

REVIEWS

Development with Dignity: Self-determination, Localization, and the End to Poverty

Tom G. Palmer

Matt Warner

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This article explores Abraham Kuyper’s interaction with the patristic view of an original community of goods and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s assertion that “property is theft.” Through a consideration of Kuyper’s general appreciation for the early Church fathers, John Calvin, and Christian socialists in his day, it concludes that patristic influence, if only indirectly, on Kuyper’s views of poverty and wealth is likely.

Tom Palmer and Matt Warner argue that human dignity is a foundational principle for economic development. The authors define dignity to mean broadly being able to conduct oneself as an upright human being in front of one’s family, community, and government. To readers in liberal societies who might think this kind of dignity is a mundane aspect of everyday life, I encourage you to read the section of this book that includes Parth Shah’s account of Indian street vendors. Shah recalls how merchants in Delhi before the 2014 Street Vendors Act was passed often fled when they saw the police because India did not grant local businesspeople the dignity to trade in public without fear of expropriation. He describes how liberalization in 2014 transformed the lives of vendors who could

sit and discuss public policy with the same police officers who, only a few years earlier, would beat them up in the streets. Liberal changes in India allowed Indians to finally make an honest living and stand upright.

The book traces the historical evolution of the word *dignity* from Cicero to Deirdre McCloskey while examining other conceptions of the term by thinkers such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, Samuel Pufendorf, Voltaire, the Levelers, Richard Overton, Jeremy Waldron, Frank Knight, Chandra Bhan Prasad, and the writers of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. The authors begin with ancient Rome, where dignity was only conferred on a limited few. However, early Roman thinkers such as Cicero argued that dignity was inherent in individuals and universal to all humans, but that it required personal responsibility to live a life of excellence and worthiness. The authors sympathize most with McCloskey's articulation of bourgeois dignity referring to universal respect for individual agents as well as the state and society granting permission to author one's own life. Bourgeois dignity, McCloskey argues, led to the Great Enrichment, which remade economic, political, and social relations, and allowed for the largest increase in economic welfare in human history. Like McCloskey, the authors believe that this reframing of human dignity is the source of economic development.

This new book examines the impact of respect for human dignity on innovation, enterprise, democracy, autocracy, aid, institutions, knowledge, and innovation development. The authors seek to decolonize development, which means that they want to focus on bottom-up solutions to indignity rather than top-down efforts from the global north. The book is organized around individual stories that demonstrate the vital importance of dignity, such as the story of the life of Mohamed Bouazizi, a merchant in Tunisia, who experienced the humiliation, theft, and dehumanization commonplace in societies that withhold human dignity.

The authors define dignity through negation, meaning they demonstrate what dignity is by showing readers what problems individuals face in societies where appreciation for the dignity of individuals is weak or missing. Mohamed Bouazizi's life story illustrates several of these problems. As a vegetable trader, Mr. Bouazizi paid police bribes every day. One day, when he was unable to pay a bribe, police stole his scales and other valued possessions. Since these indignities took place in public, his reputation also suffered. Nobody listened when he sought redress through the courts. Because Mohamed Bouazizi lacked economic means or political connections, the society he lived in and the Tunisian government that ruled over him denied him equal moral standing. In protest, Mohamed Bouazizi doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire in the street. His mother later recalled that her son valued "dignity before bread." Mohamed Bouazizi's act of rebellion sparked the Tunisian Revolution of 2011, a precursor to the Arab Spring movement. Mohamed Bouazizi

experienced indignity because he lacked secure property rights, equality before the law, and social respect.

The book's economic, political, philosophical, and historical claims draw from a deep well of liberal thinkers writing on democracy, free markets, and human rights. This book synthesizes scholarly research conveying the importance of incorporating human dignity in development efforts, offering stories along the way to put flesh on abstract concepts. Although the authors are concerned with economic mobility and efficiency, this book makes primarily a moral case for granting individuals the respect they need to allow them to pursue their goals. The authors foster fresh conversations on issues ranging from overregulation and property rights to democratic governance and police brutality in the United States and abroad. For example, they argue that Eric Garner was not merely an entrepreneur selling cigarettes. He was an American who daily suffered the humiliation and disrespect of working in the shadow economy such as Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia.

Development with Dignity argues that the shadow economy is directly related to the indignity endured by individuals and the crushing of the entrepreneurial spirit. The shadow economy is large in developing countries because no alternatives for businesses to trade and innovate openly exist. Regulations limit entrepreneurs' ability to peacefully secure contracts, exercise their rights, enforce property rights, access low-interest loans, collect debts, or engage in complex financial transactions. This hampers business development and wealth creation. In addition, states withhold the dignity afforded by the formal economy through occupational licenses, cronyism, requiring bribes, high fees, and extensively laborious procedures.

Entrepreneurship and a light degree of business restrictions are vital for prosperity because formal rules are a necessary component of economic development. The book argues that these formal institutions interact with informal norms that constrain development efforts. For example, legal titles are not merely formal protection of property rights. Rather, property deeds bestow recognition as a person, a rights-bearer, and a legal agent. Ultimately, the effect of property rights is a cultural shift from inhumane treatment into a society of human dignity with freedom, rights, and responsibilities. Once entrepreneurship is esteemed and legalized, businesspeople are unleashed to trade, create, and ultimately bring themselves and others out of poverty.

The modern world was created by leveling the status of kings, aristocrats, castes, the idle-rich, and racial and sexual minorities while elevating the creators, tinkers, traders, and thinkers who gained the freedom to help others in the market. "Benevolent" despots cannot bring about these changes. Instead, *Development with Dignity* describes the myriad of ways in which bottom-up forces and good institutions take societies from the squalor of repression into the decadence of dignity.

By engaging in dignity and development's political, economic, historical, sociological, and philosophical implications, Tom Palmer and Matt Warner wrote a book worth reading no matter your disciplinary background. The writing is engaging and packed with compelling stories. Anyone interested in humane solutions to poverty should read this book.

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Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World

David VanDrunen

Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020 (400 pages)

David VanDrunen constructs a comprehensive political theology in *Politics after Christendom*, the third work in his series addressing covenant theology, natural law, and two kingdoms doctrine. The book assesses politics and public life through the lens of the Noahic covenant (NC) and creates a useful framework for Christians seeking to faithfully navigate turbulent political times. VanDrunen begins outlining a broad, biblical conception of the role of government. He then builds his novel contribution to political theology through the NC. In the latter half of the book, VanDrunen applies his approach to various areas related to politics and public life.

The phrases “legitimate, but provisional” and “common, but accountable” summarize VanDrunen’s political theology. He recognizes government as a *legitimate*, God-ordained institution. But he notes that civil government is *provisional*, as it will not continue into the eschatological era. Next, VanDrunen argues that government is *common*, in the sense that the benefits of government should be accessible to all people, regardless of ethnicity or religious affiliation. For government to be accessible to all people, VanDrunen argues, the scope of government actions should be narrowed so people with conflicting value systems do not feel excluded by state policies that might lean toward one side or another. VanDrunen then limits the implications of government’s commonality by recognizing its moral *accountability* before God. VanDrunen’s phrasing creates a sense of balance and prevents the reader from taking a single aspect of God’s design for government beyond its biblical foundation. Taken together, these elements urge the reader to recognize the good purposes for which government exists without putting too much hope in government, and to acknowledge that government exists for all people without concluding that government is morally neutral.

According to VanDrunen, the Noahic Covenant is uniquely suited for public theology because of its three overarching characteristics: it is universal, preserva-