

The Catholic Lawyer

Volume 5
Number 4 *Volume 5, Autumn 1959, Number 4*

Article 12

June 2016

Image of America

Francis P. Kelly

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/tcl>

Recommended Citation

Francis P. Kelly (1959) "Image of America," *The Catholic Lawyer*. Vol. 5 : No. 4 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/tcl/vol5/iss4/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Catholic Lawyer by an authorized editor of St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact selbyc@stjohns.edu.

BOOK REVIEWS

IMAGE OF AMERICA, by R. L. Bruckberger
The Viking Press, New York, 1959. Pp. 277. \$4.50.

Reviewed by
FRANCIS P. KELLY*

It is not an easy task to undertake a review of Father R. L. Bruckberger's¹ *Image of America*.² Even he who is most stinting in his praise must bow to the author as "le beau sabreur" not alone on the physical, but also on the intellectual level.

Father Bruckberger enjoys many formidable distinctions, won at the hardest cost in the awful struggle against Nazi-Fascist tyranny. Chaplain to the French Foreign Legion in the Sahara, the holder of the Croix de Guerre and the Medal of the Legion of Honor for his work in the Resistance Movement, he had the enormous honor of receiving General (now President) Charles de Gaulle in the Notre Dame Cathedral in August 1944 at the very time when the Nazi criminals were desecrating the timeless edifice in a last, skulking retreat of the wicked and the shameless.

Similarly, Father Bruckberger needs no encomiums on the intellectual side. He has collaborated on a prize-winning motion picture film, is the author of several books, and has edited the French periodical *The Trojan Horse*.

* Professor of Law, St. John's University School of Law.

¹ The author is a priest of the Dominican Order.

² BRUCKBERGER, *IMAGE OF AMERICA* (1959). (Originally published as *LA REPUBLIQUE AMERICAINE* [1959]).

Brilliant apothegms tumble over brilliant apothegms in the author's prose. Thus he can tell us:

"Descartes was no sport of history; he belonged very much to his time."³

"No Utopia is conceivable unless there is a clean slate upon which it can be inscribed *Once a Utopia becomes flesh, and blood, it means either a Reformation or a Revolution.*"⁴

"Governments are cynical. They do not mind at all when people call them tyrants. *What they cannot stand is to go six months with empty coffers.*"⁵

"There is something appalling in the thought that men as intelligent as Ricardo and Marx could invent ideas which they believed to be scientific and objective in a realm as vast and delicately complex as that of economics."⁶

The quality of Father Bruckberger's writing is luminescent, challenging, in many ways delightful, and yet, in perhaps equally as many ways, unsatisfying and even disturbing. The purpose of the volume, we are told in the introduction by Mr. Peter F. Drucker, is to make the United States

³ *Id.* at 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Id.* at 33.

⁶ *Id.* at 136.

understandable to Europe. Mr. Drucker further avers that Father Bruckberger will make Europe intelligible to the United States. This is indeed a large claim.

Because of its very largeness, it must of necessity engage our most careful attention. To say that one is to interpret the New World to the Old, and the Old World to the New, is to invite the frankest comment.

At this juncture, it needs to be said that Father Bruckberger's book sets out at least three provocative theories that are worthy of the most respectful attention:

Firstly, that Henry Ford⁷ and his emancipated wage policy mean more today to the worker than anything that Lenin ever did. The introduction of the \$5 daily wage on January 1, 1914 transcends the October Revolution of 1917. Ford, in sum, saved capitalism by making capitalists of the workers.

On this point, the famous lawsuit of *Dodge v. Ford*⁸ is instructive. The Dodge brothers had received fifty shares apiece of an original company issue of 1,000 shares. These were in return for work and materials furnished Ford by the Dodge machine shops, plus \$3,000 cash. This assistance had been given by the Dodges in June 1903. By 1915, the Ford Company was estimated to have earned the Dodge brothers \$5,450,000 in profits. At this point, Mr. Ford needed money to expand his River Rouge plant. In the words of the author:

... The idea of cutting wages never entered his head. Instead he cut dividends to one-tenth, still leaving, however, the not unattractive sum of \$2,000,000 a month to divide among the stockholders. The Dodge brothers were thrown into a panic. They brought suit. At the trial the two leading

parts were played by Henry Ford and Elliot G. Stevenson, the Dodge attorney. It was a memorable scene.⁹

The historian records the battle:

Stevenson: Now, I will ask you again, do you still think that those profits were "awful" profits?

Ford: Well, I guess I do, yes.

Stevenson: And for that reason you were not satisfied to continue making such "awful" profits?

Ford: We don't seem to be able to keep profits down.

Stevenson: And are you trying to keep them down? What is the Ford Motor Company organized for except profits, will you tell me, Mr. Ford?

Ford: Organized to do as much good as we can, everywhere, for everybody concerned. . . . And incidentally to make money.

Stevenson: Incidentally make money?

Ford: Yes, sir.

Stevenson: But your controlling feature . . . is to employ a great army of men at high wages to reduce the selling price of your car, so that a lot of people can buy it at a cheap price and give everybody a car that wants one?

Ford: If you give all that, the money will fall into your hands; you can't get out of it.¹⁰

Secondly, Father Bruckberger urges that the American Revolution was far more *revolutionary* than its French or Russian counterpart because our Declaration embodies a national vocation, a continuing event:

What America celebrates is not an act belonging only to the past, but an act that transcends time and space, an act that is still — as much for all people as for Americans themselves — a responsibility and a hope.¹¹

Thirdly, the author argues most persua-

⁹ BRUCKBERGER, *op. cit. supra* note 2, at 204.

¹⁰ *Id.* at chs. 18, 19.

¹¹ *Id.* at 55.

⁷ *Id.* at chs. 18, 19.

⁸ 204 Mich. 459, 170 N.W. 668 (1919).

sively that fanatic love of virtue, the desire to rearrange all things according to one's own plan, now, and with the thought that the new order should last forever, is more dangerous than professed vice.

We are continually told that vice corrupts society, and this is true. But fanatic love of virtue has done more to damage men and destroy societies than all the vice together. . . . It is exceedingly childish to try to convince us that terrorists are vicious; they are usually fanatical addicts of virtue, of a special kind of virtue. Neither Saint-Just nor Lenin was vicious. Even Hitler had his own ideal of virtue — the purity of the Germanic race.¹²

These extracts make it plain that the author is an able polemicist and a gifted writer. But he has touched upon too many areas. The stature of de Tocqueville remains undiminished.

We now address ourselves to the author's characterization of the illegitimate daughter of the schismatic Henry VIII as the "great Elizabeth." Surely this is a description and a garland of kind words to which even the most dispassionate may register an objection. Ringing contrapuntally in our ears is the language of Father John Gerard's document contemporaneous with the reign of the great lady¹³ and Mr. Evelyn Waugh's account¹⁴ of the arrest of Edmund Campion, to cite but two familiar sources.

It is not intended to suggest that the author has overlooked, much less endorsed, the atrocities of Elizabeth's reign. But it is most definitely intended to suggest that in this regard he is too sweeping in his judgments, and makes many such judgments

without any supporting proof whatever.

As to "greatness," the present reviewer prefers the Actonian assay.

If there is any presumption it is . . . against holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility has to make up for the want of legal responsibility. Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it. That is the point at which the negation of Catholicism and the negation of Liberalism meet and keep high festival, and the end learns to justify the means. You would hang a man of no position like Ravaillac; but if what one hears is true, then Elizabeth asked the gaoler to murder Mary, and William III ordered his Scots minister to extirpate a clan. Here are the greater names coupled with the greater crimes.¹⁵

So much for "greatness." We turn now to what we have called the sweeping character of the author's judgments. (The following examples are illustrative, not exhaustive.) Dealing with the discovery of the New World, Father Bruckberger speaks of "all plainfolk, sickened of . . . theological hair-splitting."¹⁶ Even conceding to the "plain folk" a keen awareness of, and interest in, stirring questions of theology, it may nevertheless not be amiss for authority to exact nicety in deciding nice questions. The author distinguishes between "Descartes, who remolded philosophy itself, and *all the scholastic professors of his time who philosophized and are now forgotten.*"¹⁷

¹² *Id.* at 64.

¹³ GERARD, *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A HUNTED PRIEST* (1952).

¹⁴ WAUGH, *EDMUND CAMPION* 175 (1946).

¹⁵ Letter from Lord Acton to Mr. Creighton, April 5, 1887, in *ACTON, ESSAYS ON FREEDOM AND POWER* 358, 364 (1948).

¹⁶ BRUCKBERGER, *op. cit. supra* note 2, at 10.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 16 (emphasis added).

Again, the author, writing of Henry VIII and Elizabeth, says, "They were concerned not so much with 'reforming' religion as with making the English Church into a national church, *rescuing it from the Pope but submitting it to their own power.*"¹⁸

A contrast is drawn between Galileo and "the vindictive theologians."¹⁹ In Father Bruckberger's work, the following extract appears:

Nothing, makes one despair of intelligence as much as the Martisto persistent misunderstanding of America. Catholic theologians were less stubborn; *not one of them* a hundred years after Galileo was condemned, *would have dared the scientific validity of the astronomy of Ptolemy and Genesis.*²⁰

Next, the author devotes an entire chapter²¹ to Henry Charles Carey, an economist who is presented to us as "the only American economist of importance." Or, at least, such was the view of Karl Marx, as quoted by the author.²²

Lastly, *Image of America* contains a chapter entitled "The Chapter of the Hate."²³ The chief flaw here is an uncharacteristically dull and labored approach, although, in a stricture upon Communism in practice the author found this to say about Karl Marx:

But when it comes to Karl Marx, the critics hesitate. The good intentions and disinterestedness of that old graybeard are so unmistakable that there is a certain reluctance to defame his memory and desecrate his tomb. Perhaps the "old graybeard" was merely a miscast paving contractor.²⁴

I now proceed to examine what I must

call the inconsistencies, if not contradictions, in *Image of America*.

In discussing the American Colonies, and their insistence upon what they conceived to be their rights, Fr. Bruckberger comments:

"Once again, Edmund Burke understood."²⁵

He then quotes Burke as follows:

The temper and character which prevail in our colonies are, I am afraid, unalterable by human art. We cannot I fear falsify the pedigree of this fierce people, and persuade them that they are not sprung from a nation in whose veins the blood of freedom circulates. The language in which they would hear you tell them this tale would detect the imposition: your speech would betray you. An Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to agree another Englishman into slavery.²⁶

The foregoing may be true. But the home island alas, for some centuries seemed to regard freedom as a commodity not for export. The writings of Maria Edgeworth bear sorry confirmation of this fact. So do the *Recollections* of John Viscount Morley²⁷ whose heart misgave him over the conditions he was forced to see during his stewardship in Ireland. The melancholy instances of the oppressed could be multiplied with a pitiable facility.

Other inconsistencies may be traced. For example, both American Puritanism and Thomas Jefferson are alternately praised and buffeted. The contrast in treatment in various parts of *Image of America* is astonishing. Much more might be said on this head. Limitations of space forbid further explanation.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 20 (emphasis added).

¹⁹ *Id.* at 58.

²⁰ *Id.* at 132 (emphasis added).

²¹ *Id.* at ch. 17.

²² *Id.* at 149.

²³ *Id.* at ch. 16.

²⁴ *Id.* at 139-40.

²⁵ *Id.* at 32.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ MORLEY, RECOLLECTIONS (1917). See also POSTGATE, THAT DEVIL WILKES (1956).