

CAL THOMAS/INTELLECTUAL METAMORPHOSIS

# Michael Novak: Resurrection man

t used to be that the highest compliment one could pay to an academic was to call him a "Renaissance man."

An even higher honorific comes to mind in the case of Michael Novak, this year's recipient of the Templeton Prize for progress in religion. It is "resurrection man."

Novak once was blind, but now he sees; once was lost, but now is found; once accepted as gospel that bigger government meant better government; once believed the litany of the 1960s counterculture that blamed America first for the world's ills and flirted dangerously with socialism.

The Templeton Prize is a fitting recognition of Novak's intellectual and spiritual metamorphosis and of the contributions he has made to infusing economics, politics and religion with intellectual soundness and plain common sense.

Perhaps more than any American thinker, Novak, who once toiled for such liberal icons as Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern, combatted the notion that capitalism is for the favored few, is oppressive and, in fact, is responsible for the impoverishment of great numbers in nations where it has been tried.

Long before values and ethics became the stuff of best-seller lists, political campaigns and talk shows, Novak understood the roots of capitalism.

In 1978, he wrote "The American Vision: An Essay on the Future of Democratic Capitalism," in which he said our system "is a trinitarian system. It is three systems in one. It is, at once, an economic system, a political system and a cultural system. If any one of these is injured, the others are injured, too. If any one is missing, the resulting system falls short of our dreams."

Novak's point is that capitalism without democracy and a firm foundation undergirding culture can be as destructive to the human spirit as socialism is, with its hostility to free enterprise, private property and individual liberties. The nations that have tried socialism are now abandoning it.

Those who lament the number of poor people among us, says Novak, forget that most Americans were poor until the turn of the century. Then the United States, by today's

considered a Third World nation.

Democratic capitalism, nourished by strong families and shared moral and cultural values, allowed this country to create wealth and raise the boats of all those willing to work to levels unheard of in history. Today even our "poor" are rich by the standards of the rest of the world and have the opportunity and freedom to escape their mis-



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ery.

More recently, Novak has been devoting his considerable intellect to a small Catholic magazine he cofounded called *Crisis*.

In the December, 1992, issue, he promotes those who hold to what have been labeled "traditional values" as the "new counterculture." Without apology, he lays blame for the destruction now being visited on the country at the feet of "those who work in the movies, rock music, television, the law schools, some leaders of the feminist movement, some leaders of the gay rights movement and many in journalism who worry about protecting their progressive credentials (who) are together waging a form of total warfare to destroy every vestige of cultural support for (and the residual cultural prestige of) Christian faith and morals."

More than cursing darkness, Novak lights spiritual and intellectual candles. He believes that those who have been on the receiving end of the cultural attack can now respond with the fires of truth.

The Templeton Prize comes with a check for \$1 million. It is small compensation for what Michael Novak is contributing to this country.

*Cal Thomas' commentary is distributed by the Los Angeles*