

and, therefore, were properly enslaved. Only persons of gold are truly to be treated as ends in themselves. For Judaism and Christianity, on the contrary, the God who made every single child gave worth and dignity to each of them, however weak or vulnerable. "What you do unto the least of these, you do unto me." God identified Himself with the most humble and most vulnerable.

Our Creator knows each of us by name, and understands our own individuality with a far greater clarity that we ourselves do; after all, He made us. (Thomas Aquinas once wrote that God is infinite, and so when He creates human beings in His image, He must in fact create an infinite number of them to mirror back His own infinity.) Each of us reflects only a small fragment of God's identity. If one of us is lost, the image of God intended to be reflected by that one is lost. The image of God reflected in the human becomes distorted.

In this respect, Judaism and Christianity grant a fundamental equality in the sight of God to all human beings, whatever their talents or station. This equality arises because God penetrates *below* any artificial rank, honor, or station that may on the surface differentiate one from another. He sees past those things. He sees *into* us. He sees us as we are in our uniqueness, and it is that uniqueness that He values. Let us call this form of equality by the clumsy but useful name, *equality-as-uniqueness*. Before God, we have equal weight in our *uniqueness*, not because we are *the same*, but because each of us is *different*. Each is made by God after an original design.

This conception of equality-uniqueness is quite different from the modern "progressive" or socialist conception of *equality-sameness*. The Christian notion is not a levelling notion. Neither does it delight in uniformity. On the contrary, it tries to pay heed to, and give respect to, the unique image of God in each person.

For most of its history, Christianity, like Judaism, flourished in hierarchical societies. While recognizing that every single person lives and moves in sight of God's judgment and is equally a creature of God, Christianity has also rejoiced in the differences among us and between us. God did not make us equal in talent, ability, character, office, calling, or fortune.

Equality-uniqueness is not the same as equality-sameness. The first recognizes our claim to a unique identity and dignity. The second desires to take away what is unique and to submerge it in uniformity. Thus, modern movements such as socialism have taken the original Christian impulse of equality, which they inherited, and disfigured it. Like Chris-

tianity, modern socialist movements reject the stratification of citizens into gold, silver, and lead, as in Plato's scheme. But, since they are materialistic at root, their traditional impulse has been to pull people down, to place all on the same level, to enforce uniformity. This program is inexorably coercive, unlovely, and depressing.

## Compassion

It is true that virtually all peoples have traditions of compassion for the suffering, care for those in need, and concern for others. However, in most religious traditions, these movements of the heart are limited to one's own family, kin, nation, or culture. In some cultures, young males in particular have to be hard and insensitive to pain, so that they will be sufficiently cruel to enemies. Terror is the instrument intended to drive outsiders away from the territory of the tribe. In principle (though not always in practice), Christianity opposes this limitation on compassion. It teaches people the impulse to reach out, especially to the most vulnerable, to the poor, the hungry, the wretched, those in prison, the hopeless, the sick, and others. It tells humans to love their enemies. It teaches a universal compassion. It teaches people to see the dignity even of those who in the eyes of the world have lost their dignity, and those who are helpless to act on their own behalf. This is the "solidarity" whose necessity for modernity Rorty perceives.

In the name of compassion, Christianity tries to humble the mighty and to prod the rich into concern for the poor. It does not turn the young male away from being a warrior, but it does teach him to model himself on Christ, and thus to become a new type of male in human history: the knight bound by a code of compassion, the gentleman. It teaches him to learn, to be meek, humble, peaceable, kind, and generous. It introduces a new and fruitful tension between the warrior and the gentlemen, magnanimity and humility, meekness and fierce ambition.

## A Universal Family

Christianity has taught human beings that an underlying imperative of history is to bring about a law-like, peaceable community, among all people of good will on the entire earth. For political economy, Christianity proposes a new ideal: the entire human race is a universal family, created by the one same God, and urged to love that God. Yet at the same time, Christianity (like Judaism before it) is also the religion of a par-

ticular kind of God: not the Deity who looks down on all things from an olympian height but, in Christianity's case, a God who became *incarnate*. The Christian God, incarnate, was carried in the womb of a single woman, among a particular people, at a precise intersection of time and space, and nourished in a local community then practically unknown to the rest of the peoples on this planet. Christianity is a religion of the concrete and the universal. It pays attention to the flesh, the particular, the concrete, and each single intersection of space and time; its God is the God who made and cares for every lily of the field, every blade of grass, every hair on the head of each of us. Its God is the God of singulars, the God who Himself became a singular man. At the same time, the Christian God is the Creator of all.

In a sense, this Christian God goes beyond contemporary conceptions of "individualism" and "communitarianism." With 18th-century British statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke, Christianity sees the need for proper attention to every "little platoon" of society, to the immediate neighborhood, to the immediate family. Our social policies must be incarnate, must be rooted in the actual flesh of concrete people in their actual local, intimate worlds. At the same time, Christianity directs the attention of these little communities toward the larger communities of which they are a part. On the one hand, Christianity forbids them to be merely parochial or xenophobic. On the other hand, it warns them against becoming premature universalists, one-worlders, gnostics pretending to be pure spirits, and detached from all the limits and beauties of concrete flesh. Christianity gives warning against both extremes. It instructs us about the precarious balance between concrete and universal in our own nature. This is the mystery of catholicity.

### "I Am the Truth"

**T**he Creator of all things has total insight into all things. He knows what He has created. This gives the weak, modest minds of human beings the vocation to use their minds relentlessly, in order to penetrate the hidden layers of intelligibility that God has written into His creation. Everything in creation is in principle understandable: In fact, at every moment everything is understood by Him, who is eternal and there-

fore simultaneously present to all things. (In God there is no history, no past-present-future. In His insight into reality, all things are as if simultaneous. Even though in history they may unfold sequentially, they are all at once, that is, simultaneously, open to His contemplation.)

Our second president, John Adams, wrote that in giving us a notion of God as the Source of all truth, and the Judge of all, the Hebrews laid before the human race the possibility of civilization. Before the undecivable Judgment of God, the Light of Truth cannot be deflected by riches, wealth, or worldly power. Armed with this conviction, Jews and Christians are empowered to use their intellects and to search without fear into the causes of things, their relationships, their powers, and their purposes. This understanding of Truth makes humans free. For Christianity does not teach that Truth is an illusion based upon the opinions of those in power, or merely a rationalization of powerful interests in this world. Christianity is not deconstructionist, and it is certainly not

totalitarian. Its commitment to Truth beyond human purposes is, in fact, a rebuke to all totalitarian schemes and all nihilist cynicism.

Moreover, by locating Truth (with a capital T) in God, beyond our poor pow-

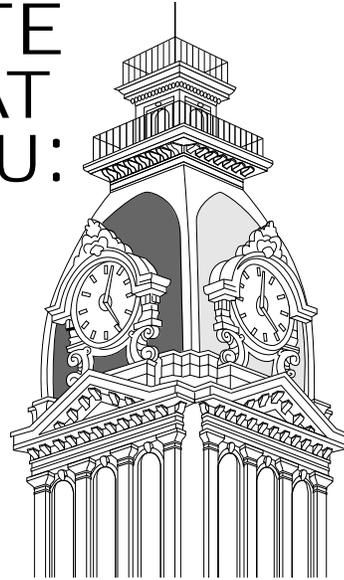
ers fully to comprehend, Christianity empowers human reason. It does so by inviting us to use our heads as best we can, to discern the evidences that bring us as close to Truth as human beings can attain. It endows human beings with a vocation to inquire endlessly, relentlessly, to give play to the unquenchable *eros* of the desire to understand—that most profoundly restless drive to know that teaches human beings their own finitude while it also informs them of their participation in the infinite.

The notion of Truth is crucial to civilization. As Thomas Aquinas held, civilization is constituted by conversation. Civilized persons persuade one another through argument. Barbarians club one another into submission. Civilization requires citizens to recognize that they do not possess the truth, but must be possessed by it, to the degree possible to them. Truth matters greatly. But Truth is greater than any one of us. We do not possess it; it possesses us.

"Better than the philosophers, Jesus Christ is the teacher of many lessons indispensable for the working of free society."

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## "A New Vision of Man: How Christianity Has Changed Political Economy"

by Michael Novak

Author, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*

**M**ichael Novak, former U.S. Ambassador to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, currently holds the George Frederick Jewett Chair in Religion and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C.

He is the author of a dozen books, including: *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, *This Hemisphere of Liberty*, *Freedom with Justice*, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, and *Belief and Unbelief*.



The Polish Solidarity movement and the Czech underground studied translations (often secretly and illegally) in the 1970s, as did members of pro-democratic movements in South Korea, Chile,

Argentina, Venezuela, and the Philippines, and China in the 1980s. Pope John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus*, published in 1991, is widely regarded as having been influenced by Mr. Novak's writings, and in her memoirs former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher noted that they "proved the intellectual basis of my approach to those great questions brought together in political parlance as 'the quality of life.'"

In May of 1994, Mr. Novak was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. 1

*One of the 20th century's greatest religious writers, Michael Novak, addresses the relationship between religion and economics. He argues that Christ revolutionized the human conception of the political economy in at least seven important ways.*

*This presentation was prepared for a July 1994 seminar in Crakow, Poland on "Centesimus Annus and the Free Society," and for a November 1994 seminar sponsored by Hillsdale's Center for Constructive Alternatives seminar, "God and Man: Perspectives on Christianity in the 20th Century."*

**F**or centuries, scholars and laymen have studied the Bible's impact on our religion, politics, education, and culture, but very little serious attention has been devoted to its impact on our economics. It is as if our actions in the marketplace have nothing to do with our spiritual beliefs. Nothing could be further from the truth. My aim here is to demonstrate how Judeo-Christianity, and Jesus, in particular, revolutionized the political economy of the ancient world and how that revolution still profoundly affects the world today.

I wish to propose for your consideration the following thesis: At least seven contributions made by Christian thinkers, meditating on the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, altered the vision of the good society proposed by the classical writers of Greece and Rome and made certain modern conceptions of political economy possible. Be warned that we are talking about foundational issues. The going won't be entirely easy.

Be warned, also, that I want to approach this

subject in a way satisfying to secular thinkers. You shouldn't have to be a believer in Jesus in order to grasp the plausibility of my argument. In that spirit, let me begin, first, by citing Richard Rorty, who once wrote that as a progressive philosopher he owes more to Jesus for certain key progressive notions, such as compassion and equality, than to any of the classical writers. Analogously, in his book, *Why I am Not a Christian*, Bertrand Russell conceded that, although he took Jesus to be no more than a humanistic moral prophet, modern progressivism is indebted to Christ for the ideal of compassion.

In short, in order to recognize the crucial contributions that the coming of Christ brought into modern movements of political economy, one does not have to be a Christian. One may take a quite secular point of view and still give credit where credit is due.

Here, then, are the seven major contributions made by Jesus to our modern conceptions of political economy.

## To Bring Judaism to the Gentiles

From Jerusalem, that crossroads between three continents open to the East and West, North and South, Jesus brought recognition of the One God, the Creator. The name this God gave to Himself is "I AM WHO AM"—He *is*, as opposed to the rest of us, who have no necessary or permanent hold on being. He is the One who *IS*; other things are those who are, but also are not. *He* is the Creator of all things. All things that are depend upon Him. As all things spring from His action in creating them, so they depend upon Him for their being maintained in existence, their "standing out from" nothingness [*Ex + sistere*, L., to stand out from].

The term "Creator" implies a free person; it suggests that creation was a free act, an act

that did not flow from necessity. It was an act of intelligence, it was a choice, and it was willed.

The Creator knew what He was doing, and He willed it; that is, "He saw that it is good." From this notion of the One God/Creator, three practical corollaries for human action follow.

*Be intelligent.*

Made in the image of God, we should be attentive and intelligent, as our Creator is.

*Trust liberty.*

As God loved us, so it is fitting for us to respond with love. Since in creating us He knew what He was doing and He willed it, we have every reason to trust His

will. He created us with understanding and free will; creation was a free act. Since He made us in His image, well ought we to say with Jefferson: "The God who gave us life gave us liberty."

*Understand that history has a beginning, and an end.* At a certain moment, time was created by God. Time is directed toward "building up the Kingdom of God...on earth as in heaven." Creation is directed toward final union with its Creator.

As many scholars have noted, the idea of "progress," like the idea of "creation," are not Greek ideas—nor are they Roman. The Greeks preferred notions of the necessary procession of the world from a First Principle. While in a limited sense they understood the progress of ideas, skills, and technologies and also saw how these could be lost, in general, they viewed history as a cycle of endless return. They lacked a notion of historical progress. The idea of history as a category distinct from nature is a Hebrew rather than a Greek idea.

Analogously, as Lord Acton argued in the essays he prepared for his *History of Liberty*, liberty is an idea coincident with the spread of Christianity. Up to a point, the idea of liberty is a Jewish idea. Every story in the Bible is about a drama involving the human will. In one chapter, King David is faithful to his Lord; in another unfaithful. The suspense always lies in what he will choose next. Nonetheless, Judaism is





Therefore, humans must learn such civilizing habits as being respectful and open to others, listening attentively, trying to see aspects of the Truth that they do not as yet see. Because the search for Truth is vital to each of us, humans must argue with each other, urge each other onward, point out deficiencies in one another's arguments, and open the way for greater participation in the Truth by every one of us.

In this respect, the search for Truth makes us not only humble but also civil. It teaches us *why* we hold that every single person has an inviolable dignity: Each is made in the image of the Creator to perform noble acts, such as to understand, to deliberate, to choose, to love. These noble activities of human beings cannot be repressed without repressing the Image of God in them. Such an act would be doubly sinful. It violates the other person, and it is an offense against God.

One of the ironies of our present age is that the great philosophical advocates of the Enlightenment no longer believe in Reason (with a capital R). They have surrendered their confidence in the vocation of Reason to cynics such as to the post-modernists and deconstructionists. Such philosophers (*Sophists*, Socrates called them) hold that there is no Truth, that all things are relative, and that the great realities of life are power and interest. So we have come to an ironic pass. The children of the Enlightenment have abandoned Reason, while those they have considered unenlightened and living in darkness, the people of Jewish and Christian faith, remain today reason's (without a capital R) best defenders. For believing Jews and Christians ground their confidence in reason in the Creator of all reason, and their confidence in understanding in the One who understands everything He made—and loves it, besides.

There can be no civilization of reason, or of love, without this faith in the vocation of reason.

## The Name of God: Mercy

Christianity teaches realistically not only the glories of human beings—their being made in the image of God—but also their sins, weaknesses, and evil tendencies. Judaism and Christianity are not utopian; they are quite realistic about human beings. They try to understand humans as they are, as God sees them both in their sins and in the graces that He grants them. This sharp awareness of human sinfulness was very important to the American founding.

Without ever using the term “original sin,” the Founders were, in such documents as *The*

*Federalist*, eloquent about the flaws, weaknesses, and evils to which human beings are prone. Therefore, they designed a republic that would last, not only among saints, but also among sinners. (There is no point in building a Republic for saints; there are too few of them; besides, the ones who do exist are too difficult to live with.) If you want to make a Republic that will last, you must construct it for sinners, because sinners are not just a moral majority, they are virtually a moral unanimity.

Christianity teaches that at every moment the God who made us is judging how well we make use of our liberty. And the first word of Christianity in this respect is: “Fear not. Be not afraid.” For Christianity teaches that Truth is ordered to mercy. Truth is not, thank God, ordered first of all to justice. For if Truth were ordered to strict justice, not one of us would stand against the gale.

God is just, true, but the more accurate name for Him is not justice, but rather mercy. (The Latin root of this word conveys the idea more clearly: *Misericordia* comes from *miseris* + *cor*—give one's heart to *les miserables*, the wretched ones.) This name of God, *Misericordia*, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is God's most fitting name. Toward our misery, He opens His heart. Precisely as sinners, He accepts us. “At the heart of Christianity lies the sinner,” Charles Péguy wrote.

Yet mercy is only possible because of Judgment. Judgment Day is the Truth on which civilization is grounded. No matter the currents of opinion in our time, or any time, may be; no matter what the powers and principalities may say or do; no matter the solicitations pressing upon us from our families, friends, associates, and larger culture; no matter what the pressures may be—we will still be under the Judgment of the One who is undecivable, who knows what is in us, and who knows the movements of our souls more clearly than we know them ourselves. In His Light, we are called to bring a certain honesty into our own lives, into our dealings with others, and into our respect for the Light that God has imparted to every human being. It is on this basis that human beings may be said to have inalienable rights, and dignity, and infinite worth.

## Jesus, the Teacher

These seven recognitions lie at the root of Jewish-Christian civilization, the one that is today evasively called “Western civilization.” From them, we get our deepest and most powerful notions of truth, liberty, community, person, conscience, equality, compassion, mercy, and virtue. These

not a missionary religion; normally one receives Judaism by being born of a Jewish mother; in this sense, Judaism is rooted in genealogy rather than in liberty. Beyond this point, Christianity expanded the notion of liberty and made it universal. The Christian idea of liberty remains rooted in the liberty of the Creator, as in Judaism. Through Christianity, this Jewish idea becomes the inheritance of all the other peoples on earth.

Recognition of the One God/Creator means that the fundamental attitude of human beings toward God is, and ought to be, receptivity. All that we are we have received from God. This is true both of our creation and our redemption. God acts first. We respond. Everything is a gift. "Everything we look upon is blessed" (Yeats). "Grace is everywhere" (Bernanos). Thus, offering thanksgiving is our first moral obligation.

It is difficult to draw out, in brief compass, all the implications for political economy of the fact that history begins in the free act of the Creator, who made humans in His image and who gave them both existence and an impulse toward communion with their first breath. In this act of creation, in any case, Jefferson properly located (and it was the sense of the American people) not only the origin of the inner core of human rights: "...and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, including..." but also the perspective of providential history: "When in the course of human events..." The Americans were aware of creating something "new": a new world, a new order, a new science of politics. As children of the Creator, they felt no taboo against originality; on the contrary, they thought it their vocation.

## Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

When Jesus spoke of God, He spoke of the communion of three persons in one. This means that, in God, the *mystery of being* and the *mystery of communion* are one. Unlike the Greeks such as Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle, who thought of God or the *Nous* as One, living in solitary isolation, the Christian world was taught by Jesus to think of God as a communion of three. In other words, the mystery of communion, or community, is one with the very mystery of being. The sheer fact that we are alive sometimes comes over us at dusk on an autumn day, as we walk across a corn field and in the tang of the evening air hear a crow lift off against the sky. We may pause then to wonder, in admiration and gratitude. We could so easily have not been, and yet we *are*, at least for these fragile moments. Soon another gen-

eration will take our place, and tramp over the same field. We experience wonder at the sheer fact: At this moment, we *are*. And we also apprehend the fact that we are part of a long procession of the human community in time; and that we are, by the grace of God, one with God. To exist is already something to marvel at; so great a communion is even more so. Our wonder is not so much doubled; it is squared, infinitely multiplied.

This recognition of the Trinity is not without significance for political economy. First, it inspires us with a new respect for an ideal of community not often found on this earth, a community in which each person is separate, distinct, and independent, and yet in which there is, nonetheless, communion. It teaches us that the relation between community and person is deeper and richer than we might have imagined. Christians should not simply lose themselves in community, having their personality and independence merge into an undifferentiated mass movement. On the contrary, Christianity teaches us that in true community the distinctness and independence of each person are also crucial. Persons reach their full development only in community with others. No matter how highly developed in himself or herself, a totally isolated person, cut-off from others, is regarded as something of a monster. In parallel, a community that refuses to recognize the autonomy of individual persons often uses individuals as means to "the common good," rather than treating persons as ends in themselves. Such communities are coercive and tyrannical.

Christianity, in short, opens up the ideal of catholicity which has always been a mark of true Christianity. *Katholike* means all of humanity, the whole human world. In this world, persons, and even cultures, are distinct, and have their own autonomy and claim on our respect. *E pluribus unum*. The many form one; but the one does not melt the many into the lowest common denominator. The many retain their individual vitality, and for this they show gratitude to the community that allows them, in fact encourages them, to do so. Person and community must be defined in terms of each other.

## The Children of God

In Plato's *Republic*, citizens were divided in this way: A few were of gold, a slightly larger body of silver, and the vast majority of lead. The last had the souls of slaves