



## Preaching to the Choir

“Love your enemies, for they tell you your faults.”

—*Poor Richard’s Almanac*

This past summer I attended the annual meetings of the Eris Society, an organization created by investment writer Doug Casey. The purpose of the Eris Society is to expand our horizons, meet new people, make us think, and challenge our views on politics, economics, science, and philosophy. Most of the members of the Eris Society are, like Doug, libertarians. And so, not surprisingly, 18 of the 25 speakers were libertarians, even though the format of the Eris Society is officially nonpartisan. Libertarians are not alone in seeking out their own. People seem more comfortable among friendly voices. Agreement among friends seems more agreeable than argument among critics.

And yet, like many of you, I enjoy a good argument. Contending with those who disagree—sometimes violently—teaches me far more about the weakness of my arguments than talking to colleagues who nod their head. And there is nothing more satisfying than convincing an opponent of the truthfulness of a theory or policy.

Undoubtedly one of the reasons the Chicago School of free-market economics has been more successful than the Austrian School is because members of the Chicago

School have traditionally addressed the entire economics profession in mainstream journals and books, while Austrians typically spend most of their time writing and chatting among themselves.

In the early 1950s, Ludwig von Mises was invited by a major Ivy League university to give a one-hour lecture on his vision of free-market economics. He declined the invitation, arguing that it would be “impossible for me to present the operation of the market economy in a short lecture.”<sup>1</sup> What a pity! Surely he could have countered the anti-capitalist mentality on this major campus, even if he were limited to an hour lecture. He might have changed the minds of only one or two students or faculty members, but that’s a beginning. Eventually one or two become a group and a group becomes a school and a school becomes a movement. . . .

I always make it a point of talking, corresponding, and reading the works of non-believers and critics. I enjoy reading John Kenneth Galbraith, Robert Heilbroner, Paul Samuelson, and Alan Blinder. I’ve made a point of seeking them out at annual meetings of the American Economic Association. You may have noticed that I frequently cite critics in my columns, not because I agree with them, but because they offer a useful counterpoint. And maybe I’ve even had an impact. Sure, I gain much from reading Milton Friedman, Ludwig von Mises, Henry Hazlitt, and other free-market economists, but it’s not enough to preach to the choir.

I know many of you have a hard time

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listening to the opposition. They make your blood boil and you may be tempted to throw their book aside, walk out of their lecture, or make a snide remark. It's hard sometimes to be civil to a speaker you strongly disagree with. R. M. Hartwell, former president of the Mont Pelerin Society, urged members to be "masters of the art of civilized discourse, eschewing rudeness and what Adam Smith called 'the insolence and brutality of anger.'"<sup>2</sup>

## Reading the Critics

In addition to books, there are several publications I read on a regular basis to find out what market critics are thinking and saying. Bernard Saffran writes a column in *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, "Recommendations for Further Reading," which summarizes interesting articles written by economists of all schools of thought.

Another publication I read regularly is *Challenge* magazine, published bimonthly by M. E. Sharpe (80 Business Park Dr., Armonk, New York 10504, (800) 541-6563, \$45 a year). Most of the contributors are what we might term "social democrats," economists who favor various forms of government intervention. A recent issue included "The Case for Subsidizing Wages," by Edmund Phelps; "The Future of Macroeconomics," by James Tobin, Alan S. Blinder, and James K. Galbraith; and an article on how privatization of Social Security hurts women. *Challenge* occa-

sionally includes an article from a free-market economist, but invitations are definitely limited.

## Creating a Dialogue

One of the best publications offering a dialogue among economists and social thinkers across the spectrum is *Critical Review*, published quarterly by a foundation established by Howard and Andrea Rich, who also operate Laissez Faire Books (*Critical Review*, P. O. Box 1254, Danbury, Connecticut 06813, (203) 794-1312, \$29 a year). The editor, Jeffrey Friedman of Yale University, selects a subject in each issue and invites a variety of viewpoints. For example, a past issue (Fall 1991) devoted to "Big Business" included a negative review by industrial organization expert F. M. Scherer of D. T. Armentano's *Antitrust and Monopoly: Anatomy of a Policy Failure*. Another issue (Summer 1996) highlighted "Critics of Capitalism" and included a debate between Steve Horwitz and Greg Hill on Keynesianism and market failure. *Critical Review* offers a delightful "interdisciplinary" forum for market advocates to take on market critics, and vice versa. The result is always a lively, yet scholarly, debate. □

1. Ludwig von Mises, *Planning for Freedom*, 4th ed. (Libertarian Press, 1980), p. 166. Mises declined to identify the name of the university.

2. R. M. Hartwell, address before the Mont Pelerin Society meetings in Vienna, Austria, September 1994.



# BOOKS

## **The Cross and the Rain Forest: A Critique of Radical Green Spirituality**

by Robert Whelan, Joseph Kirwan, and Paul Haffner

Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty & William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company • 1996 • 163 pages • \$16.00 paperback

Reviewed by Ken Ewert

Strident, apocalyptic environmentalist rhetoric has become a regular feature of American life. Vice President Al Gore intones that, “We must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization.” Other ecoprophets demand a halt to economic growth, an end to market economies and industrial development, and an abandonment of the notion of “progress.” Apparently we must repent of unenlightened desires to improve the quality of human life.

While perhaps not yet accepted by “the man on the street,” these extreme ideas are more than trendy prattle at yuppie (vegetarian) dinner parties. The widespread preaching of environmentalism in public schools—from kindergarten through university—will have its implications. Already, according to one survey, 63 percent of schoolchildren have lobbied their parents to recycle, and the situation has one author suggesting that the traditional classroom three “Rs” are in danger of being replaced by the enviro three “Rs”—reduce, reuse, and recycle.

While numerous free-market rebuttals have been penned against radical environmentalism, for the most part these works have taken aim at the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Radical environmentalism is primarily a religion. And, as *The Cross and the Rain Forest: A Critique of Radical Green Spirituality* makes clear, it must be examined and critiqued as one. This small book, authored by Robert Whelan, Joseph Kirwan, and Paul Haffner, is a worthy start. Well researched and providing a wealth of quotations, *The Cross and the Rain Forest* is an insightful look at the philosophical footings of environmentalism.

While the roots go back much further, in 1966, the historian Lynn White gave what proved to be

a significant speech entitled *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*. In this speech White attributed the “ecologic crisis” to the Christian tradition. Christianity, White wrote, “insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.” In what became a famous phrase, White proclaimed that Christianity was “the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen.” He lamented that Christianity made science and technology possible by displacing the pagan animistic belief that everything has its own *genus loci*, or guardian spirit.

Prophetically, White called for a new religion to replace Christianity. Modern environmentalism is a significant facet of this new religion. A tired and intellectually anemic Christianity is being deposed by a very old “new” religion: neo-paganism. The current battle, then, rages not over scientific facts or economic realities, but over religious presuppositions. The decisive questions are not regarding ozone depletion or species extinction. The questions are religious: Is nature made for man, or is man made for nature? Is man uniquely created in the image of God, or is he merely one (possibly carcinogenic) part of nature? Does sin consist of breaking the laws of a holy God, or does it consist of unapologetically using nature? Is the gospel the good news of God’s saving work, or the command that man conform himself to his “natural environment”?

*The Cross and the Rain Forest* cogently illuminates the religious nature of the conflict—a conflict not destined to be settled merely by appeal to scientific evidence or economics. The ultimate victor in this battle will be the most powerful gospel. □

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## **The Economic Laws of Scientific Research**

by Terence Kealey

New York: St. Martin’s Press • 1996 • 396 pages • \$75.00 cloth; \$19.95 paperback

Reviewed by George C. Leef

Americans have come to accept that a vast number of important functions can only be done if they are run by or at least subsidized by the state. According to conventional wisdom, government has to provide lighthouses, bus service,