



# God at the Pub

By Elizabeth Lev

**S**trong Brew, Theologically

The ancient Greeks invented the "convivium," pleasant gatherings where youths and adults, mellowed by food and wine would talk of gods, politics and culture. While this custom had problematic elements for Christians -- namely polytheism and a males-only rule -- the last few years have seen the spirit of the convivium Christianized.

Theology on Tap was started in the United States as an initiative to get young people to talk about Catholic faith and issues in a less formal setting than a church or classroom. Invited speakers give a short talk and then answer questions afterward. The relaxed atmosphere (and happy-hour prices) tends to draw considerable crowds.

Here in Rome, Theology on Tap has been gaining momentum ever since it was started last year. Last Thursday, a particularly interesting talk demonstrated even greater values to Theology on Tap than just getting young people to talk about God in the pub instead of just sports or movies.

Father Robert Sirico, president of the Michigan-based Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, opened the 2006 lectures with the provocatively titled talk, "Can a Rich Man Go to Heaven?"

With hundreds of business students arriving that week to get their dusting in humanities, the talk couldn't have been better timed. The aptly-named Scholars Lounge in Rome was packed.

Father Sirico approached the scriptural question with scriptural answers. He reminded the young people of Genesis, the creation of the world and that God deemed it "good." He spoke of Adam and Eve and the dignity of human work. He reminded a rapt audience of how "God takes the material world seriously." So much so that the Redemption took place in the material world.

With a few well-delivered phrases, Father Sirico knocked down the barriers between business students and theologians, and he then went to on to find common ground for the politically left or right. Elucidating the dangers of "canonizing the poor while demonizing the rich," Father Sirico also warned against "Calvinism on steroids" policies, which imply that attainment of wealth is a sign of God's favor.

In one of the most engaging moments of the evening, Father Sirico waxed autobiographical, revealing that briefly in his youth he had worn tie-dye and dreamed of redistributing wealth. The crowd, their jaws dropped in wonder, stared at the starry-eyed socialist turned captain of a Catholic think tank.

The discovery of Father Sirico's remarkable transformation also answered the question that had brought everyone to the pub that night -- "with God all things are possible."

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