

Reviews

Near the end of his story, Cardinal Daly reviews the tumult of contemporary religious and philosophical controversy. At the recent Second European Synod of Bishops, some prelates appear to have resigned themselves to their flock's "tranquil apostasy," while others "regretted the 'systematic demolition' of the family, the 'perfidious challenge' of *de facto* marital unions, demographic stagnation and the 'culture of death.'" (see *Inside the Vatican*, November 1999, p. 10-13).

Cardinal Daly is not dismayed. He revels in his gift of faith and that gives him hope. Reading his memoir, it is evident that, for him, there are aspects of living that are perceived with all our senses and not through reason alone. He illustrates his sense of irony on this subject with one of his favorite lines from the writings of G. K. Chesterton. "I made the startling discovery," wrote Chesterton, "that the whole thing had been discovered before." And then, Cardinal Daly caps his thought with another of that happy apologist's observations; "I could modestly say with Chesterton: 'A man is not really convinced of a philosophical theory when he finds that something proves it. He is only convinced when he finds that everything proves it.'" Cardinal Cahal B. Daly's life well lived and engagingly recounted adds to the everything that gives witness to the faith.

In answer to the question, "Is there hope for Europe?", his colleague Cardinal Ratzinger reminded an

interviewer that "Christ is not something of the past. As the *Letter to the Hebrews* states: 'Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be forever.'" Fittingly enough, that is Cardinal Daly's episcopal motto first assumed when he took the office of Bishop over thirty years ago.

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Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence, edited by Herbert Agar and Allen Tate. Wilmington: ISI Books, 1999 (originally published in 1936) 450 pages. Cloth. \$24.95.

Alternatives to Economic Globalization: A Report of the International Forum on Globalization San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, c. 2002. 268 pages. Paperback. \$15.95.

What do two books, published over sixty years apart, the first written by authors often styled as "conservatives" and representing some of America's literary elite, men such as Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Andrew Lytle, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and including an essay by Hilaire Belloc, the second by a group that might today be called "radical" and which supports the aims of the demonstrators against World Trade Organization (WTO) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) meetings—what do these two books have in common? As we will see, they have very much in common, which indicates to me two

things: first that the labels “conservative” and “liberal,” as these are used in the United States, are pretty much without value, and secondly that many of the issues that this nation was facing during the Depression of the 1930s are still with us, though in a different form.

Who Owns America? is a collection of essays whose contributors included many of the writers of the earlier (1930) volume, *I'll Take My Stand: the South and the Agrarian Tradition*, a defence of the Southern agrarianism. Unlike *I'll Take My Stand*, *Who Owns America?* does not focus especially on the South but is a sharp attack on big business, corporate agriculture and the commercialization of American life, and although it tends to avoid the term “distributism,” it nevertheless is a kind of distributist handbook or Bible. For it sets out with wonderful clarity and often biting rhetoric most of the distributist arguments and most of the criticisms that can be made against corporate capitalism.

Each essay in *Who Owns America?* treats a different distributist theme, some economic questions, some cultural questions of rural or small-town life. All of the contributors are Americans, except Belloc and another Englishman, Douglas Jerrold. This reprint contains an introduction by Edward Shapiro of Seton Hall University. Although Professor Shapiro's introduction contains much interesting and valuable background material, he seems to go out of his way to identify the

authors of *Who Owns America?* as “conservatives.” Indeed, he uses the word “conservative” five times in the first paragraph of his introduction. But what a strange kind of conservatism—one that denounces corporations, pillories the Republican party, supports labour unions, calls for social limitations on competition and government ownership of certain vital industries! Indeed, I might imagine quite a few radicals would be proud to have written such things as: “So far from providing freedom, monopoly capitalism does not even desire it,” or “The illusion persists that business should always be operated in a businesslike way, i.e., with a view to profit. The survival of capitalism depends on realization of the fact that monopoly is not business at all, but public service, to be operated with a single eye to the public benefit.” Or this comment on a Kansas law prohibiting corporate farming: “This is agrarian legislation of the highest type. It rightly constitutes corporate farming a public menace.” Or lastly, this amusing characterization of stockholders, from whom, as I write, President Bush is trying to remove all income-tax liability, as those “who enjoy the expectation of profits without responsibility, and most of whom are both ignorant and morally unconcerned as to the management of their property.”

Why then does Professor Shapiro call these writers conservatives? Chiefly because they rejected the collectivist and socialist solution to

capitalism's ills and championed private property, albeit well-distributed and small private property. Is that enough to make one a conservative? Certainly not, it seems to me, at least as that term is used today. Let us take a look at our second volume for a comparison.

The affinity of *Who Owns America?* with the thought of *Alternatives to Economic Globalization* is striking. This volume, collectively written by a committee chaired by John Cavanagh of the Institute for Policy Studies and Jerry Mander of the Public Media Center, interestingly comes to many of the same conclusions as our first volume. Although facing a very different world situation, in that corporate capitalism today operates globally and has managed to establish international institutions to facilitate its entry into every country, nevertheless the two books make some strikingly similar recommendations. For example, both make much of the fact that corporations, although considered by a legal fiction of the Supreme Court as having all the rights (though not the liabilities) of natural persons, do in fact receive their charters from a State government, and that therefore the State granting the charter should be able to regulate corporations in the public interest. Indeed, *Who Owns America?* is clear about the government taking over certain corporations, and *Alternatives to Economic Globalization* proposes that States exercise more firmly the power latent in their granting of a corporate

charter, and in extreme cases, where a corporation has gravely damaged the common good, e.g., by extensive pollution, confiscate the corporation's assets and sell them at public auction.

The authors of *Alternatives to Economic Globalization* are especially opposed to the international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, but the World Trade Organization is the one which they consider most dangerous and harmful to the world's welfare. For example, how many of us know that the WTO has the power to compel sovereign nations to change their environmental, consumer protection or labor laws when a corporation in another member nation complains that such laws harm their profits? And that the laws of the United States, Canada, the European Union and other states have been changed because of WTO rulings? Or that Guatemala, simply under a threat of a WTO suit from the Gerber company via its willing pawn, the U.S. government, “cancelled a public health law that had forbidden infant formula companies . . . from advertising their products as being healthier than breast milk”? The authors of *Who Owns America?* would surely have been appalled at such actions. In their day it was still possible to prevent corporations from owning farmland; today it scarcely seems possible to prevent them from owning entire nations.

Both books desire the same thing: a regional or local economy, small businesses, local and democratic decision making, strong government supervision of corporations. Indeed, the rhetoric of the earlier book is the stronger and tinged with more outrage over the relentless grasp and greed of corporations. If the authors of *Who Owns America?* are conservatives then so too are many of those who demonstrate against WTO and IMF meetings, at least as far their economic proposals are concerned.

The truth of the matter is that the conservative/liberal divide is a convenient fiction which is helpful chiefly to the elites who are the real rulers of the world. By a policy of *divide et impera* they manage to convince many good people that to oppose corporate policies is somehow to be a socialist and to take a wrong stand in what is termed the culture wars. Both these books ought to convince one that this is nonsense. Thus I can hardly recommend either book too much.

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Catholic Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democracy by Jay P. Corrin (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). \$55.95 (cloth)

Democracy, said Chesterton, is like blowing your nose: you may not do it well, but you ought to do it yourself. Chesterton's consistent be-

lief in self-determination and self-government was grounded in his Catholic Christianity. Not only did democracy best reflect politically the equal dignity of all people preached by Christianity, he felt, but it also accounted best for the political results of the Fall by dispersing power as widely as was practicable so as to diminish its necessarily corrupting effects. Yet, as Jay Corrin demonstrates in this splendid volume, if some modern Catholic intellectuals shared Chesterton's esteem for democracy, many others regarded it far less highly, and even embraced its autocratic antagonists. Corrin's ambitious attempt to trace these diverse leanings of a variegated group of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Catholic thinkers is likely to be controversial and is not without substantive and methodological flaws. But his study also provides a significant analysis and contextualization of distributism, a convincing rebuttal of a spurious, yet common, charge against Chesterton, and a piquant exploration of how leading Catholic authors responded to some of the central ideologies and events of their era. It is thus a seminal contribution to Chesterton studies, and also to scholarship in Catholic intellectual history and in modern political thought.

Corrin's work will be familiar to readers of the *Review*, for his articles have often graced these pages, and his *G.K. Chesterton & Hilaire Belloc: The Battle Against Modernity* (1981) is one of the rare acute,