Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny

Description: The rapid spread of the liberal market order across the globe poses a host of new and complex questions for religious believers—indeed, for anyone concerned with the intersection of ethics and economics. Is the market economy, particularly as it affects the poor, fundamentally compatible with Christian moral and social teaching? Or is it in substantial tension with that tradition?

In Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny, editors Doug Bandow and David L. Schindler bring together some of today's leading economists, theologians, and social critics to consider whether the triumph of capitalism is a cause for celebration or concern. Michael Novak, Richard John Neuhaus, Max Stackhouse, and other defenders of democratic capitalism marshal a number of arguments in an attempt to show that, among other things, capitalism is more Christian in its foundation and consequences than is conceded by its critics—that, as Stackhouse and Lawrence Stratton write, ""the roots of the modern corporation lie in the religious institutions of the West,"" and that, as Novak contends, ""globalization is the natural ecology"" of Christianity. The critics of liberal economics argue, on the other hand, that it is historically and theologically shortsighted to consider the global capitalist order and the liberalism that sustains it as the only available option. Any system which has as its implicit logic that ""stable and preserving relationships among people, places, and things do not matter and are of no worth,"" in the words of Wendell Berry, should be regarded with grave suspicion by religious believers and all men and women of goodwill.

Bandow and Schindler take up these arguments and many others in their responses, which carefully consider the claims of the essayists and thus pave the way for a renewed dialogue on the moral status of capitalism, a dialogue only now re-emerging from under the Cold War rubble. The contributors' fresh, insightful examinations of the intersection between religion and economics should provoke a healthy debate about the intertwined issues of the market, globalization, human freedom, the family, technology, and democracy.

""If one wants a prosperous society—with resources available for the poor as well as the rich, with rising living standards, with technological progress that does everything from heal the sick to clean the environment—one needs a market economy.... If poverty persists in wealthy countries, the unmet human needs in poorer states are staggering. Obviously the social agenda for any person of good will, and especially a Christian, remains long. The only question is how to effect reform.""
—Doug Bandow

""The conventional way of approaching debates about market systems begs the prior question of how man's telos anteriorly shapes (or should shape) the meaning of economics and wealth as such, and therefore ignores the sense in which an economic system itself already embeds, indeed is also, a theology and an anthropology and a culture.... Liberalism, even at its most benign, presents Christianity with what is arguably its most profound challenge in engaging the contemporary world."
—David L. Schindler

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