

Business as a Calling

The Fire of Invention: Civil Society and the Future of the Corporation

Tell Me Why

On Cultivating Liberty: Reflections on Moral Ecology

On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding

Business as a Calling

This book is a practical guide to the ethical responsibilities of individuals and firms based on moral theory and the real-world experiences of business professionals. The author is the George Frederick Jewett Scholar in Religion and Public Policy at AEI. A summary of the book follows.

This inquiry is for Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others who take the inner life seriously, including those who, while hesitant to belong to any church, take seriously their vocation as thoughtful and self-questioning beings.

Those who have eaten awhile of material success know that there is more to life than bread. They desire more than *having*. Many are haunted by the awareness that they are not getting all that is to be drunk of life, that there is somewhere *an unfound door*, through which what they seek is revealed. The most hardheaded people often feel this most keenly: whatever they attain, that is not it--not what they are looking for.

Further, I imagine that there is tremendous, untapped good will in many of these people and that everything I am about to write is in some sense already known to them, perhaps not in a way that they can put into words, but in a way that will ring true to them the minute they hear it said.

A larger proportion than ever before of the world's Christians, Jews, and other peoples of faith are spending their working lives in business. Business is a profession worthy of a person's highest ideals and aspirations, fraught with moral possibilities both of great good and of great evil. Business leaders often face agonizing problems such as corporate downsizing and trade-offs between profits and human rights. Through effective philanthropy they seek to return to society the blessings of their success. On a less exalted level, the daily routine of an honest day's work contributes in many ways to the good of other people, both close at hand and far away.

Often, however, those whose religious and moral vocation in life is played out in one of the many fields of business get little help from those to whom they would normally turn for instruction. Sometimes in sermons, pastoral letters, and other manifestoes of their churches, they get the impression that religious leaders do not object to wealth if it is inherited. But if they actually made the money themselves, they are given the subtle impression that that wealth, by contrast, is rather sweaty, vulgar, and morally suspect.

Some people, alas, *are* driven by materialism. One does meet people, not many in my experience, who live for nothing but making money and who seem to be satisfied by the showy "good life" that having money permits. Most human beings, however, businessmen included, cannot stand the effort to live a purely materialistic life--not for long, at least. When men begin to have enough bread as a matter of course, they become more interested in larger and more

satisfying horizons--in the things of the spirit, for which their hungers are infinite and in no danger of being sated; in prayer and contemplation; in the arts; in philanthropy; and, in general, in improving the lot of their fellow human beings.

There is something about business that no one may have told you in business school or economics class. Something important. It is that many business leaders have the sense of uncovering a personal destiny, of contributing something worthwhile to public life--something that would not have been there without them--and, more than that, of working at something that they were good at and enjoyed. Even if we do not always think of it that way, each of us was given a calling--by fate, by chance, by destiny, by God. Those who are lucky have found it.

Drawing on both personal interviews and published accounts, this book allows us to hear the voices of corporate CEOs and coffee-shop owners, investors and engineers as they talk about their lives and their work. What unifies these disparate stories is the conviction that what they do is morally serious and that it constitutes what religious believers (and not a few secularists) recognize as a *calling*.

Four characteristics of a calling become apparent in the lives of these persons: A calling is unique to each individual. A calling takes more than desire--it requires talent. Not every one can be an opera singer or the leader of a large enterprise. A true calling reveals its presence by the enjoyment and sense of renewed energy its practice yields us. Finally, a calling is not always easy to discover: many paths are often taken before the right one is found.

Little-known Facts about Business

For thousands of years of human history, the life of farming was the basic economic reality for both the poor and the aristocracy. Seen from that perspective, the amazing growth of business activities in the twentieth century is an abrupt and unsettling transformation. Moral and religious thinkers have not yet adjusted their imaginations to this upheaval.

And yet, of all the elites of American society--artists, humanists, social scientists, journalists, lawyers, and others--people in business appear to rank among the most religious. Not all people in business are religious, but a high proportion are. Many of them want to do their work in a way as faithful to their religious beliefs as they can, and they are delighted to find people who take their religious inclinations seriously. By contrast, the professions of the "adversary culture" seem to diminish religious energies and deplete religious curiosity. Some secularized professionals exude a polite but unmistakable hostility to religion. This keeps the media, in particular, well out of touch with American popular culture.

A Morally Serious Calling

What does it mean, though, to say that business is a morally serious calling? One may begin to answer this question by looking at the life of one of the greatest of all industrialists and founder of the modern corporation, Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie was, like all of us, a sinner; his flaws are not to be excused. But those who see Carnegie as motivated by greed trivialize the word: he was, properly understood, a builder, a creator, a philanthropist, ultimately, a man who changed the world for the better. Through the invention of many new goods and heretofore unimagined possibilities, Carnegie improved the lives of millions across the globe.

To be sure, Carnegie himself misunderstood the nature of capitalism. Influenced by the fashionable Darwinist ideologies of his age, he was too quick to describe capitalism as the survival of the fittest rather than as a system worthy of our esteem for liberating previously bound energies and lifting innumerable people out of poverty. It is one of the ironies of history that this wonderfully creative man failed to acknowledge the morally serious nature of his own calling.

Capitalism for the Poor, Capitalism for Democracy

At the close of the twentieth century, the empirical evidence is in: capitalism is better for the poor than any other known economic system. Sound evidence for this proposition is found in the migration patterns of the world's poor, who overwhelmingly flee from socialist and traditional third world economies to line up at the doors of the capitalist lands. Capitalism makes it possible for the vast majority of the poor to break out of the prison of poverty, to discover full scope for their own personal economic initiative, and to rise into the middle class or higher.

Capitalism is also a necessary but not sufficient condition for the success of democracy. And while there have been nondemocratic capitalist societies, the pressure exerted by the liberation of markets on authoritarian structures of power invariably leads to demands for political freedom as well. But although democratic capitalism deserves our support, it is no utopia. Like all earthly regimes it is deeply flawed. It is, however, superior to all known alternatives.

Virtue in the Modern City

For many years, Western economists have taken for granted the moral capital of the West. And yet, as the limited success of efforts to transplant democratic capitalism to Russia and its former satellite countries shows, a nation's moral ecology is even more fundamental than its physical ecology. Virtue, it seems, is a public as well as a private reality. A regime of self-government and a capitalist economy where business can flourish need to be rooted in the habits and practices of virtue.

Unfortunately, our intellectual and academic elites have been remarkably incurious about virtue and religion for some years, and our national communications media have been (at least until recent years) remarkably reticent about them. Particularly egregious in this regard is the modern entertainment industry, which has to a certain extent been pandering to public vices and which has largely ignored the specific struggles for virtue characteristic of the Jewish and Christian traditions.

And yet, business has a vested interest in virtue. It cannot go forward without realism, courage, wisdom, honesty, and integrity nor without a highly motivated and virtuous work community. It cannot endure without leaders and colleagues in whom many key virtues are internalized. In this and in many other ways, business is dependent on the moral and cultural institutions of the free society: families (especially), schools, and public civic life. Businessmen and businesswomen need to be attentive to the nation's moral ecology if the business economy and self-government itself are to survive.

Three Cardinal Virtues of Business

There are many habits an entrepreneur needs to succeed in business, but among these three are central. I call them cardinal virtues in the same sense that the ancient Greeks and Romans spoke of the four cardinal virtues of a happy life.

The three cardinal virtues of business are *creativity*, *building community*, and *practical realism*. Business creates new technologies, new ways of organizing labor, new possibilities. The principal resource for human beings is not in the ground, after all, but in the *head*--in the wit and imagination that envision what does not yet exist and sets about creating it.

Business also builds community: even making so simple an object as a pencil requires the cooperation of designers, suppliers, manufacturers, and others all across the globe. A sense of community within the business firm is essential for the firm to succeed--not only in economic terms but also in its very moral fiber.

Finally, unlike the dominant ideologies of the academy, which embrace a relativism that denies the possibility of any true reading of reality, people in business, while often romantic in vision, must remain securely fastened to the real. The virtue of practical realism--related to but more narrow than the classical virtue of practical wisdom--means staying in touch with how the world really works, from the bottom up. Without it, the person in business can lose his or her shirt (and sometimes life savings).

Seven plus Seven Corporate Responsibilities

Men and women in business face a great many moral responsibilities. It may help to divide these into two different sets.

The first set consists of the moral requirements necessary for business success. Of course, the fact that certain actions make a business successful does not disqualify them from being morally good. Among the corporate responsibilities of business that spring from its own nature are at least these seven: to satisfy customers with goods and services of real value; to make a reasonable return on the funds entrusted to the business by its investors; to create new wealth; to create new jobs; to defeat envy through generating upward mobility; to promote invention, innovation, and material progress; and to diversify the interests of the republic.

To be sure, this list does not exhaust the responsibilities of Christians and Jews whose vocation calls them to the business world. One might discern seven further moral responsibilities that are inherent not so much in business as in the religious and moral convictions of its practitioners. These include: to establish within the firm a sense of respect for the dignity of persons; to protect the political soil of liberty; to exemplify respect for law; to practice social justice (understood not as the action of the state, but as a virtue of civil society); to communicate often and fully with investors, shareholders, pensioners, customers, and employees; to contribute to making the firm's own habitat a better place; and to protect the moral ecology of freedom.

While these responsibilities form only a partial list, it is clear that business, and a life in business, has a richly varied moral agenda.

Making Things Better

The virtue of creative initiative drives a capitalist system forward. The other side of that virtue is the responsibility it imposes: it implies a commitment to make things better. Many of our more intractable social problems--from homelessness to poverty--are best approached through civil society rather than the bureaucratic state.

With regard to the homeless particularly, skillful and practical leaders of the business community should take dramatic steps in the name of self-government to remedy this social ill. Consider an analogous problem: feeding the hungry. In some cities, business coalitions have arranged for the collection and distribution of truckloads of donated food each day. Farsighted civic leaders might achieve similar results by organizing members of the legal and medical professions, builders, realtors, fund raisers, and others to meet the needs of the homeless seen on the streets of most cities today.

Corporate downsizing, to take another example, has resulted in a leaner and more competitive corporate America--but at the cost of increased anxiety and social displacement of many workers. Many of the anxieties raised by downsizing can be successfully addressed through reforms that grant workers personal ownership of benefit packages, particularly for pension and health care benefits, that they can take with them when they switch jobs.

Giving It All Away

It is one of the greatest blessings of the United States to have so powerful a philanthropic tradition. The richly diverse vitalities of civil society spring from the benefactions of those who want "to give something back," out of gratitude to the principle of self-government that is the glory of free nations.

These multiple sources of private imagination and creativity have already inspired some of the world's most beautiful architecture, splendid museums, leading medical research centers, and even unusually successful programs for the poor. Those whose calling is business do well to recognize early that, more than they may at first realize, this calling leads to giving--and to the need to learn yet another civilizing art, the art of giving wisely.

The Fire of Invention: Civil Society and the Future of the Corporation

This book, which evolved from three lectures at AEI sponsored by the Pfizer Corporation, examines the nature of the business corporation and its influence in civil society. The author argues that the corporation--though much criticized--is little understood and is actually "the most successful institution of our time, flexible and adaptable beyond all others." The following summary is drawn from the introduction to the book.

To understand America's greatness, you have to understand the sea. America was born from the sea. All of the human beings who have struggled to thrive on these shores came from across the seas. The sea gave Americans the space to be different from the rest of the world. (For a far longer time, Canada, Mexico, and all of Latin America declined to cut their umbilical cords to European political ideas.) Above all, it was the sea that set the pattern for American business, the business corporation, and, at a more substantial level, the American character, which is marked by a love for risk, invention, and freedom.

What are some of the consequences of this spirit? As Alexis de Tocqueville noted in the nineteenth century, Americans easily change their trade, suiting their occupations to the needs of the moment. Further, Tocqueville observed, while Americans may be less skillful in craft than a European specialist, their capacities are more general, the sphere of their intelligence wider. Finally, the Americans were not--and are not--held back by the axioms of craftsmen, the prejudices of professionals, or methods learned from the past. They have always known that their country is like no other and that their situation is unprecedented.

Contrast this spirit to that of Europe. European workers do not argue that their considerable occupational entitlements secure benefits for the common good or have demonstrable practical benefits for others. They do not demand a reasoned public analysis of costs and benefits. "No, an entitlement is an entitlement, let no one take it away, and that is the end of the matter. Let the world stop. Let ruin come. We shall not yield." Other Europeans halt in admiration, nodding agreement. This is a belief in the good of order, fixed order, outside the experience of any American. Hence the argument by many Europeans that, under the capitalism of Europe, the collective is preeminent, whereas under Anglo-American capitalism the anarchic individual prevails. Yet this misses an essential fact: in America the *argument* nearly always centers on the general welfare, and when a majority can be persuaded that a special interest is hurting too many others, its entitlements are almost certain to be regulated. Paradoxically, under European capitalism, individual interests often prevail against public need as entrenched interests are defended.

Risk versus Security

The American spirit, born from the sea, is evident in the greater dynamism of economic life this side of the Atlantic: 50 million new jobs over the past twenty years, many in the high-paying fields of medicine and communications, while the European job market has remained stagnant. Europeans pay a formidable price for their beloved security and stasis. They prefer the comfort of where they are to a better--but less certain--future. It is no surprise that the 5 percent of the world's people represented by the population of the United States raises more than half of all the world's venture capital. Moreover, that proportion masks an even more important reality: most of the venture capital of Europe and Japan (the other major sources of such capital) is devoted to the reorganization of older firms. But 70 percent of venture investments in the United States is poured into new technologies and new firms. Characteristically, Europeans expend most of their venture capital on less risky, mature firms--only 6 percent in new industries. By contrast with Europe, America is afire with invention. Americans love risk.

Corporations grow, too, from the American spirit of creativity and enterprise. Americans have pioneered in the development of small companies into larger ones. The business corporation has been the voluntary association through which Americans have wrought the economic revolution that changed the world's horizons. America taught the world that the "social question" that wracked the nineteenth century could be dissolved by universal upward mobility. America taught the world that there is no reason why a majority of people ought to be poor, as poor they all had been (all but a few) until the American experiment. America was the first nation to give its people an inventive, productive "just, and generous, and prosperous system," as Abraham Lincoln put it, "which opens the way to all, and consequent energy, and progress, and improvement of condition to all." Yet despite this amazing revolution of world historical proportions, its dynamo--the business corporation--is an understudied institution, especially by scholars in the humanities. Not only is the full story not told, however, but in the bits and pieces that are recounted, the antibusiness biases of historians are an unpleasant fact of life.

The core principle guiding my thought on the corporation, here and in earlier work, has been that business is a serious vocation, open to both moral and immoral behavior. Much good can be done through business, but much evil, too--even if not as much evil as can be done, and has been done, at the hands of the state. Yet it is not only the history of business that has been neglected by scholars but also the philosophy of business--the basic analysis of what economic action is; how business practices differ in their structure from, say, artistic practices; and what the particular nature of the business corporation is. Thus, in approaching the question of the business corporation in this book, I have devoted a considerable amount of time to clarifying some basic conceptions and, I hope, to raising some deeper issues for study.

The Nature of the Corporation

First, what have been the history and distinctive nature of the business corporation? As I argue, the corporation is:
a primary institution of democracy (second only to religion) a necessary but not sufficient condition for the success of the democratic project the major material institution of civil society

My analysis also carries a prescriptive dimension, one I think particularly pressing at a time when the corporation is under fire from a new set of enemies. Chief among them are those, like the British financial journalist Will Hutton, calling for a "stakeholder" society, which seeks to leave private property, risk taking, and free markets intact--only to regulate them, harness them, and guide them so his team (on the Left) gets the fruits it wants, willy-nilly. It is time for the business corporation to take account of its own identity, its essential role in the future of self-governing republics, and its central position in the building of the chief alternative to government: civil society. The corporation is an invention of free people, not a cold meteor fallen from the skies. It has changed often in history and, by its very self-discipline, inventiveness, and creativity, has surmounted even greater threats than it faces today.

Intellectual Property

A second area needing added light is intellectual property. Too often, a clear grasp of the importance of intellectual property rights is missing, and there is often confusion as to the distinctions between patents (which cover a practical insight reduced to practice) and copyrights (which cover the unique, personal way of presenting something by a writer or an artist). Why should we protect intellectual property? Sound public policy since at least the time of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* has clung to a forthright maxim, verified in practice over and over again: If you want more of something, reward it; if you want less of something, punish it.

As I show, regimes without patents penalize inventors and reward freeloaders. Patent regimes recognize the right of inventors and authors to the fruit of their own labors as a right in common law. They do so because this right serves the common good by stimulating useful inventions and creative works from which a grateful public benefits. Far from protecting private interests at the expense of the common good, patent protection advances the common good by means of private interests. The common good is the end; private interest is the means. A patent regime serves the common good better than any known alternative. In Lincoln's words, "All of nature is a wholly unexplored mine." Patent and copyright laws, by wedding the "fuel of interest" to "the fire of genius," help us to explore that mine and make use of its gold--all the more crucial as the source of economic success increasingly rests with the inventiveness of the human mind.

Corporate Governance

Finally, much has been spoken in recent years about who should govern the business corporation, and in which structures of governance. Much of this discussion has been confused, applying models appropriate to political institutions to the corporation. But the corporation is not a political community. Checks and balances are not appropriate to the corporation, where the whole point is to create something new, to achieve something, whereas in government the whole point is to prevent leaders from achieving anything beyond the already stated powers of the union. Wisdom stresses that business corporations must act quickly, even to turn on a dime when they are losing money or when they spot suddenly arising possibilities, to take the risks for which their investors have entrusted them with well-defined executive power.

Today's leading revolutionary force is not the state but the business corporation, turning the mechanical industrial age into the electronic age. Since 1980, corporation-produced miracles such as computers, word processors, fax machines, satellite transmissions, fiber optics, genetic research, and medicines heretofore unseen have transformed the world. Under Democrats as well as Republicans, the great American job machine has continued to turn out more jobs than this country has ever known. Great experiments have also been launched (and already once or twice revised) in corporate structures, management reorganization, work groups, and internal entrepreneurship. Who today can deny that the most dynamic institution in the world is the business corporation? Thus, whatever steps are to be taken in reforming corporate governance, such steps must protect the inimitable creativity of the business corporation as a unique form of social organization. Its freedom and flexibility are the envy of other institutions.

For philosophers and theologians, the business corporation raises many fascinating--and so far barely explored--questions. Having entered into these new territories, I can only hope that future

generations of humanists will press ahead further and do better. I guarantee them that they will experience intellectual excitement and that the results of their investigations will be of great interest to many who toil in the field, too busy sometimes to set down on paper the many things that they know, wonder about, doubt, or would like to pursue further if they could. Business, born in invention, is a sea of intellectual ferment. I encourage my colleagues in humanistic studies to plunge in.

Tell Me Why

Why is religion, any religion, important? How should we think of God? Does one need to be a Mother Teresa to be a good Christian? A long list of such questions from Jana Novak to her father, theologian Michael Novak, led to Tell Me Why, an extended dialogue about religion and its bearing on contemporary life.

In the early summer of 1996, Michael Novak was at a seminar in Poland when his daughter Jana faxed a long series of questions. That message and his reply were the beginning of a correspondence between daughter and father that turned into *Tell Me Why*. In his initial reply, Michael Novak wrote: "I want to do the best thinking and writing I can, because as far as I'm concerned this is your inheritance, or the most part of it." He went on to explain, "What I have to leave you, Jana, is the inner life of our faith. It has kept our family going through wars and peace for perhaps a thousand years, in the invisible lustrous chain of God's love."

Although the Novaks pay particular attention to their Catholic heritage, their book is accessible to all persons of good will. It includes sources of inspiration from a variety of religious traditions and even a few challenges from nonbelievers. In her questions, Jana Novak forcefully challenges the truth of Catholicism and of many of its particular doctrines, and her father's responses stress beliefs and practices common to all religious traditions.

Tell Me Why is organized in three parts of four chapters each, with each chapter based on a central question or issue. The first part discusses foundational questions: Why does religion matter? Why are there so many different religions? What is God like? What difference does it make whether God exists or not?

The second part is devoted to more specific questions involved in Jana's effort to come to terms with religion: Why is our family Catholic? Can I pick and choose what I believe? Must I interpret the Bible literally? What is meant by hell and by heaven?

The final part covers practical aspects of religious life: Is sex always wrong outside of marriage, and if so, why? Is a woman really supposed to find true and total fulfillment in raising children and being a wife? Is abortion wrong under all circumstances, even when bearing the child threatens the life of the mother? Do I need to be like Mother Teresa?

The remainder of this summary consists of abridged excerpts from a few of the book's chapters.

Why Does Religion Matter?

Jana: Part of the reason I don't "have religion" is that I'm not totally convinced that my lack of religion is the problem. Why is religion—any religion—important? If one can believe in God without truly needing to believe in religion, then why bother believing in religion unless it offers you something?

Michael: Why is religion, any religion, important? My simple answer is: Because it is true. If it isn't true, you shouldn't accept it. You wouldn't want to turn to religion merely for comfort, security, or peace of mind (although that's what atheists say religion is for). Because if religion isn't true, you wouldn't find any peace of mind or comfort or security anyway.

What does religion offer? If it is worth anything, it offers a true vision of who we are; a historical tradition; communal support in a centuries-long conversation; a framework for past and future through rituals of memory and expectation; and a mission in history. Most of all: it communicates to us the presence of God. And God's best name, from this point of view, is Truth: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (John 4:16).

There is no other purpose in joining a religious community except that it is a communion bearing the truth about God, human destiny, and yourself. Keep your eye on the question of truth.

Why Are There So Many Different Religions?

Jana: Okay. So religion matters. So now what? Unfortunately, just to say that religion is necessary and important does not put the matter to rest; attempting to understand the vast variety of religions is confusing and intimidating.

If religion truly mattered, it seems there would be only one religion—or at most just a few—to imply that this is the correct path. The fact that there are many religions seems to marginalize the concept of religion, for if there are many different paths to God, who is to say that any of those paths are right?

Is each of the religions, or paths, equally valid? Or are some better than others?

Michael: In each of the major strands of religious tradition—there are fewer than a half dozen if one thinks of the "trunks" rather than the "branches"—there are worthy and beautiful things to learn and sometimes to incorporate into one's own life. But this does not deter us from judging that on this or that point some of the traditions are more sophisticated than others, more discerning, truer to human nature. Without intending to play God, or to be invidious toward others, we rank them, at least unconsciously. We do so simply for our own practical estimate regarding which to invest time in.

Jana: But why are there so many religions? What does the variety mean? Is it nothing more than superfluous branches off the one "correct" root?

Michael: God chooses to be worshiped by women and men who are free. He does not force himself upon humans, by some shattering and irresistible explosion of Light. On the contrary, he

calls softly, even whispers. God is always beating softly on the door, but the dweller inside may choose not to hear, even aggressively *refuse* to hear.

Thus, following their own intuitions and reflections in human experience, humans have generated considerable variety in trying to figure out the truth about God and ourselves. Sometimes this is out of good will, sometimes out of bad will—a refusal to heed God’s whisperings in the soul.

Jana: How does one go about choosing among the different religions? How should average people—people like me, raised in one church but unsure of where I’d like to go—explore their options?

Michael: Through careful study, critical thought, and quiet prayer. The test is not which religion is more cozy, but which seems best to reflect the truth. Some good signs are a passion for truth and inquiry, a striving to inspire a universal viewpoint (its ambition to reach out to all human beings), a credible claim that this religion originates in God, not in humans, and an ability to foster holiness of life.

What Is God Like?

Jana: Dad, I think we need to go back to the beginning. My biggest difficulty is religion, but I also have trouble thinking about God, in my own mind or talking with others. We have to go back to the first “leap” people need to make, that is, *believing* in god. We need to address why people should believe in god at all—in any god. Besides the fact that religions can be seen as lulling people into a possibly false sense of security, believing in a god does not necessarily make sense. After all, in this age of advanced technology and knowledge, when the need for a god or gods to explain the unexplainable is seemingly unnecessary, how can one believe in a god? It seems difficult to find a reason for god—let alone to prove he exists.

How can we believe in something we can’t know? That requires such a leap of faith. And if we can know him, then what is it that we know? How should we even begin to think of God?

Michael: Let me give you three point-blank answers first, and then ask you to walk back and forth across the mountain with me while we climb, trying to see these answers from a better vantage point.

The quick answers are these: First, we know that God exists by learning some things about our own acts of insight and judgment, making some inferences, and trying out—testing—some new ways of grasping reality. No one sees God directly; you have to see that he exists out of the corner of your eye, as it were, by reflection of your own inner life. That is where he is best found.

Second, the best way to think about God is probably the way most Jews and Christians and Muslims always have: as light and love. These terms require us to do some exploring, and we will.

Finally, remember that even the God of Israel and Christianity revealed himself very slowly in history. He tolerates a lot of ambiguity and has very long time-horizons (so to speak). Humans have only a limited ability to see. It takes generations of trial and error even to get the questions

right. God knows humans are groping to find him on their own and making lots of mistakes; the Bible shows this. If Judaism and Christianity can imagine God in this way, we need to loosen up our imaginations, too, and not hold God to narrow expectations.

Can I Pick and Choose What I Believe?

Jana: First, I want to say up front that I'm not trying to "cheat" or be lazy—whether intellectually or physically. Now, say I've picked a religion and a church to belong to and I embrace what they stand for and believe in, the problem is, what if I don't want to embrace everything? Is there room within a religion for disagreements? I'm not saying that someone should be able to choose a Christian church and decline to believe in Jesus, for example, or that someone can remain a member while supporting an idea that completely undermines the religion. Obviously neither of those situations is compatible with belief in that particular religion.

What I am curious about is whether one can disagree with one's own religion on the slightly more "peripheral"—and I use that word with great hesitation—issues such as married priests, women priests, etc. As most people know, the Catholic Church does not allow either married or women priests. Now, since I disagree with the Church on these issues (I particularly would like to see married priests), does that mean I shouldn't bother belonging to the Catholic Church? Or is there room for discussion, debate, and disagreement? Let's face it, some of the other Christian churches do allow priests (or ministers) to be women or to marry—the Episcopal Church, for example—so wouldn't it make more sense for me to become an Episcopalian?

In other words, should I choose the religion I most agree with on all the issues and embrace it? Or, can I reject certain practices of the church to which I belong and still remain a "true" member? That is, can one pick and choose the issues of one's religion that one is willing to accept?

Again, it is not that I want to cheat to avoid the amount of effort believing and belonging requires, but there are certain stances with which I don't, or may not, agree. What then?

Michael: Let me start by rephrasing your most practical question: On those days when you think that the Catholic Church should allow the ordination of women, just like the Episcopal Church, you wonder if it wouldn't be more honest for you just to become an Episcopalian. And the same when you think that Catholic priests should be allowed to marry, just like the Episcopal priests and the ministers of most other churches.

The *easy* course of action for someone of your beliefs is to note that there are a lot of Catholics who agree with you, and to take comfort in their company. There *are* people who think that the issue of women priests is so central that they are prepared to leave the Catholic Church (unless they hope for some change in the future). But most people who express an opinion on these two points do not consider them central enough for so drastic a break. Thus to your question: Can you still be a Catholic while holding that there should be women priests and married priests? (I recognize that your question is more general, for all believers, but this is one example.) My first answer is, yes, many Catholics share such reservations, on these or other matters. These are not the utterly central issues of Christian faith. They do not figure in the Nicene Creed or any other major creed. You could still hold a tremendous amount in common with other Catholics,

including all the essentials, and not be convinced on these and similar matters.

If the easy course is simply to go along, taking comfort from the company of other dissenters, the harder course is to work at figuring out what is wrong (if anything) in your dissent. Remind yourself of the reasons why you attribute any teaching authority to the Church in the first place. If Christ did not entrust that authority to the Church, and if the Holy Spirit does not protect and guide her in the fulfillment of that task, what would be the point of heeding her teaching, even for a moment?

In summary, then, can you just pick and choose? Not quite. Not without cheating yourself and God. But it is important not to lose a sense of proportion, and to give yourself time to inquire into things, one by one. Faith must be grown into. It does not come ready-made.

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Human Rights and the New Realism

An inquiry into the nature of human rights, the relationship of the issue of human rights to policy making and strategic thinking, and the effect of the human rights issue on the conflict between the Soviet Union and the Western liberal democracies. Michael Novak begins by boldly stating five theses of human rights. He proceeds to clarify what he means by human rights in the Judeo-Christian tradition that underlies Western political thought and concludes with a variety of policy recommendations.

On Cultivating Liberty: Reflections on Moral Ecology

On Cultivating Liberty, a collection of essays by theologian Michael Novak, is divided into three sections. The first, "Liberty: The Virtue and the Institutions," collects several of Novak's most important essays on the free society, written over the past decade and a half. The section moves from the foundations of liberty (chapters one and two) to specific historical and institutional questions of the free society (chapters three through five) and concludes with a meditation on the family, which is for Novak a school of practical wisdom and a fierce enemy to all projects to engineer the human soul. The second section, "Liberty: The Tradition and Some of Its Heroes," is a look at some of the most profound theorists of freedom: Thomas Aquinas, Jacques Maritain, Reinhold Niebuhr, Irving Kristol, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and John Paul II. The third section is an afterword containing the intellectual autobiography "Errand into the Wilderness," which traces Novak's disaffection with the Left, his immersion in political economy, and his understanding of his work. In addition, the volume contains a "Readers' Guide" to Novak's major writings.

Michael Novak is best known for his wide-ranging exploration of the ideal and practice of "democratic capitalism." Novak's journey through political economy—understood in the most

capacious sense—began with the architectonic *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (1982), developed with *The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1993), and continued with two recent books, *Business as a Calling* (1996) and *The Fire of Invention* (1997), that looked at democratic capitalism from within. Novak's writings on democratic capitalism, which grew out of the long process of self-education described in the autobiographical "Errand into the Wilderness," included in this volume, seek to take back the moral high ground socialism claimed for most of the twentieth century. Socialists, with many fellow-traveling liberal intellectuals in tow, had long excoriated the capitalist societies for their many failures—from economic inequality to pervasive consumerism. As Novak painstakingly argued, however, socialists unfairly compared the ideal of socialism with the practice of democratic capitalism. Had they bothered to look closely at the reality of existing socialism, they would have discovered what the British political theorist John Gray felicitously called "the system of ruins."

Conversely, capitalism's enemies paid no attention to the moral goods democratic capitalism promised and, in many cases, realized: the rule of law, the intrinsic dignity of the individual, the encouragement of creativity, economic prosperity, and the challenge and moral decency of a life in business. We can safely say in post-Marxist 1999 that Novak won the argument, though the socialist idea continues to burn, albeit more dimly, on college campuses and in academic publishing houses across the globe. Now the contention has increasingly shifted to finding out what kind of capitalism works best. Among the possibilities: the "American" model of openness to innovation; the "Rhine" model of risk-averse social democracy; or an "Asian" capitalism more communitarian than either of its worldly rivals.

A Global Vision of the Free Society

But Novak's work extends far beyond the defense of market institutions to encompass a global vision of the free society in all its dimensions—political, moral, and cultural, as well as economic. The purpose of *On Cultivating Liberty* is to highlight this broader dimension of Novak's thought by publishing a range of essays—two appearing here for the first time, and several in substantially expanded versions—on "how to make a republic work" (to borrow a title from Novak's 1987 lectures at the University of Notre Dame).

If the free society won its debate with socialism, it has not won its debate with itself: to build or preserve a free society requires vigilantly tending to what Novak calls "the moral ecology" to prevent moral relativism from corrupting it. The essays collected here offer a sharp corrective to the moral deregulation that threatens democratic societies, despite their immense productivity and unprecedented liberties, with fragmented families, escalating crime, an overextended government that enervates the human spirit, and, at the limit, what Pope John Paul II calls "the culture of death," a cheapening of human life that attacks society's vulnerable: the unborn, the infirm, the elderly. The free society, Novak warns, will survive only if it grounds itself in an order of moral truth that transcends it.

Three Major Threads

Three major threads—each a crucial part of Novak's thought—run through the essays in *On Cultivating Liberty*.

Man's nature: dignified and sinful. As Novak stresses, man is made in the image of

God—capable of reflection, choice, remarkable acts of creativity, communal solidarity, and a life well and virtuously led. But man is fallen, too, immersed in the sin that mocks his pretensions and from which none of us ever completely frees himself. That dual aspect of human nature has political and economic implications: anti-utopianism (no earthly city will ever be the city of God); an emphasis on unintended consequences (given human blindness because of sin and finitude, the social world cannot be programmed like a computer); the need for political and economic institutions that cultivate man’s creative and rational side and that discourage his weaknesses, but that always remain sensitive to the human capacity for good and evil. (See “Twice Chosen: Irving Kristol as American” and “Errand into the Wilderness.”)

Liberty and truth. Nihilism has been “the dark underground river of the twentieth century.” (See “Truth and Liberty: The Foundations of the Republic.”) Liberal theorists, many of whom bravely resisted the totalitarian temptation, have not been as successful in escaping the twin seductions of the nihilistic view of freedom: that no moral constraints, whether natural or supernatural, limit the will; and that the will is sovereign, lord and master of all it surveys, a pure force of self-invention, at no time more commanding than when it rejects reason. To Novak, this is a dramatically false and ultimately self-destructive conception of liberty. Upon its relativistic base, no republic can stand. Novak’s alternative understanding of *ordered* liberty—of liberty as self-government—links many of the essays in this volume and brings together thinkers as diverse as Irving Kristol and Pope John Paul II, each of whom is profiled in the book.

From state to civil society. The twentieth century has witnessed an unprecedented growth in state power, a development closely related to the abandonment of liberty as self-government. That growth has taken monstrous forms, with the emergence of totalitarian regimes that exacted a terrifying cost in human suffering; and it has taken more benign forms, in the emergence of the social democratic “mixed” regimes that managed, at least for a time, to combine political and intellectual liberties with some redistribution of economic wealth. But even in its benign forms, the growth of the state has had deleterious results: it replaced the vibrant associations of civil society with stultifying government bureaucracy, and it sapped economic productivity—to such an extent that Europe’s social democracies can no longer afford their overgenerous welfare systems. (See “The Crisis of the Welfare State.”) Novak’s response to the expansion of the state is to call for a reinvigoration of civil society, that realm of associations between individual and state where men and women pursue their interests and learn, as Tocqueville explained, how to be citizens of a democracy. (See “Civil Society and Self-Government.”)

To highlight these three themes is not to deny the existence of other rich veins running through *On Cultivating Liberty*: grappling with the “boredom” of democratic capitalist societies; controversially articulating a “Whig” tradition of political thought running from Thomas Aquinas to Friedrich Hayek, open to progress but respectful of the past; exploring the tension-filled intersection between religion and democracy, the centrality of the family to the free society, and the permanence of tragedy; and making many more forays in neoconservative political theory. The picture that emerges by the end of the volume is of a complex thinker, working to synthesize classical insights into the possibilities and limits of human nature with modern institutional advances that protect the individual from arbitrary power in politics, economics, morality, and culture.

On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding

Contrary to conventional histories, the American Republic took flight on two wings: not only on the Enlightenment, but also on faith in the God of the ancient Hebrews, the God of liberty. In the first chapter of this book, "Jewish Metaphysics at the Founding," the author shows that the God of the founders was not the God of Deism. The public acts of the Continental Congress employ the Hebrew names of God and their implied metaphysics of open history, contingency, individuality, and liberty. Of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence and thirty-eight signers of the Constitution, all but one or two were deeply influenced by the Hebrew Bible.

Seven events show the power of the "second wing" that propelled the founding:

- The first act of the First Continental Congress was a resolution on September 7, 1774, calling for a public prayer, and the next day the Congress listened with palpable emotion as a white-stoled clergyman read the Thirty-fifth Psalm.
- The fires of the revolution were lit predominantly by sermons, such as the one preached by John Witherspoon, the president of Princeton University, on May 17, 1776.
- The Declaration of Independence was amended by the Congress to include four Hebrew names for God: Lawgiver (as in "Laws of Nature and Nature's God"); Creator ("endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights"); Judge ("appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our Intentions"); and Providence ("with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence").
- By official decree, Congress set aside December 11, 1776, as a Day of Fasting and Repentance, begging God's favor on the struggle for liberty.
- Commander-in-Chief George Washington gave orders that each day begin with formal prayer, that each regiment procure as chaplains persons of good character and exemplary lives, and that each chaplain see to it that all officers and soldiers "attend carefully upon religious exercises."
- In official statements, the founders cited the actions of Providence at critical junctures of the war, as when a thick fog rolled in to cover Washington's narrow escape from a British assault on Long Island.
- Congress decreed national Days of Thanksgiving for the "signal interventions" of Providence, beseeching God to establish the "independence of these United States upon the basis of religion and virtue," for example, on October 20, 1779, October 26, 1781, and October 11, 1782.

These events cannot be explained on the basis of the Enlightenment alone.

The Faith of the Founders

Chapter two, "Plain Reason and Humble Faith," shows that by "reason" the founders meant the qualities of mind to which The Federalist addressed its arguments: sober reflection and calm deliberation, an ability to overcome passion and self-interest, a capacity to consider the larger picture, and a due regard for the long experience of mankind. Faith is the habit of seeing things through the eyes of the Creator, as discerned in the Bible. James Wilson said, "The law of nature and the law of revelation are both divine; they flow, though through different channels, from the same adorable source." Thomas Jefferson, perhaps the least religious founder, often stated his belief in a Creator, Governor, Providence, and Judge to Whom all will answer after death. As in classical Christian writing, the founders placed Lockean terms such as "state of nature" and "nature's law" in a biblical context.

To the benefit of republican institutions, faith adds several worldly strengths to reason: a cosmic stage for the drama of liberty; instruction in a watchful conscience; restraint of vice and gains in social peace; fixed, stable, and general ideas on the meaning of life; a check on the downward bias of material interests; a conception of morality as a personal relation with the Creator; a motive for acting well even in secret; and the quiet regulation of mores in marriage, to undergird social trust in the larger polity.

Chapter three weaves together separate strands of American experience: the inalienable loneliness of individual conscience before the face of God, a new type of moral community, and a new religious architectonic. Because human beings in pursuit of their own happiness have a propensity to trample on the rights of others, religious liberty is fragile. To block this abuse, the founders provided public pillars of moral strength in many religions, rather than one national establishment of one religion. Three stories bring these strands together: how the young James Madison reacted to a posse that rode up on horseback, halted the sermon of a Baptist minister, and gave him a public whipping for not having license to preach; why the new constitution of Massachusetts moved to provide universal religious education; and how the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights carefully refrained both from establishing a national church and from disestablishing the existing state churches. These stories illustrate the new order of the ages: a community of free consciences, anchored in moral and religious seriousness.

James Madison had opposed a Bill of Rights, for fear such a bill would weaken any rights left unexpressed. Under pressure from the Baptists, who wanted their religious rights written down (they did not trust the Virginia Anglicans), he masterfully guided the Bill of Rights through Congress. The Congress designed the First Amendment ("Congress shall make no law") not to indicate hostility or opposition to religion, but rather approval of it as indispensable to the well-being of a free republic. The six different versions of the First Amendment serially put forward the will of Congress:

(1) The civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience in any manner or on any pretext be infringed. (2) No religion shall be established by law, nor shall the equal rights of conscience be infringed. (3) Congress shall make no laws touching religion, or infringing the rights of conscience. (4) Congress shall make no law establishing religion, or to prevent the free exercise thereof, or to infringe the rights of conscience. (5) Congress shall make no laws establishing articles of faith or a mode of worship or prohibiting the free exercise of religion. . . . (6) Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. . . .

John Adams of Massachusetts observed that religious liberty is threatened by human sloth; people are inclined to take the easiest and most self-indulgent path. Against this downward drift, Adams reasoned thus: A Republic lives by liberty, not license. Liberty cannot be exercised without an honor guard of virtues, such as temperance, self-control, fair-mindedness, courage, and sound practical judgment. That honor guard of virtues is highly unlikely to remain vigilant from one generation to another without religious awakenings. Religious awakening depends on an experimental, self-critical, and lively religious education. The Massachusetts Constitution, therefore, mandated public funding for religious education.

Throughout the new nation, the sense of community was more powerful than individualism, as was expressed in the patriotic slogan, “United we stand, divided we fall.” The Union, born in the blood of patriots in 1776 and forged in the communal process of ratification by every participating state after 1787, was not formed by a mere legal contract, but by a covenant that inspired men to give their lives for it. (One of the striking ironies of American history is that many today think of America as a nation of individuals, whereas our ancestors fought and died for Union.) The founders understood solitary individuals to be morally untrustworthy, in need of the support of strong moral communities. On the other hand, republican virtue rests on more than one religious tradition. A pluralistic grounding is truer to the genius of Christianity than the establishment of one national religion.

Religion and Liberty

Chapter four, “A Religious Theory of Rights,” highlights the founders’ deep sense of personal responsibility before the Divine Judge. No human agency can interfere with that responsibility. Each man and woman has been created by God, is called to be a friend of God, and will be held responsible for a personal response. In this inalienable responsibility lies the ground of human dignity. Natural rights are grounded in faith in a Divine Judge. (See “Madison’s ‘Remonstrance’” and Jefferson’s draft for the Virginia “Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom.”)

Some philosophers today argue that the philosophical basis of “natural right” is incompatible with Christian faith. The founders, they purport, intended to subordinate religion to politics, in the hope that religion would be driven into the private realm and ultimately wither as a public reality. Yet the founding documents show that the inalienable liberty of every individual comes directly from the Creator and Judge. The founders wanted religion to prosper—as the bodyguard of liberty.

While standing solidly in the tradition of natural and civic virtue launched by Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, and others, the logic of the founding has been enlarged by biblical perspectives. This new logic moves through these steps: The engines of liberty are acts of reflection and choice. These acts imply responsibility and give rise to a highly moral concept of the natural right to liberty. On the centrality of liberty, revelation and reason seem to reach mutually supporting conclusions. Without certain kinds of habits (such as calm equanimity, honesty, and balanced judgment), liberty cannot be sustained. “Confirm thy soul in self-control” is an imperative to practice self-government. Given the tendency of human morals to decline over time, a free society is inherently precarious. Only a source stronger than moral reflection can arrest this remorseless entropy, and that source is a constantly self-reforming religion. Trial and error teach that the advantages of liberty and the virtues it inculcates are better secured when religion is not established.

From the beginning, Catholic travelers who came to America—Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, Philip Mazzei, Thaddeus Kosciusko, Casimir Pulaski, Le Marquis de Lafayette, and Alexis de Tocqueville—expressed a powerful affinity for the American experiment and found America closer to the Catholic vision of the good City than any previous regime in history, for four reasons:

- In its very founding, as manifested in the ratification debates, this Republic rests upon the classical activities of reflection and choice.
- The American synthesis of faith and reason rests comfortably with the Catholic tradition (more so than in the evangelical Protestant tradition).
- America is publicly open to the transcendent God, in the sense that the power of Congress cannot seal off the sphere of the Almighty: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion,

or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

- In honoring the natural and civic virtues without ceasing to give thanks to God, American political culture honors both nature and grace.

In chapter five, the author replies to ten questions, including: You would not pray to “nature’s God,” would you? Why does the Enlightenment receive exclusive attention in the formation of the U.S. Republic? Does faith mean religious conviction in general, or a commitment to a specific creed and community? Has the Bill of Rights led inadvertently to relativism? Does the American system de facto subordinate the church to the civil order, and thus create a system to which no true Christian can give allegiance?

The answers given to these questions are often surprising.

The appendix, “The Forgotten Founders,” selects nineteen vignettes from the lives of the top 100 leaders of the founding generation, especially the lesser-known figures who signed the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, plus a few other opinion leaders. Tom Paine, who rejected the Bible, believed in God so strongly that he rushed to France after 1789 to campaign vigorously against atheism. One cannot deny the existence of God, he said, without taking away the foundation of human rights. Alexander Hamilton made tender requests that the Holy Eucharist be brought to him on his deathbed. Other stories shed light on the faith of the three Carrolls (Charles, Daniel, and John), John Witherspoon, Gouverneur Morris, Patrick Henry, Benjamin Rush, William Paca, John Dickinson, James Wilson, Roger Sherman, and George Mason.