

The Catholic Church has said that intelligent design is a scientific question, beyond the capacity of theology to answer.

The International Theological Commission recognized that distinction in its 2004 report *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, which states that in “the Catholic understanding of divine causality, true contingency in the created order is not incompatible with a purposeful divine providence.” The intelligent design movement’s contention that “a purely contingent natural process” cannot explain all the available scientific data is, said the commission, a scientific question, beyond the capacity of theology to answer. The commission was headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger,

who is now Pope Benedict XVI.

The first formal statement on evolution reflective of the church’s teaching authority was the encyclical *Humani Generis*, issued by Pope Pius XII in 1950. The pope stated as dogma that the human soul, being immaterial, could not be the product of evolution, but he also said that the human body’s evolution from lower animals could legitimately be investigated as a scientific hypothesis.

In a 1996 letter to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope John Paul II reiterated Pius’s essential point, but added that much evidence had emerged in support of the theory of evolution, making it now “more than a hypothesis.” Schönborn, in his essay, dismissed John Paul’s statement as “rather vague and unimportant.” But if a papal letter to scientists can be thus dismissed, says Barr, how much doctrinal weight should be given to a cardinal’s column in a newspaper?

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Not for Sale

THE SOURCE: “Markets, Morals, and Civic Life” by Michael J. Sandel, in *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, Summer 2005.

While it’s true that there are some things money can’t buy, are there some things it shouldn’t be *allowed* to buy? If some people are willing to sell their kidneys, for example, should they be permitted to? If so, then why not let them sell their votes too? In the moral analysis required to understand the limits of markets, argues Michael J. Sandel, a Harvard University political theorist, lies a road to understanding the true nature of freedom and civic life.

Many liberal critics object to sales of human organs and other market transactions on the grounds of injustice. The sellers are coerced, they argue. People who sell their kidneys are desperate for

EXCERPT

The Evangelical Thirst

The caricature of American evangelicals as incurious and indifferent to learning is false. Visit any Christian bookstore and you will see that they are gluttons for learning of a certain kind. They belong to Bible-study groups; they buy works of Scriptural interpretation; they sit through tedious courses on cassette, CD, or DVD; they take notes during sermons and highlight passages in their Bibles. If anything, it is their thirst for knowledge that undoes them. Like so many Americans, they know little about history, science, secular literature, or, unless they are immigrants, foreign cultures. Yet their thirst for answers to the most urgent moral and existential questions is overwhelming. So they grab for the only

glass in the room: God’s revealed Word.

A half-century ago, an American Christian seeking assistance could have turned to the popularizing works of serious religious thinkers like Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, John Courtney Murray, Thomas Merton, Jacques Maritain, and even Martin Buber and Will Herberg. Those writers were steeped in philosophy and the theological traditions of their faiths, which they brought to bear on the vital spiritual concerns of ordinary believers: ethics, death, prayer, doubt, and despair. But intellectual figures like these have disappeared from the American landscape and have been replaced by half-educated evangelical gurus who either publish vacant, cheery self-help books or are politically motivated. If an evangelical wants to satisfy his taste for truth today, it’s strictly self-service.

—MARK LILLA, professor in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, in *The New York Times Magazine* (Sept. 18, 2005)

cash; prostitutes are driven to sell their bodies by poverty, drug addiction, or other life circumstances. Sandel doesn't disagree, but the argument doesn't go far enough for him. What about cases in which there is no coercion? On a level playing field, are there no fundamental grounds for limiting markets?

Of course there are, and the reasons go back to why there are some things that money *can't* buy: The things themselves—from love to a Nobel Prize—would be completely corrupted by the transaction.

But there are plenty of potentially objectionable transactions that degrade the thing being sold without completely ruining it. And many of them are permitted. Consider honorary degrees, which universities often give to wealthy donors. The honor is some-

what diminished, but it survives.

What matters most in determining what's an acceptable transaction, according to Sandel, is "the moral importance of the goods that are said to be degraded by market valuation and exchange." That distinction, he admits, is not always clear. Is being a surrogate mother "morally analogous to baby selling"—as the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled in the 1987 "Baby M" case—or "more like sperm selling, a commonly accepted practice"?

What about vote buying? If one accepts today's prevailing "interest-based" view of politics, there's no meaningful argument against it. If "the purpose of democracy is to aggregate people's interests and preferences and translate them into policy," Sandel points out, then there's no basis for

objecting if a politician wants to change your preferences with a Thanksgiving turkey or a hefty tax cut.

The only argument against vote buying that makes sense, Sandel insists, is that suffrage is an aspect of "the ideal of citizenship as the republican tradition conceives it." Politics is more than a market mechanism for expressing individual choices. Each individual shares "a moral bond with the community," including "a sense of obligation for one's fellow citizens" and "a willingness to sacrifice individual interests for the sake of the common good." To sell one's vote would be to degrade and corrupt the ideal of citizenship itself.

There are certain things, Sandel concludes, "that markets do not honor and money cannot buy."

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Yawning Questions

THE SOURCE: "Yawning" by Robert R. Provine, in *American Scientist*, Nov.-Dec. 2005.

WHO KNEW? THE COMMON, CONTAGIOUS yawn repays close study by anyone interested in understanding the neural mechanisms of human behavior. So says Robert Provine, a psychologist at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, who has become, he admits, something of "a yawn stimulus" himself after years of observing the activity. "Yawns are so infectious that simply reading or thinking about them can be the vector of an infectious response." And it's



Yawns are almost irresistibly contagious, and therein lie neurological and psychological mysteries that scientists are still trying to understand.

precisely their property of contagiousness that provides a basis for exploring "the neurological roots of social behavior, face detection, empathy, imitation, and the possible pathology of these processes in autism, schizophrenia, and brain damage."

We know that yawning appeared early in vertebrate history and that mammals and most other animals with backbones, including fish, turtles, birds, and crocodiles, engage in it. But we don't know *why* it appeared. (There's no basis for the popular notion that yawning is a response to high levels of carbon dioxide in the blood.) Contagious yawning evolved much later and has been shown to exist only in chimpanzees and humans (though not in children until they are several years old). The physical consequences of the yawn include "opening of the Eustachian