gregg

This article was excerpted from Samuel Gregg's The Commercial Society—Foundations and Challenges in a Global Age, a new book published by Lexington Books.

Commercial society's impact upon poverty is ... not simply a result of the unintended consequences of market exchange. It owes much to commercial society's particular moral foundations. By moral foundations, we mean particular values and habits of action indispensable for the workings of commercial society....What follows is an attempt to describe commercial society's basic moral foundations. Taken together, these habits and values do not suffice for a society that wishes to merit the title humane or civilized. Nor are they exclusive to commercial society. Trust and peace, for instance, can exist in a range of social orders. The values identified below should therefore be understood as distinctly pronounced in commercial society, while their absence compromises a society's capacity to be recognized as commercial in character and reality.

A key freedom associated with the emergence of commercial society and the undermining of legal and social obstacles to such a society is that of entrepreneurship. Private initiative rarely occurs unless considerable incentives exist to encourage people to exercise it. At the same time private initiative is closely associated with another habit of action essential for commercial society—creativity. Marx was aware of this connection:

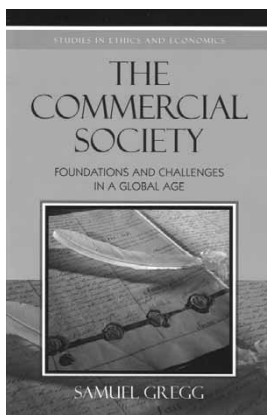
The bourgeoisie cannot exist without

constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, that is to say productive conditions, and thus all social conditions. Preservation intact of the old mode of production, by contrast, was the first precondition for all earlier industrial classes. The ongoing revolution in production, the uninterrupted shaking of all social conditions, the perpetual uncertainty and motion characterize the epoch of the bourgeoisie in contrast to all others.

Man, it seems, is designed in such a way that his very capacity for survival depends upon his unique ability to create new objects as well as to discover how to create and use things already in existence in faster, more efficient, and cost-effective ways, which can be further transformed through the further application of man's creative insight. The created world, it seems, is full of potentialities to be actualized by human reason and insight. Thus, while the natural world can produce much food of its own accord, there is tremen-

dous scope for humans to accelerate the growth, augment the amount, and transform the character of man's material sustenance. The sources of wealth and economic growth in commercial society depend far less upon the possession of natural resources and much more upon human insight and creativity.

Creativity is not a morally neutral activity. We can certainly question the worth and prudence of creating any number of substances, objects and organizations. The fact that man has used his mind to discover new, more effective means of destroying his fellow human beings does not acquire moral redemption by virtue of the creative insights that allowed such things to be produced. The moral worth of creativity is rather demonstrated by reflection upon its opposite—passiveness and excessive dependency. It concerns the attitude of being unwilling to look beyond one's present circumstances or even consider whether change might be necessary. In some cases, passivity can reflect an instinctive opposi-



The Commercial Society

by Samuel Gregg

Lexington Books

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“... imagine a future different from the present in which they exist—a future in which their well-being and that of their children...”

tion to change for sake of resistance to change or an excessive and unthinking dependence upon the past. The resilience of commercial society does, as we will see, require a high degree of trust in, and even dependence upon, long-established institutions and conventions with which we tamper at our peril. But quietism results in the slow suffocation of the human ability to foresee new possibilities, including those of a commercial character.

Creativity of thought, action, and association literally transforms humanity's outlook from one of a static or cyclical view of history and life to a vision of the world as open to transformation and uplifting through human endeavor. It permits people to break out of set and sometimes stagnant patterns of life. Creativity allows people to imagine a future different from the present in which they exist—a future in which their well-being and that of their children in terms of tangibles such as material wealth and education have all multiplied. This creativity is not limited to one choice or one action on the part of one individual. It invariably involves building upon the creative choices and insights of people living now and those long dead. This collaborative creativity can occur informally or in a more structured environment such as a business. Many such organizations even possess entire departments devoted exclusively to creative purposes. The creativity that flourishes in commercial society is thus rarely that of an isolated individual. It is invariably social in character.

Samuel Gregg is the director of research at the Acton Institute. The Commercial Society is available for purchase through the Acton Book Shoppe (www.acton.org/bookshoppe).

How does Acton's Rome office contribute to the mission of the Acton Institute?

The Acton Institute has a number of affiliates around the world, but when it came time to establish a presence in Rome, the institute opted not to start another affiliate, but to open a new Acton office, Istituto Acton. This allows the institute and its Grand Rapids staff to work closely with the Rome staff on a number of important projects that further our mission to promote a free and virtuous society on the international stage.

A large part of the execution of Acton's mission is to serve future religious leaders. Obviously, Rome is an important place to forge relationships with future Catholic clergy from around the world. Just like in the United States, we offer a number of lectures and conferences—most notably our recent series of *Centesimus Annus* conferences—that bring seminarians that blend of theological insight and economic truth for which Acton is known.

But Istituto Acton activities are not limited to Rome. The Rome office is also a base camp for its work around Europe. For example, last year one of the *Centesimus Annus* conferences was hosted in Poland at the Catholic University of Lublin where Pope John Paul II once taught.

Rome also gives Acton a vantage point from which to keep close watch on the international happenings of the Catholic Church. Often times, this offers the institute opportunities to offer comment on a variety of international events: Acton staff and scholars in Rome are regularly consulted and interviewed by the media concerning stories of international religious interest.

This year, Istituto Acton will host its first annual dinner, a testament to the importance and growth of this branch of the work of the Acton Institute.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kris Mauren". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Kris Alan Mauren
Executive Director



The Challenge of Globalization to the Church

by Lord Brian Griffiths

The Acton Institute is midway through a series of lectures—eight in Rome and one in Poland—celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of Centesimus Annus, Pope John Paul II's landmark social encyclical. The lecture series started in October 2005 and will continue through 2007. The following is taken from Centesimus Annus, Globalization, and Individual Development, an upcoming monograph itself [expanded] from Lord Griffiths's address delivered on October 19, 2006, in Rome.

The church has the potential to tackle world poverty and to change the culture of globalization in a way that governments and international institutions do not. It is very easy in considering the challenges of globalization and international development to enter a secular debate, on secular terms, in which the Christian faith has seemingly limited relevance and is reduced to the margins. Jesus, however, was under no illusion of the claims he was making when he declared "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Or of the fact that he came to establish a kingdom on earth, which he stated was "not of this world" but which is relevant nevertheless to every aspect of our life in it. The church is a witness to that kingdom and because of that has great potential to influence our world for the better.

Let me just take two examples of what I mean: the church in Africa and the leadership of business. All of the initiatives proposed by G8 countries to help sub-Saharan Africa—dealing with debt, aid, and trade—are 'top-down' initiatives. The decisions at

Gleneagles in 2005 were all 'top-down' proposals. The Report of the Commission on Africa made eighty recommendations, seventy-eight of which were addressed exclusively to either African governments, the governments of donor countries or a combination of these. In terms of these top-down initiatives the question that needs to be asked regarding such top down initiatives is how they translate into tangible results affecting the lives of ordinary people in the villages and small towns of rural Africa. Sadly the perception is that they do not.

It is here that the church scores highly. If we take sub-Saharan Africa as an example, then in 1960 the Christian church numbered around 60 million people. Today that figure is between 350-400 million. The church in Africa is in closer touch with the poor—those living on less than one dollar per day—than any other institution. Indeed many congregations are the poor. Next, the church has a stable administra-

tive infrastructure through its provinces, dioceses, and parishes which is unrivalled and is in marked contrast to independent or even failed structures of local government. The church has a highly respected leadership, especially in contrast to politicians, who are trained, experienced, and live permanently in communities in which they serve. This is in contrast to aid workers and officials of international institutions. Through the provision of schools, hospitals, clinics, dispensaries, and, more recently, micro-finance initiatives, the church has a proven track record in helping the poor. This should not surprise us. Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* stated that, "for the church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being."

The church in Africa is a sleeping giant with enormous potential. The challenge we face in rich countries is how we can



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"Throughout G7 countries there are thousands of Christians in positions of business leadership, not least in those companies which are at the heart of globalization."

serve the African Church so that in turn it can most effectively serve its people.

Another area of enormous potential influence is business leadership. We have argued that the sine qua non for economic development is the creation of a vibrant private sector in developing countries. Successful private sector companies provide jobs, training, taxes, exports, and community involvement. As Christians we are committed to companies which pursue excellence, help people develop, and are great places to work. Throughout G7 countries there are thousands of Christians in positions of business leadership, not least in those companies which are at the heart of globalization. There will be others, maybe of other faiths or even no faith, who will have equally high ideals for corporate life. Once again I believe that the Church is in a unique position to mobilize its members to take responsibility and leadership. Let me quote Benedict XVI once more: "In today's complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy, the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church."

Lord Griffiths served as a director of the Bank of England from 1985 to 1986 and as Special Adviser to Margaret Thatcher between 1985 and 1990. He was made a life peer in 1991 and has served as Vice Chairman of Goldman Sachs International since 1991.

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

Isaiah 52:8–15

"Hark! Your watchmen raise a cry, together they shout for joy, for they see directly, before their eyes, the Lord restoring Zion. Break out together in song, O ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord comforts his people, he redeems Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will behold the salvation of our God. Depart, depart, come forth from there, touch nothing unclean! Out from there! Purify yourselves, you who carry the vessels of the Lord. Yet not in fearful haste will you come out, nor leave in headlong flight, for the Lord comes before you, and your rear guard is the God of Israel. See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be raised high and greatly exalted. Even as many were amazed at him—so marred was his look beyond that of man, and his appearance beyond that of mortals—so shall he startle many nations, because of him kings shall stand speechless."

Weariness can be the lot of those who seek to live out our Lord's commandments in this

world. War, lies, power-grappling, poverty, hunger, death, disease, and deceit—each constantly reminds us that the Kingdom of God has yet to arrive in its fullness, and that until it does, the people of God are called to persevere in faith, hope, and, most of all, love. But in this meantime, how are we to keep our chins up when the evils of this world—and our own sinful natures!—seem determined to force them down?

An answer is offered in the Lorica of St. Patrick (whose feast day is celebrated on March 17). A man surrounded by hostile pagans and kings, St. Patrick wrote this famous prayer both to call on God's protection and to remind himself that it was "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down..."

Likewise, Isaiah tells us that it is God who will protect us from evil. While we are called to touch nothing unclean, we do not bear the burden of eradicating evil. That job belongs to the Lord. Whatever frustration we feel in facing the challenges of war or poverty or heresy or deceit, it is the Lord who "has bared his holy arm in the sight of all the nations," and his servant, the Crucified Christ—"so marred was his look beyond that of man"—who shall "startle many nations" in bringing about his kingdom.

How do we endure the powers of this world? Touch nothing unclean and turn to the one who shall leave kings speechless. Christ is our savior. Shout for joy.

"While we are called to touch nothing unclean, we do not bear the burden of eradicating evil."



Recovering the Catholicity of Protestant Theological Ethics

by Stephen J. Grabill

The following has been excerpted from Recovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics, released last autumn from Eerdmans.

While the Protestant Reformers inherited the natural-law tradition from their late medieval predecessors without serious question, their later heirs have, more often than not, assumed a critical stance of discontinuity in relation to natural law. In fact, according to one scholar whose views—though well documented and respected—still typify a minority position in contemporary Protestant historiography, “There is not real discontinuity between the teaching of the Reformers and that of their predecessors with respect to natural law.” With the possible exception of Zwingli, writes John T. McNeill, “Natural law is not one of the issues on which [the Reformers] bring the Scholastics under criticism.” Exploring continuities and discontinuities, developments and divergences between the Reformers and their successors and even, more generally, between the Reformation, patristic, and medieval eras in Christian theology sheds light on McNeill’s observation about the catholicity of natural-law doctrine. “Where the Reformers painted with a broad brush,” writes Richard Muller, “their orthodox and scholastic successors strove to fill in the details of the picture.” [...] Assuming McNeill’s conclusion can withstand historical scrutiny, therefore, it is fair to ask why Protestants have been so critical of natural law throughout most of the

preceding century.

The reasons, while diverse and somewhat broad ranging, encompass at least three distinct but overlapping sets of issues. Among twentieth-century Protestant systematic and historical theologians, a primary reason contributing to the unfavorable assessment of natural law has been the influence of Karl Barth’s epistemological criticism of natural theology, his (along with Emil Brunner’s) reinforcement of Calvin as the chief codifier and lodestar of Reformed doctrine, and his advocacy of a strong version of divine command theory. Suffice it to say that particularly within the arena of Reformed theology, the discontinuity thesis was underscored by Barth’s acerbic criticism not only of natural theology, but also of any theological formulation not immediately derivable from Christocentric premises.

A second reason is that natural-law doctrine is thought to originate in, and, therefore, to find its natural seat within, the intellectual milieu of Roman Catholic moral theology. Protestant intellectuals for this reason, then, have typically regarded the natural-law tradition to be doctrinally and philosophically tied to Roman Catholicism, and thus open to the standard Protestant criticisms that Rome does not take either sin or history seriously enough. This viewpoint has been articulated by a number of prominent twentieth-century Protestant theologians and ethicists.

A third, more general, reason can be at-

tributed to the anti-scholastic, anti-metaphysical accents of nineteenth-century German liberal theology that continued to exert influence on the Protestant mainstream well into the twentieth century in, for example, Albrecht Ritschl’s and Adolf von Harnack’s so-called “ethical” theologies. Thus, in commenting on nature and grace in his 1894 recortral address at Kampen Seminary, Herman Bavinck, one of the chief agents in the Dutch Neo-Calvinist revival in the latter half of the nineteenth century, singled out Ritschl’s attempt to separate metaphysics from theology specifically for criticism. “According to the Reformation,” wrote Bavinck, “that which is *supra naturam* is not the metaphysical doctrine of Trinity, incarnation, and atonement per se but the content of all of this—namely, grace. Not as if the Reformers wished to banish metaphysics from theology—the separation of the two proposed by Ritschl is practically speaking not even feasible. But the metaphysical doctrine taken in itself for its own sake does not yet constitute the content or object of our Christian faith.”

Certain promising indications exist that some leading Protestant intellectuals are presently reevaluating the conventional theological taboos associated with the natural-law tradition. To put matters in context: prior to 1990, if a researcher was interested in locating English-language monographs written by Protestants on natural law after 1934, the year of the infamous Barth-Brunner debate, it would be

Recovering the Catholicity of Protestant Theological Ethics

nearly impossible to do so. While a mere handful of dissertations have been written on natural law by Protestant authors, all of which appear after 1960, only one concentrates on the relationship between the natural-law tradition and the Reformers and Protestant orthodoxy. Even among these, none move much beyond the descriptive task of showing either that a modified tradition of natural law can be found in select theologians or periods of Protestant theology, or conversely, that Protestant theology is unable to assimilate natural law on account of theological hesitations. As might be expected, most of these authors focused on adjudicating the merits of the Bart-Brunner debate, systematically presented the viewpoint of a particular theologian, developed an extended criticism of natural-law theory, or surveyed twentieth-century Protestant viewpoints on the subject. It is important to recognize that the most scholarly and systematic treatments of natural law so far by Protestant analysts have been conducted almost exclusively within a contemporary (or twentieth-century) frame of reference.

My contention is that the contemporaneity of these studies in particular, and the paucity of Protestant treatments of natural law in general, act as contributing factors themselves to the profound gap in historical understanding of the development of Protestant ethics. This gap by its very existence helps to establish historical plausibility for the claim that, particularly among Protestant systematicians and historical theologians, the 1934 debate between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner had two principal consequences. First, from a theological and anthropological point of view, the debate helped to rupture the by then anemic natural-law tradition in Protestant theological

ethics by questioning and ultimately denying the epistemological reliability of the post-lapsarian natural human faculties. Second, from a historical point of view, the debate served to reinforce a trend begun already in the nineteenth century to bestow upon John Calvin the misplaced accolade of being *the* chief early codifier of Reformed doctrine.

To address the fundamental inadequacy of Calvin as chief early codifier position, it is important to acknowledge, first and foremost, that the theology of Protestant orthodoxy, forged in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a final, dogmatic codification of the Reformation, occupies a seminal—even if, in the minds of many today, a non-normative—position in the history of Protestant thought. “Not only is this scholastic or orthodox theology the historical link that binds us to the Reformation,” insists Muller, “it is also the form of theological system in and through which modern Protestantism has received most of its doctrinal principles and definitions. Without detracting at all from the achievement of the great Reformers and the earliest codifiers of the doctrines of the Reformation—writers like Melancthon, Calvin, and Bullinger—we need to recognize that not they, but rather, subsequent generations of ‘orthodox’ or ‘scholastic’ Protestants are responsible for the final form of such doctrinal issues as the definition of theology and the enunciation of its fundamental principles, the fully developed Protestant forms of the doctrine of the Trinity the crucial Christological concept of the two states of Christ, penal substitutionary atonement, and the theme of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.” Such increasing doctrinal complexity and sophistication is also evident in the

doctrines of natural revelation, natural theology, and natural law.

Although the tradition of natural law atrophied during the years 1934 to 1990, in the last decade of the twentieth century Protestant historians, theologians, and ethicists began to express renewed but cautious interest in natural law.

Since 1990 Protestant theologians, historians, and ethicists have become increasingly more interested in the natural-law tradition as a resource for discussing moral issues in the often hostile and religiously pluralistic environment of the public square. Indications of renewed interest in the natural-law tradition can be seen in the work of such scholars as Nigel Biggar, Rufus Black, Carl Braaten, J. Budziszewski (now Roman Catholic), Michael Cromartie, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Arthur F. Holmes, Paul Helm, Alister McGrath, Susan Schreiner, David VanDrunen, and Daniel Westberg. The privatization of religious belief and the impoverishment of public moral discourse provide the backdrop for the renewed interest in natural law. The natural-law tradition supplies an antidote to these cultural trends because, according to it, there is a universal law to which people of all races, cultures, and religions can have access through their natural reason. Natural law thus provides moral knowledge that all people can grasp without the aid of special or divine revelation. Natural law is particularly advantageous in terms of political discourse and Christian engagement in the public square because it seems to provide a moral vocabulary that can function for both religious and secular interlocutors.

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society so that we are able to understand spiritual truths and able to bring in the culture-building, life-affirming aspects of Christianity. At the same time, we help our cohorts in the culture to understand why Islamo-fascism is so dangerous. You're not going to talk these people out of what they're doing because they are blindly following an ideology. They are blindly following their god, or what they perceive to be their god, without subjecting that to reason. I thought Benedict made that point so powerfully, a real wake up call to the West. But I don't believe we're ever going to find ourselves negotiating with the Osama Bin Ladens or others of his ilk in the Islamic world. We're just not. It's not going to happen. What you're going to do is undercut them militarily by denying them places to operate, number one. And number two, it's a long, slow process, but we've got to build democratic searches in the Islamic world.

There has recently been much [hullabaloo] over calls by some to ban the nikab, the Islamic head and face covering for women. To what extent ought governments regulate religious expression?

I don't think they can regulate religious expression. We have this problem with the prison chaplains, imams, who are radical. What they can do is assure us that the violent wing of radical Islam is not being perpetrated, is not being spread through the schools. The Wahhabi influence in Saudi Arabia is providing most of the text-

books for Muslim schools in America. This is the kind of thing we should be stopping. I'm not so worried about the headdress, anymore than the Mennonites wearing their clothes. That doesn't worry me. What worries me is what they are teaching.

What are the dos and don'ts for Christians when they're engaged in public policy?

I wrote a book called, *Kingdoms in Conflict* twenty years ago that is just about to be reissued by Zondervan next year. We updated it. And it goes through, in almost five hundred pages, the dos and don'ts. But I can give you a quick summary, and that is that Christians must be engaged in politics because it is one of the realms of life over which God, who is sovereign, claims his authority. We've got to be instruments of justice and righteousness. We have to deal with moral issues. We are not, as Christian leaders at least, to make partisan endorsements, nor should we ever allow ourselves to be in the hip pocket of one political party. It's unfortunate [that] in the age in which we live, the erosion of truth has led to the rise of ideologies in its place. So you have competing ideologies, Republican and Democrat. And the Republican ideology has embraced the values voters. So anybody who is really voting a social issue agenda is going to likely vote Republican. But that's different than considering ourselves [to be] the religious adjunct of a party. That's a terrible mistake. And I think the Democrats are recognizing this and trying desperately to figure out

ways to appeal to the religious voters, which they ought to. But they can't get by their personal litmus test. That's where they're having their troubles. So I'm hoping that's going to change some day. I think it would be a healthy thing for the country. But I've never made a partisan endorsement, and I won't. But I have certainly spoken out on issues and fought for some of the human rights as a citizen and will continue to.

There are those who are unaware or even suspicious of groups like Evangelicals and Catholics Together, in which you have played a key role. What hope exists to unite Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians?

Education. I think that the more that people realize the central tenants of our beliefs, and the more groups like mine and others can engage in extended theological reflection and conversation, the more we will diminish the divisions. We're not going to change. You're not going to repeal the Council of Trent. It's going to take a long time for there to be genuine theological progress, although there's been some. There's been some that is quite startling, as a matter of fact. But what we can do is learn how to live with each other as brothers and sisters, learn how to cooperate together in the field, and learn how to work together in ministries like Prison Fellowship, which we do. Many of our volunteers are Catholics and Baptists and Pente-

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From Nothing to Hold Onto

*BreakPoint Commentary
by Chuck Colson*

costals. We can then practice what Timothy George calls an ecumenism of the trenches. We can work together on these issues, and certainly with Islam trying to destroy us, the need for this is imperative. I am finding when I argue on those grounds, that some of the people who were vitriolic towards me ten years ago are now saying, "I guess you're right." So I think it's going to happen. We're going to be driven to it by circumstances.

What do you say to critics who try to characterize the work of Prison Fellowship as a violation of the fabled wall of separation between church and state, who make such stark divisions between the good rehabilitative work that is actually achieved by Prison Fellowship and the proper role of the state?

I think they're totally misreading the Constitution and, as a matter of fact, much of the case law, and the will of the Congress: Congress said faith-based charities are to be able to compete on equal ground with secular when providing secular services. We differentiate very clearly in the prisons between the religious aspects and the secular. We don't force people to participate in the religious. We provide facilities for Catholics to worship and Protestants to worship and Muslims to worship. So we haven't broken any of the cardinal rules. We are being picked on because we've succeeded. We're being picked on by Barry Lynn because if we not only contend that

we are witnessing truth and the conversion of these people in the prison, and then we prove it, he loses the whole game. That's why this is high stakes: the question of whether you can validate truth in social sciences is posed by us, and opposed by

"We provide facilities for Catholics to worship and Protestants to worship and Muslims to worship. So we haven't broken any of the cardinal rules..."

Barry Lind, and in the hands of the court. What do I say to him? I say to him, look, you've got the poorest of the poor. You've got 2.3 million people in American prisons. You have got 60 percent of them re-offending when they get out. You've got 600,000 a year getting out. You want to do something? Let's fix this, and we've got to work together and find cooperative ways that do not violate the law. We had very careful study of the law before we went into this. But this has much less to do with us and prisoners than it has to do with the issue of truth.



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The Hagia Sophia (Church of the Holy Wisdom) in Istanbul, Turkey, was converted into a mosque after the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks in 1453, and then into a public museum in 1935.

Radical Islam is not luring Europeans away from a solid belief system; it's providing many of them with the first real belief system they have ever had. It's filling a void for people who have nothing else to believe in or hold on to.

Secularists in Europe—and in America as well—do not understand this. As [Mark] Steyn writes, "One reason why the developed world has a difficult job grappling with the Islamist threat is that it doesn't take religion seriously. It condescends to it." That condescension makes secularists unable to see what's going on right under their noses.

It's similar to the situation that's been going on in our prisons for years now....Prisoners all share one thing: a need for something to fill the emptiness in their lives. We have seen this in the thousands of prisons we work in. Radical Islamists know this, and they have made a point of targeting prisoners for conversion. Their brand of religion offers people that sense of belonging, of something worth living and dying for, that people need—the very thing that postmodern secular societies do not offer. And that's a big part of what makes radical Islam so dangerous.

As Steyn put it in a recent interview for our "BreakPoint" website, "[Radical] Islam is a weak enemy, and its strength is determined by what it's pushing against." The problem is that Europe and, increasingly, America are putting up very little resistance. If Christians won't stand up for our worldview, and secularists won't stand up for anything, one day we may have no one but ourselves to blame for the triumph of radical Islam. The greatest offense against aggressive Islam is a strong, vibrant Christian faith, which, of course, comes right down to you and me.

Lord Ralph Harris of Highcross [1924-2006]



"The power of Lord Harris came not only from his intellect, but from the more intangible talent to translate economic arguments into pithy, commonsensical phrases and proverbs such as 'the vote motive', 'prices effect quantities', 'and if it's free, I'll take six.'"

Born in Tottenham in 1924, Lord Ralph Harris was a foremost champion for free markets in twentieth century Great Britain. After a first in Economics at Cambridge and a subsequent teaching stint at St. Andrew's University, Lord Harris became general director of the Institute for Economic Affairs in 1957 (Lord Harris would hold the post of founding director until 1987). This institute would lay the intellectual groundwork for the vast free-market reforms in late 1970s and 1980s Great Britain. For this, Lord Harris earned the moniker "The Architect of Thatcherism." A famous story relates how Harris teased Margaret Thatcher about this moniker, insisting that, in fact, Thatcher was an IEA-ite since the IEA had been promoting free-market ideas decades before Thatcher's ascent to the role of Prime Minister. To this, Thatcher is reported as replying, "Ralph, the cock may crow, but it's the hen that lays the egg." In 1979, Thatcher raised Harris to a peerage.

The power of Lord Harris came not only from his intellect, but from the more intangible talent to translate economic arguments into pithy, commonsensical phrases and proverbs such as "the vote motive", "prices effect quantities", and "if it's free, I'll take six." His joviality and good nature won the devotion of his friends and the admiration of his enemies.

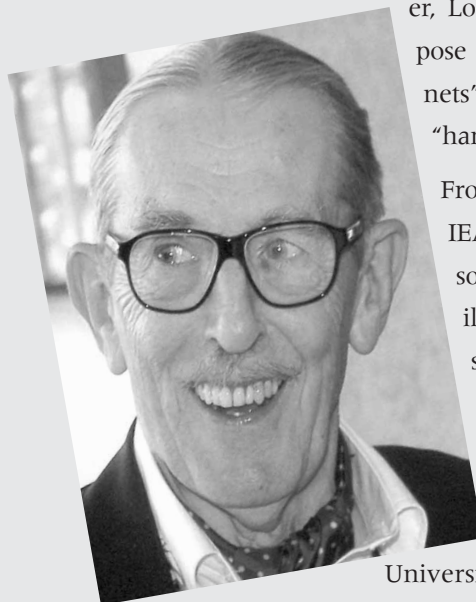
Lord Harris was also well known as a pipe-smoke enthusiast. As an active campaigner and the honorary president of Forest, a group that defends the right to smoke, he fumed against strict

regulations on citizens' freedom to smoke. His defense of freedom also took form as staunch opposition of the European Union, what he feared was European socialism reborn.

A member of the Church of England, Lord Harris believed that the poor were best served by creating wealth and that such activity occurred most efficiently in a liberalized market. However,

Lord Harris did not oppose governmental "safety nets" for the poor, only "hammocks."

From the founding of the IEA (which has inspired some one hundred similar think tanks in some seventy countries), to his involvement in the founding of Britain's only private university, the University of Buckingham



(rated tops in student satisfaction, due to the fact, said Lord Harris, that the student, not the state, was the customer), to his numerous writings, Lord Harris's influence truly has been worldwide, and its effect truly revolutionary.



Politics and Independence

On the question of religion and politics, it seems like the Christian community is forever sliding between two errors. On the one hand, there is a long tendency to eschew politics as

too worldly and unbecoming to Christian piety. If we place our hopes in the afterlife, why should we dedicate ourselves to political change now? This is the error of quietism, which calls for quiet contemplation and prayer and totally eschews any action. Yet God calls some to a political role in the hope of making a difference in the world. There is nothing wrong with this. Indeed, our faith calls for a cultural transformation. It is not satisfied with individual piety alone.

On the other hand, there is the opposite tendency to place all hope in worldly transforming, to build a pure City on a Hill, to bring the kingdom of God to earth by our own political efforts. This occurs on the left and right. The left-wing view has sought to create perfect social utopias where the structures of poverty are completely eliminated and there is no equal holding of wealth. On the right, we see a tendency for some to use the state to stamp out every manner of vice.

Both positions will lead to despair. The refusal of Christians to engage in any political activity surrenders the entire sector over to secularist control, which often leads to disastrous results for believers. Christians have an important contribution to make to public life and they should not be shy about making it, even if it means running for office and engaging in political activity.

On the other hand, we must always be aware that Christ's kingdom is not of this world. The only perfect society is found in Heaven. As a former generation of conservatives used to say, the eschaton cannot be "immanentized," especially not the through the power of the state. The use of power is particularly dangerous for Christians. The use of the sword is almost always linked with abuse. The mixing of state and religion has ended in the corruption of religion above all else.

In the last twenty years, we've seen these tendencies ebb and flow in the Christian community, which has placed its trust in princes and has been disappointed. This has produced a counter-reaction that leads people to a mistaken belief that involvement in political life is nearly always futile and even contrary to the gospel.

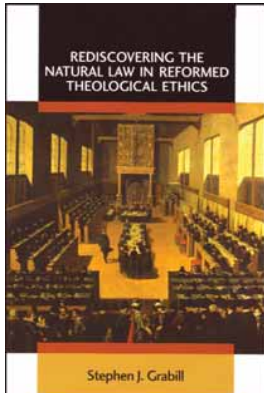
I would like to stake out a moderate position. Those who feel called to political involvement should not hesitate. We should defend life, property, and freedom as among the foremost political and moral values. At the same time, we should avoid the temptation of putting trust in any particular leader merely because he or she professes the same faith as we do. All people have a tendency to fall into sin, and I dare suggest that the political class may be even more prone to particularly destructive forms of compromises.

What about party affiliation? Political parties are part of the fabric of democracy and are unavoidable. However, no party

"If any group of people should be willing to consider itself politically independent, it is Christians, who should carry with them the realization that it was political state that prosecuted and executed our Lord and his followers."

should be able to count on the "Christian vote" lest that be taken for granted and otherwise ignored. If any group of people should be willing to consider itself politically independent, it is Christians, who should carry with them the realization that it was political state that prosecuted and executed our Lord and his followers. To be inextricably attached to a particular party is as much an error as believing that a particular form of government can be the answer to all our woes.

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Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics

By Stephen J. Grabill • Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006

320 pp. • \$20.00

Review by Rev. Raymond J. de Souza

After completing Stephen J. Grabill's book on the natural law in the thought of the Protestant Reformers, I wished - briefly - that he did not work at the Acton Institute. He has written a very

important book, and I didn't want my recommendation of it to be tainted by favoritism toward a colleague and friend.

That said, Grabill's book can more than stand on its own. It is a work of true scholarship; its origin as a doctoral thesis means that it is not a breezy read. The scholarly apparatus is heavy, as it needs be, for Grabill is out to challenge the conventional wisdom.

The concept of "natural law" in Christian ethics is generally considered to be a Catholic way of thinking. The natural law does not refer to the law of the nature - where the strong lion eats the sick antelope - but to what reason alone, reflecting upon human nature, can conclude about how we should act. The argument is that it is possible to know that God should be worshipped or that stealing is wrong even without divine revelation - natural reason alone is sufficient to know such things. Such a law is "natural" as opposed to a divinely-commanded law. The natural law tradition, which finds its biblical inspiration in Romans 2:15 - "the requirements of the law are written on their hearts" - was most carefully developed by Scholastic thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas.

The usual telling of the tale is that the Protestant Reformers rejected the natural law tradition because it gave too much credence to the powers of fallen human reason, and not enough to the necessity of grace. While the Christian (Catholic) tradition never claimed natural law sufficient for salvation, the leading Reformation thinkers still thought that natural law thinking was not sufficiently Christian in the first place.

Except that they didn't. That's the argument Grabill is advancing, against several centuries of accepted thinking on that point, including the very negative assessment of natural law given by the Protestant theological giant Karl Barth in the middle of the last century. It is the bold doctoral student who decides to take on the heavyweights in his own tradition, and Grabill does so prudently. He does not argue so much that Barth and other contemporary Reformed thinkers are wrong as much he shows that it is they who have broken with their own Reformed traditions.

Does Grabill succeed? Ultimately, that will be a question resolved only if and when his work is accepted by contemporary Protestant moralists. But his detailed chapters on Reformation thinkers, beginning with John Calvin himself, are convincing enough on the major point: Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Johannes Althusius and others accepted and made positive use of the natural law tradition. It is hard to over-state the importance of Grabill's claim. If he is right - and this Catholic finds his documentation convincing - it opens the way to four potentially important initiatives.

First, it offers a more comprehensive moral theology to Protestants, precisely at a time when Protestants leaders are calling for a broader worldview, and a morality that is better grounded in metaphysics as well as Scripture (see the interview with Chuck Colson in this issue).

Second, it could be an exciting development in Catholic-Protestant theological dialogue. While recent years have borne witness to the common moral ground shared by orthodox Catholics and orthodox Protestants, the moral methodologies have remained quite different. Why we believe something is often as important as what we believe, and Grabill's re-interpretation of his own tradition will advance that conversation between Catholics and Protestants.

Third, natural law thinking, with its departure point of human reason and human nature, inoculates religious faith against fundamentalism, whether Catholic, Protestant or, for that matter, Islamic. Indeed, the possibility of reason as a ground of ethics opens the possibility of better cooperation between Christians and Muslims as a whole, leaving aside for the time being obvious disagreements on the content of divine revelation.

Fourth, natural law gives committed Christians a vocabulary well-suited to exercising their vocation to contribute to the common good of society. Whether the issue is marriage or criminal justice or gambling, it is not persuasive to rely on biblical ethics alone in shaping public debate. Natural law provides an avenue for Christians to contribute to public debates precisely as citizens, without asking for any special privileges for Christian revelation.

All of that is too much to ask from one book. But from time to time a book can advance significantly a promising argument, and Grabill's book is just that, in arguing that the arguments of the Reformation may not have been as divisive as has been long thought.