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John Paul II's Hope for the Springtime of the Human Spirit



Interview: George Weigel

George Weigel is a senior fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., and a Roman Catholic theologian. He is the author or editor of fourteen books, including *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (HarperCollins), published this autumn. *Witness to Hope* is being hailed as the most comprehensive and accurate biography of the pope yet written.

R&L: *Witness to Hope* joins at least two other massive studies of Pope John Paul II's life, Szulc's *Pope John Paul II: The Biography* and Bernstein and Politi's *His Holiness: John Paul II and the Hidden History of Our Time*. What makes this biography distinctive?

Weigel: John Paul II can be understood only from "inside" the Christian convictions that make him who he is. Other biographies have approached John Paul from the "outside," as a world statesman who is, incidentally, a Christian, a priest, and a bishop. *Witness to Hope* begins with a prologue titled, "The Disciple." That is a crucial difference, and it sets up a very different kind of biography.

Witness to Hope also includes previously unrevealed documentation: John Paul's December 1980 letter to Leonid

Brezhnev during the first great Solidarity crisis; the pope's 1983 letter to Deng Xiaoping; and the 1988–89 exchange of correspondence between John Paul and Mikhail Gorbachev. Several of Father Karol Wojtyla's personal letters in the 1950s to a young friend on the nature of love are also disclosed here for the first time. I also was able to draw on private autobiographical memoranda that the pope kindly provided me.

In addition, readers will find an inside exploration of the negotiations that led to diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel, and the first-ever account of Andrei Sakharov's dramatic encounter with the pope, which had a direct impact on the democracy movement in the U.S.S.R. *Witness to Hope* also offers a look inside the negotiations with Fidel Castro, leading up to the

pope's epic pilgrimage to Cuba in 1998.

Finally, *Witness to Hope* includes a discussion of every major teaching document in John Paul's pontificate, in what I hope is a reader-friendly fashion.

R&L: In this biography you give John Paul three sobriquets that each reflect a certain facet of his life and work: "a witness to hope," "a sign of contradiction," and "a Christian radical." I would like for us to unpack each of these in turn. First, what has been the nature of the pope's witness to hope?

Weigel: Karol Wojtyla has looked into the heart of virtually every modern darkness and has come out on the far side of that encounter as a "witness to hope," as he described himself at the United Nations in 1995.

Hope is not optimism, which is a matter of optics, of how you look at things. Hope is a sturdier reality, a theological virtue. John Paul II's hope in the human capacity, under grace, to fulfill modernity's great aspiration to freedom and his hope that the future can bring a springtime of the human spirit have been powerful forces in the last two decades of this century of tears.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE • Interview: George Weigel © **Articles:** "T. S. Eliot's Political 'Middle Way'" by Michael R. Stevens, and "John Paul II and the Problem of Consumerism" by Raymond J. de Souza © **Review Essay:** "Biblical Theology and the Non-Abundant Life" by John R. Schneider © **In the Liberal Tradition:** Erik Ritter von Kuehnelt-Leddihn © **Column:** "Peace and Trade, Not Sanctions, Will Change Iraq" by Rev. Robert A. Sirico © **Plus Book News.**

R&L: *Second, what do you mean when you say that John Paul is a sign of contradiction?*

Weigel: The pope is a thoroughly modern man who nevertheless challenges a lot of the conventional wisdom of self-consciously modern people. In a world dominated by the pleasure principle and by personal willfulness, he insists that suffering can be redemptive and that self-giving is far more important to human fulfillment than self-assertion. In an intellectual climate where the human capacity to know anything with certainty is under attack, he has taught that there are universal moral truths, that we can know them, and that, in knowing them, we encounter real obligations. To a world that often measures human beings by their utility, he has insisted that every human being has an inviolable dignity and worth. While others insist that the world runs by politics and economics, he has taught the priority of culture in the dynamics of history. Being this kind of a “sign of contradiction” does not make John Paul a pope against modernity, however. If the goal of freedom is human happiness, human flourishing, then a strong case can be made that the pope’s “contradictions” are very much in service to that goal.

R&L: *Finally, what makes John Paul a Christian radical?*

Weigel: He is a man for whom the truth of 1 Corinthians 12:31—the “more excellent way”—is quite simply the truth of the world, its origins, and its destiny. It is not just one option in a supermarket of “spiritualities.” Nothing happens for John Paul II outside the horizon of his commitment to the “more excellent way.” He wants to introduce those who have not encountered that way to it; he wants to help those who are “on the way” deepen their commitment to it. Whether he is meeting a world leader, the association of Italian hairdressers, or the young people who flock to him, the encounter always takes place “within” the horizon of his commitment as a Christian disciple and pastor. John Paul II is not an adept statesman who just happens to say Mass every morning; his Christian commitment and his priesthood are the sources of his statesmanship and, indeed, of every other facet of his life.

R&L: *In addition to an account of his life, you also offer a great deal of analysis of John Paul’s papal teaching, which seems to cluster around three themes: freedom, work, and truth. Can you describe how he has developed these three themes in light of traditional Catholic social teaching and in response to the challenges of the modern world? Let’s start with the theme of freedom.*

Weigel: In a homily in Baltimore in October 1995, John Paul said that “freedom consists not in doing what we like, but rather in having the right to do what we ought.” That is a very Actonian understanding of freedom—freedom ordered to moral truth and goodness. John Paul’s freedom for excellence, as we might call it, is also a direct challenge to a prominent notion of freedom in our culture today: freedom as an indifferent, neutral faculty of choice that can legitimately attach itself to anything. The truly human texture of freedom, John Paul insists, is to be found in freedom’s inherent link to moral truth.

R&L: *Let’s turn now to the second theme. What has been important about his treatment of the nature of human work?*

Weigel: Some Christian interpretations of the creation stories in Genesis hold that work is a punishment for original sin. John Paul II disagrees. He knows the difficulty of work, perhaps as only a former manual laborer can. He nonetheless insists that work is a function of human creativity, which, in turn, reflects God’s creativity. What John Paul terms the “Gospel of work” is a Christian reading of work as a form of participation in God’s ongoing creation of the world. John Paul’s analysis of work is also deeply influenced by the nineteenth cen-

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Polish poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid, who wrote that work, undertaken with love, is the highest expression of human freedom. For John Paul, work and freedom go together, as do freedom and truth.

R&L: Finally, how has John Paul de-

fended the idea of truth in the modern world?

Weigel: By insisting, and by trying to demonstrate philosophically, that human beings can grasp the truth of things, even if in an incomplete way. Many Americans would be stunned to learn that phi-

losophers today are profoundly skeptical that there is any such thing as “truth”: There is “your truth” and “my truth,” but nothing properly describable as “the truth.” John Paul knows that this radical skepticism is a prescription for anarchy and then tyranny, as the will to power—settling an argument by my imposing

Erik Ritter von Kuehnelt-Leddihn (1909–1999)

“The free market must not renounce gain nor make it a fetish. It, too, falls under divine law and is not subject to purely human regulations.”

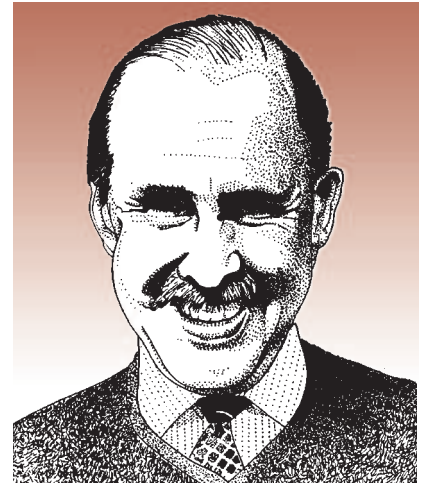
This May the Acton Institute lost a great friend and supporter with the death of Dr. Erik Ritter von Kuehnelt-Leddihn. An internationally acclaimed historian, author, journalist, and lecturer, Dr. Kuehnelt-Leddihn served for many years on the Institute’s Board of Advisors, as well as on the editorial board for the Institute’s bimonthly publication *Religion & Liberty*.

According to his friend William F. Buckley, Dr. Kuehnelt-Leddihn was “the world’s most fascinating man,” and he has left a most fascinating legacy. Born in Austria on July 31, 1909, he studied theology, along with civil and canon law, at the University of Vienna. Afterward, he received his doctorate in political science at the University of Budapest. Throughout his life, Dr. Kuehnelt-Leddihn was a prolific writer; he started writing for newspapers and periodicals at age sixteen, first publishing in the *London Spectator*. Moving to America after World War I, he taught at Georgetown University, Saint Peter’s College, Fordham University, and Chestnut Hill College. He resettled in his native Austria in 1947 and devoted his time to alternating periods of studying, traveling, writing, and lecturing.

Dr. Kuehnelt-Leddihn was a true and traditional man of letters. He spoke eight languages and read eleven others. He travelled to and lectured in dozens of countries on six continents. A collection of his novels, theoretical books, essays, articles, and occasional pieces would fill a small library. His most recent English books include *Leftism Revisited*, *An Intelligent American’s Guide to Europe*, and *Liberty or Equality*. Furthermore, he had a lasting influence on modern American conservatism (which he preferred to call by its European and, as he thought, more descriptive term *liberalism*).

His chief intellectual project centered on defending the theoretical foundations of liberty in the modern world, especially in response to the distortions in the idea of liberty precipitated by the French Revolution. In his words, “My studies in political theory and practice have been largely directed toward finding ways to strengthen the great Western tradition of human freedom, now under attack from so many sides.”

Dr. Kuehnelt-Leddihn is survived by his wife, Countess Christian Goess; three children; and seven grandchildren.



Sources: *Moral Wisdom in the Allocation of Economic Resources*, edited by Paul C. Goetz (Saint Mary’s University Press, 1987), and “Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn (1909-1999), RIP” by William Doyno, Jr. in *The Wanderer* (July 22, 1999).

“my truth” on you through brute force—comes to dominate public life. That is why the pope’s defense of the human capacity to know the truth of things is crucial for democracy. Radical skepticism and democracy cannot coexist indefinitely.

R&L: *In John Paul’s development of these three themes, what has been the keystone principle in his papal teaching?*

Weigel: The keystone of the edifice of John Paul II’s teaching is the conviction that Jesus Christ is the answer to the question that is every human life. According to many secularists, the intensity of that conviction makes the pope a sectarian. On the contrary, it is the depth of his Christian commitment that has opened him up to intense conversations with Christians of other communions, with the Jewish people, and with other major world religions.

R&L: *Much of John Paul’s life has been spent in opposition to the great totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. How would you characterize*

ture of Poland. This culture-first reading of history gave a new form of power to the powerless, attacked communism at its maximum point of vulnerability, and demonstrated that a revolution of conscience could ignite a nonviolent political revolution that led not to a new form of tyranny but to the restitution of civil society as the basis of democracy. That is what John Paul II did in east central Europe. That is what he tried to do in Cuba. And that is why the Communist leadership in Beijing has blocked his access to that country.

R&L: *On this topic, one of the great disputed questions about this papacy has been John Paul’s role in the collapse of communism in central and eastern Europe. According to your research, what is the connection between this papacy and the end of the Soviet empire?*

Weigel: John Paul was the chief, although not the only, inspiration of the revolution of conscience that preceded and made possible the political revolution of 1989. Conspiracy theories about the pope and American intelligence

ers. He knew, in his heart, that it was coming. And he knew why.

R&L: *Although you officially did not begin work on this biography until 1996, you have been commenting on this papacy since John Paul’s election. In your move from papal commentator to papal biographer, what did you discover about this pope that surprised you?*

Weigel: I have been struck by the dramatic continuity between Cardinal Karol Wojtyła’s program and style as archbishop of Kraków between 1964 and 1978 and the program and style of Pope John Paul II. A lot of what the world has seen from Rome since 1978 was previewed in Kraków in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

I have been deeply moved by encountering the intensity of the Holy Father’s prayer life. I have gotten to know the pope’s robust and dry sense of humor. And I have been somewhat surprised by the degree to which the traditional managers of popes are still uncomfortable, twenty-one years after his election, with John Paul II’s determination to be a pastor rather than a bureaucratic manager.

R&L: *Finally, how has the research for and writing of this book affected your family, your life, and your faith?*

Weigel: I am very grateful to my family for their patience with what has been a very intense project, involving a lot of travel. That they have gotten to know the Holy Father in the process is a bonus for which I am grateful to him. As a Catholic, I believe that John Paul II is Peter amidst the disciples; I have also been deeply moved by the way in which this “witness to hope” profoundly touches the lives of those who do not share his, or my, faith. A

The keystone of the edifice of John Paul II’s teaching is the conviction that Jesus Christ is the answer to the question that is every human life.

his response to tyranny?

Weigel: The creativity of John Paul’s analysis of totalitarianism and his prescription for effective resistance was its recognition that culture is the key to history. A people in firm possession of their historic culture could mount an effective, nonviolent resistance to totalitarianism; they could say “no” to communism, for example, on the basis of a higher and more compelling “yes”—for example, to the Catholic cul-

agencies are journalistic fantasies.

It seems to me that, even before the imposition of martial law in Poland, John Paul had intuited that communism was finished. It might take decades, but people who had decided not to acquiesce any longer in the Communist culture of the lie would eventually win out. As it happened, history went on “fast-forward” in a way that no one could have predicted—although it is certainly the case that the pope was less surprised by the Communist crack-up than many oth-

T. S. Eliot's Political "Middle Way"

Michael R. Stevens

When the poet and novelist Robert Graves titled his account of the period between the two world wars *The Long Weekend*, he was summoning the sort of irony appropriate for a period that seems to us now a feckless pause between world crises. Certainly the "Roaring Twenties" retain a bit of luminosity, but the 1930s do not retain any sheen, in large measure due to the rampant, and eventually tragic, political polarization of the decade. The far Right and the far Left were never stronger nor more active than in this decade, and not just in their respective bastions of Germany and the Soviet Union; everywhere, all around the globe, in the midst of democracies and in the shadows of fading monarchies, these political extremes flourished and sparred. The worst scene of sparring—indeed of furious bloodletting that presaged the coming world conflict—was in Spain, where General Franco's forces benefited from Nazi money and air support while the motley Republican army, with its International Brigade of young intellectuals from all around the world, trained under Soviet military advisors. But the Spanish Civil War elicited more than grave physical combat; it was also the source of fierce combat among men of letters in the West.

The sharpest battle of the intellectual war occurred in 1937, when Nancy Cunard and a group of other Left-wing writers in Paris (including the young British poets W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender) sent out a questionnaire to 200 writers in Europe, with this provocative content: "Are you for, or against, the legal government and people of Republi-

can Spain? Are you for, or against, Franco and Fascism? For it is impossible any longer to take no side." The confrontational questionnaire elicited 147 answers, the overwhelming majority of which—126—supported the Republic. Five writers explicitly responded in favor of Franco (among them the novelist Evelyn Waugh and the WWI poet Edmund Blunden). Among sixteen responses that Cunard, in her eventually published compendium, grouped under the skeptical heading "Neutral?" were those of some of the most famous writers of the age: H. G. Wells, Aldous Huxley, Ezra Pound (even at this time deeply involved in the Italian Fascist party), and the Anglo-American poet T. S. Eliot. Since the mid-1930s was not an era where attempts at neutrality would be tolerated, these writers were taken either as morally weak and equivocal or as mere closet Fascists trying to protect their reputations. In fact, several of them were either equivocal or Fascist or both. Not so with T. S. Eliot.

Pursuit of a *Via Media*

Eliot's actual response, in fact, is a distillation of a much broader and more penetrating agenda, which he spent the last half of his life pursuing. He wrote this response to Cunard: "While I am naturally sympathetic, I still feel convinced that it is best that at least a few men of letters remain silent." Rather than a deft side-stepping of the issue, what Eliot offers here is the credo that he had been developing since his conversion to Christianity and entrance into the Anglican Church in 1927: a socio-political version of the Anglican theological

tenet known as *via media*.

Anglicanism has made its mark on ecclesiastical history, in large measure, by filling the void between the poles of Roman Catholicism and Reformation Protestantism. The notion of pursuing a *via media*, a "middle way," has meant less a third alternative than a comfort with the ambiguity and resistance to the dogmatism that defines both extremes. Anglican theology, however, is not void of content by any means but is, rather, a coalescing of the "middle ground" into a place of theological mooring. Transposed to the socio-political sphere, this precludes a grouping of Eliot with the weak, compromising demeanor of many of his British fellows during the 1930s. Just as the theological *via media* has content, so does Eliot's fundamental schema for culture: a "neo-medieval vision" for society. Certainly this is not a call for a historical reprise, since Eliot's understanding of the Middle Ages was quite idealized. But he was after a model of order and faith. What this came to mean, in Western society between the two world wars, was that Eliot's pursuit of a political *via media* differed radically from the other political options brought to the forefront of intellectual life. Eliot's was a transcendent "middle way," hearkening both backward and forward toward a medievalism that might effect healing precisely because it is not bound to a humanistic view of man and society.

Since Eliot made precious few explicit pronouncements regarding the outworking of his faith, one must find other sources for exploring the exact nature of his socio-political thought. Such

a forum is readily provided by the journal *The Criterion*, which Eliot edited from its founding in 1922 (the first publication of *The Waste Land* appeared in the first number) until its closure in January of 1939. Certainly *The Criterion* was not founded with such a sweeping motive as thorough cultural transformation; it was intended as a cosmopolitan review of literature and intellectual discourse. But there was present, even in Eliot's early championing of the literary function of a review, a sense of political mission: the healing of Europe's intellectual wounds, which were perhaps more deep-seated than even the physical destruction of the First World War, through the avenue of an international concourse of minds.

This project of healing Europe by means of a quarterly review, though it produced in *The Criterion* an amazing and cosmopolitan expanse of literature and criticism in the mid-1920s, proved ill-fated for two reasons. First, the closing down of international communica-

tion which he formalized in 1927 with his baptism and confirmation into the Church of England. Again, the guiding ethic of Anglicanism, his chosen route, is important; the pursuit of the *via media* in matters of theology seemed to hint at a path through the socio-political melee as well.

Perhaps the first full-blown application of the *via media* in this sphere began in December of 1928, when Eliot presented a lengthy review article titled, "The Literature of Fascism," taking the role of one "interested in political ideas, but not in politics." What followed over the next few numbers was an extended tri-partite debate between Eliot, the Communist writer A. L. Rowse, and the Fascist writer James Barnes. Eliot gave each man opportunity to review the recent literature of his own political camp, and then Eliot responded in an article titled, "Mr. Barnes and Mr. Rowse." Digging at the root of both ideologies, Eliot found that they are both merely surrogate religions:


statements with unexamined enthusiasms.

This is typical of Eliot's treatment, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, of the theories behind these two increasingly magnetic poles. The constant implication is that the *via media* to which he points, with its roots in the Middle Ages and its emphasis on human dignity and simplicity, is the only socio-political option that has taken into account, by clear-sighted examination, the problematic status of human nature.

A Backward-Glancing Move

But what good was the *via media* in the face of the very actual and pernicious manifestations of the 1930s, of Hitler and Stalin and Franco? And are we talking about the same kind of "middle ground" upon which Neville Chamberlain and others stood at Munich during the 1938 accords, the bitterly ironic purchasing of "peace in our time"?

These hard questions are a good entry point to Eliot's actual and, I think, profound political vision. Eliot always argued in *The Criterion* of his interest in political ideas rather than *Realpolitik*, but such an angle did not at all mean that he had nothing to say on the political issues of the day. In fact, the articles, reviews, and commentaries in *The Criterion* of the 1930s were overflowing with political arguments. Not incidentally, these arguments were unequivocally anti-Nazi. Indeed, as early as the April 1931 number, Eliot reprinted a speech that Thomas Mann had delivered in Berlin the previous autumn, titled, "An Appeal to Reason." The text provides an amazing early critique of National Socialism's emotional excess and, in Mann's mind, return to barbaric and pagan modes: "It is distinguished in its character as a nature-cult, precisely by its absolute unrestraint, its orgiastic, radically anti-humane, frenziedly dynamic character." But the criticisms of



The Christian thinker, even the Christian imaginative artist, can and should play a part in the analysis and guidance of culture at large.

— Michael R. Stevens

tion at the end of the decade, as totalitarian regimes began to flex their muscles in the sphere of culture, destroyed the idealism that the "mind of Europe" could be salvaged through cooperation. This imposed silence alone would have dealt a great blow to Eliot's hopes for *The Criterion* were it not for the confluence of a second, very different factor, which immediately gave the journal a new set of possibilities: Eliot's spiritual awakening to Christianity,

Fascism and communism, as ideas, seem to me to be thoroughly sterilized. A revolutionary idea is one which requires a reorganization of the mind; fascism and communism is now the natural idea for the thoughtless person. This in itself is a hint that the two doctrines are merely variations of the same doctrine: and even that they are merely variations of the present state of things.... What I find in both fascism and communism is a combination of

the Fascist excess are only part of the story—the negative part. Eliot becomes constructive with regard to his *via media* as well, going so far as to print a lead article in the October 1931 number, written by the economist A. J. Penty, defending the medieval economic scheme as far more efficient, and moral, than any modern alternative. In early 1932, Eliot begins turning to one of his closest friends, the Roman Catholic historian Christopher Dawson, to provide accounts of medievalism as the crowning age, rather than the dark age, for the Western tradition. In his own “Commentary” for the April 1932 number of *The Criterion*, Eliot begins to define the parameters that such a backward-glancing move would create for his own politics, when he muses that:

The mystical belief in herd-feeling, which has been elevated to a pseudoscience under such names as ‘social psychology,’ is one of the most disquieting superstitions of the day.... It is apparent in extreme Nationalism, as well as in Communism; and indeed, the two do not seem very far apart.... It is a symptom of weakness, but the weakness is only in part pathological; for the rest it is just the essential feebleness and impotence of the individual man which Christianity has always recognized.

Despite this nascent articulation, it is only in the American Lecture Tour of 1932–33 that Eliot comes into full recognition of the route that will comprise the “middle way.” In the Turnbull Lectures at Johns Hopkins in early 1933, Eliot gives an account of poets who have been truly “metaphysical,” in the sense of presenting an account of the world that unifies poetic and philosophic forces. Dante in the thirteenth century, Donne in the seventeenth, and Jules Laforgue in the nineteenth all arose in ages crying out for synthesis, and each afforded as much as he could, though Dante’s was most complete, Donne’s less so, and Laforgue’s mainly incho-

ate. But the lectures ultimately beg the question, Who will be the next “metaphysical” poet to emerge? The answer, not so far below the surface, is Eliot himself. His will be the proclamation of a unity of spiritual and socio-political forces toward one end: the “good life,” in the medieval sense of simplicity, unanimity of soul and spirit, and oneness of intellectual purpose. The glue that holds everything together is Christianity, and Eliot himself will blaze the “middle path” through his fusion of the intellectual and the creative in his work.

From mid-1933 until the closing of *The Criterion* with the January 1939 number, Eliot pursued a spiritual *via media*, a repeated call for a socio-political transformation to the tenets, if not the modes, of medievalism. This was performed in the spiritual vacuum effected by the absolute polarization, by the time of the Spanish Civil War, between Right and Left. Furthermore, though rooted in transcendent principles and a vision of this life by reference to the next, Eliot’s vision was frequently and decidedly brought to bear on the political realities of the day. The situation was not “either/or,” but “both/and.” He could not be the prophet without seeing the world around him.

A Mosaic of Faith and Culture

Let me turn back to 1937, an obscure year of polarity and enmity, as the place to say a final word regarding the pursuit of the medieval way, the *via media*. What is it that Eliot was proffering in his response to Cunard’s questionnaire: “While I am naturally sympathetic, I still feel convinced that it is best that at least a few men of letters remain silent”? I believe he was giving a glimpse of why his “middle way,” his spiritual order, was so needed. The outcry against him, which in many permutations endures to this day, indicates why it has never come about. It is a *scandalon*, a stumbling block in this world system. Those who

would perpetuate a transcendent *via media* today invariably find that the stumbling block is very much in place.

With that in mind, what can we learn for our present historical moment from the strange model that T. S. Eliot affords? There are many lessons, but I think three are paramount. First, Eliot’s editorial work of nearly two decades with *The Criterion* shows us that the Christian thinker, even the Christian imaginative artist, can and should play a part in the analysis and guidance of culture at large. Second, Eliot’s dogged and lucid adherence to his transcendent *via media*, in the midst of political fray and derangement, shows us that we need not commit ourselves to Faustian bargains in the political sphere but, rather, that we should act on convictions and principles when we suggest remedies for socio-political woes. The test of pragmatism—often a faulty gauge of necessity and even of desirability—need not reign supreme. A final lesson to be gained from Eliot’s *via media*, aiming as it does firmly backward toward a medievalism that joined faith and culture in one elaborate mosaic, is that *new* solutions and innovations are not always the best cure for what ails us culturally. In fact, Eliot would argue that the simplest era of the last few millennia, the Middle Ages, serves a paradigm for the simplest of solutions: to let faith in Christ exude out of the next life back into this one, at every level of culture and in every way imaginable. Perhaps, as Eliot says in the visionary passage at the end of “Little Gidding,” the final of the *Four Quartets*,

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

A

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John Paul II and the Problem of Consumerism

Raymond J. de Souza

Pope John Paul II places his teaching about economics and the social order within the framework of his Christian personalism, in which the human person is the starting point of his analysis and the primary criterion of his evaluation. He has made the cornerstone of his entire pontificate the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the true nature of the human person is fully revealed in Jesus Christ and that every person has a fundamental vocation revealed by the commandment to love, to give himself to God and to others. John Paul's approach is that of a pastor who asks whether the social order recognizes the human person for what he is and whether it renders him more or less free to live out his human vocation.

It is in this context that John Paul's repeated and strong condemnations of consumerism should be understood. He regards consumerism as a threat to the freedom of the human person to live according to the higher demands of love rather than to the lower pull of material desires. It is important to understand why the pope sees such a danger in consumerism and how this is related to questions of economic liberty, which the pope has endorsed as an integral part of human freedom. It is a subject in need of greater attention than it has been given to date, so it might be useful to begin by asking some preliminary questions.

Every human person has a dual role in the economy. He is both a (potential) producer and a consumer. John Paul's social teaching has emphasized both roles. In the sphere of production, he has emphasized that only economic liberty can allow man's creativity to be exer-

cised, a creativity that leads to the twin goods of the creation of wealth and the development of the personality through work. This approach grounds man's creativity in the biblical account of Creation, which is the starting point for Christian anthropology. John Paul takes this approach in his "theology of work," when he writes that man—created in the image of God—is called to be creative in exercising dominion over the physical world.

When John Paul endorses "capitalism" or the free economy, as he prefers to call it, it is because it best allows for the freedom the human person needs to exercise his creativity. In addition, the free economy encourages producers to be attentive to the needs of others—namely, their customers—and to cooperate with others, in freedom and trust, in order to meet those needs in an efficient way. In short, it encourages economic actors, as producers, to be of service to their neighbors.

The "Same Basic Mistake"

It was from this perspective that John Paul diagnosed the fatal weakness of communism. Communism treated the person as only a factor of production, an object to be controlled and not an acting subject in his own right. Communism did not allow for the freedom necessary for the person to be creative and to give himself to others. It is striking, therefore, that the pope diagnoses consumerism to be another manifestation of the "same basic mistake" in which the "affluent or consumer society" reduces man to an object of material things (*Centesimus Annus*, n. 19).

John Paul is not saying that communism and the free economy suffer from the same basic mistake, otherwise he could not have endorsed the free economy as the best hope for the development of nations. Yet within the context of the system of economic liberty—a good in its own right—there arises the potential for persons to give in to a consumerist way of living that does make the same materialist mistake of communism—not on the side of the person as a producer but on the side of the person as a consumer.

What is consumerism? It is not very easy to define, but a good, working definition might be that consumerism is a way of living in which the person, at least in practice, makes consumer goods the object of his heart's desire; that is, they become the source of his identity and the goal toward which his life is oriented. Consumption is obviously necessary—there would be no economy without consumers. Consumerism arises when the person becomes—in his own mind or in the view of others—primarily an object that consumes solely for himself, rather than a subject who uses material goods in order to give himself to others. For the person to be reduced to a consuming object does indeed repeat the same basic mistake of reducing him to a producing object. The human person whose nature is fully revealed in Jesus Christ cannot be treated—or, as is often the case with consumerism, cannot treat himself—as an object, when in reality he has been given the human vocation to love.

Richard John Neuhaus provides a felicitous definition of consumerism in

Doing Well and Doing Good, his commentary on *Centesimus Annus*:

Consumerism is, quite precisely, the consuming of life by the things consumed. It is living in a manner that is measured by having rather than being. As Pope John Paul II makes clear, consumerism is hardly the sin of the rich. The poor, driven by discontent and envy, may be as consumed by what they do not have as the rich are consumed by what they do have. The question is not, certainly not most importantly, a question about economics. It is first and foremost a cultural and moral problem requiring a cultural and moral remedy.

Whether or not consumerism afflicts the affluent more or less than others is a practical question that needs to be addressed later. But Neuhaus here locates the problem of consumerism where John Paul locates it, in the sphere of culture, and specifically in the relationship of authentic human freedom to the possession of material goods. Neuhaus alludes to the emphasis in the pope's teaching of the primacy of the "person over things" and of "being over having."

What is needed therefore is an examination of the relationship between the free economy as it is currently lived out and the culture of consumerism. Consumerism may well be a cultural phenomenon, but the economic order is not insulated from culture, and neither is culture unaffected by economics. It is necessary, then, to ask whether the affluent, consumer-oriented societies in which we live pose a constant temptation of living according to "having" rather than "being." This is not, at least from a moral point of view, a minor problem that is outweighed by the wealth-creation benefits of free enterprise. Consumerism is a major moral threat to the salvation of souls—the primary concern of religious thinkers. John Paul teaches that what is at stake is man's fundamental vocation to give

himself to others and to God, and a consumerist society that makes this more difficult is a society "alienated" from its true purpose.

Set Free for Freedom

The challenge is to embrace economic liberty without putting it in the service of corrupting the human vocation. As Saint Paul puts it: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:5). According to John Paul, consumerism constitutes a form of slavery, which the pope does not hesitate to liken to drug abuse or pornography. It is not the possession of goods alone, or the desire for a better life that is sinful, but rather "... in possessing without regard for the ordered hierarchy of goods one has [and] ... the subordination of goods and their availability to man's being and true vocation" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 28).

Man has been set free in Christ in order to be more fully himself and to

Even in recommending "capitalism" or the "free economy" as the best option for economic organization, he cautions:

But if by "capitalism" is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed with a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative. (*Centesimus Annus*, n. 42)

John Paul's personalism emphasizes that it is the whole person—created and redeemed by God—who is free, not just the political person or the economic person. The core of the free person is the ethical and religious actor, and economic freedom is good insofar as it remains part of that larger freedom. When it becomes absolutized and becomes the dominant organizing principle of personal actions and social relations, then man becomes oppressed by his own eco-

Every human person has a dual role in the economy. He is both a (potential) producer and a consumer. John Paul's social teaching emphasizes both roles.

— Raymond J. de Souza



give of himself to God and to others. Any other good that replaces that end makes man less free to be truly human. Those "other goods" include things that are evil in themselves, such as drugs or pornography, but they also include things that are good in themselves, like the many goods we need to survive and flourish as corporeal creatures.

Man has been set free for freedom. John Paul insists that economic freedom is part of that freedom, but only part.

economic liberty. The "juridical framework" spoken of here is necessary for the smooth operation of economic relations and for a just society. It is not clear what juridical measures, if any, might be applicable in the case of consumerism, but the point remains. Capitalism requires a "framework" that places economic liberty at the service of a comprehensive freedom that is ethical and religious at its core. That "framework" needs also to be cultural, including for-

mation in the proper use of material goods. The necessity of that framework for pastors who wish promote economic liberty cannot be overstated. Without it, the pope's assessment of capitalism is "certainly negative."

Yet the answer cannot be—first on a practical level but also on a deeper theological level—to abandon freedom, including economic liberty. In his book *Soul of the World*, George Weigel has posed the question quite starkly:

Can the new democracies [in east central Europe] develop societies that provide for the free exercise of human creativity in the workplace, in politics, and in the many fields of culture without becoming libertine in their public moral life? Will "consumerism"—that is, consumption as an ideology—replace Marxism-Leninism as the new form of bondage east of the Elbe River? Has it already done so in the West? If not, how can we prevent its triumph? If so, how can we repair the damage and put the free society on a firmer moral foundation?

If we are to speak of our consumer societies as being in "bondage," how might we seek liberation? An analogy might be drawn to the issue of welfare, where religious thinkers considered how welfare affected the persons who received it: Did it expand or contract their ability to develop as persons who embrace the responsibility to live freely? The starting point was not economics but, rather, the effect on the human person, which the church insists is the "foundation, cause, and end of every social institution" (*Mater et Magistra*, n. 218–19). The ultimate "solution" to the problem of consumerism is conversion of heart, for only that can change the object of the heart's desire. But a complete account of economic liberty from a Christian perspective needs to inquire as to what specific dangers can arise in the free economy with respect to consumerism. Some areas suggest them-

selves as good starting points.

Four Preliminary Questions

Does economic policy contribute to consumerism? Is the task of combating consumerism wholly the responsibility of private sector culture-forming institutions, notably churches, universities, publishing houses, movie studios, and the like? Or are there relevant public policy measures? To employ an analogy, divorce is quite clearly a cultural problem, but recent studies have examined the deleterious effects of law on the incidence of divorce. We need to ask the same about economic policy. For example, many economic-stimulation policies focus on encouraging greater consumer spending, especially on big-ticket items. Are policies that favor consumption rather than saving subject, therefore, to moral criticism in light of the danger of consumerism?

Would there be an economic price to pay if consumerist attitudes declined? If large numbers of people heed the advice to live more simply, save more, and give more to charity, would economic growth suffer? The theological defense of capitalism has always maintained that the economy benefits from virtuous behavior (e.g., hard work, farsightedness, intelligent creativity, self-discipline, professional competence, fair treatment of customers and workers, truthfulness in advertising); might consumerism be the one vice from which capitalism benefits? If so, is the Christian willing to accept lower economic growth, if that were the consequence of a decline in consumerist attitudes?

What forms of countercultural witness are effective in resisting consumerism? That our culture is consumerist is evident. In this milieu, could Christians provide a countercultural witness by, for example, refusing to shop on Sunday or by choosing not to replace older goods that are serviceable though no longer fashionable? One also thinks

of the couples who make material sacrifices in order to have large families, choosing, in a particularly vivid way, in favor of being over having.

Do high levels of consumption lead to consumerism? Father Neuhaus earlier answered "No," and that seems right, otherwise a prosperous economy would constitute a near occasion of sin in itself. How many possessions one has is, in a certain sense, independent of how much one is attached to those goods as defining his identity (either presently with goods he has or in the future with goods he does not yet have but desires). It is, of course, possible to be very rich and to be a saint, as history teaches us with Saint Louis of France, Saint Charles Borromeo of Milan, and Saint Thomas More of England. But it is also possible to walk away from Jesus sadly, as does the rich young man of the Gospels, leading Jesus to comment about the difficulty of the camel passing through the eye of the needle (Matt. 19:16–26; Mark 10:17–27; Luke 18:18–27). It is a grave warning. Is it sufficiently received as such by Christians living in rich societies?

One of John Paul II's social teaching achievements has been to ground the Church's traditional teaching on the productivity of man, present throughout the modern corpus of social teaching, in his distinctive theological personalism. That contribution has been commented upon and made accessible to an audience familiar with economic scholarship. The same needs to be done for his equally important teaching on the role of man as consumer, and the problem of consumerism. In a post-Communist world, it is part of the challenge of freedom. **A**

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Biblical Theology and the Non-Abundant Life

A Review Essay by John R. Schneider

In this book, as the title suggests, New Testament scholar Craig L. Blomberg states his purpose as giving “a comprehensive survey, in roughly historical sequence, of the major biblical witnesses to a theology of wealth for people in the church age—that is, from Pentecost onward” (30). Christian scholars of the more orthodox type will look hopefully to the notable aims of the volume, as to those of the entire series of studies in biblical theology of which it is a part. It seems that neither D. A. Carson, who is chief editor of the series, nor its several authors quite believe the current paleontology, which says that this species of discipline is extinct.

For the most part, Blomberg makes good on his promise to be comprehensive in the manner of a survey. Beginning with the Old Testament, going next to Jewish writings between the Testaments, and at last to the writings of the New, he manages to include every text one can think of as having explicit bearing on our subject. The merely encyclopedic value of the work is, thus, considerable. Furthermore, Blomberg also delivers on his promise to put things in rough chronological sequence. We leave it to professional scholars of the Bible to debate (as they well might) his judgments on the history of the text, but there is no doubting Blomberg’s command of the vast secondary literature, and his ability to use it to construct plausible historical-critical arguments is impressive. Non-experts will be glad to find that his historical constructions do not very much at all interrupt the canonical sequence

of the Bible they commonly know and read. This bent of method, along with a style of prose that is always clear and succinct, bodes well for the book’s appeal to a wide Christian readership. The unexpected failure to include an index of references to biblical texts is somewhat compensated for by the efficient organization of the book.

*Neither Poverty Nor Riches:
A Biblical Theology
of Material Possessions
by Craig L. Blomberg*

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
1999. 288 pp. Paper: \$20.00

Old-Fashioned Inductive Exegesis

As for the more substantial matter of how Blomberg handles, in his somewhat confusing (and unexplained) terms, the “major biblical witnesses to a biblical theology of wealth,” there is much to recommend before discussing criticisms. First, the critical applications of recent sociological studies do help clear up certain basic areas of confusion that have commonly infiltrated Christian moral discourse, especially that of Liberation Theology. They confirm, for instance, that the make-up and consciousness of the early Christian movement cannot well be defined in terms of either social or economic poverty. As Blomberg (quite non-ideologically) shows, from the beginning of Christianity until now, the movement has rather

had a wondrous ability to make its way across otherwise trenchant lines of class division (105–9).

A second contribution is linked with the author’s aim, reiterated at the end of the book, as having been “to capture both the diversity and unity of the scriptural witness” (243). Having read to that point, one cannot but agree that deliberate effort has been made all the way through to do so. And at least on one level, the effort is a success. Blomberg is a rigorous practitioner of old-fashioned inductive exegesis. There is no visible trace of inclination toward creation of that convenient “canon within the canon.” He rigorously seeks to convey what the sometimes very different texts have to say. The outcome is that not just the harmless

diversities come out—differences of slant, style, stress, and so forth—but so do the larger, more dangerous ones. So, for example, the candid statement that on first reading James and Paul (not least on this topic) seem “different as night and day” (243), is typical of the work. Nor do we get away without considering the fact that Luke’s Gospel offers no simple view of wealth and poverty but rather “a diversity of application” (225). Furthermore, Blomberg bluntly accepts the most glaring difference on our subject between the Old and New Testaments. “Wealth is a sign of God’s blessing” is a major strand of Old Testament teaching that does not carry over to the New (83, 242). This, in fact, is a major thesis of his book.

In spite of the diversity, however, Blomberg discerns five “unifying mo-

tifs,” which do come up in the development of the book and then get discussed in a summary near the end. (1) “Material possessions are a good gift from God meant for his people to enjoy” (243). (2) “Material possessions are simultaneously one of the primary means of turning hearts away from God” (244). (3) “A necessary sign of life in the process of being redeemed is that of transformation in the area of stewardship” (244). (4) “There are certain extremes of wealth and poverty which are in and of themselves intolerable” (245). (5) “Above all, the Bible’s teaching about material possessions is inextricably intertwined with more ‘spiritual’ matters” (246).

Now, few will disagree that these are indeed commonplaces of Scripture. But perhaps some readers, upon weighing this as the harvest of “biblical theology” they are supposed to have reaped for all their labors, will ask aloud, “Is that it?” The homiletic message that wealth is essentially good, always dangerous, and

of the unity and specificity one can distill from their testimonies? If so, then hopeful readers looking for divine guidance in our own troubling age, “after Pentecost,” may be excused for long faces as they close the book and return to their still-muddled business in the world. For, assuming a fair degree of literacy already on the part of anyone who would read the book, how has their position as discerning Christians in a global, post-industrial, equities-driven, insanely complicated market culture been advanced in the least? A review is not the place to give a full appraisal and critique. Nevertheless, to conclude, we shall offer five observations of things that we believe go wrong (for all that goes right) with this book as a work that seeks to forge a biblical theology (or at least to serve the forging of one).

A “Canon Within the Canon,” After All

First, it seems that Blomberg underestimates the difficulty that the aforesaid

New. As is well-known to students of church history, differences between the two Testaments on material wealth seem to be entailed by differences that go deeply into opposition between religious worldviews themselves, making of them two religions, not one. For that reason ancient Judaism rejected Christianity as otherworldly, and, likewise, the Gnostics rejected Judaism and its evil God, maker of not just heaven but also of earth. As noted already, Blomberg marks the difference between the Testaments, but he seems to consider it fairly trivial. Briefly, when posing the question, why God might bless the Israelites by giving them abundant material wealth, Blomberg’s response is that God did so only because his purpose was to give them a land (e.g., 36–37, 82). But this answer is clearly a tautology: (On the view that land *is* material wealth) his answer comes to, “God gave his people abundant material wealth because God wished to give his people abundant material wealth.” It thus begs the question of why God would have such a vision for human beings in the first place (much more than of why God would then cease to have that vision later on).

A second observation expands the first. We notice early that Blomberg does not find theology so much in whole narratives as in specific concepts, examples, and teachings. Not that these are poor sources of theology, but when one interprets almost exclusively that way, the results are bound to be pedestrian, fragmentary, and even misleading. One brief example must suffice. In deriving theological meaning from the episode of the manna in Exodus, Blomberg treats it almost as discontinuous with Israel’s entry into the land and thus from what follows about the “milk and honey” that is to follow (38). The theology of “daily bread” thus emerges for him as a norm rather than as the probative process that it is—by which God equips his people for the real norm (which is the “milk and

Perhaps some readers, upon weighing this as the harvest of “biblical theology” they are supposed to have reaped, will ask aloud, “Is that it?”

— John R. Schneider

never the whole of things is as widely understood as it is obvious to almost anyone who has a Bible and can read. Now, nowhere does Blomberg himself explicitly make the claim to write the “comprehensive biblical theology” as advertised by the writer of the book’s back jacket. We recall his own rather more discrete (and somewhat imprecise) terms mentioned earlier: to give “survey of the major witnesses” to a biblical theology. But still, is that really the extent

diversity of Scripture creates for the theologian. In the introduction (which, by the way, includes a fine survey of literature, reflected in the superb bibliography), he rightly identifies our need for a more complete theology of the Bible. But from his comments, unknowing readers would never guess how monumentally difficult that quest is. Most difficult of all is finding principles of integration between fundamental themes of the Old Testament and the

honey”). In turn, that distorts the entire context in which he later interprets and draws moral theology from the Lord’s Prayer and Paul’s rhetoric during the Great Collection. (Of course, it also makes the quest for unity simpler.) A similar pattern occurs in his handling of Luke, which, some authors (neglected here) have argued, offers a developed rhetoric and implied defense of a point of view that is world-affirmative (and not just a collage of “diverse application”).

A third observation continues to expand the larger point we are making. We have cited Blomberg’s rigor in facing each and every biblical text that has explicit bearing on the topic. But where inferences must be drawn, and/or when the imagination is called into action by certain narrative pictures, Blomberg is rigorously constant in not following to the end those texts that assert the goodness of wealth in the extreme. These various texts that do not “know that they are naked” (before the modern academic establishment, anyway) and are thus “not ashamed” to proclaim the sacredness of such delight, while not entirely ignored by Blomberg, get muted before they are finished speaking. The usual qualifiers are rushed in to make sure they do not go so far as they seem about to do (lest modern wealthy Americans hear them and begin doing the same). Examples include treatment of image bearing. Blomberg rightly notes that its primary exegetical meaning is that humans are given dominion over the earth (34). But after this solid exegetical survey, we learn nothing affirmative, theologically, from the doctrine but only that “Two opposite extreme applications of this theology must both be avoided” (35). One is that “humanity must not be reduced to the material”; the other is that dominion does not confer the “right to rape the environment” (35). It seems there is nothing to learn about the most immediate reference of the symbols, which is the royal dignity of human be-

ings and the fittingness of abundance to their purpose on earth. Of course, that basic part of the Old Testament’s vision of human purpose is then missing altogether from the above-noted explanation of “Why the land?” It is also missing from Blomberg’s accounts of certain difficult New Testament narratives. For instance, Jesus’s statements about material blessings coming (even a hundred-fold to those who abandon everything for his sake), while acknowledged, are reduced entirely to the mechanisms of ancient Christian community (132, 140). The episode of the woman pouring a jar of nard on Jesus’ head (worth about a year’s wages for an average worker), while noted, is explained away by the (quite implausible) notion that this person foreknew Jesus’ death and was thus sort of anointing him for burial. Only by such strained devices can one arrive at the comprehensive judgment about Jesus—who was nothing if not a person of bewildering extremities in both directions—that, in sum, “As in Proverbs 30: 8–9, Jesus is concerned to moderate extremes” (145). Alas, it seems that the “canon within the canon” that Blomberg rigorously avoided in his straight-ahead exegesis shows up after all when he turns to interpretation. And the “canon” is but a single verse.

Existing in a Moral Twilight

Thus we come to the fourth observation, which is about the fourth of Blomberg’s five “motifs,” the one that condemns “certain extremes of wealth” as being “of themselves intolerable.” Of the five, this assertion comes closest to being a specific proposition of the moral-theological kind, and it is also the nearest of them all to the moral heart of the book (hence its title, we infer). We are informed up front and early that “one of the theses of this volume is that the avoidance of extremes of wealth and poverty is a consistent, recurring biblical mandate” (68). But, surely, making

the sentiment of Proverbs 30:8 the core of biblical moral theology on our subject is to promote a vast oversimplification of the whole. On what grounds would one do so? To take it from the episode of the manna is clearly misguided (as stated), and to infer it from the Lord’s Prayer as the norm we need in our complex world (as Blomberg does) is no better. That the sentiment of requesting no more than enough (“daily bread”) is the right one for prayer no more entails it as a moral norm for economic life than Solomon’s wish for wisdom (not riches) entailed moderation as God’s norm for him. The dynamic, rather, seems to be that when we pray in the right way, we may get a lot more than we ask for. (Of course, as Job learned, we may not, but that is quite another matter.)

But, furthermore, what are we to take as the proper norm for this blessed mediocrity itself? The notion of moderation is inherently vague and subject to so many conditions that, as a principle, it is not good for much besides relativism. As we might otherwise hope, Blomberg’s own personal applications (which he courageously shares with readers) do not clear things up, either. On the contrary, what are we to make of his concession that, after all his giving (“gradiated tithing” is the means he takes as “biblical”), he nevertheless does live in “a large, comfortable suburban home”? That it also lacks a big television hardly elevates the standard above the merely gratuitous. We may wonder at this point what Ronald Sider would say or, rather, by what clear principles Blomberg could respond. It seems that the response would be pretty feeble-sounding. For, reflecting on his admiration for promoters of “simpler living,” Blomberg explains, “God has not yet led me to follow them” (249). Now, we may ask, is Blomberg’s biblical theology thus in fact a foundation for Sider’s moral teaching? But if not (until God calls, we

guess), we still await a lucid statement of the principle that shows that it is not, and that living in suburbia (even without the big screen) is to exist in a moral twilight.

Discerning a Biblical Theology of Wealth

Which brings us to our last observation. Blomberg's view is that Scripture (here the Old Testament) supports no, one "economic or liberation analysis of poverty" (citing Pleins); that it, rather, "cuts across all modern systems and ideologies" (82). His occasional references to such systems are surprisingly colloquial. It is strange, for instance, to find someone still referring to "capitalism" with the old pejorative generalities (that it is essentially about private property, exploitation, and so forth), or to socialism as if it were essentially about the distribution of justice. A great and influential body of writings has emerged and grown in the last century that has greatly informed our sense of how to use Scripture to shape a relevant moral theology. We have learned that these human systems are in reality born of metaphysical worldviews and that no part (neither property nor justice) is separable from the whole. And we have also come to realize that the Bible must be related to them in those philosophical terms. But from Blomberg's book, the unknowing reader would never guess that any of this material exists. Much less would the reader guess how deeply relevant it is to discerning a biblical theology of wealth amid the various witness of Scripture, and still less how dubious it renders the author's own various comments on the economic systems that shape the culture of our time. **A**

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Book News



The Truth of Things: Liberal Arts and the Recovery of Reality

Marion Montgomery
Spence Publishing, 1999
309 pp. Hardcover: \$24.95

Most conservative commentators agree that contemporary education is a basket-case; they differ, however, on why this is so. Some place the root of the problem in the 1960s; others in the philosophies of Rousseau and Nietzsche. Montgomery pushes the problem back to the fourteenth century when certain philosophical ideas—essentially, that reality cannot be apprehended by human intellect—began to emerge. The way to a reestablishment of true education, according to Montgomery, therefore lies in the "recovery of intellect from its gnostic delusions" and so be able to come to terms with the truth of things.

The Devil Knows Latin: Why America Needs the Classical Tradition

E. Christian Kopff
Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1999
313 pp. Hardcover: \$24.95

Paraphrasing Tertullian, what has Athens (and Jerusalem and Rome) to do with America? According to E. Christian Kopff, professor of classical studies at Colorado University, a great deal more than we are aware of in our modern times. In truth, not only our language but our cultural and political institutions are deeply indebted to the achievements of the classical world, and we ignore that tradition only at our peril.

This collection of essays is organized into three sections. The first, "Civiliza-

tion as Narrative," comprises Kopff's argument for reestablishing Latin and Greek, in addition to English and mathematics, as the core of true education. The second, "The Good, the Bad, and the Postmodern," contains his condemnation of the effect liberalism has had on education. The third, "Contemporary Chronicles," presents examples of the classical tradition drawn from the academy and popular culture; especially noteworthy is his reading of the Greek ethical themes in Clint Eastwood's films and *The Godfather* series.

Perhaps the finest section is Kopff's final set of proposals for restoring the classical languages to elementary and secondary curricula. Here his enthusiasm for the classical tradition is most evident, as he, with evident passion, exhorts adults to the study of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. He assures the reader that it is never too late to start classical studies and offers suggestions on classes, grammars, and classical literature for the beginner.

The Footnote: A Curious History
Anthony Grafton
Harvard University Press, 1999
255 pp. Paperback: \$14.00

The lowly footnote, long the refuge of the minor and the marginal, emerges in this book as a singular resource with a surprising history that says volumes about the evolution of modern scholarship. In Anthony Grafton's engrossing account, released this year in paperback, footnotes to history give way to footnotes as history, recounting in their subtle way the story of the progress of knowledge in written form. **A**



Rev. Robert A. Sirico

Peace and Trade, Not Sanctions, Will Change Iraq

The Vatican has come under pressure from the United States to shun Iraq, the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham, during the travels of Pope John Paul II. The State Department is reportedly concerned that the pope's scheduled December visit will be manipulated by Saddam Hussein "for political purposes." No doubt. There are few heads of state anywhere whose political motivations are more suspect than Saddam's; meanwhile, the pope's motivations are unquestionably religious and humanitarian. It should be clear whose message will prevail.

The real trouble is that the pope is a vocal opponent of U.S. sanctions against Iraq, just as he has opposed sanctions against Cuba, another country he visited against U.S. wishes. Indeed, the pope has emerged as a leading critic of sanctions generally, just as the United States has emerged as a leading practitioner of sanctions around the world.

In the pope's view, articulated in many sermons and undergirded by three magisterial encyclicals on economics, forbidding trade in nonmilitary goods and services harms the poor, engenders rather than quells conflict, and forestalls political changes consistent with human rights.

Indeed, last month's United Nations' report on the effect of sanctions against Iraq seems to support this view: Half a million children under the age of five have died since 1991. Every month, another four thousand children die due to lack of medicine, food, and clean water. Malnutrition and disease is widespread. Oil-for-food exchanges have addressed only a tiny part of the problem. The pope cannot be expected to overlook a crisis of this magnitude.

The problem of sanctions is not limited to Iraq. The United States maintains some form of economic sanctions against seventy-eight countries—nearly half the countries in the world. Some are holdovers from the Cold War (Cuba, North Korea, and China); others are the usual lineup of rogue states (Libya and Iran). Lobbying groups have pushed

Congress to impose sanctions for the most menial of infractions. Even Costa Rica, Italy, and the tiny island of Vanuatu have found themselves on the receiving end of U.S. trade sanctions.

Along with the rise of sanctions mania, sweeping academic studies have appeared—like Gary Hufbauer's *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered* (1999)—that have shown sanctions to be economically harmful to the most vulnerable part of the population in the targeted country. Neither do they achieve their stated military or political objectives. After all, Fidel Castro, Muammar Qaddafi, and Hussein still rule their much-sanctioned domains. In each case, sanctions

have served to underscore the image of the leader as an opponent of foreign empire.

In contrast, Catholic social teaching has long embraced peaceful international economic relations as an expression of human solidarity. As I saw first-hand on my last visit to Cuba, forbidding trade means barring people

from having access to the means of material improvement, which is a sin against charity. It also means using a policy of coercion, rewarding some and injuring others, where peaceful exchange would be more fruitful.

We have known since Athens' embargo against Megara in 431 BC set off the Peloponnesian War that sanctions are no way to conduct international policy. If we want a world where human rights are respected, the path of peace and trade is to be preferred to a path of ongoing belligerence. Rather than being harassed by the Clinton administration, Pope John Paul II should be praised for setting an example of political independence in the face of a misguided U.S. policy against so many countries. *A*

Rev. Robert A. Sirico is a Roman Catholic priest and the president and co-founder of the Acton Institute. A longer version of this essay appeared in the National Catholic Reporter, September 24, 1999.

“For centuries it was never discovered that education was a function of the State, and the State never attempted to educate. But when modern absolutism arose, it laid claim to every thing on behalf of the sovereign power.... When the revolutionary theory of government began to prevail, and Church and State found that they were educating for opposite ends and in a contradictory spirit, it became necessary to remove children entirely from the influence of religion.”

—Lord Acton—

RELIGION & LIBERTY

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