

CHAPTER 8 Michael Novak and the Theology of Democratic Capitalism

8.1 The Questions: some initial remarks

I now need to apply my questions to Novak's writing, as I did to Cone's in chapter 7, in order to test both the questions and the adequacy of Novak's use of the Bible.

As with Cone, I need to make the point that my questions and writing do not cover the sum total of Novak's thinking and contribution to theology, but give one slant only; but it will be a test of my questions to consider the extent to which this approach does justice to the whole range of his thinking and writing.

In 1981, Novak wrote: "It is useful to distinguish between two types of criticism – (one that accepts ideals and criticises faithlessness to them, the other that questions the ideals) and it is helpful when critics are self-conscious and honest about which ideals actually move them."¹ I shall try to be self-conscious and honest, and to look at the ideals and Novak's consistency to them: faithlessness and inconsistency are present in us all, but we can strive against them; false ideals are just as dangerous – perhaps more so.

At a personal level, my reaction to Novak has been complex, and has become less hostile over several years of reading his writing. I find myself having some sympathy for his enthusiasm for business, but rather provoked by his almost uncritical zeal for Catholicism and the United States of America. Some of his thinking on wealth creation has been a welcome contribution to theology; the Churches (certainly the Church of England, to take the example about which I can speak most authoritatively) seem to have been rather too coy about business and profit and money over the last century. On the other hand, his style of writing, with all its flowery imagery, has often felt irritating. I have been suspicious about the extent of "spin" put on his thinking by associates from the American Enterprise Institute: for example, the summary of his writings by Cross of the AEI: Michael Novak: The Major

¹ Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 53

Writings,² hardly admits that he has changed sides politically,³ and portrays his thinking as a seamless whole projected by the young Novak in the flare of the Pennsylvania steelworks. It offers a gentle image of Novak which sits ill with some of his more acid attacks on the left in his later works.⁴ Reactions to Novak's politics do have to be considered alongside an understanding of the differences between American and British political culture, and especially the relative positions of left and centre politics in the two countries.

Novak's changed political alignment might make it unfair to quote earlier work alongside later work as an example of inconsistency; perhaps impossible to do so as an elucidation of his thinking. However, I would argue that in some important ways Novak's work does cohere.⁵ From first to last, he wrestles with the twin facts that he is American, and that he is Roman Catholic. These two poles and the tension between them lead him to fervent advocacy of both, to the change in his political views, to the analysis of each in the light of the other, and to his current position, where he sees them hand in hand. I shall therefore have no hesitation in quoting from every part of his work, as I apply my questions.

Novak is not a Biblical scholar; in fact he is quite explicit about not using the Bible⁶. Alongside this must be set the thinking of Vatican II, reported by Novak⁷, that the Bible should take a greater place in Roman Catholic thinking. In fact, Novak does allude to and quote from the Bible, and although the question of whether he is a theologian is hard to answer, he does wish to approach political economy from a theological point of view. So I argue that it is legitimate to persist in putting my questions to him.

2 compiled by Derek Cross and Brian Anderson, Michael Novak: The Major Writings (AEI 1998)

3 see Chapter 6 section 6.4

4 see for example Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 14 and 15 where he attacks Maryknoll, Mr Sirey, House Speaker O'Neill, Ernesto Cardenal, and Leonardo Boff, continuing, "[The Pope] recognises the disguises in which Marxists always hide their purposes."

5 Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) pp 35, 36 argues that the theme of liberty has been constant in Novak's thinking; in fact he argues that Novak's "theology is a consistent and passionate defence of liberalism and modernity."

6 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p xv see below under question 3) c) 215

7 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) pp 10, 11 and p 81 again see below under question 3) c) 215

In chapter 7 I described how the largest mass of quotations and notes coming out of the process of my interaction with Cone related to question 3) b). The balance is very different with Novak – that is to say, much more evenly spread.

As with Cone there are a number of themes running through Novak's work, as well as the two central ones (that he is American and Roman Catholic). I note here his concern with practical, pragmatic matters – what really actually works; his interest in liberty; his interest in the world (as opposed to the Church) and especially in politics and economics. All these, in addition to the two central themes, I deal with as they arise through my questions.

8.2 Background

“Novak could no longer stomach the moralistic tone or rhetoric of modern liberalism. McGovern's idealistic whining had put him over the edge. More than he realised, Novak was turning to the political Right.... In the mid 1970s the lack of a single example of democratic socialism implied something about democratic socialism even as an ideal. Novak found this disorientating and disillusioning, not even talking to his wife about it.”⁸

“Neo-conservatism ... secured numerous positions in the Reagan and Bush administrations and sustained highly effective coalitions with paleo-conservative, New Right and other conservative forces. In the 1980s while increasingly straining from various tensions with their conservative allies, neo-conservatives developed an elaborate infrastructure of institutes, think tanks, journals and consulting forums.”⁹

This very brief look at the background to Novak's work focuses only on the situation leading up to The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism,¹⁰ because this is where his new theology of democratic capitalism was born.

⁸ Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995) pp 162, 194

⁹ Dorrien : Soul in Society (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1995) p 199

Franz J Hinkelammert puts it slightly differently: “In the 1960s theological centres of completely new character appeared. The first was the department of theology of the American Enterprise Institute directed by Michael Novak. Its reason for existing was to protest against liberation theology in Latin America and the U.S. It was followed soon after by the Institute of Religion and Democracy, directed by Peter Berger, an entity that had the same purpose, but acted more at a state level of political organisations and churches in the United States. M Novak's books, which appeared in Spanish, were distributed by impressarial organisations in Latin America and by the US Embassies on the continents.” Hinkelammert : “Liberation Theology in the Economic and Social Context of Latin America : Economy and Theology, or the Irrationality of the Rationalised” (trans Elizabeth Wing) in ed Batstone, Mendieta, Lorentzen and Hopkins : Liberation Theology, Postmodernity and the Americas (Routledge, New York 1997) p 36

¹⁰ Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (1st edition Simon and Schuster, New York 1982)

8.3 The Questions Applied

8.3. 1) a) *How has he fulfilled his responsibility for the rationality and clarity of the conversation?*

“The first of all moral obligations is to think clearly”: so Novak writes near the beginning of what many have seen as his most influential book.¹¹ On the whole Novak does indeed think, and write clearly. He locates himself as a philosopher/theologian, looking into culture at first, but later into political economy: “In the end, my goal is to present a sort of rounded philosophy or theology of culture (I do not believe there is a sustainable difference between philosophy and theology; the distinction is an accident of history)”¹²

Early in his work, he wrestles with a philosophical problem important to his project at that time. He attempts to put both common sense, and scientific method into a framework which also allows for other kinds of thinking as well – for example, religious thinking. He therefore writes about the human subject which has the capacity for “intelligent subjectivity” – a mode of thinking which has room for both rational, reflective thought and also emotional, effective thought.¹³

He shows himself aware of the danger, and pervasive nature, of presuppositions¹⁴ but uses ideas linked to intelligent subjectivity to suggest how being aware allows the possibility of facing the problem.¹⁵ “Every argument about deciding on criteria by which to conduct one’s enquiries and one’s

11 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 20

12 Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p 341

Incidentally there is support for this view from an unexpected quarter: Batstone “Introduction” in eds Batstone, Medieta, Lorentzen, Hopkins : Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity and the Americas (Routledge, New York 1997) p 11 : “The coronation of Christianity as the state religion in the fourth century under Emperor Constantine transformed theology into the queen of the sciences, making philosophy a mere ancillary.... Note the hubris of a church that had forgotten its humble origins....”

13 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 71

14 “Professional elites don’t always realise how much they impose their own view of the world....” Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p38

see also Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 51

and also Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 104: “They were not at all self critical. They were so preoccupied with their own method of deciding questions that they never stopped to ask themselves: “Is this the only method? The best method? Where did it come from and why am I adopting it?”

15 This is of course exactly what I argue in this thesis.

actions is of necessity circular: it begins from and returns to one's idea of one's self. The circularity may be broken only at one point: intelligent self consciousness.”¹⁶ “Granted that values are relative, how do I wish to live?”¹⁷

He is also well aware, therefore of what may be the limits of rationality: “If you want such a universe, including men such as we, you accept evils. But why God chose such a universe rather than another, except that in his eyes it is a good universe, no man can know.”¹⁸ This does not blind him to the need to test statements of faith.¹⁹

Another feature of his rationality is his concentration on the pragmatic and practical. “Words are not enough; abstract definitions are not enough; his views must meet the test of facts....the bar of concrete reality.”²⁰ “In the real world, it is not enough to appeal to the perfect; one must propose a workable alternative.”²¹ It is the test of the practical by which Novak later fails Liberation Theology and socialism. Interestingly, given this emphasis, and given his later view that Roman Catholicism and democratic capitalism are most in tune with each other, and further given the longstanding Roman Catholic opposition to Communism, Novak has the problem that it is largely the Catholic nations (for example in South America) which have essayed Liberation Theology.²² In later books, he extols pragmatically the success of the nations of Pacific rim, and of Reaganomics and Thatcherism²³ in a way which, at least with the benefits of hindsight from 2001, seems to be giving a hostage to fortune to his opponents.

16 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 73

17 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 52

18 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 171

19 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 80: “...does a man not sometimes wish to be faithful to a vision of his own? I need criteria by which to pass judgement on such visions.”

20 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 55

21 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 35

see also Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 204 “Thus a biblical theme extremely important to the metaphysics of liberalism is that of human earthiness, contingency, sin: the “modesty,” the “lowliness,” of the biblical view of man.”

22 “In theory, Catholic social thought is nicely balanced as between the individual and society, avoiding excesses at both extremes and drawing on what is important in both. In practice Catholic nations seem all the more vulnerable to both political tyranny and economic stagnation.....” Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 87

23 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 425

One flaw in this pragmatism is that it can lead to over-simplification. Novak, for example, invites us to evaluate (perhaps even rank) nations and societies “by their fruits. . . . Imagine that all nations are running a race, such as the race to which St Paul compared the race for salvation.”²⁴ Novak should not so easily convince us that we can judge all the complexity of a nation by simple criterion.

This brings us to the areas where Novak’s thinking seems less than wholly clear and rational. He has some quite surprising blind spots in the area of theology. “One sits in [sports arenas] surrounded by ghostly ancestors, as at the Mass one is surrounded by the hosts who have since Abraham celebrated a Eucharist.”²⁵ I also find surprising the extent to which he uses the words “gods” and “Fates” in this book.²⁶ In fact he has some quite inexcusable solecisms.²⁷ There are also some minor inconsistencies,²⁸ and places where I would want to argue with him over details.²⁹

24 Novak and Preston : Christian Capitalism or Christian Socialism (IEA 1994) p 10

25 Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p 123

see also Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 37, and perhaps Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 135

26 Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) pp xv, 30, 81, 84, 87, 125, 129

see also Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p 116 and elsewhere.

27 “Western civilisation is possible because it has triumphed over envy – largely through the invention of the market” Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 205

“Think how many, now today, believe in Global Warming; think how many believe in a coming Ice Age. . . .” Novak: Awakening from Nihilism (Crisis Books 1995) p 50

“What would the lawless territory of this continent have been without a little intimidation?” Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p 64

“It is not that football satisfies everything. It doesn’t offer much guidance in how to understand a woman.” Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p xv

28 A story about a soccer match in southern France is described in Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 21 as having been witnessed by a friend, but in Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p 157 as having been witnessed by Novak himself.

29 for example:

a) some of his calculations, facts and figures seem to have been sourced in a biased way, and could bear a different interpretation.

Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 281 gives details of US investment in Latin America and the extent of returns on it. Novak argues that the investments are small and the returns reasonable. Recent campaigns by the Jubilee 2000 group on debt relief, and by The World Development Group on multi-nationals would dispute this.

Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 181 gives details of the tax burden on the (super) rich; Novak suggests that a socialism which targets this is fuelled by resentment.

b) his descriptions of Marxism could be seen as tendentious, and his choice of experts on Marxism is questionable see Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 15

More significantly, there are several areas where his thinking needs further examination. The chief topic is ‘the market’; more minor ones his stereotyping; his attitudes to the USA³⁰, and to the Roman Catholic Church, especially the Popes. The material on the USA and the Church seems to belong best in the section under question 2) a) about the recognition of the writer’s own presuppositions and commitments.

The Market

Novak argues that ‘markets’ are democratic and open – one person’s money being as good as the next’s; he argues that they are unpatronising, allowing people to be the judges of their own best interests³¹; he argues that they are beneficial, for the good of individuals in the market agglomerates (as if by an unseen hand) to the good of many; he argues that they have evolved to be the most efficient carriers of information whereas, counter-intuitively, centrally planned economies do not work – because of the danger of unforeseen consequences in complex systems, because central planning stifles human enterprise, and slows down responses to changes, and because in fact information is not carried efficiently.

These arguments have been well rehearsed and are apparently accepted by most governments in the world at the moment. However, these issues need to be examined in greater depth. The New Right and neo-conservatives (Novak distinguishes them) would argue that markets need to be free – but in fact no market is completely free, and no Government seems prepared to relinquish all control, for

c) he argues as if there were no limits to growth; from a Christian and an economic point of view this can be disputed: see Novak: This Hemisphere of Liberty: A Philosophy of the Americas (AEI Press, Washington, D.C.: 1990) p 35

d) he describes nature itself as violent and polluting, and therefore as it were excuses human pollution; in fact the quantity of some human pollution (greenhouse gases, for example) and its nature (synthetic organic pesticides and other poisons, for example) are quite different; further, the damage from volcanoes and earthquakes is unavoidable. Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 268

e) his history – he writes about the nineteenth century anti-capitalist tradition in the churches (Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 12) citing, from Britain, Belloc and Chesterton, neither of whom actually flourished in the 19th century, and neither of whom might be called typical.

f) In Novak : The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) p 205 he attacks (Governmental) social planning – yet any successful company has planning at its heart

30 Novak, who argues in favour of democracy, is supportive of the USA’s policy opposing the democratically elected Sandinistas in Nicaragua. See Novak : Will it Liberate ? (Paulist Press 1986) p 15

31 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 95

obvious reasons. But in that case, the discussion is not about laissez-faire free markets versus state control, but about the appropriateness of controls – which areas, the extent of control, and so on. The areas of defence and foreign policy impinge on trade with enemies or rivals; relatively lighter or heavier burdens of taxation on different sorts of fuel may be subject to intense lobbying (to which Governments are sensitive) by different parts of the transport industry; consumer safety produces vast amounts of regulation; companies which are too successful can dominate the market through monopolies, thereby destroying the free market which allowed them to grow – so Governments limit growth and predatory activity. The list of areas where the market is not, and probably cannot be, free could be extended. Novak seems to avoid this whole area of discussion.³²

There is another way in which the free market is a fantasy. What economists call ‘externalities’ are an acknowledgement that market transactions have results not limited to those engaging in them. One example is pollution. Novak suggests that consumers should be allowed to choose whether to pay more for petrol to protect the environment.³³ But of course I am affected by my neighbour; it is not sufficient for me to choose the less-polluting, more expensive option; nearly everyone in the world must choose the same, or the effect is lost.³⁴ Only Government intervention (perhaps only international intervention) can deal with this type of issue.³⁵

A second example relates to raw materials, the consumption of which will affect future generations. Novak is an enthusiastic advocate of ideas of wealth creation; he points out that oil was an un-used resource until human beings invented the internal combustion engine – which therefore created wealth out of what had previously been waste. He misses the point that oil companies actually get the crude oil for nothing; to be sure, they must pay for the land, pay taxes, pay extraction fees, pay for the extraction equipment, pay for the discovery of the oil field – but they do not pay for the crude oil itself, a product of millions of years of activity by plants and sun and bacteria. So that part of the industry is never adequately valued; nature is never as it were compensated; the stock of usable raw

³² Of course these points have been made widely in Christian critiques of the free market of R Preston : Church and Society in the Late Twentieth Century : The Economic and Political Task (SCM 19823) see eg pp 46 ff – so that Novak’s weaknesses in this area are compounded.

³³ Novak: The American Vision: An essay on the future of Democratic Capitalism (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI), Washington 1978) p 44

³⁴ The situation is exactly the same for diseases like cholera and TB – which is what led Governments to intervene in public health issues from the nineteenth century onwards.

³⁵ Recent events regarding the United States refusal to abide by the Kyoto Treaty on CO₂ emissions underline this point.

materials is depleted. If this were priced into the production of petro-chemicals, perhaps a different balance in production would be reached, a different rate of exploration and exploitation.

Whilst it is on the whole true that free markets do not distinguish between persons, the caveat is: so long as they have money or credit. For example, unless access to the law is entirely paid for by the state those who are rich can better afford to pay for lawyers, better afford the risks of going to court. But if access to the law is unequal, the very business transactions undergirded by contract law and patent law become unequal. By the same token, a rich player in the market can better afford to weather the ups and downs of stocks and shares than a poor player. The rich player, skill at playing the market being assumed equal, can then choose to wait to buy or sell at more advantageous prices than the poor player.³⁶

A deeper point is the way in which values are set. The free market system seems always to value scarcity: a rare postage stamp and a very senior executive both command high prices in the market because of their scarcity.³⁷ This is not the same as their utility to the community – as St Paul reminds us.³⁸ If at least some of the poor are poor simply because what they can offer is not scarce, then perhaps the free market is not working as efficiently and effectively as Novak would have us believe.³⁹

Novak makes much of the test of practical concrete results: here the market has, he claims, impressive credentials. Yet in some ways it seems also flawed. In the United Kingdom the reforms of the market under Mrs Thatcher's Conservative Government to make it less fettered seem to have produced a society where people are unwilling to join the mediating structures and institutions which Novak rightly points out are essential for society to continue to function⁴⁰. More widely, there seem to be many who feel excluded from the felicity the market was supposed to bring.

36 An example often given is that of futures trading in raw materials; Zambia, for example, was at one point reliant on copper exports for foreign exchange; when buyers stockpiled copper, Zambia was forced to sell at a lower price.

37 see Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 24

38 I Corinthians ch 12

39 Thinkers like Friedman and Hayek would accept that there is an element of luck in being successful in a market as well as factors of skill and power: these rather undermine claims of efficiency and effectiveness.

40 see for example: Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 195

Novak has some justification when he criticises the claims made for planned economies, and also when he points out the strengths of market democracies; his passion in arguing that true concern for the poor actually means looking for solutions which improve their life is perfectly reasonable; but as a theologian, even if not as an active political economist, he ought to consider a serious critique of the ideas he is advocating.

Stereotyping

Novak seems particularly prone to stereotyping, and I give examples of three types: male/female; Protestant/Catholic; national.

“Wives can tell, rather quickly, whether their husbands’ teams have won or lost.”⁴¹

“Protestants are serious, so even when writing about play make it ‘important’ Catholics are steeped in the pre-Calvinist era of the medieval festival.”⁴²

“Germans do not grasp the social bonds which, for Anglo-Americans, are implicit in the practice of the individual.”⁴³

41 Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p 26

see also Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 307

42 Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p 219

see also Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976). p xii : the Puritan bias of America is opposed to sport; Catholic and Jewish thinking is less opposed.

see also, for example : Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p 208: “The religion of southern and eastern Europeans is not as it is for northern peoples, a matter of morality and ethics. It is rather, a way of feeling, an attitude, a sentiment. Whereas northerners tend to test the quality of religious life by the propriety of one’s deeds, southerners tend to test it by the quality of one’s feelings. To be sure, northerners measure internal qualities and southerners look to actions; but the distribution of emphasis is clearly different. There is a pagan quality to the religion of southern and eastern Europe that I find beautiful. There is an activist quality to the religion of the north that I admire, emulate, but also distrust.”

see also Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972). p 173

“Protestantism is not as oppressive in its laws as Catholicism is; it is oppressive in its attitude towards the law. The Protestant spirit really does want everyone, freely, to think alike, to internalize the law, to act with participatory consensus; its view of law coerces the soul. The Catholic spirit leaves judgement of the soul in God’s hands alone. Ironically the Protestant worries about works; the Catholic relies on the grace that makes the forest grow even when the workers are asleep.”

43 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 79

see also: Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 196 “the secret to the psychology of Americans is. . . .” see also: p 174 where he produces a list of nine or ten cultural groupings, and analyses them on the basis of different characteristics.

see also: Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p 59

see also: Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 306

see also: Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p 165: “the ethnic contribution to WASP [White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant] beginnings makes New York more turbulent, more passionate, (sic) and perhaps more profound than London – truer to the complexities of the human soul.”

Novak's stereotyping seems linked to a blindness to racism,⁴⁴ firstly because it goes beyond ethnic pride,⁴⁵ and secondly because it seems to make him unaware of the problems of racism articulated by Cone and so many others:⁴⁶

"Individuals are free to make as much, or as little, of their ethnic belonging as they choose."⁴⁷ He goes further, stereotyping racism itself:

"The source of strictly racial prejudice lies far more within Nordic consciousness than in southern or eastern consciousness....Whitney Young's Urban League released a Harris survey in 1970 which showed that "native Anglo-Saxon Protestants are more likely to be hostile to blacks than Americans of Irish, Italian or Polish descent."⁴⁸

Rhetoric

Lastly under this initial question I need to deal with Novak's style of writing, which especially in the earlier writings⁴⁹ seems to be a complicated mix, with both sarcasm and straightforward language. He addresses different groups in turn – first the people he is writing about, then the readers. This settles down in later books, but the fairly flowery style Novak adopts from the beginning of his writing remains constant. Consider the following examples:

"the world of sun, moon, stars and wind into which Christ was born"⁵⁰

44 See below 235

45 See The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics (Macmillan 1972), and The Guns of Lattimer, (Basic, New York: 1978) where he celebrates his own, Polish, background as part of a wider Eastern European background which has substantial representation in the United States, by looking at the distinctive features of Eastern European culture and experience, but takes this far beyond the realms of a celebration of the distinctive to ascribe various national characteristics and traits.

46 In Novak : The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics (Macmillan 1971) pp 6-14 Novak argues that Blacks are not the only disadvantaged ethnic group in American society, but that the "programmes are mostly Blacks only," and that the gains of the Blacks seem to be at the expense of some of the other disadvantaged ethnic groups. When lower middle class blue-collar workers (the unmeltable ethnics) say this they are accused of being racist.

47 Novak: Concepts of Ethnicity Belknap Press / Harvard University Press 1980/1982) p 39

48 Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p 251

49 eg Novak : The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics (Macmillan, New York 1972)

50 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 69

“There is no comfort in the heart, no oil upon the forehead, or ointment on one’s wounds”⁵¹

“The sun shines no less brilliantly, the skies are no more thickly gray because he has betrayed his resolve.”⁵²

“I love communion with God through the things that are – red soil upon the fingers, white clouds across the skies”⁵³

“If we are to do better than clash like ignorant armies in the night...”⁵⁴

“Catholic horizons go back farther than those of modernity. These horizons include, in the smoky background of the past, a dark and blazing web of popes, saints, villains, and heroes stretching back for centuries.”⁵⁵

These examples come from a wide spread of Novak’s books – dated 1964, 1965, 1970, 1972, 1981 and 1990. They seem to show Novak to be a romantic at heart, seeing himself as the lonely poet of the un-poetical (capitalism and democracy). Hence his espousal of this style - much of it derivative (interestingly, frequently from the Bible).⁵⁶

8.3. 1) b) How has he fulfilled his responsibility for the content of the conversation – having appropriate knowledge of philosophy, literary critical theory, Biblical studies, theology, the world as it is (politics, economics...), the current intellectual climate etc – and a willingness to learn?

Novak received a seminarian education in the 1950s, which will have included considerable amounts of philosophy, but perhaps less biblical studies than would currently be the case. This is born out by his writings, in which he is clearly more at home in philosophy than Biblical studies. So he quotes

51 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 11 see also eg p 120 “the time required to master [science] exceeds any one man’s length of days”

52 Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 117

53 Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p 208

54 Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 54

55 Novak: This Hemisphere of Liberty: A Philosophy of the Americas (AEI Press, Washington, D.C.: 1990) p 2

56 One effect of the style is that Novak’s writing seems to lose precision. For example, when writing a list, Novak frequently includes one element which causes a disjunction – presumably to arrest the reader’s attention. However, the disjunction can also make it more difficult to see what the cumulative effect of the list is.

Plato⁵⁷, Buber,⁵⁸ Sartre,⁵⁹ Camus,⁶⁰ Wittgenstein.⁶¹ He deals adroitly with a discussion of existentialism,⁶² and with problems of the subjective self.⁶³ There are a couple of minor gaps: a rather weak discussion of the difference between signs and symbols,⁶⁴ and the comment that “socialism is as old as Plato.”⁶⁵ Perhaps it is his history which is less strong: he writes, for example, of Hooker, the sixteenth century Anglican divine, as a Catholic Whig,⁶⁶ (which seems to be wrong twice) and in an aside cites Hitler’s Final Solution as an example of all the revolutions since the nineteenth century which have made matters worse for humankind.⁶⁷ His knowledge of Marxism, one of his chief targets could perhaps be questioned; certainly his description of Liberation Theology is tendentious.⁶⁸

57 Actually, Novak alludes to Plato’s cave: Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p41

58 Novak refers to “I... thou” : Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 20

59 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 1

60 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 37

61 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 42

62 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 343

63 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 86: “When philosophers begin to speak about self, they are making of the self an object that can enter their theory of objects.... But [they are themselves] subjects alive and present to [themselves.]”

64 which fails to make the point that a symbol is part of what it points to, in a way that a sign is not. See Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 9

65 Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 180

66 Novak: This Hemisphere of Liberty: A Philosophy of the Americas (AEI Press, Washington, D.C.: 1990) p 9

67 Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 30 The word ‘revolution’ does not seem appropriate!

68 Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) passim: see below under question 2) b) 203

It is his lack of knowledge of theology which is most worrying. He is familiar with Aquinas,⁶⁹ of course, and with Reinhold Niebuhr (one of his heroes),⁷⁰ Tillich,⁷¹ Bonhoeffer,⁷² St John of the Cross,⁷³ as well as with some more specifically Catholic writers. However when, for example, writing about a series of the important theological/doctrinal categories he makes a list of six, not one of which is Justice, Resurrection, or The Church.⁷⁴ Here, his discussion of original sin has it that “original sin implies that each person sometimes sins.”⁷⁵ However, amongst the Church Fathers with which Novak might be familiar from seminary, Augustine saw it as Adam’s guilt transmitted to his descendants; Anselm as “the privation of righteousness which every man ought to have,” Aquinas as the loss of supernatural privileges which direct man to his supernatural end, and which enable him to keep his inferior powers in submission to reason.

His discussion of the Incarnation from the same list lacks depth: “the point of the Incarnation is to respect the world as it is.”⁷⁶ Now certainly by being ready to take on human form, God in Jesus was valuing the world as it is – and especially the flesh. But the Incarnation could perhaps also be seen as

69 see: Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 146 – Novak is discussing God as an “intelligent source”

see also Novak: Concepts of Ethnicity Belknap Press / Harvard University Press 1980/1982) p 28

70 Novak : Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Transaction Publishers 1989) pp 4, 12, 18, 28, 123, 184

Novak : The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) pp 315-332, 406-408 etc

Novak : Will it Liberate? (Paulist Press 1986) pp 114, 203

Novak cites a large range of Niebuhr’s work, including:

Reinhold Niebuhr : Man’s Nature and His Communities (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1965)

Reinhold Niebuhr : Moral Man and Immoral Society (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1932)

Reinhold Niebuhr : The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1944)

71 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 21

72 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 352

73 Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) passim

Bonhoeffer Ethics (Macmillan, New York 1955)

74 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 337 To be sure, Novak does not claim that his list is exhaustive, but he does say, “Our task is to cite, if all too briefly, religious doctrines which have been powerful in leading humanity slowly and fitfully, to those formulations of institutional practices which have made economic development, political liberty and a moral-cultural commitment to progress on earth, emerge in history as a realistic force. I judge six such doctrines most important and will address them in their Christian form.” (op. cit. p 336)

75 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 351 Long : Divine Economy (Routledge, London 2000) p 36 shows how Novak’s thinking on original sin is linked to his thinking on unintended consequences: “Although for Novak we are at liberty to fashion our world, we are so bound by original sin that perverse consequences can result from our best intentions.” Long comments – “otherwise we might think socialism possible!”

76 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 341 It continues “...to disbelieve any promises that the world is now or ever will be transformed into the City of God.”

having a cosmic aspect in which God in Jesus was joining battle with the powers of darkness, eventually to destroy the power of sin and death; it could be understood as having a sanctifying, sacramental effect, in which all creation is brought back into communion with God. It could also be seen (according to St John's Gospel) as the judgement of the world.⁷⁷ A point he might more validly make, but does not, is about the unrealised nature of the Kingdom, with a more subtle and more challenging view of Christian vocation and of the pain of living by Kingdom values in a sinful world – a view in which complacency about systems (and things) as they are would be more uncomfortable.

However, in assessing Novak's theology as weak, we must remember that he does make it clear that for him philosophy and theology are one.

“When philosophy and faith are allowed to go their separate ways, there is a defeat for the person of religious faith, because then he is in fact divided against himself – and there is defeat for the community of religious faith, since such a faith cannot endure through cultural change, without a philosophical, non-imaginative understanding of its own language and beliefs. . . . In the short run, faith without philosophy suffices. But for the community and in the long run, intelligence will have its due.”⁷⁸

I hazard one further comment, a query about the extent of Novak's own economic expertise. He does not seem to advance any real economic arguments; genuine economic questions he tackles are things like dependency, or the economic claims of socialism, where he needs simply to be able to measure outcomes. His true interest, and undoubted expertise, is in the area of political economy. Here he has wide practical experience (his early political work and his later ambassadorial status) and great breadth of reading; his thinking is innovative, and his writing respected; it is on this ground that he stands.

One agenda Novak sets out⁷⁹ is a development of a theology of economics. He writes:

see also op. cit. p 343 “The single greatest temptation for Christians is to imagine that the salvation won by Jesus has altered the human condition. Many attempt to judge the present world according to the standards of the gospels, as though the world were ready to live according to them. Sin is not so easily overcome. A political economy for sinners, even Christian sinners, (however well intentioned), is consistent with the story of Jesus.”

see also op. cit. p 352, where Novak talks about pure Christian values (loving enemies, turning the other cheek) as unworldly.

⁷⁷ See below 227

⁷⁸ Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 45

⁷⁹ Incidentally, Novak is prone to setting, or alluding to, agendas which then he does not quite fulfil:

Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 16 “The aim of the present inquiry is not so much to propose a new vocabulary for belief, however seriously that task requires to be done. . . .”;

p 117 “We cannot in such brief compass, attempt a full-dress inquiry into the nature of God. . . .”

p 28 : “The main contribution a book such as this can hope to make is to turn attention to an overlooked area of human experience. . . .”

“Even if the new Theology of economics did nothing more than to promote critical clarification and to debunk ideological uses of religious language, it would serve a high purpose. In fact though, carried to its fulfilment, a critical theology ought also to be able to articulate more exactly the worldly import of religious ideals, and the religious import of worldly innovations.”⁸⁰

“Capitalism is distinct from other commercial systems in the world because of the religious and moral value it attaches to commerce. It is one thing to tolerate commerce and regard it as a vulgar necessity. It is another to regard it as the fulfilment of a vocation from God and a way of co-operating in the completion of creation as God intended it.”⁸¹

This agenda is consistent with his commitments to America and Catholicism, and his attempts to be an apologist, mutually, between Catholicism and democratic capitalism. As we have seen and shall see, it might be more accurate to replace the term ‘economics’ with the term ‘political economy.’ In fact, taking his writings as a whole, he is working at a theology of everyday life – recreation (sport),⁸² voting,⁸³ work,⁸⁴ culture.⁸⁵ We may speculate that this is one out-working of his roots in a blue-collar Catholic community.

Influences

Amongst those whom Novak finds especially influential, and most frequently quotes, are: Lord Acton,⁸⁶ Niebuhr,⁸⁷ Lonergan,⁸⁸ Maritain,⁸⁹ Pesch,⁹⁰ and of course, John Stewart Mill and Adam Smith. This list, augmented by those whom Novak quotes less extensively, is substantial evidence of his wide

Novak : Concepts of Ethnicity (Belknap Press 1980) : p 55 : “The full cultural history of American religion is yet to be written. Accurate and detailed attention to its component historical cultures is still in its infancy...”

80 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 241

81 Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 29

82 Michael Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976).

83 Michael Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974)

84 Michael Novak: The Guns of Lattimer (Basic, New York: 1978); Michael Novak: Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life (Free Press, New York: 1996);

85 Michael Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972); Michael Novak (editor and one essay): Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry (AEI, Washington 1980);

86 Novak : Will It Liberate? (Paulist Press 1986) pp 221-223

Lord Acton : Selected Writings of Lord Acton Vol 1 : Essays in the History of Liberty (ed J Rufus Fears) (Liberty Classics, Indianapolis 1985)

reading. There are gaps: Novak, in the school of the Friedmans⁹¹ and Hayek,⁹² might particularly be expected to use von Mises.⁹³

8.3. 2) a) How has he fulfilled his responsibility about being honest and authentic about himself – recognising his own presuppositions and commitments?

“Philosophy is the love of wisdom [it] is primarily self-knowledge. . . . At the root of one’s enquiries into one’s own identity, however, the question of God inevitably arises.”⁹⁴

87 “Among Americans of this century, Reinhold Niebuhr (1892 – 1971) was the perhaps the greatest moral teacher. In “Moral Man and Immoral Society” “The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness” and “The Irony of American History” he established a vocabulary for criticising the innocence, pretension and moral arrogance that have marred American life in every generation.” Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 94

Interestingly, although this quotation is taken from one of Novak’s earlier works, Novak refers to Niebuhr equally respectfully in later writing, even though one might have supposed them to be poles apart politically.

88 “The source of the experience of nothingness lies in man’s unstructured, relentless drive to ask questions. Bernard Lonergan was the first philosopher to take that drive seriously and to give it primacy in his philosophical reflection.” Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 45

Bernard Lonergan : Insight : A Study of Human Understanding (Philosophical Library, New York 1958)

89 “. . . fond as I may have been of America as soon as I saw her, and probably because of the particular perspective in which Humanisme Integral was written, it took rather a long time to become aware of the kind of congeniality which existed between what is going on in this country and a number of views I had expressed in my book” Jacques Maritain, quoted by Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 363, note 14

Jacques Maritain : Reflections on America (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1958)

Jacques Maritain : Humanisme Integral / Integral Humanism trans Joseph W Evans (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1968)

Jacques Maritain : Christianity and Democracy trans Doris C Anson (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1944)

Jacques Maritain : The Person and the Common Good trans John J Fitzgerald (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1947)

Jacques Maritain : Man and the State (University of Chicago Press 1951)

90 Novak : Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Transaction Publishers 1989) pp 69-78

see also Novak : The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) p 239

Heinrich Pesch Lehrbuch der Nationaloekonomie 5 vols (Herder, Freiburg 1920-1926)

see Robert Mulcahy SJ The Economics of Heinrich Pesch (Holy, New York 1952)

91 Milton and Rose Friedman : Free to Choose (Secker and Warburg, London 1980)

92 F A Hayek : Law Legislation and Liberty (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1982)

F A Hayek : The Road to Serfdom (Routledge and Kegan Paul 1944)

93 Ludwig von Mises: Human Action: A Treatise on Economics (Fox & Wilkes 4th (revised) edition 1997) A book which builds on two axioms – that human beings act; and that they act to improve their condition – to derive the whole of laissez-faire economics. See Chapter 9, below, for a wider survey of other writers on political economy.

94 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 26 see also p 58 : “The primary imperative in philosophy is not ‘construct a consistent system.’ The primary imperative is ‘know thyself.’”

“To decide who I am is to decide what I think knowing is. And to decide what I think knowing is, is to determine the content and limits of what I will know. . . . To begin to live philosophically is to begin to live an examined life⁹⁵. . . . the philosopher will have striven to act exactly as he reflects. . . . The self-knowledge of the philosopher is not the same as that of the moralist, or psychologist or as that gained through psychotherapy.”⁹⁶

(Novak does admit that this self is itself a construct.⁹⁷)

Novak here articulates insights which are some of the contentions of this thesis, and in so doing, admirably fulfils my requirements for a recognition of himself and his own presuppositions and commitments – at this stage.⁹⁸ One criticism I would make is that he does not seem to revisit this insight in later work. It is as if, once he has dealt with himself, he feels free to move on, with that part of the foundations of his thinking secure. However, there are two objections to that feeling. The first is that later he changes his views somewhat: perhaps the foundations of the old views will not serve as foundations of the new. The second is that I believe this sort of insight is one to which we need to keep returning; our tendency to forget it, our difficulties with truly internalising it, are such that it cannot be treated as business completed.

Novak follows Pesch⁹⁹ in arguing that the presuppositions of economists need to be made clear too:

“Most of the time, economists do not argue about these background differences. They try to focus as much as possible on those issues that may be resolved by scientific methods. As for the rest, they assign it to ‘preferences’ to be argued about within another frame of reference. But this is exactly the frame of reference that Pesch wanted to make explicit.”¹⁰⁰

Novak’s presuppositions are deeply linked with his background as a Catholic of Polish extraction.

“While working on this book during the past year, I discovered many things about myself; my relation to my parents; my discomfort (intellectual and emotional) with a dominant conception of intellectual and professional life; my suspicion of both liberal

95 Socrates: “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

96 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) pp 60-62

97 Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 1: “I wish to show from the experience of nothingness that no man has a self or an identity; in a society like ours he must constantly be inventing himself.”

98 see also Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p xi: “one of the difficulties of writing a history of the present moment: the writer is engaged in struggling against self”

99 Heinrich Pesch, SJ (1854-1926) see above : footnote Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found

100 Novak : Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (2nd edn Transaction Publishers 1989) p 71

and radical politics; my appreciation for certain kinds of writing; my unhappiness with the sterility of political debate. . . . Friends of mine sometimes complain that they do not know where I am, or where I am coming from.”¹⁰¹

Here he is facing the difficulties his training and experience produce: “. . .becoming a professional distances ethnics from their roots. . .”¹⁰² - and perhaps also referring to himself in the middle of the changes in his views. He does not like this distancing from his roots, and at least some of the changes in his views can be seen as turning towards the political alliances which he feels will support the values of those roots. “I began to be irritated by the controlled but felt anti-Catholic bias among journalists and intellectuals.”¹⁰³

His commitment is especially strong in two areas: the United States of America, and Roman Catholicism. Here, his critical faculties occasionally seem to be lacking. I want to look at these in more detail.

USA

Novak’s extravagant style when writing of America may seem, at least to some non-Americans, astonishing. “More like a religion than a nation, America required conversion of the soul.”¹⁰⁴ “Often, in spite of themselves, non-Americans look to the US for leadership; when the US does not provide

101 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 51

102 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 36 By ethnics Novak means those who are not WASPs – White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants – but especially he means PIGS – Poles, Italians, Greeks, Slavs, rather than Afro-Americans or Asians.

103 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 63

see also Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 138 “more than one person has noted that anti-Catholicism is – or perhaps was – the anti-Semitism of intellectuals. . . . some disliked their Catholicism and ‘superstition’.”

see below footnote Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found

see also Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 210: “Hatred for the middle class is intense in the ‘adversary culture’ . . . What if the middle is far healthier than the fearful left supposes? In any case the middle feels abandoned.”

104 Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p 91

leadership, a vacuum is often created.”¹⁰⁵ “Both Left and Right affirm national ideals: the Right says America is uniquely benevolent, the Left says it ought to be.”¹⁰⁶

Novak is, (as I have already commented) at heart, a romantic:

“A nation from its inception undergoing traumatic experiences of loneliness, revolution, slavery, depression, global adventure, assassination, guilt, space exploration, defeat – such a nation is a crucible of vivid experience which none escape. We are, each in our different ways, American *because* we have been through these things together.”¹⁰⁷

The problems are that he does not see that other nations might make similar claims; and that he does not see that not all Americans did experience this together – for some there was exclusion.

“In the American system, then, the ideal of ethnic belonging has a special quality. It includes not only a willingness to co-operate democratically with those nourished by other traditions, but also an openness toward learning from others. Thus American life provides many inhibitions against tribalism. . . .”¹⁰⁸

Early in his writings, Novak is critical of America: “Today America is a land without adequate symbols. The faith of many is narrow, naïve, immature. . . . We need to reconstruct our national

105 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 537

see also Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 358: “. . . had the United States remained a primitive country, badly governed, surly and anarchic, the world might love it more. If the United States were unable to govern itself, the world could scarcely look to it for leadership.”

106 Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 117

107 Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 46

108 It continues: “. . .As a result, individuals in our society tend to develop a plurality of cultural roots. Those of us who are not by ancestry Anglo-American learn to assimilate the values, attitudes and practices of – as it seems to us – one of the most liberating of the world’s traditions. . . . From Jewish traditions we learn both a psychiatric and sociological sophistication. . . . From black culture, Indian culture, from the multiple Catholic cultures, from the culture of Asia and of Latin America, we appropriate other cherished values.” Novak: Concepts of Ethnicity Belknap Press / Harvard University Press 1980/1982) p 42

project.”¹⁰⁹ This theme does not appear in later books. But even when he is critical, he still seems to feel that America is the best place on earth.¹¹⁰ At only a couple of points is this muted:

“We have no more urgent symbolic need than to revise the dream of American goodness. I do not mean by this an orgy of breast-beating, which is only a disguised method of proclaiming one’s innocence. We need simply to take an accurate account of the lashes visited upon the backs of Negro slaves, the death marches of Indian tribes, the violence of our industrial life (maiming even today 1800 persons every week), the destruction of neighbourhoods and family life in the name of ‘modernisation,’ the staggering bombardment of distant nations, and other plain realities of our history. . . . The mature American dream to which we are called promises us a less tractable world; no more than dubious ‘success’; tragedy; a full share of evil; and the check of the common good and the public interest upon individual fantasies of fulfilment. It is in all these respects a dark faith.”¹¹¹

Even here, where Novak is offering something deep and serious, something which any nation with dreams of success would do well to consider, he still calls it the American dream. Perhaps he does this to be clear that it replaces an immature American dream – but perhaps he still cherishes ideas that America is special.

Twelve years later, Novak’s advocacy of America is interestingly changed:

“Granted that the US has made many foolish foreign policy and even military interventions in some nations of Latin America, and that in virtually all cases it has conducted itself with a painful measure of arrogance, there are many reasons for resentment. But can it really be said that every act of the US regarding Latin America during the 20th century has been harmful, damaging and oppressive? Is there nothing at all on the good side of the ledger?”¹¹²

109 Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 109

see also op. cit. p 73: “A benign faith in social progress is at the very heart of the American sense of reality. If America does not get better year by year, how can we justify the agonies inflicted on the Indians, the centuries of slavery and injustice, the shame engendered in immigrants. . . . So much suffering simply for material gain?”

see also Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 106 “What James, Pierce and Dewey had accomplished by 1910 needs to be accomplished again. . . . the articulation of a style of American life that might liberate our national energies for the next 50 years – in the same way the myth of pragmatism has for the last 50.”

see also Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 34 “Nothing less than the orientation of the American character, the American sense of reality, the national philosophy, is in question.” see also p 1 “In American society the pursuit of happiness has almost attained the status of a constitutional right. Yet is it wise, or human, or good to pursue happiness? At any cost? At anyone’s expense? By any deeds whatever? A small number of men and women have no special right, have they, to accept a major part of the wealth of the entire planet? States of essentially white middle class Americans may not be so sacred that all other values, purposes and meanings in the universe must be subservient to them.”

110 “Look on America and see, if we may paraphrase Isaiah 53, there is no comeliness in her, no beauty.” Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 38

111 Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 296 and p 301

112 see also Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 111

There is an element of wistfulness and almost of defiance: we may have made mistakes, but we did a lot of good too..... There is also an element of blindness: he objects to diatribes about American imperialism¹¹³ yet the way in which he feels able to comment on the political and economic systems of other nations is in itself a symptom of that imperialism.

In the end, Novak's enormous respect for the Founding Fathers, his enthusiasm for the American system of democratic capitalism¹¹⁴ (a system which he sees it as his mission to articulate and even evangelise), his defence of that system to his church, his respect for the people who make that system work and who work within it, his gratitude for what it has offered to his family – all of these shine through.¹¹⁵ In fact he applies Biblical categories to America: “These [Kennedy's] words are richly biblical, and they recapitulate America's self-understanding. As God led Israel out of bondage to Egypt, so did he lead his ‘second Israel’ out of bondage to the King of England, for the sake of ‘mighty works’ on behalf of all mankind.”¹¹⁶

Roman Catholicism

113 Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) pp 158 ff

114 Interestingly, Novak's enthusiasm for democracy has not always been so great: “One might stand the ideological praise of democracy upon its head. For persons whose time is preoccupied with economic necessities, democracy in all but major elections might seem to be too expensive.” Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p 218 see also p 223: “Democracy is in actual practice and in a very wide range of matters extremely fatiguing, inefficient, and a vast nourisher of illusions.”

115 “The present work is a struggle to discover the contours of my own sense of reality. It is not my self discovery that is of interest. The task is to discover what America is or might be.” Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p xv

116 Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 142
see also Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 219 in the extra chapter on Pope John Paul II, written in 1988: “The American experiment, in particular, springs from, and is inconceivable apart from, two biblical narratives, Creation and Exodus.” Clearly he still holds his original view!

Novak makes great claims for Catholicism:¹¹⁷ “the Church wishes to stand above all ideologies.”¹¹⁸ He also asserts its right to judge:

“It cannot endorse a set of institutions that work well in some cultures but which, for various reasons, would not work for others. Nonetheless, Christianity is an incarnate and historical religion. . . . provisionally it must choose this, not that, discerning as best it can the institutions of the moment that meet its tests of practical wisdom.”¹¹⁹

It is as if he is claiming or constructing a vast overarching system covering every aspect of human thought and endeavour¹²⁰ and also as if the Roman Catholic Church were the only church in the world.¹²¹ In fact, on occasion Catholic and Christian are used interchangeably. Novak is ready to describe a submerging of will and mind and knowledge to ‘the [Communist] Party’ in scathing terms,¹²² when a more cautious member of a church which has only just apologised for its treatment of Galileo might have said less : there are parallels between ‘no life outside the party’ and ‘no salvation outside the church.’ Novak himself frequently appears as a liberal Catholic, and yet there are issues over which he is quite traditional.¹²³ The free market in ideas which he is so keen to promote in the world is not, he thinks, appropriate to the Church.¹²⁴ Even when he is critical he is also defensive:

117 I have already mentioned Novak’s stereotyping of Protestants and Catholics. See above 186 and at footnote Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found.

118 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 144 It seems to invite the cynical retort : “but to promote its own.”

see also Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 168 “It is true that Catholic social thought is, and must be universal and transcendent. . . .

see also Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 227: “The church makes room for both democratic capitalism and democratic socialism.”

119 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 168

see also Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 38: a list of Catholic criteria for an acceptable political economy.

120 Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 223 : “ . . .absorbing the great achievements of Adam Smith into the common treasury of Catholic wisdom.”

121 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 126 “summoning all the world’s bishops to Rome, opening the church to the world, inaugurating an era of uncommon hopefulness.”

122 Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 194

123 “The reach of sin is universal (excepting only our Lady and our Lord.)” Novak: This Hemisphere of Liberty: A Philosophy of the Americas (AEI Press, Washington, D.C.: 1990) p 40

124 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 11

cf Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 7

see below Wildavsky’s comment quoted 205

“men who love the splendour of Rome, its absoluteness. . . . are not despicable, mean or uncouth. They are good men, victims of the system they faithfully and loyally serve.”¹²⁵

Catholic and American: Democratic and Capitalist

Novak’s interest in politics,¹²⁶ his commitment to liberty,¹²⁷ to his country, and to his faith, come together in a fascinating way in his project to link Catholicism and America, Democracy and Capitalism.

125 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) pp xii, xiii

It is interesting to note that within Novak’s Catholic allegiance there is a further level of loyalty towards some Popes as compared with others. John XXIII and John Paul II, in particular, get lavish praise. Compare the phrases he uses in Catholic Social Thought in connection with Paul VI:

p 147 “Paul VI interrupts the flow from John XXIII to John Paul II. . . . the document lacks a certain humility. Paul VI seems to imagine an almost causal relationship between the development of some and the under-development of others. Paul VI lashes out quite negatively. . . .” “Paul VI’s flirtation with Marxism. . . .”

with, on the other hand, the phrases used of John XXIII

pp 128, 129 “marvellous passage. . . . beautiful notion. he sees the link. . . . the Pope grasps too. Tirelessly Pope John calls for. . . . A brilliant text concludes this section. . . .”

and of John Paul II:

p 150 [John Paul II] “quite brilliantly weaving together the traditions drawn on by Leo XIII and Pius XI. . . .”

cf the almost personal affront with which he describes the assassination attempt on John Paul II: p 149 “Pope John Paul II was gunned down by the bullets of an international terrorist using Bulgarian assistance and allegedly with Soviet approval. . . .”

Where Novak is critical – for example of Pope Pius XI’s attack on liberal thinkers like Mill, and politicians like Theodore Roosevelt – he is able to shift the weight of his criticism to researchers and drafters like Fr von Nell-Breuning (p 113) Yet presumably some of the brilliance and insight of John XXIII and John Paul II is also due to the work of drafters and researchers.

126 Novak quotes Peter Berger writing of a basic human right to live apolitically; Novak comments that living apolitically is in itself a political act, because we cannot evade responsibility. See Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 277

127 “individuals must individually conquer and appropriate this liberty for themselves. It is their vocation and their destiny to make a pilgrim’s progress in the painstaking and (often lonely) appropriation of their own responsibility.” Novak: Morality, Capitalism and Democracy (Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), London 1990) p 19

There was a background of mutual suspicion. Novak believes that the Roman Catholic Church has been guilty of misunderstanding democratic capitalism,¹²⁸ and describes clearly a situation, earlier in the century, where Catholics were suspect in America. However, by the time of President Kennedy things had changed and were continuing to change; and from a Catholic point of view: “Catholics have been especially eager to show how adaptable they are to America.”¹²⁹

“..... my own dream of undergirding the humaneness of liberal institutions with (as I see it) the more adequate Catholic philosophy of the human person, its deep sense of community, and its long-experienced respect for intermediate associations or mediating structures,

This project of undergirding liberal institutions is in part a response to Schumpeter’s suggestion that capitalism could be a victim of its own success. Schumpeter first took a static model of the economy and showed that in this case there would be no profits. He then argued that in the real case profit arose from the activities of innovative entrepreneurs. However, this activity was in a sense exterior to the economic system, and there was a tendency for the economic system to become rational rather than romantic, critical rather than heroic – and so to suppress the activities of entrepreneurs:

“Capitalism creates a critical frame of mind which, after having destroyed the moral authority of so many other institutions, in the end turns against its own; the bourgeois finds to his amazement that the rationalist attitude does not stop at the credentials of kings and popes but goes on to attack private property and the whole scheme of bourgeois values.”¹³¹

128 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 278 “the tragedy of the seventeenth century, setting in motion the nineteenth century, was the failure of Catholic thinking to grasp the creative potential of democratic capitalism. One result was that many early republicans and liberals, opposed to pre-modern ways of thought, were confirmed in the practical necessity of being anti-clerical and anti-Catholic.

see also Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 25: “Catholicism stood outside of, and has I think misread, the liberal democratic capitalist revolution.” see also p 282

129 Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 88

130 see Novak: Freedom with Justice: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p x It continues : “. . . has been attacked both from the left and from the right.”

131 Joseph Schumpeter : Capitalism Socialism and Democracy (1942) quoted in Robert Heilbroner : The Worldly Philosophers (Penguin 7th edition 2000) p 300

see ed Novak : Democracy and Mediating Structures p 183 where Novak argues that capitalism, superior to communism in economics and politics, will fail because of cultural weakness: it is opposed to ideas; the class of people with ideas is dispossessed; hedonism and consumerism undercut discipline and restraint etc.

see Novak : The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) p 32 : the success of capitalism leads to its failure – corruption of affluence, irresponsibility of leadership, an ambitious adversarial class making money through the public sector, envy.

It is this attack which Novak is concerned with, when he condemns intellectuals, journalists and others (the adversarial class).¹³² It is this need for a spirit behind capitalism and democracy – to counter the loss of belief described by Schumpeter – which leads him to the Spirit of Democratic Capitalism, in which he argues that Catholicism¹³³ can supply that spirit¹³⁴ through the third of the three separate but linked spheres which he sees democratic capitalism as based on: the economic, the political, and the cultural¹³⁵ – if only it will stop being anti-capitalist.¹³⁶

Novak tackles the task he sets himself, of articulating “a theory that expresses our [the American] vision,”¹³⁷ not simply as a scholar, but as passionate poet. Like many conservatives who feel that the left has had the best of the contest for idealism,¹³⁸ Novak wishes to state the grand vision and the compelling theory behind what has hitherto seemed a rather grubby, pragmatic enterprise.¹³⁹

132 see Novak : The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) pp 150 ff where Novak argues that the attack on the bourgeois is hypocritical, and seems merely envious of its success.

see ed Novak : Democracy and Mediating Structures pp 188 ff “... the intellectual class, eschewing bourgeois morality ... patriotism, obedience and other important values neglected... the anti-bourgeois tradition has won...” cf p 205

see Novak : Choosing our King : p 210 “Hatred for the middle class is intense in the adversary culture.”

see Novak : The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics p 143 : “According to analyses made by the intellectual Left, America is sick because of the activities of others: business men, capitalists, industrial militarists, unenlightened bigots, and fascists. One seldom hears advanced the possibility that America is sick because her intellectual classes are also sick; because what intellectuals do is a primary conduit of disease.”

see also Novak : The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics p 38 where he criticises journalists for being unsympathetic to the working class see also p 238 where he suggests limiting the salaries of lawyers, newscasters, journalists etc to the level of auto-workers and plumbers.

see also Novak : Belief and Unbelief p 183 where he criticises the complacency of (Catholic) believers.

133 Novak relies heavily on Max Weber : The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Eng trans Talcott Parsons : Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1958) but claims that Catholicism is better suited to the role of providing the spirit than Protestantism.

134 see Novak : The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) p 20 “democratic capitalism did not seem to need a moral theory; it relied on its own moral and cultural leaders to maintain one”

see also : Novak : Towards a Theology of Corporation : p 29 “[The Christian story / moral value system] vivifies and restrains the [economic system] not by subordinating it institutionally, but by supplying it with a way of life that gives it spirit.”

see also Novak : The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics p 197 where he argues for enhumanment rather than enlightenment

135 see Novak : The American Vision p 7 see also pp 41 ff

136 see Novak : Towards a Theology of Corporation p 9

137 Novak: The American Vision: An essay on the future of Democratic Capitalism (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI), Washington 1978) p 1

138 “the ideals of socialism began to fail me” Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) pp 25, 26

139 see Roger Scruton: The Meaning of Conservatism (Macmillan 1984) on the Right, and the undramatic

Novak has other commitments.¹⁴⁰ He owns a passionate commitment to his family: I have already mentioned the dedications of his first two theological books: The Open Church¹⁴¹ is dedicated to his younger brother Dick, a priest killed in East Pakistan; Belief and Unbelief¹⁴² to his and Karen's (his wife) parents. He also writes that during his work on the primaries, his daughter was born: "Compared to her, politics and its symbols seem unreal. Yet the shadowy world of politics is our reality too, and so taking the politics seriously is, in some poor way, also an act of love for her."¹⁴³

8.3. 2) b) *How has he fulfilled his responsibility about being open to listening and to changing?*

Certainly Novak has been prepared to move – the change in his political views is charted above. This change seems to have come from a gradual disillusionment – at first with the intellectual left as it appeared to spurn the values Novak had learned from his community roots, then later with what he perceives as the actual outcomes of different political economies. To be sure, Novak must have been in contact with the right, and have read its writings; but I gain the impression that his changed views arise from his own internal dialogue, rather than as a result of him in conversation, as it were, with right-wingers who mounted a critique of his views:

“The tradition of liberalism is a tradition **I** have had to acquire, despite an innate scepticism about many of its structural metaphors (free market place, individual autonomy, reason naked and undisguised, enlightenment.)”¹⁴⁴

140 A (lesser?) commitment is to sport. Aged 40 he wrote: Novak : The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p xi that sports were more important than “my other work... deeper in my being than most of what I did, spoke to me of beauty, excellence, imagination, and animal vitality... true in a way few things in life are true. My love for sport was deeper than any theory I had. The reality is better than its intellectual defence.” There is a slightly unnerving irrationality here: Novak admits (p 71) to a lack of athleticism, yet writes (p 82) about how excited he gets, how involved he is, how his palms sweat, as a spectator at a football game.

141 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964)

142 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965)

143 Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p xv

144 Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p 70 (emphasis my own) He continues: “Radical politics, with its bold and simple optimism about human potential and its anarchic tendencies, has been despite its appeal to me as a vehicle for criticising liberalism, freighted with emotions, sentiments and convictions about humans I cannot bring myself to share. As critics noted, my radical writings (A Theology for Radical Politics, for example) are rooted in the social and earthly sensibility of Catholic experience. They are explicit about my dismay at Protestant tendencies.”

In The Open Church, Novak is clear enough about the existence, side by side, of conflicting ideologies and the dialogue between them: “Theologies other than non-historical orthodoxy now have the right to exist. Given this open chance, they cannot fail to embarrass their predecessor.”¹⁴⁵ He tackles the problems of relativism in Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge : “Final appeal in such argument cannot be to any abstract criteria or any code of propositions: merely to assert that other criteria or another code are correct is to beg the question. The final positions of wisdom are won only through dialectic.”¹⁴⁶

He also demonstrates the need for dialogue, for a readiness to search for a middle way which strengthens a set of beliefs by taking account of the criticisms and insights of a different view point. “Fidelity, kindness, benevolence, humaneness are not implicit in capitalism or democracy; . . . they need an informing culture and tradition.”¹⁴⁷ Earlier, making a similar point he wrote that he wanted to retain the dream of socialism as an inspiration to communal responsibility and the vision of a just society alongside the capitalist sense of sin.¹⁴⁸

There are a number of places where Novak is in some sort of dialogue with specific authors. There are several writers whose works have been influential: some of these have been mentioned above under 1) b) Influences; clearly, with these there is a considering of their views. Some examples of dialogues with other authors are also revealing:

“I would like to thank Novak for responding to my criticisms of his work – orally at New York University, and in writing in our debate in the Spring 1996 edition of The Review of Politics. Although I do have my honest disagreements with him, he has paid me the genuine complement of responding to my writings.”¹⁴⁹

Second, in Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions, at one point Novak is considering a piece by Wildavsky in the New York Times on Novak himself.

“Wildavsky, however makes a further point, on which we are in some disagreement. He seems to embrace the view that ‘there cannot be one moral rule for the church and

145 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 313

146 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 99 – see also p 100

147 Novak: Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry (AEI, Washington 1980) p 204

148 Novak: Capitalism and Socialism: A Theological Inquiry (AEI, Washington 1979) p 122

149 Thomas O’Rourke : A Conscience as Large as the World (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland 1997) p xiii

another for society.’ In other words, a person who favours liberal institutions in worldly society should also favour them in the church.”¹⁵⁰

Novak goes on to argue that there are several conceptions of authority; scientific authority, for example is not the same as secular authority, nor can it be.¹⁵¹ “I would not *want* a church that operated with the same conception of authority in the domain of faith and morals that the larger secular society employs. There are many areas of life in which truth is not determined by majority rule or individual preference.”¹⁵² (Unfortunately, the phrase: “I would not *want*...” is in the end precisely what Novak is arguing against: individual preference!)

A third example of Novak’s relationships with other theologians can be found in Towards a Theology of Corporation where he is writing about the origins of corporations. He describes religious communities in the New Kingdom in Egypt, late Roman law, Benedictine monasteries, 14th and 15th century guilds, 16th century merchant adventurers, joint stock companies.¹⁵³ This may be a standard genealogy of corporations, but it bears close resemblance to a description given by Johnson in an earlier (1980) book edited by Novak: Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry.¹⁵⁴

Another example¹⁵⁵ of Novak in dialogue is in The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism where he constructs a critique of Moltmann,¹⁵⁶ pointing out that there is not a sharp divide between rich and

150 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p xiii

151 Is this another aspect of his espousal of the doctrine of the “Two Kingdoms” ? See below at footnote Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found

152 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p xiii

153 Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 2

154 Novak: Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry (AEI, Washington 1980) Preface This earlier book is “drawn from the proceedings of the 1979 Summer Institute on Theology and Economics” and derived from edited transcripts of oral delivery.

155 Further examples include :

his response to readers who are themselves responding to his writing:

“A number of readers chided me with referring too seldom to biblical texts. They failed to notice, however that the texts of the Bible have powerful meaning under any and every system of political economy. With the great Jesuit theologian-economist Heinrich Pesch, I am firmly of the belief that no-one can deduce a system of political economy from the texts of the Bible alone.” Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p xv and Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry (AEI, Washington 1980) pp 201-211 where Novak publishes a discussion between himself and some of his audience at the end of his lecture.

156 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) pp 255 - 259

poor, but a continuum, and that peoples' wealth can and does change.¹⁵⁷ Earlier he has argued against Moltmann that an authentic theology of economics “requires a critical philosophy of history – not a view of a moral imperative and inexorable necessity towards self-improvement. A realistic social order needs to be designed more realistically.”¹⁵⁸

Clearly then, Novak does engage in dialogue with other writers and thinkers. Indeed, the American Enterprise Institute – like many academic institutions – exists partly with that purpose. All the same, there are substantial areas where Novak's openness is in question – for example his description of Liberation Theology. He gives some characteristics of Liberation Theology:¹⁵⁹

- a) that it arose out of social conscience and dependency theory – which says that Latin American nations are being kept in a position of dependence on economic activities and decisions taken in the rich world (perhaps to guarantee a supply of cheap labour and raw materials);
- b) that its main tool for analysing society is Marxism, which sees Latin America as capitalist, and its disparities between rich and poor as analogous to the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie¹⁶⁰
- c) that these new insights – Christianity as revolutionary praxis – are the true identity of Christianity

His responses are a) that dependency theory is empirically invalid; b) that Latin America is pre-capitalist, and Marxism misleading; c) that revolutionary praxis falls apart because there is no concrete vision of political reality, and that in any case Christianity's transcendent claims should be paramount.

However, Liberation Theologians might wish to argue that the most important characteristic of their theology is that it takes seriously the situation of particular groups of Christian people: this is surely very like the theology which Novak was so excited about in The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II as it challenged a-historical orthodoxy. Second, they might wish to point out that its analysis is

¹⁵⁷ Novak's critique of Moltmann parallels my own critique of Cone in Chapter 7.

¹⁵⁸ Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 22

¹⁵⁹ Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) pp 21-32

¹⁶⁰ Novak frequently makes the point that Liberation Theology's analysis is based on a utopian and outdated view of the world: see for example Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 294 “There is an oddly conservative, rural, cast to Liberation Theology.”

attempting to ask hard but valid questions about power, and by whom it is exercised, and for whose benefit.

Novak writes that “Latin American experts say that liberation theology affects only a minority of the clergy;”¹⁶¹ that it “exists much more powerfully in books than in reality.”¹⁶² One might ask: What experts? What does it mean to say a theology exists in reality? His writing reads more like a series of statements in a briefing against liberation theology, than a coherent account and careful critique of it. He demonises his opponents:

“It is characteristic of Marxists to mask their true aims, disguising their true purposes by speaking the language of bourgeois ideas, and maintaining silent cover within a popular front until they are in a position fully to declare themselves. Mendacity of this sort is a classic tactic.”¹⁶³

This is not the language of openness and conversation.

There is one further area where I question Novak’s performance as a “conversationalist.” In a conversation, one expects to move on, rather than to repeat old ideas. This is a problem for any author, who needs each book to stand alone, rather than expecting readers to be familiar with all previous works. However, and perhaps it is inevitable in one so prolific, some of what Novak writes is a repetition of previous ideas and thinking. There are fresh ideas in each new book, but perhaps not always enough to justify a whole book.¹⁶⁴

161 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p16

162 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 3

163 Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 154
see also Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 15

164 So, for example, Novak : On Cultivating Liberty (1999) : is collection of essays, only two of which are new.

8.3. 3) a) How has he fulfilled his responsibility to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which raises matters of faith and life?

Novak writes about God both from an abstract and from an emotional point of view. In Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge, (a fairly abstract book) his writing about God is abstract:

“Very few among ordinary people are interested in the theoretical problems of subjectivity; ordinary language has almost no direct resources for the inquiry after God. Ordinary language is from a religious point of view, furthermore, inherently idolatrous. It makes belief in God into a function of human business...”¹⁶⁵

In The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit, (which is more passionate) his writing about God is more passionate:

“I love the tests of the human spirit and I love to see defeated teams refuse to die.... That is the way I believe the human race should live. When human beings actually accomplish it, it is for me as if the intentions of the Creator were suddenly limpid before our eyes: as though into the fiery heart of the Creator we had momentary insight.”¹⁶⁶

Novak’s faith is not something effortless, at least in his early writings: he mentions the difficulty of belief, and the need to believe that one truly [does] believe in God.¹⁶⁷ He recognises the problem of evil: “We are not trying to justify God. We are trying to understand more clearly, from the facts of evil, what he must be like in order to be called good.”¹⁶⁸ In Novak’s view, for non-believers, God is something to which they feel no personal bond, but for believers God is a ‘you’ spoken ‘to’ not ‘of’. It is in prayer that one comes to know God best; belief and prayer are inextricable. Both believer and non-believer live in a world of silence; neither one hears ‘voices’; neither one sees God.¹⁶⁹

165 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 79

166 Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p 150

see also p 159: “God is no egalitarian. Prowess varies with every individual. God fell in love with variety”

167 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 22

168 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 165

see also Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 173: “...in the real world.... The believer is sometimes tempted to despair, the non-believer is sometimes tempted to hope.”

169 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 107 - part of Chapter 4 ‘What do I mean by “God”?’

His spirituality is thus informed by St John of the Cross, and the ‘dark night of the soul.’¹⁷⁰ He has not written in detail about what took him away from the seminary, but two of his early books (Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge and The Experience of Nothingness) have many references to darkness¹⁷¹, and as I have already mentioned, later he writes of a “dark faith.” He is aware that doubt is a predominant part of faith;¹⁷² this leads to the experience of nothingness, the darkness with a heart.¹⁷³ And one of his latest books, Tell Me Why: A Father Answers His Daughter’s Questions About God,¹⁷⁴ which continues to deal with matters of faith and spirituality, is undogmatic in tone.

Two further quotations broaden our understanding of Novak’s spirituality as relying on the seen as a way to the unseen, an unseen which will always remain out of reach:

“Yet as St John teaches us in his Gospel and in his letters, though God himself is lost in a night men cannot penetrate, men can find their way safely to God by loving their fellow men. God is love. As long as men love, they are in communion with God, living the same life as God. The more they love their fellow men, the closer they are to God.”¹⁷⁵

170 as well as earlier quotes see also eg Novak: Choosing Our King: Symbols of Political Leadership (Macmillan, New York: 1974) p 293: “The centre of human life is suffering, not escape from suffering. The pursuit of happiness is madness. Life has happy moments.... How can it be that a nation committed in its basic documents to “the pursuit of happiness” has so thoroughly misplaced the secrets of happiness? Joy is not our nation’s style.”

171 “The darkness is habitable: that is the first message of the new consciousness. It is *in*habited: that is its discovery..... That is why St John of the Cross writes, in the poem set as the prologue to these lectures.....” Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 116

172 to be faithful to [the drive to question] is to be constantly expanding one’s horizon, constantly losing one’s life and regaining it....” Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 115

see also Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 45: “The source of the experience of nothingness lies in man’s unstructured, relentless drive to ask questions..... Bernard Lonergan was the first philosopher to take that drive seriously and to give it primacy in his theological reflection.” Bernard Lonergan : Insight : A Study of Human Understanding (Philosophical Library, New York 1958)

173 “The experience of nothingness is an incomparably fruitful place for ethical enquiry. It is a vaccine against the lies upon which every civilisation, American civilisation in particular, is built.” Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 1

174 Michael Novak: Tell Me Why: A Father Answers His Daughter’s Questions About God, with Jana Novak (Pocket Books, New York: 1998)

175 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 319

NB Novak assumes that the Gospel and letters are from the same hand. That God is lost in darkness impenetrable is a reading that seems to come from Novak’s dark phase.

There is a mismatch between ‘men can find their way safely to God by loving their fellow men.... the more they love their fellow men, the closer they are to God’ and ‘as long as men love they are in communion with God.’ The second has the sense of human beings being characterised by love, and so in communion with God and other human beings; which is different from getting closer to God by loving human beings – an understanding which seems to me less close to St John.

“The myth of Genesis, which describes God as the one who begins in darkness and creates light, asserts that man is made in the image of God. Just so the experience of nothingness places man in the position of *creatio ex nihilo* we must create our own values and identity from the depths of emptiness and abandonment.”¹⁷⁶

Novak does not deal with the relationship between God and the Bible – or for that matter between God and Jesus, or God and the Church – he is not a systematic theologian. But perhaps his roots in Catholicism, and therefore in a tradition of natural theology,¹⁷⁷ lead him to see God’s hand in human society. So, in The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism, Novak makes a link between the nature of God and the structure of democratic capitalistic society.

“To look upon human history as love-infused by a Creator who values others as others, who sees in those originating purposes of insight and choice (persons) the purpose of creation, and who in loving each as an individual creates of the contrarious many an unseen, hidden, but powerful community, is to glimpse a world in which the political economy of democratic capitalism makes sense.”¹⁷⁸

Earlier in the book he has rejected the argument that since God is one, there should be one order in human society.

“In a genuinely pluralistic society, there is no one sacred canopy. By intention there is not. At its spiritual core, there is an empty shrine. That shrine is left empty in the knowledge that no one word, image or symbol is worthy of what all seek there.”¹⁷⁹

The American system refuses to fill this dark empty shrine at its centre, but leaves it open to invite us towards God; it is not blank, but not defined by others; it can be approached from any direction; it allows to people liberty of conscience and of religious faith.¹⁸⁰

176 Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 59

NB The Biblical creation stories do not, of course, talk about *creatio ex nihilo*, but rather about God through creation bringing order out of chaos. This might have been quite a fruitful image for Novak elsewhere in his writing.

177 It is surprising that he writes: “God calls his followers to bring his presence to their work. . . .” Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 33 In fact, should we not be affirming that God’s presence is in our work ahead of us? We do not have to bring it to our work, but rather recollect that God is there already.

178 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 355 There is a contrast between Novak’s readiness to make links between Biblical descriptions of God and the structure of society, and his rejection of Biblical thinking on economics. (see below footnote Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found 216) see also Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 164 “What works is a social organisation for personal creativity. A society so constructed reflects the image of the Blessed Trinity, the Creator of all things, Lord of history, Spirit brooding over dark creation.”

179 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 53

180 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 53 see pp 53 - 55

Novak, who has grown up in a culture and society with a fundamental separation of church and state, is able to cope with allegiance to a pluralist state alongside a church which makes exclusive, absolute, claims. He seems to be going farther than this, however in seeing pluralism as a reflection of the nature of God's love for the world.

A further example of Novak's view of the relation between God and democratic capitalism, can be found in Towards a Theology of Corporation, in which he considers seven signs of God's activity and grace in corporations – they are metaphors for grace, a kind of insight into God's ways.¹⁸¹ The seven signs are: creativity; liberty; birth and morality; social motive; social character; insight; risk. So, first, corporations are creative and human beings made in the image of God are creative.¹⁸² Second, “the corporation mirrors God's presence also in its liberty (by which I mean independence from the state).” Third, corporations can rise and fall, and have a life cycle – just as human beings do. Fourth and fifth, the signs of social motive and character are that corporations bring a communal element into economics (simple buying and selling by individuals is not particularly interesting to Novak at this point, having occurred since biblical times). Sixth and seventh, the signs of insight and risk are found in the way in which the primary capital of corporations is not money but insight and invention (Novak frequently makes the point that capitalism comes from the Latin *caput* meaning head).

Novak's thinking on spirituality is thus consonant with his view of the relationship between God and democratic capitalism:

“To a remarkable degree, the secrets of producing wealth are spiritual. A very great deal depends upon insights, attitudes, psychological disciplines, habits of social co-operation, a capacity for organisation, a passion for literacy and education, and a spirit of invention, creativity, and economic activism. Minorities which share such spiritual qualities typically demonstrate economic advancement even in the midst of majority populations

181 Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 43 The discussion of the 7 signs is pp 37 ff

182 Novak argues here that instead of being biased against Americans, saying that Americans (6% of the world's population) use 40% of its energy, we should be saying 6% of the world's population invented 100% of its energy and distribute 60%. In fact it seems hard to sustain the argument that Americans invented 100% of the world's energy!

still suffering considerable poverty. The cause of the wealth of nations is chiefly the human spirit, focused in a creative and productive way.”¹⁸³

Novak goes on to look at ‘corporate sin.’ “[Corporations] are capable of the sins of individuals and of grave institutional sins as well.”¹⁸⁴ Accusations sometimes made¹⁸⁵ are that corporations are autocratic; they alienate employees; they represent too great a concentration of power; their profits are too great. In each case Novak defends the corporations: that their executives are not as autocratic as, for example, some cardinals; that farming is just as alienating as working on an assembly line; that a concentration of power is necessary for the enterprises they tackle; that whilst corporations can take too much profit, the market will punish them – and that some profit is healthy, being needed for re-investment. His defence seems to me less successful – having admitted the possibility of corporate grace and sin, he rejects actual examples of sin.

Novak omits other charges – racism, pollution, corruption – which are at least as serious, and perhaps less easy to shrug off. He seems much more optimistic about corporations than about individuals: “Higher standards, achieved through culture and made routine in daily practice, come only with strenuous effort. But they do come.”¹⁸⁶ Novak has elsewhere insisted on the need for systems which do not assume that human beings will grow into good behaviour. Here, he is prepared to trust that corporations, albeit with effort and vigilance, will evolve into morality. He sees a need for the poor to be challenged to make their own way out of poverty, else they will indolently subsist on handouts; he argues for political economies full of checks and balances; but he does not suggest what challenges, checks and balances there are on the behaviour of the rich and powerful, either individuals or corporations.

183 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 175

184 Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 51; see also Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 170 and Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 61.

185 Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 44

186 Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 61

8.3. 3) b) How has he fulfilled his responsibility to the Christian (and Jewish) communities, which are creators and carers, and which are interpreters in their own right, with other conversations – some from the past, and some from the present?

Novak does not mention Orthodox Christians¹⁸⁷, but certainly he is very much aware of Jewish and non-Catholic Christian communities,¹⁸⁸ writing of them as jointly part of a cultural and theological system which shares scriptures¹⁸⁹ and which has produced a view of history which makes possible democratic capitalism,¹⁹⁰ and a value system which makes it work. The values are first enterprise, which produces a willingness to experiment; and second humility which can cope with human weakness, and with the self interest which provides the energy to change history.¹⁹¹

I have already dealt with the stereotyping of which Novak is guilty almost every time he writes about Protestantism, and which mars his performance under this question. All the same, he is able to appreciate the link between Protestant and Puritan thinking on the one hand, and the rise of free market capitalism on the other – indeed I have already commented that this connection, or rather the opposite, the lack of such a connection between Catholicism and Capitalism, gives him pause.¹⁹²

Novak is therefore concerned to motivate the Church to tackle the problems of a theology of economics.

“Events in Iran and Nicaragua have begun to show public policy analysts that they omit religion – specifically the ideas of theologians – from their calculations at their peril. [it is more necessary] to persuade theologians and church leaders to attend more carefully, and more empirically, to matters of public policy.”¹⁹³

187 A surprising omission, since some Poles and many other East Europeans are Orthodox.

188 Jews are mentioned alongside Christians, for example, at Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) pp 26 & 28; see also footnotes Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found, Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found, Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found

189 Novak: Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge (Macmillan, New York: 1965) p 149

190 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 18: “Judaism and Christianity are distinctive among the world religions because they understand salvation as a vocation in history. It is the religious task of Jews and Christians to change the world as well as to purify their own souls.”

191 Novak: Capitalism and Socialism: A Theological Inquiry (AEI, Washington 1979) p 116

192 see above 181

see also for example Novak: Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry (AEI, Washington 1980) pp 180 – 182 “The Theology of economics is very weak, hardly advanced beyond the 17th century; ethics of distribution are those of Aristotle. . . . Papal economic theory is innocent of a good deal of contemporary experience. . . it doesn’t show much economic sophistication”; Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) pp 243 – 248 etc

193 Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) Preface

He then goes on to look at six kinds of ideology which churchmen will need, in his view, to rethink: ideas on poverty, its causes, nature, and solution; out-dated world views which do not take account of modern, differentiated, pluralist societies; naivety about transfer payments; an anti-capitalist bias; guilt mongering; nostalgia for a Constantinian planned society “that would once again permit Church leaders to be in alliance with civil leaders in suffusing an entire society with their values.”¹⁹⁴ He points out that economic order in a pluralist society cannot be based on the principles and ideals of any single church, but must be based on assumptions that permit all who participate to define their own values.¹⁹⁵ This last point in particular shows Novak thinking more widely than just his own church. Indeed there is a sense in which some of his remarks apply not just to Christianity, but also to other religions.

There are some significant subtleties here. Although Novak himself on occasions represents the Catholic Church as the ‘one true church’ with the authority to judge world order – here he is prepared to embrace pluralism in society so thoroughly that he rejects a single religious value system,¹⁹⁶ and doing so, to some extent rejects the claims of his church.¹⁹⁷ He expands the point about pluralism in The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism.¹⁹⁸ His first argument here is that realism about human nature means that we cannot have a Christian society (he means a society based on the ideals of Christianity) before the end-time – economic and political structures cannot be based on expectations of goodness. Second, although Christianity has helped to shape the ethos of democratic capitalism, that very ethos forbids Christians or any others from attempting to command the system. The role for religion is “not at the centre... [but rather] to inspire, to enter the market place of competing ideas and symbols.” This means that the “institutional force of religion is dramatically altered – strengthened in some respects, weakened in others.” Novak is confident that Christianity and Judaism will be able to survive in this marketplace. He argues that this is because they are

194 Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 11

195 Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 10

196 see my comments above 210

197 This interplay between Novak’s allegiance to democratic capitalism and to Catholicism is fascinating, and important for an understanding of his thinking. See above 201

198 Novak: Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) pp 67 – 70

narrative religions which suit a world view of emergent probability¹⁹⁹ which is the best way to view the world since the rationality of every individual is empowered in a way that fosters enterprise.

Another way Novak has of viewing the Church is to understand it as a mediating institution.²⁰⁰ Mediating institutions stand between the (minimal, as he argues) state and the individual; he approves of them because they are voluntary, local, flexible, appropriate, human. All sorts of “freely chosen associations” function as mediating institutions – not just churches. There is, however, a difficulty with this thinking; Christianity becomes simply another hobby or lobby, the Church is put on a level with a golf-club. There are problems with promoting a public, external understanding of the Church which is so much less than our self-understanding, even though we may accept that the one never matches the other perfectly.

A final area to consider here is Novak’s view of the laity. He does see a distinctive Christian vocation for the laity: It is “to take up worldly responsibilities to increase the wealth available to mankind, and to turn the use of such wealth to noble and Christian purposes. Vocation extends beyond private prayer to social, political, and economic responsibilities.”²⁰¹ It is actually one of his criticisms of Liberation Theology, that it fails “to think institutionally about checks and balances, and theologically about the vocation of lay men and lay women.”²⁰² This emphasis is perhaps not surprising as Novak is himself of course lay (though having trained for ordination) and given the weight he puts on economic activity. All the same it is a useful reminder – perhaps particularly to the institutional church – about the need to respect what is the majority of Christian participants in this conversation.

8.3. 3) c) *How has he fulfilled his responsibility to the Bible itself?*

¹⁹⁹ Novak describes Lonergan’s idea of Emergent Probability: the world is in process; both things and ideas develop. Human insight plays a part in this process – its application affects the probability of success or failure.

²⁰⁰ see for example Novak: *This Hemisphere of Liberty: A Philosophy of the Americas* (AEI Press, Washington, D.C.: 1990) p 21 see also eg Michael Novak (editor and one essay): *Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry* (AEI, Washington 1980)

²⁰¹ Novak: *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 259

²⁰² Novak: *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) pp 312, 313

There is a view, which Novak himself accepts, that the Roman Catholic Church before Vatican II was not noted for its study of the scriptures.²⁰³ Vatican II “gives a new place to Scripture...”: ²⁰⁴ “Pope Paul made biblical studies the heart of this renewal [of the Church]: ‘the first requirement of this reform will certainly be a more diligent study and a more intensive proclamation of the Word of God.’”²⁰⁵ Novak, however had left the seminary in 1960 – before the reforms of Vatican II, and his knowledge of Scripture is perhaps not great. He explicitly rejects a use of Scripture to construct a political economy :

“Some theologians may be dismayed that I do not more often use Scripture in what follows.... writers of the biblical era did not envisage questions of political economy such as those we face today.... In all contexts, Scripture has words of universal power. It is a mistake, I believe to try to bind the cogency of Scripture to one system merely. The word of God is transcendent. It judges each and every system, and finds each gravely wanting. Liberation Theologians today err in binding Scripture to a socialist political economy, and I do not wish to indulge in a parallel mistake.”²⁰⁶

“To accumulate biblical texts written for a pre-democratic, pre-capitalist, pre-growth period of history, and then to leap from that context to today is a kind of fundamentalism. Of far more decisive importance is the impact of the Bible down the ages.” ²⁰⁷

203 [it was] “largely Latin in character, not deeply rooted in the study of the history of the people of God, not scriptural, not patristic....” Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 8

204 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 10

205 Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 81

see also Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) p 205, quoting Cardinal Leger of Montreal: "A return to Scripture is the heart and center of all theological renewal."

206 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 335

see also Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) pp xv, xvi : “A number of readers chided me with referring too seldom to biblical texts. They failed to notice, however that the texts of the Bible have powerful meaning under any and every system of political economy. With the great Jesuit theologian-economist Heinrich Pesch, I am firmly of the belief that no-one can deduce a system of political economy from the texts of the Bible alone..... Biblical fundamentalism has often been a mischievous force in the story of actual human liberation..... To read the Bible intelligently in the light of the best available human disciplines, and with a certain humility concerning one’s own capacities for interpretation is to draw upon far more intellectual disciplines than private meditation alone. One needs to add to study of the Bible a profound study of political philosophy, of social institutions, and of economic experiments throughout history.”

207 Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 37

see also Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) pp xv, xvi quoted below 233

see also Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 71 : “.... what is worse, derive an economic system from Holy Scripture.”

However, Novak does think that the Bible has influenced the American Constitution, and also neo-conservatives: see Novak : Will it Liberate ? (1986) p 51. There is a little inconsistency here; on the one hand, Novak is arguing that the Bible is pre-capitalist, and of no direct use for capitalism; on the other, he is claiming that the Constitution and the thinking of neo-conservatives are loyal to the Biblical tradition – and in Novak : Morality, Capitalism and Democracy (1990) pp 4- 7 he attempts to show that the American system is the natural and necessary outcome of certain Christian principles.

This thesis, insofar as it argues that Scripture does not have a single meaning, supports that view. However, this does not excuse Novak from the failure to make other uses of Scripture. It is one thing to see that Scripture is patient of more than one interpretation, and that Christianity has flourished in more than one political system;²⁰⁸ it is quite another for a theologian to fail to set himself the challenges of the hard questions of Scripture. In fact, Novak does, at one point, praise Aquinas for refusing to concentrate solely either on the biblical message or the secular city – in other words for holding the two together.²⁰⁹ Further, when his reverence for the (equally pre-capitalist) Founding Fathers almost leads him to argue that they foresaw every problem faced by a modern political economy,²¹⁰ the rejection of the Bible on the grounds that it is pre-capitalist is a little strange.

A particular example may show that a more Biblically aware Theology might lead to a different view. Novak characterises the Green movement as “the new anti-capitalism”.²¹¹ It could just as well be characterised as a new prophetic movement. Its proponents feel that they are compelled to speak out; they speak with passion and conviction – ready to face suffering, even imprisonment and death; they oppose the ‘powers that be’, the establishment, and are unpopular; they speak about the future in terms of what will happen if people persist in certain activities; they use symbols and visual aids. All of these are characteristics of the independent prophets in the Hebrew Bible. This is not to say that Greens are definitely speaking the word of the Lord,²¹² but it is to argue that they should be taken seriously.

A difficulty with Novak’s view of Scripture – as “words of universal power” – is that by refusing to ground it in the particular he may rob Scripture of its power to challenge. I discuss this in question 3) c) iii) below.

208 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 261

209 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 20

210 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 120, 121

211 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) pp 434, 435

212 As the Old Testament shows, that is a hard claim to decide: see eg Robert P Carroll : From Chaos to Covenant : Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah (SCM 1981)

8.3. 3) c) i) How has he fulfilled his responsibility to the Bible itself as needing to be known thoroughly and deeply?

I list twenty-six examples of Novak making reference to or alluding to the Bible – drawn from nine of his books (there are others – some quoted elsewhere in this chapter).

The Open Church:

a) p 43: “as though not to snuff out the smouldering flax or crush the bending reed” (referring to most of the Bishops at Vatican II going along with the resistant ones).

b) p 180 “they had not here a lasting home”

Belief and Unbelief:

c) p 11: “The project of belief seems to be as cruel and long-range as Sartre has found unbelief to be: There is no comfort in the heart, no oil upon the forehead, or ointment in one’s wounds.”

d) p 120: “the time required to master [science] exceeds any one man’s length of days.”

e) p 149 “If our age is characterised by a widespread decision to declare the religious query illegitimate, it is possible that this decision arises from a preconception of what inquiry is, and of what is real. The quest for God is not eradicated; it is declared to lead off limits, and is ignored. ‘My soul,’ sings the Psalmist, ‘seeketh God as the hart panteth after water.’”

f) p 149 : “God, according to St John, knows each man by name.”

g) p 170, 171 “If God has drawn the suffering ones to himself, their fundamental good, is he evil? ... ‘Tho’ he slay me, yet will I love him,’ Job confessed.”

h) p 185 “Yet the citizen does not flee the US because its political life is choked by mediocrity, compromise and veniality.... It has been said from the beginning, ‘Lord to whom, shall we go?’”

The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics:

i) p 131 “Are there no guardians of culture to drive the money changers from the temple, to impose standards and controls upon the floods of inanity?”

Choosing Our King:

j) p 38 “Look on America and see, if we may paraphrase Isaiah 53²¹³, there is no comeliness in her, no beauty..... The outsider [Nixon in victory], the prisoner, the condemned man was suddenly chosen priest, prophet, king – the tabernacle his. David did no more gleeful a dance before the ark.”

k) p 271 “...the Father of lies...”

The Joy of Sports:

213 Novak also applies the Suffering Servant image to Corporations : see below 231

l) p 22 “Temples do not require whispering. Jesus knocked the temple tables over, jangling metal coins on the stones.”

m) p 27 (referring to the hunger for perfection in sports) “‘Be ye perfect,’ Jesus said, ‘as your heavenly Father is perfect.’”

n) p 169 Novak refers to the seven seals, from the Apocalypse of St John

o) p 224 “In God’s house are many mansions, many athletic fields.”

Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions

p) p 32 “Be ye perfect as God is perfect.” reflecting on the perfect being the enemy of the good, but God’s perfection being prepared to create the imperfect.

q) p 37 “the commitment of Catholic social thought to economic development and to the protection of human rights has already narrowed the gate and made strait the way through which any acceptable political economy must pass.”

r) p 151 (discussing the Pope’s writing about work) “Work is made for man, not man for work – as Jesus had earlier said even of the Sabbath.”

s) p 192 “In summary, liberation theology seems to fail the very test on which it places so much stress: the test of praxis. . . . The gate to the creation of wealth is narrow and the way strait; not every method passes the test of praxis.”

t) p 217 “For economic creativity is another word for development. Its springs lie in the human spirit, made in the image of the Creator. Its evangelical image lies in the carpenter shop that nourished Jesus of Nazareth for thirty years.”

Will It Liberate?

u) p 108 “As wonder is the beginning of wisdom. . . .”

v) p 125 “It is not those who say ‘The poor! The poor! who will enter the kingdom of heaven, but those who actually put in place an economic system that helps the poor no longer to be poor.’”

This Hemisphere of Liberty:

w) p 2 “A church fashioned round the eucharistic instruction ‘Do this in memory of me’ inclines the appetites of the soul toward memory.”

x) p 41 (Self interest is not always evil.) “A person’s interest in becoming holy is not an evil interest. ‘What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffers the loss of his soul?’”

y) p 84 “What do these enemies of capitalism propose to offer them – the stone of socialism. . . .”

Morality, Capitalism and Democracy

z) p 5 “the poor ye shall always have with you. . . .”

In each case the Bible is certainly part of the landscape of his mind, though it often seems rather more as a literary source than as Holy Scripture. The altering of quotations²¹⁴ is an interesting mark of this – see o) u) v). In several, the Bible is used as a kind of proof text – see for example g) x). Many are in an archaic form – see e) m) z).²¹⁵ There are some repeats – i) and l); q) and s); m) and p). Clearly at one level Novak’s work is suffused with the Bible – though taking his writing together there might have been even more Biblical references.

However, there are gaps where he very well might, or even ought to, have used a biblical reference, but did not. For example, in The Experience of Nothingness Novak writes: “Few voyagers enter the promised land they seek – eg Ho Chi Minh, Mao-Tse-Tung.”²¹⁶ Surely this begs for a reference to Moses? In The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnic: he is writing about ethnic groups asking for a fair deal;²¹⁷ St Paul’s words about there being no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, in Christ,²¹⁸ spring to mind. In The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism he is looking at community²¹⁹ under democratic capitalism. Novak looks at four features of community – its global aspects, community in corporations, interdependence and co-operation.²²⁰ But there is no biblical material; yet the Bible has many valid insights into community, insights not diminished by a changed world.²²¹

214 In The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 345, 346 Novak quotes Matthew 19:24: “It is as difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.” He has altered this quote; actually it should, of course read: “It is more difficult for a rich man... than for a camel...” or words to that effect: NRSV REB etc See also Novak : Will it Liberate? (1986) p 108 where he alters “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs ch 1 v 7 Psalm 111 v 10) to “wonder is the beginning of wisdom.” see below footnote Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found

215 The question could be asked: Is he making serious current study of the Bible?

216 Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 119

217 Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnic: Politics and Culture in the Seventies (Macmillan, New York: 1972) p 286

218 Galatians ch 3 v 28 cf Colossians ch 3 v 11

219 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) pp 128 - 142

220 Later in the same book, he considers the proper limits to Government intervention – especially with regard to the problems of poverty – and seeks a balance: Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 203 “Democratic capitalism allows for Government action in alleviating poverty, enhancing the liberty of all and fulfilling basic needs. Yet it is deeply concerned lest Government overstep its limits and become itself a threat worse than the injuries it sets out to redress.”

221 Novak himself elsewhere admits this: see : Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 51 “Ironically the liberal society, some of whose first historical protagonists were anti-religious, owes its originating insights about the dignity of the human person and the nature of community to Jewish and Christian inspiration, and does not make sense apart from biblical perceptions.”

see also below Error: Reference source not found where I discuss more fully Novak’s thinking on the tension between human law and conscience.

Again in the same book, he writes about money and its use.²²² Now, Novak’s argument that the Bible comes from a pre-capitalist world is incontrovertible – but again both the Gospels and the Epistles have things to say about money²²³ – things which Novak, and indeed any of us, might find uncomfortable. In Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions he describes six characteristics of a good society²²⁴ – the number of the poor should decrease, the poverty threshold should rise, there should be a free circulation of individuals up and down, according to talent and effort, there should be an improvement over an individual’s lifetime, there should be a safety net for the unlucky and the disabled, and invention, creativity, and personal liberty should flourish. These are realistic, and sensible characteristics, but would not biblical witness insist on a seventh about justice and fairness limiting the size of the gap between rich and poor – even if realism prevented one from advancing the suggestion of a jubilee re-distribution! My point is that in all these examples, it is not that Novak is wrong, but that there are points he has missed, and which greater attention to biblical material would have suggested.

Finally a minor gap relates to St Paul’s image of the church as a body.²²⁵ Novak makes the point that “looked at religiously, international economic activities based upon voluntary transactions represent a humble and earthy image of the unity of humankind in its daily activities. (God has distributed resources variously to make humans depend on each other.)”²²⁶ There is a little difficulty here, since pressing this imagery too far might mean that people and nations became fixed in particular forms of economic activity – the organs of the body do not change their functions! The earlier part of that chapter²²⁷ would have been more appropriate: it talks about the variety of gifts within the church.

222 Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 348, 349 “money is not a material thing, but a symbol, whose value is upheld by social health...”

223 eg Matthew ch 6 vv 19-34; Matthew ch 25 vv 14-46; Luke ch 12 vv 13-34; I Timothy ch 6 vv 7-10; James ch 4 v 13 – ch 5 v 6

224 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 47

225 Novak quotes I Corinthians ch 12 vv 12-16.

226 Novak: This Hemisphere of Liberty: A Philosophy of the Americas (AEI Press, Washington, D.C.: 1990) p 28

227 I Corinthians ch 12 vv 4-11

8.3. 3) c) ii) How has he fulfilled his responsibility to the Bible itself as complex, and layered; as a (whole) canon; as offering more than one point of view – perhaps even contradictions?

In this section, I cite four examples illustrative of Novak's understanding of the Bible's complexity:²²⁸ his discussions of self interest, of competition, of the poor and of property.

Self interest

Novak points out that to an economist, self-interest is neutral; to a Jew it means the proper concern for self; to a Christian it can be pejorative.²²⁹ Adam Smith and others point out that self interest may serve the common good or work for others. Novak looks at Erickson's idea of 'basic trust'²³⁰ which Erickson relates to the biblical idea of love: it is the root impulse of creativity, love, faith and affirmation. The opposite is the miser, the hoarder, for whom Novak has only scorn. Novak's point is that basic trust, as a motivation, cuts across the question of self versus others: he would almost say that Christianity has gone too far when it encourages people to go beyond the law, and to deny self-interest in order to love God and neighbour. But again, he does not draw on the Bible to find support for this view: he might have looked, for example, at the parable of the unjust steward,²³¹ or at the Psalms.

Competition

²²⁸ Two further, minor, examples are :

"Take the idea of legitimate power and make it the moving force of an institution. Take the idea of law and make it the measure of human fidelity. The combination adds up to clarity and efficiency in organisation, and it also seems to imitate the Gospels, for it emphasises obedience.... But it makes the Gospels juridical. What one is faithful to is human law rather than self-critical conscience. Christ himself was faithful to conscience rather than to human law, to man rather than to the Sabbath.... the more one reflects on Christ's fidelity to conscience and on St Paul's letters to the Romans and the Hebrews (sic) – the more one discerns that emphasis on lawful power and obedience to the law are off centre; they are not at the heart of Catholic life.... It would be a grave mistake to oppose the Gospels to human law... The choice is not an either/or. Nor is it a both/and..." Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) pp 242, 243

In Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 26, 27 he writes about the kingdom of God being an impossible possibility, and that since we must do something in the face of injustice, the perfect may be the enemy of the good.

²²⁹ Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 8

²³⁰ Erik Erickson: Identity, Youth and Crisis (Norton, New York 1968) pp 91 – 107 quoted by Novak: Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 9

²³¹ Luke ch 16 vv 1-8

Related to self-interest is the idea of competition, a central concept for the political right. In a section in The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism about competition, (within which Novak explores related themes like success and failure, and will-to-power), he argues that:

“In every story in the Bible, attention is focused upon the moment of decision. In any given story, dramatic attention is aroused because the outcome remains in doubt until the closing lines. Judaism and Christianity, in other words, envisage human life as a contest.”²³²

Three points need to be made here. The first is that the narrative form inevitably demands moments of drama and decision, particularly in the short stories we have in the Bible. Some knowledge of form criticism would have led to the realisation that it is not necessarily significant that outcomes remain unknown; and so the deduction that life is a contest may not necessarily be made from these units of biblical material. Second, Novak himself shows that the naive understanding of economics as a contest with a zero sum (that is to say, that one participant wins at the expense of the other who loses) is no longer appropriate. In a modern, complex economy, there can be several winners in a transaction; in fact it is perfectly possible for there to be no losers. As this has actually been a possibility in buying and selling and bartering in markets since time immemorial, the view of life as a contest does not stand. Third, there are many examples of biblical material where competition, or decision, or the will-to-power, is not the crux of the story: none of the images of the church offered by St Paul involves these – the vine, the body, the living temple; the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection do not; the story of the creation does not.

Novak does go on to point out that there is not a direct link between what one might say of the “life of the spirit” and the “laws of political economy.” He understands well that God turns worldly success upside down,²³³ but points out that the tendency to feel guilty about success is also damaging. He might have found help here too, if he had had a greater familiarity with the Bible and tradition. Jewish thinking at the time of our Lord seems to have been that wealth was a blessing from God, poverty a punishment. Novak is seeking to hold together a valuing of wealth and poverty, of competition and co-operation – and the balancing of these different poles of thinking is complex:

²³² Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 344 Just before this section, Novak has been reflecting on a perception that clergy tend to be un-competitive conciliators. He goes on to point out that different, more assertive, gifts will be needed in political leaders and captains of industry.

²³³ In The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 345, 346: Novak quotes Matthew 19.24: “It is as difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.”
see above footnote Error: Reference source not foundError: Reference source not found

but the Bible, itself containing elements of all of these, does offer at least some assistance. “It does not seem to be inconsistent with the gospels for each human being to struggle, under the spur of competition with his fellows, to become all he can become.”²³⁴

Related to competition is the difficulty that outcomes will be unequal:

“The Jewish and Christian view shows that God is not committed to equality of results. One steward differs from another in his performance; some virgins are foolish, some wise. The faithful son receives no celebration comparable to the one given by his father for the prodigal. Workers who arrive at the eleventh hour receive the same wage as those who bore the whole day’s heat.”²³⁵

An initial point is, of course, is that Novak is treating these parables as allegories. This is not necessarily wrong, but it is not the only way of understanding them. More important, surely Novak has made a mistake here? The older son is told that all that the father had is also his – that is to say, he could have had a celebration whenever he wanted – his need is to learn that he should celebrate what he has; the workers in the vineyard are all paid the same wages, no matter what their work; both of these actually show equality of outcomes.

The Poor

The Bible has complex ideas about the poor, and Novak picks up some but not all of the nuances. He writes about the claim that the poor should be heard because they are privileged in a theological sense.²³⁶

“What the poor cry out deserves to be sympathetically heard. It does not, however, suffice to still critical and practical inquiry. The poor may have things wrong. Their opinions are not necessarily God’s, nor do they necessarily carry the warrant of truth.”²³⁷

234 The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 348 see also p347, where Novak claims that competition brings out the best in people – a claim which could be disputed: a queue of desperate people waiting water or food does not always encourage generosity or gentleness.

235 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p345

236 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 184

237 Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 185

His arguments that the poor are no more likely to be truthful or right than others, and that the poor do not speak with a single voice, are cogent. But he misses several important points about the theological status of the poor. God's "option for the poor" rests, it would seem, on their dependence on God rather than on wealth; they do not have possessions to come between them and God. It is the culmination of an important strand of Jewish thinking when Jesus, in the Gospels, emphasises this – counteracting a second strand emphasising the rich as blessed by God. Jesus' emphasis can perhaps be seen as standing in the whole New Testament tradition from the Beatitudes to the Epistles – God turning things upside down. If taken seriously, it poses a radical challenge to Novak's lack of challenge.

Novak picks up this second strand when in articulating a critique of Moltmann he quotes Matthew ch 19 vv 23-26,²³⁸ picking out the last part of the story: "with God all things are possible." He continues: "The gospel seems to treat riches and poverty as irrelevant. . . . [it] seems neither to insist that poverty is evil, nor that it will be removed from human history."²³⁹ Novak argues that Moltmann's views on poverty are not clear. How would the Bible define poverty? Would it use monetary terms? How are sin and salvation connected to poverty? Again Novak's treatment of all this certainly recognises that there are many strands in the Bible, woven together in a complex way. I think he ought to analyse more thoroughly the claim that riches and poverty are treated as irrelevant in the Gospels.

Property

In a long extra section on Pope John Paul II and the encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis²⁴⁰ in the second edition of Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions Novak discusses property,²⁴¹ – a topic at the heart of political thinking. He defends Pope Paul VI's view that property is not an absolute right in every respect, by quoting both Locke and Mill. He notes admiringly John Paul II's thinking on creation theology – especially in Genesis. But he does not draw on some of the support for a subtle and complex view which he might find in the Bible: he does not mention, for example, the view in

²³⁸ The camel and the eye of the needle.

²³⁹ Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 258

²⁴⁰ Pope John Paul II : Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (Concern for Social Reality) 30 Dec 1987

²⁴¹ Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) pp 222 ff

Genesis that the land is given to *families* in perpetuity; even when sold away, it is to be returned at the Jubilee²⁴² (– if that ever happened!)

8.3. 3) c) iii) *How has he fulfilled his responsibility to the Bible itself as being different and challenging?*

An initial point to make is that Novak himself is aware that the Bible can and should challenge:

“In all contexts, Scripture has words of universal power. It is a mistake, I believe to try to bind the cogency of Scripture to one system merely. The word of God is transcendent. It judges each and every system, and finds each gravely wanting.”²⁴³

Novak is also clear that it will not be simple to create a theological critique.

“For candor’s sake, I must add that the emphasis upon Scripture studies during the past generation does not seem to have effected, as its sponsors hoped, the revitalization of Christian life and practice. There is a great gap between the Word of God and systems of economic, political, social, and cultural thought in modern societies. The human mind requires a powerful set of philosophical and theological concepts in order to relate the pure and simple Word of Scripture to the complex body of modern thought. By trying to take a shortcut around systematic philosophical and theological reflection, and by ignoring intellectual and social history, too many contemporary clergymen, theologians, and devout laypersons have ensnared themselves in pious simplicities which falsify reality. Quoting Scripture, they do not manage to relate the Word of God incarnationally to every fiber of modern civilization. They fail to understand that Scripture applied to the real world without exact intellectual analysis echoes empty. Those who would apply Scripture to public policy cannot take shortcuts.”²⁴⁴

First, we should note Novak’s view of Scripture; Novak sees it as ‘out there’, pure, distant, simple (naive?); this is not a view of Scripture which all would hold. Second, not all of his opponents have

²⁴² Genesis ch 29

²⁴³ Novak: *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 335
see also Novak: *Towards a Theology of Corporation* (AEI, Washington 1981) p 54, where Novak himself makes a similar point regarding a theology of the corporation: “No [real or imaginable economic system] is the Kingdom of heaven. . . . A theology of the corporation should not make the corporation seem to be the ultimate; it is only a means, an instrument, a worldly agency. Such a theology should attempt to show how corporations may be instruments of redemption, or human purposes and values, of God’s grace; it should also show their characteristic and occasional faults.”

²⁴⁴ Novak: *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 335

taken shortcuts round systematic reflection.²⁴⁵ Third, some would say that a renewed emphasis on Scripture *has* led to a revitalisation of Christian life and practice. All the same, he is right to set before himself and us the need for the deepest study and reflection. One method he uses himself to apply Scripture is the unfolding of Biblical themes or general principles: we shall look at two examples – in The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism, and in Will it Liberate? One possible reservation about this method is that its generality denies the Bible both its complexity and its particularity, and so robs it of power to challenge.

In The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism Novak writes about six theological symbols, which resonate with economic development, political liberty, and a commitment to progress. He claims not to be employing “theological reflection as an argument for or against any form of political economy.”²⁴⁶ The first symbol is Trinity. Novak describes the resonance here as “community within which individuality is not lost.”²⁴⁷ He argues that the challenge for socialism is whether, through its institutional arrangements, it can effect the survival of individuality.

The second symbol is the Incarnation: Novak sees it as a

“doctrine of hope but not of utopia. The point of the Incarnation is to respect the world as it is, to acknowledge its limits, to recognize its weaknesses, irrationalities, and evil forces, and to disbelieve any promises that the world is now or ever will be transformed into the City of God. If Jesus did not effect that, how shall we? If the tears of six million victims pleading for their loved ones could not effect that, how shall we?”²⁴⁸

While Novak certainly has a point about the realism of the Incarnation, he misses, for example, what some parts of the Bible (and Christian doctrine) see as the cosmic significance of the Incarnation as an event which changes creation completely.²⁴⁹ He also misses Jesus’ own understanding of the

245 And I wonder what exact intellectual analysis he has in mind? Ardent advocates of even the most mathematical versions of economics could not claim that they are an exact science.

246 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 341

247 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 338

248 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991). p 341

249 see also above 190

Incarnation as Kingdom of God coming upon people.²⁵⁰ He does write: “we may hope His kingdom will unfold in our midst partially and gradually, as yeast unfolds in dough or as seeds do in the ground. We may hope in modest progress but not in final victory over irrationality and sin.”²⁵¹ But Biblical concepts of the Kingdom, and of eschatology, are more complex than this. Even though in one sense it is true that human beings commit the same sins, make the same mistakes, suffer the same temptations, that we ever did, Novak misses something when he writes: “The single greatest temptation for Christians is to imagine that the salvation won by Jesus has altered the human condition.”

Novak continues, showing how the Founding Fathers tried to design a system for “the free man of property and commerce,” “a system cut to common cloth.”²⁵² He has a good point: the Incarnation does value the ordinary and the everyday. It does seem to be about reformation from within, rather than revolution from without. However we should notice here that Novak is thinking of the Incarnation in the abstract – from the point of view of God as a strategic planner. The Incarnation may indeed challenge utopianism - but if we begin to think about the Incarnation as it actually happened, it represents an equal challenge to many other ideologies, including democratic capitalism.

Novak’s third symbol is competition,²⁵³ which I have already discussed in detail.²⁵⁴

His fourth is original sin,²⁵⁵ which again I have discussed above.²⁵⁶

His fifth is the separation of realms: he cites the “classic text”:²⁵⁷ “Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”²⁵⁸ Although there are a number of ways of interpreting this passage, many basic commentaries would point out that when the Christian has

250 Luke ch 11 vv 14-28; see also John ch 9 vv 4,5 and John ch 16 vv 8-10

251 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 342

252 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 343

253 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 344

254 see above 222

255 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 349

256 see above 190

257 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 351

258 Matthew ch 22 v 21

given to God what is God's, there is nothing left for Caesar; other interpretations would be no more helpful to Novak's argument. A better text from his point of view might have been, "My kingdom is not of this world..."²⁵⁹ The relationship between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world is complex, but no Christian should? does? really accept the complete separation of state and church, and there are great dangers associated with this view.²⁶⁰ However, one interesting and possibly positive point is that Novak goes on to use the separation of realms to establish from a theological perspective the pluralism which is a reality in the United States.

Novak rejects a Biblical challenge to market economies within his discussion of his fifth symbol – the separation of realms. He quotes Bonhoeffer, on the impossibility of a Christian economy; pure Christian values are unworldly (love your enemies, turn the other cheek...)²⁶¹ Novak marginalises this challenge by arguing that it is unrealistic – even monasteries could not be run in this way. In fact, democratic capitalism is comfortable with inequalities of wealth because they are typical of nature, and bring benefits, including a lack of coercion.²⁶² The way to deal with the poor is to "multiply opportunities among [them] so that [they] can rise as far as their talents take them..... [This is] more human, more Christian and more promising..."²⁶³ Novak has a point about realism, as I have already agreed – but given that the discussion above focuses on the realism of the biblical concept of love, I would have expected Novak to devote some thought to why the Bible contains, as he sees it, both realistic, and unrealistic ideas. My own view is that the unrealistic, idealistic elements are a necessary challenge to the realistic; without them, we become too comfortable.

259 John ch 18 v 36

260 Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms : "Since few believe and still fewer live a Christian life, do not resist evil and themselves do no evil, God has provided for non-Christians a different government outside the Christian estate and God's kingdom and has subjected them to the sword.... For this reason the two kingdoms must be sharply distinguished, and both permitted to remain; the one to produce piety, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds; neither is sufficient in the world without the other" Luther : "Secular Authority : To What Extent It Ought to be Obeyed" quoted in eds Rupp and Drewery : Martin Luther (Documents of Modern History) (Edward Arnold, London 1970) pp 107 – 112

The matter is beyond the space available in this thesis, but for basic treatments of the wider issues, see : J L Houlden : Ethics and the New Testament (Mowbray 1975) pp 80-88 and Eduard Schweizer : The Good News according to Matthew (SPCK 1976) pp 193-209

261 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 351

262 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 204

263 Novak: Morality, Capitalism and Democracy (Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), London 1990) p 33

Novak's final symbol is *caritas*, which he translates and defines as sacrificial love²⁶⁴. In fact the New Testament *αγαπᾶω* seems to mean divine love there, or more widely, brotherly love. Novak draws on Aquinas, both in the use of *caritas* and in writing about it meaning “willing the good of the other.”²⁶⁵ He draws parallels between the growth in maturity of loving relationships and the stages of political economy from *pietas* – primordial love of country – to *dilectio* – compact, election. Democratic capitalism, according to Novak, imitates the demands of *caritas* by respecting individuals, by being based on realism, and by making communal life more active, intense, voluntary and multiple.²⁶⁶

In fact one obvious reading of the Gospels would show Jesus making clear that divine love is best understood as the love of a father for his children. This seems certainly to carry the elements Novak notes, but also to be less competitive, more generous, more sacrificial than democratic capitalism – indeed to carry elements of socialism too, and feudalism and... In other words, the implied claim that democratic capitalism embodies love more perfectly than other political economies does not stand up. (Interestingly, Novak is critical of certain sorts of family bonds; he judges that they stand in the way of economic development.²⁶⁷)

In *Will It Liberate?* Novak explores three biblical notions from which he deduces three aspects of democratic capitalism.²⁶⁸ The Jewish-Christian notion of sin leads to thinking about the division of powers, and a concern with checks and balances. The Jewish-Christian concept that human beings are made in the image of God the creator suggests that human beings should be creative, persevering, and so on. In an earlier book Novak has pointed out that God left the creation incomplete, allowing humans to be co-creators, to realise their own potential and the potential of the rest of creation.²⁶⁹

264 Is it significant that Novak uses the Latin of the Church rather than the Greek of the New Testament? In fact neither he nor Cone considers the problems of the translation of the Bible from its original languages.

265 Novak: *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 353
I quote Novak's next sentences 210

266 Novak: *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 357

267 “Familism of certain kinds has injured many traditional Catholic cultures by imposing upon individual family members constraints which damage conscience. ‘He who loves father or mother... is not worthy of me.’” Novak: *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions* (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 160

268 Novak : *Will It Liberate?* (1986) pp 39 ff

269 Novak: *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 39

He continues this point here, arguing that God saw that the creation was good, and making a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘perfect’.²⁷⁰ From this ‘good but not perfect’ we are to infer that creation is as yet incomplete, and that it contains things which are not yet as they should be. Novak links this with the notion of sin, and the division of powers and the need for checks and balances which are about needing to have systems which cope with things as they are, and with human sinfulness. Finally, the Jewish-Christian idea of community based on free voluntary covenant gives rise to free associations – of which there are a vast number of examples in America.²⁷¹

These two discussions can be judged positively. Novak’s re-statement of the positive sides of individualism, creativity, self-reliance, plurality, and realism, for example, are at the least a helpful corrective to those who have neglected them and a celebration of them for those who have taken them for granted. However, there are some negative things to say as well. Novak could be accused of having chosen these biblical principles to suit aspects of democratic capitalism. This selection of Biblical principles omits all the more challenging principles which could have been picked: what about Justice, or Service and Sacrifice? Then the interpretations themselves need examination: the Jewish-Christian ideas of community and covenant are more than free associations – they do have an element of election, selection, by God; Jewish views of community and covenant are partly based on birth and geography; they do carry a sense of, for example, corporate salvation. Finally the idea that there are such things as Biblical principles is itself a decision about a method of interpretation.

Interestingly, Novak uses the Bible to challenge one of his targets – the educated, intellectual, class:

“biblical realism must become especially critical of the power of the educated class – because the enlightened conventional wisdom is more powerful than ever before. . . . If we are to talk about biblical realism, the role of conscience and the pursuit of truth, then there is imposed on us the obligation to think more clearly about the new power in society of the ideas sector. . . .”²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) p 28

²⁷¹ Novak: Will It Liberate? Questions About Liberation Theology (Paulist, New York 1986) p 39

²⁷² Novak: Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry (AEI, Washington 1980) pp 186, 187 Novak goes on to refer to “verbal hygiene”, which is something like political correctness.

The Bible does challenge the powerful, the establishment; it does have plenty to say about wisdom; it does ask questions about truth; it is quite direct, down to earth, concrete.²⁷³ Earlier, in the same vein, Novak has criticised television coverage of sport:

“The Television people have forgotten form. They do not trust the power of the word. They do not remember that the Word, not vision, was the name God gave himself. In Hebrew as in Christian thought, God speaks but is not seen. The ear, not the eye, is the organ of human fact. And also of thought. . . .”²⁷⁴

I surmise that Novak comes, as do many Christians, from a sub-culture which values reading and words, and is slightly suspicious of television. However, other cultures differ: so, in turn, Novak’s valuing of the (pure?) Word over against the image is perhaps culturally conditioned, which may weaken Novak’s argument. But Novak does well in persuading us to think about this.

Finally I give one example, where Novak’s use of the Bible verges on the scandalous in its complacency. Novak, defending corporations, applies the Suffering Servant imagery in Isaiah 53. 2-7 to them:²⁷⁵ they have, he argues, been unappreciated. Now he may be right that corporations have been unfairly lambasted, and stereotyped; but it does seem that he has lost his sense of perspective to write this. The Suffering Servant is a person who actually suffers for his people, without hope of success or motive of gain: it has been applied to the prophet and to Jesus. It seems highly inappropriate to apply it to corporations in this way.²⁷⁶

8.3. 3) c) iv) *How has he fulfilled his responsibility to the Bible itself as requiring considered use?*

²⁷³ Novak does not go on to develop this point; it seems to be one of his allusions to another agenda which ought to be tackled. See above 192

²⁷⁴ Novak: The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit (Basic, New York: 1976) p 251

²⁷⁵ Novak: Towards a Theology of Corporation (AEI, Washington 1981) p 33

²⁷⁶ Wogaman in ed Block, Brennan, Elzinga : Morality of the Market : Religious and Economic Perspectives : Proceedings of an International Symposium Vancouver 1982 (pbl The Fraser Institute 1985) p 43. Wogaman questions these inflated claims made about moral motivation. Walter Block (p 72) responds to Wogaman’s attack saying, “Is not the businessman, as well as the labourer, worthy of his hire?”

We have already noticed Novak's insistence on 'what works,' on pragmatic, practical tests. In so far as he has a hermeneutic it is this same thinking:

“When is doctrine pure? Faced with two propositions, each with the same number of words, each in the same language, each trying to express the same point, by what method does one decide which of the two is more faithful to the Gospels? Sometimes, for example, the key word in the proposition cannot be found in the Scriptures, either because the formulation is not in Scriptural language, or because the precise point did not explicitly arise in biblical history. Words are not enough; abstract definitions are not enough; his views must meet the test of facts, the bar of concrete reality.”²⁷⁷

In order to look at whether a Biblical interpretation will work, Novak acknowledges the need to go outside the Bible, to other disciplines:

“...To read the Bible intelligently in the light of the best available human disciplines, and with a certain humility concerning one's own capacities for interpretation is to draw upon far more intellectual disciplines than private meditation alone. One needs to add to study of the Bible a profound study of political philosophy, of social institutions, and of economic experiments throughout history. One of the central motifs of Biblical realism is the pervasive sinfulness of human beings. Partly because of sin, and also for other reasons, one must think clearly about what actually does work --in a sinful world -- to achieve the liberation of peoples and persons. For institutions often work in counter-intuitive ways that are best discerned by trial and error. Such is the irony of history. Biblical simplifiers have often before led their followers into tragedy.”²⁷⁸

At the same time, Novak is prepared to look to the Bible for a series of general principles which can inform economic thinking, as we have seen. In The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism he looks at six

²⁷⁷ Novak : The Open Church (Macmillan, New York: 1964) pp 54, 55

²⁷⁸ Novak: Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) pp xv, xvi See above 216 NB Biblical realism is a concept of Reinhold Niebuhr's: it was an attack on unchastened idealism and 'soft utopiansim,' including the evading of moral responsibilities to history in a vain and futile quest to maintain moral purity, and the failure to take sin seriously. see Niebuhr : The Nature and Destiny of Man (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1943). See also Niebuhr : Christian Realism and Political Problems (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1953)

Novak applies the same thinking to political economy: "Democracy and Capitalism both require a steady critique from a larger moral and cultural perspective.... What we need then is not an exaltation of democracy and capitalism, but an awareness that their value is instrumental.... Even the virtues associated with capitalism – thrift, hard work, savings – have been proved by German and Japanese militarists ...to be disastrous... by themselves.." Novak: Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry (AEI, Washington 1980) p 204 – the words are actually a point put to Novak by one of his audience, to which his response is: "I agree." cf : "One may believe commercial values to be less than the highest of virtues, but it is not contrary to biblical faith to honour them for their instrumental value." Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 122

theological doctrines;²⁷⁹ in Capitalism and Socialism he looks at what he calls Judaeo-Christian values in capitalism (enterprise, humbleness, co-creation, the light of intelligence);²⁸⁰ in Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions he looks at ‘creation’ theology;²⁸¹ in Will it Liberate? he looks at ‘Three Biblical Notions’ (sin, the image of God, covenant).²⁸² Behind this perhaps lies a meta-narrative: the Judaeo-Christian idea of salvation as a vocation in history; we are to save our souls and change the world (ie build up the Kingdom of God).²⁸³ A difficulty with this method is that persons using it are open to the accusation that they have chosen or deduced their themes or ‘notions’ to fit their own prior agenda, that their biblical principles do not reflect the Bible in its range and balance. Novak is certainly open to this criticism, as we have already seen.²⁸⁴

Model

It is difficult to identify the “model” of the Bible which Novak may have. In some ways his use of it is, as I have said,²⁸⁵ almost as a literary source. Perhaps the closest metaphor is that of the city or place, whose denizens inhabit the language. Novak might argue that his thinking was shaped by and dependent on the Bible without being limited by its limitations – he could innovate and develop from it as a foundational starting point.

8.3. 3) d) *How has he fulfilled his responsibility to the world?*

The main interest in this section must be Novak’s strong advocacy of pluralism in the face of what the rest of Christendom understands as Catholic opposition to this. Pluralism “decisively distinguishes democratic capitalism from traditional or socialist societies...”²⁸⁶ In fact reason itself is pluralist: “it

279 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) pp 337 ff See above 227 ff

280 ed Novak : Capitalism and Socialism : A Theological Enquiry (1979) pp 116 ff

281 Novak : Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions (Harper & Row, San Francisco: 1989) pp 162 ff

282 Novak : Will It Liberate? (1986) pp 39 ff see above 230 ff

283 Novak : Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Madison 1991) p 18

284 See above 190

285 see above 220

286 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 49

seems important for a liberal civilisation today to tread its way philosophically between the Scylla of relativity and the Charybdis of too narrow a conception of universal reason.”²⁸⁷ “The true liberal spirit is cosmopolitan rather than universalist.”²⁸⁸

It is important to note again the point made above²⁸⁹ that Novak’s view of pluralism in political economy seems to embrace not only other Christian denominations, but also other faiths; he does seem to be thinking mostly of Judaism in addition to Christianity, but perhaps more widely than that.

As we have seen,²⁹⁰ his enthusiasm for pluralism ironically leads us to one of his weaknesses, blindness to racism:

“In a pluralistic nation like the United States, cultural diversity plays a unique psychological role. Indeed it appears to be bringing about the development of a unique psychological type: the pluralistic personality. From a very early period, American society was established upon three significant principles which have led to a unique experiment in pluralistic living. First, ethnicity has not been permitted to become an instrument of territorial sovereignty, or of political exclusion in any jurisdiction. . . . Political rights inhere in individuals, not in groups. . . .”²⁹¹

Presumably neither blacks nor Native Americans nor Hispanics would agree with Novak.²⁹² He denies a growing disparity between income of blacks and whites²⁹³; there is a black poor, but the social profile of this group – in particular its shift in marriage patterns – is to blame.²⁹⁴

287 Novak: Concepts of Ethnicity (Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press 1980/1982) p 35

288 Novak: Concepts of Ethnicity (Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press 1980/1982) p 38

289 See above 214

290 See above 187

291 Novak: Concepts of Ethnicity (Belknap Press/ Harvard University Press 1980/1982) p 39

292 He has, earlier, written in : Novak : The Open Church (DLT 1964) : p 319 “In a moving address in Philadelphia in 1963 one of the experts who shared in the work of the liturgical document pointed out the way that community worship must affect community life. ‘We do not proclaim the death of the Lord, we trumpet the blasphemous triumph of Satan, if we eat of the Bread and drink of the Cup, and refuse to accept the Negro as our daily table guest.’ However, ‘table guest’ is inadequate for a fellow-Christian. cf Novak : Choosing Our King (Macmillan 1974) p 129 where Novak writes that civil religion (he would include politics in civil religion) must be broadened and deepened and made more plural to include blacks and women.

293 Novak : The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (Simon & Schuster New York 1982) pp 215 ff : p 219 : “Black Americans are richer and better educated than any other blacks in the world and most other people besides.”

294 Novak: The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism (2nd edition Madison Books, Lanham: 1991) p 426

On ecological issues; on issues of cultural imperialism by the United States (or the west) towards the rest of the world; on issues about women; indeed on the wider world, Novak is relatively silent. Perhaps this is not entirely fair – he might say that his advocacy of democratic capitalism is something for the whole world.

He makes an interesting point about violence, one which Cone might almost echo:

“There are different styles of violence. The war in Vietnam and black militance have unmasked upper-class violence. Anti-personnel bombs were not invented by men of a construction gang; guys on beer trucks did not dream up napalm. Ph.D.s from universities, who abhor bloodshed, thought them up.”²⁹⁵

One further point is his attempts (in Belief and Unbelief) to relate to those who do not believe:²⁹⁶ he suggests “the perplexed take up a ‘point of view’ and accept faith as their pre-supposition (after all, no one set is more compelling than another) and note how such pre-suppositions, like new spectacles, clarify their experience.”²⁹⁷ In fact his project of justifying Catholicism to America can be seen as an attempt to persuade the perplexed to take up a Catholic point of view.

8.3. 4) *What has been left unsaid? Are there relevant parts of the Bible which have been omitted?*

Two things can be said here, in addition to the gaps already noted. First, Novak looks at symbols in connection with sports, and presidency; it is a strength of his discussion of these matters, and he understands its centrality.²⁹⁸ Why then does he fail to discuss the symbols of the Bible?

²⁹⁵ Novak: The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics (Macmillan 1971) p 169

²⁹⁶ cf Novak : Belief and Unbelief (DLT 1966) p 144 : “If our age is characterised by a widespread decision to declare the religious query illegitimate, it is possible that this decision arises from a preconception of what inquiry is, and of what is real. The quest for God is not eradicated; it is declared to lead off limits and is ignored.”

²⁹⁷ Novak : Belief and Unbelief (DLT 1966) p 51 following Reinhold Niebuhr

²⁹⁸ see Novak : Choosing Our King p 24 “Politics is the art of understanding the symbols actually operative in society.” cf p 250 f where Novak articulates his unhappiness with Nixon through a critique of Nixon’s use of symbols.

Second, liberty is one of Novak's central concepts;²⁹⁹ yet in his discussion of it in Morality, Capitalism and Democracy³⁰⁰ he makes only one biblical reference : "the truth shall make you free."³⁰¹ Compared with the Liberation Theologians, at whom he has looked so critically, his views on this are inadequate. Even if he wishes to reject much of their economics, perhaps even their philosophy and world-view, a Christian view of liberty needs to be more Christianly informed – not only by the Bible but by the whole Christian tradition too (for example ideas about liberty for service). This is one example – there are others – where his thinking needed to be more informed by Christian sources.

8.4 Interim Conclusion

It is important to see the extent of Novak's achievement. In his work, he has articulated for democratic capitalism – after all the most widely adopted political economy in the world – what has never been articulated before. Not only has he tried to show that it is entirely congruent with Christianity, but also that it is based upon spiritual values, and has a poetry of its own. It has required its own courage, for democratic capitalism certainly has not been fashionable either in academic circles, or ecclesiastical ones. He has commanded an audience which includes some of the most influential people in the world – not just politicians, but heads of corporations, and political theorists. His work has produced Christian reflection on completely new areas – sport, for example, as well as political economy. He has also worked to keep Catholicism in the main-stream of political and intellectual life.

Novak's claim to be writing theologically, taken with his avowed rejection of the Bible in some instances, and his familiarity with the Bible, justify me in using my questions. I judge that Novak does not do as well as he should. There are major areas where attention to the Bible would raise questions about Novak's views and arguments; the area of justice, central to Biblical thinking, comes to mind.³⁰² A further, surprising, result was in the range of his knowledge, where I identified what seemed to me serious gaps.

299 see Novak: The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II (Macmillan, New York: 1964) pp 3,4 243; Novak: The Experience of Nothingness (Harper & Row, New York 1970) p 88

300 Novak : Morality, Capitalism and Democracy (Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), London 1990) pp 16-28

301 John ch 8 v 32 quoted in Novak: Morality, Capitalism and Democracy (Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), London 1990) p 18

302 McGovern : Liberation Theology and Its Critics (Orbis 1989) p 251 "von Rad claims that there is absolutely no concept in the Old Testament with so central a significance for all relationships of human life as that of justice. The doing of justice constitutes the very substance of religious faith; without it, God remains unknown."

