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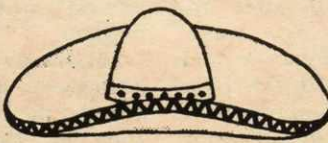
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Confessions of a Catholic

Confession of a Catholic by Michael Novak Harper and Rowe, 1983 221 pages, \$16.50

Review by Geoff Martin

"... I sometimes want to call myself a Liberal-Conservative-Democratic-Market-Communitarian-Pluralist-Catholic," American theologian and political commentator Michael Novak writes in his most recent book.

Novak's purpose in *Confession of a Catholic* is three-fold. He attempts to explain his own Catholic faith, its relationship to the broader Catholic Church, and provide a critique of the changes which have taken place within the Roman Catholic faith since the introduction of Vatican II in 1965.

In the book, he critically analyzes Catholics of both "conservative" and "radical" persuasion. Conservatives because they are too resistant to change and radicals because they are too eager. As a "neoliberal", or moderate, Novak feels able to support the use of contraception, but is for the most part worried about the present convulsions in the church.

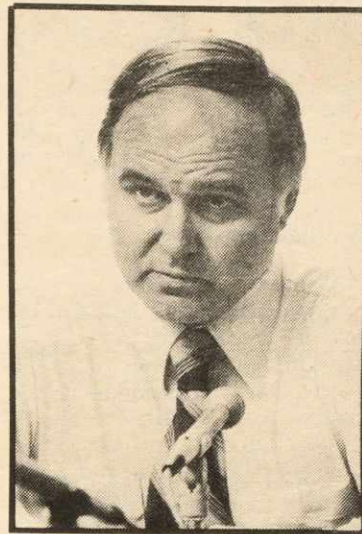
As early as page 2, Novak states his hostility to the present rise of "liberation theology" and other left-wing movements in the church, for "secular" reasons. "The main point of Cathol-

cism—some were now saying—is community, the political and social liberation of the oppressed Having rejected such uncritical slogans on secular grounds, I am not about to identify them with what I value most, next to conscience itself: My Catholic faith."

By separating his political beliefs from his religious beliefs, Novak may be betraying the very nature of Christianity. Christ was in a very real sense a revolutionary, and one can easily view his gospel as a call to activism on behalf of less fortunate people, rather than simply as a selfish way of reaching Nirvana.

Like many others, Novak makes the mistake of perceiving all movements on the left as "Marxist", and therefore invalid. What would he have said to E. F. Schumacher, a non-Marxist Christian who criticized Capitalism on the grounds that it depended on the sins of greed and envy for success? Schumacher advocated a decentralized model, which Novak does not deal with.

The other weakness of the book lies in Novak's naive belief in "democratic capitalism". Novak's model—one of cultural, economic and political pluralism—has never existed and never can, if only because industrial capitalism leads to monopolies and oligopolies, which in turn



Author Michael Novak

lead to an unfair distribution of political control. Novak's notion of democratic capitalism is as naive as Marxism, and no less impractical.

Despite these problems, Novak has provided us with a very perceptive and intelligent rendering of the meaning of Catholicism, both for him and for the factions within the church. He also makes some perceptive comments on the negative results of Vatican II, and from the standpoint of a "moderate Catholic," he is probably right to criticize it.

Sakharov: Glimpses of hope

On Sakharov Ed. Alexander Babyonyshev New York: Knopf, 1982 283 pages \$6.95 paper

by Moira Matthews

When Andrei Sakharov was arrested on the street in Moscow in January, 1980, he was the Soviet Union's foremost physicist.

Since then he has been stripped of all his honours, taken without trial to the distant city of Gorky and held under house arrest. He is cut off from the scientific world, and his papers are routinely disturbed or stolen. His family and friends are harassed.

On Sakharov is a collection of essays both about and by Sakharov. It serves as a good introduction to his life and thought, giving as well an overview of his enormous scientific contributions. His interests range from ecological problems to the effects of radiation from weapons tests. (Sakharov himself was the chief instigator of the 1963 Test Ban treaty which has served as a model for disarmament negotia-

tions ever since.)

Sakharov is saying things the Soviets do not want to hear. Because he believes in freedom, he continues to speak as if he were a free man. He has spoken out about human rights abuses in his native land and throughout the world, as when he criticised his government for the invasion of Afghanistan. He has always spoken boldly in defense of individuals. Before his arrest, he was conspicuously present at hundreds of trials. Even in exile, he continues to defend individual human dignity.

The book is of special interest to those who want lasting peace between the superpowers. This same refusal to accept conventional ideologies which distinguish him as a scientist gives Sakharov a unique approach to questions of peace and human rights. He considers the most important problem now to be the threat of nuclear war and humankind's priority to be a strategic balance and gradual disarmament of both sides. Sakharov places his hope in continued dis-

ussion, in the possibility of increased understanding and in the efforts of human rights activists inside the Soviet Union.

There are other glimpses of hope. The world scientific community is rising above political boundaries to grapple with world problems. In addition, there is a sense of community of human rights defenders throughout the USSR and Eastern Europe.

The main hope, however, is the character of Sakharov himself. One writer describes him memorably: "The man fears nothing. Nothing and no one."

Sakharov realizes that what he says will make little change in the Soviet Union and will probably only bring more repercussions against himself and his family. Still, he continues to write and is read at least throughout the West.

We should read his words as a warning against naivete and a directive to our own future action. Most of all, we should read them as an assurance of the possibility of equality and peace for humankind.

