I also find, however, that one important section is missing from this book, and that is how to attend to one’s spiritual well-being while overseas. I can imagine many good suggestions about how to link up with a faith community, what to expect in terms of cultural difference in worship styles, how to maintain links with a faith community back home, how to respect the faith of the local people, and so on. My own experience and conversations with fellow Christian academics, not to mention missionaries, tell me that this is a crucial determinant to whether or not the overall experience is successful. While I can empathize with the notion that a book directed to a wide audience would leave out such issues, I also think it would be good to include such a section. Not only would it provide helpful advice to those many researchers who do have faith orientations, but it would also send the important message to the academic community that religious faith is not foreign, strange, or weird, but a natural and essential part of life.

In the end, this is an excellent practical guide to getting started and carrying out research in the Third World. Barrett and Cason are to be thanked for compiling and organizing so well the collective wisdom of 63 experienced researchers. Anyone contemplating a foreign research project, especially those first timers, is strongly advised to buy a copy and read it thoroughly, even to the point of spilling airline coffee on it and dog-eating its pages.

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**Business as a Calling: Work and the Examined Life**

Michael Novak  

"With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith." 2 Thessalonians 1:11 (NIV)

The preceding verse is but one example of the many Scriptural references to the concept of a “call” or “calling.” Within the Christian community, this term is often used in reference to one’s particular place of service within the church. Michael Novak, a Roman Catholic theologian who holds the George Frederick Jewett Chair in Religion and Public Policy at the American Enterprise Institute, has written this book in order to make the case that one’s vocation, particularly in the realm of business and commerce, can also be an expression of a spiritual calling.

In the book’s first chapter, Novak begins to address the issue of one’s
calling in "the ordinary business of life" (to use Alfred Marshall's phrase) by citing a number of stories involving businesspersons for whom work is much more than simply a way to "make a living." One interesting example from this group involves John W. Rowe of the New England Electrical System. When Mr. Rowe was asked by his pastor how he liked his work, he responded by describing several benefits that he derived from his job, all of which were non-monetary. Novak writes that "Mr. Rowe still remembers the stunned look on the minister's face: 'You mean you have a calling?" From these collective stories, Novak derives the conclusions that each calling is unique to each individual, requires certain preconditions, reveals its presence through the enjoyment and renewal it brings, and is often not easy to discover.

In the next chapter, Novak takes time to defend businesspeople against the charge that their level of collective morality, whether by self-selection or because of the incentives associated with the marketplace, is inferior to that which is found in other professions or pursuits. He supports this point by citing the work of Smith College sociologists Stanley Rothman and Robert Lerner. In a 1990 poll, Rothman and Lerner "discovered that next to military officers (and leaving aside church professionals), more people in business attended church every week than any other elite: twice as many as congressional aides, four times more than people in the news media, nine times more than television and movie elites." Novak builds upon this line of argument by concluding that "a large proportion of the laypersons in the world today, perhaps even a substantial majority, work out their destiny — economic, social, and religious — in the daily activities of business." If this observation is empirically correct, it heightens the importance of the themes which are developed in the next two chapters.

In this portion of the book, Novak writes that business is a morally serious and valid calling, and that capitalism is the best system for promoting the economic well-being of the poor and for the preservation of democracy. These points will be familiar ones to any reader who has encountered some of Novak's previous works in this area, such as The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism. What differentiates this book is the attempt to bring the first theme into the discussion, and to show that the impulses which stem from one's faith can (and should) be lived out, within the commercial realm, in day-to-day, practical ways. As a case in point, Novak devotes considerable attention, both here and later in the book, to the example of Andrew Carnegie. He does not claim that Carnegie was a Christian. But he argues that as a result of his commercial innovations, and the philanthropic initiatives that were permitted by his business successes, "Carnegie created opportunity, and in the end wealth, for far more families than his own." The implication which follows from this line of reasoning is that persons of faith who have been "called" to serve God in the marketplace should take quite seriously their responsibility to create wealth and opportunities for others through successful commercial activity.

With the next chapter, Novak begins an examination of the nature and importance of virtue, especially for those who are engaged in business. He contends that there are several obstacles to the restoration of virtue as a central theme in American society and culture. Some of his propositions in this area constitute rather sweeping indictments, such as the assertion that American intellectuals and academics, as a class, are indifferent to the state of virtue and character in our culture, as well as the state of the American family.

Novak continues this discussion by defining what he regards as the three "cardinal virtues" of business: creativity, building community, and practical realism. In this section, he makes the case that commerce, no less than in other areas of human activity, gives people the opportunity to express the gifts and talents
Is it reasonable to expect (as Novak hopes) that commercial success will actually reduce the sin of envy?

which God has given to each person in ways that benefit others. By doing so, we are participating with our Creator in the ongoing process of creation. Novak also advances the viewpoint, which might be controversial to some readers, that business activity relies to a greater extent on cooperation, as firms seek to meet the needs and desires of potential customers, than it does on competition. He then proceeds to outline two sets of seven “corporate responsibilities.” These duties go well beyond the firm’s traditional obligations to its owners, customers, and employees. In constructing this list, Novak is arguing that enterprises should take an active interest in the context of their commercial ventures by promoting social justice, respect for the rule of law, and a concern for the quality of public life.

This is certainly an ambitious goal! One can imagine the range of reactions to this list that might be forthcoming from different groups of readers. Some businesspersons might respond by maintaining that their day-to-day responsibilities of seeking customers and managing employees are challenging enough without attempting to pursue another long series of objectives, however worthwhile they might be.

As economists, our first question might be, “What are the potential trade-offs between some of these goals?” For example, what if a firm decides that the path to creating new wealth involves eliminating existing jobs, even though the creation of new jobs is also identified as a corporate responsibility? Another question that readers of this review might ask is, “Is it reasonable to expect (as Novak hopes) that commercial success will actually reduce the sin of envy?” In spite of these questions and reservations, it is my judgment that this list of responsibilities represents a desirable standard for enterprises to keep in mind, even if they may not consciously “take aim” at all of these goals, all of the time.

In the remainder of the book, Novak addresses himself to a number of specific issues which confront enterprises and businesspersons today. Among those issues is the question of business conduct in legal and political environments where human rights are being violated and the rule of law is not respected. Novak argues persuasively that transnational firms, even more so than civil governments in some cases, can be a positive force for political and social change in their host countries, if they resist the inclination to completely disengage from such situations. On the other hand, he warns corporate decision-makers (and others) not to deceive themselves into thinking that such decisions will be “cost-less.” Novak also puts forth a variety of guidelines and suggestions for those who, having succeeded in amassing wealth through a business career, now desire to “give it all away,” either during and/or after their earthly lives.

This volume is not a book about economics (narrowly defined), nor does it claim to be. In my judgment, however, it still represents valuable reading for ACE members, particularly for those who teach classes where the majority of the students are preparing for careers in business and commerce. At the very least, this book provides a resource which can be drawn upon in order to combat the notion that those Christians who are engaged in a business career have chosen to pursue a “second-class calling.”