

Catholic social teaching is often called “the Church’s best-kept secret” by its advocates, and I think this volume is one example of why that is the case. There are many interesting takes on *Caritas in Veritate*, such as Michael Naughton’s emphasis on the logic of gift and what it could mean in terms of the American fascination with “earned success,” but this is nothing new. Theologians and philosophers over the centuries have written about the paradoxes of pride and humility, charity and justice, and, at its best, Catholic social teaching should remind us of these and help us live more faithful lives. If Catholic social teaching remains the purview of academics who disdain or simply do not understand the political world in which they live, no one should be surprised when that world is run by people who are ignorant of Church teaching. At the same time and as we can now see, the political activity of Catholics will be meaningless, even destructive, for the well-being of society if those same Catholics are not well-formed in doctrine and in their interior lives.

As mentioned above, the United States uses competitive checks and balances, and focuses on commercial activity to achieve a certain type of common good at the political level, and it does so without overt public appeals to virtue or religious dogma, despite a great reliance on these in the people. This state of affairs is, in fact, a unique contribution of modern political thought, coming from thinkers such as Machiavelli, Locke, Montesquieu, Smith, and one that the Catholic Church, for obvious reasons, had been very reluctant to accept. This reluctance has not and may never be fully overcome, but it ought to be clear that most Church leaders now support and even try to ennoble liberal society through Catholic social teaching. The success of this endeavor will depend on taking liberalism and partisanship seriously, instead of wishing that the messy political realities of this world never existed.

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A Free People’s Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future

Os Guinness

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2012 (205 pages)

That our republic suffers from disorder and decay is no secret. The moral and economic order appears increasingly chaotic and lacks a deeper meaning. The country, bitterly divided politically, cannot agree on the purpose of freedom. Frustration has turned into increased political activism and fragmentation, and perhaps the only national agreed-upon principle is that people feel increasingly separated from their own government.

The current year (2012) has seen some like-minded books published to address the magnitude of the crisis we face. Sound thinkers such as Arthur Brooks and Rev. Robert Sirico have offered up, respectively, *The Road to Freedom* and *Defending the Free Market*. They are, without a doubt, worthwhile examinations of economics and our moral order. While there is no dearth of books to address our problems and its root causes, perhaps

none is better than Os Guinness's *A Free People's Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future*.

Guinness trumpets a stirring defense of ordered liberty, examining the deep meanings of freedom and its ability to survive and perhaps flourish again. An assessment of freedom beyond the surface is truly central to our republic. Americans, as they have in the past, must once again ask, "How can a free republic maintain its freedom?"

Guinness, while not American, offers immense praise for America's founding. The Founders in his view were "born" and "schooled in human freedom." He quotes Lord Acton's summation of the American Revolution: "No people was so free as the insurgents, no government less oppressive than the government which they overthrew." It consisted of free men fighting for greater freedom. America's strength is rooted in the fact that the Framers had such a high view of liberty; thus their experiment is worth preserving. "Unquestionably freedom is, and will always be, America's animating principle and chief glory, her most important idea and greatest strength," says Guinness.

The paradox Guinness sees is that a misunderstanding of freedom puts freedom in peril. Freedom by itself, unordered and excessive, void of virtue, a moral order, and faith, is toxic to the American experiment. Society warped by too much negative freedom (freedom from constraint) chiefly cherishes the license of one's desires or merely the freedom to consume. "Modern people value choice rather than good choice," says Guinness. Moreover, as Lord Acton claimed, freedom is "not the power of doing what we like but the right of being able to do what we ought."

Deep cultural problems like these also exacerbate the need for the state to intervene in the affairs of the individual and society. People wrapped up within a materialistic worldview are "perpetually dissatisfied" and "restless" in life. Those who have superficial meaning and purposes outside of the state are much more inclined to look to the state as savior and protector. "The triumph of the modern, secularist view takes the negative aspect of freedom to excess, undermines the ordered liberty necessary for a republic and breeds a democracy of appetites that hungers for an all-catering state," Guinness observes.

On top of that, an America taken up with excess, whether it is public debt or consumer spending, finds itself infected by or indifferent to strains of imperialism or empire, something it once harshly criticized. America exhibits a meaningless mission abroad when its mission and vision at home are muddled.

Guinness stresses what he calls the "golden triangle" to protect and preserve freedom. He argues that freedom requires virtue, virtue requires faith, and faith requires freedom. He is certainly not saying that a faith and virtue ethic or worldview has to be solely Judeo-Christian, but as the dominant paradigm operating in this country, Christianity is the framework and overarching influence of the land. Guinness challenges secularists and atheists to build virtue entirely outside a religious worldview for the vibrancy of the republic but readily admits, "The plain fact is that no free and lasting civilization anywhere in history has so far been built on atheist foundations."

Undoubtedly, Guinness sees that a reordering of societal virtue and values is paramount. The status quo is unsustainable; the republic will not even merely be able to stay afloat. At best, it seems the country can manage its steady decline.

While Guinness may not have all the answers, and would presumably admit as much, this account is a modern defense of ordered liberty that addresses the lack of civic vision that plagues this country. It makes sense that such a critique would come from an individual who is not American; perhaps it takes an outsider's unique perspective to assist in diagnosing many of the internal problems that are causing a once-vibrant nation to crumble from moral and economic rot. We must somehow find a way to ask again the questions that once made us not just a great nation but a great example to the free world.

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Wisdom & Wonder: Common Grace in Science & Art

Abraham Kuyper

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Translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman

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If the name Abraham Kuyper rings a bell with you, then you already know him as a proponent of the doctrine of common grace. The concept of common grace existed in Christian theology before Kuyper, of course, but he adopted it as a signature doctrine and developed it at great length in an eponymously titled three-volume *opus*. This slim book represents the first fruits of a project to translate those volumes into English. (I serve as one among many informal advisors to the project.)

What is common grace? Simply put, the doctrine of common grace describes God's care for and development of the creation after the fall. Common grace has nothing directly to do with the salvation of individuals. Kuyper underscored this point by publishing a separate treatise on particular grace, which emphasized the uniqueness of salvation in Jesus Christ. By contrast, the doctrine of common grace examines God's work outside of the church—in nature, history, and culture. While common and particular grace may be conceptually distinct, both function together in the lives of Christians—and Christian societies—to accomplish God's purposes.

The two series of reflections in this book focus on the effects of common grace in the sciences and the arts. Fairly self-contained, they formed a coda to Kuyper's long-running meditations on common grace that he serialized in *The Herald*, a weekly paper. They were first issued as a separate publication in 1905 under the title "Common Grace in Science and Art," and then posthumously incorporated into the second edition of his volumes on common grace in 1922. This publication, rendered fluently from the Dutch by Nelson D. Kloosterman and supplied with elucidatory notes, permits English-speaking readers to