

Michael Novak and the pagan cult of spectator sports

by L. Wolfe

The Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls and the Consecration of the American Spirit

by Michael Novak

University Presses of America, Lanham, Md., 1988
384 pages, paperbound, \$11.50

There were 2 out in the top of the 7th inning, when Bill Hasselman, the Seattle Mariners' catcher, came to bat against Baltimore Orioles pitcher Mike Musina on June 6, 1993. Hasselman had earlier homered against the young Orioles hurler. This time he wouldn't get a chance to hit at all. The first pitch, a fast ball, headed straight for the batter's body. Hasselman turned, taking the pitch on his left shoulder. He turned again, and, dropping his bat, ran toward the mound and Musina. Musina stood his ground, and a fight began. Within moments, the field at Oriole Park in Camden Yards resembled the site of a gang brawl, with both benches emptying into the mêlée. Unlike many baseball fights, which are over quickly and involve only some shoving, this was a war, with hand-to-hand combat. It swirled about the field for nearly half an hour before the umpires could restore some semblance of order. Several players were injured, with one breaking a collarbone.

More than 45,000 watched this spectacle from the relative safety of the grandstands, while perhaps a million people saw it on television. By that evening, nearly the entire country had seen at least part of it on the evening news. It was then that something else became obvious. There were several

score Baltimore City police on duty at the stadium, as there are at all baseball or other sporting events in the city. Clearly, if such a brawl had taken place on a street, or even in the parking lot, the police would have responded, quickly and in force, arresting the perpetrators. These individuals would have been charged and tried in a court of law, and sentenced, in accordance with the relevant laws of the land and the given locality. But here, in the face of what some observers described as a "riot," the police did not intervene. Instead, they merely ringed the stadium, to keep the crowd separate from the participants in the obviously illegal altercation on the playing field.

When asked about the behavior of his officers, the Baltimore Police Commissioner stated that they had no authorization to act. Their assistance could only be requested by the umpires, and no such request came. *The laws that apply to all residents of Baltimore or the United States did not and do not apply to spectator sporting events, he said. They have their own law.*

The United States was founded as a republic based on principles of natural law which can know no such distinction between actions of individuals who are participants in spectator sports and everyone else. To do so is to undermine the very notion of natural law itself, which must be universal in its application. The events on the playing field at Camden Yards defied the concept of natural law; they were wanton acts of violence, yet they went unpunished by the law that governs our land. Punishment instead was meted out by baseball's own internal laws, which suspended and fined a handful of the participants.

There were among the spectators, both present and on television, thousands of children. How is it that they can come to understand the concept of law, if their heroes on the



Tens of thousands of devotees watch mass spectator sports games at stadiums and several million more watch on television, caught up in a fantasy world of idolizing their favorite players, as shown by this victory parade in Washington, D.C. for the Redskins football team. Neopagan Michael Novak postulates that this induced mass psychosis is really an American secular state religion, because it supposedly reflects “real” human nature.

playing field behave in such an obviously lawless manner, without seeming sanction?

To Michael Novak, such behavior is merely “part of the game.”

In *The Joy of Sports*, which first appeared in 1976 and was more recently re-issued in paperback, Novak, a failed seminarian and apologist for the degenerate culture and economic policies of the Anglo-American imperium, writes, “the emptying of the dugouts in an occasional fist swinging mêlée — such outbreaks serve to indicate that even in baseball, humankind cannot bear too much rationality and must break out of Anglo-American bounds.” For Novak, organized sports, and especially mass spectator sports, serve to demonstrate that man is driven by bestial instincts, and that, if “controlled,” such bestiality can be “beautiful.”

This view of man as an animal, directly contrary to the Judeo-Christian view that man is created in the image of his Maker, is the centerpiece of the neo-pagan religion that Novak identifies as mass spectator sports. He confesses to be a celebrant in this religion of sports, claiming it to show the way for him to the true meaning of human existence. “Even in our own secular age,” Novak writes, “and for quite sophisticated and agnostic persons, the rituals of sports really work. They do serve a religious function: They feed a deep human hunger, place humans in touch with certain dimly perceived features of human life within the cosmos, and provide an experience of at least a certain sense of godliness.”

First written before Novak became a prominent theo-

gian and neo-conservative apologist, the book is a confession of a brainwashed sports addict, who speaks with almost revolutionary zeal about his addiction and would seek to have all others both understand and find the “rapture.” “Sports are the heart of the matter,” this pseudo-Christian continues. “Sports are the high point of civilization — along with the arts, but more powerfully than the arts, which are special in taste and execution and appeal. Only a very few books and folktales can reach the same metaphysical levels as sports can. Very few philosophical-religious texts have the same ring of truth as a baseball smacked from the fat, true center of a willow bat.”

His defenses down, Novak allows us to peek inside a very sick mind, showing the effect of the addiction on his thought processes. Novak claims that sports are a part of his “personal mental life,” that through their giving him pleasure and joy, enhance his creative powers, just as many other addicts will make the same assertions about their use of cocaine or any other drug. But, as in the case of cocaine, aside from its physically debilitating effects, its use adversely affects all mental life, distorting creative capacity. So it is with sports, and, since it is only the capacity for creative reason that makes man truly human, a sports addiction makes a person less human.

Novak, though he professes to be a priest of the sports cult, is its victim as well. In that sense, he is like millions of other Americans addicted to mass spectator sports. However, unlike those pitiful masses, Novak has provided us with an

elaborate pseudo-philosophical justification for his behavior and a proselytizing call for others to join in his full embrace of spectator sports.

Sports and mental life

All sports, as distinct from physical exercise, are premised on the creation of a *field of play*, with *fixed boundaries*. This *bounded* field of play defines the universe of the sporting event or activity. That universe is governed by an *arbitrarily* established set of laws or *rules of the game*. Objects and actions within this universe are identified by equally arbitrary *names*, creating a shared nominalist language among participants and spectators. There is absolutely no lawful reason why a baseball field is shaped around a diamond, instead of a square, or why the distance between the bases is 90 feet. These considerations are totally *arbitrary*, as is the case with all other playing fields and their *fixed geometries*. Similarly, there is no lawful reason why a baseball game should be divided into nine “innings,” rather than ten or any other number, or why there are three “outs” to an inning, rather than two or four.

While there appear to be infinite possibilities to *act* within the established rules, there are in fact *absolute limits*, which Novak calls *ritual limits*, which define the boundary of the game’s fixed system. What can change is *limited* and *pre-determined* by arbitrary rules.

Some *countable* determination is made to determine the *winners* and *losers*. In the end, all sporting events have winners and losers which are determined by scores, standings, etc. All sporting events are ultimately reducible to zero-sum games, and can, therefore, be simulated on a computer.

The real universe is not arbitrarily bounded, but is governed by natural law. Man has been created in the image of his Creator, not in some corporeal sense of bones and muscle, but in the capacity of his mind for creative reason. It is that capacity which distinguishes man from the animal and allows him to discover the laws that govern the universe. The creative act must be defined as the search for the necessary principle that can overturn the axioms of one system of knowledge, so that mankind can progress to the next higher level of knowledge. It is this search for universal truths, for the perfection of man’s knowledge of the universe that is the essence of creativity.

“Human thought,” writes Lyndon LaRouche in his essay “On the Subject of Metaphor” (*Fidelio*, Fall 1992), “knows only change; we know only a thinkable correspondence between the change in our behavior and a correlated change in the manifest behavior of nature.”

Sports, for both the participant and the spectator, demand the adherence to arbitrary and fixed laws. Novak claims that it is from sports that all law is derived. But this is not natural law, merely a law of *limits*, coherent with the Aristotelian system, which ignores change. Novak admits as much when he compares the “laws” of sports to Aristotle’s ethics, identifying them as mere codes of conduct for “combatants” on the

field of play.

There is nothing wrong, and much right, with vigorous physical exercise, including the playing of sports. But, to the extent that an individual is immersed in a world dominated by sports, then such an individual is destroying his or her capacity for creative reason.

One is tempted to say that what takes place on the sporting field has no relationship to the “real world.” In a certain sense that is true. What happens on a given playing field, in a given sporting event, whether it be a Little League baseball game or the Super Bowl, is absolutely meaningless for the present and future existence of human civilization on this planet. However, a civilization dominated by sports has the capacity for the creative thought of each of its individuals to be deformed and damaged. Thus, sports, especially mass spectator sports, through their destructive effect on individual minds and the ability of individuals to think creatively, can cause the death of any civilization which the sports culture infects.

Childlike play versus a return to infantilism

Novak compares sports to “play,” and finds in sports the same liberating sense of expression that a child finds in his or her playful activities. It is this sense of *childlike freedom*, a freedom which has no relationship to *necessity*, which Novak claims is the main attraction of sports for the adult spectator or athlete. “The basic reality of all human life is play, games, sports,” writes Novak. “These are the realities from which all that is important in the rest of life are drawn. . . . Barbarians play in order to work; the civilized work in order to play.”

“Play is a pagan part of the human beast, our natural expressiveness,” Novak asserts. “It flows from inner and perennial energies, and needs no justification. . . .”

Putting Novak’s gushings aside for a moment, games and sporting activities are, to some extent, appropriate for children, whose mental development has not progressed beyond a certain point. Children must be allowed to play, and in their play, including sports, there are some limited things that can be learned about cooperation with others, according to certain rules, and the development of motor skills and muscle coordination. The problem arises when these forms of infantile behavior are carried forward beyond childhood. At that point they inhibit the development of creative reason, because contrary to Novak’s assertions, *there can be no freedom without necessity*. Participation in sports, especially as a spectator, forces the mind into a straitjacket of rules and arbitrary laws that inhibit creative reason. More importantly, habituated participation in spectator sports emotionally cripples an adult, who tends to respond with infantile emotionalism to situations that demand reasoned judgment.

Like an infant demanding his rattle, Novak demands his sports and sanctifies his own fanaticism. He refuses to join the adult world. After spending three hours in rapture watching his beloved Los Angeles Dodgers play baseball on television, he was confronted with a pang of conscience: “How

could I be 40 years old and still care what happens to the Dodgers? How could I have thrown away three hours of an evaporating life, watching a ritual, an inferior dance, a competition without a socially redeeming point. . . . And so I asked myself: Is it time for sports to be discarded? Is it time to put away the things of childhood?" Like Peter Pan stating, "I never want to grow up," Novak's conscience collapses: "What I had just seen was somehow more important than my other work, was deeper in my being than most of what I did, spoke to me of beauty, excellence, imagination and animal vitality—was true in the way that few things in life are true. My love for sports was deeper than any theory I had. The reality is better than an intellectual defense."

LaRouche has observed that the fate of ancient Rome was sealed when its population started rooting for one side or another at sporting events. Popular opinion rotted, rendering the population unable to make morally informed judgment, much the same way in which the infantile and sterile fanaticism of televised spectator sports today is rotting away the Americans' ability to judge.

Freud, the father of mass brainwashing

As I have described in other published locations, this *infantilism*, and the non-reasoned, animal-like behavior it induces is the basis for all mass brainwashing, as has been elaborated in the pseudo-psychology of the evil Sigmund Freud. The same theoretical outlook that was behind the mass brainwashing of Nazi Germany is found in the crowd phenomena of spectator sports. Freud's principal point, elaborating on the work of Gustav LeBon, was that masses of people can be organized around appeals to the emotions. Mass rallies, for example, appeal not to reason, but to the emotions, for the appeals to be successful. The most powerful such appeals are to the *unconscious*, which has the power to dominate and throw aside reason, Freud claims.

"The mass has never thirsted for truth," he writes in *Mass Psychology and the Study of the I*, indicating his agreement with LeBon. "They demand illusions and cannot do without them. They constantly give what is unreal precedence over what is real; they are almost as strongly influenced by what is untrue as what is true. They have an evident tendency not to distinguish between the two."

Freud further states that under this condition, with man's reason dominated by *emotionalism* and unable and *unwilling* to look for truth, the individual in a mass or crowd loses his moral conscience, or what Freud calls his *ego ideal*. This is not necessarily a bad thing for the individual, the evil Freud claims, since the moral conscience which he later named the *Over I* or *superego*, causes man to "unnaturally" repress his basic animal instincts; this, Freud claims, produces neuroses.

In a crowd organized around people's emotions, the individual will exhibit a tendency to "let himself go," to free himself of all moral and social inhibitions: "Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian—that is a

creature acting by instinct. . . . Nothing about it [how a person behaves under crowd conditions] is premeditated. . . ."

A crowd "cannot tolerate any delay between its desires and the fulfillment of what it desires," writes Freud, which is his explanation for why the individual is so willing to let himself become a part of a powerful mass experience that can gratify those emotional desires.

Such crowds, observes Freud, have regressed to *the mental life of children*. They operate, not according to reason, but according to irrational, emotional desires. In this mindless emotional state, individuals are easily manipulated by leaders who can shift the values of the masses to coincide with the crowd's infantile fantasies.

In the television era, there are two audiences for every sporting event: one that is present at the event and one that is viewing the event, usually as it takes place, on the television screen. (There are those who will videotape a game to watch later, and insist they be kept ignorant of the final score, the better to relive the excitement.) The first audience is limited by the size of the stadium and even the largest stadiums are limited to well under 100,000 people. The television audience, especially for a major sporting event like a football game, numbers in the millions.

Each sporting event, therefore, takes on a *psychological significance* to the viewer. It becomes a common emotional bond between himself or herself and *1 million or more* other people. Some recent psychological surveys of Americans between the ages 15 and 50 found that, when they were asked to list significant events that occurred within their lifetime, an extremely large number listed sporting events, and many listed several such events. Similarly, among American males especially, this *co-participation* in spectator sports creates a sense of *identity* with fellow *fanatics*.

This mass phenomenon, the brainwashing experience of spectator sports, has created the pagan religion of which Michael Novak is a priest and theologian. "Some 'enlightened' persons feel slightly guilty about their love for sports," Novak preaches to the uninitiated. "It seems less rational, less universal, than their ideals; they feel a twinge of weakness. The 'enhumaned' believe that man is a rooted beast, feet planted on one patch of soil, and that it is perfectly expressive of his nature to 'root.' To be a fan is totally in keeping with being a man. To have particular loyalties is not to be deficient in universality, but to be faithful to the laws of human finitude." Novak also "warns" that sports rooting can be carried to excess, which he cautions against: "Of course, there are fanatic fans, fans who eat and sleep and drink (above all, drink) their sports. Their lives become defined by sports. So some politicians are devoured by politics, pedants by pedantry, pederasts by pederasty, drunks by drink, compulsive worshippers by worship, nymphomaniacs by phalluses, and so forth. All good things have their perversions, good swollen into Good, idols into God. Every religion has its excess. Sports, as well."

One wonders whether Novak thinks pederasty "good,"

so long as it is not overdone.

Sports as a secular state religion

Novak believes, if he believes in anything, in a gnostic spiritualism that rejects the fact that man is not merely a two-legged beast. He says this openly in the pages of his 1976 work. Novak lays out the thesis that American sports, especially since its mass penetration through television, have become a *civil or secular religion*, holding sway over the masses.

"The institutions of state generate a civil religion," writes Novak. "So do the institutions of sport. The ancient Olympic games used to be both festivals in honor of the gods and festivals in honor of the state — and that has been the classical position of sports ever since. The ceremonies of sports overlap those of state on one side and those of the churches on the other. . . . Going to a stadium is half like going to a political rally, half like going to a church. . . ."

But Novak is not saying that sports are mere *symbols* for religions. They satisfy "religious needs" of the popular masses, needs which he claims the churches are unable to satisfy or, at times, even grasp: "I am saying that sports flow outward into action from a deep natural impulse that is radically religious: an impulse of freedom, respect for ritual limits, a zest for symbolic meaning, and a longing for perfection. The athlete may, of course, be pagan, but sports are, as it were, natural religions. . . ."

"Among the godward signs in contemporary life, sports may be the single most powerful manifestation . . . sports drive one in some dark and generic sense 'godward'. . . ."

"Sports are religious in the sense that they are organized institutions, disciplines, and liturgies; and also in that sense they teach religious qualities of heart and soul. In particular they recreate the symbols of the cosmic struggle, in which human survival and moral courage are not assured. To this extent, they are not mere games, diversions, pastimes. . . . To lose symbolizes death, and it certainly feels like dying, but it is not death. . . . If you give your heart to the ritual, its effects on your inner life can be far reaching."

Novak sees sporting contests as teaching man of the existence of death through the concept of *losing*. In assigning such importance to death, Novak is mirroring Freud, who argues in several locations that life is the struggle between two opposing instincts, *Eros*, or the sexual drive for perpetuation of the species, and *Thanatos*, or death, a drive towards man's own destruction. The death instinct claims Freud is diverted from the individual towards the external world, and manifests itself as human *aggressiveness and destructiveness* — two qualities of the *human animal* which Novak says sports "joyfully" celebrate!

Arguing against a concept of sports as mere entertainment, Novak identifies the relationship between the individual fanatic and the athlete as psychologically the same as that between a priest and his disciples. But the priesthood being described is a *gnostic and pagan* priesthood, not that of Chris-

Divorcing creativity from morality

The Catholic Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

by Michael Novak

The Free Press, New York, 1993

334 pages, hardbound, \$24.95

Michael Novak's newest book is yet another attempt on the part of a group of neo-conservative liberal capitalists in the American Catholic Church, to misinterpret Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, in such a way as to turn it into an apology for Anglo-American economic looting of both eastern Europe and Ibero-America. More sophisticated than Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, who attempts in *Doing Well and Doing Good, The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist*, (see *EIR*, Jan. 29, 1993) to portray the pope as having endorsed the Protestant ethic, Novak attempts to make his so-called "democratic capitalism" more palatable to Catholics by packaging it as a reflection of the Catholic ethic.

In his preface, Novak admits that this book differs from his earlier book, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. He writes, "In 1981, when I was writing that book, I had not yet seen the link between capitalism and creativity, the crucial point in the Catholic ethic." Not to have seen the connection between human creativity and economics does not say much for Novak's previous understanding either of economics or of Christian morality. But instead of humbly reconsidering his understanding of economics in light of this failure, he has merely attempted to salvage his previous flawed concept of liberal capitalism by cloaking it in the Judeo-Christian concept of man as created in the image of God.

In reality, both Novak and Neuhaus reflect the same kind of Manichean tendency as Philip Melancthon observed in Martin Luther. They deny that the so-called material world, the world of economic policy, can or should be ordered according to the spiritual or moral values, which flow from the concept of man as created

tianity: The priests are elevated into a god status: "Athletes are not merely entertainers. Their role is far more than that. People identify with them in a much more priestly way.

in the image of God. Their essentially Manichean presumption that the material world is evil and that spiritual values are limited to personal, familial relationships, but do not extend to economic policy for humanity as a whole, leads them to the completely immoral act of defending the evils of liberal capitalism.

Novak correctly identifies human creativity as the true source of economic wealth and derives man's creative capacity from the fact that he is created in the image of God. However, by divorcing creativity from morality, he reduces man's capacity and responsibility to use his creative intellect for the good of his fellow man into a rationalization for his continued exploitation.

Moreover, by emphasizing what he calls "civil society" in opposition to the role of the state, he, like his collaborator Reverend Neuhaus, deliberately runs interference for the policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which Pope John Paul II referred to as the "Structures of Sin" in his 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*.

If Novak were an honest man . . .

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the fallacy of Novak's approach to capitalism is to discuss the American System of political economy versus the British system. Novak, like Neuhaus, understands that there are two forms of capitalism. However, either through ignorance or design he completely confounds the two. Thus on the one hand he refers to himself as in the "Whig Catholic tradition" and cites the economic policies of Abraham Lincoln favorably as coherent with the social teaching of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, he includes Abraham Lincoln in a rogues' gallery of liberal capitalists such as John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, Friedrich von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and Milton Friedman.

Like Neuhaus, he defines liberal capitalism as extreme libertarianism, in order then to claim that his brand of liberal capitalism is in the Whig tradition. Novak even goes so far as to offer Ayn Rand as his only example of a liberal capitalist, as if liberal capitalism began with the writing of *Atlas Shrugged*.

But as the leading economist of the 20th century, Lyndon LaRouche, has documented, the American Revolution was fought against the economic policies espoused by British East India Company employee Adam Smith in his *The Wealth of Nations*. Moreover, contrary to Novak and Neuhaus, Adam Smith's economic policies were not those of a "Christian moral philosopher," but rather of an

immoral hedonist, as is demonstrated by Smith's 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

The American System was based upon the dirigistic policies of France's Jean-Baptiste Colbert and the physical-economic theories of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in direct opposition to the free-trade policies advocated by Adam Smith. If Novak were truly a Whig Catholic, he would acknowledge that the American System of economics inherited by Abraham Lincoln was first put into practice by Alexander Hamilton, U.S. treasury secretary under President George Washington, as *EIR* amply demonstrated in its special Jan. 3, 1992 issue dedicated to the bicentennial of Hamilton's 1791 *Report on the Subject of Manufactures*. Novak would then have to admit that this system promoted the development of manufactures through protectionist tariffs and through the issuance of credit by a National Bank.

Then he would have to admit that, in contrast to the liberal capitalist British system of Adam Smith and the related socialism of Karl Marx, the American System identifies the true source of wealth as the development of the "productive powers of labor." As LaRouche has documented, this concept is not only expressed by Alexander Hamilton in his *Report on Manufactures*, but is the crucial economic conception put forth in the economic writings of Benjamin Franklin's Irish-American collaborator Mathew Carey, his son Henry C. Carey, who was Abraham Lincoln's adviser, and Friedrich List.

Thus if Novak were honest, he would acknowledge that his recent discovery of the importance of the creativity of the human person to political economy is the central thesis of the American System of political economy, in opposition to the British system which he is advocating. He would also acknowledge that his attack on the state sector of the economies of Ibero-America and his support for the privatization of those sectors as demanded by the IMF and World Bank are coherent with the colonialist policies of free trade advocated by Adam Smith, and are in opposition to the policies of the American System or Whig tradition.

If Novak were to maintain that this American System of political economy were coherent with the social teaching of the Catholic Church, he would be right. For this system, like the social teaching of the church, rejects the axiomatic assumptions of both Adam Smith's liberal capitalism and Karl Marx's socialism, and identifies the primacy of man as *imago viva Dei*, the living image of God. — *William F. Wertz, Jr.*

Athletes exemplify something of a deep meaning — frightening meaning, even. . . .

"Once an athlete accepts a uniform, he is, in effect, don-

ning priestly vestments. It is the function of the priests to offer sacrifices. As at the Christian Mass, in athletics the priest is also the victim: He who offers and he who is offered

is one in the same. Often the sacrifice is literal: smashed knees, torn muscles, injury-abbreviated careers. He is no longer living his own life only. Others are living in him, by him, with him. They hate him, they love him, they berate him, they glory in him. He has given up his personal persona and assumed a liturgical persona. That is, he is now a representative of others. His actions are vicariously theirs. His sufferings and his triumphs, his cowardice and his courage, his good fortune and his ill fortune become theirs. If the Fates favor him, they also favor *them*. His deeds become messages from the beyond, revelations of the favor of the gods. . . .

“Being an active player is like living in the select circle of the gods, of the chosen ones who act out liturgically the anxieties of the human race and are sacrificed as ritual victims. The contests of sports . . . are the eucharists.”

Novak is describing *cult* practices, and he knows it: “A religion, first of all is organized and structured. Culture is built on cult. . . .”

The pagan view of man, the animal

Americans, Novak writes, have little connection to the Renaissance traditions of European civilization and the values it places on man and the power of creative reason. Turning the American Revolution on its head and ignoring the Declaration of Independence, he claims that America was born not in rebellion against the British Empire, but against *the Renaissance tradition of man*. Therefore, we need a new ethos and have found it in our sports: “The streets of America, unlike the streets of Europe, do not involve us in stories and anecdotes rich with 1,000 years of human struggle. Sports are our chief civilizing agent. Sports are our most universal art form. Sports tutor us in the basic lived experiences of the humanist tradition.”

Having rejected the Renaissance tradition of man created in the image of the living God, where each human individual has the equal capacity through his powers of creative reason to participate in God’s Creation, Novak asserts that sports present the true image of man: an aggressive beast, the most powerful and pernicious of animals. “The human animal is a warlike animal,” he writes. “Conflict is as near to truth about human relations, even the most intimate, as any other feature. Sports dramatize conflict. They help us visualize it, imagine it, experience it.”

Football, for example, teaches reality in a way that no church or Renaissance thought can, Novak claims. It shows us that “human life, in Hegel’s phrase, is a butcher’s bench. Think what happened to the Son of God, the Prince of Peace; what happened in the Holocaust; what has happened in recent wars, revolutions, floods, and famines. . . .

“What is human?” asks Novak. “What has human experience been in history? In a fully humanized world, gentle, sweet and equitable has never yet been seen on this earth. . . . One of the game’s [football’s] greatest satisfactions, indeed, is that it violates the illusion of the enlightened edu-

ated person that violence has been or will be exorcised from human life. . . .”

Novak is telling us that sports teaches us that man cannot perfect his existence beyond that which is most animal in him, that the best that can be done is to celebrate his animal nature as his *Aristotelian true self*: “There is no use despising part of our natures. We are of earth, earthly; descended, so they say, from other hominids; linked by neurons and cells and organisms to the teeming chemical and biological life of this luxuriant planet. We are not pure minds, nor rational animals, nor separate individuals. The life of earth courses through us like the air we breathe, the sunlight that permeates us, the molecules of water and food that we ingest. We are part of the earth. And sports makes visible to the human mind the great struggle of being and nonbeing that constitutes every living thing. . . .”

Here, again, the pseudo-Christian Novak displays his thorough agreement with the atheist Freud, who states in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, that Christians, in particular, behave like “little children” who refuse to face a harsh “reality,” when “there is talk of the inborn human inclination to ‘badness,’ to aggressiveness and destructiveness, and so to cruelty as well. God has made them in the image of His own perfection; nobody wants to be reminded how hard it is to reconcile the undeniable existence of evil — despite protestation of Christian doctrine — with His all powerfulness or His all-goodness.”

Sports teaches us we are not created equal

Since it teaches us that man is nothing more than an aggressive animal, Novak claims that sports also *must* teach us to discard as meaningless the concept that all men are created equal; it teaches the precise opposite, he claims. The athlete, especially the professional, is clearly not the equal of the average man: His is a superman, a godlike figure, with qualities that the average man can only dream about: “Life is not equal. God is no egalitarian. Prowess varies with every individual.”

Aristotle, says Novak, teaches us to perceive value and beauty from this inequality. On this basic principle of *human inequality*, asserts the neo-pagan Novak, all sports and all life is premised. If men are not equal, according to Novak, neither are they capable of loving humanity, for, sports teaches that aggressiveness and the drive for dominance are the most basic of animal-like human instincts. In life as in sports, love, especially Christian love or *agapē*, hardly matters for anything. Certainly such a universal concept does not provide us with motivation to live a certain kind of life, he claims, and if it does, we will find ourselves sadly deluded. This too, is what sports teaches us, concludes the anti-Christian Novak.

“But we are not infinite. . . . The human imagination, heart, memory, and intelligence are finite. The nature of the human psyche is to proceed from what is close to us outward;

we cannot without self-deception begin by embracing everything. To claim to love humanity is to carry a very large and thin pane of glass toward a collision with someone you can't abide."

Again, there is agreement between Novak and Freud. In a famous passage of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud argues that the concept of universal love, on which Christianity is premised, causes a neurotic distortion of *Eros*, the libidinal instinct. It does so because it is based on a false and deluded view of one's fellow man: "A love that does not discriminate seems to me to forfeit a part of its own value, by doing injustice to its object; and secondly, not all men are worthy of love. . . ."

God is just, and delivers justice in accordance with Universal Law. But Novak's gods are *mystical* and arbitrary; There is no *justice*, only Fate. Sports, with its liturgies and sacrifices, teaches that there is no justice in the world, only blind fate. The word *fan* (believed to be an abbreviation of *fanatic*) is derived from *fanum*, which is Latin for a local temple. To be a fan is, for Novak, to participate in a pagan rite of passage and sacrifice. He sees the act of cheering a team, or *rooting*, as putting man in touch with himself and his species, in a way that no religion can offer: "A human goal more accurate than enlightenment is 'enhumanment.' Sports like baseball, basketball, and football are already practiced as expressed liturgies of such a goal. One religion's sins are another's glories."

Religion and the case of the 'Fighting Irish'

Novak sees the *neo-pagan, secular religion* of sports as enhancing the other established churches, providing something that they do not provide. But a *neo-pagan religion*, whose teaching and practice is opposed to Christian doctrine, as he describes sports, can *only undermine Christianity*. To be sure, sports and religion in America are wedded together. Churches sponsor sports teams, even offer organized prayers for the outcomes of important games. Perhaps the most famous of all football teams, the "Fighting Irish" of the University of Notre Dame, have a loyal following in the scores of millions and have made millions of dollars for the university from televised games each year. Novak himself comments that the most important thing that the University of Notre Dame ever did, its most important contribution to humanity, is "the *myth of Notre Dame football*."

The relationship between religion and mass spectator sports is that of a victim and a disease. It is a failing of the church—all churches—that they have not seen how sports have become a powerful counterpole to Christianity, one whose dogma is irreconcilable with Christian teaching. Through mass spectator sports, our citizens are being brainwashed to view man as an animal, to think that universal truth and love are meaningless concepts. A large section of our people are reduced to a state of infantile obsession with the sports fantasy-world, such that they are incapable of com-

prehending profound ideas. Our churches do nothing to fight this. As Novak says, churches have the "good sense" to have their Sunday sermons over in time to allow people to get to their television sets for the afternoon football games!

And this is good, in Novak's view, because he sees sports as putting man into contact with his true bestial nature. For Novak—and for his oligarchical masters, the same people who promoted Freud and also put Hitler into power—in sports one finds *negation* of the principles of western Judeo-Christian civilization and the *affirmation* of a neo-pagan, gnostic religion based on Freudian concepts of the innate destructiveness of the *human animal*. To be a sports fanatic is to worship Novak's pagan gods of Fate and to *celebrate* what is *inhuman*.

Given his sports addiction and the moral outlook both stated and implied in his book, it is perfectly lawful that Novak would become an apologist for Anglo-American culture and economics of the last decades of the 20th century. It is the same abandonment of Judeo-Christian principles that one sees in the mass spectator sports of today that dominates the degenerate, immoral, and predatory actions of such agencies as the International Monetary Fund and the financial markets. Such markets operate in defiance of natural law, and according to arbitrary rules, and thrive on dog-eat-dog competition so prevalent in modern mass spectator sports. High finance also incorporates the inherent belief in the Fates, in the gods of fortune that determine ultimate outcomes that dominate what Novak praises as the "free market."

What is more shocking is that Novak should be widely regarded as a leading Catholic theologian, who claims that his teachings are coherent with traditional Christian views. As his book makes clear, he is a *neo-pagan* who openly embraces pagan ideals against the Christian view of man as *imago Dei*. To do so, especially when one professes to be a practicing Christian, is no innocent act. It is the act of a fraud and a hypocrite, a betrayer who knows about Christian concepts and deliberately rejects them and tries to confuse others about true Christian teachings. In their stead, he has concocted a witch's brew of neo-Freudian archetypes and stereotypes, mixed with a heavy dose of Friedrich Nietzsche's "triumph of will" and "blood and soil" doctrines, and wrapped them in the American flag (baseball, football, and basketball are "American games" and part of "everyday American life," he says). There isn't an original idea in the lot, but it resonates within the debilitated minds of our sick society, infected with the same evil that poisons the neo-pagan mind of Michael Novak. In place of the spirit of *agapē*, of Christian love, is it not the case that all too many among us, subscribe to the motto of Novak hero Vince Lombardi, the late coach of the Green Bay Packers: "Winning isn't everything. It is the *only* thing"?

A nation and civilization that subscribes to what Novak preaches has lost the moral fitness to survive.