

Cort has written a pleasing and engrossing narrative interlacing his long life and the religious and social movements of his time.

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## In Defense of Human Dignity: Essays for Our Times

**Robert P. Kraynak and Glenn Tinder (Editors)**

Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003  
(252 pages)

At the beginning the twenty-first century, people around the world are reexamining the last century's commitment to human rights and political liberalism. The Cold War's end vindicated key elements of liberalism, but globalization and international terrorism challenge them once again. Using new conceptual resources, some thinkers defend liberal institutions, while others condemn them for promoting individualism and atheism. Many Christians find liberalism philosophically problematic but are simultaneously committed to its ideals. Recognizing this intellectual and political climate, this book focuses on the nature and source of human dignity. Its best essays carefully analyze why liberalism presents difficulties for Christianity. Others, however, rely on philosophically vague concepts of religion and demonstrate considerable ignorance of contemporary Christian thought. The result is a flawed but important book that should interest both scholars and citizens.

Robert P. Kraynak and Glenn Tinder solicit contributions from excellent scholars, including Glenn Tinder, Susan M. Shell, Robert P. Kraynak, John Witte Jr., Timothy P. Jackson, David Walsh, John Rawls, and Kenneth L. Grasso. The Tinder and Rawls essays have been published elsewhere, but others appear here in print for the first time. Protestant and Catholic authors explore the problematic relationships between Christianity and democracy. They also discuss Dostoevsky, Kant, Pope John Paul II, and Martin Luther, providing exegesis and constructive commentary. Finally, the book features a discussion of abortion and euthanasia (Timothy P. Jackson, "A House Divided Again: Sanctity Versus Dignity in the Induced Death Debates"), which I recommend to anyone working in applied ethics.

David Walsh contributes by far the best essay in the volume ("Are Freedom and Dignity Enough? Reflections on Liberal Abbreviations"). Liberalism, he notes, finds itself in a strange situation; theoretical challenges have exposed its conceptual weaknesses while, at the same time, countries all over the globe clamor to adopt liberal institutions. Walsh responds by adeptly using Michael Oakshott's idea that political language consists of abbreviations for more extended knowledge. Human rights discourse is appealing, he argues, because it is an abbreviation for minimal consensus, the dignity of the person, and the way that the political order depends on spiritual tradi-

tions. Walsh opposes those who uncritically reject liberalism, developing a nuanced account of why religious persons should support it.

I found two other essays particularly illuminating. Susan M. Shell (“Kant on Human Dignity”) carefully discusses how Kant grounds human dignity in the autonomy of the will. Persons have dignity because they can use reason to set ends, making them qualitatively more valuable than things. I recommend Shell’s discussion of Kant and politics, which challenges the image of Kant as a foolish child of the Enlightenment. Kenneth L. Grasso (“Saving Modernity from Itself: John Paul II on Human Dignity, ‘The Whole Truth About Man,’ and the Modern Quest for Freedom”) nicely brings out how the pope celebrates modernity’s notions of human rights while rejecting its defective concept of freedom. He makes good use of John Paul II’s pre-papal and papal writings, and understands how John Paul retrieves phenomenology within a philosophy of being.

Unfortunately, Tinder and Kraynak contribute the weakest essays in this book. Tinder (“Against Fate: An Essay on Human Dignity”) discusses *fate*, the absurd conditions that cause human beings to become the playthings of events; and *destiny*, the coherent stories that persons enact through their lives. Contrasting these two conditions, he explores pride, suffering, hope and transcendence. Destiny is a very illuminating idea (the great phenomenologist Max Scheler has some wonderful things to say about it), but Tinder elevates it to a moral obligation. For him, destiny originates in the “transcendent,” a concept that, I think, few religious persons can accept. Christians rarely see the Trinity as simply one instantiation of transcendence. Buddhists rarely view nirvana as merely one species in the larger genus “transcendence.” Instead, they define comprehensive destinies that all persons should pursue. By appealing to the transcendent, Tinder resurrects a version of religious pluralism (made popular by John Hick) that is largely discredited today.

Robert P. Kraynak’s essay is equally disappointing. Persuasively, Kraynak resists identifying Christianity and democracy, criticizing contemporary Christians who carelessly equate them. He also does a good job of analyzing the meaning of the image of God in the Bible and in Christian history. However, Kraynak depicts all modern understandings of human dignity as “Kantian,” ignoring important philosophical developments. For example, he claims that Pope John Paul II develops a “synthesis of Thomism and a Kantian version of phenomenology that tips the scales in favor of traditional natural law duties over modern natural rights” (111). Here, Kraynak deeply misunderstands the pope’s philosophical project.

John Paul II uses Kant selectively but draws heavily on Scheler, who was one of the great anti-Kantians of the twentieth century. Similarly, Kraynak stretches credulity when he labels Jacques Maritain a “Kantian.” Like John Paul II, Maritain is deeply critical of Kantian epistemology. Kraynak shows little awareness of the exciting ways in which Roman Catholic personalists use Thomas Aquinas and phenomenology to develop rights theories. To equate personalism and Kantianism is intellectually unfounded.

When the Berlin Wall collapsed in 1989, some predicted that the world would enter a new era characterized by liberal institutions and human rights. The war in the former Yugoslavia, the 1994 Rwandan genocide, and the 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States dashed these hopes. Many people now realize that developing liberal institutions will require hard work. Part of this work is intellectual, for those committed to liberalism need to defend it against its despisers. Despite its flaws, *In Defense of Human Dignity* is an important book that recognizes this challenge. I recommend it for scholars and citizens who are concerned about liberalism's future.

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## Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy

**Paul Knitter and Chandra Muzaffar (Editors)**

Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2002 (193 pages)

Do the world's religions have the capacity to overturn or re-direct global capitalism? Should they?

In this anthology, which puts these questions to all the major religions of the world, the answer to the first is, "Probably not," and the second is, "Probably so." Focusing on the vice of greed, it is agreed that the world's religions are universally opposed to it. Global capitalism, on the other hand, gives greed full rein.

Scholars from seven religious traditions tell us how their faith defines and responds to greed. As one of them notes, "None of the world's major religions has as its maxim: 'Blessed are the greedy'" (Sallie McFague, 119). All religions in some way or another "subvert" greed. They balance it with virtues, they master it, or they oppose it. Though there may be many doctrinal differences among the religions, *all* religions seem to unite around their concern for the poor, and they insist that true religion includes this concern. Perhaps, the editor suggests, an ecumenism of practice might be in the offing.

Global capitalism seems, by contrast, to be based on greed. People seek more and more goods, businesses seek more and more profits, and national borders are knocked down so that international trade can bring all people into one global market. The effects of this have been tremendous inequality. One citation showed, for example, that "A total of 358 people own as much wealth as 2.5 billion people own together—nearly half of the world's population." (Ameer Ali, 142). The world's religions must challenge these inequities.

It may well be that the values lauded in the global marketplace are different from those of the world's religions. Thus, by challenging global capitalism at the point of the vice of greed, the authors take up a worthwhile task. The Achilles' heel of this volume, however, is that the central role of greed in capitalism is not thoroughly argued even though it serves as a premise for these authors. Is greed the only, or necessarily