

Market values: Christian symbols and pagan shrines

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [July 15, 2008](#) issue

As Christians conquered pagan lands, they regularly superimposed Christian symbols on pagan shrines. I thought of this when I read that the buildings of Chicago Theological Seminary have been sold to the University of Chicago and will become the Milton Friedman Institute, named after one of our era's most celebrated economists.

Only the most nostalgic and sentimental will begrudge CTS for selling. It's getting a new building better situated for training people for ministry—and financial loot to boot. Not a bad bargain. But what's the future of the Thorndike Hilton Chapel, a gem of all gems in Chicago? Or of the Graham Taylor Chapel, where theological greats held forth and generations of students worshiped? Given the devotion extended through Friedman to the free market, will the signs \$ and £ replace Christian symbols for worshipers at the new institute?

During two years of doctoral work, I daily passed the CTS wall and often ran my finger along the engraved statement: "The Lord hath more truth and light still to break forth from his holy word" (from John Robinson, who sent off the Pilgrims). Now the holy word will be that of Adam Smith and Friedrich Hayek.

The Congregationalists inset stones on their cloister wall. One of them comes from Wartburg Castle, in honor of Martin Luther. "Freely chosen" was Luther's credo, but "freedom to choose" is the motto for Friedman and followers. Another comes from Plymouth Rock. If Friedmanites know their history, they will wince to learn that the Mayflower people were virtual socialists in England and Holland and at Plymouth. Then they will leap for joy as they learn that the communal economic vision of the colonists did not last long; they became protocapitalists—sometimes with good conscience, sometimes with bad.

The Friedman people will perhaps be puzzled to view a stone from Scrooby Manor. Suffering under Anglican rule, the Scrooby people fled to Holland, then moved

across the Atlantic with elder William Brewster and Governor William Bradford. Will the capitalists at the Friedman Institute be impressed by the Brewster children's names: Patience, Fear, Love and Wrestling? Might they invite Brewster descendants, among them Cokie Roberts, Lyndon LaRouche, Chevy Chase, Howard Dean, Julia Child and Bill Richardson?

The transition from the Congregationalists to the Economists will not be entirely smooth. Friedman once told interviewer John Lofton: "I am an agnostic. I do not 'believe in' God, but I am not an atheist, because I believe the statement 'There is a god' does not admit of being either confirmed or rejected. I do not believe God has anything to do with economics. But values do." And "I do not know where my values come from, but that does not mean (a) I don't have them or (b) I don't hold them as strongly as you hold your belief in God. (c) They turn out—not accidentally, I believe—to be very much like those held by most other people, religious or not. (d) Which leads me to believe that they are a product of the same evolutionary process that accounts for the rest of our customs as well as physical characteristics." Get out the eraser for old engravings.

In a celebrated article titled "The Market as God," theologian Harvey Cox noted that the *Wall Street Journal* and other such market literature assign to the market attributes once assigned to God: omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. Friedman told his interviewer that though he was not religious, he did have faith. His successors and devotees may change the symbols at the seminary, but aside from that, they should feel right at home. And they will.