

Catholic theologian who 'moved from left to right' dies at age 83

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [March 29, 2017](#) issue

Michael Novak, a Catholic theologian who argued that capitalism fostered social well-being, died February 17 at the age of 83 in Washington, D.C.

The cause of death was complications from colon cancer, the *Washington Post* reported.

He authored or edited more than 50 books, his most well-known being *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, published in 1982. He received the Templeton Prize in 1994 for his “influential new insights into the spiritual foundations of economic and political systems.”

He taught at the Catholic University of America, the University of Notre Dame, and Harvard University, among other institutions. Novak was affiliated with the American Enterprise Institute, a think tank, beginning in 1978.

“During his varied career, he moved from left to right on the political spectrum,” Catholic News Service wrote. “During the Second Vatican Council, he wrote *The Open Church*, which took a liberal look at the council. . . . In 1982, as a neoconservative, he founded *Crisis Magazine*.”

According to the biography on his website, Novak’s work “sprung from his childhood in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, a steel town in the middle of coal country” where his Slovak immigrant ancestors settled.

John Garvey, Catholic University president, remembered him as “a man of great intellectual honesty. Unlike some scholars, Michael Novak made it a point to reflect on new and different topics, always with a fresh and dynamic perspective.”