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Editorial

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The December 2023 issue of *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)* is focused on the critical analysis of the thought of the American-Slovak philosopher, theologian and political economist, Michael Novak (1933–2017), a prolific author and commentator due to the 90th anniversary of his birth. He was a prominent defender of a free society and an exposer of its relationship to Christian ideals. Through his magnum opus*, The Spirit of democratic capitalism*, he won the admiration of Pope John Paul II. He was also known for his work on such diverse areas as faith and reason; entrepreneurship; nihilism and existentialism; charity-its scope and meaning; social justice; civil society; the American Founding; the 20th Century Catholic Intellectual Renaissance; and philosophy of sport. He was known as a "Neo-conservative" who moved from the left to the right side of the political spectrum during his life, as told in his autobiography, *Writing from left to right*. He was the United States Ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Council under President Ronald Reagan and a strong proponent of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In this special double issue, we offer you a series of scientific articles dedicated to the life and work of Michael Novak. We think the choice of the editor-in-chief Vasil Gluchman to this special issue to Michael Novak was significant. After all, this well-known personality, also in the USA, has greatly influenced our entire Central European political scene, not only after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when he became well-known to our post-Communist society, but especially during the period of totalitarianism, when he tirelessly helped in our countries' struggle for freedom and democracy (e.g., also supporting Solidarność in Poland) until the Communist regime banned travel to the then Czechoslovakia. For those of us who lived and worked under this totalitarian system, Michael Novak's ideas remind us of the most important things that the so-called Velvet Revolution in 1989 brought us. It is about ordinary life in everyday freedom and the struggle to build a political and civil society based on the values of Western European and American democracy.

As the well-known Slovak columnist Lukáš Krivošík wrote in his obituary, Michael Novak was a personality listened to by Pope John Paul II and American President Ronald Reagan. His ideas have resonated from Central Eastern Europe to Latin America. To understand Michael Novak's work, it is crucial to know his origins, family, and the environment in which he grew up. He was born on September 9, 1933, in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, a coal and steel town. Novak's family history is a story of social uplift. "My ancestors were serfs, working for a nobleman who lived in Spiš Castle", Novak wrote. "All four of my grandparents were born in Slovakia and immigrated to America when they were very young".

"My father's family comes from the village of Dúbrava, situated just below a mountain peak from which the ruins of Spiš Castle can be seen", Michael Novak wrote in 1991 in the preface to the Czech translation of his best-known book, *The spirit of democratic capitalism*. "My mother's family came from the small, high-altitude village of Brutovce". In the spring of 1900, a group of villagers gathered at the Church of Brutovce to pray the rosary for 16-year-old Benedikt Sakmar. The young man walked to Bremerhaven, Germany, where he was about to sail by ship to America. Before he left, he attached a cross to a tree by the roadside. In 1974, his grandson Michael Novak discovered him there, although the road had already led elsewhere. It was the last time the authorities of socialist Czechoslovakia would allow him to enter the land of his ancestors. He did not return until after the Velvet Revolution.

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Therefore, we are pleased to present scholarly articles falling under three headings, namely, those that address Novak's debts and influences; those that aim to a general account of Novak's work; and those that focus on special topics.

Under the first heading, "debts and influences", Dariusz Góra from Warsaw in Poland ("A Catholic correction of Max Weber's thesis on Protestant ethic in the view of Michael Novak") gives an assessment of Novak's engagement with Weber. Some intellectual historians hold that, when great thinkers seem to engage each other, they actually fail to do so and prove to be like ships passing in the night. For Góra, it is not quite so: he argues that, although the "idols" which stand for Novak, the normative advocate, and for Weber, the social scientist, are indeed far apart, nonetheless, the genuine contributions of these two cautious thinkers are so much in harmony, that, if these men could meet personally, they would "respectfully shake hands". Next, in "Ethical foundations of Jacques Maritain's and Michael Novak's conception of human rights", Wendy Drozenová of Prague explores the necessary relationship among human rights, freedom, and spontaneous order, and traces Novak's conception of human rights to Jacques Maritain and, before him, to an Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition which grounds human rights in an objective human nature. Finally, Carlos Hoevel of the Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina ("The capitalist economy in Catholic thought between Maritain and Novak") assesses Novak's attempt to effect a reconciliation between the tradition of Catholic Social Doctrine and capitalism. Hoevel uses Maritain's dim view of capitalism as a fruitful instrument for assessing incisively Novak's own view in contrast. In the face of globalization and consequent strong criticisms of capitalism, he concludes, "many of the insights that Novak introduced into the debate … are again very relevant".

Every paper in this special issue sheds light on Novak's thought in general. But among those which, under the second heading, might be identified as aiming especially to give a "general account", the first is by Ján Kalajtzidis from Prešov ("Novak's understanding of capitalism"). Novak famously held that the most basic pluralism of a democratic capitalist society is that among its distinct political, economic, and moral-cultural systems. Kalajtzidis gives an appreciation of the power of Novak's thought on the influence of the moral-cultural upon the economic system. But he raises several concerns, such as whether an ethical outlook which addresses "structures" as well as "persons" is needed, and whether an economic system even if deeply informed by a moral-cultural system can be appreciably self-regulating in the ways which are needed. Next, in "The overview of Michael Novak's economic and political theory in the context of his relations with Poland", Stefan Konstańczak (University of Zielona Góra, Poland) raises concerns about the serviceability of Novak's ideal of democratic capitalism as regards traditionalist and conservative societies, insofar as Novak's support of pluralism, and his emphasis on freedom, may easily be viewed with suspicion, leading to an unfulfilled promise. Finally, Michael Pakaluk (The Catholic University of American, Washington, D.C., United States of America) in his essay, "Understanding Novak's *Spirit of democratic capitalism* through "the corporation"", aims to view the general through the particular. Novak wrote or edited four books on "the corporation", which he regarded as the main "agency" in democratic capitalism. Novak was an empirical and pragmatist thinker. By looking at what Novak says in these works about this particular entity, the corporation, Pakaluk argues, we can arrive at a more balanced grasp of Novak's contribution as a whole.

A third group of papers fall under the heading of "special topics". These thoughtful contributions only begin to examine the richness and scope of Novak's thought which was described above. First, Orlando Samões (Institute for Political Studies, Universidade Católica Portuguesa) in "Michael Novak, wealth and virtue: Work, creativity and the poor in democratic capitalism", gives a trenchant account of how the virtues distinctive of a democratic capitalist society are rooted in a certain conception of private property, its risks and prospects of creativity, and our individual responsibility and stewardship for it – admittedly with a view to "the universal destination of goods". Then, in "Novak, the *commons* and the spirit of Scholastic reasoning", Giovanni Patriarca of the University of Bayreuth, Germany, shows how Novak's insistence on fostering a "community *within which*

individuality is not lost" is not a modern ideal but falls within a long tradition of Scholastic thought, while, at the same time, it dovetails nicely with the "polycentrism" of Elinor Ostrom and the so-called "Bloomington School" of economics. (A good scribe in the kingdom of heaven brings forth things both new and old, indeed.) "Progress" is the next special topic, undertaken by Inocent-Mária V. Szaniszló (Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, "Angelicum", Rome) in "The idea of democracy and the progress of society in the work of Michael Novak". This contribution carries the subtitle, "A look at the theory and subsequent development of Michael Novak's predictions in the context of Central European countries". Using the guiding idea that "social order is based on civil dialogue", Szaniszló identifies Novak's distinctive concept of progress with the help of the ideas of Giuseppe Angelini, John Courtney Murray, and Paul Steidl-Meier. Finally, as if one might have wondered what, in the end, everything is leading up to, at least on earth, in "The vision of Caritapolis and the perspective of the future" by the Czech expert Roman Míčka from České Budějovice in Czech Republic, we are given a glimpse of how Novak in his work wanted to build up a universal "civilization of love", the "Caritopolis". In a provocative conclusion, Míčka raises challenges to Novak's view while emphasizing, as so many of our contributors here have done, that Novak should be regarded as "one of the significant and necessary voices in the Catholic and wider debate". Míčka like others holds that Novak's contribution has not receded in value over time but in many ways has become even more important and should be more salient.

The editors look at this special issue with pleasure and with confidence that it will prove illuminating and helpful both to students looking for ways to understand Novak better, and for researchers looking for new avenues of investigation.