

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

the *main* motivator in market economies? Is greed the same as the pursuit of profit? The authors might have recurred to sociological studies that address these questions and in so doing might have strengthened their case.

Even so, the questions are worth asking: How much of what goes on in the market is motivated by greed? What do the world's religions have to say about it? Can the world's religions subvert greed and raise up other values in its place? While the world's religions may be incommensurable on doctrine, might they be united in their concern for the poor?

Many may be put off by the assumption that the veins of global capitalism bleed greed. Those who can get past this and grant that the above questions need to be asked, will be well-served by this little book that surveys the world's religions on this issue.

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Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition:  
Christian Ethics After MacIntyre  
**Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg,  
and Mark Thiessen Nation (Editors)**  
Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003  
(385 pages)

With the publication of *After Virtue* in 1981, Alasdair MacIntyre became established as one of the leading and most controversial moral philosophers of our time. What set him apart was the untimely character of his thought: Standing against regnant “universalist” schools of ethics (e.g., Kantianism, utilitarianism), MacIntyre argued that all ethical discourse is embedded in or arises from particular *traditions* of inquiry, including the universalist schools themselves. What is more, MacIntyre argued that the most compelling and coherent account of ethics remains the virtue ethics of the Aristotelian tradition. Since *After Virtue*, MacIntyre's thought has embraced Thomas Aquinas as an even more coherent and synthetic moral thinker than Aristotle, and MacIntyre, himself, has converted to Catholicism.

Following MacIntyre, might there be seen to be a specifically *Christian* tradition of ethics, one that is both distinct from universalist, secular systems and in fruitful dialogue with them? And what might such a tradition say to urgent moral issues in society today? The editors of *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition* have assembled a fine collection of essays introducing the reader to the MacIntyrean method and addressing these questions.

Contributors are chiefly theologians, religious ethicists, and Scripture scholars, and include the luminaries Stanley Hauerwas and John Howard Yoder. Essays by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews are all notable for a focus on the *communal* character of lived faith; there is a marked emphasis on how theological ethics must be considered