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CNS documentary service

Usury: A Moral Concern for Jews, Christians and Muslims

Father Ryan, SJ

"The critique of aspects of the market economy, and especially the charging of interest on loans, that is found in Greek philosophy and in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions of faith needs to be taken into account in any evaluation we might make of the purpose of business or of the morality of a market economy," Jesuit Father Patrick J. Ryan said in the semiannual McGinley lecture at Jesuit-run Fordham University in New York. Father Ryan, the Laurence J. McGinley Professor of Religion and Society at Fordham, spoke April 8 at the school's Manhattan campus and

"The Lord does not despise the market as long as the merchant ... remembers to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with his God."

April 9 at the main campus in the Bronx. In his time holding the McGinley professorship — which was held for years by the late Cardinal Avery Dulles — Father Ryan has focused on dialogue among Christians, Jews and Muslims. In his latest lecture, Father Ryan discussed views of usury in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. He said that the traditional "Christian hostility to interest on loans, inherited from the Hebrew Bible," has dramatically changed through the years, so that "today most Christian churches would only define as usury the charging of excessive interest on loans; some form of reasonable interest is more or less taken for granted. The life of the market became respectable for Christians — perhaps entirely too respectable." Father Ryan said that while over the past five centuries most Christians have "overcome their aversion to charging interest on loans, Muslims have not." He ended his lecture with a discussion of Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 encyclical "Caritas in Veritate" and its call for an economy of gratuitousness. Father Ryan's lecture follows.

a little over four months ago I made an appearance one Sunday afternoon on the "PBS NewsHour Weekend" with Hari Sreenivasan. Eight of the 15 minutes of fame that the late Andy Warhol said all of us would eventually have passed very quickly once my balding head had been sufficiently powdered up not to shine under the TV lights.

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