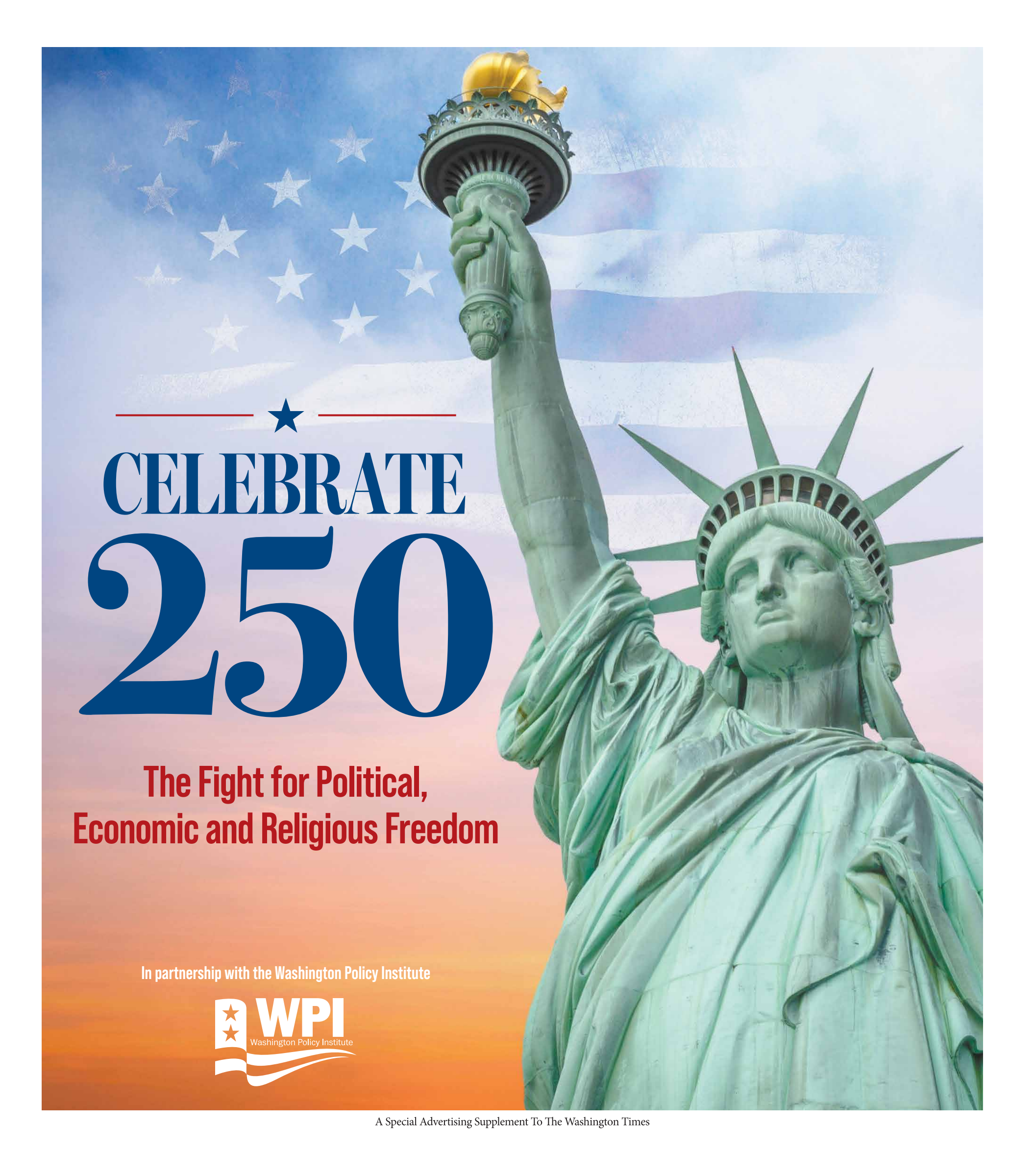




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CELEBRATE 250

**The Fight for Political,
Economic and Religious Freedom**

In partnership with the Washington Policy Institute



Celebrate 250

The Fight for Political, Economic and Religious Freedom

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Celebrate 250 honors America's founding and core values

By Tom McDevitt and
Dr. Art Lindsley

Freedom is a gift from God and should never be taken for granted.

The kind of freedom our founders shaped is unique and, one might say, the fruit of God's Providence. It is not the freedom to do anything you want to do without any restriction. It is an ordered freedom, grounded in virtue and faith, that guides human responsibility to fulfill the purpose for which we are created. As President Ronald Reagan said, America's freedom needs to be constantly renewed or else it will be eroded or lost.

We now live in a "civilizational moment," as

venerable scholar Os Guinness describes, with massive challenges on the global and domestic fronts. As Americans and friends from around the world celebrate the 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we think it is a sacred duty to reflect upon and commit together to keeping that freedom alive.

To this end, we offer this *Celebrate 250* special section as the first in a series of three educational resources published in *The Washington Times* in honor of America's semiquincentennial anniversary.

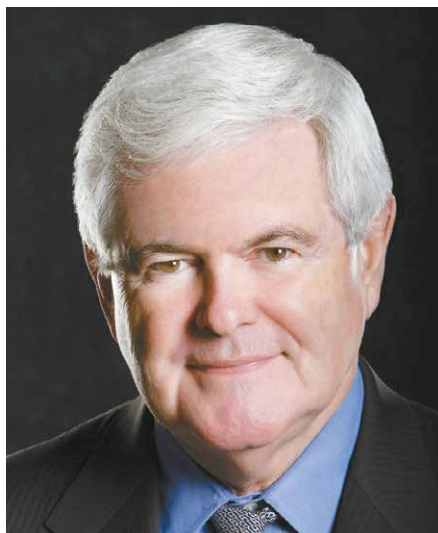
This first issue accents the premise that a nation will not flourish without political, economic and religious freedom. Our second issue will focus on the self-evident principles on which America was founded, with

special emphasis on the profound connection between the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. A third in the series will be on Thanksgiving for America, sharing our gratitude for this blessed land and countering those who believe otherwise.

Many thanks to each and every contributing author for their valuable insights on the topic of freedom, especially from a faith perspective. Thanks also to our sponsors, including the Washington Policy Institute, for supporting the *Celebrate 250* campaign.

We hope that the insightful articles included in this first *Celebrate 250* special section will be widely shared and used as a source of learning, inspiration and empowerment for you, your family and all people who cherish freedom.

Freedom is at the heart of American exceptionalism



By Speaker Newt Gingrich

In the famous movie "Braveheart," William Wallace, as portrayed by Mel Gibson, was ultimately tortured to death. In his final moments, when given a chance to seek mercy, he yelled one word, "Freedom!"

This is only a movie (the real Wallace was killed even more gruesomely than the movie portrays and almost certainly did not shout anything). But the emotional impact of this scene was especially powerful for Americans.

Freedom is a word that is close to the heart of the American experience. The men who came to Concord and Lexington in 1775 to stop the British Army from confiscating their weapons were fighting for freedom.

They had trained for months. They knew that freedom had to be won on the



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battlefield. The British Army had a long tradition of defeating popular uprisings in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. As recently as 1744, the British Army defeated a rebellion in Scotland in the battle of Culloden. Ironically, many of the Scots who fled British oppression ended up in Western North Carolina and got their vengeance on the British Army in the battle of King's Mountain 36 years later.

The underlying theme of the movement for the American revolution was the question of tyranny versus freedom. This was in some ways the culmination of a long process that began at Runnymede in 1215.

King John of England was in desperate need of more money. His nobles insisted that he concede key powers to them in return for the money, including a provision that he could only raise future taxes with their approval. Thus, the Magna Carta was signed. This was an enormous step away from the divine rights of kings to do whatever they wanted. Of course, King John broke his word shortly thereafter. But the principle had been established, and British constitutional rights and the rule of law grew steadily from that event.

A copy of the Magna Carta is displayed in the U.S. Capitol as a symbolic reminder of the history from which we

came. The following 500 years witnessed a steady increase in the principle that laws matter and must be obeyed, even by kings.

This commitment to freedom and the rule of law was at the heart of the founders' decision that they had to rebel against the king in the 1770s. There was a long discussion starting in the early 1760s as the British government became increasingly tyrannical and despotic toward the colonies. Winning the Seven Years' War seemed to infect the British aristocracy with a sense of hubris. Benjamin Franklin went to London to represent the colony of Pennsylvania as a good loyal Englishman. He was so alienated by the arrogance and corruption of the British aristocracy that after 16 years he came home as an American committed to standing up to the crown.

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, we need to remember that this concept of freedom was its foundation.

We are a free people.

We are bound by laws we voluntarily accept, beginning with the Constitution. Our freedom is preserved by the rule of law, the right of free speech and the right to elect those to whom we loan power.

This is the heart of American exceptionalism.

Hon. Newt Gingrich, Ph.D., served as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1995 to 1999. He previously represented Georgia's 6th Congressional District and currently is a historian, conservative commentator and author of 24 books.

'America will be great again if we humble ourselves in prayer for revival'



By U.S. Sen. Tim Scott

If one desires to make America great again, we must understand what made America great in the first place.

Our nation's foundation, the freedoms we cherish, and the opportunity we enjoy come from ordinary people doing extraordinary things because they were first on their knees in prayer.

This 250th anniversary, we are reminded that God changes things. Our nation is the result of prayer warriors appealing to heaven for wisdom, discernment and strength. It is that Judeo-Christian foundation that is the bedrock for this entire country, and when we turn our hearts back to the Lord, He will hear us, and it will lead to remarkable outcomes — not just for America, but for the world.

As we reflect on the Fourth of July, this calling to return to the Lord is personal: If you dedicate your life to the Lord every single day, which means starting your day in a rhythm of seeking divine guidance, praise and reading the Word of God, you will be close to His heart. James 1:5 reminds us: If anyone lacks wisdom, let them ask of God, who will give liberally, and be not like a wave of the sea tossed to and fro.

My story is living proof that seeking divine guidance changes things. It's this prayer that inspires our nation. It's the trust in the Lord that transforms our world. But it is not just unique to you and me. There is no way to grasp the last 250 years of America without looking to the power of humbling ourselves before our Creator. You can find it when Americans turned to the Lord in moments of great joy and times of adversity. From the Civil War, to WWII, to landing on the moon, Americans have looked to God for guidance, for peace and for strength.



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There is no way to grasp the last 250 years of America without looking to the power of humbling ourselves before our Creator.

It is this commitment to seeking divine guidance that powered the Civil Rights Movement. The journey for justice for all was rooted in the Black church — a body of believers who refused to let go of God. In 1955, Rosa Parks did not simply refuse to give up her seat, she refused to give up her dignity before God. Her courage was cultivated on her knees before it was acted out on the bus. Her “no” was not born of rage, but of righteousness.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., did not lead from a mere podium, he led from the pulpit. His dream was not a political speech, it was a sermon. He quotes Amos 5:24: “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream,” when he called America not to be a new nation, but to honor its founding promise. His words echoed the words of Frederick Douglass in 1852 in the face of slavery: “The principles contained in the [Declaration of Independence] are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost.”

Bombed churches did not silence the worship, it amplified it. The movement sang before it marched. It prayed before it protested. It relied on the gospel before it looked for legislation. The Civil Rights Movement was driven by the truth that all men are created equal, and our rights come from God, not government.

The next 250 years of America will be built by men and women with bold faith, committed to founding principles, and those who choose to live out Proverbs 31:8: “Speak out on behalf of the voiceless.”

America will be great again if we humble ourselves in prayer for revival. We're witnessing it today on college campuses, in our communities, around kitchen tables around this country, and

even in the halls of Congress.

May this year stir revival in this country as we humble ourselves before God and commit to the founding principles that made America the greatest nation on earth.

Our faith must be the active engine for the next 250 years, driving American innovation and securing opportunity for all. If we maintain the rhythms of daily connection to the Lord, I believe the best is yet to come for America.

.....
Senator Tim Scott has served the people of South Carolina as their U.S. Senator since 2013. In the U.S. Senate, Tim has been a leader in fighting for opportunity and education for families, defending God-given rights, and advancing safety and security goals at home and abroad. He is the chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee and the Senate Banking Committee. Prior to his time in politics, Tim built successful small businesses. He lives in the Charleston area with his wife, Mindy, and is home every weekend to take his mama to church.

Freedom: The greatest inheritance we leave behind



By U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt

Recently, on July 4th, I stood in Philadelphia as America marked the 250th anniversary of our nation's birth. One of the most meaningful moments of that celebration was the burial of an American time capsule that will remain sealed until America's 500th birthday in the year 2276.

I had made comments, along with a couple fellow commissioners that I serve with on the Semiquincentennial commission. My comments posed the question: What were we really leaving behind?

Certainly, future generations will inherit our buildings, our technology and our written history. They will know the milestones we achieved and the challenges we faced.

But I hope they inherit something even more valuable: I hope they inherit a nation that still understands freedom.

Too often we think of freedom simply as the absence of government control. While that is certainly part of it, freedom is much richer than that. Freedom is the opportunity to worship according to one's conscience. It is the ability to start a business, own property and build a better life through hard work. It is the right to speak freely, vote, assemble peacefully and choose those who govern us.

These freedoms do not compete with one another. They reinforce one another.

The late philosopher Michael Novak described this as a "three-legged stool." A flourishing society depends upon political freedom, economic freedom and religious freedom working together. Remove any one of those legs, and the stool becomes unstable. And history bears this out.

A nation may hold elections, but if its citizens cannot own property, build businesses or enjoy the fruits of their



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labor, political liberty eventually rings hollow. You end up with elections that are just for show, like those in Russia, Iran and North Korea.

Likewise, economic opportunity cannot long survive where people are denied the freedom to speak their minds, criticize their government or peacefully influence public policy.

And neither political nor economic freedom can fully flourish when religious liberty is pushed aside. Faith transforms individuals toward personal responsibility, compassion, honesty and service to others. America's faith has long strengthened our communities by encouraging citizens to care for their neighbors, raise strong families and live lives grounded in moral purpose.

The Founding Fathers understood this relationship well. They did not believe government was the source of our rights. They declared in the Declaration of Independence that we are "endowed by our Creator with certain

unalienable Rights." Government exists not to create those rights, but to secure them.

That idea remains just as revolutionary today as it was in 1776.

Around the world, we continue to see societies where freedom is divided or denied. Some permit economic activity while silencing political dissent. Others allow elections while restricting religious expression. Still others promise equality while placing nearly every aspect of life under government control.

Such systems may endure for a time, but history has shown they rarely produce societies where human flourishing truly thrives.

America's strength has never rested solely on military might or economic prosperity. It has rested on a profound confidence that free people, guided by faith, personal responsibility and the rule of law, are capable of governing themselves, solving problems, building strong families and creating vibrant communities.

As we celebrate America's 250th birthday throughout the year, we rightly honor the courage of those who pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to secure liberty.

But preserving that liberty is now our responsibility. The freedoms they secured cannot simply be admired. They must be protected, practiced and passed on.

That responsibility extends to every generation, including those not yet born. Freedom is not merely an inheritance we receive. It is an inheritance we are called to preserve so that our children, our grandchildren, and yes, even the unborn, may one day enjoy the blessings of liberty that so many Americans have sacrificed to defend. If we truly believe our rights come from our Creator, then every human life possesses inherent dignity and deserves both protection and the opportunity to experience those God-given freedoms.

In 500 years, I hope they inherit a nation that still understands freedom.

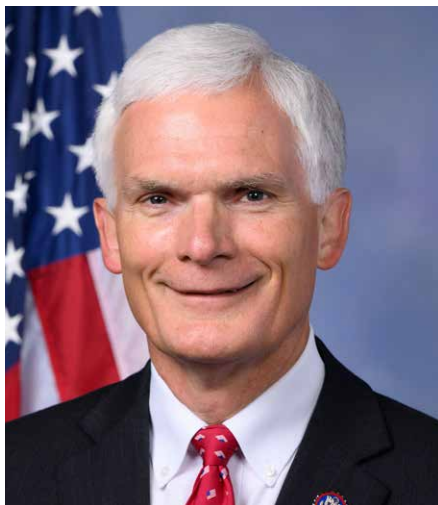
When Americans gather in Philadelphia in 2276 to open that time capsule, I hope they will discover more than artifacts from another century. I hope they will see that our generation understood the precious gift entrusted to us. That we defended political freedom, economic freedom and religious liberty. That we recognized these are not competing values but indispensable pillars of a free society.

Most of all, I hope they will find that we left behind not merely a prosperous nation but a free one — a nation that understood every generation is entrusted with safeguarding liberty for the next. Because no generation truly owns freedom. We simply hold it in trust, preserving it for those who come after us, including those whose voices have yet to be heard.

That may be the greatest inheritance we can leave behind.

Rep. Robert Aderholt, Alabama Republican, is chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on Labor, Health & Human Services, and Education, which oversees the largest non-defense segment of the federal budget. He also chairs the Values Action Team (VAT), a Congressional Member Organization dedicated to promoting families, communities, and religious freedom.

Let freedom ring!



By U.S. Rep. Bob Latta

With the passage of 250 years since the signing of our Declaration of Independence, what does the word freedom mean to Americans today? I believe the word freedom rings today with the same meaning it had on July 4, 1776.

Our founders gathered in Philadelphia to proclaim, “that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.”

The founders concisely laid out what they sought: the right of self-government, no taxes being imposed without the right of their consent, trial by jury, economic freedom and many more. These are the same freedoms that we cherish today.

These words were not lightly written. The signers knew the risks they were taking when they concluded the Declaration with the pledge to each other of “our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” During the American Revolution, some signers were imprisoned, others lost their property, and others their health.

When the founders once again assembled in Philadelphia in 1787, they toiled to produce the greatest document of self-government ever known in world history: the United States Constitution. What is important about our Constitution is that it was not the government taking power from the people, but it was people enumerating what powers the federal government would have. In a short period of time thereafter, the first 10 amendments to the Constitution were ratified: our Bill of Rights. And again, the Tenth Amendment states that powers not delegated to the federal government are reserved to the states or to the people.

From the American Revolution to the present day, every generation of Americans has been called upon to defend



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the freedoms and liberties won through sacrifice. Our nation’s war memorials powerfully illustrate the cost of that responsibility. Anyone who visits the World War II, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans Memorials — especially during an Honor Flight, when veterans from across the country come to Washington — cannot help but gain a deeper appreciation for the sacrifices made by those who served.

Many veterans will tell you that serving in the armed forces was one of the greatest privileges of their lives. They left behind their families, homes, schools, and careers to answer their nation’s call.

At the World War II Memorial, more than 4,000 gold stars represent the over 400,000 Americans who gave their lives in that war. The Korean War and Vietnam Veterans Memorials bear the names of those who did not return home, ensuring their sacrifices will never be forgotten. Across the Potomac River at Arlington National Cemetery, the long rows of white headstones stretching across the hillsides offer another powerful reminder of the tremendous price paid to preserve our freedom. Together, these memorials and cemetery stand as enduring tributes to the courage, sacrifice and selflessness of generations of Americans.

The cost of freedom has never been free. It has been paid for in the blood of Americans who have paid the ultimate price and those who have borne the horrible scars of battle.

As Americans, we enjoy freedoms that so many around the world can only

dream. Some of these freedoms include religion, speech, press, assembly, petition, right to keep and bear arms, no unreasonable searches and seizures,

probable cause, no self-incrimination, speedy and public trials, and no excessive bail. Today it is interesting to read the stories of foreigners visiting the United States during the World Cup. They see a nation of plenty. Wide open spaces and stores teeming with merchandise. Americans have been given the freedom to take chances to succeed. America does not guarantee success, but it will give you the chance. America gives you the ability to dream big.

It was recorded at the end of the 1787 Constitution Convention when Mrs. Powel asked Benjamin Franklin, “What have we got a republic or a monarchy,” to which Franklin replied, “A republic if you can keep it.” All agree that he was not just talking to Mrs. Powel but to every generation of Americans who must pass the torch of freedom on to the next generation.

Rep. Bob Latta, Ohio Republican, is chairman of the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee on Energy, Deputy Whip, and co-chairman of the Rural Broadband Caucus and the Congressional Propane Caucus. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree at Bowling Green State University and his Juris Doctor degree at the University of Toledo College of Law. He and his wife, Marcia, live in Bowling Green, and they have two daughters and a son-in-law.

A freedom worth fighting for



By U.S. Rep. Brian Babin, D.D.S.

“If we lose freedom here, there’s no place to escape to.” President Reagan spoke these words on the cusp of our nation’s 200th birthday.

This week, Americans celebrated the

250th anniversary of the United States of America. As backyard barbecues took place and fireworks lit up the sky, we honored the land of the free and the home of the brave, celebrating all that our great country has become over the last 250 years.

On the verge of the Revolution, Benjamin Franklin said, “Where liberty is, there is my country.” Through the fight for our independence, the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution, the Great Depression and two World Wars, America has stood the test of time, continuously proving that freedom is worth defending.

The American Dream is celebrated and cherished because no other country can offer the promise of freedom and opportunity. Liberty, justice and self-governance remain the defining principles of our republic. These ideals did not emerge by accident. They were sought

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Saving Western civilization is the central issue



By Ambassador Sam Brownback

One pressing issue stands out above all others as Americans are beginning to eye the 2028 race for the White House: saving Western civilization from without and within.

Americans are intensely concerned with the rise of a powerful adversary in the East that threatens all our cherished freedoms — communist and atheist China.

They are likewise deeply troubled by the slide of our own culture from its Judeo-Christian roots.

Western civilization, which has led the world into more freedom, dignity and prosperity than any other civilization in the history of mankind, is built on the belief that every human being has immeasurable worth at every stage of life, being created by the love of God. This unfathomable worth and dignity of being image bearers of God brings with it the right to freedom for us all.

The rapid ascendancy and renewed threat of totalitarian communism, coupled with our own drifting away from our foundational values, brings us to this defining moment and challenge.



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Will we renew our covenant with the God who gave us freedom and our civilizational values or surrender our leadership to a godless, authoritarian system that has killed more of its own people in its ruthless demands for obedience than any other government system in history?

All our freedoms are at stake.

The way we lose is to not recognize the fight we are already in and to fail to summon the courage and fighting spirit needed to preserve our freedoms and leadership. The defeat of the last communist global menace in the Soviet Union took decades of sustained, united confrontation from the West.

Communist China is a tougher opponent than the Soviet Union ever was. Bigger, more technologically

sophisticated, economically far more powerful and equally as ruthless, the Chinese Communist Party will test our resolve and character as much as any time in the history of our republic.

That's where our values come in.

We maintain the fight by standing together, all behind the fundamental values that Western civilization has always stood for: dignity and freedom for all.

So much divides our country today, but bigger are the freedoms that draw us together. We must openly, freely and even passionately discuss our honest differences but also our unifying values that have placed us in a position of global leadership on our nation's 250th birthday.

Recognizing a common enemy to our most basic and cherished values

has the potency to unite us. We were united after 9/11 by the challenge of global terrorism.

China is doing everything it can, using our freedoms of speech, assembly and press, to drive their diversionary messaging that the enemy is someone other than them. They infiltrate our social media and point to the problem as being Israel or the opposing political party or racial divisions or anything else to keep us from focusing on their drive for global hegemony. Why? Because once we are united against an obvious evil, we are powerful and at our best.

Ronald Reagan spent decades traveling America fighting Soviet communism, calling it out as inherently evil. He rallied the American public to move past détente, where we simply co-exist, to a much clearer understanding of the threat we faced and the only real solution — “We win, they lose.”

We are at another “civilizational moment” for the next Ronald Reagan to sound the alarm to the communist threat emanating from China. We and our freedom-loving allies must renew our core values to meet this menace.

Let's all hope and pray God is stirring in the souls of our fellow countrymen and in our current and future presidents, the fervor and passion to save Western civilization from without and within.

Ambassador Sam Brownback is the co-chair of the International Religious Freedom Summit and chairman of the National Committee for Religious Freedom. He served as Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom from February 2018 to January 2021, and as Governor of Kansas from 2011 to 2018. Prior to that he represented his home state in the United States Senate and the House of Representatives. He earned a B.S. from Kansas State University and a J.D. from the University of Kansas.

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after by men and women who loved God and their family, choosing sacrifice over comfort and hard work over entitlement.

Growing up in the piney woods of Southeast Texas, I saw this play out firsthand. My father worked hard to put food on the table for my family before answering the call to serve our nation. He began a legacy of service that continues to my son and me. There is no greater nation than the United States — not because we are perfect, but because

we were founded on enduring principles of freedom. The liberty of the American people and the bedrock of faith will always be its greatest strength.

That spirit was on display again this month. As our nation celebrated its most significant birthday to date, we also welcomed thousands of people from around the world for the FIFA World Cup. As Americans celebrated with hamburgers and fireworks, thousands experienced firsthand what makes America exceptional. For years, the world has painted our country in a degrading light, speaking ill of anyone who found any pride in being from our great nation.

However, as you listen to the

accounts of so many who stepped onto American soil for the first time, that could not be further from their experience. They witnessed southern hospitality, the beauty of the West Coast, and the hard work riddled throughout some of the world's largest cities that fill our northeast. They bore witness to an American spirit of drive and determination, one that doesn't give in easily and serves their community well, and is anything but lazy, because we've seen the fruits of the American Dream.

Freedom has never been free. For 250 years, Americans have willingly paid its price because the liberty of our children and grandchildren will always

be worth it.

It is my prayer that long after my generation leaves the halls of Congress, Americans will continue to stand in the gap for what is good and true, what honors our nation and our Lord, and preserves the American spirit for generations to come.

Rep. Brian Babin, D.D.S., Texas Republican, is chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, and co-chairman of the Congressional Space Force Caucus. He also serves on the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. He and wife Roxanne have five children and 17 grandchildren.



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‘What are you doing for others?’

The purpose of freedom is to serve others



By Dr. Alveda C. King

** These are my personal views and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Agriculture or the U.S. government.*

We are living in a beautiful time in America, especially as we celebrate our 250th birthday as a nation. America is truly exceptional. There is nowhere in the world where greater freedoms are found, and it is all by God’s grace on us as a people.

There are endless opportunities for every American to achieve the American Dream — creating businesses, rising out of poverty into

homeownership, building families, growing in careers. These opportunities are not merely for the wealthy or powerful; they are for *all* Americans. This freedom to pursue our dreams unifies us, motivates us and puts the fire beneath our feet to take risks and aim high.

We have God to thank for these freedoms we enjoy and yet too often forget just how blessed we are. My uncle Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said it best: “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!”

As Americans, we have this great gift of freedom that only comes from our Maker; however, freedom comes with a *warning*. Galatians 5:13 says, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”

If we have great freedoms but fail to serve our brothers and sisters, we have missed the point of God’s gift. Society tells us to use our freedoms to serve self above serving others. Our Lord calls us to challenge this narrative and use our freedoms in service to others. My uncle did this so well,

and he instilled this fervent love for service in both me and my family. He famously said, “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”

When we stand before God when our lives on this earth are complete, how will you say you used your freedoms? Did you serve yourself, or were your eyes open and hands outstretched to see and meet needs right where you are? To whom will you extend compassion? Whose shoes will you walk in until needs are met in love?

To serve others well in a culture that places value on status instead of humility, one must focus on how we are the same. We all bleed the same. We are made in the same Image. Service to our fellow man brings forth unity as we affirm God’s image in every person we see and serve.

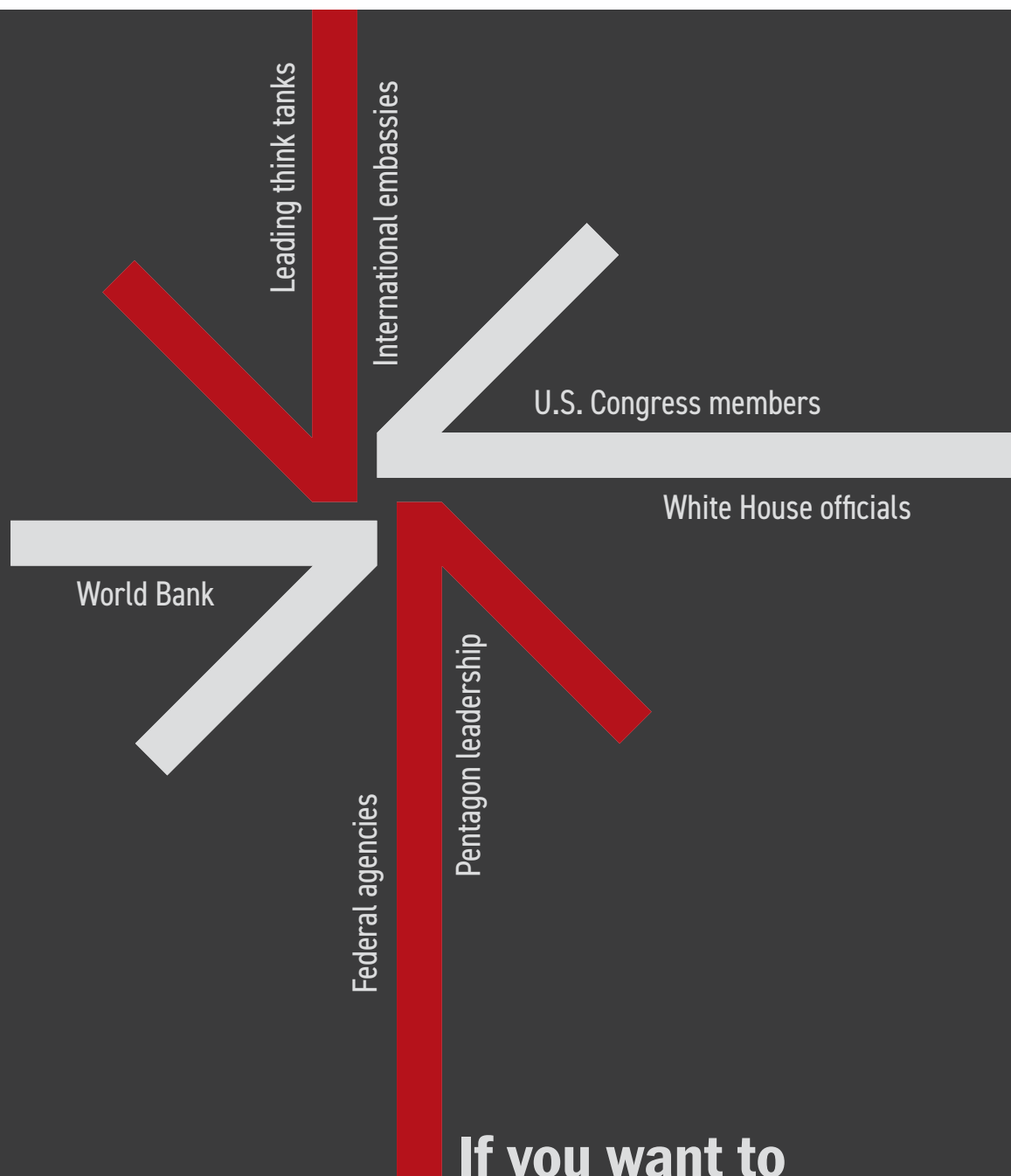
Christ set this example of servanthood when He washed the disciples’ feet in John 13. We must reject the cultural lie sold to us that true satisfaction and peace come from self-service or indulgence. Freedom is found in service, as our Savior has shown us time and time again.

Freedom is not something to be experienced by one ethnic community or one people. We are the *human race* — one blood, from the womb to tomb and beyond. As you play at the park, enjoy long road trips and laugh with your children, may you remember that these opportunities to achieve the American Dream and our freedoms were not truly free; they came at a price.

God is the author of our freedom and died on a criminal’s cross to ensure that we could experience the freedom from sin. Our freedom from tyranny came at a price that continues to be paid so that the American Dream stays alive and well.

My question to you is this: With these great freedoms you have been gifted, who will you serve and how will you live? May you accept the gift of freedom Christ has extended and steward your American freedoms well, placing servanthood above self.

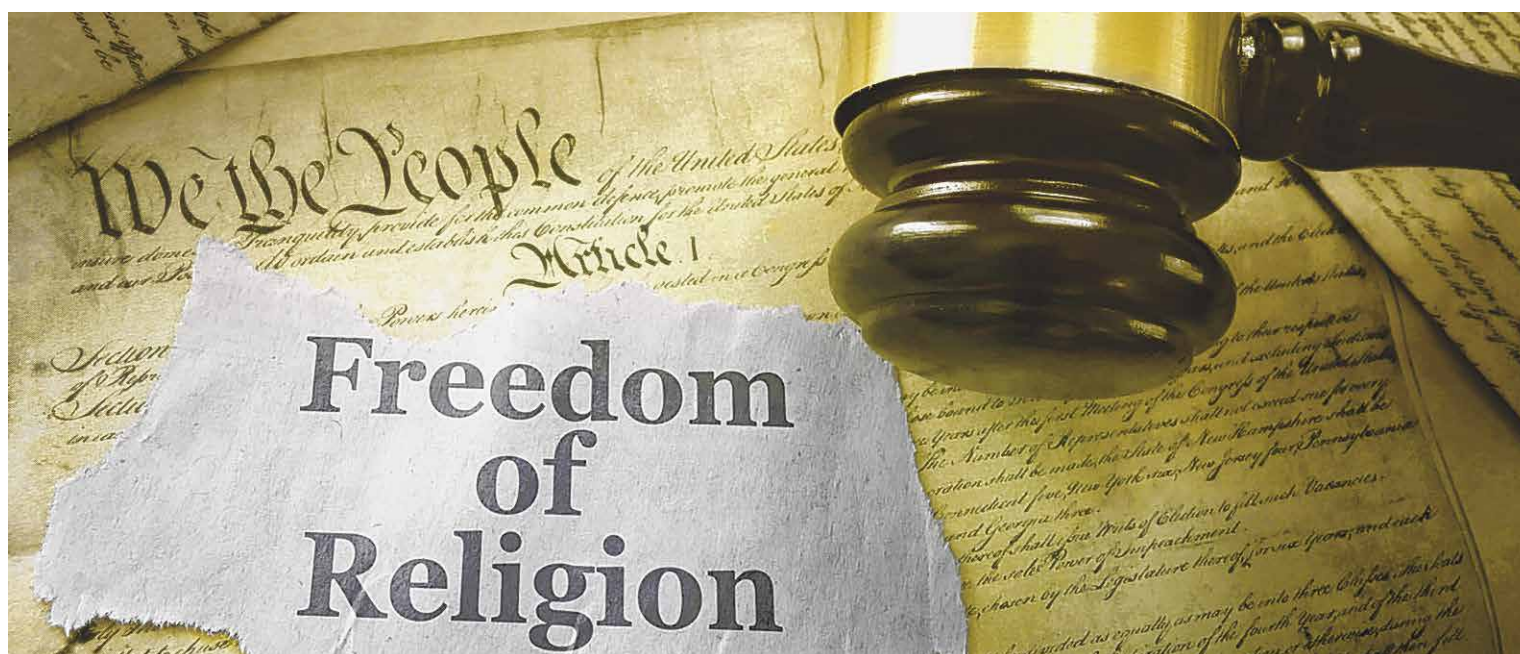
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Alveda C. King, Ph.D., serves as the senior advisor on Faith and Community Outreach for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the chair of the Center for the American Dream at America First Policy Institute. She is the daughter of the late slain civil rights activist Rev. A.D. King and the niece of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She is the founder of Speak for Life, fighting for the sanctity and dignity of all life from the womb to the tomb.



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250 years later, our first freedom is being erased



By Rev. Samuel Rodriguez

Two hundred and fifty years ago, the founders of the United States enshrined something radical into the architecture of this republic: the idea that no government could stand between a human being and his or her Creator.

The First Amendment did not create religious freedom. It recognized it as self-evident, as belonging to every person by virtue of their humanity, not by the grace of any king or congress.

That vision did not arrive by accident. It was forged in the fires of lived experience. People came to these shores fleeing governments that told them how to pray, who to worship and what to believe. The memory of that coercion was fresh. They built the First Amendment as a wall of protection, not to keep faith out of the public square, but to keep the

state from colonizing the human soul.

Two hundred and fifty years later, that wall needs defending.

I have led the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference for more than two decades, representing millions of Latino Christians worldwide. We did not arrive in America and discover faith. We brought it with us. Faith is not a weekend activity for our community; it is the marrow of our identity and the framework through which we live our lives and raise our children. When religious freedom erodes, we feel it first. And we feel it most.

Religious freedom is not a culture-war bargaining chip. It is the headwaters from which every other freedom flows.

What I see today troubles me, beginning with the culture's subtle, yet relentless encroachment on our religious freedoms. Business owners are forced to choose between their convictions and their livelihoods. Physicians face mandates that violate the sanctity of their conscience. Faith-based organizations that have served the poor and the broken for generations are told that their religious identity disqualifies them from the public square. A decade ago, the threat to religious freedom came in like a fog, but today it snapped into focus. Belief is permitted in private, but the moment faith walks into the world, it must leave its convictions at the door.

That is not the America our founders imagined. That is not the America we should pass to the next generation.

The thing every member of Congress must understand is that religious freedom is not a culture-war bargaining chip. It is the headwaters from which every other freedom flows. John Adams was right when he insisted that our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. He was not imposing a theocracy. He was stating a structural reality: Self-governance requires self-discipline, and self-discipline has historically been formed by faith communities. Weaken them, and you do not strengthen the state. You destabilize the nation.

America's founders understood something many modern leaders have forgotten: Freedom cannot survive without virtue, and virtue cannot flourish without moral formation. The institutions that cultivate character, responsibility, compassion and self-governance are often the very faith communities now being pushed to the margins of public life. Weakening them will weaken the cultural foundations upon which our country depends.

I am not asking Congress to establish a religion. I am asking it to remember the principles our Founding Fathers built this nation under and to enforce the First Amendment as written. Do not penalize faith. Do not coerce silence. Do not demand that the most deeply held commitments of a person's interior

life be abandoned as the price of civic participation.

America is a nation that was built by people of faith, sustained by people of faith and renewed in every generation by the moral seriousness that faith produces. This is not nostalgia. It is history.

As we mark 250 years of this extraordinary country, the question before us is not merely political, it is civilizational. Will we pass on a republic where every person of faith can live, serve, speak and worship without fear, or will we hand to our children a nation that has quietly traded its first freedom for the illusion of a more manageable public square?

I choose the former. I believe Congress can too.

Religious freedom is not a relic; it is the foundation. And a nation that forgets its foundation does not gradually decline. It collapses.

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Rev. Samuel Rodriguez is the Lead Pastor of New Season Church and president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC), the largest Hispanic Christian organization in America, representing millions of Christians worldwide. He has advised three U.S. presidents and is the first Latino to participate in multiple presidential inaugurations. A #1 best-selling author, he has written 12 books, including "Persevere with Power." Rodriguez is a movie producer with "Breakthrough" and "Flamin' Hot" both receiving Academy Award nominations for best original song. He is widely recognized by major media outlets as one of the most influential Christian leaders in America.



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Second Amendment freedom guarantees all our freedoms



By Derrick Morgan

The Second Amendment reminds us that our government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed. So when the home state of the National Rifle Association passes landmark restrictions on firearms, we must take notice.

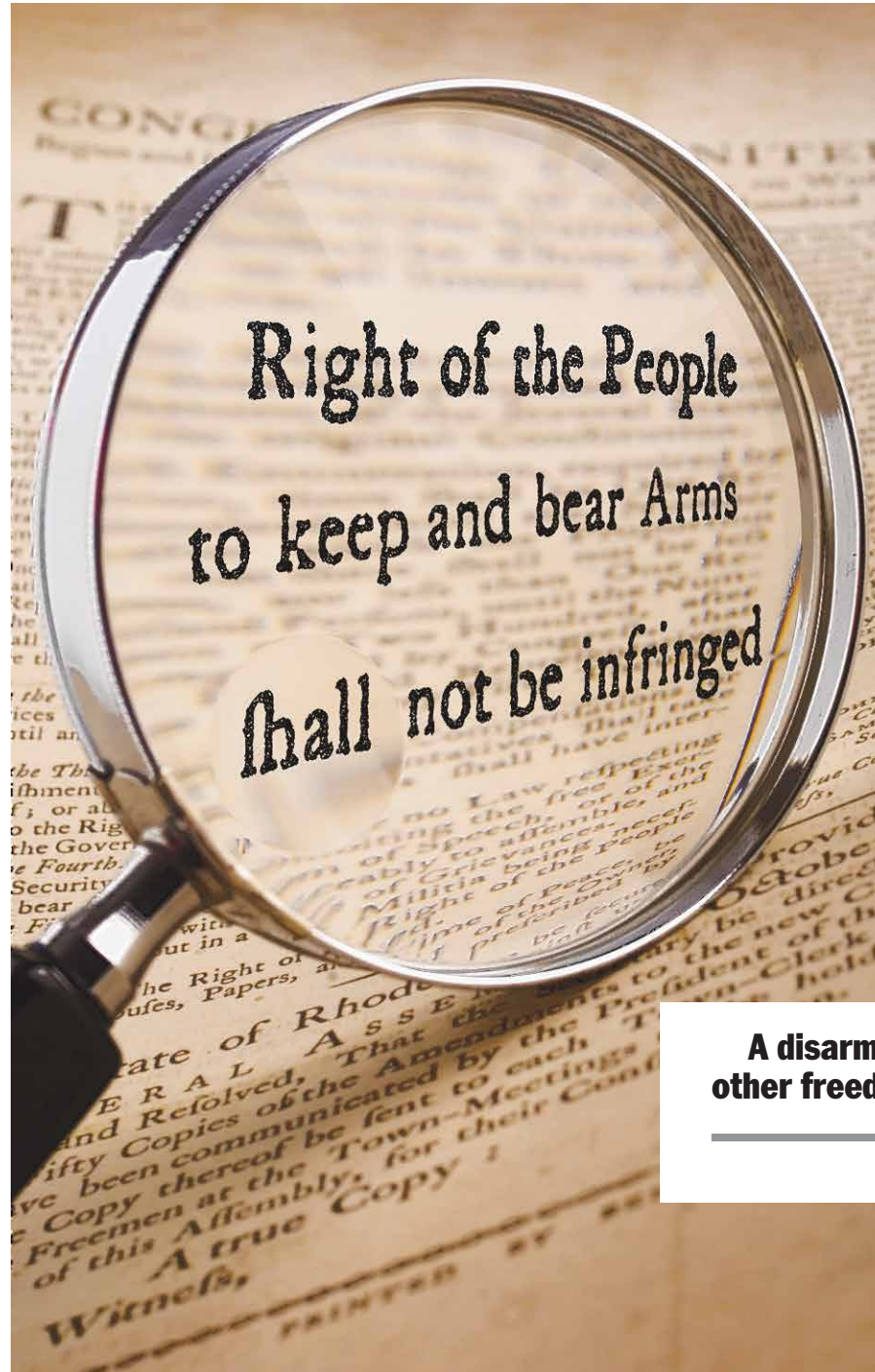
Starting July 1, Virginia law will forbid the future sale, manufacture and transfer of a huge swath of America's most commonly owned rifles, pistols and shotguns, along with magazines holding more than 15 rounds. Gov. Abigail Spanberger signed the package in May, and lawmakers in Richmond are already congratulating themselves for "commonsense" reform.

Don't believe it. This is a Beltway-style assault on a constitutional right, headed for the same legal reckoning that similar bans have met elsewhere. The Second Amendment is, and always has been, a freedom amendment.

The text is not complicated: "The right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed." It is not a select militia, not a government bureaucracy; it's the same "people" referenced in the First and Fourth Amendments, where nobody pretends the word means something other than individual citizens.

This right traces back to Great Britain, which historically did not have a large standing army. Instead, there was a requirement for free men to be armed and ready to enter the king's service if needed. As gunpower spread, Charles I, and later James II, moved to disarm the people (especially those they distrusted). Parliament and the people pushed back, including through a Civil War, and a proto-right to bear arms was ensconced (though limited to a subset of Protestants at first).

St. George Tucker, annotating Blackstone's Commentaries for an American



A disarmed citizenry is one whose other freedoms rest on borrowed time.

audience in 1803, called it "the true palladium of liberty" and warned what happens when rulers chip away at it: "The right of self-defense is the first law of nature ... and [where] the right of the people to keep and bear arms is, under any color or pretext whatsoever, prohibited, liberty, if not already annihilated, is on the brink of destruction."

Our Second Amendment supplies its own logic up front: a "well-regulated Militia" is "necessary to the security of a free State." Alexander Hamilton, in Federalist No. 29, wrote about keeping the body of the people "properly armed and equipped."

The founders understood, especially

with British History in mind, that citizens must be capable of common defense, and, if it ever came to it, resistance to tyranny. After all, Lexington and Concord were about protecting arms and supplies. Later in another revolt, patriots in Gonzalez, Texas, raised the "Come and Take it" flag when the Mexican government wanted to confiscate their cannon.

This is the right that makes the rest of the Bill of Rights enforceable. Free speech and due process mean little to a population that can be steamrolled at will.

The militia clause is not a relic. States still maintain organized forces that can

be called up, and federal law still defines the unorganized militia as able-bodied citizens of fighting age. Virginia's new ban on common semi-automatic rifles thwarts at that design, disarming precisely the citizens the Commonwealth's own constitution still calls the militia.

The Supreme Court spoke clearly in District of Columbia v. Heller (2008). Individual self-defense is "the central component" of the Second Amendment right. Two years later in McDonald v. City of Chicago, Justice Alito wrote for the majority and extended that protection against state and local governments, calling the right "fundamental to our scheme of ordered liberty."

This is not fringe legal theory. It is the settled law of the land, grounded in centuries of legal tradition.

Beyond the constitutional architecture, the right to keep and bear arms sustains a way of life. Hunting and shooting sports bring families outdoors together, pass skills from one generation to the next, put food on the table and fund conservation programs.

Freedom is a father teaching his daughter to shoot. It's a family filling a freezer each fall. Virginia's new law doesn't just burden self-defense, it tells law-abiding sportsmen and hunters that Richmond knows better than they do what arms they're entitled to own.

Laws like Virginia's are precisely why the Second Amendment needs zealous guardians on the bench, in the legislature and at the ballot box. This is the right that preserves all the others: the one that makes the rest of the Bill of Rights more than mere words. A disarmed citizenry is one whose other freedoms rest on borrowed time.

Derrick Morgan is executive vice president of The Heritage Foundation where he oversees the policy and government relations functions of America's largest and most influential conservative policy organization. Morgan has worked at the White House, for four U.S. Senators, and in the energy sector. He has analyzed the economy, along with immigration, energy, national security, and regulatory policy on Fox News, Fox Business, CNN, CNBC, and Newsmax, among others. Morgan holds a Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Texas at Dallas and a J.D. from Georgetown University.

4 words that changed the American Revolution — and brought you liberty



By Dr. Jim Garlow

Nearly 250 years ago, the Continental Army — the ragtag army of the fledgling 13 Colonies — won the Revolutionary War against the imposing British forces.

What you might not know is that the American army almost lost.

The Battle of Bunker Hill in Boston in June of 1775, which sustained heavy losses, was won by the British. Two months later, the British won the Battle of Long Island, which allowed them to take control of New York City, making it a strategic base for their operations.

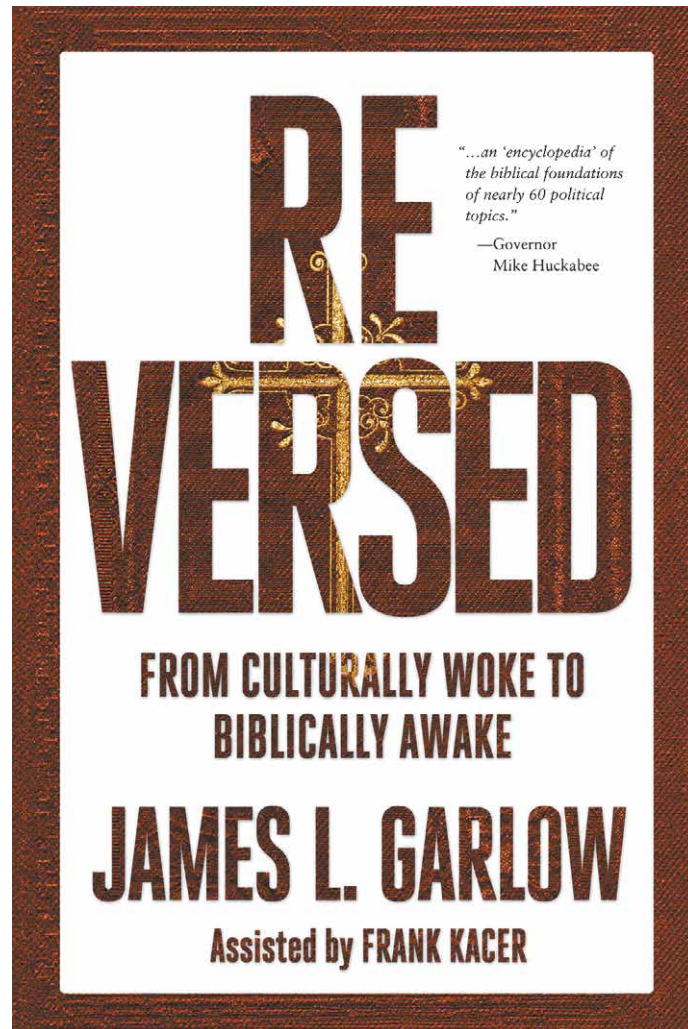
What was worse, General George Washington was out of money. Soldiers had not been paid, and they lacked food and even the weapons and ammo needed to fight. They were deserting.

Washington was desperate. In 1781, he turned to Robert Morris, his secretary of finance and uttered the four words which would alter all of human history: “Send for Haym Salomon.”

Haym Salomon is the forgotten Founding Father who, had he not done what he did, you would be giving allegiance to the King of England.

The backstory

Salomon, born in Poland in 1740, traveled throughout Europe during his 20s, developing a relationship with the banking houses while teaching himself eight languages. At age 32, he arrived in New York City



Haym Salomon is the forgotten Founding Father who, had he not done what he did, you would be giving allegiance to the King of England.

in 1772, took up the cause of the Patriots and immediately became respected as a broker.

The British arrested him and put him in one of the horrific prisons in which more Americans died than were killed in the war. However, once the Redcoats realized Salomon's linguistic skills, they put him to work communicating with the Hessian soldiers — Germans who had been coerced to come to the New World as mercenaries — to fight a war which they neither understood nor desired to be involved.

Speaking in German, which was not understood by his captors, Salomon began convincing the Hessian soldiers to desert. Many did.

While imprisoned, Salomon functioned as part of the “Culper Ring” of spies, which kept General Washington supplied with intel regarding the British.

Angered by this, the British sentenced Salomon to be hung. But before the executioner's date, Salomon escaped with a bribe to a Hessian prison guard and fled 100 miles south to Philadelphia, temporarily abandoning his wife Rachel and son Ezekiel.

Arriving in Philadelphia penniless, this economic genius and entrepreneur quickly established a brokerage office and acted without salary as the intermediary between European banks and the Continental



Statues of Haym Salomon, designed by sculptor Scott Stearman, are available at WellVersedWorld.org/Haym.

Army. He subscribed heavily to government loans, endorsing notes for the American cause.

The European banking houses in France, the Netherlands, Spain and elsewhere did not trust the 13 colonies, which had no money, or the new Continental Congress, which had no capacity to tax or ever pay back any loans. However, the bankers knew and trusted Haym Salomon. They loaned to him, and he financed the war for the Patriots.

The 1781 call

When Robert Morris followed Washington's order to “Send for Haym Salomon,” Morris obeyed and located Salomon at the Mikveh Israel Synagogue celebrating Yom Kippur.

Jews cannot transact business on a shabbat or high holy day, unless it will save a life. However, Salomon raised \$20,000 on the spot, a sum worth many millions in today's dollars. Washington's troops were paid, fed, armed and went on to win the Battle of Yorktown, which altered the course of the war.

From 1781 to 1785, Salomon transacted major loans for the new American nation at least 75 times. In addition, he

provided personally guaranteed no-interest loans for Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe and Alexander Hamilton, as well as many lesser known, financially needy supporters of the American cause.

Through Haym Salomon's personal brokerage and language skills, “a Jew saved America.”

Without his personal funding, the Continental Army would have lost.

It is hard to know the total amount of what he loaned, but it is suggested that given today's valuation, it might have been as much as \$6 billion. Some estimate much higher.

Salomon died in 1785 at age 44 from tuberculosis, contracted while in the squalid British prison in New York in 1776 and 1778.

He also died penniless — due to the failure of the new U.S. government to repay him — as did his widow Rachel, as did his four children. As a pauper, he was buried in an unmarked grave at his Philadelphia synagogue.

Honored with only a 1944 ship named in his honor and a 1975 postage stamp commemorating him, he has been largely forgotten. Although Los Angeles and Chicago have statues honoring him, there is no such statue in our nation's capital.

Now is the time to honor him. You can get your own personal 13-inch tall statue of Haym Salomon from www.wellversedworld.org/haym. More importantly, we need a heroic statue recognizing the Jew who funded the American Revolution.

Jim Garlow, Ph.D., is a historian, pastor, and founder and CEO of Well Versed, (www.Well-VersedWorld.org), a ministry to bring biblical principles of governance to government leaders and elected officials worldwide. He has six earned degrees, authored 26 books, including “ReVersed: From Culturally Woke to Biblically Awake,” and done 1,700 interviews. Married to Rosemary, they have eight children, 14 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.



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The freedom to live well



By Dr. Larry P. Arnn

One hundred seventy-three years ago, a man named Edmund Fairfield addressed the Hillsdale College community to dedicate our campus's oldest building, Central Hall. He picked the Fourth of July. He said that education was the enemy of slavery and a friend of freedom. He was speaking on the 77th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

This summer we celebrate the Declaration's 250th anniversary. Some people object that we do this. Others wonder about the relevance of that old document today.

Things are different now, so the argument goes. When Ransom Dunn rode his horse in to found Hillsdale College,

he traveled by the same mode that Thomas Jefferson traveled to Philadelphia to found the nation.

Central Hall, in Edmund Fairfield's day, was heated with wood stoves, just as Independence Hall in Philadelphia was heated. Students in those days cut wood in exchange for scholarships and low tuition. Today, I drive a Cybertruck to work, and it can talk to me. I do not wear a powdered wig, nor do any of you.

This is why the Declaration of Independence still matters: It tells us what we are.

But some things are the same. The most immediate and obvious is that the Declaration is controversial, as it is in every important time. It is a revolutionary document.

In 1776, it offended the monarch by saying that his power, to be rightful, must come from the people, and they are not subjects but citizens. In 1853, it offended the slave owner with its universal application. Yes, some authors of the Declaration were slave owners, but they were uniform in proclaiming that slavery was wrong. Jefferson said, "I tremble for my country when I think that God is just."

That is the immediate thing, but the deepest thing to understand about Edmund Fairfield's speech and the Declaration of Independence is eternal, beyond time. Both arguments had very much to do with the urgency of their time. In 1776, the revolution had already

begun. When Edmund Fairfield spoke, the storm clouds of the Civil War were gathering, and they were unmistakable. But they do not begin with those urgencies, just as we must not today.

The Declaration begins, "When in the course of human events." That means any time. It says, "one people." That means any people. It says that the signatories are proceeding under a standard: the laws of nature and of nature's God.

What is the date when those laws were written? It turns out there is no date. They are eternal laws. Today, in this time of change and confusion, it is hard to remember what they are.

Aristotle's *Ethics* was written about 2,500 years ago. It is a book about how to be a good person. A good person to Aristotle, as to Edmund Fairfield, as to Thomas Jefferson, is one capable of living well, of service to his community, his family, his nation, one capable of casting his mind up to God. Such a person is courageous, moderate, just, and wise. These are hard things to achieve. It is our work to achieve them.

This past spring I taught a course on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In our final class meeting, one senior, a smart girl, asked: "Is freedom compatible with virtue?" I replied, "If someone makes you do a thing, are you responsible for

it?" The reply was "no." So I said, "then would doing it be a virtue in you?" Everybody looked up and smiled. Freedom is not merely compatible with virtue; it is necessary to it.

This is why the Declaration still matters: It tells us what we are. We are free, rational creatures, made to seek the good; made to live, and to live well. In order to live well, we have to learn. We have to meet life's challenges, which come every single day. We have to grow. We have to strive. We have to suffer. Only we can choose to do that. Our right to do it is written in our nature, and in the laws of nature and of nature's God.

The first nation, the only nation, founded according to a principle like that, the principle that matters most of all principles, is our own. Hillsdale College exists so that, in a shifting world, we may learn to grasp and follow these permanent things. We have kept that up for 182 years. Let us pray that our nation may return to that path from which it has departed, and let us resolve to work as citizens to help it do so.

Larry P. Arnn, Ph.D., is the 12th president of Hillsdale College, where he is also a professor of politics and history. Dr. Arnn is the author of three books: "Liberty and Learning: The Evolution of American Education"; "The Founders' Key: The Divine and Natural Connection Between the Declaration and the Constitution and What We Risk by Losing It"; and "Churchill's Trial: Winston Churchill and the Salvation of Free Government."



U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

President Ronald Reagan with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during a working luncheon at Camp David on Dec. 22, 1984.

The lure of socialism



By Cal Thomas

Lamenting Elon Musk recently becoming a trillionaire, Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Massachusetts Democrat, said: “Elon Musk has more money and more wealth than anyone in human history.”

To which I say, “So?”

King Solomon was probably a trillionaire by today’s standards. Perhaps Warren missed the biblical stories about his wealth and more importantly the Book of Ecclesiastes, which he wrote and said: “I hated the things I worked so hard for here under the sun, because I will have to leave them to someone who comes after me.” (Ecclesiastes 2:18)

Warren and her ideological twin, Sen.

Bernie Sanders, Vermont Democrat, think many people are hanging on by their fingernails (Warren’s words) in a struggling economy and should pay more in taxes to the government, which presumably will redistribute it to those fingernail holders.

The reason socialism has become so popular, especially among the young, is that Americans have never had to live under it.

This is the central flaw in socialism. It is the idea that if you make more money than I do, you “owe” me some of it. That might be true if there were only a fixed amount of money in a jar and I took more than my “fair share.” But the money supply is unlimited for people who follow what were once known as “the rules.” These included staying in school (school choice is sweeping the land), getting married before you have babies, saving and investing wisely, staying off drugs and developing good character.

The reason socialism has become so popular, especially among the young, is that Americans have never had to live under it. Young people have no experience with it and no knowledge of it. People who have come to the United States from former communist and socialist countries are amazed that so many think these systems are better than capitalism and freedom. Today, freedom has

become license, which is not freedom at all, but bondage.

The values of “The Greatest Generation” are fast disappearing. The reason they were great is because they lived by certain principles: personal responsibility and accountability, duty, patriotism,

and treating government as a last resort, not a first resource. Envy, greed and especially entitlement are replacing inspiration, motivation and perspiration.

As a young reporter I interviewed many wealthy people. I didn’t envy them. I wanted to be like them. Warren and Sanders believe people’s circumstances are fixed, and if you are poor or “struggling,” that is your lot for life. Why don’t they consider the millions who have risen from poverty to self-sustainment and urge people to follow their example? The answer is that the less people rely on government, the more that harms a politician’s political career.

Ronald Reagan used to say, “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are I’m from the Government, and I’m here to help.”

His ideological mate, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, echoed his view when she said, “The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out

of other people’s money.”

And this from the “Iron Lady”: “It is good to recall how our freedom has been gained in this country — not by great abstract campaigns but through the objections of ordinary men and women to having their money taken from them by the State. In the early days, people banded together and said to the then-Government, ‘You shall not take our money before you have redressed our grievances.’ It was their money, their wealth, which was the source of their independence against the Government.”

Then there was this line from our tax-reducing 30th president, Calvin Coolidge: “I want taxes to be less that the people might have more.”

The revelations of fraud, especially by states mishandling our tax dollars, is reason enough to “starve the beast.” We don’t need socialism in America. We need more capitalism. Young people had better learn that. If they don’t, they will discover what they now embrace in theory they will come to regret in practice.

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Cal Thomas is one of the most popular syndicated columnists in the United States, appearing in hundreds of newspapers. He is a veteran of TV and radio news. For 19 years, he worked for the Fox News Channel and before that with NBC News and KPRC-TV in Houston. He began his journalism career at the age of 16. In 2024, he marked his 40th anniversary of his column.

At 250 years, freedom still requires virtue



By Dr. John Pinheiro

Liberty, the Declaration of Independence proclaims, is a divine gift. Freedom is not the privilege of the educated or the well-born. It belongs to every person by nature, carrying with it the capacity to know right from wrong. Important insights follow from this that are as true today as they were in 1776.

If liberty is a gift of God, then a person's liberty transcends the State. The State can only recognize and protect it. This is why the right to liberty is "unalienable."

As we celebrate the birth of American freedom, however, we need to remember that freedom requires virtue. Forget this, and we risk losing the very freedom the founders defended.

For Thomas Jefferson, every human person possessed what he called a "moral sense" that was "as much a part of man as his leg or arm." This moral sense can be strengthened or weakened. While its strengthening takes centuries, Jefferson recognized that its weakening can occur rapidly. Importantly, Jefferson understood freedom as the right to do what one ought to do, not merely what one wishes.

Jefferson trusted most Americans to use their "moral sense" in their decision-making. He was confident that there were matters of right and wrong that all people could know regardless of their education. "State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor," he wrote, and "the former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter,



*The Government of the United States, which gives to
Ligotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance,
requires only that the Government should deem them
citizens, in giving
it on all occasions their effectual support.*

THE CHRISTIAN ROOTS OF AMERICAN LIBERTY

*of my administration, and
your favorable opinion of my administration, and
ferent with the children of
the stock of the nation, who dwell in this land, continue
to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants,
while they are not suffering from the same, and make
wine and figs, and there shall be more to make
him afraid. May the Lord scatter
light and truth upon us, and make
us all in our several vocations here, and in his
own due time and way, truly happy.*

A READER

G. Washington

DYLAN PAHMAN AND JOHN C. PINHEIRO

A people that cannot govern its appetites will not long govern itself...

because he has not been led astray by artificial rules." William F. Buckley Jr. expressed a similar sentiment when he said that he "would rather be governed by the first 2,000 people in the telephone directory than by the Harvard University faculty."

And yet while Jefferson recognized that each of us is capable of great good, he knew from personal experience and history that we are also corruptible.

It is precisely because the human person is corruptible that government

is at once necessary and dangerous. Necessary, because freedom without order decays into license. Dangerous, because every government is staffed by fallible men tempted by power. Jefferson warned in 1787,

"The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield, and government to gain ground."

There is a similarity here to Lord Acton's famous dictum that "power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

For Jefferson, government was not a necessary evil but an irreplaceable good. It is "necessary," he said as president, "to close the circle of our felicities." In other words, good government has a role to play in our pursuit of human happiness.

But how much government do we really need?

The central insight of the Founding Fathers, Jefferson included, is that freedom requires limited government. Government must be limited not just so that we can do whatever we want, but because it suits our very nature. Jefferson's prescription, offered in his first inaugural, was "a wise and frugal government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another" and otherwise leave them free, never taking "from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned." In our own parlance: low taxes and small government.

"Ay, there's the rub," as Shakespeare's Hamlet said. Government stays small only when citizens are virtuous. Limited government presupposes a people who not only can but also want to do things for themselves.

A people that cannot govern its appetites will not long govern itself, for disordered souls are an invitation to the Leviathan that devours liberty. Russell Kirk put it plainly: If you would have order in the commonwealth, you must first have order in the soul. Freedom, virtue and limited government are not three separate goods to be enjoyed à la carte. They are links in a single chain, and the chain breaks at its weakest point.

A republic that remembers only that we are endowed with liberty but forgets the hidden premise of the Declaration — that self-government presupposes a virtuous people — will discover that it has celebrated Independence Day but lost the holiday's meaning.

At 250, the question is not whether we Americans still cherish freedom. It is whether we are still the sort of people who can keep it.

.....
John C. Pinheiro, Ph.D., is an historian of the American Founding, and director of research at Acton Institute. The author or editor of five books, his newest is "The Christian Roots of American Liberty." His Substack is Liberty & Order.

The wealth we chose: Honoring 250 years of economic freedom



By Dr. Anne Rathbone Bradley

As America marks its 250th birthday, it's worth noting a quieter anniversary: the 250th anniversary of the publication of Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations." This is no coincidence of the calendar.

By 1774, on the eve of revolution, colonial Americans were the most prosperous people on earth, ahead of Great Britain in per-capita income by over 50%, with colonial output increasing twelvefold in 70 years. This wasn't the product of a king or a central plan. The founders inherited this prosperity, understood why it existed and built a republic to protect it.

But the story begins earlier, on a cold shore in Plymouth in 1620.

The Pilgrims arrived under a charter requiring communal farming: Everything produced went into a common storehouse and was distributed equally regardless of effort. It sounded just. In practice, it was catastrophic. As Governor William Bradford recorded, the system bred "much confusion and discontent." Productivity collapsed. Within two years, nearly half the colony was dead.

This was not a failure of character; it was a failure of institutions, the predictable result of severing effort from reward. Bradford saw it clearly: The planners had behaved "as if they were wiser than God."

In 1623, Bradford divided the land into private plots. Each family now farmed for itself, and Bradford recorded what followed with something like wonder: "It made all hands very industrious." Within four years, the colony had gone from starvation to surplus. Same people, same land—different rules.

The first Thanksgiving wasn't a celebration of collectivism. It was a feast made possible by abandoning it.



The genius of the American system is that the market constrains the individual even more powerfully than the Constitution constrains the state, through the discipline of profit and loss.

government might otherwise claim. He warned of "soft despotism": a state that, in trying to do everything for people, quietly crowds out their initiative and dignity.

The Pilgrims had learned that lesson the hard way. Bradford's insight was that the problem was not the people but the system. Change the incentives, and the same people who languished became industrious.

Fast-forward to today. The United States produces roughly \$30 trillion in GDP, which is 26% of global output, added within a single lifetime. That big number is really a proxy for something human: our ability to provide for our families, neighbors and communities and to pursue happiness and flourishing.

As we mark 250 years of independence, we should remember Adam Smith's core insight: Wealth is a social process, powered by the division of labor and free exchange. We serve our neighbors best not by managing their choices but by protecting their freedom to make them. James Madison made the same point in Federalist 51: Because men are not angels, government must be constrained. But the genius of the American system is that the market constrains the individual even more powerfully than the Constitution constrains the state, through the discipline of profit and loss.

None of this happened by accident. The founders built a framework that made American innovation inevitable by institutionalizing economic freedom. As Smith showed, wealth is not divided; it is multiplied.

Bradford was right in 1623, and the truth hasn't aged. We are stewards of the most successful experiment in self-governance in history. The task now is to remain worthy of it and protect it for future generations.

Anne Rathbone Bradley, Ph.D., is a full-time professor at the Institute for World Politics. She is the George and Sally Mayer Fellow for Economic Education and the academic director at the Fund for American Studies and an Affiliate Scholar at the Acton Institute.

The Founding Fathers understood this deeply. They were building a commercial republic: a nation of free people trading across state lines, generating prosperity no central plan could match. The Constitution became the largest free trade zone in the world, prohibiting tariffs between states and establishing common commercial infrastructure, because they knew power, left unchecked, would replace shared opportunity with institutionalized privilege.

Embedded in this was a transcendent vision of freedom's purpose. George Washington repeatedly invoked Micah 4:4 — every man under his own vine and fig tree, none to make him afraid — not

as decoration but as shorthand for property rights, rule of law and freedom from coercion. The founders weren't building a welfare state. They were building conditions in which ordinary people could pursue extraordinary lives of their own choosing. They understood that with commerce as king, buttressed by virtue, integrity, prudence and hard work, the republic would withstand internal and external foes.

The framework worked, and the world noticed. When Alexis de Tocqueville visited in 1831, he marveled not at the government but at the people; their instinct was to form voluntary associations for every purpose

Political, economic and religious freedom: The lasting basis of national stability



By Dr. Art Lindsley

Freedom should not be taken for granted. America fought for freedom, and it has been central to America since the Revolution. The Declaration of Independence notes that certain “unalienable Rights” include “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Patrick Henry famously said, “Give me liberty or give me death.” The First Amendment says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

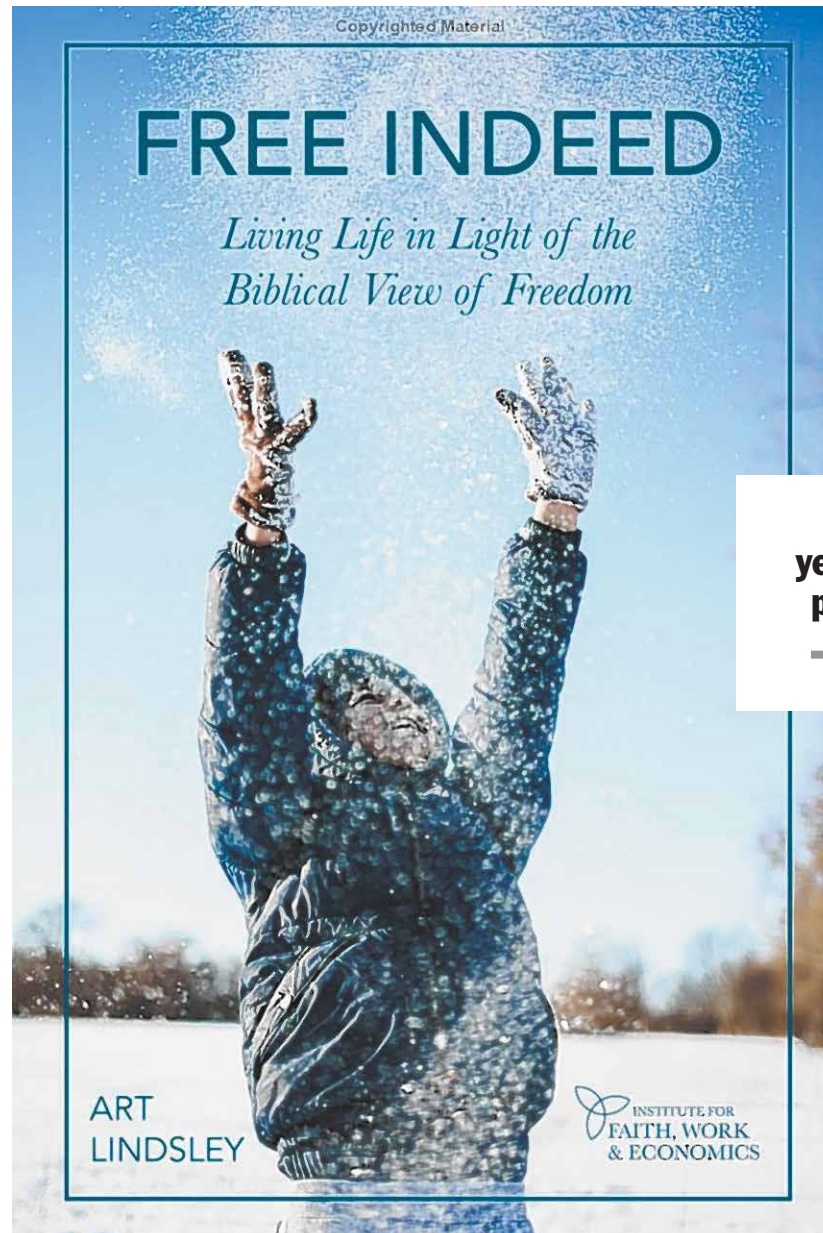
Freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly are all guaranteed. These freedoms are still upheld, but without vigilance, there is always the prospect that these freedoms will be eroded and eventually lost.

There are dark clouds of socialism and communism on the horizon. We are at a “civilizational moment” where we will see what the future of America holds. This 250th anniversary of our independence begs the question of whether the faith-based values of the founders will be maintained.

A nation will not flourish without political, economic and religious freedom.

Michael Novak’s classic book, “The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism” — often called the book that changed the world — used the illustration of a three-legged stool where each leg must be strong or else the stool becomes unstable or falls apart. The three legs are political, economic and religious/moral-cultural freedom.

Taken too far, political freedom can become anarchy or totalitarianism. Likewise, economic freedom can become harmful if not checked by the rule of law and the consciences of those who do business. However, without economic freedom, a society will not flourish. Without political freedom, economic



freedom is precarious. It may be maintained for a while, but it is always in danger of being controlled at the whim of the ruling elite. Above all, without religiously based moral values, a society will eventually crumble.

Michael Novak was a “radical leftist” early in his career as a professor at Stanford University. He published a book, “A Theology for Radical Politics,” arguing for his leftist, socialist views.

I had a number of personal conversations with him in the later years of his life. He said that what convinced him that socialism was harmful was the numbers. He said that he discovered that socialism always hurt the poor, whereas economic freedom always helped the poor.

The “numbers” still show the same thing. For 30 years, the Fraser Institute in Canada has published the “Economic Freedom of the World” annual report. The Heritage Foundation has also published a

similar but independent “Index of Economic Freedom” for the last 32 years. The bottom line is that the more economically free a country is, the more we see better life expectancy, less infant mortality, better quality of healthcare, less poverty, less corruption, better income levels, more income for the poor, more happiness, less child labor and less unemployment.

Socialism and Marxism restrict economic freedom and provide big government solutions. In these lists, you can see that countries that are Marxist and socialist are always harmful to the poor. This conclusion seems counterintuitive, but the numbers have shown the same results for many years. These numbers stick in the craw, bother or grate on the socialists’ advocacy. If they are going to face the facts, they have to try to get around these numbers.

In addressing poverty, there is a role for government, non-profits and

markets. But the main driving forces towards eliminating poverty has been the free market.

In 1800, 85% of people were in extreme poverty. In 1950, it dropped to 50%; in 1992, it was 25%; in 2007, 15%; and in 2015, 9.6%. At one point, the former head of the World Bank, Jim Kim, maintained that extreme poverty could be virtually eliminated by 2030.

That may be overly optimistic post-COVID-19, but that is the direction things are headed. Twenty-five countries in 25 years have eliminated extreme poverty within their borders.

Twenty-five countries in 25 years have eliminated extreme poverty within their borders.

I once had a conversation with Ron Sider, left-leaning evangelical and author of “Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger.” I noted that in the introduction to the fifth edition of his book, he admitted that in previous editions, he had not given as much place to markets as he ought to have done. He responded, “Churchill said that if you are under 30 and are not a socialist, you don’t have a heart, and if you are over 30 and you are not a capitalist, you don’t have a mind — with some qualifications.”

When you look carefully at the track record of socialism versus free markets, the evidence points towards democratic capitalism.

We need to maintain a strong view of political and economic freedom — undergirded and reinforced by faith-based morality — if we are going to flourish as a nation.

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Rev. Dr. Art Lindsley is chairman of the board of Transform World, senior fellow at the C.S. Lewis Institute and a senior fellow at the Geneva Institute for Leadership and Public Policy. He was formerly vice president at the Institute for Faith Work and Economics. He is author of many books, including “True Truth: Defending Absolute Truth in a Relativistic World,” “C.S. Lewis’s Case for Christ: Insights from Reason, Imagination, and Faith,” and “Be Transformed: Essential Principles for Personal and Public Life.” He is co-editor with Anne Bradley of “For the Least of These: A Biblical Answer to Poverty” and “Set Free: Restoring Religious Freedom for All.” Art has an M.Div. from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh in Religious Studies.



Of all the economic systems known to man, the most beneficial has been the American private enterprise/capitalist system.

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‘No one is worth a billion dollars’? Free enterprise beats socialism every time



By Bob McEwen

“No one is worth a billion dollars. No one can earn a billion dollars,” the congresswoman boldly declared on a talk show. “That’s right, that’s right,” the host affirmed.

Well, just how is wealth created? How does one become wealthy?

Who exactly decides the value of a person’s work? The value of one’s contribution to society?

Across the ages there have been only two answers to that question: *One is the people. The other is the powerful.*

It works like this. There is a car going down the street. There are only two ways one can get money from the passenger in that car. One is called free enterprise/capitalism; the other is called socialism.

Under free enterprise, a man lies awake nights dreaming up ways to do something good for the passing traveler whereby he will slam on his

brakes, pull into the driveway and say, “You will wash my car, sweep the carpeting, and clean my dash and windows? I would much rather have that than this \$20 bill.”

Or, a person sees a Global Positioning System (GPS) app for sale. He or she decides, “I would much rather have that app than this \$60, so I’ll never get lost again.” Or someone decides, “I’d rather have that small Smart TV than this \$200.”

Under free market capitalism, the only way one can get money from a stranger is to offer something so beneficial that the customer *voluntarily* and *freely* reaches into his wallet and makes an exchange with the producer, such that at the end of the exchange they are *both* better off. They are both wealthier than before their exchange. And if not, *they don’t make the exchange!*

This is the only way that wealth is created.

In a free market, there is no need for some powerful government planning board. The people — the consumers — are supreme. Through the simple expedient of profit and loss, the producer must comply with the demands of the consumer who, voting with his or her dollars, dictates what is produced in what quantity and what quality. The marketplace determines the value/price of any good or service.

The freer the country, the more open the economy; the greater the wealth creation. The United States makes up only 4% of the world’s population, yet it produces between one-fourth to one-third of the planet’s goods and services. It’s not because we are smarter or work harder than others. Hardly. It is because

we are the freest.

Every time we use our right to vote to make the economy less free, e.g., by voting for candidates who favor government control of private enterprise, we make the nation/state/city poorer. Our wealth disappears just as if it were taken by conquest.

Of all the economic systems known to man, the most beneficial has been the American private enterprise/capitalist system.

Now, the only other way to get money from the passing traveler is to simply *take it*.

We call individuals who take things by force criminals.

When people ban together to take things by force, that is called *socialism*.

The impact is the same: fewer choices and a lower standard of living.

Let me explain.

A worker crossing the parking lot is accosted by a criminal who puts a gun in his ribs and demands half of his pay. The worker goes home and explains that this is how much the family has left for expenses.

Or suppose the worker makes it to his pickup truck, opens his paycheck and sees that Uncle Sam has already been there. Half of his pay is already gone! *The impact is the same: fewer choices (less freedom) and a lower standard of living.*

Thus, the greater the government, the greater the poverty. Whereas the greater the freedom, the greater the wealth. It only works this way, every time.

Under socialism, a good or service is taken from the producer and given to a favored voter/consumer. Under socialism, wealth is not *created but*

redistributed. The degree to which the receiver benefits is the degree to which the producer is diminished. This “taking” punishes the producer. No longer able to produce without sufficient compensation, he must move to a freer state in America or go out of business.

The greater the socialism, the emptier the shelves.

Concluding wealth principle of free enterprise: The greater your contribution, the greater your reward.

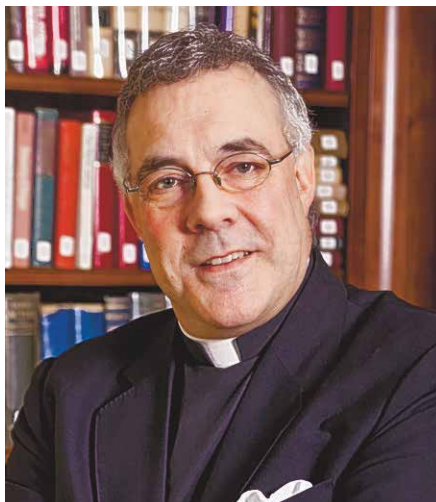
Provide one cup of coffee, get one reward. Provide 5,000 cups of coffee, greater reward. Serve 5 million cups of coffee, receive even greater reward.

Only under free enterprise are persons rewarded not because of who they are but rather by what they do for others. The producer is rewarded *only* when consumers decide that the light bulb, the Microsoft software, the Starlink connection is such a significant blessing that they voluntarily (freely) exchange for those products they value so greatly

In free America, yes, the reward for that contribution could even reach a billion dollars, Madam Congresswoman.

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Hon. Bob McEwen served six terms in the U.S. House of Representatives representing Ohio. During his tenure, Hon. McEwen served on the Intelligence and the Rules Committees. He was also a member of the U.S. delegation to the European Parliament for 10 years. In 2020, President Trump appointed him to the 1776 Commission on patriotic education and the Defense Science Board. He and his wife, Liz, have four children and nine grandchildren.

‘Christian socialism?’



By Rev. Robert A. Sirico

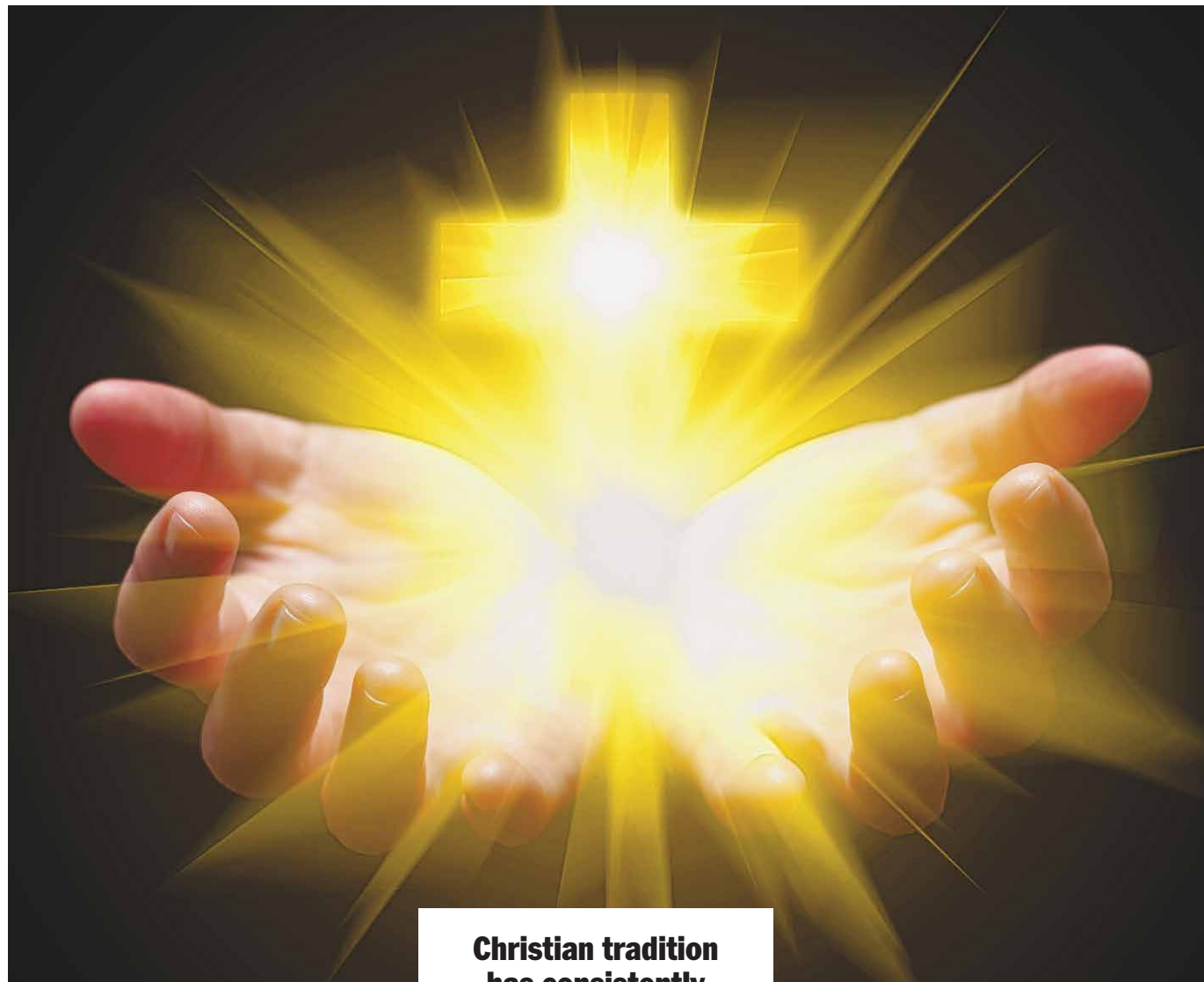
The fundamental claim of socialism, in almost all of its various forms, is ultimately a moral one. It presents itself not merely as an economic system, but as a vision of justice and equality — a society in which wealth is distributed according to need rather than privilege, and in which economic disparities are overcome through collective ownership or state control of productive resources.

Whatever its practical and historically documented failures, socialism has long appealed to the moral imagination by claiming to embody compassion, solidarity and concern for the poor.

Some of socialism’s most influential thinkers have argued that the origins of this vision are to be found in the New Testament itself. The life of the early Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles has frequently been cited as evidence that the first Christians practiced a form of “primitive communism.”

Particular attention is given to passages such as Acts 2:44-45: “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.” Likewise, Acts 4:32-35 records that “no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.” St. Luke even remarks that “there was not a needy person among them,” because those who owned lands or houses voluntarily sold them and laid the proceeds at the apostles’ feet for distribution according to need.

Read superficially, these passages appear to reject private property altogether. The remarkable generosity of the first Christians, together with the statement that “no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own,” has led many interpreters — from 19th century socialists to contemporary Christian socialists — to conclude that the apostolic



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**Christian tradition
has consistently
distinguished
voluntary generosity
from compulsory
redistribution.**

Church anticipated the central economic principles of socialism.

If the earliest Christians lived without private property and organized their common life around shared possessions, does this not suggest that socialism is not only economically desirable but authentically Christian?

The answer turns on a distinction that is both subtle and decisive.

The sharing described in Acts was entirely voluntary, born of conversion, charity, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. It was neither imposed by civil authority nor enforced through legal coercion. The apostles did not abolish private property; they converted the hearts of those who possessed it. Their concern was not the elimination of ownership but the cultivation of generosity.

The difference between a community in which property is freely shared because of love and one in which property is redistributed through political compulsion is not incidental. It marks the fundamental distinction between Christian charity and socialism.

That this is so becomes unmistakably clear only a few chapters later in the account of Ananias and Sapphira. They

are not condemned for retaining private property but for lying about their gift. St. Peter asks Ananias: “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal?” (Acts 5:4).

Few passages in Scripture offer a clearer affirmation of the legitimacy of private ownership. Peter explicitly recognizes both Ananias’ ownership of the property before its sale and his freedom to dispose of its proceeds afterward. The sin was not possession but deception, not ownership but dishonesty.

For this reason, Christian tradition has consistently distinguished voluntary generosity from compulsory redistribution. From St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine, through St. Thomas Aquinas and the modern social encyclicals, the Church has defended both the right to private property and the universal destination of material goods.

These principles are not contradictory but complementary. Property is a natural right, yet it carries with it a profound moral obligation toward one’s neighbor. Christianity does not abolish ownership; it sanctifies it through charity.

This distinction has not been lost on thoughtful observers outside the Christian tradition. Speaking during the political controversies surrounding trade unionism and socialism in 1908, Winston Churchill contrasted the spirit of the early Church with the socialism of his day: “The Socialism of the Christian era was based on the idea, ‘All mine is yours.’ But the [today’s socialism] is based on the idea, ‘All yours is mine.’”

This is why the first Christian community should never be mistaken for a socialist commune. The difference is not merely economic. It is theological.

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Father Robert Sirico is co-founder and president emeritus at Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty. This article is adapted from the ideas found in his popular books, “Defending the Free Market: The Moral Case for a Free Economy” and “The Economics of the Parables.”

Can the Bill of Rights survive the AI revolution?



By Dr. David Kotter

Artificial intelligence may prove to be the greatest constitutional test our generation will face. At the outset of the American Experiment, the Founding Fathers went to great lengths to secure specific freedoms for the citizens of their nascent nation, including the rights to worship according to conscience, assemble peaceably and be free from unreasonable searches and seizures.

The liberties secured in the Bill of Rights were not fully realized at the nation's founding, but over succeeding generations Americans repeatedly expanded and defended those constitutional protections against new threats. Each generation has faced its own constitutional tests. Artificial intelligence is likely to be ours.

The AI revolution is arriving faster than any that preceded it, expanding human capability in medical research, creative production and nearly every form of thought work. At the same time, AI is destabilizing the constitutional architecture the founders built, demanding that we update our protections for liberty before technological capability outpaces constitutional restraint.

No right illustrates this danger more clearly than the Fourth Amendment, which guards against unreasonable searches and seizures and requires a warrant with a specific description of what is to be searched. The Fourth Amendment was written for a world in which government surveillance was naturally constrained by time, distance and human effort. Artificial intelligence has removed those constraints.

In 1791, there was no constitutional issue if a constable saw a person ride a horse into town in public. In the age of artificial intelligence, however, over 5,000 communities have deployed more than 100,000 Flock cameras capable of capturing license plates, timestamps and locations for millions of vehicles.



No society can remain genuinely free if every public action is permanently recorded, searchable and analyzed by artificial intelligence.

an estimated 700 million cameras with facial and gait recognition to track every single individual. These surveillance feeds are combined with mobile apps (WeChat, Alipay), financial records, internet activity and government databases to build comprehensive profiles of individuals. No society can remain genuinely free if every public action is permanently recorded, searchable and analyzed by artificial intelligence.

China's surveillance state is not a distant dystopia but rather a working blueprint that authoritarian governments are already exporting, and that democratic governments are incrementally approximating, one camera and one database at a time. The difference between Beijing and an American city is not yet the technology; it is the legal and moral framework restraining its use. That framework is eroding. What is at stake is not merely the Fourth Amendment, but the entire architecture of ordered liberty the founders constructed. When government can track where you worship, whom you assemble with, what firearms you purchase and which doctors you visit, every right in the Bill of Rights is simultaneously compromised.

This deployment is not simply "taking a picture of a car in public" in the traditional sense; it is automated, continuous and aggregated surveillance able to reconstruct days, weeks or years of a person's movements.

With AI, enough data points create something fundamentally different from isolated observations. The constitutional question is no longer, "Can police observe a car on a public street?" but rather, "Can the government reconstruct nearly every movement of nearly every citizen for years?"

The quantity of observations becomes a qualitative difference: With AI systems already deployed, government license plate databases can reconstruct where you sleep, where you worship, which political meetings you attend,

which gun ranges you frequent and which friends you visit. Accordingly, this technological pressure on the Fourth Amendment equally affects other aspects of the Bill of Rights, such as freedom of religion, the right to peaceful assembly, the right to bear arms and many others.

All of the rights in the Constitution need to be defended against technological disruptions that could not have been foreseen by the Founding Fathers.

Even as automatic license plate readers have helped law enforcement officials solve auto thefts and recover Amber Alert victims, they are far from the technological limit of what governments could use to undermine the Fourth Amendment. Today, the Chinese Communist Party has deployed

Artificial intelligence will undoubtedly make our lives safer, healthier and more productive. But history teaches that every expansion of technological power must be accompanied by an equal commitment to preserving human liberty.

The challenge is not to reject AI, but to ensure that constitutional protections evolve to meet capabilities the founders could never have imagined. The freedoms secured in 1791 must not be surrendered simply because technology has made their erosion easier.

The question, then, is not whether we can prevent every government from ever building a surveillance state, but whether we will choose to defend the Bill of Rights with updated laws and renewed vigilance before they are eroded away by technological innovation.

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Dr. David Kotter, Ph.D., is the director for The Quarry: Innovation Lab for Artificial Intelligence at Colorado Christian University. He also serves as the Dean of the School of Theology at CCU and formerly was a visiting scholar for the Institute for Faith, Work, and Economics.

A former socialist's journey to a new life of freedom, faith and dignity



By Ismael Hernandez

My father looked approvingly as I retrieved my red flag from a ditch. “Wave it, son!” he shouted with revolutionary zeal.

That memory of my former life emerges as I leaf through the pages of the FBI’s counterintelligence file on my father. He was a founding member of the Movement for Independence, the precursor of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party. Our family — and my identity — was immersed in socialism, which explained our poverty and lending indictments.

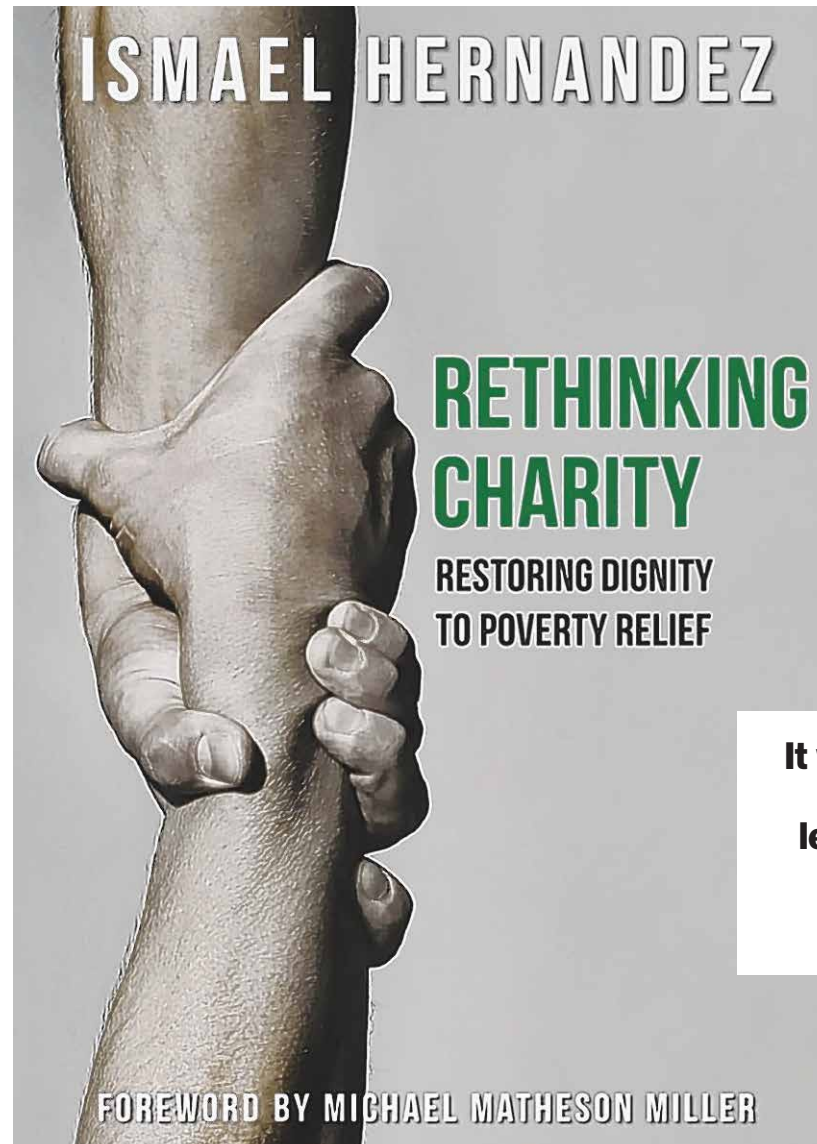
In our master plan to transform chaos into ease, there were intoxicating promises of a grand new world devoid of antagonisms and social pathologies. As an embattled community, we sheltered under the mantle of that dream, and I committed myself to becoming a faithful drop in the great wave of revolution — my dignity emerged there.

“America is the enemy of humanity!” my father once railed and, naturally, I believed him. The litany of condemnations against “Yankee imperialism” became my catechism, and the meagerness of our existence nurtured my rage toward America.

I will never forget the night when I saw the look of desperation on my mother’s face as she stormed outside to confront the men monitoring my father. I heard the buzz of inquisitorial voices mingling with her dejected cries. Later I learned they were intelligence officers of the Puerto Rican police working with the FBI, and I hated them.

I blamed America for destroying my parents’ marriage and our lives. But in reality the destructive force was socialism, which I would not learn until many years later, away from the utopian allure of its grasp.

At this same time, God was



becoming a vital factor in my life.

My mom sent me to Mass with friends, and those experiences shaped in me a sort of double consciousness. On one hand, God; on the other, Marx. The Revolution and the Kingdom. How to reconcile this existence? By joining the Jesuit order, of course!

This solution placed me in their embrace of liberation theology — which came to the fore during the mid-1980s amid the political turmoil brewing in Central America. I was accepted in the order, and they planned to send me to the heart of the Revolution, Sandinista Nicaragua, for my philosophy studies — a socialist’s dream come true.

But then news came of seven Jesuits murdered in El Salvador close to the border with Nicaragua. The order, concerned for our safety, decided to send us to Fordham University in New York instead. Fordham? Frustrated, I left the seminary and angrily returned home. Still, at this point, I made the most beautiful “mistake”: I decided to come

to America after all.

Curiously, I landed not at Fordham but at the University of Southern Mississippi. It was when my feet hit American soil — in the Deep South, no less — that my lungs were filled with the air of freedom. For the first time in my life, I was able to challenge the fiercely held assumptions of my ideology. While in the United States, I dared to try on a new filter, and a new landscape informed by liberty facilitated the experiment.

By the end of my first summer at the university, I thought about staying, but I soon found myself troubled by heretical thoughts against socialism. The Berlin Wall had fallen and this struck my consciousness. I contemplated the last of all socialist excuses: “Socialism has never really been tried.” Yet there was a new reality that spoke the language of dignity with new words — ones that made me realize that I was not merely an insignificant drop in a vast ocean.

Today, I am no longer a socialist. I encountered the reality of American

freedom and its constitutional primacy on the individual, which led to the realization that socialism is an anthropological mistake.

Socialism fails because its foundational premises misunderstand humankind’s very nature. I discovered that I was unique and unrepeatable. I have the moral capacity for self-realization because, made in the imago Dei (Genesis 1:26), I have the capacity to reason to discover the truth, and the volitional capacity to choose, to do what is good.

I was willed into being by God for my own sake. I am loved by God in the radical concreteness of my existence and ordered to personal communion with others. It is in the exercise of dual capacity of reason and choice, I came to see, that my dignity could be found.

What is needed today is a social and political context that protects, affirms and optimizes these individual capacities.

It was when my feet hit American soil – in the Deep South, no less – that my lungs were filled with the air of freedom.

A few years ago, I buried my father, who died a communist. At that time, I again silently sang the revolutionary songs in homage to the fallen warrior. I remembered his laughter when, by his side, I retrieved my red flag many years ago. I mourned his death, and I honor his life to this day. I remember still his words toward the end of his life, “Don’t be a fence-sitter!”

His example of leading a committed life is an important legacy that I have woven into my own coat-of-arms. Now I fly the crest of God-given individuality and the shield of liberty. I am convinced that my father salutes this new and uniquely American flag as he looks on in contented approval.

May God bless America!

Ismael Hernandez is founder and president of the Freedom & Virtue Institute, which exists to combat the paternalistic, condescending and statist way of addressing poverty in America. He is the author of a new book, “Rethinking Charity,” and the bestselling novel “Not Tragically Colored: Freedom, Personhood, and the Renewal of Black America,” which offers a new perspective on racial reconciliation and racial tensions in America. He holds a master’s degree in political science and lives in Fort Myers, Florida, with his wife and three children.

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Awake, informed Christians can sway America

'The numbers are there'



By Nancy Schulze

"What is it about Christians and patriotism?" asked a friend who identifies as a "none" (no particular religion).

"Well," I replied, "the founding principles upon which this country was built were borne out of Scripture by men and women who, almost to a one, believed that the God of the Bible is God."

The hearts of awake and engaged Christians burn with patriotism because they fully grasp the significance of the Creator's gift of free will. The power of freedom is real to them, as they've been forgiven — liberated from the choices they've made for evil over good.

On a broader scale, they grasp the fact that over 600,000 lives were sacrificed in the fight to provide freedom for all Americans. And more Americans than that have died to provide freedom for others in this world.

Freedom is the rock upon which our founding documents stand. In a world where the average constitution lasts less than 20 years, there is a reason the American Constitution is still standing after 250. Our founding documents were built on observable, self-evident realities of human nature and the nature of God.

The slide toward socialism in America is paralleled by the slide of civic and biblical literacy in this country. Illiteracy has been strategized and financed by the secular left, who have been operating under the radar for a century — infiltrating, educating, indoctrinating, entertaining, persuading and deceiving. Spinning scripture and the Constitution to fit a leftist agenda. Skillfully, cunningly luring those "useful" to that agenda — especially women under 40, who vote significantly to the left of men, and older women as well. They've evidently bought into the lie that free stuff is freedom.



If awake, informed, un-woke Christians did vote, it wouldn't be long before the country returned to its roots.

Every time the "useful" are given another spoonful of free stuff, highly taxed Americans get out their "checkbooks" and pay the bill, reducing the freedom to spend their earnings as they would otherwise. The top 10% of earners in this country pay over 71% of federal income tax. Almost 50% pay little (3%) to nothing. Who is paying their fair share and who isn't? If this isn't redistribution, what is?

Two-thirds of our annual budget goes to entitlements and welfare, very little of which is authorized in our founding documents. We're \$40 trillion in debt. No nation in history whose debt has exceeded 100% of GDP has ever survived economically. We're at 123%. A collapse would send this country into the open arms of socialism.

The only way the spending is going to stop is if the American people stop electing spenders who don't know or care about the fact that they are spending wildly outside the boundaries of

their authority under the Constitution — members of Congress who just keep shoveling out free stuff while digging Americans deeper in debt. Their "kindness" is killing us.

Socialists and communists are out of the closet now, having gained enough voter momentum to actually win positions of authority over the rest of us.

What's the socialist agenda? The eradication of freedom. Elitist government control over the people of America. *This is what we fought a revolution over.*

Given the realities of human nature, our founders knew firsthand that there will always be men who use and abuse their free will to dominate and subjugate others, so they built in safeguards against it. The most brilliant governing documents of all time were written to preserve and protect freedom. And under it all was their belief that no king, ruler or government outflanks the Sovereign Creator of the universe who

created men to be free.

But bureaucratic creep has buried a free people and free enterprise under mountains of control, taxation and regulations which have handcuffed the most industrious, creative, innovative, forward thinking, benevolent and generous (by far) people on the planet. There isn't a close second.

The Bible was the best-selling book in the colonies and to this day remains the best-selling book of all time in all the world. Thanks to leftist spin, many are now reading it through a woke lens.

Until the 1900s, the Bible was a textbook in American schools. Over half of the 56 signers of the Declaration were graduates of seminaries or Bible schools. They, and Americans in general, were highly biblically literate. They understood what the book actually said. Extensive research into the writings and speeches of the founders reveals that they quoted Scripture more than any other source, by far.

John Adams said that our Constitution will only work for a moral and religious people. In other words, if Americans choose to live outside the boundaries of right and wrong, good and evil, there won't be enough laws to contain all the chaos. We're there.

In November, Americans will choose between two radically different visions for the future of this country. According to Rasmussen polling, 49% of Democrats agree that the U.S. Constitution "should be mostly or completely rewritten."

Approximately 63% of 330 million Americans identify as Christian. Fifty percent of them are registered to vote. Fifty percent of those registered don't vote.

If awake, informed, un-woke Christians *did* vote, it wouldn't be long before the country returned to its roots. The numbers are there.

Nancy Schulze is a speaker, founder and CEO of the Republican Congressional Spouses Speakers, and wife of the late U.S. Rep. Dick Schulze. She serves on the boards of the Council for National Policy and the American Association of Evangelicals.

Safeguarding our most important constitutional right: Freedom of religion and conscience



By Judge Phil Ginn

Across our world today there are many nations who tout their foundation in democracy. Though the details of their governments may differ, they, at least on paper, seek to protect individuals from the tyranny of government intrusion into their personal lives. In fact, many of these countries can trace their heritage all the way back to the United States Constitution, which arose out of our fight for independence with Great Britain.

It is that struggle for freedom that we now celebrate in America after the passing of 250 years of our glorious history as a nation. The freedoms birthed in the hearts of the English serfs have come to full fruition in the annals of our own American struggle for that illusive idea of freedom.

Unfortunately, we have recently seen individual rights of conscience curtailed around the globe and even in our sister countries of the United Kingdom and Canada, particularly in the arena of religious liberties. Nevertheless, there is a uniquely American protective phenomenon that deserves recognition particularly in the limelight of our grand celebration.

You see, it is the United States Constitution that provides its citizens specific rights that cannot be taken away by the government because they do not emanate from the government. We know these enlightened defenses of basic freedoms as the Bill of Rights, which composes the first 10 Amendments to our founding document.

Mind you, we would never even have had our Constitution without the addition of the Bill of Rights. As a matter of fact, it would be several years before the last two states would ratify our Constitution because it did not include



This was never an attempt to protect our government from religious interference, but solely to protect the rights of our people to worship God and to serve God in any way they see fit.

enough individual protections against an overreaching government. Now all this time later, these most important and crucial modifications are making all the difference in the quest for freedom of conscience for the American people.

Interestingly enough, the most important freedom that rose to the top of the concerns of a vast number of the early citizenry was the concept of religious freedom. It is the very First Amendment to the United States Constitution that explicitly begins with this language: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Perhaps it was the strong influence of conservative protestant beliefs that permeated the last two colonies that ultimately has proven to be the safeguard of our most precious

freedom. Nevertheless, this was never an attempt to protect our government from religious interference, but solely to protect the rights of our people to worship God and to serve God in any way they see fit.

Ironically, this protection actually facilitated the early creation of social safety nets created by Christian and Jewish charities, including child welfare, feeding the hungry, hospitals and education, which included several Ivy League Schools. To be sure, a good number of these originally faith-based entities have long since demurred from their respective faith origins, and many of the safeguards they once championed have been taken over by the welfare state of overreaching government. Regrettably, in most cases, the needs have not been met by bureaucratic

governmental control to the degree that they were met under the care and guidance of religious leadership.

Unfortunately, it is this perennial promise of freedom of faith that is now under great threat even by the U.S. government whose founding documents originally offered complete protection.

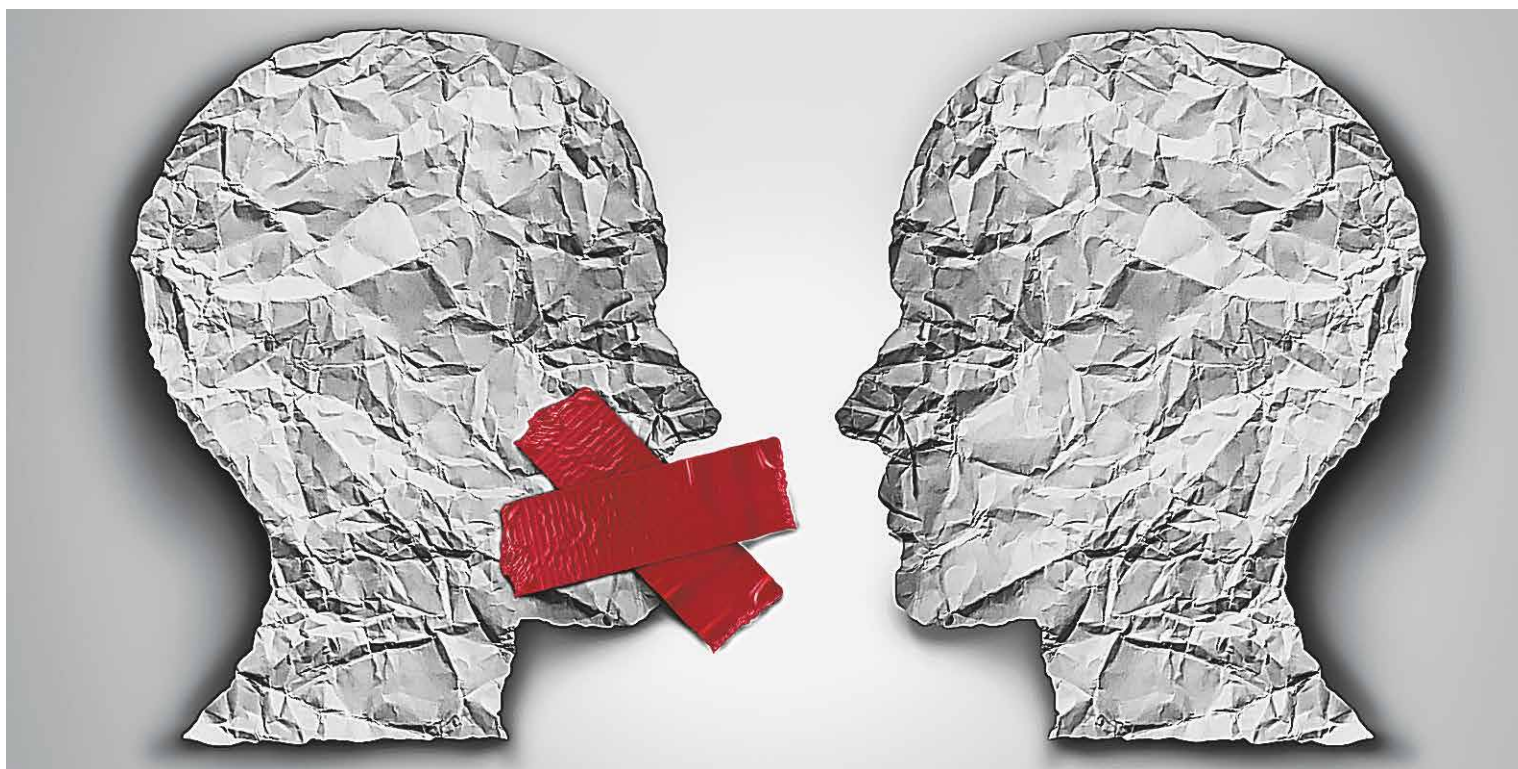
The juggernaut of the LGBTQ+ mindset is directly aimed at people of faith who oppose actions and teachings that are contrary to the tenets of their faith. To explain it in a way that even a Supreme Court justice, U.S. senator, congressperson, or even a president and vice president can understand, this includes deviant forms of sexual immorality outside of the marriage between an "individual capable of creating sperm and an individual capable of creating eggs," sometimes more commonly referred to as a "man and a woman."

Not only that, but the historic Christian belief that life begins at conception and that the act of abortion terminates the life of an individual worthy of the protection of our Constitution is now one that is looked upon with equal disdain as the composite biblical worldview that shaped and guided our Founding Fathers.

With all this in mind, as we celebrate the 250th year of our birth as a nation, perhaps we should be extraordinarily thankful that our forebears so wisely included protections for people of faith in the very first amendment to the most significant founding document of any nation in the history of the world.

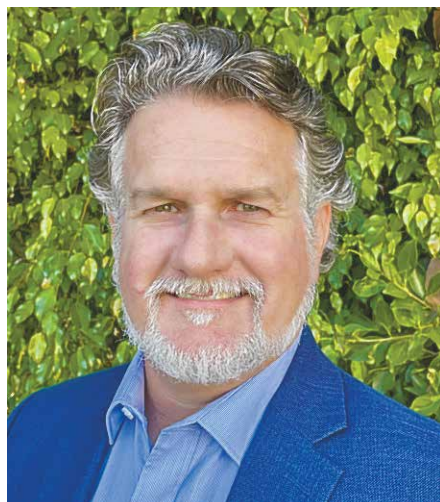
May God protect America from the onslaught of attacks on this most important freedom. Make no mistake, it is the very lives of our children that will be the price to be paid if we fail as a nation to be steadfast in our resolve.

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Judge Charles Philip "Phil" Ginn, J.D., D.Min., assumed the role as president of Southern Evangelical Seminary as of April 1, 2021. Judge Ginn is a retired Superior Court Judge, attorney, and businessman. He has been married to his wife, Lynn, since 1979. Together they have four daughters, three sons-in-law and five wonderful grandchildren.



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Artistic freedom at 250



By Rev. Joel Pelsue

Artistic freedom is essential for the future of America. It is not negotiable and it must not to be taken for granted, for there will always be censors and bad actors seeking to restrict the art they find offensive.

While Christian fundamentalists overstepped in their desire for censorship last century, the progressives are overstepping today as they censor, sue and cancel those who want to sing a different tune.

Why does this matter? The simple truth is that art has the power to unite and divide cultures. This was a core claim of Pitirim Sorokin, who founded the sociology department at Harvard. He experienced the lack of creative freedom and the peril of propaganda in

Soviet Russia as a young man. His vast research while at Harvard confirmed over and over the necessity for art to unite a country.

The American experience is beautiful and unique. When we come together, singing “The Star-Spangled Banner” before a baseball game, it is more than tradition. It is a remembrance of the precious freedoms we have and what they cost. Our freedoms are not free, and it’s worth remembering and sharing with our neighbors of every race, creed and tongue.

When artists kneel to the demands of kings and elites, everyone suffers.

Slavery ended because people used their creativity to expose the uncomfortable truth. It was creative freedom that allowed Harriet Beecher Stowe to sell millions of copies of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” exposing the evils of slavery and compelling men to fight to stop slavery.

National anthems, flags and seals are not silly little things. They are shorthand for the great story of which we are a part. It is not a perfect story, but the story is not over yet. We continue to strive to be united, and we continue to expose evil, opposing injustice and seeking a more perfect union where human flourishing is known by more and more people every year.

But creativity dies under tyranny. When artists kneel to the demands of kings and elites, everyone suffers. First, the artist suffers because she is not free

to create what is in her heart. Second, the audience suffers because they are robbed of the true depth of ideas and imagination of their fellow citizen.

Third, society suffers as culture begins to shrink and shrivel under the censors’ fear-infused edicts.

Censorship is alive and well, but it isn’t coming from the White House. It is coming from Hollywood themselves. This is evident in the artists they refuse to support as well as the artists they insist on silencing. From the CEOs of major media companies to the halls of

as efficiently as any fascist tyrant. Like Disney, many companies have been obsessed with progressive ideas, stories and characters. But the audiences are sick of propaganda. Even “South Park” skewered Disney for the tired, woke, progressive stories we are all sick of. Sadly, until my friends on the left recognize the enemies to their left, it will continue.

If the republic is going to flourish, conservatives need to embrace the value and power of songs, movies and the arts. But more than that, they need to invest in the next generation of creatives. Liberals need to reject the fanaticism of the progressive censors and return to the liberal ideas they were founded upon.

Our best days are ahead of us if we can stop the censorship from the progressives, and if we can return to celebrating what is true, good and beautiful. Our faith is not in our republic or man’s abilities, but in the hands of God who can direct our path.

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Rev. Joel Pelsue is the founder and president/CEO of the Arts & Entertainment Ministries (www.a-e-m.org) as well as the Arts & Entertainment Institute. He is a Presbyterian minister, pastoring now for over 20 years both in New York and in Los Angeles. Joel lives in Los Angeles with his wife Michelle and their three children. Joel has a B.A. in Philosophy from Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA., and his M.Div. from Reformed Theological Seminary. Joel recently enjoyed a sabbatical studying theology and aesthetics in London at King’s College and the National Gallery and is currently writing a book on beauty as a result of those studies.

the American Civil Liberties Union, censorship is alive and well.

Just take a few minutes to explore the outrageous court cases against Jack Phillips and Masterpiece Cakeshop, or Barronelle Stutzman and her flower shop, or 303 Creative. The desire to punish and destroy artists who will not bend the knee to progressive ideology is clear. If it wasn’t for the inspiring defense of the First Amendment for artists by Alliance Defending Freedom, our nation would be in a far worse place, and the rights of artists would be shrinking annually. Thankfully, they were able to go to the Supreme Court and win victories for creative freedom for all.

Tragically, the Oscars are doubling down on requiring progressive stories and characters to qualify for their award, which in turn promotes propaganda

Let us remember from whom our freedoms come



By Kristen Waggoner

What happens when a nation continues to speak the language of freedom but forgets the truth that made freedom possible?

It's a defining question of our age, and America's 250th anniversary is an ideal moment to reflect upon it.

Our country was not founded on freedom alone but on the truth that freedom comes from God. That is what makes our freedoms inalienable. That is why government has no authority to touch them — because government did not invent them.

Our founders called that truth “self-evident.” But is it still?

It was self-evident to the founders because, even though they were not uniform in their beliefs, they inhabited a world shaped by Scripture and natural law. That is not the case today, where faith has been in decline in the culture and under attack in the law. Many people, including those who write and interpret our laws, do not believe our rights come from God.

The consequences of losing sight of this once-self-evident truth are all around us.

We have a government that treats rights as privileges. We have states harassing pregnancy centers for supporting women and their children, censoring counselors who speak truth about how we are created male and female, and punishing faith-based schools for teaching God's word. We have a government that turns lies into laws: the lie that sex can be changed or that unborn life doesn't count.

We can't say our founders didn't warn us.

Patrick Henry once asked, “[How] can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their



freedom from religion. They hold the view that true liberty requires liberation from every limit: from family, faith, work and even from the truth about what it means to be human.

But a freedom detached from truth leaves people adrift, not liberated. When this happens in one life, it is a tragedy. When it happens across society, it is a crisis.

That crisis plays out in both our culture and our courts, which reinforce each other in a vicious cycle. Courts impact the culture because the law is a teacher. What it protects, people learn to honor. What it permits, people learn to accept. And the culture, in turn, shapes our laws because it determines who we will elect to write them and how hard we will fight to defend them.

Preserving religious freedom, and all freedom, requires replacing the vicious cycle with a virtuous one. It requires people who will fight in court when the government violates the God-given rights it was created to protect. And it requires citizens, parents, pastors and educators to use those rights, dearly protected, to defend and advance truth in the culture.

It's true that our founders' time was different from our own, in its scriptural foundation and otherwise. But it was also similar in many respects. Their challenges were not so different from our own. They, too, faced a threat to inalienable truth — theirs from a tyrant an ocean away. The threat in our time is in our own backyard and in our hearts. But the fight is much the same.

We cannot return to 1776, but perhaps we can reclaim its spirit, its belief in truth and its willingness to fight for it.

We cannot return to 1776, but perhaps we can reclaim its spirit, its belief in truth and its willingness to fight for it. The clarity that made the American experiment possible: that freedom comes not from government but from God.

Doing so will determine whether our rights can endure today and, by God's grace, for 250 years more.

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Kristen Waggoner is CEO, president and chief counsel of Alliance Defending Freedom. Follow Kristen on X @KristenWaggoner or follow ADF @ADFLegal.

only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God?”

John Adams wrote, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

Neither was arguing for government-enforced religion, but they did believe that freedom of religion was

the first freedom. They believed it mattered to everyone, believers and nonbelievers alike. They knew that it created space to seek truth, speak truth and form the virtue that enables self-government.

Compare that to the modern understanding. Many Americans today, especially young people, have been taught that freedom of religion means

Nigeria's escalating insecurity: A direct assault on religious freedom



By Dede Laugesen

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation with over 242 million people, is in the grip of a security crisis that is systematically destroying religious freedom for millions of its citizens.

Fresh data from the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa's (ORFA) June 2026 six-year report and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) May 2026 update paint a grim picture of targeted violence against Christian communities.

The Trump administration has described the violence as genocide against Christians. Nigeria's Tinubu administration rejects any religious motivation, framing the killings primarily as banditry and criminality that affect Muslims as well — a view echoed in part by the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, who has noted the complex mix of factors while acknowledging disproportionate impacts on Christian communities in certain regions.

Between October 2019 and September 2025, ORFA documented 79,323 people killed and 34,917 abducted in attacks linked to terror groups and bandits. Among civilian deaths, Christians accounted for more than twice as many victims as Muslims. When adjusted for local population sizes in affected states, Christians were killed at a rate of 4.4 to 1 compared to Muslims.

Abductions affected both groups in roughly equal numbers, but Christian captives often faced higher ransoms, longer ordeals, sexual violence and a greater risk of execution.

Fulani-linked militant groups — estimated by USCIRF at around 30,000 fighters—have emerged as the dominant force behind much of the killing, surpassing Boko Haram and militant



Survivors describe communities too fearful to gather for worship, churches abandoned or burned, and clergy deliberately targeted.

group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

ORFA attributes a large share of Christian civilian deaths to these mostly Muslim Fulani ethnic militias (often called Fulani Ethnic Militia or FEM), who operate across Nigeria's northwest and the Middle Belt. They launch night raids on Christian farming villages and abduct worshippers from churches. Millions have been driven from ancestral lands; hundreds of communities remain occupied and too dangerous to reclaim. The Nigerian government often fails to recognize these victims as internally displaced persons, leaving women and children especially vulnerable with little access to aid.

In 2025 alone, mass killings in Benue and Plateau states claimed hundreds of lives, including displaced Christians sheltering at a Catholic mission. In Niger State, gunmen abducted 315 students and teachers from St. Mary's Catholic School in Papiri — one of the largest school kidnappings in recent history.

The violence showed no let-up in 2026, as attacks timed to Christian holy

seasons continued. A Palm Sunday massacre in Jos's Ungwan Rukuba area killed around 30 people. On Easter Sunday in Kaduna's Ariko village (Kachia Local Government Area), gunmen stormed an Evangelical Church Winning All congregation and nearby St. Augustine's Catholic Church during services, killing at least 12. The Nigerian Army claimed to have rescued 31 hostages, but Christian leaders and local residents disputed the assertion, saying there was no rescue and many captives remained missing. Similar deadly strikes happened across Benue, Nasarawa and other Middle Belt areas.

This campaign directly undermines religious freedom. Survivors describe communities too fearful to gather for worship, churches abandoned or burned, and clergy deliberately targeted. According to Aid to the Church in Need (ACN), at least 212 Catholic priests were kidnapped across 41 of Nigeria's 59 dioceses between 2015 and 2025. Of those, 183 were released or escaped, 12 were murdered, and three died later from injuries and trauma; at least four remained

in captivity as of late 2025. *Agenzia Fides* reported 145 priests kidnapped and 11 killed in the same period, with Kaduna among the hardest hit.

Fides noted five Catholic church workers murdered in Nigeria that year. As one ACN report observed, when a priest disappears, "an entire parish is left without protection, leadership or hope."

The Nigerian government has taken some positive steps — designating certain bandit groups as terrorists, moving to end pardon programs for repentant fighters, and advancing state-level policing following the U.S. designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern in late 2025. Yet critics, including USCIRF, highlight slow security responses and inconsistent accountability. Proposed U.S. targeted sanctions and reviews of Foreign Terrorist Organizations reflect growing bipartisan concern in Washington.

Rep. Riley Moore, West Virginia Republican, whom President Trump appointed to monitor religious violence in Nigeria, stated on X in July: "As I have been saying since I started investigating the genocide against Christians in Nigeria, Fulani militants are by far the largest perpetrators of violence against Christians in Nigeria. The Trump Administration has made historic progress against Boko Haram and ISWAP, but we must also stop the killing in the Middle Belt at the hands of the Fulani if we want to ensure our brothers and sisters in Christ are safe to live and worship without being murdered."

Without stronger protection for religious minorities and serious efforts to address youth marginalization, Nigeria risks normalizing a reality in which practicing one's faith can be a death sentence. The toll — tens of thousands dead or abducted, communities destroyed, and clergy hunted — demands urgent action from Nigerian leaders, the Trump administration and the international community.

Dede Laugesen is president and CEO of Save the Persecuted Christians, a U.S. educational nonprofit based in Monument, Colorado. For more information, contact info@savethepersecutedchristians.org.

The undeniable link between religious freedom and economic prosperity



By Dr. Richard Rogers

When searching for the best recipe for economic prosperity, especially in the United States, our history reveals numerous examples that show that economic breakthroughs were seeded in the fertile soul of religious liberty. While the relationship is complex rather than automatic, in case after case, it is undeniable.

The United States offers several historical examples where religious freedom helped create conditions for economic prosperity.

Pennsylvania (after 1681)

The religious freedom Pennsylvania was founded upon attracted human capital, entrepreneurship and investment. Pennsylvania was established as a colony with unusually broad religious tolerance for its time. Quakers, Lutherans, Mennonites, Amish, Presbyterians, Jews and other immigrant groups settled there, bringing in highly skilled farming techniques, trades, banking practices and commerce. The Keystone State's Philadelphia became one of the wealthiest cities in colonial America.

Rhode Island

Roger Williams founded Rhode Island after being expelled from Massachusetts because of his strongly held religious beliefs. In welcoming people from many faith backgrounds, it became a center for trade, shipping and manufacturing. The religious diversity fostered in Rhode Island led to commercial relationships and economic prosperity while spurning the religious conformity of the old world.

As it turned out, Roger Williams' grand experiment taught the world that religious liberty was very attractive to merchants and innovators in the



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During the 1800s, it was religious freedom that attracted the talent that fueled industrial expansion.

colonies and to those who would visit our shores.

Nineteenth-century immigration

During the 1800s, it was religious freedom that attracted the talent that fueled industrial expansion. Suddenly, millions of Catholics, Jews, Lutherans, Orthodox Christians and others immigrated to America and founded businesses, banks, factories and farms at breathtaking pace. Cities such as New York, Chicago, Cincinnati and St. Louis grew rapidly, and major American companies were established by immigrants who came to America seeking both economic opportunity and religious liberty.

Post-World War II America

After World War II, the United States experienced extraordinary economic growth while maintaining strong constitutional protections for religious liberty. It was faith-based organizations that established and expanded hospitals, schools, universities, charities and disaster relief. These institutions contributed to education, workforce development and community stability. This era taught us that in a civil society — religious institutions and organizations could complement government and markets in

supporting economic development.

American history is replete with powerful examples of religious freedom helping create an environment where diverse people from a variety of faith backgrounds could contribute their talents, build institutions and successfully pursue economic opportunity.

Religious freedom, from the very beginning, was an important part of the broader framework of liberty that enabled the nation's remarkable economic growth because religious freedom, at its core, always encourages and nourishes economic prosperity. Here are the five most obvious ways:

1. Religious freedom protects individual liberty, regardless the religious affiliation.

When people are free to follow their conscience, they are generally also freer to start businesses, innovate and pursue opportunities without fear of government interference.

2. Religious freedom strengthens the rule of law and stands for justice for all.

Countries that protect religious freedom often also protect property rights, contracts and freedom of association — all foundations of a healthy economy.

3. Religious freedom builds trust

and social capital in the lives of everyone affected.

Faith communities often create networks of trust, volunteerism, unparalleled charitable giving and mutual support that can reduce poverty and encourage entrepreneurship.

4. Religious freedom has always attracted investment and talent.

Businesses tend to prefer societies that are stable, predictable and respectful of human rights. Religious persecution often signals broader political instability.

5. Religious freedom unleashes human potential and opens doors of opportunity.

When the people are free to worship, work, educate their children and participate fully in society, the economy benefits from the talents of the entire population rather than only favored groups.

All of the five items listed above are strong empirical reasons for the link between religious freedom and economic prosperity.

But the primary reason the link is so strong is a sixth element:

6. Religious liberty invites and elicits God's hand of provision and protection.

Where religious liberty is celebrated and codified, it attracts the blessing, favor and guiding hand of our Creator.

The damning link between a government dictating what people may believe or how they may worship can undermine innovation and economic growth. And while religious freedom does not guarantee prosperity, it does invoke the very hand of God on your behalf.

Religious freedom and economic prosperity reinforce one another. They always have because freedom is God-given, inalienable and inherent.

The freedom of religion is a critical part of what it means to be human. While religious liberty alone does not create wealth, it is a battle cry of the free and an anchor to stable societies in which prosperity is most likely to flourish.

Richard Rogers, Ph.D., serves the American First Policy Institute as vice-chairman of the Center for American Values, which seeks to champion the core values that strengthen American communities and families. Dr. Rich is from Flowery Branch, Georgia, and earned his doctorate from Pepperdine University, where he has also served as a professor for more than 20 years. Dr. Rich is currently on Free Chapel College's executive team and has served as the president for the last five years. He is the father of four girls and was married to his wife Theresa for over 30 years before she passed in 2022 after an eight-year battle with breast cancer.

Persecution of Christians in India



By Faith J. H. McDonnell

In January 1999, a gentle Australian missionary doctor and his two little boys were murdered in Orissa State, India. Dr. Graham Staines and his nurse wife, Gladys, had provided education, health care and social development to lepers and other tribal people considered the lowest of society for over 30 years.

Staines and his young sons, Timothy and Phillip, had just finished a week of ministry in Manoharpur, deep in the forest, and were sleeping in the back of their jeep. Members of Bajrang Dal, a radical Hindu paramilitary organization, mobbed the vehicle, set it on fire and burned the three alive.

Staines was murdered because he was a Christian whose ministry led to the growth of Christianity amongst tribal peoples. Hindu radicals violently oppose religious freedom and the right of any Hindu to convert to Christianity. Radicals falsely accused Staines of bribing or otherwise coercing conversions.

But the poor, oppressed, lower-caste peoples to whom missionaries brought the good news that they were created in God's image, and that Jesus loved them so much that He died for them, did not need coercing. Embracing Christianity was leaving a religion that sentenced them to misery as untouchables.

Orissa, now known as Odisha State, continues to be the site of many violent and murderous attacks against both Christians and Muslims. But persecution happens beyond Odisha. Other regions of egregious violence include Manipur and Punjab States. And radicals do not discriminate — persecution is rampant against both Catholics and Protestants in this nation where only 2% of the population are Christians.

Persecution includes egregious discrimination; beatings and torture; burning of churches, businesses and homes; and even murder. It is attributed to mobs fomented by radical Hindu groups, such as Vishva Hindu Parishad



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(VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), as well as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

These groups hold much sway over the Indian government. Because of this, the welfare of Christians was overlooked during the COVID-19 pandemic. This neglect contributed to death of thousands of Christian pastors, leaders, priests and nuns who tried to care for others without adequate protection themselves.

In its 2026 Annual Report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent government agency created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, recommended that the State Department designate India as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) "for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations." But so far, India is not on the State Department's official list although it has been urged by USCIRF for many years.

India ranked 12th on Open Doors' 2026 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian. That's up from 31st in 2013 before Modi came to power. Christian human rights and religious freedom groups worry about radical Hinduism's disturbing similarity to Islamic supremacism. These parties promote "safronization" of India: belief that India is for Hindus only. Exacerbating this is the institution — now across 13 Indian states — of a new anti-conversion law.

Another report warning of India's lack of religious freedom — this one from International Christian Concern — was released on July 7. Their 2026 *Global Persecution Index* puts a spotlight on India — and Prime Minister Modi. *The Persecution Index* accuses Modi of "fanning a growing flame of Hindu

nationalism" and being "willing to sacrifice the rights and freedoms of religious minorities to increase his power."

The 2026 *Global Persecution Index* states that "Modi's India illustrates how persecution can grow within democratic

institutions." Unlike many other nations where Christians are persecuted, the report says, "India's decline in religious freedom is not the result of civil war or chaos but of deliberate governance choices that recast religious diversity as disloyalty."

Indian Christians are exemplary and loyal citizens of their country. Their only "disloyalty" is being followers of Jesus. Despite terrible persecution, the Body of Christ in India continues to grow. They deserve our prayers, respect, and advocacy.

(To know more about Dr. Graham Staines, check out the great film *The Least of These*, with Stephen Baldwin as Graham.)

Faith McDonnell is director of Advocacy at Katartismos Global, a Christian ministry founded by The Rt. Rev. and Mrs. Julian Dobbs for the purpose of "equipping the saints." Previously, she directed the International Religious Liberty Program at the Institute on Religion and Democracy for 27 years. She is co-author of "Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children." Faith was married to Francis McDonnell until his death in 2014 and has one adult daughter.

America didn't give the church its mission



By Chris Larson

Two hundred fifty years in, Americans will hear much this year about political and economic freedom. Less will be said about a quieter blessing: the constitutional protection of religious freedom and what that freedom is for.

America's constitutional order protected the free exercise of religion and declined to establish a national church; it

did not command the conscience or prescribe worship. Citizens were given broad room to live out their convictions through worship, teaching, giving and service. By God's providence, that freedom was afforded unusual legal protection.

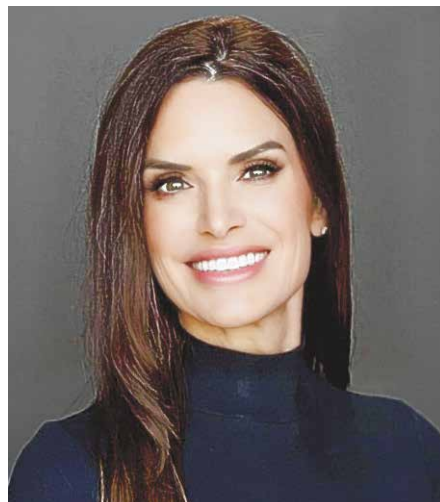
For Christians, that freedom to serve has a particular purpose. Christ sends his people to proclaim the good news of his life, death and resurrection and to teach all that He commanded. That mission was never the product of national ambition or institutional self-interest. It is driven by Christ's love for his people and, in response, our love for him.

In love, God sent his Son to redeem a people from every nation, tribe and tongue, that they might worship him freely forever. Those united to the risen Christ no longer live for themselves but for him.

Christ's love does not merely move his people; it compels them (2 Corinthians 5:14). His love comes first. We love because he first loved us.

» see **MISSION** | C31

Freedom's greatest test: Ending human trafficking

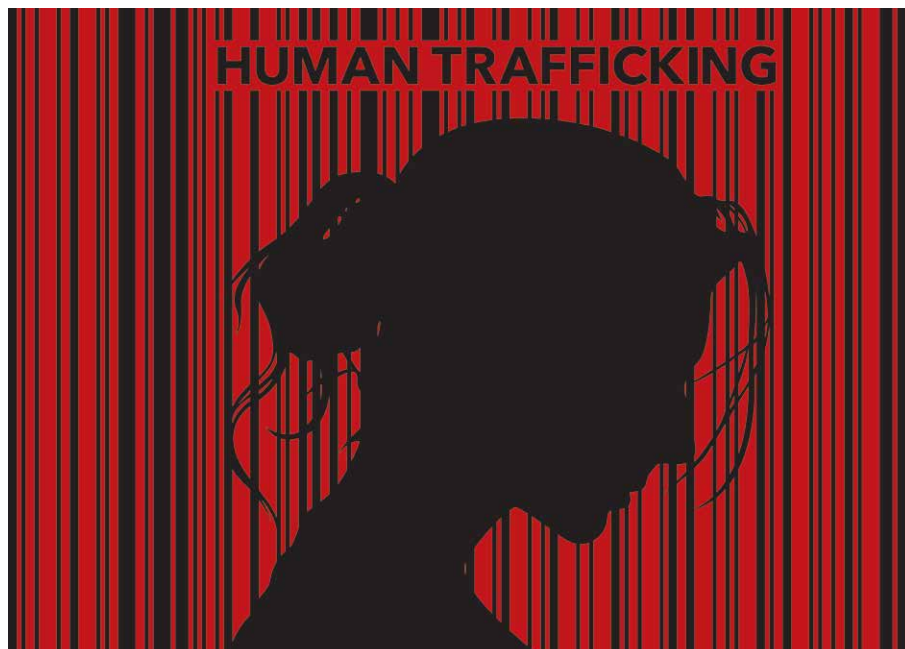


By Tami Brown Rodriguez

As America prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of our nation's founding, we will rightly reflect on the extraordinary freedoms secured by our founders and defended by generations of Americans. The Declaration of Independence established a revolutionary principle — that every person is endowed by our Creator with the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Yet one of the greatest threats to those ideals is not found on a distant battlefield. It exists in every state, every major city and countless communities across America. It is modern-day slavery.

Human trafficking is the systematic theft of liberty. It strips away dignity, exploits vulnerability and reduces human beings to commodities for profit. There may be no greater contradiction to America's founding ideals than allowing slavery to flourish in the nation that first declared liberty to be an unalienable right.

After more than a decade working alongside legislators, prosecutors,



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law enforcement, survivor leaders and technology experts, I have learned that trafficking is one of America's most misunderstood crimes. According to the National Human Trafficking Hotline, nearly 18,000 potential victims are identified each year in the United States, yet experts agree these numbers represent only a fraction of the true scope of trafficking because it remains one of the most underreported crimes.

The victims are children recruited through social media, teenagers manipulated through online gaming platforms, women escaping abuse, foster youth searching for belonging, veterans rebuilding their lives and vulnerable adults targeted because someone saw an opportunity for profit.

Traffickers are often not strangers. Research has found that in some child sex trafficking cases, up to 47% of victims were trafficked or facilitated by a family member or caregiver.

Technology has only magnified the crisis. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children receives millions of CyberTipline reports each year on suspected online child sexual exploitation. Approximately 460,000 children are reported missing annually in the United States; that's 1,200 a day.

While many are recovered safely and may not be trafficking victims, traffickers deliberately target runaway and vulnerable youth because they know these children are among the easiest to exploit. One national study identified more than 100,000 online commercial sex advertisements every day across the nation's largest commercial sex marketplaces. Meanwhile, the International Labour Organization estimates that forced labor and sexual exploitation generate approximately \$236 billion in illegal profits each year, making human trafficking one of the world's fastest-growing criminal enterprises.

These numbers tell us something profound. We cannot prosecute our way out of this crisis.

Although some 18,000 potential victims are identified annually, the federal government averages only about 184 federal human trafficking prosecutions each year. Even in Texas, a leader in anti-trafficking legislation, only 28% of trafficking arrests resulted in trafficking convictions over nearly two decades.

Justice matters, but justice alone is not enough. After helping advance 82 anti-trafficking laws across 20 states, I have become convinced that prevention — not simply prosecution — must become America's next frontier. Parents need tools to recognize online grooming. Children deserve age-appropriate digital safety education. Schools, churches, healthcare providers, businesses and technology companies must work together to identify exploitation before it becomes tragedy.

America has faced great moral tests before. The generation of 1776 challenged tyranny. Lincoln's generation confronted slavery. Our generation must confront the buying and selling of human beings in the digital age.

As we celebrate 250 years of liberty, perhaps the greatest tribute we can offer those who came before us is not simply remembering the freedoms they secured, but ensuring those freedoms are protected for the next generation. History will not judge us solely by the liberty we inherited. It will judge us by the liberty we chose to defend.

Tami Brown Rodriguez is CEO of Untrafficked, a national nonprofit dedicated to preventing and combating human trafficking through education, technology, intelligence and legislative reform. She is a nationally recognized speaker on human trafficking, digital safety and public policy.

MISSION

From page C30

This is the animating impulse of Christian service. Service is not the root of our acceptance with God, but its fruit. When Christ's love grips the heart, lesser motives lose their command, and that love moves outward.

Across generations, Christians have put this freedom to work. They have proclaimed the gospel, taught the Scriptures, published and translated faithful resources, equipped pastors and churches, cared for the sick and poor, and carried the good news of Christ to

places they would never call home.

This freedom is shared across America. Each Lord's Day, congregations gather for worship without seeking the state's permission. Parents teach their children the faith. Christians give quietly, care for their neighbors and seek to obey God at home, at work and in public life. None of this should be taken for granted.

America did not give the church its mission. Jesus did.

Nor does the gospel depend on American liberty. It has often flourished under persecution, and Jesus Christ will build His church in seasons of freedom and under opposition. Still, we should thank God for the freedom to gather, publish truth, send resources

abroad and serve openly.

Church and state have distinct responsibilities, yet both remain under God. The state is not called to preach the gospel or govern the church, and the church is not called to exercise civil power. Keeping those roles distinct was never meant to suggest that the state is independent of God.

For Christians, love must be rightly ordered. We love God first, then our neighbor. Love for family, community and country belongs within that order, but it does not end at our borders.

Dr. R.C. Sproul, who founded the ministry I serve, put it plainly: "The kingdom of God trumps every earthly kingdom. I'm a Christian first, an American second."

That higher allegiance does not weaken love of country. It orders it. Christians may give thanks for their nation and serve their fellow citizens without ever confusing an earthly nation with the kingdom of God.

No constitution can create the church's mission or guarantee its success. Yet by God's kindness, America's protection of religious freedom has afforded Christians remarkable liberty to serve. That freedom is worth guarding and using well for the good of our neighbors and the glory of God.

Chris Larson is president and CEO of Ligonier Ministries, the international Christian discipleship organization founded by theologian Dr. R.C. Sproul.

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