

ers into patrons and keeping blacks where they have always been—dependent on the largesse of whites.” All parties, black and white, Steele suggests, must stop regarding blacks as victims deserving of special treatment and privileges, and begin instead to think of blacks as human beings—as American citizens whose constitutional rights guarantee them fair and equal treatment, nothing more, nothing less. White administrators (and faculty members) must stop trying to exorcise their “guilt” by caving in to ridiculous black demands for segregated facilities, for separate programs, and for special standards. White administrators (and faculty members) must realize that such behavior is all but killing blacks with phony kindness. Rather, these administrators and faculty members should spend their energies in demanding that black students achieve first-rate academic performance and in helping them to achieve it.

Black students, conversely, must stop “taking comfort” in being victims, must stop blaming others for their own failure and lack of initiative, must start taking responsibility for their own actions. Black students must stop acting in ways that confirm the racist stereotype that they hate learning, that they are lazy and intellectually inferior. Black students must seek to excel in academic performance by seeking aggressively to exploit the academic opportunities universities “all but shower on them.” Rather than living as professional blacks, rather than being part of a black collective demanding special treatment and programs, black students must realize that their salvation lies in acting as self-interested individuals working toward becoming part of the mainstream in the university and in society. At the risk of being labeled “Toms” and “Oreos” by their black separatist peers, black students must have the courage to espouse middle-class values. Black students must realize that “Hard work, education, individual initiative, stable family life, property ownership—have always been the means by which ethnic groups have moved ahead in America.” “Regardless of past or present victimization,” Steele insists, “these ‘laws’ of advancement apply absolutely to black Americans also.”

Considering that so many young

blacks are educationally and economically “disadvantaged,” how, without special help, can they be expected to attend, much less excel in, the universities? Steele’s answer is that such programs are desirable if they are available not only to blacks but to all “disadvantaged” young Americans. Provide “better elementary and secondary schools, job training, safer neighborhoods, better financial assistance for college”—but don’t provide such help for poor blacks on one side of town at the expense of poor whites on the other.

A Book-of-the-Month Club selection, *The Content of Our Character* has been called a remarkable book, “powerfully original,” and it has recently won the National Book Critics Circle Award. Yet it hardly seems remarkable. Much of what it says has been said by white conservatives for years. What is remarkable is that Steele is not a white conservative. A professor of English at San Jose State in California, he is a black liberal, and as such he is able to bring to his material a point of view that converts the book’s fairly conventional conservative thought into something exciting.

It is ironic, considering Steele’s views on reverse discrimination, that were he not black his book wouldn’t probably be in print, but to say so is not to diminish the quality or the importance of his book. If good writing is clear thinking made visible, good sense in print, then Shelby Steele is a very good writer indeed. And *The Content of Our Character*, though short on specific solutions to the problems he so ably articulates, is important not only for its attack on black separatism, but for its attack on the entire “politics of difference,” of “diversity” and of “multiculturalism” that threatens to destroy the integrity of American universities. Arguing against all university programs and policies that “make of everyone on campus a member of a minority group,” Steele establishes himself in the tradition of our sanest and most distinguished critics of American higher education, of such critics as Robert Maynard Hutchins and Jacques Barzun. In articulating his belief that universities must emphasize not “diversity” but “commonality,” Steele sets himself as a new champion of an idea as old as the university itself:

namely, that the university is, by nature, an intellectual community based on values its members, as human beings, hold in common; that it is a community of individuals and specialists capable of conversing with and understanding one another (and thereby of realizing themselves intellectually as individuals) only because they are united by a common stock of ideas, a common tradition, and a common language.

James P. Degnan writes from Aptos, California.

## Reinventing the Wheel

by Robert A. Sirico

**Religion, Wealth and Poverty**

by James Vincent Schall

Vancouver: The Fraser Institute;  
202 pp., \$14.95

**Capitalism or Socialism? An Economic Critique for Christians**

by Enrique M. Urena

Translated by Robert Barr

Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press;  
256 pp., \$14.95



Two Jesuits have recently written books on social ethics, the humane economy, and on liberating the poor. I know what you’re thinking: two more liberation theologians using Marxist criteria for their analysis, and ruthlessly criticizing the free market. Think again.

Prevalent opinion traditionally associates the Society of Jesus with all forms of cabals, while a current version of this conspiracy theory identifies Jesuits with socialism and its religious expression, liberation theology. Yet, if stereotypes can be shortcuts to knowledge, they might just as easily be detours around it, and the appearance of these books by Jesuit Fathers James Schall and Enrique Urena (a Spaniard), both of which make a moral case for a free market, prove this fact. These works are made all the more relevant by the centenary of *Rerum Novarum* on May 15, the first of the papal social encyclicals, which will no doubt excite much de-

bate about the connection between economics and morality.

Father Schall's collection of previously published essays is significant for two reasons. First, Father Schall, a political scientist at Georgetown University, defends the free market by retrieving from the Catholic tradition a respect for the rights to property and enterprise (a tradition superbly traced in Alejandro Chafuen's enormously important little book *Christians for Freedom: Late-Scholastic Economics*, 1986). Second, this series of theologically astute pieces is published under the aegis of the Fraser Institute, a Canadian libertarian think-tank, which indicates the importance that libertarians are beginning to place on moral and even religious arguments in making the case for a free society.

One of the many enlightening sections of Father Schall's collection is Chapter 16, "Both God and Money." Here, Father Schall uses the occasion of a visit to a Carmelite chapel to bridge the gap between the spiritual and material worlds. He acknowledges that money may enable "us to do many more immoral things than we might were we poorer," but he also probes more deeply to observe that the "refusal to make money, even if disguised as religious virtue, can be an injustice to others."

A *leitmotiv* winding its way through these essays is the production of wealth as both a moral and a spiritual endeavor. In constructing this theme, Father Schall displays an enviable talent for condensing much wisdom into short sentences, such as, "The 'right to be fed' can be turned into a formula to blame those who know how to produce food for the condition of those who do not."

Point those who would conclude from the above that Father Schall is nothing but a papal lackey to his commentary on John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. Here Father Schall engages the Pope's arguments seriously and displays what critical yet loyal dialogue with the magisterium on moral issues ought to look like, as when he laments, "The word 'consumer' is a perfectly good one, and it is a pity to see it used as some sort of substitute for greed."

In private, Michael Novak once likened Father Schall to his Jesuit-brother

John Courtney Murray. This caused me to think of Father Enrique Urena as our side's Juan Luis Segundo; with three separate doctorates, one each in economics, theology, and philosophy, Father Urena brings to his study a number of disciplines.

Interestingly, Father Urena's book was translated at the behest of Orbis Books, the publishing house of the Maryknoll community, and as such the major printing arm of liberation theology in the United States. Orbis did not initially know what they had on their hands. When it became clear that Father Urena opted for the free market instead of for socialism, they decided its content did not accord with their publishing guidelines; it was at that point that the book was recommended, by a third party, to its present publishers. The events in Eastern Europe, they said, "seem to be a confirmation of the author's thesis."

Orbis's confusion is understandable. Father Urena reminds me in some ways of Father Avery Dulles, S.J. Both are writers who are so scrupulously objective in stating the various sides to an argument that it is necessary to read them carefully to see where they themselves stand on an issue. After pages of probing with an "on the one hand, and on the other hand" type of analysis, Father Urena concludes that the free market is practically and morally the superior way of organizing society.

But Father Urena's unique contribution to the discussion of Catholic social ethics does not lie in this conclusion; others have, after all, made the same case in different ways. Rather, Father Urena's ability to write without a hint of partisanship is what is most valuable. Father Urena simply asks, in essence: which form of social organization will best demonstrate, from a historical and economic perspective, a "humanizing superiority"? It is not his intention to examine the theoretical basis for the relationship between Marxism and Christianity; he seeks, instead, to engage "the practical vector of the problem," and this leads his study more specifically into economics. No specifically *economic* treatment of this question on the part of liberation theologians readily comes to mind. Father Urena has taken as a point of departure an area that is as critical as it is absent in contemporary discussions

of social ethics, from the corpus of liberation theology, to magisterial pronouncements, to the pastoral letter of the American bishops.

Father Urena puts it this way: "A respectable option for socialism (or for capitalism) on the part of the Christian *cannot be made directly from the demands of the Gospel, not from theology: it must be preceded by a strictly economic, political, and sociological analysis of the problem.*" The theoretical impact of Father Urena's empirical investigation is, however, to "destroy the myth that Marxist economic socialism is *theoretically* closer to the Gospel than any possible form of market economy."

A body of Catholic writers is beginning to lay the groundwork for a contemporary moral perspective on liberty and on the institutions designed to preserve and enhance it. As contemporary contributions to the development of Catholic social thinking, both Father Schall's and Father Urena's books are essential. History isn't ending; rather it may be just beginning.

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## A Distant Encounter

by Gregory McNamee

### Yankees in the Land of the Gods

by Peter Booth Wiley,  
with Korogi Ichiro

New York: Viking; 578 pp.; \$24.95

◆  
In the spring of 1847, Ranald McDonald, half Chinook Indian and half Scots, jumped ship from the Yankee whaler *Plymouth* and steered his stolen dory toward Rishiri, a small island in the Japanese archipelago. Having heard tales of Nippon for years—a land of cannibals, American sailors whispered; no place to be shipwrecked—the curious McDonald, who had roamed over much of the world, thought to have a look at the