

The Religious Underpinnings of the Marketplace

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This essay deals with the moral and religious underpinnings of the marketplace. I undertake this task, not as a specialist in business but as an ethicist. Specialists in applied ethics face a double risk when they attempt to comment on a field of practice. They occupy the middle of a no-man's land. On one side, experts in theoretical ethics or theology feel that they have done the truly foundational work upon which applied ethicists abjectly depend. On the other side, practitioners worry that applied ethicists do not really know the complexities of their fields of practice. Thus applied ethicists run the risk of being semi-comic figures, carrying water from wells that they haven't dug in order to fight fires that they cannot quite find.

I am consoled, however, in this risky enterprise by Machiavelli who, in his dedication to the *Prince*, asked himself bluntly how he could justify offering advice on the art of governing to those who were vastly more experienced than he. Machiavelli responded by adroitly comparing himself to a landscape painter, that is, someone who does not himself work in the woods but whose cognitive distance might throw some fresh light on the forest.

Let it be conceded at the outset that some believe that the marketplace does not need moral and religious underpinnings. Indeed, they argue that the marketplace mechanism, as opposed to more utopian modes of social organization, spares us the need to place heavy moral demands upon people. It does not ask them to be idealistic or moralistic. It appeals chiefly to their self-interest. It recognizes that the man upon whom one can rely to stay up all night with a sick cow either owns it or is paid to care for it, his self-interest engaged in keeping the cow healthy.

Adam Smith believed that the free marketplace nicely accommodates to human nature. Capitalism does not ask the butcher to be a saint, a patriot, a hero, or even a particularly public-spirited citizen. It asks him simply to be a good butcher, which, of course, in the marketplace system serves his own self-interest. He need not devote himself to larger questions of the common good. The marketplace asks only that he slaughter and dress meat well and eventually exchange his product in the marketplace with other relatively knowledgeable and self-interested parties who have produced their own specialized products. Such exchanges enrich both parties and contribute cumulatively to the wealth of the nation, without anyone having to keep so much as a wall-eye on the question of the common good.

So conceived, the marketplace is but one of four mechanisms upon which a modern democratic state depends to let the society function without demanding too much virtue of its citizens and yet without tearing itself to pieces. The other three mechanisms are:

The political mechanism of checks and balances within a constitutional framework. The devices of checks and balances and divisions of power help limit the damage that merely self-interested persons or groups can inflict upon one another in a democracy.

The social mechanism of the large-scale organization. The modern corporation or bureaucracy typically does not ask for *heroic* but merely skilled performances from its members. Indeed, given its internal specialization of functions, the large organization would find extraordinary, idiosyncratic behavior disruptive. It prefers instead regularized procedures followed by reliable workers through which the corporation achieves economies of scale as it competes successfully in the marketplace. As one commentator put it, bureaucracies and corporations are devices whereby people who are not themselves great can nevertheless accomplish great things.

The mechanism of the modern positivist university. Institutions of higher learning no longer pretended to form their graduates morally, but simply to provide them with the objective knowledge and skills which they need to get them jobs within the large corporations, which, in turn, compete most advantageously in the marketplace, all within a constitutional framework.

Thus all four mechanisms deserve our respect, so the argument goes, not because they morally inspire us but because they accommodate realistically to human nature and mobilize the most fundamental drive within us, that is, self-interest.

Others, however, would argue that the marketplace cannot function as a wholly impersonal mechanism that makes no moral demands upon us. Specifically, apologists for the marketplace and the guardians of bourgeois society in the 19th century argued that the marketplace requires the three personal virtues of industry, honesty, and integrity for the system to work. (When many business people refer to business ethics today, they still have in mind these three virtues often associated with the Protestant work ethic.) The marketplace needs the virtue of industry (without which goods will not be produced), honesty (otherwise one would steal from the neighbor rather than exchange with him) and a modicum of integrity (without which one could not hope for value in contractual exchanges). To these three virtues, twentieth century guardians of the marketplace have added the virtue of fairness, to facilitate especially exchanges in equities. They have prohibited the insider trading of insecurities to level the playing field between buyers and sellers. The virtue of fairness, so conceived, along with the virtues of honesty and integrity, fall under the demands of commutative justice, that is, justice in the dealings of one party with another.

Emphasis on these virtues alone, however, does not begin to touch the systemic issues of modern economic life. Preaching the virtue of industry hardly addresses the structural issue of the employable unemployed. Commending to farmers and farm workers the personal virtues of honesty and integrity hardly spares them financial ruin when a foreign country suddenly changes its wheat export or import policies. Nor does the principle of fairness, if restricted to such issues as insider trading, address the sometime coercive inequalities in the bargaining power of parties, such as workers and employers, entering

into agreements. The virtues hardly touch the "externalities" of pollution, injurious products, hazards of the workplace, or the disrepair of cities, which the marketplace often haphazardly exacts as an unmet cost of its operations.

Emphasis on these individual virtues alone also fails to respond fully to the intramural moral needs of the large-scale organization. The corporation requires, beyond the individual virtues of industry, honesty, and integrity, the more social virtues that dispose the members of a large, complex organization to work together. The philosopher, A.W.H. Adkins (*Merit and Responsibility*, 1960) might have designated these the co-operative, as opposed to the competitive, virtues. Henry Cabot Lodge of Harvard Business School observed that Lockian individualism had to give way in our time to the more organizational demand for teamwork, if the corporation were to succeed.

Clearly, moreover, the virtues associated with teamwork are not enough. In his *History of Ethics*, Alisdair MacIntyre rightly called the merely co-operative virtues, "secondary virtues." They are virtues of process rather than substance. They do not derive from shared substantive goals. They simply specify skills which the large-scale organization requires in pursuing any goal whatsoever, including those goals which may be quite immoral. Emphasis upon the cooperative virtues alone—those skills persons need to act in concert with others—systematically brackets the key moral question which the corporation ought to face; namely, the substantive question of the aim and goal of the enterprise.

The business leader must evince not simply the three traditional virtues of industry, honesty, and integrity, or the secondary cooperative virtues that make one artful in acting in concert with others, but also, substantively and preeminently, if I am right about the power and privilege of business in the modern world, the virtue of public-spiritedness. I would define public-spiritedness as the art of acting in concert with others for the common good. This definition includes both a subjective and an objective element. Subjectively, the art of acting in concert with others summarizes the virtues of process. Objectively, the common good defines the goal, which the leaders of the enterprise must pursue. A modern ethic of the marketplace needs a healthy dose of thought about the common good of the kind which the U.S. Bishops offered in their pastoral letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy.

Why should the business leader orient to the question of the public good? After all, business leaders head what we distinctively characterize as a *private* enterprise with responsibilities traditionally restricted to private investors. Is it not, at the least, a distraction and, at the worst, a corruption of the enterprise—to expect the leader, *qua* business leader, to be public-spirited? Should we not, at the most, concede the possibility of an occasional act of charity, a grace note of generosity, to ease the organization's way in the community at the level of PR, but no more?ⁱ

On the contrary, I will argue that both the power and privilege of corporations (and the professionals who largely work for them) in the setting of the modern democracies

require us to rank public-spiritedness among the cardinal virtues required of the business leader.

We mislead ourselves if we view the business community merely as one private interest group among others in a market economy. That vision of things may have described the time when the framers of democratic constitutions devised the mechanisms of checks and balances—in and through which diverse interest groups might successfully limit one another. Today, however, the business community wields a power that vastly exceeds that of any other group in our society—churches, synagogues, labor organizations, service organizations, and the like. In a market economy, business leaders make decisions on major aspects of production and distribution which in other societies might be reserved to the government. Business people decide on industrial technology, patterns of work organization, the locations of industries, market structures, resource allocation, and executive compensation and status. These decisions have momentous public impacts, for good or for ill, not only on investors, but also on workers, neighbors, consumers, suppliers, and satellite service industries, and also upon the air we breathe, upon the water we drink and bathe in, and upon the forests and lakes to which we would retreat of a weekend. While engaged in what we call private enterprise, business leaders are, in effect, "public officials" in a market economy. Taking the long view of Western history, Charles E. Lindblom has observed that two institutions shape the modern world just as surely as the church and the state shaped the medieval world: these preeminent institutions are business and government.

Further, the public power that business wields is not merely a power that business itself has created. Business depends heavily upon public largesse in a modern democratic society. To cite but a few in the USA: road improvements, railroads, airports, enclosure acts, huge tax offsets amounting to what *Time Magazine* called in a cover article, Nov. 9, 1998, "corporate welfare," tax credit for research and investments indulged far more than necessary, the business rental of Defense Department plants at favorable rates, urban renewal projects to help retailers, special tax free perquisites, and fringe benefits for top management, and government investments to support the infrastructure of education and other services that enable business to recruit workers.

Business also receives special treatment at the hands of the law and government officials. Business leaders expect government officials to take seriously their judgment on policy matters affecting the business climate. While the government can forbid some actions, it cannot directly command business to perform, hence it behooves presidents and prime ministers to confer with business leaders. Their formal and informal veto power in the society is enormous. Their capacity to create convulsive impacts on traffic patterns, school systems, parking accommodations, sewage plants, police and fire departments, and other public facilities without having to face the answering veto power of other groups points to an extraordinary power that can no longer be defined as wholly private. The business leader is an unelected, even though carefully selected, public functionary. His or her power, privilege, and role demands the virtue of public-spiritedness.

How should one define the goal or goals pursued in public-spiritedness? The question has provoked serious debate. The corporation (and other large-scale bureaucracies) are largely single-purpose institutions. Hospitals seek to heal; universities, to educate; and businesses, to produce goods and services for a profit. In a sense, the large-scale organization can pursue several ends. (The university hospital not only *heals* patients, it also *teaches* students and *sponsors medical research*; the business conglomerate may span a number of businesses.) But these complex goals can usually be reduced to a single, inclusive, primary aim (such as health, education, or economic performance at a profit).

This tendency of a large-scale organization to orient itself toward a single public purpose has had both its fierce critics and defenders. Radical critics from the Left in the late sixties in the USA protested against major organizations that kept to their specialized tasks but failed to respond to overriding moral challenges and political crises, which, the radicals felt, should test an institution's right to survive. At the other end of the spectrum, conservatives (but not only conservatives) argued that a society functions best if each institution within it pursues its own special mission.

The term "conservative" here loosely covers two very different visions of the social order. Classical conservatives (Edmund Burke) held to a more organic view of the body politic and envisaged the great institutions of the society, the government included, working compactly for the common good. Modern American libertarian conservatives, (Milton Friedman and many others) argue for a minimalist state and believe that a multiplicity of goods will best be attained through the allocative wizardry of the free market alone. Far from subordinating self-interest to some notion of the common good, business institutions, in this libertarian view, can make no greater contribution to the society than to pursue, without distraction, the maximization of profits. Otherwise, Friedman argues, corporations 1) exceed their authority (which is derived solely from stockholders), 2) exceed their competence (which is economic decision-making rather than social engineering), and 3) abuse their power (as they paternalistically impose on others their notions of social and cultural good).

In my judgment, neither the New Left nor the U.S. libertarians offer an altogether satisfactory resolution to the problem of institutional purpose. The Left's ideal of multi-purposed, decentralized institutions overlooked the very prosaic advantages of specialization: efficiency and productivity. Further, despite its talk about community, the "New Left" of the 60's undercut one of the important features of community: reciprocity. A latent hostility toward community lurks behind the reluctance to specialize and the refusal to accept what specialization implies: a dependency upon the dedicated efforts of others. Mutual dependency in a differentiated society requires that institutions sustain a primary mission, a mission, moreover, that must be pursued across an extended period of time. Anarchy results if institutions are forced to infinitize themselves and do everything. The educational institution must educate well; it cannot, in and of itself, respond to any and all moral and political challenges served up to it before lunch on any given day. (The same thing is true of the corporation.) Making good on its primary purpose is part of the *public* responsibility of the institution.

However, Friedman's monomania for the maximization of profits is just as unacceptable. Although *economic performance at a profit* is a requirement of a mixed economy, *maximizing profits* at the expense of all else converts a requirement into an imperial obsession. Each of Friedman's three arguments for maximizing fails.

1) The view that corporations are incompetent to make judgments about matters other than profit making—exaggerates. In some areas of corporate responsibility, management usually has more knowledge and competence than most others in the society. Certainly it should know a great deal more than others about product safety and about the harmful impacts of its manufacturing processes on workers and neighbors. The principle of subsidiarity would argue that corporations should accept responsibility by virtue of their proximity to such problems. In other areas, to be sure, the corporation may not be knowledgeable or competent. But moral responsibility in life is hardly limited to areas in which persons and institutions have an advance competence. Virtuosity in lovemaking does not always give a young couple the right to restrict their responsibility to that activity alone. Competent lovers may find themselves—willy-nilly—in the somewhat nervous position of being inexperienced, not-very-competent parents, but morally obliged to acquire that competence. Economic prowess and competence sometimes generate responsibilities elsewhere. Unfortunately, economists have had a convenient way of excluding many issues from the manager's responsibility by writing them off as "externalities." But the externalities of water and air pollution, traffic congestion, neighborhood crime, unemployment, and the quality of education and culture in a host city have a way of obtruding on the moral and political agenda of citizens and their institutions and require them to develop some measure of wisdom and even expertise in areas where previously they possessed none.

2) Friedman and other critics have further charged advocates of corporate responsibility with paternalism—that is, with a benevolent, but nonetheless oppressive, interference in the affairs of others. Precisely because the corporation exercises great economic power, the libertarians argue, it should forswear further social, political, and cultural interventions that diminish human autonomy and freedom.

The very word, "paternalism," of course, stirs a subtle mix of negative memories, including Victorian Company towns and suffocating total institutions. However, in my judgment, modern industrial cities have suffered less from the overbearing presence of benevolence than from its absence. The callused self-interest of the powerful today threatens human autonomy and freedom far more than misguided good works. Interventions, moreover, need not inevitably diminish the freedom of others; they may also expand opportunity. Freedom, when responsibly exercised, is not a commodity of fixed bulk that automatically diminishes for some when exercised by others. The civil rights of citizens, their economic opportunities, and their cultural resources may expand and flourish to the degree that intermediate institutions in the society (such as the corporation) open out beyond their immediate self-interest toward the common good.

3) Finally, some have sought to meet Friedman's most often cited argument from authority (that is, that the only legitimate duty of management is to stockholders) by

distinguishing between stockholders and stakeholders. Stockholders are important stakeholders in a company, but by no means the only ones. Workers, customers, neighbors, and the public at large have in varying ways a stake in its performance, sometimes, indeed, a deeper stake than stockholders, who may dart in and out of their investments more easily than workers and neighbors. The latter have less mobility and depend fatefully on a company and its fortunes.

Usually phrased, however, this argument rests on little more than the consonance of the two words—"stock" and "stake"—unless one can show why obligation should extend beyond stockholders in an enterprise. Some help is at hand, I believe, in the religious notion of a covenant, a notion central to Protestant thinking but to which the National Conference of Catholic Bishops also appealed in the Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy. The notion of a covenant in the religious tradition provides a basis for acknowledging the responsibilities of a corporation to its various stakeholders. It provides a motive for competent service to stakeholders; and it forbids a paternalistic and patronizing style in the delivery of that service. For a covenantal ethic, above all else, understands moral obligation responsively. Human acquiring, selling, and giving depend upon a primordial receiving which makes possible whatever acquiring, selling, and giving we engage in.

In its ancient and most influential form—the biblical covenant—obligation arises from specific exchanges between partners that lead to a fundamental promise which, in turn, shapes the future for both parties to the agreement. The over-arching biblical covenant determines first the relationship of God to his people—the gift of deliverance from Egypt and the promises made at Mt. Sinai—from which flow derivatively the covenantal responsibilities of men and women within the human community. Thus God commands the Jewish farmer not to pick his crops too clean. "Leave some for the sojourner for you were once sojourners in Egypt." This command clearly places limits on the profit-making maxims of the marketplace—leave some for the sojourner—but it also undercuts philanthropic assumptions about the self-sufficient benefactor—remember, you were once sojourners in Egypt. Give in the knowledge that from the beginning and unceasingly, you are also a beneficiary.

The notion of a covenant at once expands obligation beyond the limits of commercial contract (the stockholder's purchase) and takes corporate responsibility a notch deeper than token expressions of corporate philanthropy (contributions to the local community chest drive). A covenantal ethic concentrates on those obligations that arise in relationships between several parties that are responsive and reciprocal. It acknowledges a two-way process of giving and receiving that occurs in extended exchanges between parties, from which permanent obligations and agreements arise that give shape to the future. This growing sense of responsibility between parties lies behind the notion of a stakeholder. Much has happened between two parties (between a corporation and its workers, a corporation and its neighbors) that gives them a stake in what each does. They are covenanted together.

In contrast, the ideal of philanthropy (which Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush extolled) presupposes a one-way street from giver to receiver. The philanthropist pretends to be pure giver alone; others relate to him as pure receiver. When the philanthropist loses interest, he moves on. That is why corporate responsibility reduced to philanthropy alone trivializes corporate ethics. The corporation obscures the depth of its obligation when it adopts the philanthropist's view. In truth, the corporation cannot give as pure benefactor alone. It has already received much from the community—not only the investments of stockholders, but also the labor of workers, the ambiance and services of the community in which it is located, the privilege of incorporation by the state, and, through the legal fiction of the corporation as person, all the protections bestowed upon persons under the due process clause of the Constitution. Its indebtedness to the society is great.

But not all this indebtedness can be toted up in commercial, contractualist terms. The corporation, to be sure, pays its workers and its taxes (often with the benefit of sweet deals on taxes), but these transactions also build up a life between people and institutions that goes deeper than transient marketplace contacts. Exchanges build up relations even while they "discharge" obligations. That is why the word "covenant" helps more than a contract to define the moral obligations of the corporation.

Formally considered, the concepts of contract and covenant are first cousins: they both include an agreement between parties and an exchange; they also look to reciprocal future action. But, in spirit, contract and covenant differ dramatically. Contracts involve buying and selling. Covenants include further ingredients of giving and receiving. Contracts are external; covenants are more internal to the parties involved. Contracts are signed to be expediently discharged; covenants have a gratuitous growing element in them that nourishes rather than limits and terminates relationships. Contracts can be filed away, but a covenant becomes a part of one's history and shapes in unexpected ways one's self-perception and perhaps even destiny. The decision-making of a corporation rests upon a covenantal base that charts its life, grants it protection, and endows its enterprises with a public significance and responsibility.

The Spirituality of Work

Since this conference focuses on the spirituality of work, I will confine myself to comments about the bearing of the corporate covenant on only one of its aforementioned stakeholders—its workers. The stakes for workers are deep. For better or for worse, corporate behavior affects profoundly a worker's core identity. In its own idiom, the Catholic Church, has spoken most forcefully on this matter by referring to the "spirituality of work." John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens* and the American Catholic Bishops in their Pastoral Letter *Economic Justice for All* have pointed out that employment itself is a spiritual matter. The word "participation" figures large in the concept of the spiritual. Employment is the way in which adults participate in the economic life of a society. Just as voting lets citizens participate in the political order,

earning a living allows them to participate in the economic order. Unemployed, workers suffer a loss of identity; they become strangers in their own land—in the society but not really *of* it.

Earning a living entails two minimal moral standards: measures to protect workers' health and safety and payment of a just wage. Without the protection of health and safety, workers cannot live healthily enough to work; and without a just wage, workers cannot earn enough to live and to support those whose lives depend upon their earnings. Left to their own devices, corporations in the early phases of industrial capitalism, often dealt recklessly with workers' health and safety and replaced the standard of a just wage with the marketplace law of supply and demand. During oversupply of labor, an individual's bargaining power dwindles. Hence workers looked to government regulations and/or to collective bargaining to protect their health and safety and to secure decent wages. Corporations, in reaction, have sometimes sought to reassert a superior bargaining power by delegitimizing unions. They have also resisted pressure from governments on worker (and environmental) issues by threatening to remove their operations to other cities and even other countries. The global scope of the marketplace today has made it particularly difficult for mere national governments to limit corporate behavior.

For the sake of survival and profits today, corporations have often pled the necessity of downsizing the workforce, even when the corporation has decided to stay in place. The current commitment to downsizing—"lean and mean"—is particularly mean when accompanied by a hostility to the government and a resistance to any taxes which would enable the government to provide employment to those who can find no employment in the private sector. In effect, some corporate leaders have wanted to have it both ways. Under pressure of profits, they deny their own responsibility for continuing employment for workers, (even those workers from whom they may have extracted long-term service); and they would deny to the government, even as a last resort, the power to assure that citizens can continue to participate in the economic life of the nation.

In effect, extreme libertarians who recognize only shareholders as stakeholders, deny a corporate responsibility to workers (other than living up to their contracts); and they would whittle down the role of the other major player in the modern world—government—to the task of protecting marketplace exchanges. Libertarians are willing to pay taxes for security (fire, police, and defense departments) and transportation (roads and airports) but resist governments efforts to address the unmet welfare needs of citizens for food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare. They prize the law as it enforces contracts; but they would pare down the law as it seeks even minimally, to make good on the social covenant.

Recent changes in the corporation and the marketplace—mergers, takeovers, reengineering, downsizing, the instant anxiety of the global market, accounting and policy maneuvers oriented to quarterly reports, and the near-cyclonic speed of changes in technologies and products—have spiritually affected workers and slipped the hold of their stake in the enterprise. An adult son who works in one of the "sunrise" industries said to his father: "In your day, Dad, people seemed transient and institutions permanent;

but today institutions are no longer permanent; they seem to have the life span of a firefly and that compounds a worker's sense of his own transiency."

Richard Sennett has detailed the contrast between the old and new capitalism in a series of opposites, dramatizing the shift from the relatively permanent, hierarchically organized structures (Max Weber called them "iron cages") of industrial capitalism to the shifting forms of a service and information-oriented economy. The work world has transmuted: from hierarchy to networking, from a relatively defined job to a shifting participation in limited projects, from repetition to reinvention, from the specialized to the highly adaptive, from rigid work schedules to flex-time, from cumulative experience to staying ahead of the curve, from inside the cage to outsourcing from no fixed abode (indeed, one can feel like a nomad even if one works within a given corporation), from clear lines of authority and responsibility to the survival principle of letting nothing stick, from boss to team leader, from a linear sense of time to broken field running, from relatively legible tasks to managing technologies whose inner operations are opaque, from relative security to a constant vulnerability, that is, to the steady state of always being at risk.

Sennett does not attempt to ride down the moonbeams of nostalgia to an earlier industrial capitalism. "None of us would desire to return [to a social world that was].. claustrophobic... rigid."(p.117). He concedes that "a deadening politics of seniority and time entitlements ruled the unionized workers at Willow Run; to continue that mindset today would be a recipe for self-destruction in today's markets and flexible networks." Still, Sennett recognizes that industrial capitalism offered for immigrant generations relatively continuous, if sometimes poorly paid employment. The relative stability of corporate structures and clearly marked job identifies supplied the objective, external casing in which a worker's character and career path might form, and produce factory wages that supported, be it ever so modestly, those enduring commitments to family and other communities that fill out a human identity.

The spiritual problem we confront today is "...how to organize our life histories ...in a capitalism which disposed us to drift." That drifting impermanence compounds the individual's own sense of his impermanence and drift. Even having a character becomes baggage that one may need to drop to survive. Or, put another way, one's character must become that of a chameleon. One's identity needs to be light, agile, superficial, one's work continually repotted, one's resumé, continually reconfigured. Further, the breakdown of institutions and a stable self also entails the breakdown of community. First, in the workplace, a kind of protective indifference and withholding replaces the give and take, the trust/distrust, the angry protest and engagement that transpire in genuine community. And, inevitably, commitments to others, apart from work life, become difficult to sustain –to wife/husband, children, neighbors, congregation, and service organizations.

Religious Background

We have suggested that a conventional ethic supplies a religiously grounded alternative to economic libertarianism, but I have not yet explicitly stated the libertarian position in

its own religious form. The religious issue in a covenantal versus a libertarian view of human life turns on one's understanding of the *imago dei* in humankind.

Michael Novak in *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (and thereafter Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in her speech before the National Assembly of the Church of Scotland) justified religiously the libertarian position by associating the *imago dei* with human *creativity*. Novak writes:

Creation left to itself is incomplete, and human [beings] are called to be co-creators with God, bringing forth the potentialities the Creator has hidden. Creation is full of secrets waiting to be discovered, riddles which human intelligence is expected by the Creator to unlock. The world did not spring from the hand of God as wealthy as human beings might make it.

Traditional Christianity did not sufficiently appreciate the meaning of the *imago dei* within us—our participation in the creativity of God. Thus it took the revolutionary theorists of the late 18th century to remove the obstacles. "They [Montesquieu, Adam Smith, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson] saw themselves as agents of the progress which traditional religion, its towers blocking the sun, has passionately resisted." But, once modern theorists helped remove the religious restraints of church and state upon the marketplace, capitalism unleashed the single most powerful revolution in human affairs, a "stream of sparks," a "continual stream of innovations," a "sustained growth" unmatched in human history.

The spirit of democratic capitalism is the spirit of development, risk, experiment, and adventure. It surrenders present security for future betterment. In differentiating the economic system from the state, it introduced a novel pluralism into the very center of the social system. Henceforth, all societies of its type would be internally divided--and explosively revolutionary.

Along with the economist, Joseph Schumpeter, Novak gives a kind of religious resonance to the "creative destruction"—shades of Vishnu and Siva—which capitalism inspires and celebrates. Serving as a kind of troubadour for capitalism, Novak regrets that intellectuals in the U.S. and elsewhere have failed to appreciate the prodigal talents of the business executives from whose accomplishments the society has so richly benefited. He complains that "Their inventions and organizational innovations, their capacities for leadership and practical judgement, are assets which benefit their fellow citizens. Until their activities in history, the human race was far poorer than it is. Yet few minorities in the U.S. are as subject to ridicule and disparagement in the public media."

No one such as myself who cut his teeth in a privately endowed university and read there Pico Della Mirandola's "Oration on the Dignity of Man" can glibly deny either the importance of creativity in human affairs or the role of the marketplace in stimulating it. Yet, after celebrating a creativity so spectacularly displayed in a few, we have to ask

ourselves whether, in fact, the image of God solely displays itself there. Traditionally, of course, philosophers and theologians have associated the *imago dei* with the godly faculty of reason, the power of creativity, and the capacity of technical reason to subdue the earth. However, the Church has carefully understood this participation in the divine creativity as a warrant, not for untethered liberty, but creativity directed to the common good. "... human beings achieve self-realization not in isolation but in interaction with others." One must always act on the *imago dei* in oneself in such a way as to honor and empower it in others in the service of our common life.

Further, as splendid as the power of creativity may be, it goes unmentioned in that decisive scriptural passage on the *imago dei*. "So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; *male and female* he created them." Taken at face value, this remarkable passage from Genesis does not appear to equate the image of God in us with creativity alone. Rather, the *imago dei* spreads across a relationship: "male and female created he them." Further, this personal relationship, as we have reason to know from many other passages, depends for its life on the covenantal dynamics of giving and receiving. Human beings may exhaust themselves in the activities of acquiring, securing, anticipating, worrying, achieving, displaying, dominating, excelling, creating, vanquishing, and humiliating, but the essence of human life occurs in the transaction of giving and receiving—male and female created he them. Inevitably, the prophets and the Apostle Paul employed the metaphor of marriage to explicate the promissory bond between God and humankind. And, eventually, the church attempted to honor and celebrate this relational life in the godhead itself when it resorted to the threefold name: Father—Giver; Son—Receiver; in the procession of the Spirit. The *imago dei* does not lie in a power which we possess in isolation but spreads across a relationship. It displays itself primarily not in creating but in caring, or, better yet, in a creativity that cares, a generative love.

One should not move too deductively and glibly from the great affirmations of faith to the social systems under which we live. But those affirmations do offer a horizon in which to interpret and assess the performance of the marketplace that has so much power to enhance or deface the image of God in us. Clearly, an economic system works best when beneath all its buying and selling, it acknowledges the bonding that builds up between us through giving and receiving.

A reciprocal, donative element exists in the upbuilding of a covenant—whether the covenant of marriage and friendship or the covenantal ties of a professional to his or her client or a great corporation to the neighborhood, city, state, and country of which it is a part. Tit for tat characterizes a commercial transaction, and one-way giving characterizes philanthropy; but neither does justice to the covenantal ties between us by virtue of which we serve and draw upon the deeper reserves and lives of one another.