

# The End of Democracy?

In his 1937 *Great Contemporaries*, Winston Churchill wrote, “Whatever else may be thought about [Hitler’s] exploits, they are among the most remarkable in the

whole history of the world.” He was referring not only to Hitler’s political triumphs—the return of the Saar and reoccupation of the Rhineland—but his economic achievements. By his fourth year in power, Hitler had pulled Germany out of the Depression, cut unemployment from 6 million to 1 million, grown the gross national product 37 percent, and increased automobile production from 45,000 vehicles a year to 250,000. City and provincial deficits had vanished.

In material terms, Nazi Germany was a startling success. And not only Churchill but others in Europe and America were marveling at the Third Reich, its fascist ally Italy, and Joseph Stalin’s rapidly industrializing Soviet state. “I have been over into the future, and it works,” Lincoln Steffens had bumbled. Many Western men, seeing the democracies mired in Depression and moral malaise, were also seeing the future in Berlin, Moscow, Rome. In Germany, Hitler was winning plebiscites with more than 90 percent of the vote in what outside observers said were free elections.

What calls to mind the popularity of the Third Reich and the awe it inspired abroad—even after the bloody Röhm purge, the Nazi murder of Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss in 1934, and the anti-Semitic Nuremberg laws—is a poll buried in the *New York Times*.

In a survey of 24 countries by Pew Research Center, the nation that emerged as far and away first on earth in the satisfaction of its people was China. No other nation even came close.

“Eighty-six percent of Chinese people surveyed said they were content with the country’s direction, up from 48 percent in 2002. ... And 82 percent of Chinese were satisfied with their national economy, up from 52 percent,” said the *Times*.

Yet China has a regime that punishes dissent, severely restricts freedom, persecutes Christians and all faiths that call for worship of a God higher than the state, brutally represses Tibetans and Uighurs, swamps their native lands with Han Chinese to bury their cultures, and threatens Taiwan.

China is also a country where Maoist ideology has been replaced by a racial chauvinism and raw nationalism reminiscent of Italy and Germany in the 1930s. Two-thirds of all Chinese, however, say the government is doing a good job in dealing with the issues of greatest concern to them.

And what nation is it whose people rank as third most satisfied? Vladimir Putin’s Russia. Moscow is today more nationalistic, less democratic, and more confrontational toward the West than it has been since before the fall of communism. Yet, wrote the *Times*, “Russians were the third most satisfied people with their country’s direction, at 54 percent, despite Western concerns about authoritarian trends.”

Of the largest nations on earth, the two that today most satisfy the desires of their peoples are the most authoritarian.

High among the reasons, of course, are the annual 10 percent to 12 percent growth China has experienced over the

last decade and the wealth pouring into Russia for the oil and natural gas with which that immense country abounds. Still, is this not disturbing? In China and Russia, the greatest of world powers after the United States, people seem to value freedom of speech, religion, or the press far less than they do a rising prosperity and national pride and power. And they seem to have little moral concern about crushing national minorities.

Contrast, if you will, the contentment of Chinese and Russians with the dissatisfaction of Americans, only 23 percent of whom told the Pew poll they approved of the nation’s direction. Only one in five Americans said they were satisfied with the U.S. economy.

Other polls have found 82 percent of Americans saying the country is headed in the wrong direction, only 28 percent approving of President Bush’s performance, and only half that saying they approve of the Congress. In Britain, France, and Germany only three in 10 expressed satisfaction with the direction of the nation.

Liberal democracy is in a bear market. Is it a systemic crisis as well?

In his 1989 essay, “The End of History?” Francis Fukuyama wrote of the ultimate world triumph of democratic capitalism. All other systems had fallen, or would fall by the wayside. The future belonged to us.

Democratic capitalism, it would appear, now has a great new rival—autocratic capitalism. In Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, nations are beginning to imitate the autocrats of China and Russia, as some in the 1930s sought to ape fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

The game is not over yet. We are going into extra innings. ■

# All Roads Lead to Rome

Mogul Tom Monaghan envisioned Ave Maria as the perfect faithful community. But will its residents sing from the same hymnal?

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

SIX YEARS AGO, Tom Monaghan, the Domino's Pizza founder turned Catholic philanthropist, flew over southwest Florida and saw a dream become possible. Amid the run-down tomato farms, he would transplant his Michigan-based Ave Maria University and develop an entire community by the same name, putting the church physically and spiritually at its center. For a time, he even hoped to ban pornography and contraceptives there. But just a year after the town opened, Ave Maria has attracted more controversy and fewer residents than Monaghan ever expected.

The ten-mile Oil Well Road that runs west from the sprawl of Naples to Ave Maria is narrow and dangerous. It becomes slick in the rain, and mile-long stretches are surrounded by pools of standing water—breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Driving away from the gulf and its breezes, the temperature can rise as much as ten degrees during the trip. Construction vehicles traveling to Ave Maria or to Immokalee, its much poorer neighbor, careen down the road at 80 miles per hour, scaring the new residents. Builders want the county to expand the road to six lanes with a manicured median, but tax receipts aren't yet sufficient to support that vision.

Near Ave Maria Boulevard, one of two entrances to the town, the rough and thick of the Everglades falls away, replaced by fields of trim sod. Flanked by two huge waterfall installations bearing the town's name, the four-lane thor-

oughfare is immaculately landscaped with sable palms and buttonwood. The effect is transporting and pleasant at first, but after several miles turns monotonous and unsettling.

The few hundred residents are divided among four neighborhoods that surround the college campus. On the south side are Dell Webb and Bellera Walk. The former is built around a golf course designed by Gordon Lewis and a recreation center called South Park. Bellera Walk is a gated community featuring dozens of manmade ponds and lakes. Neither neighborhood is within walking distance of the town center; both are marketed to "active adults" by Pulte Homes, the homebuilder. At the far northern end of town is Emerson Park, which contains the lowest-priced homes, starting in the high \$200s. This section of town has filled up most quickly and is within walking distance of baseball and soccer fields and a parochial K-12 school. Near the town center is Hampton Village, where many professors live. Each neighborhood has four model homes near its entrance. The developer offers 16 designs; variation depends on buying a screened patio with a pool. At full capacity, Ave Maria would have 11,000 homes, but so far only about 300 have been built.

At the center of this town is Ave Maria Oratory, an imposing and strange steel and stone building. It sits in La Piazza, an awkwardly named square with commercial property on the ground level

and luxury apartments above. The sidewalks are wide enough to accommodate outdoor seating for restaurants that have yet to arrive. There is a jewelry shop, a supply store for homeschoolers, a coffee and smoothie shop, and the university bookstore. The architecture is friendly, bright, and soft, a facsimile of New Urbanist ideas.

When I first approached it, builders were entering and exiting the sides of the oratory as they finished work on the confessionals. Throughout La Piazza, audio speakers emitted insipid smooth jazz. Claire, a recent graduate and current employee of the university, leaned against the railing on the steps, waiting for a friend. She asked for my first impressions, and I ventured that putting a church like this in the center of town seemed unusual. She shot back, "It's not unusual at all. Every town in Europe is like this, and was built this way, with the church—God—at its center." She implied that it was the rest of America—suburbanized, unchurched or megachurched, and anonymous—that was the real aberration. Her friend walked over to us—a priest in a long black cassock. The two departed to a bench across the street where she bowed her head and made her confession to the tune of ambient tenor saxophones.

Claire was correct that cities in Europe have churches at their centers, but they almost always have a port or thoroughfare—some economic reason for existing as well. Ave Maria, far from