



1. *Conservatives Conserve*
2. *Review: The Catholic Enlightenment*

Conservatives Conserve

By FEDERICO ALEJANDRO ROMERO
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Most people will probably agree that the politicization of the environment is unfortunate. The Left now holds a near-monopoly on environmentalism and is often at the forefront of national and international efforts to conserve the environment. They rightly attack the Right for excusing legislative inaction on the issue with appeals to anthropocentric arguments (the view that only the human species—for example, its economic prosperity—counts). The contemporary Right ignores the existence of intergenerational obligations and similarly neglects long-term obligations to nature. They have convinced themselves that fluctuating numbers on a screen can replace the planet's

Rather than serve the interests of the American plutocracy, conservatives should actually lead in the preservation of this country's national heritage.

objective and finite beauty, arguing that the momentary generation of wealth and employment explains away any mismanagement of the soil we all share. It is the progressives, those who wish to do away with many long-held conventions and bring about a new world, who wish to serve as stewards of the environment. In terms of nature, the self-described conservatives are conserving nothing.

Rather than serve the interests of the American plutocracy, conservatives should actually lead in the preservation of this country's national heritage. Given its shift toward stronger anti-immigration policies in recent years, the Republican party has once again demonstrated political ineptitude and greed. In terms of its political self-interest, it should be ripe for greener policies because they can be used along with anti-immigration rhetoric. But corporate interests tend to favor both more immigration and cuts in regulations, so Republicans have rejected the opportunity to add pro-

environment policies to their agenda, opting to keep appeasing their donors through America's natural defilement.

The party could easily have argued that lax immigration policies burden the environment. Immigrants do overwhelmingly move to urban cores, leading to more urban sprawl, oil consumption, and strain on infrastructure. An opponent from the Left would cite studies which indicate that immigrant populations place a smaller strain on the environment than native populations. But there is an easy, common-sense counter-argument the Right could make: immigrants will not live like immigrants forever. Like all people, they will reproduce and create a new generation of American citizens, which will strive toward their native-born counterparts' greater prosperity. In addition, there is no question that first-generation immigrants themselves wish to attain the comfortable living standards of the average American. Although these notions may prove extremely controversial among today's environmentalists, they might stimulate a malleable conservative base to care more about the soil we stand on. There is more to conserve than the wallets of usurers.

The Left is correct in its view that the living standards of the average American are environmentally harmful and decadent. The only socially unifying concept left in this country seems to be that everyone loves to consume and, more often than not, consume beyond their means. The once-conservative value of thrift is no more. (Ironically, this is another value that progressives have brought into their socio-political culture.) If they do not want to adopt environmentalist policies as a result of their position on immigration, then Republicans could make the case that the conservative values of self-restraint and love of family should lead to a cultural shift that benefits the environment. They should advocate less reliance

continued on back

Review: The Catholic Enlightenment

By ANDREW JUCHNO
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

In *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement*, Ulrich Lehner challenges the longstanding academic assumption that the Enlightenment and Catholicism are fundamentally incompatible. Citing the Council of Trent's emphasis on a theology of human freedom, Lehner posits that the men he calls "Catholic Enlighteners" were "moderates, favoring a modernization that compromised with tradition and reigning authorities." These 18th-century Enlighteners had two aims: to use scientific and philosophic achievements to defend Catholicism in a new language, and to reconcile their faith with modern culture. Although Lehner recognizes local variations in the particulars of Enlightened Catholic belief, he suggests that they generally shared a scholastic tradition that disdained religious enthusiasm, and had little room for superstition or prejudice.

Part of the purpose of *The Catholic Enlightenment* is to argue for such a movement's actual existence. In academia and the historical literature, it is still relatively common to find scholarly (and not-so-scholarly) arguments about the essentially anti-Catholic nature of the Enlightenment. On the whole, scholars tend to present Catholicism and Enlightenment thought as mutually exclusive. To some of the academic world, an enlightened Catholic is oxymoronic.

Accordingly, Lehner uses his introductory chapter to acquaint readers with the intellectual leaders of the Catholic Enlightenment in 18th-century Europe. Although he offers only a cursory introduction to the ways in which it unfolded across France, Italy, Scotland, and Germany, several key themes emerge. Lehner sees church reform as the heart of the Catholic Enlightenment. Although Enlighteners debated the specifics of reform (topics like

continued on back

on large corporations and emphasize the importance of communitarianism and setting down roots. “Hard” or uncompromising individualism must cease to exist if American consumerism is to be defeated. And consumerism ought to be defeated, since it is antithetical to serious environmental efforts. Conservatives who truly wish to conserve must restrain themselves from consuming the products of the factory farm, or the cheap plastic

trinkets imported on gas-guzzling ships. Moreover, they must understand the relationship between the soil they stand on and a duty to future generations. Today’s American professional class is rootless: it moves restlessly and selfishly around the country in an attempt to maximize its income without apparent regard to the communities it exploits. Its members seem to view themselves solely in overarching, global

terms. Republican party leaders should urge the professional-class people in their base to settle down and become part of a tangible community. Only then will they feel a responsibility to maintain the breathtaking landscapes of North America for their descendants. Whatever their politics, American environmentalists and conservationists are the people who most truly love their country.

CATHOLIC ENLIGHTENMENT . . . cont.

priestly celibacy and church teaching on divorce), they shared a desire to update their church. Almost paradoxically, the second major commonality was their interest in upholding a significant degree of continuity with the Catholic tradition. In steering debates away from radical rationalism and skepticism, the Enlighteners maintained some semblance of religious orthodoxy.

Another chapter is almost as thought-provoking, with its characterization of Catholicism as flexible. Focusing on missions in America, China, and India, Lehner stresses that Jesuits in India and Catholics in Maryland were notably more liberal and accommodating than their contemporaries. “Inclusionism” in America signaled that Catholics were, in particular circumstances,

was responsible for any number of now-disreputable practices or beliefs normally attributed to the church. This questionable finger-pointing occurs in his description of European attitudes toward native South American peoples. “The armchair anti-Americans,” he emphasizes, “were all famous [secular] Enlightenmenters.” But even if Lehner writes partly in defense of Catholicism, his work merits

In The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement, Ulrich Lehner challenges the longstanding academic assumption that the Enlightenment and Catholicism are fundamentally incompatible.

Lehner notes that some Catholic monarchs—although a minority of them—engaged or at least agreed with the movement’s religious toleration, with Emperor Joseph II of Austria particularly inclined to permit the building of Protestant churches and allowing Jews to live more freely. His limited toleration was less progressive than that of the Polish king, Stanislaw Poniatowski, who in 1791 approved a constitution that tolerated all religions. Lehner nonetheless acknowledges the limitations of tolerance in early modern Catholicism.

The book’s most provocative chapter argues that a kind of proto-feminism emerged in Catholic Reformation thought. Speaking to the relationship between science and faith, Lehner identifies Maria Gaetana Agnesi as a major “voice of the Catholic Enlightenment” and places her as an early philosophe who posited that increasing knowledge of the natural world increases knowledge of God. He also discusses Madame LePrince, a proponent of education for women. But it is unclear how representative these highlighted case studies truly are—there is no way of knowing just how widespread this strain of Catholic female empowerment was, or indeed if it is even a recognizable trend in Catholic thought.

both required and able to adapt their teachings to local cultures and politics. While recognizing that not all Catholics—especially those who spoke out against Jesuit accommodationist practices in China—were on board with quasi-syncretic (the combination of Christian and indigenous) religious practice, Lehner seems too inclined to present Enlightened Catholicism as a benevolent force. One wonders how he would square the continued existence of the Inquisition in Spain with a supposedly open-minded church.

Although an author’s motivation is not necessarily a fatal flaw in a book, and wouldn’t be in this one, some readers might question Lehner’s reasons for writing *The Catholic Enlightenment*. In the historical scholarship on the Enlightenment, there is a notable shortage of work on Catholicism. Although filling that gap is likely the book’s main impetus, the tone of Lehner’s discussion of 18-century Catholicism hints at an underlying goal of apologia (making a case for something, often tending toward total justification, when it’s faced major criticism). When Lehner presents the church’s relation to what he calls the secular Enlightenment, he seems quick to suggest that the secular Enlightenment, not Catholicism,

no more scrutiny on this basis than do any of Mark Noll’s or George Marsden’s prominent works on evangelicalism in the United States. The degree to which the author’s religious or sectarian goal is relevant in judging a book depends on how much analytic bias it produces. Because *The Catholic Enlightenment* and Lehner’s other books are among the few major works that directly connect Catholicism with the Enlightenment, it is difficult to judge them fairly and completely. Not until his arguments are fully in the academic mainstream, beyond only Catholic intellectual circles, can we do so.

In any case, *The Catholic Enlightenment* makes good use of specialized scholarship related to its subject, is cogently argued, and is a positive addition to historical writing that has focused on other themes: either Protestantism’s relationship to the Enlightenment or the Enlightenment’s overshadowing of religious thought. With its approachable prose, it is highly recommended both for historians removed from the early modern period and for general readers unfamiliar with the era. And historians of the period, especially those with an interest in the intersection of religion and science in the 18th century, should engage with it, even if they push back against its claims.

<p>ENQUIRY vol. VIII</p> <p>Casimir Zablotzki <i>Editor-in-Chief</i></p> <p>Philip Chivily Walker Cummins <i>Associate Editors</i></p>	<p>STAFF WRITERS</p> <p>Carter Briglia Tiffany Lopes John Madigan Nikki Matsuoka Edward Shvets</p>	<p><i>The opinions expressed in these articles are the views of their authors and do not represent the views of Enquiry or the Alexander Hamilton Institute.</i></p> <hr/> <p>Enquiry accepts articles of 500 to 800 words at czablots@hamilton.edu. Please be aware that we do not accept anonymous submissions.</p>
---	---	---

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION^{THE}

1. *Conservatives Conserve*
#ConservativesConserve
2. *Review: The Catholic Enlightenment*
#CatholicEnlightenment