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THE UNITED STATES
AND RELIGION

In memoriam
Richard J. Neuhaus

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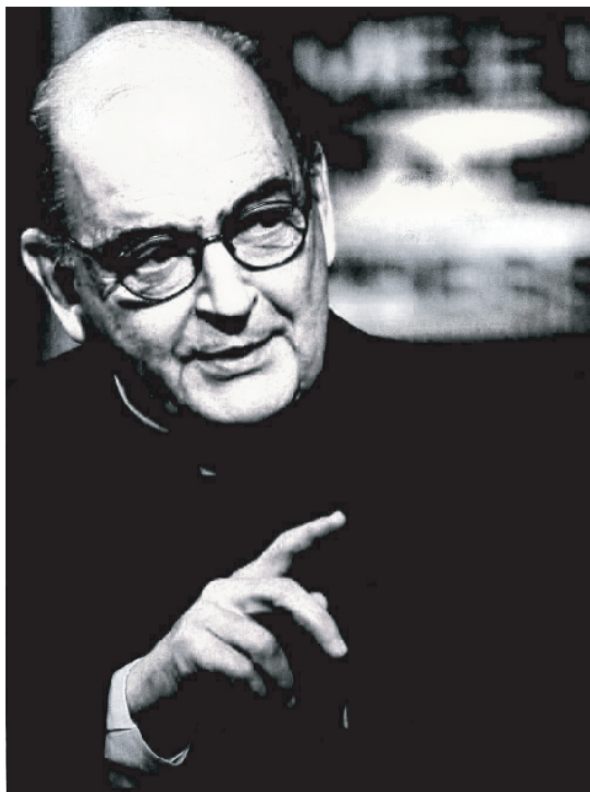
Richard J. Neuhaus

Public intellectual

Lover of Truth and Freedom

Faithful son of the Church

Friend of Poland



RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS

May 14, 1936—January 8, 2009

CONTENTS

- 13 **Andrzej Bryk:** Religion in America and Liberal Monism: Richard J. Neuhaus and the Challenge of Reasoned Faith. Introduction
- 33 **Patrick Allitt:** Catholicism in the United States: Between Liberalism and Conservatism
- 45 **Stephen Barr:** Evolution, Darwin, and Catholic Belief
- 67 **Mark Blitz:** Some Notes on Religion and Democratic Liberty
- 75 **Andrzej Bryk:** Romantic Theopolitical Testament – Richard J. Neuhaus and the American City of Man
- 123 **Spasimir Domaradzki:** Religion and American Policy: Contesting the Obvious
- 139 **John Hayes:** From Christ-Haunted Region to Anomic Anyplace: Religion in the 20th Century South
- 169 **David Lorenzo Izquierdo:** Ethics, Tradition and Religion
- 179 **Christopher Lazarzski:** Enemies or Allies: Liberalism and Catholicism in Lord Acton's Thought
- 197 **Leonard Leo:** Religion, Religious Freedom, and the American Political Tradition
- 205 **Harvey C. Mansfield:** Providence and Democracy
- 215 **Wilfred M. McClay:** The Place of Religion in the American Public Square: Christianity, Civil Religion, and the Enduring Contribution of Richard John Neuhaus
- 229 **Alan Mittleman:** The Theological-Political Predicament of American Jewry
- 241 **Marta Młodzianowska:** Religion and Religiosity in the United States
- 261 **Robert Uberman:** Why Values are Precious?
- 279 **George Weigel:** The End of the Bernardin Era
- 291 **Catherine H. Zuckert:** Musings on Mortality

CONTENTS

Archive

305 **Richard J. Neuhaus:** A New Order of Religious Freedom

313 **About Authors**



Top: Marching with Abraham Joshua Heschel and Martin Luther King Jr.

Bottom: With Fr. Maciej Zięba, OP, Michael Novak, and George Weigel in Krakow



Top: With John Paul II

Bottom: With Cardinals O'Connor and Ratzinger at the 1988 Erasmus Lecture

Photos published with the consent of "First Things".

Andrzej Bryk

**RELIGION IN AMERICA AND LIBERAL
MONISM: RICHARD J. NEUHAUS AND THE CHALLENGE
OF REASONED FAITH. INTRODUCTION**

It is impossible to understand the United States without reference to its religious legacy, or, to put it better, without biblical narrative being its indispensable story. The dramatic transformation of this narrative today constitutes an integral part of understanding what America has been, and where it is going. Biblical Christianity is without doubt a constitutive part of the story of American freedom, because the American Enlightenment, so different from the French anti-Christian project, recognized Christianity and religion in general as an important part of the creation of the United States. Europe, at least its Western part, today in general represents an ocean of “metaphysical boredom”, with the human rights doctrine as the avowed basis of its civilization, yet lacking any deeper justification as to why it should be considered a living “faith”.

The United States of America is a country in which religious, biblical imagery still permeates politics and public language, even if transformed into the form of civil religion, a robust heroic “faith” of American destiny. The First Amendment to the American Constitution, a subject of interpretative legal and political struggles, forbade the establishment of a state Church, but guaranteed free religious activity in the public sphere. Different denominations, churches, synagogues, and recently mosques, various sects have been part of the American drama from the beginning, not as public square ornaments but as important, legitimate shapers of the nation’s destiny and its identity. This religious American story has been a fascinating phenomenon to observe.

During the last sixty years the United States has been subjected to the colossal changes of the civil rights revolution and the countercultural turmoil of the 1960s, including a profound anthropological change incorporated into the very core of traditional liberalism. Liberalism accepted the idea of the autonomous imperial Self as a basis of right, turning itself gradually from a limited doctrine of political and economic arrangements of free people into a monistic ideology which might threaten freedom. It has put enormous pressure on the entire human activity within its sphere of operation, to conform to liberalism's pre-political assumptions treated increasingly as a *sine qua non* condition of the only legitimate behavior of its citizens.¹ Whether such pre-political axioms have been present in the liberal doctrine from the beginning, irrespective of how diverse philosophers conceived of them, or they constitute an outcome of a relatively new incorporation into liberalism of the New Left "philosophy" of "emancipation" from any conceivable, public or private "oppression", is beside the point. Liberalism became an official ideology of Western society, and American society at that, during the latter half of the 20th century, and set the stage for a tremendous conflict, branded imprecisely today as "culture wars".

Such an evolution of liberalism coincided with a period of a tremendous religious turmoil, with a corresponding search within churches for a proper response to the changes, a need for a new language of communication and orthodoxy in conditions of growing dissolution of the traditional paradigm of the American political and cultural code. All of that corresponded with a relative decline in the United States' standing in the world, and a more or less subconscious creeping in of cultural self-doubt, a sense of cultural melancholia, which, so far, refuses to go away. Religious life, mainly biblical religiosity, with its myriad of denominations, has been part of these dramatic changes with discussions and transformations.

Richard John Neuhaus was one of the most important liberal public theologians of the 20th century, probably the most prominent in America after Reinhold Niebuhr and John Courtney Murray, who were active in the middle of the 20th century. He stood right at the very center of these dramatic changes and debates from the very beginning, while shaping culture and public policies significantly. His focus was mainly on biblical, transcendental, revealed religions and their role in the American, or more generally, in the liberal public square. Neuhaus argued that what was at stake at this hour of late modernity was in fact not the fate of Christianity, but the very survival of the idea of freedom, the source of the great creativity and ongoing potential of Western civilization. He argued that Christian anthropology constituted the greatest security of human dignity in liberal democracy.

Neuhaus's life was one of passion, since he was one of those Christians acutely aware that the times in which he lived were not ordinary times. At ease with the world and with people of all walks of life, he knew where the real anchor was, a living embodiment of a truth found in the old maps of Christian antiquity, where

¹ See: A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame 1981.

Jerusalem was put at the center – the *axis mundi*, a blatant cartographical error, but a theological truth. Few of his contemporaries wrote with such sweep and passion about the beauty of the world as a beauty of Christian hope. Neuhaus knew that Christian orthodoxy is a mirror of the world as it is, that Christianity is the great exponent of reality. At a time of great disenchantment, Neuhaus was one of the greatest apologists of Christendom. After Belloc, he could proclaim

For if God is not, then all falsehoods, though each prove the rest false, are each true, and every evil is its own good, and there is confusion everywhere. But if God is, then the world can stand.²

Born in 1936 in Canada, Neuhaus became a Lutheran pastor in 1960. Understanding his calling radically, he engaged in one of the most transforming events of American history, the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and '60s, becoming one of the collaborators of Martin Luther King. Together with the Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel and the radical Catholic priest Daniel Berrigan, Neuhaus founded the committee “Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam”, the most visible pacifist organization, part of the radical anti-war civil disobedience movement, “the Movement”, as it was then called. He was arrested on many occasions for acts of civil disobedience, both during his civil rights activities and for his anti-war protests.³ In the 1970s the ways of Neuhaus and “the Movement” parted. His journey from the left to the right was a personal odyssey caused by the reflection that the world around him was moving in a direction which seemed to him dangerous and corrupting. Many things contributed to that change. The ideologization of the Democratic Party, with radical feminism and the demand for the legalization of abortion, were the most important. The party of “the little guy” turned out to be the party ready to “kill the little guy”. Neuhaus considered this to be a betrayal of true American liberalism, the essence of which was always an enlargement of community under care and legal protection.⁴ The Supreme Court “Roe vs Wade” decision of 1973, declaring abortion a constitutional right, was for him a decisive turnaround, to limit a community for which we take responsibility. The generation which professed a fight with discrimination and for the rights of the weakest decided to seal into law a new discrimination depriving the weakest of society’s protection. Neuhaus’s faith in liberal ideas prompted him to engage in the pro-life

² Quoted in: R. R. Reilly, *Soul Provider*, “The American Spectator”, November 2010, p. 79.

³ He was also a McCarthy delegate to the 1968 Democratic Convention, and a radical candidate for Congress. It was then that he also wrote the essay *The Thorough Revolutionary*, in which he proclaimed: “A revolution of consciousness, no doubt. A cultural revolution, certainly. A nonviolent revolution, perhaps. An armed overthrow of the existing order, it may be necessary. Revolution for the hell of it or revolution for a new world, but revolution, Yes”. Quoted in: J. Bottum, *I Measure Every Grief I Meet*, “First Things”, April 2009, p. 24. Involvement in the McCarthy campaign and the above manifesto show how radical, by American standards, he was then.

⁴ In one of his editorials about abortion, Neuhaus stated: “The pro-abortion flag is being planted on the wrong side of the liberal-conservative divide. It ought to be those heartless conservatives who want to define the fetus as a meaningless lump of tissue; it ought to be caring liberals who want to expand the community of care to embrace the unborn”. *Ibidem*, p. 24.

movement, which he compared to the civil rights revolution. He became one of the most vocal defenders of the pro-life cause. But that was a move to the conservative side as well. Neuhaus realized that something more fundamental was taking place. The very anthropology of the liberal discourse changed, and with that the classical definition of truth, the basis of all previous discussions about civil rights. The old liberalism took it for granted that we all speak the same moral language, rooted in an objective morality of natural rights, symbolically written into the American Declaration of Independence. The new anthropology was based on the imperial Self. The will became a basis of entitlements and eventually of right, and with that human dignity came to be a human dignity of the imperial Self, not of a person who was tied to a moral world which protected him and at the same time imposed duties towards oneself and the community, creating bonds of mutual obligation and solidarity. If so, not only was liberalism radically transformed, but the American liberalism of the founders as well. American culture and institutions were immediately put under pressure to transform according to the same imperative. Rights began increasingly to be treated as a province not of a universe of moral obligation into which we enter to serve and be served, but as power, an entitlement against the community.

The American ethic of individual merit and personal responsibility gave way to a demand not for justice expressed in equal constitutional rights, but justice understood as equality, and as a claim on the state. A sense of guilt, coupled with the traditional American flagellation and messianism in action, caused an expansion of the federal state, taking on more and more tasks to rectify past wrongs towards different groups and applying remedial policies. Neuhaus saw consequences of these in his role as a Lutheran pastor of a poor parish of St. John in Brooklyn, which he led from 1961 to 1978. He realized there how demoralizing federal policies had become, destroying industriousness, self-help and civil engagement. Wrongly conceived welfare bred waste, apathy, the destruction of poor families and a wave of crime.⁵ Neuhaus, who had been a supporter of the Democratic Party, began to move towards the Republican Party, recognizing the benefits of the socially oriented free market. He also discovered that his observations about the welfare state⁶ had always been an important part of the Catholic social doctrine of subsidiarity.

In the 1970s, the dramatic cultural changes wrought conceptually in the '60s began to be felt. The imperial Self anthropology was slowly transforming the perception of reality, laws and institutions, influencing American Christianity as well. Neuhaus was in the middle of this transformative process within the Lutheran Church. He began to leave behind him the radical social past and an exclusive focus on charity as a way to God, which he realized was leading to subordinating God to progressive causes. This brought him to the Catholic Church and away from the mainline Protestant Churches.⁷ In 1991, Neuhaus was ordained as a Catholic priest.

⁵ This was an observation first brought to media attention in 1965 by the so called Moynihan report.

⁶ Which he published with Peter Berger in the pamphlet *To Empower People* in 1977.

⁷ R. J. Neuhaus, *How I Became the Catholic I Was*, "First Things", April 2002.

Neuhaus joined the Catholic Church at a dramatic time for it. The largest single denomination in the United States, it was in a middle of a commotion caused by *aggiornamento*. Moreover, Protestant anti-Catholicism gave way to the anti-Catholicism of secular liberalism. American liberalism began to change its character, moving, roughly speaking, from a traditional pluralistic liberalism within the confines of federalism and autonomy of mediating structures, into monistic liberalism, an ideology which absorbed the New Left doctrine of “emancipation” and the new anthropology of the radical imperial Self. The natural right interpretation of the “pursuit of happiness” from the Declaration of Independence was abandoned, and an anthropology inimical to a transcendental and revealed faith began to reign.

The Catholic Church found itself right on the front line of this new cultural battle. When the cultural conservative writer Pieter Viereck remarked in 1960 that “Catholic baiting is the anti-Semitism of the liberals” he was anticipating the new intellectual, political and legal sport of “emancipation” played by the liberals.⁸ With the mainline Protestant professing the liberal social gospel and pacified, and the fundamentalists cornered until the 1970s in the backwater of the “Bible Belt”, it was the Catholic Church which found itself cast in the role of the main adversary of liberal culture. In turn, the Church itself was experiencing a dramatic split between its orthodox and liberal wings in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. It was pressurised to conform to the general trend of liberalization of Protestant churches and to become just a “spiritual” department of the progressive causes, abandoning any pretence to shaping the terms of the public moral debate. After the “Roe vs Wade” decision of the Supreme Court in 1973 establishing the new liberal doctrine of the imperial Self as a source of moral judgment, the Catholic Church, still clinging to the moral orthodoxy of its teachings, began to be pushed out of the public square together with other churches. The secular public square was to be the only civilized and legitimate way to conduct the business of liberal democracy.

The liberal left elites began to treat religion increasingly as a problematic feature of the public square, redefining the traditional understanding of the First Amendment. Freedom of religion was being defined as freedom from religion in the public square. There was additionally a sinister twist to that new interpretation. Religious public presence began to be defined as a menace to the public square, a kind of criminalization by association operation. By attaching to religion the label of an irrational phenomenon prone to violence, and inimical to rational public discussion, this symbolic violence provided additional reasons why religions should be pushed out of the public square.⁹ This new liberalism’s definition of the public

⁸ W. Herberg, *Religion in a Secularized Society: Some Aspects of America’s Three-Religion Pluralism*, “Review of Religious Research” 1962, Vol. 4, No. 1, p. 37; P. Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice*, Oxford 2003.

⁹ Several factors apart from the internal crisis of the churches contributed to that. The abdication of the Protestant establishment of its role as a leading faith of the republic and its elite, the political rise of the fundamentalist Protestants which scared new liberals, an international rise in Islamic religious fundamentalist violence, deftly defined by new liberal elites as examples of generic religious violence, and finally a cultural shift towards

square in the United States, as empty of religious presence, corresponded with the publication of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in 1973, which provided the liberal-left camp with a secular "bible" for transformation of a society along the lines of progressive equality, defining at the same time the legitimate and illegitimate, rational and irrational terms of public debate. Legitimate discussion began to be understood as giving sufficient rational reasons, a.k.a. not religious, as a precondition of participating in the debate. This new liberalism began to base its discourse on a truncated, limited concept of rationality which excluded religious language from public debate. Religion was increasingly treated as an irrational pursuit ready to subvert the secular state. This was a subtle projection of the modern sovereign state's image of itself as an entity not tolerating any competition to its monistic pretences and defining only its power as legitimate.¹⁰

An amalgamation was looming of this new anthropological breakthrough, liberalism's limited concept of rationality, and the religious side's rationality as illegitimate and prone to violence, a dramatic problem of ghetto-type isolation of religion and religious people. It was not only a religious issue; it touched upon the fundamental issue of the citizen's freedom in the republic. It constituted a subversion of American tradition and converted pluralistic liberalism into a monistic ideology of revolutionary transformation, an act of symbolic violence towards religious people. They were told that their beliefs were to be separated from their personalities, as the beliefs of the secularists for some reason were not, and could enter the public square only as second-class citizens. This new development was a violation of the fundamental values of equal rights and religious freedom. But it also constituted the European Enlightenment-type attitude of the American liberal elites, a condescending attitude towards religion and American culture at that, and a declaration of war on a large segment of the American society. The program of "emancipation" signified a program of replacement of "oppressive" culture with a massive legislation for social justice for everyone who defined themselves, or was defined by the elites, as being "oppressed". Culture and religion began to be treated as an obstacle to the universal march of progress.

Neuhaus found himself in the middle of this conflict. He realized that politics was not the aim of human existence, as he remarked "the first thing about politics is to remember that politics is not the first things". Yet he was against writing oneself off from a society; there was no sectarianism allowed for Christians. The Church was not the sect and could not escape the world, but work out the best in the existing one. Neuhaus responded to the new situation of post-1968 liberalism with the book *The Naked Public Square* of 1984, which catapulted him into public

privatization of faith and loosening of orthodoxy, with a corresponding earlier shift to psychotherapy aimed also at the Protestant religious paradigm, all connected with the dissolution of communities and a spread of radical self-individualism.

¹⁰ On this fascinating process of "politicization" of religion by the modern sovereign state and the corresponding branding of a religious competitor as prone to violence see: W. T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, Oxford 2009.

prominence that same year. It “not only initiated a conversation, it began a movement”.¹¹ Probably the most important of Neuhaus’s books, it was

[...] a plea not for religion as such but for reasoned public moral discourse, which discourse must also and of necessity draw on the resources of religion ... [today] religious opinions are [still] viewed as being beyond reasoned discourse ... the liberal democratic tradition is a Western and Christian achievement and its future depends, for better and for worse, chiefly on the American experiment. If it dies here, I do not see anyone else picking up the fallen flag.¹²

The book was a manifesto against secularization of every part of shared common life. For Neuhaus this was a totalitarian move which would leave citizens without intellectual resources to resist the pretensions of the modern state.

The abortion decision of 1973 prompted Neuhaus to abandon his love affair with liberalism, limiting drastically its definition of those whom it would take under its protection and move into a cultural fight. This fight was fundamentally about the very definition of human freedom and human dignity, and religious freedom was a cornerstone of it. It was essentially a self-defensive move on the part of Christians. Liberalism, which was driving religion and religiously informed moral witnesses out of the public square and into the private domain, was for Neuhaus anti-freedom and anti-rationality ideology. He easily saw through the very dubious and ideologically motivated interpretations of the First Amendment by some judges and lobbying groups trying to push religious people into purely private quarters.

For Neuhaus, it was precisely the separation of state and church that religious communities were fighting for, while the state was dictating to religious communities their rightful place. The historical point of separation was not enlightened rationalism, but the growing realization among the various competing religious groups that it was better to neutralize a state in matters of religion than to run the risk of one of their opponents gaining control of the government. Thus

[...] we must never tire of explaining, [that] the ‘no establishment’ provision of the First Amendment is entirely in the service of the ‘free exercise of religion’.¹³

The “antiestablishment” portion of the First Amendment was not to defend a state and society against religion, but exactly the opposite, to defend religion against the state so as to provide security for religious denominations to function fully in the public sphere. But the situation changed. The Supreme Court decisions, coupled with a theory of the new anthropology of the imperial Self, had to recognize this Self as a sole arbiter of his or her right against community and other rights. The imperial Self was to be the arbiter of “rights”, “exclusions”, “intolerance”. Such a doctrine could not be an effective policy, but it was an effective ram to push

¹¹ Quotation from the back cover of *The Naked Public Square Reconsidered: Religion and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. C. Wolfe, Wilmington 2009.

¹² R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, New York 2009, p. 24.

¹³ *Idem*, *The Public Square*, “First Things”, November 2006, p. 78.

religious language and people out from the public discussion, in order to prepare quite a coherent doctrine of the new community. From that point of view, the Christian Right's entry into politics in the 1970s was a defensive tactic in the face of the aggressive liberal secular state. Its rise constituted a fight with the "onslaught of anti-biblical barbarism".¹⁴

Neuhaus was also convinced that religious denominations play an indispensable role in preserving freedom as such against any pretensions of a sovereign state.¹⁵ In the civil public square, democratic citizens participate not as "unencumbered selves" driven by the imperial Self, which was a cover for power and selfish will, but citizens who use reason and draw on the wisdom of the many traditions. Despite America being a commercial republic, its citizens have always tried to order their lives justly and pursue the common good. And if that common good was from time to time compromised, as for instance in the case of slavery, that internal logic of decent public life eventually prevailed. Neuhaus was thus a fierce critic of the ideology of "strict separationism" promulgated by secularists and other liberals who sought to use raw judicial power, so as to disenfranchise people of faith who do not share their convictions and who reject liberal pieties.¹⁶

Neuhaus was a public theologian of the first order, capable of translating the most intricate intellectual matters into clear statements. He was a driving force behind many important public initiatives. In 1990 he founded the Institute on Religion and Public Life. Its journal *First Things*, was an ecumenical journal attempting to provide a "survey of religion, culture, and public life", and Neuhaus was immediately recognized as a weighty contender by his intellectual adversaries. Its purpose was "to advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society". The magazine has been seen since then

[...] correctly, as the intellectual organ of a certain kind of religious conservatism. It is not the conservatism of those who reject modernity, but conservatism of those who see modernity ... to be rescued.¹⁷

In 1995, Neuhaus also helped to create a crucial alliance between the Evangelicals and the Catholics, or, to be more precise, between the conservative evangelicals and the conservative, orthodox Catholics. Slowly the religious public presence as a civilizing cultural and social force in America had to be grudgingly accepted by liberal elites, marred only by one cliché, with the movement and its leaders, of which Neuhaus was probably the most important one, being called "theocons", as if suggesting that what America was about to have was a theocratic state despite

¹⁴ I. Kristol, *Taking the Religious Conservatives Seriously*, [foreword in:] *Disciples and Democracy: Religious Conservatives and the Future of American Politics*, ed. M. Cromartie, Washington 1994, pp. VII–VIII.

¹⁵ This idea was set forth by him for the first time in a 1976 pamphlet by P. Berger and R. J. Neuhaus, *To Empower the People*, Washington.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ S. M. Barr, *To Lit a Candle*, "First Things", April 2009, p. 20.

the overtly humanistic and freedom-oriented effects of such people's efforts. This constituted not such a subtle case of criminalization by association, when the very word "theocon" elicited images of a theocratic government like Iran, with ordinary life in certain aspects civilized, but with the horrible regime from the liberal-democratic point of view. This is why Neuhaus resented and resisted it.

His liberalism was definitely not a liberalism which accepted the New Left slogan of "emancipation" from all established forms of human existence, defining them as hiding unequal relations of power, thus making any human activity inherently political. Such "liberation" had no stopping point, since it lacked definite criteria of judgment and led to a morality of oneself. Neuhaus's liberalism rejected the idea that the imperial Self was to be the sole arbiter of one's destiny. His liberalism was the tradition of Madison, Tocqueville, or Acton, where liberty was more an achievement. He was against post-'60s liberalism embracing empty freedom, ignorant of evil, racing into nihilistic nothingness, liberalism as a pursuit of freedom decoupled from a search for truth, without any sense of human nature. He rejected its notion of tolerance rooted in the adulation of the imperial Self as a subject of moral judgment, as good as anyone. For Neuhaus genuine tolerance did not mean

[...] ignoring differences, as if differences made no difference; genuine tolerance meant engaging differences, energetically, within a bond of civility and respect...that commitment to differences engaged and explored must remain both watchword and method.¹⁸

Neuhaus was convinced that life was a serious, consequential business. His life constituted a paean for God-the Creator who could be approached by reason and reasoned about in public, and recognized the existence of an objective world, into which was written a meaning and a law of motion, which could never with impunity be changed. After St. Augustine he knew that created things should not presume to create. This world exists not only in our minds, or in culture, but is true objectively and filled with fullness, is rational and capable of being known. The message about this is conveyed by God, not by man. Neuhaus was a realist and a metaphysician. Metaphysics tells us that reality has a sense embodied in it permanently, the sense which is not only a cultural variable, that in human relationships and the nature of man there are written immutable principles and laws, which have to be read and implemented. Without metaphysics one cannot defend human dignity, which is the very reason why human rights should be binding. Metaphysics defends us against the hubris that a sense of reality depends only on our mind, which would have meant that who is a man and who is not is decided not by facts, but opinions. In other words that we are of our own making, a product of our will, power and self-explaining mind.

His was a rejection of such a modernity which dethroned God, because that would have meant the elevation of Man, in fact an invention of Man. The act of

¹⁸ G. Weigel, *Multiplying Himself*, "First Things", April 2009, p. 63.

Creation was to continue now without a Creator. God had created human beings in His own image and likeness out of the act of love, thus free. Humans thought that with impunity they could now continue the task and press that freedom to the utmost limit, while at the same time declaring as non-existent the very source of this limit. Man was now to be the centre of creation from which the meaning of that creation began to be decided. Humans owed nothing to God, everything to nature and biological chemistry in that, the crowning evolutionary element of which has become human reason. As Nietzsche observed, little was changed, except that the total inversion of the object of worship took place. Worship of God was converted to worship of humanity itself. The yearning for metaphysical dimension was not eliminated, as the modern mind claimed; it was just placed somewhere else. The deity was not the biblical God who was telling His created beings “You shall” because I love you. The new Deity was put in this place, and now it was “humanity”, the modern equivalent of biblical idolatry, the religion of Me.

But secularist humanism as an ideology, Neuhaus argued, was not able to provide one crucial element of this manmade self-creation, that is the love with which the Creation was executed, and because of that of the absolute undestructability of any human life. Secularism was unable to be enforced metaphysically as a concept of equality putting everyone, because of it, within a circle of total moral responsibility, guaranteed by the taboo of God, which could not be reached by an act of will and power of anyone under any circumstances. To destroy that taboo mentally was a truly practical consequence of the death of God, and because of that the very concept of moral equality of all. Their belonging to the circle of moral responsibility was from now on dependent on the sheer imaginary, will, power and utility of humans and their power relations. There was nothing in them which could not be altered by self-justifying logic of a self-explaining mind, driven to utilitarian solutions rationally justified post-facto. This constituted the very essence of moral auto-creation. Love gave way to a certitude about the boundless possibilities of development in every field, with no guides to the limits of such an endeavor, inviting the hubris of deeming them non-existent, the very essence of rebellion against God which biblical imaginary defined as the fall. Love was equated with happiness as bliss. As in the great tale of Baron Münchhausen, humans began to auto-create themselves, rooted in the myth that they were self-originating and saving themselves from an abyss of a whirlwind of senseless cosmic drama, by their own will.

With that, the relational element in God’s Creation, expressed by such a concept as the Trinity, or such images as God’s need for company as a reason for Creation itself, or Adam’s need for Eve, was destroyed. And with this destruction of a relational element of human creation and human nature, human solidarity was destroyed as well. There was simply no metaphysical need for it. Humans by the process of self-creation de facto rejected the need for dependency, the very essence of which was a relational bond with God, and unequal, that is dependent on someone else. Destruction of dependency gave a free hand to auto-creation, an invitation

to a belief in the endless plasticity of the world outside, and humans there as well, subject only to will and power. Metaphysical individualism gave rise to social and political individualism, the very essence of the American experiment, but historically tempered by metaphysical fear of God, as well as communities of well, biblically formed consciences, or in other words religious communities. Sternly inculcated morality gave rise to values and opinions which were from now on to become substitutes for religions, a.k.a. biblical morality, and form a new ethical behavior. Opinions, which are in fact a province of moral auto-creation, are in the contemporary world confused with conscience.¹⁹

Neuhaus was thus critical of the contemporary liberal idea of conscience, whether in public life or in religious life, not only for theological reasons, but for practical ones as well, for the sake of a viable community, democracy and freedom. The rule of conscience may ultimately isolate people, driving them deeper into themselves. A consequence is the subordination of autonomous institutions into a dictate of a state, meaning a minority elite in power and cognoscenti justifying it. If the individual conscience has primacy then we are bound to have incessant clashes which are ultimately irresolvable. They require arbitration, but also criteria for judging between them, a process which will be done not by the reasoned public argument of informed citizens with properly formed consciences, but by an imposition of such a judgment by narrow elites. Here, Neuhaus was Tocquevillian to the core.²⁰

The properly informed conscience is thus a prerequisite of the free society as it has been understood in Western civilization, which is essentially of Christian making. Neuhaus refused to accept the new post-1968 liberalism's adulation of the autonomous self as a carrier of his or her inner truth created in a process of moral auto-creation, and especially justifying it as the surest protection of minorities. Such a conscience does not search for virtue as truth, but virtue as personal identification. In such a case a change in traditional morality takes place. Virtue ceases to be who one is in relation to the objective moral world – not to what one should be, but what one defines oneself to be, what one personally stands for in the process of the conscience's work understood essentially as moral auto-creation. Moral responsibility turns out to be secondary and subordinate to the definition of one's identity, which in fact inexorably turns to an identification of desire, self-definition of the world, and morality identified as personal choices and as a consequence social causes.

Morality is thus connected more with supporting "good" social causes instead of opting for a proper, universal moral conduct, identification with an objective virtue, that is moral truth. But such a stance treats others who have different views,

¹⁹ For Neuhaus, after Newman and in congruence with the papal encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* of 1993, conscience works well if it freely adopts God's law, objective moral laws a basis of moral choices.

²⁰ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square Now: A Symposium – Stanley Hauerwas, Mary Ann Glendon, Harvey Cox, Alan Mittleman, Andrew Murphy, Jean Bethke Elshstain, Ralph C. Wood, Allen D. Hertzke, David Novak, Wilfred M. McClay, Richard John Neuhaus*, "First Things", November 2004, p. 25.

not partners in a process of deliberating over the objective criteria of communal conduct, a search for truth. During that search people may err, but are part, and recognize themselves as such, of the common humanity oriented towards not themselves, but something which is essentially higher than their desires. When virtue becomes self-identification, as something one stands for, as an outcome of one's self identification, other people are treated essentially as people with unbridgeable views, also a result of their self-identification derived from their moral auto-creation. This causes those who do not identify with our choices and our causes to be demonized as a nuisance, as thwarting our will, as enemies, not people living in the same moral universe. A colossal process of demonization follows, and we are essentially in a conflict which has no moral criteria of adjudication, because there is no objective point towards which to turn. Those who do not share our point of view, whether these are matters of race, sexuality, relations between sexes, homosexuality or global warming, are not only wrong, but they are essentially acting against virtue, they are amoral, and thus not in the wrong, but simply evil.²¹

New Liberalism, based on this new anthropology of an imperial Self, is wrong exactly on the basis of the premises which will never achieve the intended results. It will have to end up defending the rights of every minority, eventually a minority of one, on the basis of a totally non-discriminatory approach to the claims made by such minorities against society. This is for Neuhaus the most egotistical equation of personal desire with rights against others and the community and a demand from the state to protect such desires. This constitutes a rejection of majority self-government and giving up power to the state and its governing elites focused only on providing individuals with rights, a kind of consumerism which destroys community, democracy and eventually freedom, subverting the very essence of the rights of consciousness based on such an idea. Neuhaus explained this in the context of the fight with religion, meaning essentially Christianity in the public square. Here he was especially derisive of the Supreme Court, which accepted New Liberalism's anthropology as the basis of its judgments.²² But the wrong anthropology is the basis of wrong morality and wrong politics, and eventually wrong life.

For Neuhaus, an improperly ordered conscience would eventually cause a slide towards despotism administered by the cynical elites, content with providing consumption. For him a regime was legitimate only on the condition that it allows properly formed consciences to flourish, and here the anthropology of the New Liberalism, if recognized as an official doctrine of a state, was destroying this conscience. It was wrong politics producing a wrong community and loss of freedom. *The Naked Public Square* was thus a warning that pushing biblical religion out was a zero-sum game. The non-religious side was creating a civilization dangerous to civility and liberty.²³

²¹ Idem, *Empty from the State*, [in:] *The Best of Public Square*, Michigan 2001, p. 152, or *Judgment Day*, *ibidem*, p. 164.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 25.

²³ *Ibidem*.

Neuhaus had an acute sense that contemporary Christians were on the defensive against the human rights culture which demanded that they not only respect other religions, but give way to them as well. His understanding of human rights was not dependent on the contemporary human rights liberal doctrine, which has become a pivotal point of the rhetoric of liberal internationalists. For them, Judeo-Christian tradition has nothing to contribute to understanding of human rights, as if the underlying idea of human rights was not dependent first of all on that tradition, and as if human dignity, that is free will and reason, personhood and moral choice did not reflect the very nature of the ultimate reality that is God himself.²⁴

Any account of human dignity sufficient for grounding human rights convincingly, excludes secular accounts of them. All are spurious and self-circular. For him, human rights without a metaphysical grounding have to succumb to a logic of secular rationality based on a modern New Liberal anthropology of an imperial Self. Without a metaphysical grounding of human rights in God's love and equal rights, Neuhaus claimed, the rational liberal mind will always find ways to justify the wishes of the strongest over the weakest, as the abortion culture testified.

Neuhaus was aware that the main fault line of conflict today is not a fight between faith and reason, the idea that liberal monism wanted to impose on public discourse, but one over the very nature of reason.²⁵

The modern liberal concept of reason is limited. As a consequence, there was simply no way that reasonable people need to resign themselves to a materialist, naturalist understanding of the universe. For him the claim that the only respected rational assumption is that nature is all there was wrong and incoherent. There is no conflict between reason and faith, but there is definitely a conflict with the limited concept of reason applied in public discussions today by late liberalism, and there is a conflict with non-reason as the reason of the entire post-modernist thought. What Neuhaus tried to do, together with other, less public theologians as critics of modernity such as Newman, Balthasar, Pannenberg and, in the American context, Murray or Schall, was to engage critically and publicly with that liberal and post-modernist truncated concept of reason and show how it deforms rationality and public life at that, with the negative consequences of contemporary thinking.

Neuhaus started with a basic question which stands at the beginning of any reasoned argument. This is a question to which the right answer results in properly organized public life, and also a proper understanding of religious liberty within that. The question is as follows: "Is Being as such, and all it contains in it, that is the cosmos, the first cause, laws of physics and human history, consciousness, ethics, love and hatred, caritas and indifference, and finally reason as such, an effect of blind fate, born without a definite Creator and changing in endless, senseless process coming from the chemical forces of evolution, a utilitarian response to an environment?" Or Being has sense and properly applied reason can discern it, even

²⁴ Idem, *A Formula for Despotism*, [in:] *The Best of Public Square...*, Vol. 2, pp. 227–229.

²⁵ Idem, *The Naked Public Square Now: A Symposium...*, p. 25.

by a sheer falsification of the pretensions of its opponents. The consequences of answering such a question one way or another are fundamental for both individual and public life. Even assuming that both positions are not possible to subject to a definite resolution, the conclusion can only be that the ontological status of both of them is the same. To wit, a religious person, for instance, is as rational as a liberal intellectual, and the latter's rejection of faith as a superstition can be turned around and thrown at him.

If so, then religion and theology have the same epistemological status, as a non-theological, non-religious language, to convey to us something significant and fundamental about the cosmos and human nature. Both constitute forms of rationality, except that the former language is wider, richer, while the latter is truncated. A skeptic might ask in relation to what one is wider and the other narrower. To which the answer is simple and present in Christianity from the very beginning, namely in relation to realization of the true potential of human predicament, the nature of which was set by outside love, that is outside rationality. This of course has grave consequences for the ability to construct any compelling universal ethic derived from the self-explaining reason as an outcome of blind fate. The liberal, monistic claim to exclude a religious, theological point from a public discussion is thus not only logically contradictory, as by the standards of plurality the liberal mind considers itself to be constitutive to its operation in the public place, but also politically dangerous, since it has to suppress liberty by eliminating competitive languages in the public square.

This was a core argument of *The Naked Public Square*, from which many practical consequences follow for public life, including the recognition of a theologically inspired reason as necessary in the public space, the legitimate place of religiously motivated citizens in the political sphere who have the right to act on their beliefs as rational, not superstitious ones. As such they constitute essences of their *persona*, not an ornamental hobby to be practiced in private, and the rational essence of a public language at that. Neuhaus was aware, as Murray before him, or his contemporary James Schall, that a theological statement per se was not a language in which one could engage public sphere directly. Thus, in his public pronouncements Neuhaus tried to convey his message in a language of rationality.²⁶ He used such a language because he considered reason to be part of God's creation, so capable of forming a universal language of human communication. This language of rationality is natural law, of which Neuhaus was a defender.²⁷ But Neuhaus's argument was not dependent on the validity of any sort of religious orthodoxy. He acknowledged a debt to the Catholic tradition influencing his entire understanding of politics and morality. But his public arguments concerning such issues as abor-

²⁶ Such language was demanded from the non-liberal side as a precondition of civilized public life by John Rawls in his famous, even if woefully reductionist argument of public morality formulated in *A Theory of Justice*. Neuhaus's argument is deeper, and above all truly inclusive.

²⁷ Together with such modern thinkers as Robert George, Russell Hittinger or John Finnis.

tion, euthanasia, and the proper meaning of the First Amendment were not sectarian, but put forth in the language of natural right rationality.²⁸

There was nothing uniquely Catholic about what he had to say about the consequences of liberalism's contemporary philosophy based on an autonomous imperial Self, who destroys civility in politics, since as Edmund Burke observed, without constraints, willingly and morally imposed on oneself and acquired through character formation, men forgo their capacity for civil liberty. This is logical because otherwise we have a self explaining itself reason derived from a materialistic revolution, which makes this reason, including consciousness, nothing more than an outcome of chemical evolutionary reactions.²⁹ But then such a justification of reason on the basis of a non-theistic explanation can only be utilitarian, allegedly the best manner of adaptation to the changing conditions. Such a reason can not justify its own ethical system which would go towards categorical "you shall", the problem which Kant realized with all its drama and tried to solve, albeit unsuccessfully, like all philosophical schools after him.³⁰

The combination of materialism and moral auto-creation has profound consequences. If all that is material, and nature is simply a matter from which no moral command can be derived, then there is need to apply will to that world, to pretend that we create, mold the world and the matter as such, that will is the moral operational course of action.³¹

Our creation, including moral creation, makes us the masters of blind fate; reality is just social construction; everything is there for grabs, for will to change it. We are in power, not the blind world. But this is of course an illusion, and even if that will tries to organize any common ethical standards, as Kant wanted to, this eventually becomes useless.³²

But two more consequences stem from such a materialistic conception of reason for public policy, and Neuhaus is aware of that. The first is that the strong have no reason to recognize the weak as morally equal, because there is no external measure to, without discussion, as the Ten Commandments demanding from God "You shall", impose a moral command to do so. There is only a utilitarian reason, which may always justify why, for instance, the weak have to vanish. Abortion, euthanasia, cloning, sexual regression, as Neuhaus termed sexual revolution, are

²⁸ In his later years he somehow modified his position about natural law, which he explained in *The Naked Public Square...* Instead of stressing the language of natural law he stated that he "would make the appeal more explicitly and insistently to the human capacity for reason, including moral reason. Natural law enters here, but somebody has to come up with a better term than natural law, which is too easily seen as a peculiarly Catholic thing". R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square Now...*, p. 24.

²⁹ *Idem*, *Science, Matter, Spirit, and Three-Card Monte*, and *Thinking About Our Thoughts*, in his *The Best of The Public Square*, p. 195, 203. This sort of argumentation is of course a famous Baron Münchhausen paradox, when the baron pulled himself out from a mire by his own hair.

³⁰ L. Kołakowski, *Kant i zagrożenie cywilizacji*, [in:] *Czy diabeł może być zbwiony i 27 innych kazań*, Kraków 2006, p. 185–197.

³¹ This is the logic, of course, of Darwin's and Nietzsche's argument, but long ago charted by Machiavelli.

³² R. J. Neuhaus, *Minding the Mind*, [in:] *The Best of The Public Square...*, p. 190.

a contemporary version of that inability of the liberal mind to justify its commands in a compelling way, because the utilitarian reason is ultimately in service of a desire. This is a process

[...] in which millions have been infantilized, encouraged to pretend that they do not know what they know, and to call the resulting confusion choice... The ontology ... lies shattered under a barrage of rights ... until all memory of design was lost in the immeasurable expanse of desire. [It was] the civilizational undoing, [which] is a moral undoing.³³

The second consequence is that within the perspective of such a conception of reason as the best adapting instrument, religion and religious people are viewed logically as a wrong evolutionary path taken by consciousness, something which, of course, Marx captured with his memorable phrase about religion being “an opiate of the people” and Leninists and the disenchantments school of all stripes term as “false consciousness”. In other words religious consciousness is a wrong track taken by evolution which led to a consciousness less efficient to adapt to reality. Such reason thus has to recognize religion and religious people as burdened not only with false consciousness, but redundant in that dimension of their existence, and many times causing problems. At best they were introducing the wrong solutions to human problems in public life, at worst they were conspiring to impose a theocratic government by fanatical methods based on violence. Thus, such materialists look at religion and religious people as enemies of public order, and for this reason suspicious and thus pushed beyond the public sphere.³⁴

This, as Neuhaus claimed in *The Naked Public Square*, is a monistic ideology since, in the case of Christianity at least, it means that a state has to come up with thoroughly secular and politically dangerous solutions. A religion-free public square is anything but neutral. It is filled by nostrums of relativism and nihilism and a claim to total moral autonomy of the imperial Self. Such a liberalism proves nothing, since it is based on self-explicating axioms. It creates them, and on their basis reaches social, political and moral conclusions. Such an ideology is wrong and has a totalitarian potential. For Neuhaus it was obvious that the wish to insert religious texts and religious authority into public life was simply a rational move, recognizing something correctly, namely the non-neutrality of secular reason. For him:

Secular humanism was simply the term unhappily chosen for “ersatz religion” and thus needed to be confronted as such, and by its erroneous anthropology exposed as wanting.³⁵

Religion is thus, argues Neuhaus, indispensable in the public square, since it is crucial for a self-definition of a human being, not in terms of contemporary notion of identity, but in a much more important sense of proper recognition of one’s

³³ Idem, *Delicate Ground*, ibidem, p. 244–246.

³⁴ This was the gist of the justification for the US Supreme Court’s decision “Everson...” of 1947, which changed the paradigm of thinking about religion in public life in American history.

³⁵ N. Frankovich, *The Aeropagus of Morningside Heights*, “First Things”, April 2009, p. 31.

station in relation to Being. In this perspective theologically inspired reason can tell us, for instance via natural law, something fundamentally important about the human condition. The secular reason of liberalism is definitely an important contribution to civilizational politics, but it can tell us nothing about first things as such, also in the communal, not only individual sense. As Neuhaus knew, secular liberal reason cannot justify itself, despite claims to the contrary, and cannot give reasons for its own permanence. Religion, at least biblical religion, is God's code in man, and the political project of liberalism is essentially subservient to that anthropological fact, an Augustinian observation. Neuhaus was aware that liberal reason and theological reasons were different, but nevertheless not equal. Liberal reason had a tendency to use politics as a way of shaping culture for its own aims, a particular vision of a social and moral order. Its basis is the modern idea of rights rooted in an anthropology of the imperial Self, kind of a modern Pelagian idea of self-salvation, a purely ideological axiom treated as the basis of human order, a kind of symbolic violence. For Neuhaus it was culture which shaped politics, and religion was at the root of culture, since it was religion, that is transcendental religion, that could only give a proper self-definition of a human being in relation to Being.³⁶

Modern monistic liberalism is thus fundamentally based on the wrong concept of anthropology on which it wants to base its ideal political and social order. Because of this anthropological error, visible for instance in modern human rights, it reverses the order of importance. For liberalism it is politics which should and can shape culture, and eventually religion, an official faith of legitimate and illegitimate public beliefs. This constitutes the highest form of modern state idolatry, a tolerance of only such religions which operate, as once the Roman religions, to the logic of the state defined interests. Such a liberal mind gives

[...] vent to its angry astonishment that anyone should challenge what they declare to be the consensus of the enlightened... *Our* world in which [others] must become like [them]. ... It is the new world of secularism's oppressive tolerance ... the petty intolerance of [their] infatuation with tolerance.³⁷

This was probably Neuhaus's most important contribution, an assertion publicly pronounced that religious freedom, and the transcendental presence of religion as an independent pillar of human existence and personal conduct of a properly understood citizenship, is a *sine qua non* condition of human freedom as such.

A less known but nevertheless important achievement was Neuhaus's Polish connection. Together with Fr. Maciej Zięba, Rocco Buttiglione, George Weigel and Michael Novak, he cofounded the *Tertio Millenio* seminar. This three-week seminar takes place every summer at the Dominican priory in the ancient city of Krakow. In its official pamphlet its intent was

³⁶ "I do ... believe ... that public life is mainly about culture and at the heart of culture is morality, and at the heart of morality is religion", [in:] *The Best of Public Square...*, p. VII.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 111, 113.

[...] to deepen the dialogue on Catholic social doctrine between North American students and students from the new democracies of central and eastern Europe.

The priory, founded at the beginning of the 13th century, was Neuhaus's home for sixteen summers in a row. From here he travelled around Poland. His main contribution to the seminar was his lectures, and a bottle known as "Jack Daniels, OP" for the staff. The seminar, taught by outstanding figures from both continents, was much more than just

[...] an exposure to Catholic social teaching, the thought of John Paul II, a vast ocean of Catholic culture, the friendship whose root is the lord ... with the Masses he celebrated [which] were the heart of the seminar.

As one of the American participants observed, it was about preparation for responsible freedom in the modern world, a school of rigorous thinking about life as a heroic activity, its gravitas, a warning about the trifle pitfalls of ubiquitous consumerism, to spiritual values of human dignity and solidarity, crucial to a just society. He called his students

Americans searching for the roots of liberty, Eastern Europeans so lately liberated to the authentic path of freedom and holiness, centered in the sacrifice of Christ, and raised the host to unite the group in a bond far stronger than argument. Over the years, as more and more young people came to be part of the First Things family, one of the first questions asked of them ... was "Were you in Krakow?" Thanks to his generous generosity in the service of God, Krakow will always be in us.³⁸

Neuhaus was in love with his faith because he was in love with freedom, and he was in love with freedom because he knew where its ultimate anchor was. Because of that, Neuhaus was a lover of life in all its forms, including cognac and cigars. A defender of the human right to enjoy them, he resisted the totalitarian pretensions of the mentally confused Savonarolas of the "religion" of healthy, meaning sterile, life, for lack of anything else worthy of believing in. If there was a Christian asceticism in Neuhaus, it was definitely not of its Gnostic type. It did not renounce this world and its pleasures, but embraced it, since "it was good". His most fascinating happiness lay somewhere else, but worldly pleasures constituted nice and important ornaments of life. After all, as he himself remarked, apart from a cognac with a good cigar, and of course friends,

[...] the two most enjoyable activities of mankind are gossip and metaphysics – the sparkles on the shallows of conversation about people, and the vast ocean of thought about reality, where the deeper you dive, the greater the darkness and the pressure grow.³⁹

³⁸ A. Chesser, *Neuhaus Invades Poland*, "First Things", April 2009, p. 25–26.

³⁹ R. J. Neuhaus, *Obituary to Irving Kristol 1920–2009*, "First Things", November 2009, p. 73.

Which, combined together and paraphrased a little, came pretty close to a remark by the eternal Gilbert K. Chesterton, that the two pastimes which distinguish a real man from a moron were drinking and religion.

This volume commemorates the person and achievements of Fr. Richard J. Neuhaus. It contains articles by various scholars on a subject so dear to him. Written from different perspectives, they contribute to an endless conversation about the civic public square and religion in liberal democracy. This is probably the most dramatic issue of late modernity, and it is within this circle of conversation that the fate of human dignity and freedom will be ultimately decided. Neuhaus was a distinguished participant in that conversation.

Last but not least, this volume is a token tribute of gratitude to R. J. Neuhaus from his Polish friends. They owe him the debt of meeting someone who understood their sensibilities, in significant measure probably, because of his Catholic culture and his American tradition of liberty. At the center of the Polish torturous and hard-won identity stands the universal value of freedom grounded in Christian heritage, so well communicated in the world by that great son of Krakow, John Paul II. Freedom of all and each of us. This volume comes out in Krakow, the ancient city of the Polish kings, vibrant with culture in the widest possible sense and fiercely intellectually independent. Neuhaus loved it, as he loved Poland. Many young people who attended his seminar carried with them a sense of participating in an experience transforming their lives, of meeting a teacher who led them not to himself but to something which is higher, to truth which provides real freedom. He knew that secret of a master teacher, that the deepest longing of the young, as Paul Claudel once remarked, was not hedonism but heroism. Krakow and Poland will miss him.

Patrick Allitt

**CATHOLICISM IN THE UNITED STATES:
BETWEEN LIBERALISM AND CONSERVATISM**

Harvey Mansfield has always taken the long view. As he sees it, the way to approach an American topic is to ask first what the Founding Fathers said about it, then see what Tocqueville added. In the same way, his approach to any European issue starts out with a word from Plato and Aristotle, then moves along through Augustine and Aquinas to the opinions of Machiavelli and Edmund Burke. In this sense he's just like the Catholic Church, which has always specialized in taking the long view, while trying to avoid being paralyzed by the weight of tradition. Taking the long view means being aware of oneself as part of an extended historical process, of being indebted to the insights of earlier generations, without being blind to those generations' limitations. It usually guards against provincialism of time and place steers us away from utopianism, while helping us to see sensible ways forward.

Mansfield, just as he knows how to make the most of tradition, also knows how to take a familiar concept and make it look a little bit strange. He certainly did that in his book on manliness, showing how inadequate to the concept is the scientific approach of social psychologists and evolutionary biologists. Here too he shares a breadth of insight with the Catholic Church, which has never rejected science out of hand but has often issued reminders about the limits of its explanatory powers. The Catholic idea of nature, for example, is fuller and more involved than the modern scientific definition; the Catholic idea of natural law has a complex moral component which modern scientists' claims about the laws of nature lack.¹

Let's not take the analogy too far; I'm certainly not going to argue that Harvey Mansfield is a figure of papal stature or that he can speak infallibly on qu-

¹ H. Mansfield, *Manliness*, New Haven 2006.

estions of faith and morals. On the other hand, he prompts anyone who engages with his work to think about politics in a richer way. The same is true of a serious encounter with Catholicism, even for people who have lived their entire lives outside the Church. Think, for a moment, about the binary opposition of “liberal” and “conservative,” two of the most familiar terms in the American political lexicon. In the Catholic context they take on additional layers of meaning, enabling us to see more clearly into the paradoxes of political labeling.

Both terms have complex histories. In the United States “liberal” in the early nineteenth century meant support for the free market economy and a minimum of government intervention. Starting in the early twentieth century, however, and increasingly after the New Deal of the 1930s, “liberal” began to connote *advocacy* of government intervention in the economy. The Great Depression convinced many American intellectuals and politicians that only the federal government had sufficient power to counteract the downward economic spiral of the 1930s and promote social equity. The liberals of recent decades have been their heirs. “Conservative” was more often used in the nineteenth century as an adjective than as a noun, and it implied a willingness to keep things as they were and to acknowledge the authority of tradition. After the Russian Revolution, however, and particularly after World War II, “conservative” came to signify ardent anti-Communism, and now *it* was the label given to supporters of the free market. Traditionalists who also claimed to be conservative often found themselves at odds with free-market or anti-Communist conservatives, who showed little reverence for ancient things.²

American politics, unlike British, has never featured an encounter between a liberal party and a conservative party. Since 1950 the Republicans have *tended* to be the more conservative party, more enthusiastic about the free market, more likely to include traditionalists, more likely to be religious, and (pre-1990) more fervent anti-Communists, whereas the Democrats have *tended* to be the more liberal, favoring big government, less deferential to religion and tradition, and generally less bellicose. These are only tendencies, however. The two great parties are assemblies of interest groups from all over the nation, whose ideological character is muted by the need for party discipline and a search for electoral majorities. The social upheavals of the 1960s, meanwhile, created a set of new political constituencies: African-Americans, who were now able to vote en masse for the first time, feminists, advocates of gay liberation and gay marriage, and environmentalists. In almost every case these new groups linked their political fortunes to the Democratic Party and urged it to become more liberal than it had been in the foregoing decades (liberal in the sense of extending government economic programs and securing legal protection for groups whose members were the victims of discrimination). Some socially conservative whites, in reaction to this process, began to switch the-

² L. Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, New York 1955; P. Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History*, New Haven 2009; G. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, New York 1979, p. 57–83.

ir allegiance to the Republican Party, especially southerners who had previously supported racial segregation and “ethnic” white urban northerners. The rise of the new “lifestyle” issues in politics also provoked the creation of the New Christian Right, a populist conservative group, which first came to prominence in the general election of 1980, and has remained politically influential ever since. These were the shifting groups, circumstances and definitions among which American Catholics (about a third of the total U.S. population) struggled to situate themselves.³

Catholics, at first glance, might seem like obvious conservatives. They are beholden to the leadership of a hierarchical organization, an elective monarchy, which is legitimated by two thousand years of tradition and by claims of divine authority. They worship in a way that would have been recognized more than a thousand years ago and they accept a moral code much of which is older still. Throughout the nineteenth century American Protestants, making exactly these arguments, doubted whether it was possible for any man to be, at the same time, a good Catholic and a good American citizen. After all, said Lyman Beecher, Samuel Morse, and many other luminaries of the American pulpit, their first loyalty goes to a monarch in Rome, not to a republic on this side of the Atlantic.⁴

American Catholics worked very hard to deny the charge of dual loyalty and to insist that they could be just as American as anyone else. At the same time they had no wish to repudiate their religion and its long heritage. Accordingly, they walked a tightrope, emphasizing that in the prudential realm of politics they were as free to make judgments as everyone else, while simultaneously affirming that in spiritual affairs the doctrines of their faith were inviolable. When John F. Kennedy ran for the presidency in the election of 1960 he asserted, in a speech to a group of Protestant ministers in Houston, that if an issue arose creating an intolerable conflict between his religious conscience and the demands of his office he would resign. He added that any other president who found himself in a similar predicament should do likewise, and that the dilemma was no more acute for Catholics than for members of any other church (his opponent was a Quaker).⁵

The election of Kennedy itself indicated a decline in American anti-Catholicism, which corresponded to the religious revival of the early cold-war years. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which began during his administration, also had the effect in America of reducing tensions between Catholics and other citizens. For the first time Catholics were encouraged to think of Protestants not as heretics but as “separated brethren,” and to look favorably on the condition of religious freedom and the First Amendment to the Constitution which protected it.⁶

³ L. Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, New York 1955; P. Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History*, New Haven 2009; G. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, New York 1979, p. 57–83.

⁴ B. Welter, *From Maria Monk to Paul Blanshard: A Century of Protestant Anti-Catholicism*, [in:] *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America*, ed. R. Bellah, F. Greenspahn, New York 1987, p. 43–71.

⁵ J. Murray Cuddihy, *No Offense: Civil Religion and Protestant Taste*, New York 1978; T. Carty, *A Catholic in the White House? Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign*, New York 2004.

⁶ *Vatican II and U. S. Catholicism*, ed. D. Bromley, Greenwich 1991.

If at first glance Catholics seem like obvious conservatives, then, at second glance they seem like obvious liberals or radicals. Jesus never urged his followers to preserve the status quo, and Catholic history provides countless examples of political upheavals and experiments undertaken in his name. Besides, the particular history of the Catholic people in America tended to put them in opposition to the local forces of conservatism. As immigrants, first from Ireland, later from Germany, Italy, Poland, Slavic southeastern Europe and Latin America, they usually arrived in the United States poor, ill-equipped to compete strongly in an industrializing nation, and victims of ethnic and religious prejudice. The vast majority of American Catholics, immigrants and their descendants, voted Democrat up to and beyond the middle of the twentieth century, strongly favoring President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs. Their support for the Democratic Party, however, was more often linked to their search for economic security than to an interest in personal liberation, and it weakened after the mid 1960s.⁷

Just as the American Catholic population's political loyalties divided in the 1960s and 1970s, so an incongruity between Catholic ideas and American politics became increasingly apparent. Prominent Catholics in American public life during the last few decades have been "conservative" on some issues and "liberal" on others. A linear political spectrum from left to right cannot be imposed on most American Catholics' political ideas without distorting both. Since the mid twentieth century, moreover, the Catholic laity have outstripped their clergy in education and expertise. Where once the bishops spoke unaided, confident of their authority, on a wide array of political, economic, and moral issues, they have recently come to depend on the advice and guidance of lay specialists. In the nature of things the specialists themselves often disagree. On the question of poverty and its resolution, for example, the old Catholic tradition, embodied in the phrase "the poor ye shall have always with you," no longer seemed adequate to America's condition of astonishing material abundance in the mid twentieth century. Whether big welfare states offered the best solution to the residual problem of poverty was controversial; representative Catholics addressed it from all points on the political compass and could always support their arguments not only from secular authorities but also by quoting and construing the most sympathetic passages from papal encyclical letters and other Church teachings.⁸

Under these conditions, the nature of Catholic leadership changed. Depending on the context the phrase "Catholic leaders" could signify bishops and archbishops, or it could signify prominent figures in public life—governors, senators,

⁷ On the social and immigration history of American Catholics see J. P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, Garden City 1985; C. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church*, New York 1997. On electoral behavior see *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension Between Faith and Power*, ed. K. Heyer, Washington 2008.

⁸ D. Brown, E. McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare*, Cambridge 1997; *The Catholic Church Speaks Out on Poverty*, Washington 1988.

congressmen, judges, and businessmen—who were also Roman Catholics. The steady rise in lay assertiveness reached a crescendo in the opening years of the twenty-first century during the scandal over priests' sexual abuse of children and teenagers, and revelation of the recurrent clerical tendency to cover it up. In 2000 a group of enraged laity created "Voice of the Faithful," which described itself as "a lay organization of faithful Catholics" whose members intended "to actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Church." By then the sheer fact that the bishops (indeed all priests) could only be men, and only celibate men at that, had vexed feminists inside and outside of the Church for decades and contributed to the perception that Catholicism was conservative in the worst sense: hide-bound, backward-looking, resistant to change, and hypocritical.⁹

Another caveat is necessary. People who in religious affairs could be thought of as "liberal Catholics" were not necessarily political liberals. Similarly "conservative Catholics" on religious questions might not be political conservatives. In *religious* affairs, a liberal Catholic is someone willing to choose among Church teachings and to emphasize some far more strongly than others, whereas a conservative Catholic is one who insists on the "full magisterium," and seeks to follow Church teaching to the letter, whatever its secular and political implications might be. In the 1960s, for example, a group of Catholic laymen led by William F. Buckley, Jr. ran "National Review" magazine. They were outspoken political conservatives, passionate anti-Communists and opponents of the New Deal and Great Society. At the same time they were liberal Catholics in the sense that they were reluctant to act on Church teachings that they believed inappropriate or ill-considered in the context of the Cold War. They openly deprecated Pope John XXIII's encyclical letter *Mater et Magistra* (1961), which in their eyes misled Catholics about the character of the Cold War.¹⁰

When one member of the "National Review" group, L. Brent Bozell, split off to found a journal of his own, "Triumph", in 1966, he took with him the group's most religiously conservative Catholics. Their adherence to the letter of Church teaching, however, soon led them to contradict their old friends' ideas on foreign policy. They began to criticize American conduct in the Vietnam War because it failed to conform to Catholic "just war" teaching. In other words, their Catholic conservatism put them in the company of American political liberals, who were also becoming disenchanted with the nation's conduct in Vietnam.¹¹

A comparable dispute about nuclear weapons showed many of the same incongruities in the 1980s. The American Catholic bishops had been, from a political conservative's point of view, reliable Cold War allies in the 1940s, 1950s

⁹ See for example, M. J. Weaver, *What's Left: Liberal American Catholics*, Bloomington 1999; R. McBrien, *The Leadership Crisis*, www.catholicvote.org/index.php?forums/viewthread/23. On Voice of the Faithful see www.voiceofthefaithful.org/whoweare/who-we-are/100. For the Catholic feminist position see R. R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, Boston 1993.

¹⁰ P. Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950–1985*, New York 1993, p. 93–97.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 141–160.

and 1960s. Fiercely anti-Communist, they had more or less accepted that American policy must be based on the threat to use nuclear weapons, whose effect would be to deter Soviet aggression. In the 1980s, however, a new generation of bishops, many of whom had been horrified by American conduct in Vietnam, revisited the question and wrote a pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*. Taking Catholic just-war teachings more to heart than their predecessors, they came close to arguing, especially in early drafts, that the use of such indiscriminate weapons could never be justified, because they could never meet the criterion of non-combatants' immunity, or the proportionality criterion (that the damage done in war must be commensurate with the good sought by those who resort to arms).¹²

Catholics who were political conservatives deplored the letter, regarding it as tantamount to an endorsement of unilateral disarmament, from which the Soviet Union would gain a strategic advantage. Michael Novak, an energetic Catholic controversialist and a political conservative, wrote a long rejoinder to the bishops, *Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age*, which was reprinted in "National Review" and circulated widely. Novak approached the proportionality question from a different direction than the bishops. As he saw it, the fact that for nearly four decades both sides had possessed nuclear weapons and yet had *not* fired them against one-another was a demonstration that deterrence worked. In other words, they fulfilled the criterion of proportionality *better* than conventional weapons by creating the maximum of deterrence with the minimum of destruction. The way to *use* a nuclear weapon, said Novak, is by *not* firing it at the enemy, even while indicating unmistakably that you *will* fire it if he attacks first. To non-Catholic observers, this kind of reasoning probably seemed weirdly sophisticated, but for Catholics dedicated to squaring the tradition of Church teaching with their political views it made perfect sense.¹³

Whatever the rights and wrongs of these foreign policy questions, some of the most divisive American domestic issues of the 1960s and 1970s also provoked intra-Catholic disputes. The bitterest issues were contraception and abortion. Catholic teaching prohibited artificial contraception. In the 1960s, however, American popular opinion swung strongly in favor of contraception, partly because of changes in social mores ("the sexual revolution") and partly because of growing fears that the Earth faced a crisis of overpopulation. When Pope Paul VI appointed a pontifical commission to study the question, a wide variety of Catholics anticipated a change in Church teaching such that married couples would be permitted to use the contraceptive pill, recently invented by a Catholic doctor, John Rock. In the event, however, the Pope rejected the majority report of his commission, and issued instead the encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* (1968), upholding the old prohibition.¹⁴

¹² National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*, U.S. Catholic Conference, Washington DC 1983. The most comprehensive treatment of the question can be found in G. Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis: The Present Failure and Future Promise of American Catholic Thought on War and Peace*, New York 1987.

¹³ M. Novak, *Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age*, Nashville 1983.

¹⁴ L. W. Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History*, New York 2004; L. McLaughlin, *The Pill, John Rock, and the Church*, Boston 1982; P. Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, p. 162–180.

Humanae Vitae generated sharp debate and divided the Catholic community. Religiously conservative Catholics accepted it because they regarded loyalty to the Pope as the first principle of their faith. Religiously liberal Catholics, by and large, deplored it and began to use contraceptives anyway, sometimes with the covert cooperation of their priests, who declined to reproach them in the confessional. Studies from the 1970s and 1980s suggest that lay Catholics who were *politically* conservative were just as likely as those who were politically liberal to avail themselves of contraceptives. After 1970 big Catholic families, conspicuous in America throughout the middle decades of the century, began to disappear; the Catholic birth rate became indistinguishable from that of Protestants.¹⁵

Abortion was even more contentious than contraception and the issue has wracked the whole of American society, not just its Catholics, for the last forty years. Illegal throughout the United States until the late 1960s, abortion reform came under consideration in several state legislatures, whose members were influenced by fears of overpopulation, by feminist arguments (“a woman’s right to choose”), and by concern that rubella and drugs like thalidomide caused severe birth defects. In 1973 the Supreme Court declared, in *Roe v. Wade*, that a constitutionally protected right to privacy entitled pregnant women to decide for themselves whether to have abortions. The right was made almost absolute in the first trimester of a pregnancy, with a growing set of limitations for women whose pregnancies were more advanced. The decision overturned laws in all fifty states and has remained to date one of the court’s most controversial decisions.¹⁶

American Catholic opinion had split sharply on contraception. It showed greater unanimity on abortion. The Catholic bishops and most prominent Catholics in public life condemned *Roe v. Wade* as an attack on human life at its most vulnerable moment. The politics of the issue were, however, complicated. Catholics who held elective office were beholden to Protestant and Jewish as well as Catholic constituents and recognized the need to tread cautiously. Catholic religious leaders, moreover, were restrained from intervening too openly in politics lest they jeopardize their cherished tax-free status. As individual citizens they were free to denounce abortion and denounce candidates for office who favored it, but if they organized their parishioners to vote for particular anti-abortion candidates they would be breaching the wall of church-state separation.¹⁷

Different Catholic politicians thought about the issue in different ways. In 1984, for example, Mario Cuomo, the governor of the state of New York, was invited to speak on the issue at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, America’s most renowned Catholic university. In a widely reported speech he made a distinction that many Catholic politicians, especially Democrats, later

¹⁵ A. Greeley, *The Catholic Myth: The Behavior and Beliefs of American Catholics*, New York 1990.

¹⁶ J. T. Noonan, *A Private Choice: Abortion in American the Seventies*, New York 1979; P. Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, p. 180–203.

¹⁷ C. Morris, *American Catholic*, p. 424–428.

quoted in justification of their own approach to the question. As a Catholic, he argued, I believe abortion to be morally wrong. However, I am governor of a pluralistic society whose citizens hold a wide variety of opinions on religious and social questions. I am aware that many of them do not regard abortion as wrong. I am also aware that, according to the Supreme Court, abortion is a constitutionally protected right. Therefore I ought not to use my office to try to prevent abortion. All citizens are free to agitate for constitutional amendments and to petition their legislators for reforms. Catholic citizens should agitate for anti-abortion laws or constitutional amendments but in the meantime Catholic elected officials, myself included, are required to uphold the laws of the state as they stand.¹⁸

Widely praised for this approach to the issue, Cuomo had in effect given all elected officials a convenient justification for not raising the abortion issue too strenuously. Politicians of both parties and of all religions were uncomfortably aware that the abortion question did not divide along party-political lines; plenty of Democrats were pro-life and plenty of Republicans were pro-choice. Office holders knew, therefore, that any remark they might make about abortion was likely to cost them votes.¹⁹

Robert Casey (1932–2000), like Cuomo, was a Democrat and a Catholic. As governor of nearby Pennsylvania, however, he took a very different view from Cuomo and declared his intention to end or reduce the incidence of abortions if possible. As he saw it, the law has a teaching function—if citizens see that abortion is legal they will assume that it is right, and the moral imperative against it will diminish. He actively supported passage of the Pennsylvania Abortion Control Act of 1989, which imposed waiting periods on applicants for abortion, required parents to be notified if the applicant was a minor, and prohibited late-term “partial birth” abortions. The pro-choice organization Planned Parenthood sued for what it regarded as a violation of the protections enumerated in *Roe v. Wade*. When the Supreme Court adjudicated the case in 1992, however, in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, they found that the state government had *not* exceeded its authority, and that it was entitled to regulate abortion and restrict access.²⁰

Most Catholic religious leaders regarded the decision in *Casey* as a welcome, if partial, victory. But it infuriated many Democrats, who retaliated by preventing Casey himself from speaking at the 1992 Democratic convention. As the Catholic journalist and editor Peter Steinfels wrote, “At the party’s national level, opposition to abortion was becoming literally unspeakable,” even in a party that still depended on millions of Catholic voters. On nearly all the other important political issues of

¹⁸ M. Cuomo, *Religious Belief and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor’s Perspective*, www.pewforum.org/docs/index.php?DocID=14, September 13, 1984.

¹⁹ N. E. H. Hull, *The Abortion Rights Controversy in America*, Chapel Hill 2004; M. Haussman, *Abortion Politics in North America*, Boulder 2005.

²⁰ The decision of the Supreme Court in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* can be found at www.caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=505&invol=833. See also R. P. Casey, *Fighting for Life*, Nashville 1996.

his era Casey held what would normally be regarded as typical liberal views, which coincided closely with those of mainstream Democrats. Son of a coal miner, he favored trade unions, improved access to subsidized health care for the poor, and most of the heritage of the New Deal and Great Society.²¹

Constitutional Amendments require two-thirds majorities in both houses of Congress and then ratification by three quarters of the fifty state governments. Although moderate anti-abortion sentiment was widespread, among traditionalist Protestant and Jewish voters as well as among most Catholics, it was never able to gather that kind of support. *Roe v. Wade*, limited by such state laws as Pennsylvania's, therefore remained as national policy. Catholic intellectuals continued to polemicize against it, chiefly in the "Human Life Review" (founded in 1975 by the Catholic conservative James McFadden) and then in an influential new journal, "First Things," founded in 1990 by Richard J. Neuhaus. A Lutheran minister who had converted to Catholicism and become a priest, Neuhaus was at the same time very Catholic and very ecumenical, believing strongly in the need to bring Jews, Protestants, and Catholics together in support of moral and political reforms. His emergence as a conservative leader among all of America's religions in the 1990s was itself a sign of the times. Increasingly in the late twentieth century, political affiliations were overriding religious ones. Where once sharp religious antagonisms had kept Protestants, Catholics, and Jews apart, now liberal Protestants, Catholics and Jews were coming together on one side of controversial political issues, and conservative Protestants, Catholics, and Jews on the other.²²

Neuhaus himself had published an influential book, *The Naked Public Square* in 1984 and his contributions to "First Things" were gathered in a section named "The Public Square." In his view the United States, misunderstanding its own heritage, had undertaken to exclude religion from public life, a process aided by a succession of odious Supreme Court decisions. This trend, he wrote, was a perversion of the Founders' intention, which had been to prevent the creation of a state religion but had not been to exclude religion and religious points of view from public debate altogether. He feared that the United States was inadvertently coming to espouse an ideology of dogmatic secularism, a doctrine that was "demonstrably false and ... exceedingly dangerous." It was, accordingly, vital for right-minded Catholics, Protestants, and Jews alike to fight back on behalf of religion itself. He added, however, that the Catholic Church's long history and intellectual richness gave it a natural leadership role for this counterattack.²³

²¹ P. Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America*, New York 2003, p. 92.

²² R. Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II*, Princeton: 1988. On McFadden and Human Life Review see P. Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, p. 191–199. On Neuhaus see the autobiographical sections of his *Catholic Matters: Confusion, Controversy, and the Splendor of Truth*, New York 2006.

²³ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, Grand Rapids 1984, p. vii; R. Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World*, San Francisco 1987.

If Neuhaus and “First Things” were widely—and plausibly—regarded as politically conservative in their attitudes and interests, many of America’s Catholic bishops tried hard to avoid this kind of labeling. Two prominent figures of the late twentieth century, Cardinal John Joseph O’Connor of New York and Cardinal Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle illustrate the point. O’Connor, a former military chaplain, was treated by secular media like the “New York Times” and National Public Radio as a staunch conservative, because of his support for the government’s Cold War posture, but his opposition to the death penalty put him sharply at odds with most American conservatives. Hunthausen, conversely, had such a lively reputation for liberalism that he was twice investigated by the Vatican, even though his anti-abortion statements equaled Robert Casey’s in their capacity to annoy most secular liberals. Both men shared the “seamless garment” or “consistent life ethic,” eloquently voiced by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, that the Church must be consistent in its respect for human life wherever it was threatened.²⁴

Bernardin (1928–1996) had hoped that the “seamless garment” might bring together a Catholic community that, by the 1990s, seemed increasingly fractured along political and ideological lines. The historian Garry Wills commented in 2001 that “it is a sign of the fragility of the Catholic Church’s present structure that a man of such good will, tact, and dedication had to work so hard to maintain even basic cordiality between contending forces.” The fragmentation, apparent in foreign policy and “life” questions, was equally apparent in the area of Catholic higher education. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries American Catholics had built an impressive array of colleges and universities, designed to ensure that young Catholics could gain high levels of education without enrolling at secular or Protestant institutions. Powerful trends in American intellectual life and higher education, however, gradually led the faculty at many of these colleges to transfer their loyalty from the Church to their particular academic disciplines. That in turn led them after about 1960 to abandon the natural law philosophical principles by which the Catholic colleges’ curriculum had initially been unified. Eagerness for federal funding and eagerness not to appear prejudiced also tempted them to recruit non-Catholic students and to diminish their explicitly Catholic character.²⁵

A papal apostolic constitution, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* (1990), tried to reassert greater uniformity over Catholic higher education throughout the world, but fell afoul of the American traditions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Universities like Notre Dame and Georgetown, which were nationally distinguished, feared that their reputations would suffer from the appearance of censorship

²⁴ On O’Connor see P. Steinfels’ insightful obituary, *Death of a Cardinal*, “New York Times”, May 4, 1980. On Hunthausen, see T. P. Schilling, *Conflict in the Catholic Hierarchy: A Study of Coping Strategies in the Hunthausen Affair*, Utrecht 2002. On Bernardin and the “seamless garment,” see G. Wills, *A Tale of Two Cardinals*, “New York Review of Books” 2001, No. 48 (April 26) and P. Steinfels, *People Adrift*, p. 17–29, 85–86.

²⁵ G. Wills, *A Tale of Two Cardinals*. On Catholic higher education see in particular, P. Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1995; A. Gallin, *Negotiating Identity: Catholic Higher Education Since 1960*, Notre Dame 2000.

if they submitted too readily to *Ex Corde*. In general the only American institutions that welcomed it were the handful of self-consciously traditionalist Catholic institutions, such as Christendom College, the University of Dallas, and the Franciscan University of Steubenville. Each university in its own way came to terms with *Ex Corde*. It remained true by 2000, however, that some Catholic schools had a reputation for liberal Catholicism and others for conservative Catholicism. In a nation that favored a maximum of consumer choices in all things it was perhaps not surprising that political and religious fragmentation, apparent in other areas of American life, should be duplicated here also.²⁶

In 2004, for the first time since the era of John F. Kennedy, one of the two major political parties chose a Catholic as its presidential candidate. This was the Democrat, John Kerry. The religious issue was far less salient in the 2004 campaign than it had been in 1960, indicating the overall retreat of anti-Catholicism in America, but church-state questions did intrude periodically. Kerry was pro-choice and favored stem-cell research (another controversial human life issue). Arguing in the idiom of Mario Cuomo, he claimed to be personally opposed to abortion but to favor the pro-choice position for America as a whole. Some Catholic leaders were indignant—a few bishops even warned that he would be refused communion if he came to their churches. Kerry deftly avoided a direct confrontation on the question, while journalists speculated that such a refusal might even help his campaign: “Catholics who are loyal to neither party,” wrote one, “and who hold more liberal social views might be attracted to his candidacy, as might non-Catholics upset by what they see as an intrusion into American politics.” The showdown never came, however, and Kerry eventually lost to George W. Bush in the election.²⁷

This brief overview of recent American Catholic history indicates, I hope, that the relationship between Catholic ideas and the political divisions in American society is complicated, and has been for the last half century. It would be wrong to describe America’s Catholic population or the Church as an organization as either *essentially* liberal or conservative. Political societies are entirely this worldly, whereas the Catholic Church treats politics as only one, and not the most important, realm in which its people move. It has spiritual objectives and supernatural beliefs entirely beyond the grasp of worldly politics, and their implications inform Catholic thinking about the world. No wonder “liberalism” and “conservatism” are conceptually inadequate to encompass American Catholics’ beliefs. At the same time, of course, even the most spiritually exalted and otherworldly individuals cannot avoid living in particular times and places, and cannot avoid being affected by their contemporaries’ practical ideas, beliefs, and actions. In the spring of 2009

²⁶ Catholic Church, Apostolic Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on Catholic Universities, United States Catholic Conference, Washington D.C. 1990. On variety of Catholic campuses in recent US, see A. Wolfe, *Catholic Universities Can be the Salvation of Pluralism on American Campuses*, “Chronicle of Higher Education” 1999, February 26, B6.

²⁷ T. Eastland, *John Kerry’s Catholic Problem*, “Weekly Standard” 2004, April 15.

President Barack Obama spoke at the University of Notre Dame on the 25th anniversary of Mario Cuomo's address there. He acknowledged the intractability of the abortion issue while urging the holders of different views on the controversy to respect one another. Some Catholics condemned the university for permitting him to speak; others acclaimed it for doing so. By then, the long decline in denominational differences and the steady rise in ecumenical alliances on behalf of shared political objectives had made it harder than ever to label any set of political views as distinctly "Catholic." Actual Catholic people held a wide array of views on the era's controversies but nearly all of them, to the degree that they were serious about their religion, held beliefs that jarred against the secular political orthodoxies of their age.

Stephen Barr

EVOLUTION, DARWIN, AND CATHOLIC BELIEF

In recent years there has been much discussion of the theory of evolution and its relation to Christian belief. This discussion has been particularly intense in the United States, but it involves theological and philosophical questions of fundamental importance to all Christians. Unfortunately, the discussion has often been conducted by people holding extreme positions and reported on by journalists interested primarily in sensationalism. As a consequence, confusion and misunderstandings abound. In this article I will attempt to clarify the issues and examine them from a Catholic point of view. Much of the confusion is created or compounded by ambiguous terminology. It is useful, therefore, to begin by clarifying terms, and most importantly the term “evolution” itself. The theory of evolution has several layers; and when people refer to “evolution” in the current controversies, it is not always clear to which layer they are referring. First, there is the evolution of species, the idea that the present species of plants and animals arose from other species by a gradual process, and that ultimately all of them came from a single original form of life. This is sometimes called the theory of “common descent”, since it says that all living things descended from a common ancestor. Second, there is human evolution, the idea that human beings evolved in the same way and are thus part of the same branching tree of life. Finally, there is the Darwinian mechanism, the idea that evolution is driven by natural selection acting on random genetic mutations.

When discussing the second level, the evolution of man, one must further distinguish between a weaker and a stronger version. The weaker version says that human beings are the product of evolution at the physical level and does not presume to say anything about the spiritual dimension of man. The stronger version says that human beings are completely explicable in physical and biological terms,

and therefore entirely the products of evolution. The weaker claim is a scientific one and is supported by overwhelming evidence, whereas the stronger claim is a philosophical extrapolation that goes far beyond scientific evidence and is, indeed, highly debatable on scientific as well as philosophical grounds.

Serious confusion also exists about the meaning of the words Darwinism and neo-Darwinism. In a scientific context, the word Darwinism refers simply to the idea that the mechanism of evolution is natural selection, and the word neo-Darwinism refers to its modern form, which arose from its synthesis with the science of genetics in the mid-twentieth century. Many theologians and philosophers, however, understand these words to refer to atheistic and materialistic philosophies inspired by evolution. There are several reasons for this. In the first place, Darwin himself was a religious skeptic, and philosophers tend to look to the founder of a movement of thought for its authentic interpretation – they reason that if Darwin was a skeptic then Darwinism must be a skeptical philosophy. Moreover, it is more common to name philosophical schools than scientific theories after their founders. One does not refer to Newtonism, Maxwellism, or Einsteinism, whereas one does refer to Platonism, Thomism, and Kantianism. The word neo-Darwinism strengthens this impression: there are such things as neo-Platonism, neo-Thomism, and neo-Kantianism, but the prefix neo has never (except for neo-Darwinism) been attached to scientific theories. Finally, many biologists believe and proclaim that Darwinism does have atheistic and materialistic implications; so it is natural for non-scientists to assume that these philosophical conclusions do indeed belong to the meaning of the terms Darwinism and neo-Darwinism. Nevertheless, while it is natural for theologians and philosophers to use terms in this way, it causes misunderstandings that are both harmful and avoidable. For example, when Cardinal Schönborn publicly condemned “neo-Darwinism” several years ago, he intended to criticize only philosophical errors, but was widely understood by scientists to be attacking well-established scientific ideas.

Another source of confusion is the fact that several controversies over evolution are going on at the same time. The two major ones that involve religion are the Creationism-versus-evolution battle and the Intelligent Design-versus-neo-Darwinism battle. Creationism is not just the idea that the universe is created by God, which all Christians hold. Rather, it is a theological movement that rejects all three levels of the theory of evolution in favor of a very literal reading of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. Some creationists accept that “microevolution” has happened, which makes limited changes, as in the shape of finches’ beaks; but all creationists deny “macroevolution”, which makes major changes, such as the evolution of birds from reptiles, or reptiles from fish. The struggle of creationism against evolution has very little intellectual interest in our day, since the evidence for common descent is overwhelming.

The second battle, the one between the so-called “Intelligent Design movement” (or “ID movement”) and neo-Darwinism, is somewhat more interesting.

Again, some clarification of terms is necessary: All Christians believe that there exists an intelligent being who designed the universe and its laws. However, the Intelligent Design movement does not just say this; it makes specific claims about biology. It says that, while evolution may have happened, the Darwinian mechanism is not capable of explaining the degree and kind of complexity we find in living things. So, one can believe in an intelligent designer without agreeing with the distinctive claims made by the Intelligent Design movement. The Catholic Church, for instance, takes no position on those claims. One might ask why the battles over evolution have intensified in recent years. In the 1960s and 70s, even in the United States, one did not hear much about anti-evolutionism in its various forms. The recent flare-up of these debates is due largely to the agitation of two groups, aggressive atheists on the one hand and defenders of a certain narrow kind of biblical literalism on the other. Many “evangelical Protestants” (which in the United States refers to Protestant groups with a relatively “low” view of Church tradition and authority) are committed to this kind of biblical literalism, because they think it follows logically from the central Protestant principle of *Sola Scriptura*, i.e. that Scripture is the sole authority in matters of faith. Some evangelicals see such literalism as the only way to guard against liberal interpretations of Scripture on matters of faith and morals. Given that *Sola Scriptura* rules out any recourse to an authoritative tradition or magisterium to resolve theological disputes, they may well be right. And so for such evangelicals, accepting evolution would endanger their whole doctrinal system. (It should be emphasized, however, that not all evangelicals reject evolution, though surveys show that the majority of them do.)

On the other side, many atheists, such as the biologist Richard Dawkins, use Darwinism as a weapon in their war against religion – not just biblical literalism, but all religion. Evolution, they argue, has debunked the idea that man is a special creature made in the image of God by showing that we differ from other animals only in degree, not in kind. And it has demolished, they maintain, the idea of a divine Designer or Architect, by showing how things that appear to be designed can actually arise by blind natural forces.

Catholics, of course, don’t agree with the philosophical assertions of Dawkins and his ilk; nor do we agree with the manner of biblical interpretation of the most literal-minded evangelical Protestants. So, what has the Catholic Church said about evolution? As far as official teaching goes, i.e. pronouncements of the magisterium, the Church said virtually nothing for almost a hundred years after Darwin published his theory in 1859. However, some sense of the general attitude of Catholic scholars and theologians toward evolution in the early days of the theory can be gotten from looking at the Catholic Encyclopedia, which as written in the first decade of the 20th century. Of course, this encyclopedia was not an official document of the Church’s magisterium, but it was one of the outstanding products of Catholic scholarship at that time, at least in the English-speaking world, and it carried a *nihil obstat* and an imprimatur certifying that it contained nothing contra-

ry to Catholic doctrine. The encyclopedia contained an article entitled “Catholics and Evolution”, which first summarized the theory of evolution as it stood at that time, and then said, “This is the gist of the theory of evolution as a scientific hypothesis. It is in perfect agreement with the Christian conception of the universe.” An impressive book of Catholic apologetics called *The Question Box* was published around the same time. In a question-and-answer format it responded to hundreds of common objections to the Catholic Faith. This book sold several million copies, and seems to have been given to students in Catholic schools in the United States in those days – I have my mother’s old copy, dating from her high-school days in the 1930s. In answer to the question on page 8, “May a Catholic believe in evolution?”, the book said, “As the Church has made no pronouncement upon evolution, Catholics are perfectly free to accept evolution, either as a scientific hypothesis or as a philosophical speculation.” What these books were speaking of in the sentences I just quoted was the evolution of species, i.e. of plants and animals. As far as the evolution of man was concerned, they insisted (as the Church still insists) that the human soul, being spiritual, cannot be reduced to matter or explained by any merely physical process, and that therefore evolution of the human soul is contrary to Catholic faith. On the evolution of the human body, however, they did not come to a definite conclusion. The encyclopedia admitted that it was “per se not improbable” that the human body had evolved, and noted that a version of this idea had “been propounded by St. Augustine”. However, both books thought the scientific evidence for human evolution was weak, and observed that most theologians of that time had a negative view of the idea. Nevertheless, they admitted that there was no official Church teaching on the matter.

As far as the mechanism of evolution was concerned, little was said by either book. The idea that evolution was a natural process was not problematic, as far as the Church was concerned. This is an area where the Church’s deep philosophical traditions served her well. Many opponents of evolution see Nature as being somehow in competition with God, so that the more we attribute to natural processes or natural causes, the less we can attribute to God, and *vice versa*. But the Church has never accepted this dichotomy. She has always understood that there are two levels of causality, called by the scholastic theologians “primary” and “secondary”. God, acting vertically, so to speak, is the direct cause of every event in the physical universe – he is the “Primary Cause”. At the same time, the events in the world have amongst themselves various causal relationships, which could be thought of as horizontal. This is called secondary causality. There is no contradiction or competition between the two; rather God’s primary causality undergirds all secondary causality. As an analogy consider the play Hamlet. In that play Polonius dies because Hamlet stabs him through a curtain. However, it is also true to say that Polonius dies because Shakespeare wrote the play that way. So both the character Hamlet and the playwright Shakespeare are truly causes of Polonius dying in the play, but on completely different levels. Events in the play do have causal relationships to

each other; however, the play itself, every event in the play, and every causal relationship among those events exist only because the playwright ordained that they would. Analogously, one physical event causes another in the natural world because God has created a world in which such causal relationships exist. If fire burns wood, it is only because God creates a world in which there are such realities as fire and wood, and in which wood has the physical and chemical properties that it does.

This basic insight about primary and secondary causality is related to another insight of traditional Catholic teaching, which is that God in his divine nature is outside the flow of time. He sees from all eternity the whole pattern of history, which unfolds according to his plan. The idea of his having to intervene repeatedly to take care of unforeseen problems or that he is, as it were, “making it up as he goes along”, is utterly alien to Catholic thought, which sees God as creating everything – past, present, and future – by a single all-seeing and all-encompassing act of his will. *The Question Box* used an analogy: “A billiard player wishes to send a hundred balls in different directions. Which will require greater skill – o make a hundred strokes and send each ball separately to its goal, or, by hitting one ball, to send all the ninety-nine others in the directions which he has in view?” The Catholic Encyclopedia put it this way: “If God produced the universe by a single creative act of His will, then its natural development by laws implanted in it by its Creator is to the greater glory of His divine power and wisdom.” The encyclopedia then went on to quote Aquinas and Suarez: “St. Thomas says, ‘the potency of the cause is greater the more remote the effects to which it extends’; and Suarez [says], ‘God does not interfere directly with the natural order where secondary causes suffice to produce the intended effect.’” “The Church has always taught that there is a natural order that comes from God, and the greater the powers and potentialities that God has implanted in Nature, the more it shows forth His power and greatness. To be sure, these old Catholic articles condemned radically atheist interpretations of evolution, which deny the existence of God or his providential governance of the world, as incompatible with Catholic belief. They sharply distinguished, however, such philosophical extrapolations from evolution as a biological theory. It may be asked whether these articles were out of the mainstream of Catholic thought at that time. It does not seem so. For example, John Henry Newman, later Cardinal Newman, wrote in a letter to the Rev. David Brown in 1874, “I see nothing in the theory of evolution inconsistent with an Almighty Creator and Protector.” In 1868, he said, “The theory of Darwin is not necessarily atheistic. It may simply suggest a larger idea of divine prescience and skill.” Even earlier, in 1863, he wrote in one of his notebooks, “There is as much want [i.e. lack] of simplicity in the idea of creation of distinct species as in that of the creation of trees in full growth whose seed is in themselves, or of rocks with fossils in them. I mean that it is as strange that monkeys should be so like men with no historical connection between them as the notion that there should be no course of history by which fossil bones got into rocks.” Note that Newman wrote this only four years after Darwin published *On*

the Origin of Species. The great author of *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* understood very quickly the plausibility of a developmental picture of the history of life on earth.

G.K. Chesterton was perhaps the most popular Catholic author of the early twentieth century. (He did not enter the Catholic Church until 1922, but his theology was essentially Catholic long before that.) In 1908, he wrote, in *Orthodoxy*, “If evolution simply means that a positive thing called an ape turned very slowly into a positive thing called a man, then it is stingless for the most orthodox. For a personal God might just as well do things slowly as quickly, especially if, like the Christian God, he were outside time.”

The first official pronouncement of the Church on the subject of evolution did not come until 1950, when Pope Pius XII issued the encyclical letter *Humani generis*, in which he specifically addressed the question of the evolution of man. His central point was that one must distinguish the origin of the human body and the origin of human spiritual soul. The evolution of the spiritual soul, of course, he declared to be inconsistent with Catholic faith. On the evolution of the human body he took a very cautious stance, saying that Catholic scholars could investigate it as a “hypothesis” as long as they did not reach any conclusions rashly. Though he was obviously less convinced by the evidence than were scientists of that time, it is clear that he thought the matter was to be decided by the evidence and that he was willing to let the chips fall where they may.

Another point that Pope Pius XII addressed was the question of monogenism versus polygenism; that is, whether all human beings were descended from a single original pair of humans or many. He said that Catholic scholars had to adhere to monogenism, but did not absolutely close the door to polygenism. He said “it is in no way apparent” how polygenism can be reconciled with certain Catholic teachings, in particular on Original Sin. But his precise wording is significant; he did not assert that these ideas could not be reconciled, only that it was „not apparent” how they could. Many Catholic theologians have been quick – too quick in my view – to toss monogenism overboard, because they think that the theory of evolution requires polygenism. They would be right, if the emergence of true human beings with spiritual souls were simply a matter of biological speciation. I will return to this very important question later in this article. The next notable Church statement on evolution did not come until 1996, when Pope John Paul II delivered an address on the subject to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. Referring to the encyclical *Humani generis*, he said, “Today, half a century after the appearance of that encyclical, some new findings lead us toward the recognition of evolution as more than a hypothesis. In fact, it is remarkable that this theory has had progressively greater influence on the spirit of researchers, following a series of discoveries in different scholarly disciplines. The convergence in the results of these independent studies – which was neither planned nor sought – constitutes in itself a significant argument in favor of the theory.” Of course, the Pope was not officially teaching

that evolution is true – the Church will never certify the truth of that or any other scientific theory, for this is beyond her mission and competence. It was simply the explicit acknowledgement of an obvious fact, namely that there was a great deal of evidence for evolution and significantly more than there had been in 1950.

Pope John Paul II in the same message reiterated what he called “the essential point” made by Pope Pius XII, namely that “if the human body takes its origin from pre-existent living matter, [nevertheless] the spiritual soul is immediately [i.e. directly] created by God.” This has always been the essential point for Catholics. Evolution is a theory of how atoms came to be assembled in certain ways to form biological organisms. We human beings, however, are not just assemblages of atoms. We are also spiritual, in that we have rational intellects and free will, which cannot be explained merely in terms of the motions of atoms. That means that there is not just a difference of degree between us and other animals, but what Pope John Paul II in the same message called an “ontological discontinuity”.

Another important document was issued in 2004 by the International Theological Commission, which is a body that advises the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, at that time headed by Cardinal Ratzinger. The document, called *Communion and Stewardship*, was approved for publication by Cardinal Ratzinger. It analyses some of the philosophical and theological issues surrounding evolution. It stresses the same points made by Pius XII and John Paul II, but contains a great deal more. In particular, it argues that the neo-Darwinian mechanism of evolution is not incompatible with the Catholic doctrine of divine providence. I will come back to this important point below. We see from all this, that the Catholic Church and the best Catholic thinkers have never been caught up in anti-evolutionism. As I noted, that has largely been a fundamentalist Protestant phenomenon. There does seem to have been an increase of anti-evolutionism in Catholic circles in recent years. I suspect that part of this may be due to a weakened understanding by some Catholics of their own theological and philosophical tradition. It may also be a by-product of the fact that a significant number of evangelical Protestants have come into the Catholic Church in recent decades, and that many of them have brought anti-evolution attitudes with them.

In the rest of this article I will examine the reasons that many religious people reject or are uncomfortable with evolution. I am going to start with several theological objections to evolution that are rather flimsy, and then take up the more serious and subtle ones. The first flimsy theological objection to evolution is that it disagrees with the biblical account of creation. *The Question Box* answered this well: “*The Bible* is not a textbook of science, and, therefore, cannot rightly be quoted either for or against evolution. As Pope Leo XIII says in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus*: ‘The sacred writers did not intend to teach men these things, that is to say, the essential nature of the things of the visible universe’.” One also should note that some of the Church fathers, including the greatest of them, St. Augustine, took many of the things in the book of Genesis in a figurative way. For instance,

Augustine did not take the Six Days of creation literally as a temporal sequence, but believed it more probable that the whole universe was created in one instant. St. Thomas Aquinas followed Augustine's view on this, saying that the idea of a temporally successive creation was more common and "superficially more in accord with the letter" of Scripture, but that St. Augustine's view was more "in accordance with reason", and that he (St. Thomas) therefore preferred it.

The second flimsy objection is that evolution takes away from human dignity, by saying that we are descended from apes. However, it is not clear why being directly formed from the dust of the ground is more dignified. An ape is certainly something higher, ontologically speaking, than dirt. In fact, *the Bible* in many places emphasizes that we are creatures of dust, precisely to show us our lowliness. For example, Psalm 103: 13–14 tells us that "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those that fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." And Ecclesiastes 3: 18–20 says that "the sons of men themselves are beasts. For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other; yea, they all have one breath; so that a man has no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." Our special dignity, then, comes not from our physical origin, but from our spiritual nature. Only in the account of man's creation do we find it said that "God breathed into him, and he became a living soul". That is, only on man did God confer a spiritual nature in some way resembling His own, so that only human beings are said by Scripture to be made in the image of God. As it happens, science agrees with the Bible that we came from dust. Billions of years ago there were just particles and dust from which condensed all stars and planets and living things. Whether we came from dust very quickly as portrayed in Genesis or through a slow process as described by science is really theologically irrelevant, as Chesterton observed. Our bodies are taken from the dust and they will return to dust. The third flimsy objection is that evolution implies that there is only a difference of degree between man and animals. However, that conclusion would only follow if we deny what John Paul II called the „essential point“: that man has a spiritual soul as well as a body.

The fourth flimsy reason is that evolution is "naturalistic". This is an important point for Phillip Johnson, one of the founders of the Intelligent Design movement and the author of several popular anti-darwinist books, such as *Darwin on Trial*. Johnson seems to think, or fears that others will think, that explaining things naturally rather than supernaturally leaves God with less to do. Strangely, people who make this objection to evolution rarely raise the same objection to the natural explanations of phenomena that are given in astronomy, geology, physics, or chemistry; the naturalism they find in biology seems to disturb them much more. In any event, we have already seen the fallacy involved in this point of view, namely failing to distinguish between primary and secondary causality.

None of these objections to evolution should have any force for Catholics; and indeed historically they have had almost none. So now let us turn our attention to the more serious criticisms, of which there are at least four. One is that the Darwinian mechanism of natural selection has undercut or destroyed the traditional „argument from design” for the existence of God. The second is that the role assigned to chance in Darwinism is incompatible with the Catholic doctrine of divine providence. The third is that the theological accounts of man’s creation and fall contrast with the history of human origins found through paleontology and genetics. The fourth objection, raised mostly by Thomist philosophers, is that Darwinian evolution eliminates teleology from biology.

The first of these objections to the compatibility of Darwinism with religion has been argued very vociferously from the atheist side by the zoologist Richard Dawkins. He notes that for a long time people believed that the intricate structures of living things proved that they were the products of an intelligent designer, but we now realize that they are the products of the blind forces of nature, and specifically of natural selection. Dawkins concedes that living things do indeed have all the earmarks that we normally associate with design: complexity, functionality, and interdependence of parts. But Darwin showed us how things that appear to be designed may actually not be. Dawkins calls such things “designoids”. By showing that no designer of living things is necessary, Darwin made it possible for the first time, says Dawkins, to be “an intellectually fulfilled atheist.” Even if one were to grant to Dawkins that living things are designoids, it would not mean that Darwin had destroyed the argument from design for the existence of God. To begin with, there is not just one kind of design argument, but at least three, which I shall call the cosmic design argument, the providential design argument, and the biological design argument. The cosmic design argument points to the orderliness and lawfulness of the cosmos as a whole. The providential design argument points to the way the various parts of the cosmos work together harmoniously for some good end, such as the sustenance of life. The biological design argument points to particular living things, and to the complexity of their organic structure. Of these, it is only the biological design argument that can be said to have been destroyed, or at least weakened, by Darwinian evolution. The other two versions of the design argument are alive and well. Indeed, I shall argue that the cosmic design argument has been enormously strengthened by modern scientific discoveries and is likely to be strengthened further by future discoveries. Not only are they more robust, but the cosmic and providential design arguments are also more ancient and more fundamental than the biological one, which is a relative newcomer to the theological scene. We can see evidence of this in four passages taken from the *Old Testament* and early Christian writings that speak of God as the designer of the cosmos. The first is from the *Old Testament Book of Wisdom*, which was written by an Alexandrian Jew of the 1st or 2nd century B.C., responding to the challenge posed to the Jewish religion by the sophisticated philosophy and science of the *physikoi* of ancient Greece.

It contains this eloquent passage, which just as well could have been addressed to the physicists of today: “For all men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing Him who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan; but either fire, or wind, or the swift air, or the circuit of the stars, or the mighty water, or the luminaries of heaven – the governors of the world – they considered gods. Now if out of joy in their beauty they thought these things to be gods, let them know how far more excellent is the Lord than these; for the original source of beauty fashioned them. Or if they were struck by the might and energy of these things, let them from these things realize how much more powerful is He who made them. For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen. But yet, for these men the blame is less; for though they have indeed gone astray, they perhaps seek God and wish to find him. For they search busily among his works, but are distracted by what they see, because the things seen are fair. But again, not even these men have an excuse. For if they so far succeeded in knowledge that they could speculate about the world, how did they not more quickly find its Lord?” (Wisdom 13: 1–9)

The second passage is from the Letter of Clement to the Church in Corinth, written in Greek ca. 97 A.D. It is one of the earliest Christian documents aside from the *New Testament* itself. In it, Clement, the fourth pope, is arguing that peace and harmony within the Church are to be obtained by submission to God’s will and laws, and he cites the harmony of nature and its obedience to God’s laws as teaching this lesson: “Let us turn our eyes to the Father and Creator of the universe. Let us contemplate Him with understanding, noting with the eyes of the spirit . . . the total absence of friction that marks the ordering of His whole creation. The heavens, as they revolve beneath His government, do so in quiet submission to Him. The day and the night run the course He has laid down for them, and neither of them interferes with the other. Sun, moon, and the starry choirs roll on in harmony at His command, none swerving from his appointed orbit. Season by season the teeming earth, obedient to His will, uses a wealth of nourishment to spring forth for man and beast and every living thing upon its surface, making no demur and no attempt to alter even the least of His decrees. Laws of the same kind sustain the fathomless deeps of the abyss and the untold regions of the netherworld. Nor does the illimitable basin of the sea, gathered by the operations of His hand into its various different centers, overflow at any time the barriers encircling it, but does as He has bidden it. . . . The impassable Ocean and all the worlds that lie beyond it are themselves ruled by the like ordinances of the Lord. Spring, summer, autumn, and winter succeed one another peaceably; the winds fulfill their punctual duties, each from its own quarter, and give no offence; the ever-flowing streams created for our well-being and enjoyment offer their breasts unflinchingly for the life of man; and even the minutest of living creatures mingle together in peaceful accord. Upon all of these the great Architect and Lord of the universe has enjoined peace and harmony.”

The third passage is from the famous Letter to Diognetus, written in the early part of the second century. It contains this statement about Christ and Creation: “The Almighty Himself, the Creator of the Universe, the God whom no eye can discern, has sent down His very own Truth from heaven, His own holy and incomprehensible Word, [the] Artificer and Constructor Himself, by whose agency God made the heavens and set the seas their bounds; whose mystic word the elements of creation submissively obey; by whom the sun is assigned the limits of his course by day; and at whose command by night the obedient moon unveils her beams, and each compliant star follows circling in her train. Ordainer, Disposer, and Ruler of all things is he; of heaven and all that heaven holds, of earth and all that is in earth, of sea and every creature therein; of fires, ether, and bottomless pit; of things above, and things below, and things in the midst. Such was the Messenger God sent to men.”

The last passage I will quote is from a work of apologetics written to non-Christians by the Latin writer Minucius Felix around the year 200 A.D.: “If upon entering some home you saw that everything there was well-tended, neat, and decorative, you would believe that some master was in charge of it, and that he was himself much superior to those good things. So too in the home of this world, when you see providence, order, and law in the heavens and on earth, believe that there is a Lord and Author of the universe, more beautiful than the stars themselves and the various parts of the whole world.” Over thirty examples are given in these passages of phenomena that point to a divine “Artisan”, “Architect and Lord”, “Artificer and Constructor”, “Lord and Author”, “Ordainer, Disposer, and Ruler”, and designer of the universe. Of these examples more than half are taken from astronomy: the heavens, the orderly movements of the sun, moon, stars, and other “luminaries of heaven”, and the alternation of day and night. Most of the other examples are non-living things on earth: the elements, fire, wind, mighty waters, fathomless deeps, the sea and ocean, and the cycle of the seasons. Only three references are made to living things: “man and beast and every living thing”, the creatures of the sea, and the “minutest of living creatures”; and these references make no mention of the complexity of their structure. Thus, the biological design argument is missing from these passages. One finds primarily the cosmic design argument, with its focus on the beauty, order and lawfulness of the cosmos. (Note the many references to the laws, decrees, and ordinances, with which God governs the universe.) One also sees the providential argument, with its emphasis on the harmoniousness ordering of the whole cosmos toward the sustenance of life. Though even this is found in only two lines: “the teeming earth, obedient to His will, causes a wealth of nourishment to spring forth for man and beast and every living thing upon its surface, and “the ever-flowing streams created for our well-being and enjoyment offer their breasts unflinching for the life of man.” There is no mention at all in these passages of individual living things or their bodily structure as pointing to design. (This is not to say that the biological design argument is completely lacking in early Jewish and

Christian texts. Such an argument is perhaps implicit in Psalm 139: 14: “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works.”) It seems that the emphasis on and even obsession with biological structure as evidence of a divine artisan or designer was a development of modern times, and especially the writings of the natural theologians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as William Paley. Very revealing is a passage from the English historian Macaulay, written in 1840: “A philosopher of the present day . has before him the same evidences of design in the structure of the universe which the early Greeks had for the discoveries of modern astronomers and anatomists have really added nothing to the force of that argument which a reflective mind finds in every beast, bird, insect, fish leaf, flower and shell.” Note that Macaulay begins by speaking of “the structure of the universe”, and mentions astronomers along with anatomists, but when he concludes with examples they are all taken from biology, and in particular the bodies of living things or parts of them: “beast, bird, insect, fish, leaf, flower, and shell.” Somehow, the biological design argument has come to overshadow the older versions. This shift toward the biological design argument and away from more traditional arguments was fateful: only two decades after Macaulay penned these words, Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*. Darwin suggested a mechanism by which the kind of complex organic structure seen in animals and plants could arise in a natural way. But Darwinian mechanisms cannot explain the orderliness and lawfulness of the universe, which is the basis of the cosmic design argument; nor can any other naturalistic mechanism. At first glance, it might seem otherwise. After all, there are many instances of order in the cosmos for which physics has explanations. The orderly motions of the solar system are a prime example. Johannes Kepler found several beautiful mathematical patterns in these motions: The orbit of every planet is an ellipse, with the Sun at one of its foci. These elliptical orbits all lie nearly in the same plane, and the planets all move around the Sun in the same direction. Each planet moves in such a way that the line between it and the Sun “sweeps out equal areas in equal times”. And there is a precise algebraic relationship between the time it takes a planet to go around the Sun and its distance from the Sun. Every one of these beautiful Keplerian patterns was explained by Newtonian physics. It is believed that the solar system started as a swirling cloud of gas and dust, which condensed under the influence of gravitational forces. It can be shown fairly easily, using Newton’s laws of gravity and mechanics, that such a condensing cloud tends eventually to form a Keplerian planetary system. Here it would seem that in the astronomical realm one is seeing highly intricate structure arising “spontaneously” from chaos and disorder, and form from formlessness. This is at least vaguely analogous to the way increasing organic complexity arises in the biological realm as a result of Darwinian mechanisms. Just as random genetic mutations fuel evolution, so random motions of particles in the primordial cloud of gas and dust gradually turn into highly organized patterns. The same kind of thing is seen in the growth of crystals: as a liquid crystallizes, the random molecular

motions of the liquid lead to highly symmetric structure. However, this appearance of order arising “spontaneously” from chaos, and form from formlessness, is an illusion. That is not how physics explanations proceed. In physics, the explanation of order at one level is always based on a more comprehensive and impressive orderliness that is presumed to exist at a deeper level. Kepler’s laws of planetary motion, for example, were indeed explained by Newton; but that explanation appealed to deeper and more mathematically sophisticated and beautiful laws, namely Newton’s laws of gravity and mechanics. Those Newtonian laws, in turn, were explained, to a large extent, by Einstein’s even more mathematically sophisticated and beautiful theory of General Relativity. The same is true of the lovely patterns we find in crystals. These can be explained, indeed; but they are explained as coming from even deeper symmetries and principles of order at the level of atomic physics, and deeper order still at the level of quantum field theory. In physics, astronomy, and chemistry, order is not “explained away,” order is not found to arise from mere chaos. Quite the reverse is true: it is always found that order at one level is explained by greater order at a deeper level. And so, as fundamental physics has progressed, we have more and more come to see that the laws of nature form a single, harmonious, and magnificent edifice of great subtlety, intricacy, and mathematical beauty. Indeed physicists think they have perhaps glimpsed the outlines of the truly fundamental laws of physics in something called superstring theory. A science reporter asked Edward Witten, a leading theoretical physicist, why he believed that superstring theory was likely to be right even though there is still no experimental evidence for it. Witten in exasperation exclaimed, I don’t think I have succeeded in conveying to you its wonder, incredible consistency, remarkable elegance, and beauty.” Witten is not religious, as far as I know. Yet even non-religious physicists marvel at the grandeur and beauty of the laws of physics. The mathematical ideas involved in superstring theory are so deep that even after twenty five years of intense study by hundreds of the world’s most brilliant mathematicians and physicists, they feel that have barely scratched its surface. How great the mind must be that conceived such laws! The cosmic design argument is alive and well. Here is what one of the greatest mathematicians and mathematical physicists of the twentieth century, Hermann Weyl said in a lecture at Yale university in 1931, and what he said then applies with much greater force today: “Many people think that modern science is far removed from God. I find, on the contrary, that it is much more difficult today for the knowing person to approach God from history, from the spiritual side of the world, and from morals; for there we encounter the suffering and evil in the world, which it is difficult to bring into harmony with an all-merciful and all-mighty God. In this domain, we have evidently not yet succeeded in raising the veil with which our human nature covers the essence of things. But in our knowledge of physical nature we have penetrated so far that we can obtain a vision of the flawless harmony which is in conformity with sublime reason.” There is another point to be made in reply to Dawkins. Again supposing that Darwinian mechanisms

are sufficient to explain the facts about evolution, the very fact that the universe is able to give rise to living things at all depends on the laws of nature and the structure of the universe having many special characteristics. Indeed, at least *prima facie* it seems that the laws of physics are in many ways designed to make life possible. I will give just a few examples. First, if the law of gravity depended on distance, not as the inverse square, as discovered by Newton, but as some other integer power, planets would not be able to orbit stars, and there would be no warm habitat for life. Second, the fact that life is possible in our universe is a result of the great richness of chemistry, which in turn is a result of the large number of chemical elements. There are almost one hundred naturally occurring chemical elements, and no fewer than twenty-five of them are required to make a human body. Almost all of the chemical elements were forged in the interiors of stars or in stellar explosions called supernovas. The forging of the elements depended on certain quite delicate balances between the various forces of nature. For example, if the so-called strong nuclear force were a few percent weaker, a nucleus called the deuteron would not be able to exist, and as a result practically none of the elements except hydrogen would have formed in any appreciable quantities. And if the electromagnetic force were stronger than it is, then the nuclei of many elements would be unstable. A third example is that the proton is slightly lighter than the neutron. Had the neutron been slightly lighter than the proton, the nucleus of hydrogen would have been unstable, making impossible the existence of organic molecules, almost all of which contain hydrogen. There are many features of the laws of physics that seem to be arranged to make life possible. These are called “anthropic coincidences”. One can see in the anthropic coincidences support for what we called the providential design argument, i.e. the argument for the existence of God based on the harmonious ordering of the cosmos towards good ends, such as the sustenance of life. Thus, modern science has actually strengthened the two forms of the design argument that are most commonly found in early Christian writings. Only the relatively recent biological design argument can be said to have been affected by Darwinian biology. It should be noted that no mechanism analogous to natural selection can explain the intricate structure in the fundamental laws of physics that is appealed to by the cosmic design argument. Any explanation of the structure of these laws based on the idea that they evolved would be circular: for, if the laws did evolve by a natural process, then that process to be natural would have to be governed by laws of some kind, and those laws would themselves have a non-trivial structure needing to be explained. The second serious theological objection to Darwinism is that the role it assigns to random mutations is in conflict with the doctrine of divine providence. The word random spooks many people. It is sometimes used to mean pointless, arbitrary, or meaningless. A few years ago, Cardinal Schönborn of Vienna wrote an article in the “New York Times” in which he criticized “neo-Darwinism” for asserting that life arose from natural selection acting on random, and therefore “unplanned” and “uncaused” genetic variations. He said that to posit unplanned and uncaused

sed events as the origin of life, and human life in particular, is to deny a divine plan and divine providence. The cardinal was certainly right, at least to this extent: many influential expositors of evolutionary theory, such as Dawkins, do put such an atheistic “spin” on Darwinism. They do go about claiming that it is an intrinsic part of Darwinian theory that evolution is an unplanned and unguided process. Indeed, I have seen this stated even in some biology textbooks that were used in American high schools. The fact, however, is that the word random as used in science does not necessarily carry any implication of “unplanned” and “unguided”, in spite of the fears of some people and the claims of others. If it did, then those of us who believe in divine providence and that every event in the universe is encompassed in God’s plan in some way would have to reject not only Darwinian evolution but much of modern physics, astronomy, and chemistry as well. For the word random is a basic term used in every branch of science. Fortunately, though, the word random as used in science is not just another word for unguided and unplanned. In fact, the words unguided and unplanned and their synonyms are hardly ever used in science. According to the standard Science Citation Index of the Institute for Scientific Information, there are only about 500 papers in all of the scientific literature in English that have the word unplanned in the title, most of them having to do with unplanned medical operations or unplanned pregnancies. There are only about 50 papers with the word unguided in the title; and most of them have to do with guided missiles. By contrast, there are over 50,000 scientific papers with the term random in the title. Random, unlike unguided and unplanned is a scientific term. It is used in discussing the motions of molecules in a gas, fluctuations in a quantum field, noise in an electronic device, statistical errors in a data set, and any other things in addition to genetic mutations. So what does the term random mean as used in science, if not unplanned and unguided? Basically, it means “having no systematic correlation” and therefore not predictable. Consider the example of a coin that is tossed many times. Because all the coin tosses are “independent” of each other, their outcomes are not systematically correlated with each other. That is why knowing how previous tosses came out gives no information about the next one. So mathematicians say that the outcomes form a “random sequence”. Consider a second example. When my children were young, they liked to observe the license plates of the cars and trucks that passed us on the highway to see what parts of the country they were from. They would see one from Delaware, followed by one from New York, and then one from Maryland, another from New York, then Florida, and so on. There were, of course, probabilities involved in these sequences, as in any random process – as there are in coin tosses. One can say that driving in our part of the United States one is more likely to see a car from New York than one from California. Nevertheless, one cannot predict after seeing a sequence of license plates what state the next car will be from. So there is there is an element of randomness. Nevertheless, each car is where it is, at that particular time and that particular place, for some reason. Each driver has a plan and an itinerary; each is guided by some

map and schedule. Each driver's trip fits into the pattern of his life in some intelligible way. It is just that the events of one driver's life are usually not systematically correlated with the events of other drivers' lives. Consider a third another example. In a sonnet, there is a strict correlation among the sounds of the final syllables of the different lines. But in a passage of prose, the sequence of final syllables will exhibit randomness. That does not mean that the words in a passage of prose are not chosen or planned. They may have been chosen with great care. It is just that the author did not choose them with the intention of rhyming them. That is, he did not choose to impose on the final syllables of his lines of prose any systematic correlation. In the same way, God, though He planned the universe with infinite care may not have chosen to impose upon the motions of the different molecules in a gas certain types of correlations. The kind of randomness that we talk about in science could be called statistical randomness, to distinguish it from other, more philosophically loaded uses of the word random. The idea of statistical randomness is obviously connected closely with the ideas of chance and probability. However, the connection is rather paradoxical and subtle. The randomness of a sequence of coin tosses prevents one from predicting the outcome of any particular toss; but at the same time it makes it possible to use probability theory to make useful predictions about what is likely to happen in a long sequence of tosses. One can show, for example, that in a sequence of a million coin tosses the ratio of heads to tails is unlikely to deviate from 50–50 by much more than a tenth of a percent. The paradox here is that randomness is a lack of systematic relationship, whereas probabilities can be thought of as a kind of systematic relationship. That is why the concept of randomness is so useful in explaining things in science. Just as knowing that a sequence of coin tosses is random allows the mathematician to make statements about the averages of large numbers of tosses, knowing that the molecules in a gas are moving randomly allows the physicist to calculate numerous properties of a gas made up of many molecules. When large numbers are involved, "chance" can lead to a kind of necessity. (The resolution of the paradox is that probabilities are ideal frequencies of outcomes, around which the actual outcomes vary in an unsystematic and therefore unpredictable way. The unsystematic nature of the variations around the ideal frequency, means that in a long sequence the ideal frequency will be closely approximated.) It is a fact that statistical randomness, chance, and probability play a role in nature. Nature itself takes probabilities into account. Certain animals spawn vast numbers of offspring precisely in order to compensate for the fact that the chance of any one of them surviving is low – this is part of the unconscious "survival strategy" of the species. In the same way, so many sperm are sent off in search of the egg precisely because the chance of any one sperm accomplishing its task is exceedingly small. Nature "plays the odds", and it couldn't do so unless there were odds to be played. It is not clear why God should not make use of statistically random processes and probabilities to achieve his ends in evolution also. If God can so arrange things that many larvae are produced so that a few of them shall "win thro-

ugh” to adulthood, why should he not arrange that many genetic mutations should occur so that some of them shall “win through” to produce new and interesting creatures? One may use an analogy. If a man wants to see a straight flush dealt in poker he could make sure of it in different ways. He could take one deck and “stack it”, i.e. introduce the right correlations among the cards in the deck, so that the straight flush is dealt. Or he could take a million shuffled decks – i.e. randomized decks – and deal a hand from each one of them. Then the chances would be overwhelming that a straight flush will be dealt in at least one of them. The question arises: In making plants and animals, did God stack the molecular and genetic decks, or did he shuffle them and use large numbers? Being God, he could have done it either way. Now one might object that God does not “play the odds”, since he knows everything, past, present, and future. He knows from all eternity “what is in the cards”. While that is true, the cards he deals, so to speak, may nevertheless appear to any statistical analysis to be random. God knows where every molecule in the gas is going to go. But the physicist is quite entitled to call those motions random in the statistical sense. *The Bible* itself speaks of chance. Ecclesiastes says, “I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill, but time and chance happens to them all.” Ecclesiastes is not saying that these matters are outside the control of God’s providence, but simply that there is not a perfect correlation between being strong and winning or between having bread and being wise. One final note on this point is that the document *Communion and Stewardship* published by the International Theological Commission with Cardinal Ratzinger’s approval in 2004, makes very clear that there is nothing incompatible between speaking of random genetic mutations in the context of Darwinian evolutionary theory and Catholic teaching on divine providence. This is a convenient point at which to make some comments about the Intelligent Design (ID) movement. The leading thinkers in that movement are Michael Behe and William Dembski. Behe is a Catholic and Dembski a Protestant. The ID movement does not object to the use of chance and probability to explain events in nature; far from it. In Dembski’s famous “explanatory filter”, only after one has shown that explanations of an event based on chance and the laws of nature are insufficient can one arrive at the conclusion that intelligent design is involved. Nor does the ID movement say that natural selection is inherently incompatible with theism or Christian belief. Even Phillip Johnson, the godfather of the movement, admits that God could certainly have used natural selection to produce animals and plants, if he had wished to do things that way. The ID theorists simply don’t think that natural selection succeeds in explaining the degree and kind of complexity we actually see in the biological world. Let us return to the poker analogy. Suppose a group of people are playing poker and Mr. Smith deals himself a straight flush. A suspicion might arise that Smith has cheated. However, the mere fact that the cards turned up that way would not prove (or even show it to be probable) that Smith cheated. After all, mil-

lions of people play poker around the world and straight flushes are bound to turn up by the laws of probability. However, suppose that every time Smith deals the cards he gets very good cards. If this happened consistently over a long period, it would become harder and harder to believe that Smith's good fortune was just the result of randomly shuffled decks. On purely statistical grounds it would become increasingly difficult to deny that someone was somehow consciously and deliberately manipulating the deck to produce a certain outcome.

That is what the dispute between the Intelligent Design movement and neo-Darwinism boils down to. The neo-Darwinists say that the history of life is consistent with the genetic mutations that gave rise to it having been statistically random. The ID people, on the other hand, say that living things are complex in such a way that one can show by purely statistical arguments that someone has been consciously and deliberately "rigging the game" so that life would appear. Who is right? For myself, I cannot see how anyone can know at this point. It is clearly a matter to be decided by mathematical calculation; and nobody is in a position to carry out the required calculations. It does not take great mathematical sophistication to calculate the probabilities in poker. In evolutionary biology, however, it cannot be done unless the sequence of steps at the genetic level that were required to produce the complex structures in living things is known. And, even then, one would have to know, in quantitative terms, the selective pressures to which organisms were subjected throughout evolutionary history, and many other facts that are no longer accessible. Unfortunately, the biological community is very dogmatic and intolerant of any questioning on this subject. Many scientists act as though only fools could question the sufficiency of natural selection. But there have been scientists who were far from being fools who did question this. Werner Heisenberg described the views of Wolfgang Pauli, one of the giants of twentieth century physics, in these words: "Pauli is skeptical of the Darwinian opinion, extremely widespread in modern biology, whereby the evolution of species on earth is supposed to have come about solely according to the laws of physics and chemistry, through chance mutations and their subsequent effects. He feels that this scheme is too narrow." On the other hand, some advocates of the Intelligent Design movement claim far too much. They make arguments that are supposed to show that natural selection cannot explain certain biological structures. They speak of what they call "irreducible complexity". Certain biological structures are irreducible, they say, in the sense that all the parts of the complicated structure must be in place for it to function at all. If any such structure exists in biology, then it is clear that it cannot have evolved one small step at a time, as Darwinism requires, but must have arisen in one incredibly improbable step. The difficult thing to show, however, is that any particular structure is actually irreducibly complex.

A Roman arch might be considered the perfect example of irreducible complexity, since every stone must be in place for the arch to stand up. And, indeed, it is difficult to imagine how such an arch could be built one stone at a time. However,

it can be done by first building a wall one stone at a time, and then removing stones one at a time to leave an arch. Thus, as in magic tricks, a thing may seem impossible, but actually turn out to be easy once the trick is explained. Until we know all of Nature's tricks, we cannot be sure that there are irreducibly complex structures in biology.

The third serious theological objection that can be raised against evolution is that it does not seem to tally with the theological account of man's creation and fall. According to modern biology, the process by which a new species originates takes place gradually over many generations and involves an interbreeding population that is numerous, whereas the Church teaches that the creation of man happened at a sharply defined moment and that there were at first just two true human beings. There is no contradiction, however, if it is understood that the appearance of the first true human beings was not simply the emergence of a new biological species, as species are understood in modern biology.

The definition of "species" in modern biology is somewhat fuzzy, and there are not sharp dividing lines between species. For example, one commonly used theoretical criterion for two types of animals being of the same species is whether they would be able to interbreed to produce fertile offspring. But 'being able to fertile interbreed' is not what mathematicians call an "equivalence relation", and therefore it does not allow the partitioning of animals into species that are sharply defined "equivalence classes". The problem is that there are examples where animals of types A and B can fertile interbreed, and those of types B and C can fertile interbreed, but those of types A and C cannot. If A and C are different species, then to which of these two species does B belong? More generally, there can be a sequence of types of animals A1, A2, A3, etc, where types that are far apart in the sequence, such as A1 and A100 are unable to fertile interbreed, but each type in the sequence is able to interbreed with the neighboring types. (There are well known examples of this, such as the *Larus* gulls. For the *Larus* gulls the sequence forms a closed cycle or ring. Such examples are therefore called "ring species".) Similarly, considering temporal sequences of animals, speciation is not understood to happen in such a way that an animal is of a different species than its parents, although two animals that are many generations apart may clearly be of different species.

Speaking purely biologically and of physical characteristics, therefore, it may be a difficult question whether a sharp dividing line could be drawn between human beings and their non-human ancestors. But the Church does not understand the difference between human beings and non-human animals to be purely biological and physical. The Church teaches that human beings have spiritual souls whose operations cannot be understood in terms of physics, chemistry, and biology alone. Presumably, a creature either has a spiritual soul or it hasn't. It therefore does not allow the partitioning of all terrestrial creatures into equivalence classes, in fact two of them: the class of creatures not having spiritual souls and the class of creatures having them. This is the "ontological discontinuity" of which Pope John Paul II spoke.

The apparent conflict between the biological and theological account of human origins is not difficult to resolve, in light of these observations. A possibility that has suggested itself to many thinkers independently is that human beings originated in the following way: a gradual process of evolution, occurring over many generations and involving large populations, gave rise to an ancestral population of proto-human creatures nearly indistinguishable at the physical level from true human beings. Upon two of these creatures (if monogenism is correct), and upon all their descendents, God may have conferred spiritual souls. Originally, only those first two would have been human in the theological sense, but they may have lived among a much larger population that was of the same “species” as biologists currently think about species.

Interbreeding may have been possible between the fully human beings and their proto-human neighbors, who were physically practically indistinguishable from them. These proto-humans presumably would have been mentally far evolved beyond the level of any non-human primate that exists now. They would have been capable of extremely complex behavior and communication, which a casual observer may have had a hard time distinguishing from truly rational activity. That such interbreeding actually did occur is suggested by two considerations. First, there is the old puzzle of who the children of Adam and Eve married. Under the assumption of monogenism, if there was no interbreeding with creatures not fully human, then interbreeding with siblings or other close relatives must have happened. Second, there is the result of genetic research, which seems to indicate that there was never such a narrow “genetic bottleneck” in the human past that there existed a generation with only two individuals from whom all human genetic material today derives. There does seem to have been a very narrow bottleneck; but theoretical estimates are that the „ancestral population” of all humans at the time of that bottleneck numbered in the thousands. In other words, the evidence suggests that there was at the time of the first true humans an interbreeding population of several thousand. The only question is whether in the first few generations of true humans only a few members of this interbreeding population had spiritual souls (as in monogenism) or many or even all of them did (as in polygenism). One might wonder at the idea that two creatures could be biologically nearly indistinguishable, with one having a spiritual soul and the other not. Perhaps there were physical differences between the two types that were so slight as not to make fertile interbreeding impossible, but large enough to make an important qualitative difference at the mental level. Science knows of several phenomena where a virtually infinitesimal quantitative difference can result in dramatic qualitative difference. For example, there are “phase transitions” in physics, such as the transition between water and ice. Infinitesimally above the freezing temperature, H₂O is liquid, whereas infinitesimally below it, H₂O is crystalline. Perhaps the brain structure of true humans was only slightly different from that of proto-humans, but that difference was enough to cross a threshold into a new “phase” in which the physical substrate was

ready to receive a spiritual nature. Another issue that some have raised is whether Darwinian evolution is consistent with the Church's teachings about the fall of man and its consequences. How, some ask, can death be a consequence of the fall (cf. Romans 5: 12: "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin"), if life-and-death struggle was a force that shaped the first man? To this, one need simply reply that the immortality offered to the first man and woman has always been understood by the Church to be a "preternatural gift", i.e. something that went beyond what was naturally possible for him. And when he forfeited this gift by sin, man simply reverted to the natural state of subjection to death that was the lot of his animal forebears. Similarly, some ask how lust and violence can be a consequence of the fall, if they were bred into us by evolution. The answer is that the "concupiscence" which resulted from the fall is not to be identified simply with the sexual instinct and such passions as anger, which are not evil in themselves, and which we undoubtedly have in common with animals (who, of course, are also not evil). Rather, concupiscence is the disorder whereby the control of reason over these passions was weakened. So it is quite consistent to say that the passions themselves had a biological origin and long pre-human history, whereas their subjection to reason (like reason itself) was a gift from above, a gift partly lost through sin. The fourth objection to Darwinian evolution, usually raised by Thomist philosophers, is that it eliminates teleology from biology. This is highly questionable, however. There is an obvious sense in which the eyes, optic nerves, and the visual cortex of the brain are "for seeing"; the reproductive system is for reproduction; the immune system is for immunity; the lungs are for oxygenating the blood; and the heart is for pumping blood; and this is not denied by modern biologists. It was, after all, modern biologists who named these systems the "immune system", the "visual cortex", and so on. In other words, these structures and systems have an "intrinsic finality", i.e. inherent directedness towards "ends" or goals. Of course, these goals are not conscious intentions on the part of the physical structures themselves. And Darwinism says that they arose through a natural evolutionary process that is itself unconscious and has no foresight. But this is not really very different from the way Aristotle would have understood the intrinsic finality in the biological world. Aristotle would not have said that the heart had a conscious intention to pump blood, or that an intelligent designer had fashioned the heart with conscious foresight in the same way a human artisan makes a tool. Even though the Darwinian mechanism lacks foresight, there is a form of teleology built into it. This is generally overlooked because people are looking for teleology in the wrong place. People see the "randomness" of the genetic mutations that fuel evolution as antithetical to teleology. But it is in the process of natural selection, not in the random mutations, that teleology plays a role. One can see this by asking a simple question: why are some mutations favored by natural selection and others weeded out? The reason a particular mutation may be favored is that it makes the eyes see better in some way, which assists the animal in its goal of finding food or mates or avoiding predators, which

in turn assists the animal in its goal of living and reproducing. Why, on the other hand, do species that take up residence in caves, gradually lose the ability to see? The reason is that a capacity for seeing light serves no purpose for animals living in total darkness, and so mutations that harm the faculty of sight are not selected against. In many cases, one cannot understand why natural selection selects as it does without bringing intrinsic finality into the explanation. Moreover, it has been suggested by respected evolutionary biologists, such as Simon Conway Morris, that evolution is channeled in certain directions. As is richly documented in his book *Life's Solution*, the evolutionary process has repeatedly stumbled upon the same "solutions" to the problems of survival – a phenomenon called "convergent evolution". Eyes, for example, have evolved independently several times in the course of life's history on earth. Another example is that marsupials in Australia and placental mammals elsewhere often show remarkable similarity, although evolving completely independently. It may be that "built into" the physics and chemistry of life are certain developmental pathways, and that the Darwinian mechanism is merely finding them, just as the meandering river always finds the sea. Finally, the "anthropic coincidences" show that the fundamental laws of physics and the structure of the universe cannot have an arbitrary form if life is to be a possibility at all. The universe itself seems to be ordered toward the possibility of life. In all these ways, teleology can still be seen in the biological realm after Darwin. And since God knew and willed from all eternity the whole pattern of created reality and its development, one can still affirm that the finality we see in nature comes from the intention of an intelligent agent. In an essay such as this, one cannot hope to address all significant theological questions raised by evolution. But this much, I hope, has been made apparent: Neither evolution nor the Darwinian theory of natural selection poses any danger to Catholic doctrine or the fundamental insights of traditional Catholic theology. The Catholic Church has never had a quarrel with the science of Darwinian evolution. Catholics are therefore free to follow the evidence wherever it may lead. That is what the Church has wisely taught and continues to teach.

Mark Blitz

SOME NOTES ON RELIGION AND DEMOCRATIC LIBERTY

My intention is to discuss briefly several elements of the connection between liberal democracy and religion. This topic is decisive in much of Richard Neuhaus' work. Conserving liberty is a central task today, and religion's place in this task important, although controversial.

The orientation of my paper is toward this political or ethical issue, not toward faith as such. One should recognize, however, that from some secular standpoints the unlikelihood, improbability, or lack of evidence for revelation shapes from the start the seriousness with which one addresses the connection between religion and politics. From these standpoints, the moral height and strength of the Jewish and Christian revelations is not as such evidence of their truth. The fact that Farabi, Maimonides, Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, Kant, and Hegel – and in their own way Plato and Aristotle – considered the issue of the connection between thought and faith does not show its intellectual power. We and they grapple with a problem that there is no special intellectual reason to deal with earnestly – as distinguished from historical or political reasons. The evidence for revelation is not greater than that of other possibilities one would not dream of taking seriously. Similar (although opposed) assurance may also govern those convinced by faith.

It is sometimes said that judgments about the importance or superiority of reason cannot escape from an original leap of faith not different in principle from faith as we ordinarily understand it. The choice to follow along reason's path must at first be irrational, or not demonstrated. One begins by assuming a superiority of reason that one cannot prove. Yet, this argument apparently does not lead those who doubt the evidence and authority of pious faith to take its claim more seriously. One reason is that, however reason begins, its journey can always remain open to

a reasonable showing of its superiority and necessity or, indeed, the superiority or necessity of faith. That reason cannot at first satisfy its own claim is not, for reason, a reason to eschew it.

Indeed, faith must work within a world of natural intelligibility in order to clarify and issue its commands, report its source, announce its justification, and so on. Religious commands must be intelligible if they are to be obeyed: what are they asking of whom, when, and where? This intelligibility seems, indeed, to show the superiority of reason as a first step, because nothing can be commanded or grasped altogether apart from intelligible speech, and, therefore, from reasonable articulation. This is not to say that the true meaning, bearing, and grounds of intelligibility are obvious. But the need to clarify them seems to be a rational need. In this sense, beginning with and even preferring reason is not arbitrary. Perhaps, moreover, openness to such reflections differentiates faith that can accord with reason and does not contradict or wish away the limits it imposes from arbitrary faith and obedience. Indeed, one should always ask how much the actions of a pious or obligatory life allow or require unbridled reflection or questioning, and how much of observant ritual or of faith can be defended by reason, that is, defended in its worth for character, liberty, justice, or good politics. In any event, we cannot altogether isolate the political question from the epistemological or theoretical one.

Toleration and Piety

The significance of our liberal democratic political orientation for religious practice itself becomes visible once we remember that for liberal democrats the chief religious virtue is tolerance, not piety.

Tolerance at first meant grudging acquiescence in religious practices different from one's own, not today's easy-going acceptance of those with different faiths, let alone active support of them. But it always suggests a character that tries to permit others to observe as they choose. This virtue is allied with legal toleration. Toleration limits and is intended to limit the public sway of any sect in particular, and, from a political or legal point of view, it equalizes them. Using law to aid religion, or treating observance as restricted unless publicly supported, is constitutionally impermissible. Particular beliefs may help to form practical judgment and goals, and belief generally can be aided or advanced with different degrees of subtlety. But, using public force to command belief, to support particular rituals, or to punish particular believers or non-believers is unacceptable.

The dominance of toleration as a virtue and in law is bound to affect religious observance and, ultimately, belief. Religion that requires or profits from public support – from mandated prayer to mandated keeping of the Sabbath, from political and educational tests to employment discrimination – is weakened, or transformed into belief that can do without such mandates. Together with the expansion of li-

berty and material wealth, toleration, indeed, even has the effect of making distinctions among believers who belong to different sects less relevant and pressing, or of advancing private and not merely public religious equality. This occurs even in countries that are dominated by a single religion. Religion becomes primarily a private matter, and the way is opened for new sects and new preachers.

The Tension between Faith and Liberal Democracy

The danger that toleration is intended to ameliorate helps make visible faith's tension with liberal democracy, especially when piety demands public support for orthodoxy and ritual. This danger is that religion becomes authoritative, or that the authority of religion is merged with the authority of law, leaving no justified room for unfaithful judgment and certainly not for the public effecting of such judgment. The natural openness that is connected to the imperfection of every regime becomes transformed by the religious-legal link into the perfection of this particular regime. Private choice becomes restricted, especially the private use of reason. Horizons of understanding and action are narrowed and constricted. Men become constrained, or their energies dissipated. In situations where religion is authoritative but where it is split from much day to day law, the hope for salvation turns attention away from improvement here and now.

The connection between piety and law is, because of our current attention to Islam, more broadly familiar to us now than it had become. It is visible intellectually in the link between piety and justice in Plato's *Euthyphro* and in his *Republic* and, especially, in his *Laws*. These dialogues attempt among other goals to clarify the degree to which we can make piety compatible with what reason teaches us about virtue and thought.

When piety dominates political life and our understanding of the soul's virtue, we may also find danger in the substance of what piety demands and ritual commands. This danger can be evident in the good things that faith requires or restricts. Piety can absent itself from reason to greater or lesser degrees. It can eschew natural satisfactions. It can advance the arbitrary and limit freedom. It can point sway from natural satisfactions. If it is universal, it can leave little room for challenge anywhere.

These difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that the meaning of mystery and revelation, the demands of law, ritual, and observance, and the proper way to form the soul – in short, the meaning of piety – all need to be interpreted. Religion often or, indeed, usually becomes in effect the rule of priests, and the wider its field, the wider the rule. One can in principle doubt or disclaim priestly authority because, as I have suggested, what is commanded and said about how to act, behave, think, and be educated piously must enter the realm of natural reason and evidence to be comprehended or obeyed.

But the degree to which doubt or criticism can effectively limit priestly teaching and rule is unclear. These considerations indicate the difficult relation between liberal democracy and public piety. The rule of priests is not self-rule by a liberal democratic people. The natural authority of individuals is not the authority of those with special access to tradition or revelation.

The justice of pious obedience is not the justice of equality under laws made by one's representatives. The goods favored by pious obedience are not the sensual satisfactions our equal natures demand, or the property connected to them. Nor are the virtues of humble obedience the same as the liberal virtues of responsible self-reliance and vigorous enterprise. Pious action, moreover, is not the continued attempt to resolve intellectual perplexity.

Religion and the Origin of Liberal Democracy

These discrepancies help to explain the attempt by modern thinkers from Machiavelli on to limit the sway of religion, of pious observance, of priestly control, and of other-worldliness. In particular, the authority of priests, and of those such as kings who derive their authority from them, is replaced by the evidence of one's own authority for oneself and the grounding of political authority in representation of ourselves. This attempt is most evident in John Locke, in the understanding of rights, authority and government that we see in the *Essay* and the *Two Treatises* as well as in the *Letter on Toleration*.

From the viewpoint of liberal democracy and its intellectual founders, piety suffers from still another defect that limits its attraction. As we have suggested, it is not always clear how a claim of revelation differs from strange, arbitrary, or unreasonable assertions. At the least, such claims often appear to be unscientific. For piety truly to be a virtue, one therefore suggests, it needs to be correlated with demands that are not irrational. But when we fit it together with what is reasonable, it seems more to favor traditional or Aristotelian virtue and understanding than it does the standpoint of modern science and the technology that modern science supports. This technology, however, seems to be central to the economic growth that is vital to liberal democracy, given its connection to equal self-reliance and material goods. In this way piety and liberal democracy pose special challenges to each other.

Religion's Compatibility with Liberal Democracy

Despite these difficulties, religion and liberal democracy are compatible in various ways, and it is these ways that provide mutual support between the two. These areas of convergence also help to explain why toleration, not piety, is our central

religious virtue. Liberal democracy encourages individuals to at first take an individual standpoint, to think of themselves primarily as individuals. Other attachments must be legally permissible on the basis of individual rights and authority, and they are finally grounded in individual choice. This means that all attachments are in principle voluntary, and most are in practice. This includes religious observance and affiliation. This voluntary and individual stance toward religion is one reason that toleration becomes desirable and is encouraged.

When attachments are voluntary, however, we wonder what enables us to have and secure the virtues of character that we need to use our individual rights vigorously. We wonder as well about what helps to generate and protect the immediate or emotional standpoints we need to treat others as if they enjoy the equal rights that we know intellectually belong to them. And, we wonder about the origin and security of the understanding of what is good that attracts us to use our rights well. We require good character and good institutions in regimes that are based on natural rights even though these institutions enjoy much less traditional and implicit power than they do in other regimes or places. Religion is among the practices that help to transmit the virtue, justice, and direction to what is high that we need in liberal democracy. This is so despite the fact that in liberal democracy the conditions of implicit attachment to religious institutions are weakened, and despite the contrast between the independent authority at the source of liberal democracy and a life of pious observance. Liberal democracy reduces the sway of ritual and piety, especially publicly.

The Liberal Benefit of Religion: Virtue and Institutions

Let us discuss more fully the place of virtue in liberal democracy, and religion's potential help in developing and establishing it – although, of course, we do not mean help for everything that calls itself virtue, by everything that calls itself religion. Liberal regimes are based on citizens who seek to secure their rights. For them to secure and enjoy their rights they require responsibility, the steadiness and training to do their jobs successfully and to amass the skills and other dispositions that this effectiveness requires. When so much relies on oneself rather than others one needs a responsible character. Indeed, when so much relies on each of us, attention to public matters must also arise from voluntary choice. This choice to attend to public matters is connected to the wish and impulse to take on more and more responsibility, to advance one's responsibility in larger and larger fields, and, thereby, to advance the common interest together with one's own.

The effective use of rights also requires the more typical "bourgeois" virtues of industriousness, probity, and considerateness. Each of these virtues, and modified versions of classic virtues such as courage too, can be aided by religion. For, Christianity, Judaism, and other religions can lead one to wish to elevate oneself, to

make the best of oneself, to think of others even as one thinks of oneself, to see in each of us a certain equality with others.

Of course, religion's general aid to character does not simply require liberal democratic regimes, although responsibility and the other characteristically liberal virtues cannot flourish apart from liberal democracy. Religion may even work against responsible self-reliance by developing, instead, pious humility, cruel insistence on conversion, or "spiritual" disdain for property and wealth. Liberal democracy, on the other hand, requires that we appreciate property and wealth.

Indeed, property is a chief outward form of our inner freedom, and material wealth a more or less neutral means to the variety of ends that free men pursue. Nonetheless, the discipline and attention to others that religion often inculcates can work together with liberal democracy when the character religion has in mind and aids involves attentive industry and responsibility – not responsibility as wallowing in guilt but as seeking to be effective and successful. From this viewpoint, religion and the character that liberal democracy needs can be brought together, although more on liberalism's terms than on traditional religion's. The link in the United States between capitalist energy, love of individual freedom, and individual religious rebirth is telling and genuine, but hardly inevitable.

Religion aids character not only or primarily as doctrine but because it is one of the institutions that implicitly shape and guide us. Most and in a sense all attachments in liberal democracies are in the final analysis voluntary. But much of our view of what is desirable and proper, and much of the training that first impresses this on us, comes from what one takes for granted, not what one constantly judges and chooses. This is obviously true in the family, but it also is significant in other institutions, in neighborhood, and education.

Indeed, liberalism's weakening of these institutions because of its individualism and the rapid change it often promotes is an internal source of its own difficulties. Religious life that supports individual rights and its necessary virtues is a bulwark against this decline.

Religion, as we are arguing, is significant in guiding character and helping us to learn to choose what is correct. To some degree, moreover it does this because we are so often shaped by ritual and belief: religious institutions are among those that help to mold our implicit expectations and guides. Yet, if religious affiliation is voluntary, some of this implicit and continuing forming is lost. It is subject to many of the same difficulties that beset liberal institutions generally. New affiliations may take the place of or reenergize old ones, however, something we saw, say, in the development of President George W. Bush. In fact, one might also suggest that the constant presence of religion in the United States because of the variety of faiths partially makes up for the weakening of what is implicit in religious life and belief (and, therefore, the weakening of its effects on character) that voluntary religion seems to bring about. One of the significant phenomena to explore in addressing the current relation of liberal democracy and religion is the greater significance of

religious life and, especially, of belief in God in the United States than what we see in much of Europe. In any event, religion can aid the virtue and restraint that equal freedom requires, and can help to elevate our understanding of what to choose with our freedoms. The voluntary choice that is central in liberalism, however, in general, if not always, affects the implicit as well as the explicit ways in which religion does this.

The Liberal Benefit of Religion: Elevation and Consolation

There are other ways that religion can not only be compatible with liberal democracy but can help to secure it, speaking, again, from the standpoint not of faith as such but of liberal democracy. Part of the human elevation that liberal democracy can help to advance is a view of each of us as at root inviolable. This connects much of what is suggested by the holy and the divine with individual rights, and is also related to what we mean by dignity.

The natural right of each individual is his authority to consider, to choose, and to act. Natural rights belong to each of us justly; we hold them as equals; they are not properly awarded to us as privileges bestowed by others. Natural rights, indeed, do not stem from the authority of others. Rather, in liberal democracies political or other authority stems from natural individual authority, from individual choice and transfer. Any just regime must take the equal natural authority of individuals (equal because reason sees no distinction among us in our natural authority to choose, act, and move for ourselves) into account.

Our natural authority is inseparable from freedom as self direction and from freedom understood as being unobstructed. Freedom suggests the need for the responsibility and reasonable understanding that can secure it, and use it successfully and well. A basic element of our height or elevation, in short, is the natural freedom and authority of self direction and choice, and central to the inviolability of each individual is precisely the natural authority to consider, choose, and proceed. This is an authority whose external effect can be obstructed, whose presence in individuals can be obscured, and whose use can be unwise or insufficiently reflective. But, it is an authority that transcends human whim, cannot justly be ignored, and can never simply be taken away.

In this sense, natural individual rights express much of the sanctity of the individual that religion too means to express. This is vital for the link that is possible between religion and liberal democracy. This link is not grounded in a matter of bare moral dignity in Kant's sense but, rather, in individual natural rights. Ethical freedom and authority exist even without Kantian moral universalism.

The naturally free does not exhaust natural height and therefore does not exhaust either the compatibility or tension between religion and liberal democracy. What is holy or divine in us is not only our natural freedom but also the highest or

fullest use of our powers. What is divine in us is reason, as it informs our enjoyment and pursuit of the goods that we usually seek, and as it seeks its own fullest field, in theoretical understanding. When religion supports the holy and divine, it also helps to protect the best use of our human powers, when these are seen to comprise what we are most fully.

Religion can belong to and even take some of the lead in elevating us because of the emotional power, seriousness, and social force with which it consecrates the central events of birth, marriage, and death that are so basic in our grasp of human inviolability and in our understanding of our ability to transcend ourselves in order to make the best of ourselves. For this reason, religion may find itself opposed by the misinterpretation of natural rights as equal license and the consequent objection to an ethical and intellectual education that is oriented to what is better and worse. But, it is also true that religion may become an enemy of reason, or deem impious and unholy what is in truth only imprudent, or undesired by the reigning authorities.

Religion not only elevates, it can also console, or enlarge our implicit understanding of the limits inherent in what is choiceworthy and good. Both this consolation and elevation help to account for religion's strength, a strength that supplements what is available to reason alone. Of course, such elevation can be misguided if its substance is distorted, and such consolation has often been too comfortable with material and political conditions that in fact we should challenge and overcome. As we said, much as piety, thought, and liberal democracy properly support each other they are not compatible simply. Practical affairs cannot do without practical judgment.

Andrzej Bryk

**ROMANTIC THEOPOLITICAL TESTAMENT
- RICHARD J. NEUHAUS AND THE AMERICAN CITY OF MAN**

Christianity is to life what Shakespeare is to literature: for it envisages the whole.
Malcolm Muggeridge

Richard J. Neuhaus was a fascinating phenomenon. A first-rate public intellectual, in the 1960s he was a civil rights Lutheran activist for the equality of black Americans within the circle of Martin Luther King. He was a socially active priest-intellectual. Neuhaus's life was a life of an incessant burning passion, a Christian acutely aware that the times in which he lived were not ordinary times. He was at ease with the world and with people of all walks of life because he knew where the anchor was, a living embodiment of a truth found in the old maps of Christian antiquity, where Jerusalem was always at the center, the *axis mundi* – a blatant cartographical error, but a theological truth. At a time of ubiquitous disenchantment, Neuhaus was one of the greatest apologists of Christendom of today, a spectacular feast when Christendom was consigned by the majority of modern Western cognoscenti either to the ash heap of history or, at best, to a psychotherapeutic spirituality. His apology for Christendom, and the Catholic Church in that, stemmed from his understanding that Christianity, with all its sins, created and has been a defender of human freedom in the most fundamental, anthropological, but also political sense. A possible demise of Christianity would thus constitute in his judgment a menace to freedom even for those who battled it.

Neuhaus's journey from Lutheranism to Catholicism in 1990 was long, akin to the one which Henry Newman once traveled, for a long time not realizing that in fact he was always there. Because, as he observed many years later, "I was a Pro-

testant ... albeit of Catholic and Catholic proclivities".¹ His conversion was also a call to faith in action. Neuhaus was an embodiment of the once common link between popular religion and high intellectual achievement, a combination of religious enthusiasm and a generous and transformative change for an improvement of this world. Cold intellectual sterility was not his style. He was living proof of someone who knew, as did the protagonists of Marilyn Robinson's novel, that "nothing true can be said about God from a posture of defense".² This was a treasure in an age when the cognoscenti decided that reasoned faith is a charming oxymoron. Having no patience with the secular intellectuals criticizing transcendental religions, who exhibited an ocean of ignorance and bad will, he reserved his most biting comments for the most radical of them, the new atheists, a curious brand of toxic pseudo-intellectuals who were late for the Enlightenment. Neuhaus dismissed them with the tart remark that he did not believe in the God in which they did not believe.

Post-1968 monistic liberalism and *The Naked Public Square*

In the 1980s, when he wrote his most famous book, *The Naked Public Square*, Neuhaus was considered a conservative. But his refusal to abandon traditional liberalism, coupled with his conversion to Catholicism, gained him the label of a "neo-conservative", a notoriously elusive term, more one of abuse in recent decades than explaining anything.³ In terms of Catholic teaching, he was definitely a defender of the orthodoxy subverting the development within the Church dominant since the '60s, which exploded in that decade and went by the name of liberal Catholic theology, and which seemed gradually to have run its course.

For Neuhaus such liberal Catholicism was a dangerous path for the church's theology. He realized that if the Church yielded theologically and morally, it would progressively become a province of a liberal state, since "where orthodoxy is optional, orthodoxy will sooner or later be proscribed."⁴ The problem was deeper though. Such liberal Catholicism, or Protestantism or Judaism, apart from professing just social gospel with such issues as the fight against poverty, war, or the environment, would soon turn the doctrinal, metaphysical component into some kind of spiritual comfort, psychology of a communion with the healing, all embracing God, so as to strengthen, not guide the inner self-esteem, merging with psychology turned to religion. Neuhaus knew that psychology was valuable only when it was based on sound metaphysics, but when it relied on a false philosophy, it became not only nonsense, but at the same time disastrous.

¹ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square Now: A Symposium* on the 20-year anniversary of the publication of his influential *The Naked Public Square*, "First Things" 2004, November, p. 24.

² Quoted in C. Miller, *Simple Gifts*, "Claremont Review of Books" 2009, Fall, p. 40.

³ He was termed a religious "neoconservative", later dubbed during George W. Bush's years a "theocon", and was portrayed as such in the media, including such diverse networks as PBS, C-SPAN, and EWTN.

⁴ Quoted in: R. R. Reno, *Religion, Culture, and Life*, "First Things" 2009, April, p. 57.

Apart from a youthful stint with radicalism, throughout his life Neuhaus remained a liberal democrat in politics, in the traditional sense of the word, when liberalism had not yet turned in the wake of the '60s into a monistic "religion", excluding people not sharing its new anthropology and morality from public life. He had an Aristotelian and Augustinian view of politics. From Aristotle he took the conviction that people, irrespective of where they came from, should discuss and organize their life together for the common good. Against those who removed themselves from the civilizational circle of moral conversation he minced no words, branding the enlightened or less enlightened barbarians refusing a priori to be limited by what we know, wisdom we have received, and traditional notions of good and evil, right and wrong. For those who wanted to be part of a civilized circle of moral conversation, the essence of liberal democracy for him, he was always open to argument, provided they shared with him an understanding that truth existed and what was worthy in life did not stem from the whimsical wishes of the imperial Self. But he was also Augustinian, realizing that the first thing to remember was that politics was not the most important thing, and a fundamental division in politics between *sacrum* and *profanum* was a precondition of human freedom.

A radical critic sometimes of the most repugnant features of the new liberal civilization, Neuhaus showed no bitterness towards life and people of even the most opposite views. He knew that modernity was a station in human history into which God placed Himself. He realized the verity of the truth expressed by a protagonist from Robert Musil's novel *The Man without Qualities*, that one could not be angry with one's own times without doing damage to oneself. But as a public – and Catholic – intellectual, he was aware, after Augustine, of the provisionality of every mundane order, considering it his duty to "subject every mundane political or cultural order to the final judgment of the Kingdom of God".⁵ His passion, and the memory of the glorious days of his social activity, prompted him sometimes to take risky intellectual endeavors and reckless political choices. This pertained especially to his flirting with liberal democracy as the best regime. In this respect he was a romantic Actonian. Part of that liberalism was of course the crucial presence of a transcendental religion, mainly Christianity, in the public square, in other words an absence of the "naked public square", a profoundly illiberal situation, which was eventually, he thought, to elevate a state into the position of absolute, uncontested sovereign. The "liberation" of the '60s and radical secular modernity began to threaten the moral order and free exercise of religion. The decision of the Supreme Court in 1947 in "Everson v. Board of Education" (330 U.S. 1), stating in effect that the First Amendment was to create a neutral public sphere, something which Neuhaus later called the "naked public square", as a consequence led to a secular "sacralization" of the idea of the separation of religion from society and culture.⁶ From now

⁵ R. J. Neuhaus, *Katolicy nie potrafią udowodnić swych racji* [Catholics cannot prove they are right], "Europa", 14, June 2006, p. 11.

⁶ Idem, *The Public Square*, "First Things" 2006, November, p. 78.

on there was only a short step to conclude that the aim of the First Amendment was to protect the public space from religion in the name of neutrality and the rights of non-religious people. The whole post-Emerson adjudication thus revolved around the idea that religious people constituted a threat to the public order. On the basis of this adjudication the American elites began to create a climate which slowly pushed religious people into the margins of public life. The public rousing of religiously minded people in America since the 1970s, essentially a move of self-defense, was done in the name of freedom and in the name of the community.

Neuhaus responded to the new situation in 1984 with the book *The Naked Public Square*, understanding that the religious communities were fighting precisely for the separation of state and church, in a situation when the state began to dictate to religious communities their right social and doctrinal place. It was, argued Neuhaus, precisely the lack of such a separation which threatened religious communities, and subjected them to public discrimination in the traditionally Christian America. This was no coincidence. The Supreme Court began slowly to accept a new anthropology of the imperial Self as a sole arbiter of individual right against rights of the community. Culture was taken over by the legislation of social justice propelled by rights derived from a subjective sense of grievance. The line between inalienable human rights and social rights was blurring, and the imperial Self was to be the sole arbiter of rights. Such a doctrine could not be an effective policy, but it was an effective ram to push religious language and people from public discussion, to prepare quite a coherent doctrine of a new community defined by the new secular elites.

With *The Naked Public Square* Neuhaus countered the official stance of the Supreme Court and the secular elites, pointing out that a point of separation in the antiestablishment clause of the First Amendment was not an enlightened rationalism, but the reality of various competing religious groups. It was thus prudent to neutralize the state in matters of religion rather than run the risk of one of their opponents gaining control of the government. Thus “we must never tire of explaining [that] the ‘no establishment’ provision of the First Amendment is entirely in the service of the ‘free exercise of religion’”.⁷ The point of the “antiestablishment” portion of the First Amendment was therefore not to defend a state and society against religion, but exactly the opposite, to defend religion against a state so as to provide security of religious denominations to function fully in a public sphere. Today, the situation is the same, except the realignment of alliances, since “the lines of suspicion and hostility are less and less between competing religious groups and more and more between publicly assertive religion in response to publicly assertive secularism”.⁸

The Naked Public Square was not only the book which brought Neuhaus into public prominence, but it enabled him to organize a milieu of similar-thinking

⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸ *Ibidem.*

people, beginning many public initiatives over the years, of which three seem to be the most consequential. The first was the founding of the Institute of Religion and Public Life in 1989. It began to publish the *First Things* magazine in 1990. The second, following Neuhaus's conversion to Catholicism in 1990, was the manifesto "The Evangelicals and Catholics Together", an ecumenical project that Neuhaus initiated with Charles Colson in 1992, to overcome the strains and tensions within American Christianity and to formulate a common strategy in the face of rampant and aggressive secularism. This turned out to be a crucial, even if rocky, alliance between the Evangelicals and the Catholics, or, to put it more precisely, between the conservative Evangelicals and the conservative Catholics, although the latter would probably prefer to be called orthodox.

The third initiative was a very controversial symposium at First Things in 1996 entitled "The End of Democracy?", in which the participants put forth the question whether an activist, rights-constructing role of the Supreme Court was still within the limits of a democratic, constitutional mandate, or whether it was already an usurpation of power.⁹ All three initiatives constituted a practical application of the ideas which Neuhaus promulgated in *The Naked Public Square*. But if the first two could be considered to be somehow intra-religious affairs, the third was considered by many as radical, calling for civil disobedience tactics and denying, inter alia, the legitimacy of the American political system.

With the first two initiatives the presence of religious, public-minded communities slowly began to be accepted. The religious communities took their place in the public square, after a very long absence, as a civilizing cultural and social force in America. This acceptance was yet marred by accusations of this movement and its leaders of theocracy. Neuhaus and some others were soon dubbed "theoconservatives".¹⁰ This constituted an ominous case of criminalization by association, when the very word "theocon" elicited images of a theocratic government like Iran. Neuhaus vehemently protested against such a term, while trying to elucidate a position regarding the liberalism he believed in.

Neuhaus believed that liberal democracy as he conceived it could at this point in history be the best available regime. He accepted liberal democracy not because it constituted the end of the human adventure in history, but conditionally, as for now, the best regime in which the properly formed moral aims of a human being can be achieved. For him sectarianism was for practical as well as theological reasons a false road for Christians. The Church was not a sect and could not escape the world, but only work out the best way in the existing one, using *non possumus* tactics, and the catacombs option, only in the conditions of grave idolatry which

⁹ The editors of *First Things* formulated the problem as follows: "If the judiciary continues on its present course, if it does not restrain itself, and if there is no way to restrain it we are witnessing the end of democracy. See a transcript of that symposium, with a discussion which followed." *The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics*, ed. R. J. Neuhaus, M. Muncy, Dallas 1997.

¹⁰ The term was probably used for the first time by Jacob Heilbrunn in *Neocon vs. Theocoon*, "New Republic", December 30, 1996, p. 20–24.

may corrupt a community. There was of course such a case which warranted for Neuhaus such a choice. This was abortion, which excluded the unborn from the common world of moral obligation, which is why Neuhaus battled it without hesitation.

As he never tired of insisting in an Augustinian fashion, a Christian was in this world, but not entirely of this world.¹¹ Yet there is a certain ambiguity in Neuhaus's reasoning about liberal democracy. St. Augustine lived in the Roman Empire, but he had no illusions about its corruption, even if many elements of it, for instance Roman law, were a universal possession of humanity. The Christian conscience, that is the true human conscience, was what counted for Augustine, and Rome was corrupting it. For Neuhaus that connection was much more nuanced, and he thought that there was a "pure" uncorrupted core of liberalism which could be either restored or searched for. That was not necessarily a bad pragmatic stance, but intellectually, and ultimately morally, it was risky. It is probable that there could never be the possibility of such a civil public square as Neuhaus longed for within the province of liberal ideology as a monistic ideology of the liberal Self. If so, then to be faithful to the City of God and St. Augustine's distinction it was necessary to discern the very structural impossibilities of such an argument within liberal democracy as it has developed, and to create a new one, so as to engage oneself in a fundamentally countercultural, anti-systemic activity.¹² To be honest, at the end of his life Neuhaus seemed to be more aware of such a dismal possibility. This was not only because the basics of his core religious beliefs were more and more incompatible with the tenets of existing liberal democracy, as they began to be codified now into a secular ideology of "human rights", with protests against such dogmas utterly ineffectual. Intimations of this subtle reconsideration process may be visible in an elegiac form in his public testament, *American Babylon*.

Catholics have of course always had a problem with the United States, and Neuhaus is not an exception here. The problem was not the transient one of political and social discrimination, which to all practical purposes disappeared in the 1950s. It was also not a problem of so-called "dual loyalty". The problem was theologically deeper. From the point of view of the Catholic orthodoxy there has always been something suspicious about a nation which stated in its foundational document, The Declaration of Independence, as one of its basic values the "pursuit of happiness", that is paradise on Earth, which was to be added, even if not predicted in the New Testament, into the promised paradise in Heaven. Of course

¹¹ R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon*, New York 2009, p. 11.

¹² This was a core of a feud with the paleoconservatives, who told Neuhaus that he was not recognizing that the constitutional liberal regime in the United States he was dreaming about had gone at least half a century ago, a fact that they claimed Neuhaus had not noticed. See *The End of Democracy?...*, p. 225–227. This of course implied that there was a possibility of sustaining a classical liberal constitutional "perpetuum mobile" of the American regime, a fascinating dream of the American conservatives, and a perennial baffling surprise not only of the cynical at large European intellectuals of all camps, let alone Catholics. This was also a feud with some Jewish neoconservative critics of the "First Things" symposium in 1997, who apparently seemed to tolerate Neuhaus's Catholic truths if they were relativized, or pushed aside from the public square. *Ibidem*, p. 218.

one could argue that this pursuit of happiness was part of such natural rights tied to the moral law prescribed by Creator. But the “pursuit of happiness” began to be understood, as one of the protagonists of *The Great Gatsby* remarked, as a license to treat America as a “great magic”, where everything was possible. From the point of view of Catholic doctrine this was a double heresy, theological and political. This heresy contributed to a decline in liberal Christianity in America, in both its Protestant and Catholic dimensions, in terms of metaphysical soundness.

There was also a strong expectation from non-Catholics that Catholicism would evolve gradually into a kind of religious individualism. A similar process befell Protestantism. Catholics were expected to filter the truths of faith through a prism of individual conscience.

The problem was not that an active search for faith among Catholics or spreading their faith was excluded from the public square; that was not feasible under the First Amendment doctrine of freedom of religion. What was expected on the side of the political and religious Protestant establishment was that the Catholic truth would be subordinated to the overreaching aim of American religiosity, that is a judgment of each individual conscience with slight attention given to theological orthodoxy. This individual conscience directed by the all-American individual “pursuit of happiness” would cause a situation whereby each faith would be allotted a niche for followers to nurture their faith, and in a similar way ethnic groups could nurture their individual identities. There was in such an approach a danger of trivialization, of turning religion into one of the Roman cults once supporting the glory of the empire, and now supporting the glory of America as a universal nation. Christianity and Catholicism, as any other religion, was to be turned into a kind of a social Gospel, a nice sublimation of a metaphysical longing into useful social causes, with charity and ubiquitous, all-tolerant vocabulary of forgiving love towards others, the world, and finally oneself, with a sprinkle of the “feel good” popular psychotherapy. The end station of such a development was a gradual decay of liberal Protestantism and also a decay of liberal Catholicism.¹³ The questions concerning the very essence of the reality of human existence began to morph into a kind of pantheistic spirituality aimed at “feeling good”. Catholicism, as happened earlier with liberal Protestantism, felt increasingly incapable of providing any clear criteria of moral judgment.

Protestantism could not sustain such pressure, and eventually split into liberal and fundamentalist wings. As for Catholicism, “opening windows” and “building bridges” to the world in the wake of the Second Vatican Council caused such a liberal Church to be headed by an increasingly liberal hierarchy, which split Catholicism and resulted overall in a civil war. That pertained to other Churches too, splitting them in the ‘70s into two warring camps, liberal and conservative.

¹³ An excellent analysis of this process was made in two articles by J. Bottum: *When the Swallows Come Back to Capistrano: Catholic Culture in America*, “First Things”, October 2006 and *The Death of Protestant America: A Political Theory of the Protestant Mainline*, “First Things”, August–September 2008.

This time the split was not between the traditional denominations of Catholics and Protestants, but within them, forming more or less visible alliances across denominations. Whatever the causes, consequences, and adequacy of responses, the fundamental issue went well beyond a matter of political, social, or even conventional doctrinal issues. The Churches had to confront a fundamental problem of the post-1968 liberal order, the problem of the ontological status of truth and its source, which liberal civilization for the first time began to question, with Christianity gradually being defined as irrelevant. An anthropology of the imperial Self was put in its place. What was at stake was the question how the Christian Churches, as well as any creedal faith, for instance Orthodox Judaism, should respond, and how they were going to function within such a liberal civilization tolerating them as “just” one of the versatile identity groups within the general framework of human rights.¹⁴

Such changes led to a dramatic questioning of traditional sources of human freedom and dignity, which the post-1968 monistic liberalism began to define anew. Its radical ontological and anthropological axiom began to be treated as a yardstick for legitimate behavior, in fact citizenship as such. It appeared that post-1968 liberalism had decided to wage an open war on the totality of human institutions, traditions, mores and wisdom itself, with its battle cry, taken from the New Left, of “emancipation” of everything from any conceivable “oppression”, which in fact meant the totality of the existing culture and religious life.¹⁵ Culture was defined as one seamless garb of post-modernist personal narratives, bound together by the ubiquitous prattle of “inclusion” of everything “excluded” in the world, without any judgment, hierarchy or condemnation for fear of “discrimination”, with solipsistic disintegration of common language and community life and a redefinition of human rights. Such a world view began to take over the Christian meaning of sin, substituting for it psycho-therapeutic dialogue and self-contentment.

The biblical narrative suddenly began to be one of the possible narratives, or identities, to be chosen at will among all other available ones, including simply a personal narrative of any subjective will. Such a biblical narrative might be useful for teaching the good morality thus aiding the liberal narrative of emancipation and inclusion. That constituted the end of Christendom, since the Bible in Christian civi-

¹⁴ D. B. Hart defined this issue dramatically for the Christian churches as simply a rejection of the very essence of Christianity, a position considered by monistic liberalism as being a precondition of legitimate functioning in a liberal state. The issue, as he put it, was straightforward “If we turn from Christ [the truth – AB] today, we turn only towards the god of absolute will, and embrace him under either his most monstrous or his most vapid aspect.” D. B. Hart, *Christ or Nothing*, “First Things”, October 2003, p. 47–57.

¹⁵ See: H. Hecló, *Christianity and American Democracy*, Cambridge 2007; for an explanation for why the conflict immediately touched the essence of human freedom see D. B. Hart, *Freedom and Decency*, “First Things”, June–July 2004, esp. p. 41–41. Alisdair MacIntyre claimed in that context that however one frames it, “liberalism is [always] preempting the debate...so that [objections to it] appear to have become debates within liberalism...so called conservatism and so-called radicalism in contemporary debates are in general merely staking horses for liberalism: the contemporary debates within modern political systems are almost exclusively between conservative liberals, liberal liberals and radical liberals. There is little place in such political systems for the criticism of the system itself, that is, for putting liberalism in question”. A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, as quoted [in:] E. T. Oakes, *The Achievement of Alisdair MacIntyre*, “First Things”, August–September 1996.

lization, which created the modern society by providing its humanistic justification, was not just one of the narratives which constituted a part of some greater, cosmic narrative, to which other narratives belonged. It was the exclusive Great Narrative, which contained within itself all other narratives and made all others redundant.¹⁶ The Church in that perspective was a depository of *anamnesis*, a guardian of memory, the essence of which was the Truth which elevated each human being to the image of God and made it untouchable by any other threatening human narrative, inexorably driven by a rationalized, utilitarian desire. The Church was not an organization with charitable, cultural or sociological theology, treated as exercises in perfection of one's ego.

Neuhaus was cursed and blessed to be part of such a drama. His response was as conscious as it was countercultural, doctrinally and politically. He understood, while still a Lutheran minister, that such a cultural and anthropological redefinition of reality posed a colossal challenge to traditional Christian orthodoxy. By implication it weakened the conflict with any other Christian Church, or currents within them, for whom the biblical narrative was an existential point of reference, while at the same time exacerbating such a conflict with these Churches, or the currents within them, which were more or less consciously accepting anti-biblical narrative. The same conflict, to be sure, was visible within liberalism, which began to split into all kinds of branches, with the so-called American liberal conservatives strongly clinging to the natural rights sources of American or human identity.

From a cultural and social point of view this was a new situation and made possible an opening on the part of all biblically faithful orthodox Churches to allay themselves, orthodox Catholics, fundamentalist Protestants, Orthodox Jews. Such an alliance was difficult to form. Protestant fundamentalism rebelled against liberal Protestantism, but escaped into its own world of faith, which from the point of view of the Catholic Church was emotional, not reasoned faith. Many fundamentalist churches reacted to the de facto creeping atheism of the Protestant Mainline Churches by escaping towards "unreasonable faith". Many Catholics distancing themselves from liberal Catholicism in the wake of the Second Vatican Council joined fundamentalists stressing born-again, evangelical aspects. But instead of "faith seeking understanding", these Catholics subconsciously found themselves as allies of "faith escaping from understanding". Such Catholics began to be looked upon as pawns in a war against "understanding destroying faith" preached by the Protestant left, that is liberal Protestantism. Catholicism began to split, as far as both the faithful and the priesthood were concerned.

Neuhaus, still as a Lutheran minister, was aware of different ways of expressing faith vis-à-vis the new liberal challenge, seeing the dialectical dimensions of the "unreasonable, escaping from understanding faith" of Protestant evangelicals with born-again, evangelical Catholics, "faith seeking understanding" of orthodox Catholics and Protestants. All of them reacted against the "understanding destroy-

¹⁶ D. B. Hart, *Christ or Nothing...*

ing faith” which united the liberal wings of the Protestant and Catholic Churches, accepting the Social Gospel narrative within the larger language of progressive, monistic liberal narrative, and the latter’s stance towards religion, treated as a generic phenomenon, irrespective of what it was.¹⁷ The churches, which began to stress less a proper understanding of the Gospel, discipline and traditional liturgy, including the Catholic Church, the most disciplined in its orthodoxy, began to crack. But the Catholic Church had such a problem on this scale for the first time, since what was at stake was not in fact a fight over the meaning of the Gospel, but one over the very relevance of the Church itself.¹⁸ A colossal schism comparable to the Reformation was looming large. It was during such turbulent times that Pope John Paul II took over the Church in 1978, and it was then that Neuhaus began to move towards orthodox Catholicism. Both eventually began to act in different realms, but they were very close theologically.

Neuhaus by temperament was a social activist and intellectual fighter, obsessed by questions over what the relationship between Christianity and the world, between the Church, and finally individual Christians and the world should be. He knew that Christianity was at a dramatic crossroads, and tried to answer his questions in response to the above developments, which amounted not only to a revolution inside Christianity, but to equally important evolutions inside of liberal, dominant Western doctrine. The first was threatening the integrity of the Christian creed; the second was threatening human freedom, and religious freedom at that. *The Naked Public Square* was a response to that dramatic predicament. Christianity, he said had a duty to engage culture energetically, and by that very fact to engage inescapably with politics as such. This was a more pressing task than ever, because Neuhaus already knew that the monistic pretensions of the post-1968 liberal politics, premised more and more on the idea that “the private is political” and thus needs to be “liberated” for the sake of individual rights, devour and dominate, in a totalitarian manner, more and more autonomous social bodies. This meant especially the bodies which were traditionally outside of politics and no concern for politics, the very core of the Christian understanding of freedom based on the Augustinian distinction between *sacrum* and *profanum*. This constituted an emasculation of civil society and a subordination of the people to the logic of state power operated by the elites professing such an ideology, the problem Neuhaus and Peter Berger dealt with in the influential pamphlet “To Empower People”.¹⁹ This engagement of culture was not

¹⁷ See for instance: R. J. Neuhaus’s essay published in: *Civil Religion and Political Theology*, ed. L. S. Rouser, Indiana 1986, p. 87–90, 209–211.

¹⁸ Within the Church there was also another current, less threatening at face value, because it officially did not subvert doctrine, simply transcending it. This was a drift towards “spirituality”, coming from East Asian religions, represented by such a prominent figure of Neuhaus’s generation, as the Trappist Thomas Merton, or the Jesuit Anthony de Mello S.J. See a comment on this in “First Things” 2006, Vol. 2, p. 53, 64–65.

¹⁹ P. L. Berger, R. J. Neuhaus, *To Empower People: the Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy*, Washington D.C., 1976. The concept of “private is political” is treated here figuratively. The slogan was invented by the radical feminist movement within the New Left “emancipation” ideology and inescapably dovetailed with the traditional liberal concern for individual rights. But once rights began to be grounded in an anthropology which

easy, but it had to be done. After John Courtney Murray, Neuhaus revived the tradition of “public theology”. He delineated his more theologically precise program in his important book *The Catholic Moment*, on his way to Catholicism and shortly before his conversion”.²⁰

Neuhaus championed a form of Catholic wisdom that the modern world could not tolerate except in a condescending way, either by ostracism or with a shrug. But he had no doubt, following Murray, that Roman Catholicism was

[...] the keeper of a truth that has everything to do with the right ordering of our lives together in the “City of Man”. Murray represents a tradition of “public theology” that takes the world up on its claim to be, above all else, reasonable. In this view the mission of Roman Catholicism is not to be a refuge from the world nor a crusade against the world, but a wisdom for the world. Murray did not want to diminish the distinctiveness, even the scandalon, of the Church With Walker Percy [we may] come to the perfectly sensible conclusion that the modern world is manifestly mad. By the measures of such a world a sane person might very well seem to be mad. [But] it makes all the difference....whether one is a fool for Christ or just plain fool ... Faith is for flaunting and the world must be challenged, but faith is not to be confused with a religious self-indulgence that ends up challenging not at all a world that has long since learned to tolerate almost anythingThere was, and there is, another Roman Catholicism that is determined to engage the world on its own terms. It is not enough ... to flaunt and defy ... [But this] scandalon of the Church [constitutes] the distinctiveness of the Church that, by contrast, highlights the distinctiveness of the civil society that we call the modern world ... When the Church engages in the modern world, it must employ also the language of the head ... the tradition of Thomas Aquinas [which] has ... far from existed its possibilities in building an ecumenical understanding of the Church in the world. This is one of “the riddles of Roman Catholicism”, how it contains the tradition of both romance and reason in its relation to the world.²¹

This engagement in culture may be based on several paradigmatic models. If we assume for the sake of argument H. Richard Niebuhr’s potential models for Christian engagement in culture on which Neuhaus relied, we have five such models: the Church against the world, the Church of the world, the Church above the world, the Church as the transformer of the world and the Church and the world in paradox.²² Neuhaus’s clearly stated choice was the fifth model. Only paradox seemed to be capacious enough and capable of holding the first four tensions all at once. That is why

made the imperial Self their source, with an auto-created individual morality, definition of oneself and the world, the concept of rights, and inescapably the concept of human rights at that, began to be defined in relation to it. This anthropology became a basic doctrine, for instance, of the US Supreme Court decision in “Planned Parenthood v. Casey” of 1992. As a consequence the list of rights began to be extended step by step, and because of autonomous institutions, like for instance families and churches, are treated as problematic institutions enslaving a “non-emanipated” autonomous individual. This gave modern liberalism the ominous twist of having a totalitarian potential, a monistic ideology waging war on any as yet not liberated institution. See on that process: A. McIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame IN 1981; also P. Manent, *A World beyond Politics? A Defense of the Nation State*, Princeton 2007.

²⁰ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment: “The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World*, San Francisco 1987.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 7–8.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 16–24.

[...] the Church is at points against the world, but always for the world by its participation in the transcendent, and it is ahead of the world by its anticipation of a future time, yet it is always of the world. And it is transformer of the world, not merely by providing spiritual energy for existing goals of change, but, most importantly, by reminding the world of its incompleteness, by preventing prideful or despairing acts of premature closure, by keeping the world open to the promised transformation that is the destiny of Church and world alike. Authentic paradox is not like a riddle ... that can be solved by greater understanding or the application of more careful reasoning. Authentic paradox, the paradox of the Church in the world, cannot be solved; it can only be superseded. It will be superseded, we have reason to believe, by the fulfillment of the promise, by the coming of the Kingdom.²³

The Church thus has to resist both the temptation of the Great Inquisitor to close history by political means in the name of the Gospel, and that of the Great Escape from this world, that desire of “saving negativity toward the word”, as Neuhaus formulated it.²⁴ The Church’s proposition here was to be premised upon a promise, and it was to be in tension with all such views of reality, as Neuhaus points out, premised simply upon the present world alone. The Church must also live in the present, but it is its promise which defines the ultimate truth about the present. The Church’s relationship to the world is

[...] essentially paradoxical. It is a relationship of yes and no, now and not yet. The Church will endure until the End Time, but along the way it is ever being tested as to whether it has the courage to live in paradoxical fidelity. Nowhere is that testing so severe, nowhere is the outcome of that testing so ominous, as in the Roman Catholic Church. ... the paradox cannot be resolved and must not be relaxed. It can only be superseded by the coming of the One who is both the consummation and companion of our common pilgrimage.²⁵

To fulfill that role the Church also has to define its moment properly, since it was a holy institution of the unholy people. To meet this double task, two intertwined missions – to the world and to America – had to be taken up. But they could only be accomplished, Neuhaus argued, by the Roman Catholic Church resisting the Protestant liberalization of faith, and also liberalization theology, which in many Christian circles coincided. The Church cannot “Protestantize”, since it would turn into one among myriad modern, social gospel Churches, turning to politics as a way of creating the kingdom on this earth. But this would amount to the greatest heresy of all, the immanentization of the *eschaton*. Neuhaus’s intellectual project was aimed at forming a conscious new coalition of Churches. Such a coalition could then engage culture with a proper understanding of its role in relation to the Christian promise of making the best of human beings, of calling them to heroism.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18. It was the latter’s course of Christian witnessing, as represented by a theologian Stanley Hauerwas, which became the basis of a friendly, if uncompromising argument between them, until the heated climax during the American engagement in Iraq in 2003 on the basis of the just war doctrine, which received conditional, and soon criticized, support from Neuhaus.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 288.

Neuhaus was one of the theologians and ministers who saw in John Paul II someone for whom they had been waiting for a long time, a pontiff absolutely at ease in this world and outside of it, ecumenical to the core, but at the same uncompromising on the most fundamental principles of the faith, who was engaging this world in an active way, always knowing where the center of the cosmos was, and who brought from his Polish heritage its most cherished and heroic value of freedom. But both the pope and Neuhaus represented probably the last optimistic Christians in the phase of Catholic engagement in the world, at least in the Western world, when it was still thought that it was possible to engage and move Western culture.

There was in the “Catholic Moment” a certain choice of a political project, if not overtly done, at least by implication. Neuhaus, like Murray before him, sided with the idea that at this point of time in human history Christianity could give qualified support to help sustain the liberal project. Or one should better say its American version, rooted in the Enlightenment, which was definitely British and American, not the Jacobin French one. Such a liberal American Enlightenment, explicitly promulgated in the universal, natural law language of the Declaration of Independence of 1776, contained within itself an assumption that its operating political idea of freedom could not be sustained without the spiritual resources of Christianity. Neuhaus was an heir here to all those American thinkers, politicians and preachers like Orestes Brownson, Abraham Lincoln, Richard Niebuhr, John Courtney Murray, or Martin Luther King. All of them claimed that it is impossible to understand and sustain the story of American freedom without the Christian story.²⁶

“American Babylon” and the hopes of civilized liberal democracy

With such a faith came Neuhaus’s conviction that liberal regimes on a course to aggressive secularism could somehow make a turnaround, that they could turn to Christianity, in the case of America an American foundational religion without which the cause of freedom could not be sustained. Behind such an argument was a much more far-fetched project to avoid a clash of civilizations and make the Western type of liberal freedom possible to contemplate for the non-Western, for instance Islamic world. As Neuhaus argued on many an occasion, there was no chance that these people could accept a Western type of liberal regime, if the operating principle of that regime was decisively anti-religious, and which made this anti-religiosity a *sine qua non condition* of building such a regime. That was, Neuhaus warned, a recipe for disaster on a global scale, since in such a case secularism, an aggressive ideology which refuses to give religion its rightful place in the public square and public deliberation, would turn out to be not a historical affliction of the Western liberal way, but its constitutive element. But it did not have to be so,

²⁶ See: A. Bryk, *Covenant, the Fear of Failure and Revivals as the Contemporary Sources of American Identity* [to be published].

and it was not so, argued Neuhaus, observing and seeking with great magnanimity the possibility of democratization of Islamic countries from despotism. There was in that hope a wonderful disposition towards the Christian idea of freedom being tantamount to the liberal idea of freedom, the modern equivalent of Christian universality straight from St. Paul's letters.²⁷

As far as his optimism was concerned life proved him wrong on many counts. By the end of his life he had realized that it was increasingly belied by the course events had taken in the Western world, let alone America. Europe had long ago turned out to base its project of the European Union on the premise that Christianity, its foundational religion, was not necessary to aid its freedom. It was also not fit to provide culturally the only European common identity. In fact the European Union was building its identity on a contemporary version of 18th-century French liberalism, with Christianity as the greatest enemy of freedom, in fact responsible for all the previous calamities in history.²⁸

His greatest disappointment was yet to come with America, even if it was not overtly articulated. Neuhaus experienced an acute sense of puzzlement, when he observed the confusion of languages into which American religiosity was sliding, in the face of the more and more aggressive secular liberalism. His beloved Catholic Church had to endure the agony of the sex abuse scandals, instead of assertively taking the lead from the declining mainline Protestantism, let alone "civilizing" and infusing with theologically reasoned argument the public debate, including the public debate into which the fundamentalist and evangelical wings of Protestantism thrust themselves.

General cultural trends have turned out to be more ominous, a situation long recognized in Europe and applauded there, but in America not only new, but looked upon with deep concern. True, the liberal wings of Christianity, whether Protestant or Catholic, have run their course and are drying out on the theological and cultural roads erroneously taken. It is also true that the new orthodox, conservative movements have increasingly set the tone of religious as well as American public language since the 1970s and '80s. Nevertheless, Neuhaus's optimism has not been corroborated by the hard realities of the American religiosity. Not only had the growth of liberal Christianity by the beginning of the 21st century reached its limits of expansion, but the American public has turned out to be less abiding religiously, which Neuhaus took for granted. And the picture of that religiosity is more and more blurred and confused.

²⁷ His Christian liberalism was ultimately very much a balancing act, which, some say, later in life led him to reckless political choices. Whatever the merits or demerits of such accusations, not all of them were coming from the circles of his avowed enemies. There is no doubt that his Christian liberalism was always "in danger of tipping over into an idolatrous Christianity that confuses America with the Church and vice versa, or into an idolatrous liberalism that acknowledges no authority higher than Hobbes Leviathan or the imperial self", in clear contradiction to his theoretical scheme of engagement on the part of the Christian explained in his books. R. Douthart, *By the Waters...*, "National Review", April 20, 2009, p. 48.

²⁸ See: A. Bryk, *The United States, the European Union, Eastern Europe: Different Approaches and Responses to Modernity*, "Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe" 2008, Vol. 1.

This picture is not only complicated by the offensive of the militant secular atheists, a kind of *déjà vu*, a pseudo-intellectual phenomenon reminiscent of the European Enlightenment fight against religion two centuries ago. This is a marginal phenomenon, even if a noisy one. These atheists are philosophically anachronistic and primitive. Theologically they express the depth of wisdom of a village atheist. In fact, they celebrate unreason over reason, ignorance over knowledge, hatred over understanding.²⁹ Although they may be hailed and marketed by the new secular, aggressive liberal cognoscenti of the media or the universities, their efficacy is limited, as is the efficacy of any fad of a moment used for sinister purposes of persuasive, self-serving manipulation. But the fact that they proliferate signifies the easy gullibility of the public, no longer sure what is their religiosity, with more and more Americans, along with the rest of the Western world, sliding slowly into a kind of pantheistic spirituality, the ominous prospect which Tocqueville observed as a possible spiritual dead-end station of the democratic man.³⁰ In the course of this process a kind of ersatz Christianity, a long term consequence of the liberal post-‘60s dissolution of Christian orthodoxy coupled with a spread of a therapeutic culture, has begun to proliferate, creating a phenomenon named “moralistic therapeutic deism”.³¹ Neuhaus was at the end of his life aware of this process. He attempted to explain the American religious dynamic and American liberal-democratic predicament in his last book, with the grim title *American Babylon: Notes of a Christian Exile*. It may seem to be a collection of hastily assembled essays, but it is one which is nevertheless bound by a profound underlying narrative. In *The Naked Public Square*, Neuhaus decried the exclusion of religion, chiefly Christianity, from public discussion and policy making. His argument was made less from a stance of a sectarian believer as from the point of view of a freedom-oriented man in a liberal democracy. He was convinced that once religion was driven from the public square a state would establish a virtual monopoly on public space and its basic meanings. By doing that, it would establish a pseudo-religion of its own, in fact imposing absolute sovereignty, with a corresponding diminution of human potential stemming from rightly ordered freedom. *American Babylon* takes up these thoughts, but it is additionally a book about America, Neuhaus’s trust in her people and their energy. This is finally a book about passionate, romantic adventure, and at the same time his testament, a profound meditation on a closing life.

²⁹ See on this the study of one of the most profound modern religious thinkers D. B. Hart, *Atheists Delusions: The Christian Revolution and its Fashionable Enemies*, Yale University Press 2009.

³⁰ A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Chicago 2000, p. 425–426.

³¹ The idea of a therapeutic culture was essentially predicated on the notion that it would be a substitute for Christianity. See A. R. Heintze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton 2004, something which Neuhaus pointed out in his review of Heintze’s book in one of his *Public Square* reviews. On the psychotherapeutic culture see the classic study by P. Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*, Wilmington 2006; the term “moralistic therapeutic deism” was introduced by the sociologist Christian Smith.

To the question whether the American freedom experiment was tied to Judeo-Christianity, because the overwhelming majority of Americans were Christians, or because the American experiment in freedom required Judeo-Christianity to sustain it, Neuhaus responded tentatively, but without hesitation. The American freedom experiment required Judeo-Christian anthropology for its sustenance. It provided a fundamental prerequisite for it, a metaphysical, pre-political division of powers between *sacrum* and *profanum*. This division was rooted in the distinctive ontology of a personal God, who had made a covenant with his people and with each person individually. *Yahweh* put such an individual under his which was absolute, because God could never be defined or touched, so his commands could never be destroyed or abolished. This covenant constituted the beginning of Western freedom, because it delegitimized once and for all any tyranny which might ever be attempted. It was this covenant, claimed Neuhaus, which gave rise to the chain of thought, tied to the practical, institutional experience of courageous people, which gave rise to the American republic, a universal achievement, and by implication the Christian gift to humanity.

American Babylon has a both polemical and devotional character, and it covers a vast amount of contemporary as well as eternal questions, culminating in a moving meditation on the nature of Christian hope. It weaves through theology as well as political philosophy issues, merging many currents. But its main theme is Augustinian in character, trying to explain the

[...] proper attitude that would-be inhabitants of the City of God should take toward the City of Man in which they find themselves in exile ... Are we in Babylon? Are we in exile? ... [Yes because] Babylon is a symbol for a place or idea.³²

Neuhaus is aware that to identify America with Babylon is all too easy, since many in the world use the language of anti-Americanism to show the utter confusion and moral conceit of Americans, combined at the same time with their allegedly irresponsible use of power. But to say that America is Babylon, claims Neuhaus, is not to compare it with other societies, but to compare it with that

[...] radically new order sought by all who know love's grief in refusing to settle for a community of less than truth and justice uncompromised. [For Christians], it is [always] exile from that new order.³³

This is not, as many in history accused Christians, especially Catholics, a dual belonging to and betrayal of the earthly homeland. Neuhaus explains that he belonged to America, accepting fully God's plan to know him through a mediation of American culture, a privilege which he cherished. Thus we accept our mundane existence within

³² R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon...*, p. 48–49.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

[...] the scandal of particularity that is [our] place in a world far short of the best of all possible worlds. This world, for all its well-earned satisfactions, is worthy of our love and allegiance. It is self-flattering conceit to think that we deserve a better world. What's wrong with this one begins with us. And yet we are dissatisfied. Our restless discontent takes the form not of complaint but of hope. There is a promise not yet fulfilled. One lives in discontented gratitude for the promise, which is to say one lives in hope.³⁴

Neuhaus was aware that one has to find a way of being in a world that is not yet the world for which one hopes. For Christians this has always been an especially wrenching issue, since they are the people who are “in but not of the world” in a time which is “now” but “not yet”, the Old Testament, Jewish in origin, idea. Christians thus live “between the times”, engaging others in a language which is both rational and eschatological, building rational, mental bridges so a “final leap of faith” is not an absurdity, but a rational choice left after all alternatives have been exhausted. Thus,

[...] all time is time toward home, time toward our true home in the New Jerusalem. And so there is a continuing tension between the “this-worldly” and the “otherworldly” dimensions of Christian existence ... the word for this is prolepsis, an act in which a hoped-for future is already present. For Christians, the supreme act of prolepsis is the Eucharist Eschatology refers to the last things, the final things, the ultimate destination of the story of God's dealings with the world of creation. In the Christian view, that destination, that eschaton, has already appeared within history in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead ... The Christian claim is that God – the Absolute, Being Itself, the Source and End of all that is has invested himself in the human project. This happened with the Incarnation. The People of God is a pilgrim people ... But at the end of the day, we say with Paul, “Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known”.³⁵

So Neuhaus's is a Christian narrative which is, of course, also a narrative within the entire Jewish narrative of the Old Testament, reaching to the Books of Genesis and Exodus, with the promise of Moses' Tablets. He is at the same time a Christian apologist in the best understanding of the word “apology”, a sense succinctly captured by the great Catholic apologist and writer Hilaire Belloc:

The Catholic Church is the exponent of *Reality*. In the twentieth century Catholics are the only organized body consistently appealing to reason. For if God is not, then all falsehoods, though each prove the rest false, are each true, and every evil is its own good, and there is confusion everywhere. But if God is, then the world can stand.³⁶

Where is that *Reality*, and where is that opening to individual freedom? For Neuhaus this was an absolutely rational statement, since from it comes the Augustinian framework of *sacrum* and *profanum*. This is the shortest definition of the Western idea of freedom, claimed Neuhaus, when power was limited not by any

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 13–15, 21–22.

³⁶ Quoted from: *The Essential Belloc: A Prophet for Our Times*, ed. S. Bloch, Charlotte 2011.

human institutional framework, but by a metaphysical perspective which killed once and for all any despotic pretensions of the powers that be. This was the basis upon which any regime was from now on defined as legitimate or illegitimate. It was legitimate only when a state was providing the conditions for the development of a properly shaped conscience. This Augustinian framework is grounded in the idea of God as a person, which of course comes from Judaism. It is this Judeo-Christian narrative which has since antiquity become the freedom narrative of the West. Of course, writes Neuhaus,

[...] the earthly city of Augustine's time was the Roman Empire. The earthly city to which [I] attend is chiefly, but by no means only, America. Augustine's City of God provides a conceptual framework. For Augustine, the biblical narrative provides the drama of which we are part. City of God weaves into that narrative Augustine's penetrating insights into the possibilities and limits of the human condition [with] Augustinian sensibility. It is the sensibility of the pilgrim through time who resolutely resists the temptation to despair in the face of history's disappointments and tragedies, and just as resolutely declines the delusion of having arrived at history's end.³⁷

It is within this Augustinian framework that Neuhaus deals with confused, always in tension, and interrelated problems of the modern American liberal-democratic experience. For Neuhaus the paramount issue is as always the dignity of human person as realized in freedom, of which the *sine qua non* element is a properly understood religious freedom. Here he is a warrior. But his confrontation with adversaries is always with an open heart. His form is dialogical, and his major enemies are not people who have different views, but monistic ideologues, totalitarians of one idea, who want to exclude others from the civilizational circle of moral conversation, as he liked to say, barbarians who look with disdain at "traditional values", refusing to be limited at all by what we know, good and evil, right and wrong. To wit by wisdom we have received, which is an instinctual point of orientation of the overwhelming number of the people.

American Babylon is in general a religious and cultural meditation and polemic, touching on issues ranging from the relationship of Christianity with postmodernity, the confused and tense relationship with monistic liberalism as a modern ideology of the secular state, through the question of a proper balance between political activity and eschatological expectation, to, finally, the relationship of Christianity to the American experiment. It also contains Neuhaus's special, personal, beloved subjects, written with hope mixed with delicate disappointments, interrupted by promising as well as false truces, of which the relationship of Christianity with the Jews, especially in America, occupies a paramount position. Neuhaus was a passionate man, but when it comes to Christian-Jewish relations his passion was at the same time tied to a romantic, in a theological sense, philosemitism, a stance which had, of course, many practical consequences as well.³⁸ Hoping cannot be

³⁷ R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon...*, p. 23.

³⁸ I owe the phrase "romantic philosemitism" to D. H. Hart, *Con Man*, "The New Criterion", September 2006, p. 127.

helped, observes Neuhaus, but the Christian reason for hope is intimately and inseparably connected with the people of Israel.

Neuhaus recognizes the dramatic dilemmas and challenges of Christian-Jewish inter-faith relations. They are often messy and acrimonious, fused with memories of bitter scars from the past, and sometimes an arrogance and bad will on both sides as well. He does not hide all the shades of such a dialogue. Yet he is adamant in stressing that such misunderstandings, complications, differences of languages used should and might be overcome with a mutual feeling of friendship and magnanimity. Both sides should be vitally interested in keeping up a meta-physical awareness which may come only from a properly understood freedom of religious experience.

This, argues Neuhaus, is the fundamental rock of human freedom, and at the same time it provides the surest basis of social and political security for all sides concerned. The main enemy of such freedom and security today is radical secularism. This radical secularism, rooted in an anthropology of the imperial Self, aims at the “naked public square” totally devoid of any transcendent dimension which is the only true guarantee of human dignity and the rights stemming from it. For Neuhaus, Jews and Christians should be aware of that danger. This monistic liberalism can push liberal democracy onto the slippery slope towards barbarism. If secular Jews do not recognize that such liberalism might be a danger to freedom as such, of which the authentic freedom of religion is a foundation stone, then they may fool themselves that such horrid experiences as happened before, including the Holocaust, can never be repeated.”³⁹

Neuhaus refuses to subject the Christian-Jewish dialogue to the logic of liberal secular monism which would make the Christian-Jewish relationship a trite affair of looking at the Jewish-Christian drama not in a perspective of the eternal covenant offered to them by the God of Abraham, but through the lenses of recent calamities. If such a perspective is going to be obscured, Jews and Christians may easily slide into historical obsessions with past wrongs, mainly the ones which Christians committed towards Jews. In such a situation the true religion of the Jews and, by implication, the logic of Christian-Jewish dialogue, will be not the religion of the God of Abraham, but a “religion of the Holocaust”. This may constitute the highest form of idolatry, imposed on both sides by the liberal monistic narrative, and a posthumous victory of Hitler.

Friendship between a Jew and a Christian can be secured, thinks Neuhaus,

[...] in our shared love for God of Israel; the historical forms we call Judaism and Christianity will be transcended, but not superseded, by the fulfillment of eschatological promise. But along the way to that final fulfillment, there is no avoiding the fact that we are locked in argument. It is an argument by which – for both Jew and Christian – conscience is formed, witness honed, and friendship deepened. This is our destiny, and this is our duty, as members of the one people of God

³⁹ R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon...*, p. 168–169, 163, 165.

– a people of God for which there is no plural. The Church does not go [today] outside herself but more deeply within herself to engage Jews and Judaism. Christians believe that that redemption that is surely yet to come has already appeared in the Redeemer [Jews] sense of heightened expectation of something new – as distinct from the confirmation of a completely foregone and foreknown conclusion – seems to me the appropriate mode of eschatological hope for Christians. Knowing that we do not yet know even as we are known, we know that there is more to be known. Dialogue between Jews and Christians should be marked by an element of curiosity, by shared exploration of what we do not know, and perhaps cannot know until the End of Time.⁴⁰

For Neuhaus, if a true, deep theological alliance might be formed, properly understood Christian-Jewish dialogue in the contemporary world is essential for a wise approach to politics and freedom as such. Both Jews and Christians are uniquely equipped to contribute to the human story of freedom by engaging in a secular world with their understanding of the human journey on earth. It is especially important for them to relativize the claims of historical and political self-sustained, and self-justified argument, stemming from a materialistic concept of reality. They should contribute to a decent society, countering the pretensions of the secular, monistic mind, which has a tendency to turn religions, and Christianity and Judaism as the religions of the transcendent God especially, into a castrated spirituality sustaining and enhancing, as in Rome, the glory of the naked state power. This is because Christians and Jews

[...] bear witness together. These are truths without which our life in exile is, in the words of Thomas Hobbes, ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’. They are truths with which, in the vision of the prophet Jeremiah, the peace of our place of exile, in which we find our peace, can be approximately secured.⁴¹

If writing honestly about the relationships between Christians and Jews means writing about problems, the theological problems which Christianity faces in relations to modernity and postmodernity, the issue which occupied Neuhaus’s thought essentially one way or another throughout all his writings, they are summed up in *American Babylon*. Neuhaus wrestles with the fundamental problem of how Christianity has to face the hegemonic pretensions of the Enlightenment. This Enlightenment, with its truncated concept of rationality, is in an existential sense capable of explaining nothing about the ultimate predicament of human existence. But in a political sense, despite the pretensions of monistic liberalism, which requires all other alternative explanations of reality to be reduced to an inconsequential hobby of a private pursuit, it is also flawed. This is an old theological problem which in contemporary Christianity can be symbolically defined as a contest of two visions. One is the vision of Karl Rahner, with his concept of “anthropological breakthrough” which considered Christianity to be an inescapable part of modern consciousness. Hence the demand to understand the world from within it. The other

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 180–181.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 182.

was the perspective of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who, in the line of the great Protestant theologian Karl Barth, considered the Christian's role as a witness to the *anamnesis*. But this required defiance in face of the pretensions of the Enlightenment and modernity.

Neuhaus rejects siding with the postmodernist anti-rational rebellion, although he recognizes the dramatic problem which the Christians face. Subjected to the constant pressure of rationality alone, and its political equivalent of the monistic liberalism of rights, without any legitimate public recognition of the wisdom of tradition or revelation, they feel more and more like paratroopers dropped into an enemy's territory. The contemporary liberal culture, smug enough to think that liberalism can sustain the political and moral structure of rights without any recourse to tradition or revelation, seems to them not only arid, but outright dangerous. It is obvious that such liberalism lacks proper ontological and anthropological foundations. For this very reason it is not only a spent intellectual force, circling around within the extremely narrow confines of taken-for-granted existential axioms and in the process itself subverting the very basis of rationality of which it claims to be a master. But at the same time, refusing to recognize that, and not allowing other traditions to flourish in the public square, or pressing them to become just a folklore-type ornament, it is turning into a form of a monistic ideology with outright totalitarian pretensions.

However, Neuhaus rejects the postmodernist challenge as a tool of helping Christians to resist such totalitarian pretensions. He deals with this problem in an extensive discussion about Richard Rorty and the "age of irony" he symbolically represents. Neuhaus treats irony as a strategy to cope with the ubiquitous homelessness of the modern age, morphed into postmodern suspicion of everything. This suspicion, bordering on a happy celebration of senselessness and despair, is nevertheless a distinct form of response to that homelessness that is in fact inimical to Christianity. It is also a form of a modern faith, a default line of behavior in the face of disillusion and creeping despair, a road to nihilism and likely violence, not a meaningful response. Postmodernism is an attempt to see through all statements on reality as foundational statements and reduce them, including Christianity, to absurdity.⁴²

The postmodern liberal project is thus the most radical form of pushing Christians beyond the public square, or all people who accept the classical concept of truth, by considering them not just in the wrong about reality, but as deluded, by the very fact of venturing into making any foundational statement. But another consequence is the total destruction of meaningful language. Culture cannot thus teach us anything, will is everything, and the greatest fear is a fear of not being novel, the only form of distinction left to the postmodern man in the sea of nonsense in his own life.⁴³ For Rorty everyone who is oriented in fundamental questions of

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 131.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 149–150.

reality should be forced to privatize their project. By force, law, or ridicule, using the vocabulary of political correctness which today begins to assume the role of a tool not of communication but of repression, with such words as “tolerance”, “non-judgmentalism”, “diversity”, or “opinionated”. Rorthy also cannot bear the fact that his type of irony – being in fact a *mélange* of old vocabularies and traditions, unless we assume that his reason achieved an absolute point of neutral observation – may be just *nothing*, meaning *nothing* to the people whose innermost longing of reason or heart push them into the existing traditions, whose ontological status is, by Rorthy’s standards, exactly the same as the ironic self-destructive narratives of his will.

But it is nonsense to assume that such narratives do not come from old narratives, but claim to be transcending them, since by Rorthy’s atheistic standards they may only result from blind chemical reactions resulting in self-destruction.⁴⁴ From the point of view of orthodox Christians and, Neuhaus adds, observant Jews, the post-modernists do not even entertain the notion of the existence of such a vocabulary. For him everything “just happened”, including the appearance of the notion that everything just happened. But Christians and Jews, even if they cannot prove the compelling reasons by which they are persuaded to choose such justified beliefs, believe that in the end it will be proven that not everything just happened. That Christian eschatology, and as a consequence anthropology, does not terminate in the self.

Rorthy’s caricature of religion, including above all Christianity, means that he is unable to understand the phenomenon of religion, considering it simply as a dead, overcome “language”. For him the postmodernist project seems to be the third stage of the Enlightenment, succeeding rationalism and Romanticism, but this is an illusion. Together with Descartes and Hume, Rorthy has as his major enemy the “Great Trinity” of enemies: religion, tradition and authority, which are just inherited, thus necessary to be discarded entities and the language which depicts them. Neuhaus shows that such a tradition is a part of the great movement of the rationalist Enlightenment. It is part of the general attitude of “liberation”, which after 1968 left philosophers’ studies and hit the streets with a demand for a political dismantling of all “oppressive” institutions. But such projects end where all projects of self-salvation end, in “moral autcreation” and a narcissistic justification of base desire, when nothing matters, except nice living decided by the “self”, outside of any conversation about the common purposes of human beings.⁴⁵

For Neuhaus this is just a stale repetition of absolute skepticism and nihilism, an utterly solipsistic guidance to life, since Rorthy concedes that he cannot prove that his narrative and its vocabulary are true, just best adjusted, pragmatic, so to speak. But with that, he has no reasoned criteria of any hierarchy of goods, what is better and what is worse, and his desire to continue his cherished liberal democracy is just hanging in the air.⁴⁶ Neuhaus makes Rorthy’s story one of the

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 155–156.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 157.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 159–161.

central threats for liberal civilization in his *American Babylon* narrative. This is so because it constitutes one example of the much more serious intellectual and moral disarray in which Western culture found itself, which needs to be countered with “hope which gives reasons”. Not, adds Neuhaus, because people should accept them without any conditions, but because this is the only response to despair and the only chance to support the liberal democratic regime, which, lacking ubiquitous narratives like that, does not have any justification why anybody should defend it.⁴⁷

Postmodernism is a dead end solution, and although Neuhaus was an enemy of the secular rationalism eliminating religion that is equally aggressive in its operation, he had no doubts that religious believers should never side with reconstructionists, even if ostensibly they battle the hegemonic pretensions of the Enlightenment. One cannot use Nietzsche or Rorty to battle Voltaire, warned Neuhaus, since the totalitarian pretensions of the secular reason cannot be battled by nihilists. They do not care. The new secular totalitarians can be battled only by people who believe that this world has sense and a meaning, that there is truth about reality and that truth is a source which can be rationally searched for, but only found with love.

Secular humanists, the idea of progress, and Christianity today

This brings Neuhaus to the greatest feud today: between secularists, or secular humanists, or atheists, and religious people, or to put it better the people of the transcendent God. Secular humanists are typically those who acknowledge no reality that transcends the *saeculum*, meaning the temporal order. In this view, all that was and is to be confined within the limits of history. But do such humanists, can such humanists, live without hope? Some kind of eschatology, a vision of what might be and perhaps will be, a sense of destination in which history culminates in the true community for which we long, is inherent in the thought and action of all serious people. Thoughtful humanists know that this longing, this presupposition of purposeful action, has again and again ended up in utopian irrelevance, chaos and tyranny. They want no more of that. What are they to do with this hope that will not go away and cannot be discarded without risking the loss of their humanity, and how are they rationally to explain it? Many invest their hope in historical progress, and moral progress at that.⁴⁸ Few things are so constitutive of modern secularism as the idea that progress, which means essentially incessant change, is

[...] to something better ... it has an end ... what the Greek called a *telos*. ... Change is [thus] good because it is a movement toward the better on history's way toward some unspecified, and perhaps unspecifiable good. Such is an article of faith in the mindset we call modern.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 162.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 244.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

Christians do not believe in the uninterrupted triumphal march of history, “experience both ... personal and social is crucifixion; it is the way of the cross. At the same time, the cross is not the final word. There is resurrection”.⁵⁰ For the secularist, somehow on the road of that historical progress a compelling moral sense of right and wrong would emerge. But in fact, observed Neuhaus, what could only emerge is an interplay of utility mixed with power to hasten history. The Enlightened rationalism decoupled history and progress from the transcendental commands and rationality in search of moral sense, apart from metaphysics, so moral virtues can be created. Instead it began to slide into the nihilism of postmodernism, the rationalized irrationality which claims at the same time to possess an insight where history is going, and that this history is moral and accumulating moral progress. But this is sheer nonsense. There were attempts to produce ethics to which rational persons, acting rationally, must give assent, then they failed. The best known here was of course the Kantian attempt. If they produced, sometimes, and in some places, decent societies, it was because society was for a time able to live off the capital of earlier traditions of virtue. But now the capital has been depleted. The failure of the Enlightenment moral project has not come with a moral triumph, but moral nihilism and acedia, with a corresponding desperate default line, of grounding morality in an auto-creation of the autonomous, imperial Self defined as a basis of human dignity. That is why post-modernity is nothing new, but a version of modernity which failed, and the nihilistic avant-garde is a regression to the rule of barbarians. Neuhaus points out that barbarians today, as in classical Greece, are defined as those who are

[...] outside the civilizational circle of conversation about how we ought to order our life together, about the meaning of right and wrong, good and evil. They are those who know nothing and insist that nothing can be known about such matters. Yet they admit that we have no choice but to choose, to act upon our preference, in the full awareness that we can appeal to no authority beyond our willing it to be so.⁵¹

It may be the case that such barbarians will dominate within the liberal democracy, that they will define the monistic parameters of liberalism for a long time. Those who are called barbarians are not overt primitives; they resemble more the gentle, cultivated nihilists of ancient Rome, with diplomas from the most distinguished universities certifying that they are supposedly “the brightest and the best”. But this, Neuhaus points out, entirely misses the point. The new barbarians are

[...] not barbarians because of the hypersophistication with which they have removed themselves from ... the civilizational circle of moral conversation. In simplest terms, we may speak of “traditional values”. The barbarians refuse to be limited by what we know, by the wisdom we have received, and good and evil, right and wrong. For them the past is merely a prelude. The wisdom of

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

history is disenfranchised. Only the present gets a vote. ... What the powerful agree to call truth is what we will to be. In the beginning is not the Word but the Act. Truth is not discerned or discovered but is the product of our acting, knowing all the while that the action we call "choice" is only an illusion, for all our thinking, choosing, and acting is, in turn, the product of those little synapses in the brain following their predetermined course. And so it is that Nietzsche in his apparent triumph is finally defeated as the will to power is exposed in all its pitiful impotence one cannot be both. We cannot be, at the same time, both the captives and the masters of nature.⁵²

What then, asks Neuhaus, for the claims of materialists and liberal monists that there is moral progress in history and that they know how to introduce it, if only they created conditions for each to exercise their autonomous will, liberated from the "oppressions" of religion, tradition, culture in general. Then they would base human moral progress on a preconceived will of a perfect moral order. There is, of course,

[...] no doubt that within a particular civilizational circle, there is moral progress, and regress [sic!] in how we live, but there is no progress in the sense of moving beyond the moral truths that constitute the circle itself we can develop not further implications of those truths, or we can step outside the circle by denying that there is such a thing as moral truth.⁵³

Our times are hyper-sophisticated intellectually and with that we have painted ourselves into a moral Mexican corner, a modern Pontius Pilate rendition of the question "What is truth?" Neuhaus stands for permanent truths which he shows no hesitation in calling natural law, visible for instance in the principles of the Declaration of Independence. But such principles are also called first principles in ethics, and by definition are always first. For the moral analysis to go beyond or behind them would require an assumption that human consciousness can go beyond or behind itself. Of course such first principles draw support from all religious and moral traditions in inculcating certain rules, since these are the axioms that constitute the civilizational circle.

The most corrosive attack on such principles, as Neuhaus points out, is modern hermeneutics of suspicion, which comes from rudimentary Marxism, which claims that every rule, or law, or custom is perceived to have behind it some hidden purpose, power protecting its own interests. As a consequence, commands and limits are "explained away", to the cheering of many contemporaries, for whom this seeing through the first principles of ethics is exactly to see nothing, which means to see that there is nothing except what we will to do. So speak, points out Neuhaus, "the barbarians among us..."⁵⁴

These modern barbarians, often in Armani suits, are fundamentally wrong, also because – Neuhaus follows here in the footsteps of Pope Benedict XVI in his 2007 encyclical *Spe Salvi* [Saved in Hope] – to talk about progress in a materialistic

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 80–81.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

sense, as if the historical march would secure us higher and higher plateaus of our once and for all “won freedoms” and “morals”, is a fundamental error. In the sphere of ethical awareness and first of all moral decision, there is no accumulation, since each man’s freedom is always unique. It is new and must be utilized anew. Such decisions can never be made in advance by others, since if they were, our freedom would be taken from us. Those who think that history aims at a particular point, and that they carry with them an awareness of a better moral future progressively attached, are prone, less or more consciously, to treat others who are not with them as simpletons, or corrupt. They should thus be nudged, by different means, towards progressive morality. But that would be an abolition of freedom.⁵⁵

Neuhaus then looks at the recent and absolutely unexpected spate of books written by atheists, which have acquired enormous media prominence. One would assume that such a type of atheistic literature, with fury matching its sterile and shallow arguments, was gone with the “village atheists” of the end of the 19th century. One would also assume that in the West, with secularization theory taken for granted, such literature would be redundant for sophisticates. But Neuhaus realizes that this is a new situation, and it signifies “a last gasp of angry protest against a world that is becoming ever more overtly religious”,⁵⁶ since secularization has evidently not gone hand in hand with modernization, Europe being just an exception confirming the observation. Yet although secularization theory failed as a tool of explanation of the modernized world, it could be right in the sense that the old way of expressing religious convictions could be gone.

Religion in such a case would become more unorthodox, more individualistic, more “spiritual”, so to speak. But at the same time there is a growing enmity between the secularized elites and the religious masses, an old problem of Europe and a new phenomenon in America.⁵⁷ But a pitting of faith against reason and belief against knowledge was at the same time connected with another subtle distinction, between something which was legitimately public and something which was private, and thus definitely illegitimate in public. In this way of thinking, shows Neuhaus, there is

[...] a radical departure from the public nature of religion, whether that religion has to do with the ancient gods of the city or with the biblical Lord who rules the nations the gods of the city and the God of the Bible are emphatically public. The confinement of the question of God or of the gods to the private sphere constitutes what might be described as political atheism many today who are believers in private have been persuaded, or intimidated, into accepting political atheism. This powerfully contributes to ... the naked public square.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 84–85.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 93.

One should add that this crop of new atheistic vitriol which has unexpectedly been visible of late might not be as irrational as Neuhaus thought. It constitutes the latest action on the part of the secularized elites, this time by proxy, to show their utter impatience towards people of belief. In other words, the 18th-century antireligious tracts engaged in a modicum of argument over ideas. Today's atheists simply show furious impatience towards not so much beliefs, as believers as people who refuse to see the light, resisting a future of progressive education. Contemporary atheism is as much an intellectual – or, one should say, quasi-intellectual – effort as it is first of all a political effort to eliminate believers totally from public life so they cease to conspire to subvert the march of progress. It is, in other words, an ideology in the service of naked power.

Neuhaus thinks that this might be, unfortunately, the future of Western intellectual culture. This culture will allow only the post-Enlightenment language of monistic liberalism, the dominant form of public discourse today. It has abandoned all pretenses to any search for a foundational justification of its claim to political and cultural monopoly, accepting an exclusivist anthropology of the imperial Self creating morality in a process of auto-creation. In a process of such monistic redefinition it tries to redefine its own human rights culture accordingly. The free market is an ideal here. The liberal, free market of everything, overseeing by means of a liberal state a homeostasis between Christians, Jews, Muslims, Marxists, Nietzscheans, utilitarians, devotees of Mother Gaia, and transsexuality, so they would not overstep the boundaries of a liberal certified discourse. This is a society in the image of a great university class, where under the teacher's supervision all points are freely discussed, and then all go for a beer. Such an intellectual discussion is another instance of modish fads which currently saturate the public square with such words as “diversity”, “multiculturalism” or tolerance, or the right never “to be offended”.⁵⁹

Neuhaus asks the question, scandalous from the point of view of such monistic liberalism, “Can these atheists be good citizens?” This is a striking question for modern liberal sensibilities awash with a vocabulary studded with words such as “tolerance”, “non-discrimination”, or “non-judgmentalism”. Neuhaus does not say that only religious people can be good citizens. After all he was one of the harshest critics, albeit rational, of corruption in the American Church in the wake of the pedophile scandal in 2001 and 2002. Neuhaus does not want to say that an atheist cannot be an exemplary moral person. Yet it all hangs on the definition of who is a citizen, and what are the ultimate bases of the liberal order. He realizes that the question whether atheists can be good citizens

[...] engages concerns that go beyond individual rectitude or moral and intellectual seriousness. As a generality, can people who do not acknowledge that they are accountable to a truth higher than the self, a truth that is not dependent upon the self, really be trusted?⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 102.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 106.

As Neuhaus stresses, politics in its nature, if not always in its practice, was and is fundamentally a moral enterprise, whether we want it or not, by conscious intent or by default. In 1787 as today, questions of “oughtness” are moral questions, and the very vocabulary of politics is definitely moral, since we

[...] debate what is right and what is wrong, what is fair and what is unfair, what serves and what disserves the common good. In any society, moral judgments draw upon the deepest beliefs and convictions held by the people of that society. In America and most of the world, those beliefs and convictions are inseparable from religious traditions. This may seem self-evident to most readers, but in fact it touches on questions that continue to be hotly contested. It is true that the Constitution establishes a secular order of government. The word “secular” derives from the Latin *saeculum*, which means the present time. To say that this govern, and is secular is to say that it is for the present time; it is a temporal order. It is for the city of man, not the City of God. The American founders did not establish this constitutional order to be a church, although for some secularists it may be the closest thing they have to a church. This constitutional order is temporal, provisional, for the time being. It is not the New Jerusalem.⁶¹

The aggressive secular movement trying to capture and redefine American history is an object of Neuhaus’ concern. It persuades Americans that the history of their country was a secular, anti-religious enterprise. But America is an “incorrigibly and pervasively religious society”.⁶² The social compact of 1787 was and is premised upon a sense of covenantal purpose guiding this *novus ordo seclorum*. Can an atheist, asks Neuhaus provocatively, be a citizen in such a nation? Of course he can be a citizen, and unreflexively a decent one, but he cannot be a good citizen. Such a citizen is dependent on others who sustain such a compact in which he can have a “free ride”. Neuhaus has a heroic, romantic image of Christianity and of American republican government. Christianity and citizenship are linked as two kinds of active stance towards public life, challenging its slide towards moral indifference and utter privatization. Moreover, this is an image of reality which needs to be defended by citizens in loyalty to their republic, not because it is theirs, stronger, or defending their interests better. This is the kind of a debased patriotism which Neuhaus abhors. America is a regime worth supporting, not because it is strong or belongs to Americans, but because it is moral, despite all its concrete foibles, stupidities and crimes committed in history, the idea so well captured in the Declaration of Independence. That is why an atheist citizen “cannot be a good citizen”, because he cannot give a compelling reason why he or she should sustain such a public order and towards what end, except as a simple framework sustained for security and consumption reasons, both rooted in egotistical individual wishes.⁶³

Neuhaus is aware that there are atheists, and then there are atheists. There are many who are morally earnest, as were the protagonists of Albert Camus’s novels, whom he calls “saints without God”. But there are the “new atheists” who exult in

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 115.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 116.

assaulting religiously grounded foundations of the republican order. They glorify transgressive ways of thinking and behavior. From their indulgence and supposedly sophisticated, but in fact shallow superiority, which they equate with moral probity, they scandalize the religious people. But at the same time they preach their “warped” new religion of nothingness. This new breed of atheists fights not only with faith and arguments for it. New Atheists do not have such arguments, and the arguments they have are as primitive as they can be. In reality they fight religious people who allegedly offend their convictions that such people should not exist, since their truncated reason tells them that such a possibility is a rational impossibility. By religious people they mean of course mainly Christians and Christianity. But they are wrong, because those who

[...] adhere to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus turn out to be the best citizens. Those who were once called [in imperial Roman times] “atheists” are now the most persuasive defenders not of the gods but of the good reasons for this regime of ordered liberty. They are that not despite the fact that their loyalty to this polis is qualified by a higher loyalty, but because of it. ... The best of the good reasons they give in defending this regime is that it makes a sharply limited claim upon the loyalty of its citizens. The ultimate allegiance of the faithful is not to the regime or to its constituting texts, but to the City of God and the sacred texts that guide our path toward that destination. We are dual citizens in a regime that ... was designed for such duality. When the political order forgets itself and reestablishes the gods of the polis, even if it does so in the name of liberal democracy, these citizens have no choice but to run the risk of once again being called “atheists”.⁶⁴

Neuhaus argues to those trying to destroy the morally given account why the American liberal regime is good and what its ultimate justifications are as destroying the very basis of the regime which protects them in the first place. The new regime they are trying to create is a monistic regime where they are to be the new secular “priests” and their will for power grounded. All grounded solely in an imperial, self-explaining and circular morality of the imperial Self, its moral autcreation. The new atheists cannot give any compelling account in defense of the regime of which they are part. This is so because in democracy society and government requires reasons. Community is communication; it depends on reasons that draw their authority from what transcends people, otherwise we are engaged in a life of sheer cheerful nihilism coupled with a debased utility. The new atheists represent a wrong, community-destroying way, which would also annihilate those who advocate such a society.

What, then, would be the conditions for a properly given moral account of why such a liberal regime as America should exist? What kind of civilizational circle of moral conversation is necessary, and what are the public conditions in which such a moral conversation could take place? Neuhaus realizes that the public square is a domain of politics and “politics is conflictual”. The true community is impossible in the *polis*, which is the “city of man”, since such a community is only the one in which human alienation will be finally fulfilled, which is tantamount

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

to this ideal state of living together in the truth.⁶⁵ Such is the price of wisdom in the “city of man” which is not cynicism but wisdom, which was also contained in the “genius of the American constitutional order”. This constitutional order allows us to combine political mundane operations with loftier aspirations, with a clear understanding at the same time that “aspirations are tethered to interests”. But this realism recognizes that it is usually best secured by the contest of mundane interests typically claiming to be in the service of The Public Interest.⁶⁶

It is here that Neuhaus defends the absolute necessity of religious presence in the public square. His idea, put forth in 1984 in *The Naked Public Square*, was not to be understood as a call for action. As he points out, it was sometimes understood as a call to engage in political activity in a direct way. For him

[...] the alternative to the naked public square – meaning public life stripped of religion and religiously grounded argument – is not the sacred public square, but the civil public square. The sacred public square is located in the New Jerusalem the best that can be done in Babylon is to maintain, usually with great difficulty. The best that can be done in Babylon is to maintain, usually with great difficulty, a civil public square. In the civil public square, all have a right to participate – not only because they are citizens so entitled by this constitutional order, but also, and more fundamentally, because we recognize that they are possessed of a human dignity that cannot be denied without threatening the ever fragile earthly city on which we all depend.⁶⁷

Neuhaus presents several reasons here for why the public presence of religion is thus necessary for the maintenance of a free, democratic order.

This religious, Judeo-Christian voice is one of the most important public voices, because it is rational, and its verity is grounded in realism about human existence. Thus, aggressive secularism, which tries to eliminate Judeo-Christian biblical religion from the public square, constitutes a totalitarian attempt to monopolize the definition about human existence and then impose it by politics and law on the public square. This is definitely not a voice for a proper separation of a state and religion. Religious people have the right to participate in public life, because this is a fundamental life which stems both from their human dignity and from their citizenship, which implicitly has to recognize the equality of everyone in public life. The argument that citizens could enter the public square while separating their religious beliefs from their public activity, a standard secularist argument which has become a staple of monistic, totalitarian liberalism, is unfounded on two counts. One, it has to define religion as a kind of private hobby, or a kind of superstition which someone must abandon while entering the public square. This is the most primitive and ignorant understanding of what biblical religion is. Moreover, this is the most paternalistic, unequal and concession-type definition of citizenship created on a false premise, from which then the public life is constructed, with a distinction

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 184–185.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 186.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

of a legitimate and an illegitimate activity. But an argument which stems from false axioms, which are themselves axioms of a secular “religion” grounded in this anti-religious prejudice, cannot constitute the basis for a civilized discussion. Religion is not a private thing, but a personal thing, and as such it is constitutive of personality as a whole, that is of human dignity. That is true, such a religious public presence must give reasoned argument while it engages in public activity, and Neuhaus is adamant that such an argument can be given, since the Judeo-Christian message is rational, it is realism per se.

Modern secular liberal monism is based on an old delusion of rationalism, and because of that bias it thinks that only it represents rationality. Religion, in fact Christianity, was defined as totally irrational. The secularists who think that only they represent rationality and by those criteria that religiously grounded argument, the argument of biblical religion, is nonsensical, have a primitive and truncated notion of limited rationality. Their argument is ideological, anti-democratic, anti-freedom and, in the worst and true sense of the word, elitist, or one should say Gnostic. Gnostic, that is conveying an idea that there is a self-defined and self-imposed elite which possesses the key to the meaning of reality. This elite allegedly has the right to tell others that they should follow their idea how the public argument can be framed, the polity construed, and how religious people should define their religion so they can be allowed into the public square. Of course not all religions are treated that way, but in fact, only Christianity. Not only prejudiced perception is at stake here. Neuhaus implies on many occasions that Christianity is treated in such a way because it is in fact the only competitor to the monistic pretensions of the modern state which may be a carrier of the new, exclusivist ideology of monistic liberalism, of which the anthropological basis is the imperial Self. This imperial Self as the key to secular, post-1968 anthropology and as the basis of the increasingly liberal human rights doctrine is obviously a competitor to Christian anthropology, and obviously arbitrarily declared as true. Such a liberal, monistic argument is ideological to the core, posing at the same time as rationality.

But rationality is inescapably connected with the real, that is the Being. Neuhaus is a realist. Monistic liberalism is against reality, proof of which might be the constant recourse to symbolic violence to keep its monopoly of power. For this very reason, in the civil public square, all have the right to participate, not only because what is at stake is essentially the question of dignity of human beings. It is because there they can be subjected to a test of a rigorous public argument. In this process a real dignity can be protected – not spurious dignity synonymous with the whims of the imperial Self, but human dignity which can only thrive in the true recognition of what a human being is and its human, potential nature. The discussion is not about a religiously grounded argument; it is about a fundamental anthropological and ontological argument as well, thus deciding the predicament of humanity.

Christianity constitutes here, claims Neuhaus, the most important way by which the reality of the human condition is rightly understood. For this reason,

a properly understood civil public square needs religious people on grounds of equality, but not because they are fully-fledged citizens, but by the fact of their controlling all of the reasons why they are citizens in such a liberal order in the first place.⁶⁸ This means that this earthly city of the liberal order is just a technical way of securing the ultimate human freedom and thus human dignity, the very essence, in turn, of the biblical God's gift to each person. Politics is in such a case inescapable, because it is a way of ensuring that warfare is carried on by other means, reflecting

[...] the intense conflict over differing visions of American culture, over the ideas and ideals that ought to shape our common life. For the sake of maintaining the civil public square, culture warriors on all sides ... are called to sharpen their arguments rather than their swords. This is especially the case with respect to the inescapable interaction of religion and politics ... Politics is primarily a function of culture, ... at the heart of culture is morality, and ... at the heart of morality are those commanding truths typically associated with religion. I [think] it is true in every society, but it is certainly true in this society, that politics and religion can be distinguished but never separated.⁶⁹

If state interest is put above others, then such a state constitutes a return to a pre-Christian understanding of a state which has total sovereignty over its subjects, including religious beliefs, being dictated by Caesar. Such a danger is present today with an attempt to return to a monistic concept of sovereignty, and attempts of both the secular fanatics as well as religious fanatics to impose their order, thus to execute a confluence of a state with religion. This is "politics inspired by religious belief" in the worst possible sense.⁷⁰

Politics thus engages and should engage all problems which come from human existence, with foibles, stupidities, errors politically expressed, but the deepest question with which contemporary politics has to deal, according to Neuhaus, is the issue of "what it means to be a human being". Although this is not an overtly political question, the dissolution of the common anthropological framework in the post-1968 world has made it so. If we rephrase this question, however, and

[...] put it in terms who is a bearer of rights that we, as a society, are obliged to respect, it is turned into a political question and must be addressed as such. And so we have center-staged in today's political arena what are commonly called the "life questions". They are typically posed in terms of conflict between individual freedom, on the one side, and the dignity of the human person, on the other. But the arguments invoking freedom and those invoking dignity can cut in surprising directions.⁷¹

For Neuhaus "life questions" are the fundamental questions engaged mainly by bioethics. It is here that problems connected with the present and proposed technical manipulations of the humanum, in other words of what it means to be human, impose themselves most dramatically in the public square.⁷²

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 188.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 189.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 190.

The great dispute today – probably the greatest, claims Neuhaus – is over the idea of human dignity. Such a concept should be useful in discussing bioethical issues, but in fact it is being used today more to cloud clear thinking about the powers and responsibilities that shape the human future. If we ask the question whether the idea of human dignity is useful, there is an immediate question which follows:

[...] useful for what? In this context we are asking whether it is politically useful. This is the great question over which [modern liberal democracies] are locked in civil argument.⁷³

Neuhaus realizes that Western civilization's reflection about ethics and morality is focused on the maxim "do good and avoid evil" or "do right and avoid wrong", from which stems the principle of practical moral reason in obedience to that maxim to direct one's will in accord with the human good. He realizes, then, that in such cases human good is served by respect for human dignity. But this is exactly the modern point of contention, visible if the argument is phrased in another way:

[...] if we speak not of human dignity but the dignity of the human person. The phrase human dignity may suggest the human collective and include efforts such as taking technological charge of the evolution of the human species. The dignity of the human person places the accent on the individual ... to be sure, the individual situated in society, and, one hopes, in society that aspires to being community ... Respect for dignity of others includes treating them as rational creatures capable of being persuaded by rational argument, even in the face of frequent evidence to the contrary. This is notably the case with respect to policy questions touching on the dignity of the most human persons.⁷⁴

Neuhaus is convinced that the most salient contemporary issue where the dignity of the human person is at stake is abortion and the issues related to it. He terms abortion to be the most consequential political event of the past half-century. Here, in *American Babylon* the issue received especially moving treatment, as if constituting a fitting closing of a journey of a man who had begun his career as an activist at the side of Martin Luther King for the cause of the downtrodden. The fight against abortion turned into a fight of the same order as the fight for civil rights in America, and Neuhaus contributed enormously to making this fight all-important.

Neuhaus opposed abortion for moral as well as constitutional reasons. The moral case was straightforward to him. It touched the most fundamental political question of who the Americans were as a community. He defended the unborn on the basis of the dignity of the human person. A basic political question stemming from the moral one was: who belonged to the community, and whom did the American republic take under its protection? "Roe v. Wade" of 1973 was thus both a moral and a political act, since it radically redefined the political community by redefining its moral responsibility. It was also a profoundly anti-political decision,

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 190, 197.

since the Supreme Court usurped to itself the definition of that community beyond a democratic mandate. In that, it also defined a new anthropology and a morality of the autonomous imperial Self, creating a new right. By doing that the Supreme Court in fact gave the power of defining what life is, and giving a decision what to do with this life, to an individual woman.

On constitutional grounds the 1973 “Roe v. Wade” decision was an exercise in “raw judicial power”, in clear contravention of the constitutional mandate. The real problem with these decisions was that they “removed a preeminently political, which is to say moral, question from public deliberation.”⁷⁵ The Supreme Court took an explosive moral and political issue from political discussion in the public square. Once abortion, practically on demand, became a constitutional right, all those who considered it unacceptable and wanted to keep it as an open moral issue were immediately defined as anti-constitutional, and delegitimized in the public square. The issue concerned not only the immediate abortion decision, but a total redefinition of liberal anthropology which put many people in dramatic situations, closing a democratic debate.

For Neuhaus, therefore, the moral question was an unavoidable fundamental political question. The Court removed questions about obligations of the community and definition of that community from its verdict in “Roe v. Wade”. But in fact it made an overt political decision in all such areas, turning the issue of abortion, settled for centuries of civilizational tradition which was part of American tradition too, into a battlefield. It did this by simply stating that the moral tradition which claimed that it was morally wrong to kill innocent people was not valid any more, and established a tradition that it was right to kill them.

The Court thus redefined morality, but it did this because it unequivocally redefined the anthropology on which the traditional morality rested. With that the Court put forth a new definition of who a human being as a subject of morality was to be. From now on it was to be a total sovereign of his or her own morality, outside of community, outside of tradition, outside of moral reasoning. The raw autonomous imperial Self was a source of all decisions concerning moral issues, including the fetus. This new anthropology was officially declared in the 1992 decision “Planned Parenthood v. Casey”. The Court thus redefined the entire culture, according to a new anthropology put forth by the most radical feminist lobby, adjusting the entire constitutional tradition to it and falsifying history. At the same time it nominated itself as an arbiter of life and death, by settings the criteria of distinction for good, since allegedly derived from the fundamental law of the Constitution.⁷⁶

But his point goes deeper, namely that under the regime of “Roe” there are no clear and unambiguous rules which exclude such horrors from being contem-

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 198.

⁷⁶ The best exposition of the entire legal and moral revolution wrought by the Court, including falsifications of history, was done by F. J. Beckwick, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice*, New York 2007.

plated. That is, if we accept the anthropology of the imperial Self as a basis of right, and as a basis of shaping other rights, there is no way the utilitarian logic of looking at society at large cannot creep in. This would happen not because of some conspiracy, but simply because there would be no cultural taboos which were thought inconceivable. The moral autonomy of the imperial Self can always be put forth for the entire rational argument why certain things may happen and why they should happen. But this constitutes a rational justification of a sheer desire for convenience. Apart from a subversion of the deeply entrenched concept of dignity of the human person, the Supreme Court also redefined the meaning of the foundational documents of the United States, especially the Declaration of Independence, with its unequivocal commitment to natural rights. The question was thus

[...] who belongs to the community for which we as a community accept responsibility, including the responsibility to protect, along with other natural rights, their right to life? This is a preeminently political question. It is not a question to be decided by bioethicists [or for that instance the Supreme Court judges]. Bioethicists [may] help inform political deliberations ... but these questions are – rightly and of necessity – to be decided.⁷⁷

For Neuhaus it was obvious that “the people who are the American *polis*” were attached to the concept of the dignity of the human person. Yet, warned Neuhaus, what we might have experienced here was a subtle revolt of the elites against their own people, when the former tell the latter that their popular attachments are either prejudices, unreflexive biases, or false consciousness which need to be cleared off their heads, as having no legitimate place in an authentic, that is defined by them, *public* discourse.⁷⁸ This happened in the case of a huge portion of the public which has never accepted the “Roe v. Wade” verdict. It also just happened that such elites seemed to represent the contrary views and values to the majority of the American society, a view coming from the 1968 radical generation.

Neuhaus points to the dangerous potential of such a monistic liberalism, since the moral authority of those who would usurp for themselves a creation of rules of those who might be admitted and those who should be excluded from the public discourse is, at best very fuzzy, at worst totalitarian in nature. They are rightly perceived as such by a large section of the American people, who try to organize from bottom up to thwart such monistic attempts.⁷⁹

Neuhaus is aware that in most cases which are related to ordering an ordinary life of a community, an invocation of moral reality beyond what is required for the resolution of a particular issue at hand is not necessary. But in the case of bioethics this is an entirely new game. Here people who are devoutly religious may advance in the public square arguments that are not distinctively religious in

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 201.

⁷⁸ The concept of the revolt of the elites was introduced by C. Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, New York 1995.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 203–204.

character. They may for instance use natural law theory. Neuhaus defends here the theory of natural law, since

[...] contrary to whatever critics of natural law may say, the theory and its practice are not discredited by the observation that many, if not most, of the practitioners do in fact have definite ideas on sources and ends. Nor is the theory discredited by being widely perceived as a distinctively Catholic theory, which it is not. To the extent it is perceived that way ... its proponents can readily respond that a distinctively catholic contribution to our common life is to have preserved a universal understanding of reason that, being universal, is in no way peculiarly Catholic. It is an understanding that has strong roots in the Aristotelian view of politics and public discourse under discussion here.⁸⁰

As for Americans, Neuhaus observes, religion and morality are inextricably intertwined. He understands at the same time that such universal arguments can appeal only to people who have a comprehensive, universal approach to human existence, to people who are morally serious, not just stating that what counts for them is a utilitarian approach or simple a hedonistic life devoid of burdens. Thus we have here a problem of how to invoke in public arguments an explicitly Christian or Jewish moral tradition derived from Scripture, so as to persuade others. One may say that religious people here have in the public square an obligation to present their arguments in a form that is public, which means that they should be accessible to all reasonable parties. This is an argument, for instance, found in such liberal-left authors as Jürgen Habermas or John Rawls, one which Neuhaus considers both unreasonable and unfair. Such a demand is not imposed on any other sector or institution of a society. All such institutions and groups, feminists, labor unions, environmental groups, gays and others are expected to advance their interests without giving any *a priori* justifications of their position.

They argue as if they were engaging in a discussion based on a universal language. In fact it is often a secular language based on a particular ideology masked as a rational thought. There is no reason why churches could not frame arguments supporting their interests the same way, simply on the understanding that they are another interest group and they have their rights to engage as such. But there is also another sort of discrimination. This is an argument that a distinctly theological language is worthless as a moral proposition. This means that, for instance, allegedly any language of any ethics liberal-left professor at any university, whether John Rawls, or Ronald Dworkin, or Martha Nussbaum, formulating his or her system based on, let's say, Kant's or any other self-contained system, is of higher legitimacy than the moral argument of Judeo-Christian ethics, which built the entire ethical, universal civilization in the first place.

But this is, as Neuhaus pointed out, a classical case of the tyranny of a minority, about which Tocqueville cautioned. This minority defined itself as the elite which decided to wage war on the majority of ordinary people in the false convic-

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 205.

tion that because they are more educated and intelligent, then they are at the same time more moral and wise. It may be suspected that precisely the opposite might be true today. Such elites seem to usurp to themselves prerogatives of the once Gnostic elite, which nominated itself to be possessors of a secret truth, which would be revealed to the simpletons led by them. Thus today, warned Neuhaus, caution is needed in relation to

[...] the minority that would impose a rule that authentically public discourse be methodologically atheistic. [But in fact] restraint, civility, and disciplined reason are seriously undermined by the hostility to “comprehensive accounts” in our public discourse—especially if they are perceived to be religious in nature. In most intellectual enterprises, and not least in ethics there is a propensity to emulate the methodologies and exactitudes associated with the physical sciences ... [But] the concept of the dignity of the human person was arrived at, and is today sustained, by ... a different form of understanding. It is a form of understanding that is carefully reasoned, and frankly moral, and for most people who affirm it, it is in fact, if not by theoretical necessity, inseparable from a comprehensive account that is unapologetically acknowledged as religious. the hostility to admit this account to public discourse is long-standing ... It has long been argued by some that moral references should be eliminated altogether from law and public policy, that [modern liberal-democratic polity] is a strictly procedural polity devoted only to means and prescinding from ends ... But, of course, it was by ideas and experiences outside the law that the concept of the dignity of the human person was enshrined in the law.⁸¹

Neuhaus claims that the concept of the dignity of the human person depends on a universal understanding of a human person which is

[...] a person possessed of a dignity we are obliged to respect at every point of development, debilitation, or decline by virtue of being created in the image and likeness of God. Endowed with the spiritual principle of the soul, with reason and with free will, the destiny of the person who acts in accord with moral conscience in obedience to the truth is nothing less than eternal union with God. This is the dignity of the human person that is to be respected, defended and indeed revered.⁸²

Neuhaus is aware that this is a very comprehensive concept of human dignity, but he thinks that it can be accepted by all, on the basis of the properly understood freedom principle. This freedom principle in the West has been clashing, at least since the 16th century, with a monistic concept of the modern. This modern concept of sovereignty was conceptually a great return to pre-Christian times, when the unity of the state and society was complete and there was no external standard of judgment, let alone institutional limitation of state power. But the Christian idea of divided sovereignty, with *sacrum* and *profanum*, destroyed that unity, and introduced into Western culture the idea that a state is a dependent institution, subject to external judgment and in fact limited in its scope, also by the power of the universal Catholic Church.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 208–209.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 210.

Modernity returned to the unified concept of sovereignty through the conversion of divine law to the laws on nature, or natural rights instead of natural law, and then this law of nature would become free of any association with divinity as such, it would be rejected for human self-legislation, which would become an exclusive province of a sovereign state, and subject to manipulation and exploitation for its own purposes.⁸³ With that, divine law, as a political concept and a function of this divine sovereignty, was pushed back by historicism into the remote, supposedly overcome, primitive past in an evolutionary scheme of progressive humanity. This self-declared emancipation from prejudice, with the latest stage of it in the post-1968 Western thought, became in such a case a logic of law and a logic of power of a modern state. It was first limited to the province of sheer politics, but soon it entered into all spheres of human life according to monistic liberalism's slogan that the "private is political".

The concept of freedom of the human person which Christianity introduced was a *sine qua non* condition of the human person in its social and political sphere, that without that there would be no Western freedom at all. This external judgment to assess the legitimacy of a state was of course a judgment of the properly formed conscience grounded in the moral universal law of God via natural law, for which an absolutely essential element was the creation of an individual person with an individual conscience. The concept of a person means a revolution in consciousness unparalleled in history, since from now on any political power was not dealing with an undifferentiated mass of anonymous groups, forever subjected to impersonal whims of state power. It was from now on dealing with persons, each endowed with a name and individual face and under the protection of a personal God. Each was created in God's image. This personal connection between each person and God took precedence and constituted a judgment on the actions of a state, which from now on lost any legitimate claim to the totality of a human person and his earthly life. Tyranny was annihilated in an instant, and although practical tyranny has often been a fact in history, it has never again been without a competitor, moral, intellectual and eventually institutional.

The gradual desacralization of the public space, as a result of the catastrophic religious wars of the 16th century and the intellectual developments which placed the blame on religion – that is Christianity per se – and not on the political use of it, resulted in a return of the monistic concept of sovereignty. The rest, as they say, was history. Rights were substituted for natural law, the state for plurality of Christendom. But if the experiment did not thoroughly fail, at least it has several times produced calamities of modern ideological killings which were possible, since the very idea of inalienable personhood was simply brushed aside.⁸⁴ The process went hand in hand with a gradual atheization of culture with the substitution of liberal rights for Christianity's grounded rights. Finally, this atheization of the state and its

⁸³ See: L. Strauss, *Natural Law in History*, Chicago 1955.

⁸⁴ R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon...*, p. 210–211.

growing power was to be kept in check by the modern human rights doctrine, with human dignity rooted in all kinds of Kantian or neo-Kantian justifications, gradually more and more dubious as an effective justification imposing a universal willingness to accept them. The crisis of the modern concept of human rights in relation to the monistic pretenses of modern liberalism based on the reigning anthropology of the imperial Self is more than evident.⁸⁵

Liberal atheisation and the covenant story of the American Founding

Neuhaus believes, after Murray, that America is different, in fact exceptional. Exceptional not only in a political sense but in a moral sense as well, since it has not yet abandoned this connection with the external justifications of personhood and rights, and has not made methodological atheism a *sine qua non* condition of the public discussion of right.⁸⁶ The concept of human dignity in America has not been thoroughly subjected to gradual methodological atheization, meaning that secularization has not been able to reassert a sovereignty of the state with its own definition of what human dignity and what the human person was, as was attempted, for instance, by the “Roe v. Wade” (1973) and “Planned Parenthood v. Casey” (1992) decisions of the Supreme Court.

Neuhaus thinks that America is in this regard a unique society, still faithful to the principles of the Declaration of Independence, and because of this promise inherent in its covenantal message, it is still truly an “almost chosen nation”. He does not reject the conventional, contractual theory of government, but is more attached to a covenantal theory of the American founding.⁸⁷ He is not necessarily original here – the covenantal story of America was for a long time a staple of American civil religion intertwined with the Protestant cultural paradigm – but at the same time he thinks that this story has been forgotten, and that perilous consequences of that might follow.

If America is a covenantal nation, “under God” – and this is so, as Neuhaus says with a straight face to secular accusers, who claim that he is a chauvinistic particularist, not universalist – this is because

[...] among the political orders of the earthly city America is “the last, best, hope of mankind”. Although it was added late to the Pledge of Allegiance, the affirmation that we are a nation “under God” is not unimportant. It does not mean that [Americans] are God’s chosen nation and [they] should be uneasy even with Lincoln’s sharply modified claim that [they] are an “almost chosen” people. Nor does it mean that [they] are immune to the temptations and tragedies of all earthly orders. To say that [they] are a nation under God is to say, first and most importantly, that [they] are a nation under transcendent judgment. Judgment and promise are inseparable.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ See: M. J. Perry, *Toward a Theory of Human Rights: Religion, Law, Courts*, Cambridge 2007.

⁸⁶ R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon...*, p. 211–212.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 27–30.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 24–25.

No doubt, the modern world can be described as a slow dissolution of the covenantal story of humanity from which the Western idea of freedom originated. This idea of freedom stemmed from a destruction of united sovereignty. But modernity embarked on its slow reassertion again. This reassertion of the unified sovereignty thus goes hand in hand with the dissolution of Judeo-Christian anthropology and the Christian theory of power. It is based on the axiom of the impossibility of a unified political, earthly sovereignty, by the very fact of the absolute sovereignty of God being in personal covenantal relationship with all human beings. Humans are under the individual protection of God, with human arrangements always conditional, to be recognized as legitimate, only if they do not subvert that prior relationship which was a source of personal freedom and its duty to shape consciences according to God's promise, so the fullness of human potential can be achieved⁸⁹.

Modernity has progressively tried to destroy that dualism, by a subversion of the political theory on which it rested, but first of all by a destruction of a metaphysical story, the transcendental "story" without which such a dualism was impossible. It attached a metaphysical dimension to this world in the form of the idea of progress, with a destruction of transcendental religion as a competitor to the pretenses of the modern state. In that process a corresponding reduction of the metaphysics of God to the metaphysics of historical progress occurred, coupled with the psychotherapeutic progress of self-realization.⁹⁰

There is, of course, a danger of idolatry. G.K. Chesterton remarked in the 1920s that "America is a nation with the soul of a church", showing a certain ideologisation of the American message, but that in itself was not yet a danger. The real danger, pointed out Neuhaus, is that "in the absence of an ecclesiology that tethered them to the Church from its beginnings through every period of its history, for many American Protestant thinkers America became their Church."

Neuhaus adamantly opposed the idolatry of treating America as a fulfillment of the New Jerusalem. Mainline Protestant Churches have been prone to Gnosticism since their transformation of particularities and bringing "religious knowledge "to the world has been connected first with Americanization of such a religious knowledge of social gospel, then with its universalization through American power."⁹¹ Whatever form such idolatry took, it is profoundly against the real understanding of America as a universal, covenantal and religious nation.⁹²

There was yet another attempt at solidity and the doctrine of this "new Church" of civil religion, with the rise of the Social Gospel movement and Americanized Christianity at the turn of the 20th century. Then America became "not only a nation with the soul of a church, but [became] the Church", its self-understanding

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

⁹¹ R. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation*, Wilmington DE 2003.

⁹² R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon...*, p. 39.

soon shattered by the fundamentalist-modernist split within Protestant Christianity. There was then a substitution for this spiritual longing of self-redemption as psychology and psychotherapy movement or John Dewey's educational and monistic American education, kind of a

[...] distinctly American religion that would leave behind the doctrinal and ecclesiological disputes of the hoary past and embrace the people of good will in the grand cause of progressive social reform.⁹³

This idea stuck with the American progressive intelligentsia and found the "new church" in democracy as such.⁹⁴ To a certain extent the rebellion of the '60s was a kind of search for a true "church" of America as contrasted with the corrupted "'Amerika' [sic!], against which it protested". Whatever the goal of such a mesmerizing search, all such efforts were conflating covenantal mentality with the totality of American experience, transformed from now on for good. Yet such efforts constituted a kind of idolatrous escape from the burden of the „religious covenant“, understood within the structured, Augustinian framework. All of them could be looked upon as "the perennial effort ... to make sense of the story of America within the story of the world".⁹⁵

We must therefore return, argues Neuhaus, to a thorough rethinking of the proper relationship of America's story with that of the world, in whose "comprehensible account" it is caught up. There is no other way, since from the very beginning, from John Winthrop, through the Puritans, to today this connection has been solid and inescapable. A good starting point for Neuhaus is Murray, who is "an unavoidable point of reference in discussions about America and providential purpose". Neuhaus realizes that Murray was devoid of any idolatry towards America and, unlike Dewey or Rorthy and many others, who were yearning for secular "metaphysics", America was not his religion, because he never confused America with the Church.⁹⁶ The American founders agreed with the long-standing Christian stance that God had planted in the heart of man the precepts of natural law, sealed for them in the Decalogue. Neuhaus's vision was congruent with this vision for universal reasons, justified by the ultimate human value of freedom in pursuit of one's betterment. This public discourse should be guided by an appeal to natural law, the central idea of the American founding written into the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and at the same time accompanied by the presence of a Church that effectively

⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

⁹⁴ The latest progressive hero of that movement was the late Richard Rorthy, who abandoned his post-modernist "church" and recognized American democracy as a real, valuable thing. R. Rorthy, *Achieving Our Country*, Cambridge Mass. 1992, p. 87.

⁹⁵ R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon...*, p. 45.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 50.

[...] challenged democracy's idolatrous aspirations to finality – could provide a public philosophy for sustaining the American experiment in producing as just and free a society as is possible in this our exile from our true homeland.⁹⁷

There have been many who have proposed a remedy to the recovery of this universal message of the American experiment, which means a recovery of natural law, so central to the Declaration of Independence. Traditionally, Churches in America, mainly the mainline Protestant Churches, have performed that task of being a primary bearer of the American story as a universal story for humanity. Apart from that, the tradition of natural law was not part of their theology. But this is no longer the case, as Neuhaus pointed out. The mainline Protestant Churches are today viewed as “oldline” or “sideline”, and unfortunately they have totally mixed politics with the religious message, and in that very partisan politics, planting “the banner ‘Thus Saith the Lord’ on the cultural and political platform of the Left”. In turn the evangelical Protestant insurgency, having greater political visibility and vitality, have planted “the same banner on the cultural and political platform of the right”.⁹⁸ This is a tragedy, according to Neuhaus, since both undermine

[...] a religiously informed public philosophy for the American experiment, contributing at the same time to the political corruption of Christian faith and the religious corruption of authentic politics; both have forgotten that, as it is said in the Letter to the Hebrews, we have here no abiding city.⁹⁹

But the Catholic hierarchy is also split, partly still trying to ingratiate itself into the old mainline Protestant establishment, remembering the historical difficulties of being accepted into American life on equal terms, and partly sharing its belligerency with the evangelicals on moral and cultural questions. But, warns Neuhaus, Catholics should remember that the Church is to be the “contrast society”, not to be above the quarrel, but neither the captive to it. As Neuhaus stresses over and over again, the Church's chief political contribution is to provide a transcendent horizon for American civil arguments, the role it should be fulfilling all over the world at the same time. America has a great “proposition”, which provides Americans with a great chance to conduct such a discussion in terms that are universal and particular at the same time. But there is no way that cultural limitations of one's position can be avoided, or for that matter, shunned. Culture is the only medium available for us, claims Neuhaus, and a particular national community should not be treated as a calamity, but as a chance to improve on it, in the light of truths higher than the immediate chances of realizing that.

There is thus no chance and no need to shun American identity, especially if that identity embodies such truths in a direct way. There is a great role of America, which can help make such truths understood by all. This should be done not by im-

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 52–53.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

position, but, as John Winthrop and Abraham Lincoln envisioned them, by making oneself a better community. So, concludes Neuhaus,

[...] when I meet God, I expect to meet him as an American. Not most importantly as an American but as someone who tried to take seriously, and tried to encourage others to take seriously, the story of America within the story of the world. The argument, in short, is that God is not indifferent towards American experiment, and therefore we who are called to think about God and his ways through time dare not be indifferent to the American experiment. America is not uniquely Babylon, but it is our time and place in Babylon. We seek its peace, in which, as Jeremiah said, we find our peace, as we yearn for and anticipate by faith and sacramental grace the New Jerusalem that is our pilgrim goal. It is time to think again—to think deeply and think religiously—about the story of America within the story of the world. Again the words of Augustine: ‘It is beyond anything incredible that God should have willed the kingdom of men, their dominations and their servitudes, to be outside the range of the laws of his providence.’¹⁰⁰

Neuhaus was hope personified, Christian optimism applied to all the most forlorn causes. It was for this reason that he never refused to engage in a civilized conversation with anyone, even the cognoscenti in the West who had already stopped responding to the Christian narrative. But Neuhaus was constantly challenging that predicament, and wanted to engage reality and others in a conversation about Being. For him, as a Christian and a Catholic it was obvious that the Covenant and the Promise have never been revoked, and humans are all Pilgrims yearning for return to innocence, which once was, and they hope might be again. Humans may commit errors, even very grave ones. But he refused to accept that fate, since he always repeated, after Ralph Inge and T.S. Eliot, that quintessentially bittersweet blessing of Christian hope, that in this world, “there are no permanently lost causes, because there are no gained causes”.¹⁰¹

It is not victory which counts, but the verity of the cause which has to be recalled all over again. Christians have a good word for that: “witnessing”. And Neuhaus was one of the greatest Christian witnesses, and apologists, in a contemporary, increasingly ideological and monistic liberal Agora.¹⁰² We have a will to decide what to take and what to abandon. This is not Nietzsche’s choice based on the will for power and grandeur. This is not existentialism’s choice which claims that we are simply creatures of time. Christian time is different, because it rejects a senseless concept of time, such a concept of time which

[...] explain[s] our existence exhaustively and without remainder. Time too is a creature. There is ‘reality’ beyond time because being creatures of time, we are unable to think except in a temporal model. It is an irrational presumption, however, to presume that reality is limited to what we conceive.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

¹⁰¹ W. R. Inge, *More Lay Thoughts of a Dean*, New York 1931, p. 201; T. S. Eliot, *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order*, Garden City 1929, p. 78.

¹⁰² R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon...*, p. 213–214.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

Neuhaus considers such a rationality to be an instance of a truncated reason, which is against Christian reason which he thinks is incomparably wider, not subject to self-contradictions, circular self-justifications or self-explanations. Existentially such reason is dangerous since it can produce either despair or presumption, the two most diametrically opposed forms of hopelessness. At the nadir of despair, argues Neuhaus, quoting Joseph Pieper, if we reject eschatological fulfillment, which is in itself the self-destructive and perverse, then we behave in a way which “borders on the most extreme form of the not less destructive delusion of presumption, meaning a logical affirmation of non-fulfillment, as though it were fulfillment”.¹⁰⁴

Neuhaus shows that Christianity broke the senselessness of experience of time. Judaism’s doing that was based on promise, but Christianity’s God incarnated himself in the finitude of space and time, effectively ending hope without palpable proof that it would be fulfilled. That is why the Christian pilgrim’s destination is “not so much a place as a person”. This Christian hope is not otherworldly, in the sense of a promise that people will go to heaven when they die. This is not so much untrue as it is incomplete and woefully inadequate, since “redemption or salvation is . . . not an escape from this world but as participation in the future that is already happening in . . .”¹⁰⁵ The modern displacement of the gospel of Christ with the gospel of historical process gave way to a new faith in progress. It was a great substitution in which faith has become something like a new religion, with the enlightenment envisioning infinite progress. This enlightenment was to free a man at the same time from tyranny of the Church, metaphysics and the oppressive political systems. Hope without which people could not live, found expression in the idea of progress, which depended upon freedom, innovation, imagination and self-realization in history.¹⁰⁶

But this causes freedom being tied to change, as Neuhaus observes, and in the absence of the stable human nature, change presses for the infinite malleability of human nature in the name of progress. The modern idea of “emancipation” from “oppression” to freedom of the imperial Self, total moral freedom, is a consequence of such a logic. No structure can guarantee a good state of the world, since people, individual people at least, cannot reconcile themselves to any definite structure like that. It is not only that man’s freedom would be denied. This is above all because there is never a point in which a human being along the way of progress would consider his or her imperial Self finally liberated and reconciled with reality. Psychotherapy is one answer to that, but it obviously failed.¹⁰⁷

The substitution of historical progress for a Christian vision of eschatological progress turned out to be an escape from Reality as such, which Christianity defined by locating anthropological reasoning in a proper metaphysical perspec-

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 223–224.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 232.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 236.

tive. Such an escape from Reality has not brought freedom, observes Neuhaus, but periodic enslavements and ultimately despair. Neuhaus's appeal to recognize the Christian eschatological perspective is a call for return to Reality, and thus to a properly understood reason, which could then engage itself so as to decipher the bordering condition of human nature, that is freedom itself. It is thus a plea not for a generic religion, which too often today is tantamount to nebulous, psychotherapeutic spirituality, but for the Christian idea of freedom, its only sure basis and human dignity in that.

The practical consequences of such an approach were manifold, but one was obvious, as Neuhaus had apparently no doubt in stressing. Liberal democracy, if it wanted to sustain its idea of practical freedom, had to recognize the political significance of the Christian theological language of freedom as a corrective of that freedom which was tied to the idea of progress. The latter leads inexorably either to totalitarian control in the hands of the "masters" of direction of that progress or to a debilitating anarchy and chaos of the imperial Self, declared to be a new god of the post-modern, solipsistic and eventually narcissistic human being. If so, the "naked public square" is inimical to the self-declared aims which the liberal state wants to achieve. It does not sustain freedom but subverts it, and as a consequence destroys human dignity. And it subverts human dignity because it subverts reality as it is. Both Christian eschatology and the idea of progress were a response to the loss of human innocence. This loss of innocence has, Neuhaus always claims, pushed humanity into all kinds of more or less desperate attempts, sometimes stupid, sometimes criminal, or just ridiculous, to "close the gap" and to liquidate alienation, so to "close time".

The most scandalous reality of that alienation was of course the fact of human mortality.¹⁰⁸ The secular pilgrims' destination is just history, propelled by progress in a frantic activity to extend existence, and more and more infusing a secular myth with all kinds of spiritual sprinklings which do not solve the fear, just sublimate it into a kind of melancholic pantheism, which gives no answer, just an anesthetic. Neuhaus shares an essentially Augustinian view of the limits and chances of history, of a dialectic of time and eternity, of a fight between the city of man and the City of God which will never end here on earth. This is a perspective which is decisive in his vision of what Christianity and the Church has to propose to the world. Atheism might be a form of a cry for justice. Neuhaus does not deny that, noticing only that the new atheists usually act as "secularists" or "secular humanists". Although Christians rightly lay claim to the title of humanism, secular humanists, as the phrase is used today, are typically those who

[...] acknowledge no reality that transcends the saeculum, meaning the temporal order. ... All that was and is to be is confined within the limits of history. But such humanists ... can [not] live without hope ... Some kind of eschatology, ... a sense of destination in which history culminates in the

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 238–239, 230.

true community...., is inherent in the thought and action of all serious people. Thoughtful secularists know that this longing ... has again and again ended up in utopian irrelevance, chaos or tyranny. They want no more of that. What then are they to do with that hope that will not go away and cannot be discarded without risking the loss of their humanity, and how are they rationally to explain it? Many invest their hope in historical progress. ... many in “the satisfied conscience” [after] Kant. [But] it is something of a stretch, however, for the person of “satisfied conscience” to believe that his life answers the question of cosmic meaning. Such a view may reflect a modest opinion of history but an implausibly inflated opinion of the self. It implies the impossible disengagement of the self from history, by which the self is constituted, and however well intended, is not easily distinguished from egotism unbounded.¹⁰⁹

But there is no vindication of the self, claims Neuhaus, in isolation from the world of which humans are part. It is exactly the redemption of the world, which is totally contrary to disengagement from it, in which Christians seek their own redemption.¹¹⁰ In that perspective, asserts Neuhaus, Christians, and other people of transcendental faith, engage the atheists of this world, their fellow exiles in the city of man, even those, like post-modernists, who would distance themselves from the world by substituting irony for hope’s longings and mundane grief. Christians have always been with dual citizenship. They know that this it is impossible to save this world by itself, and cannot provide a perspective harnessing the calamities of a progressive mind. Neuhaus’s book suddenly becomes the end a great American jeremiad, as if recalling the religious and political sermons of John Winthrop, Orestes Brownson, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King. The Jeremiad has been a Christian and all too American genre, a warning against losing hope and a call for action without which there is only quietist resignation in a meaningless world, a betrayal of that great promise which God gave Americans in their providential scheme. American biblical culture has as its central element oratory, an indispensable feature of the public life of the United States.

The American promise imposes on it a heroic challenge to live up to it. They sealed that promise in their founding document, the Declaration of Independence, as a political as well as religious document, infused with transcendental as well as mundane references. So in the great tradition of the Jeremiad Neuhaus plunges into a fiery, oratory envisioning a time of a great, as usual, contest between hope and despair, between heroism and acedia, when Christians and Americans seek to be

[...] faithful in a time not of our choosing but of our testing. We resist the hubris of presuming that it is the definite time and place of historical promise or tragedy, but it is our time and place. It is a time of many times: a time for dancing, even to the songs of Zion in a foreign land; a time for walking together, unintimidated when we seem to be a small and beleaguered band; a time for rejoicing in momentary triumphs, and for defiance in momentary defeats; a time for persistence in reasoned argument, never tiring in proposing to the world a more excellent way; a time for generosity towards those who would make us their enemy; and finally, a time for happy surrender to brother death – but not before, through our laughter and tears, we see and hail from afar the New Jerusalem and know that it is all time toward home.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 245–246.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 249.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 250–251.

Neuhaus, with his *American Babylon* saying farewell to his earthly existence, accepted the idea that Christendom might be, for a moment, gone. But the battle which Christianity has been is a universal battle for the type of civilization in which we all would like to live. It was inconceivable for him that such a civilization might let go without a fight of people of good will against the sinister winds of the new one. This new civilization professed to be a charitable, human rights civilization, but suddenly began to decide who was to live and who was to die, and recognized a human person as the ultimate judge of good and evil rooted in the imperial Self as a basis of right. It was inexorably pushing morality into the abyss of egotistical desire. Neuhaus believed that this final act of rebellion of a Creature against the Creator was just a temporary tribulation which has to be endured.

Neuhaus's life was a lifelong love affair with Christianity, the universe of his choice and love from which he explored everything else. Christianity was for him a home, a duty, a call to action, a final rest. He did not believe in just any god, let alone the god of the new atheists. He believed in God, who made a covenant individually with every human being, so each could be not only historically, but metaphysically safe, so we could finally rest and the dragons of our cosmic fear and insignificance be broken. Neuhaus's life was an incessant fight for life against the forces of death. Everything he did in his life was propelled by a desire to preserve this spark of God's mad love for human beings so they could transcend their beastly state of nature and be better than they themselves are. His fight with the "naked public square" was not a trite affair. It was ultimately a war for *caritas* against the modern sophisticates in love with themselves, thinking that this limited point in time and space give them the authority to usurp for themselves the definition of human reality. The barbarians who embarked on the totalitarian project of "emancipation", which is in fact an emancipation to an unbound anarchic freedom of the imperial Self, the ultimate liberation to Nothingness, another great project of human engineering to create a new civilization, ending history for good. This was for Neuhaus a project out of the story of the great rebellion in Paradise, which would end up at the cemetery of heuristic ideas as well.

As for *Mater Ecclesia*, his most intimate home, knowing well that this is the sacred institution of the fallen people, he had no patience with reformers who had not recognized the great continuity amid evolution, which always comes back to the Source. If asked what kind of Church he was for, the Church of yesterday or the Church of tomorrow, he could respond as his friend, the great Avery Cardinal Dulles, once calmly responded to such a question: "The Church of yesterday, the Church of today, the Church of tomorrow, the Church eternal".

Neuhaus knew that Christianity could be defeated, but human longing for eternal love can never be defeated or sublimated. As a public philosopher he was in a classical sense a lover of truth. Neuhaus knew the fallacy of thinking that we are the last, and that because of that, we can see through Being as better or much wiser than those who were our predecessors. Thus for him history, let alone politics, was

not all there was to life, and could never quench our thirst for fulfillment. The ultimate meaning was somewhere else because, although existentially

[...] the time of tribulation is upon us, and we now must make our way through its darkness, guided only by the waning lights of memory and the flickering flame of hope, not knowing when the night will end, [we are] sustained by the sacred assurance that whoever perseveres to the end shall be saved.¹¹²

He was an outstanding public teacher in the best tradition of Christian apologetics. He was an outstanding teacher because, to paraphrase the Catholic political philosopher James V. Schall, he led all not to himself, but to the truth, to something not just passing and ephemeral, but to that which just eternally *is*.

¹¹² D. B. Hart, *A Perfect Game*, "First Things", August–September 2010, p. 55.

Spasimir Domaradzki

RELIGION AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY: CONTESTING THE OBVIOUS

Introduction

*Religion in America must be regarded as the first of their political institutions*¹
Alexis de Tocqueville

The role of religion in U.S. foreign policy is a very complex issue. Dependent on the personal attitude of the researcher, religion can play a major or secondary role in analyzing the process of shaping American behavior in international relations.

This topic is extremely difficult for political scientists (and I daresay for other scholarly approaches as well) due to its inherently internal nature. It is easier to research and analyze open, accessible and, even if controversial, publicly discussed topics. However, this is not the case with religion. When asked to contribute to the volume on this topic the first feeling was confusion. Undoubtedly, there is religious inclination in the deeds and actions of the following American administrations, but does that mean that all the actions are guided by religious principles? Does it mean that the point of relevance is the divine principles of Christianity? Is the Decalogue the driving force of American foreign policy? Ultimately, how can we measure this topic? I will risk saying no to these questions.

This would mean that there should have been no wars with U.S. involvement, that there should have been no deception, that once being attacked the U.S. should not have retaliated, but accepted reality and simply turned the other cheek.

¹ A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1, ed. A. A. Knopf, p. 305; also quoted by S. P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, New York 2004, p. 85.

It would mean that charity should have been unconditional and that suffering should not have been caused. If Christian values could overshadow national interests, national security and individual wellbeing, maybe that could have been possible. But it isn't. What to research then?

Generally, there are three research areas that are most often exploited concerning the role of religion in the American foreign policy decision-making process that can be traced in the scholarship on the subject. Some scholars focus on the activities abroad of particular American religious groups or denominations and attempt to evaluate their impact. Some, like Jeffrey Haynes or Walter Russell Mead, attempt to emphasize the importance of the religious vote in the presidential elections as well as the importance of selected religious groups on U.S. foreign policy. This indirect impact cannot be underestimated, but it should also not be overestimated. In certain cases, pressure from religious groups can augment or even determine certain political action. However, this model requires that other groups will not have significant interest in the case or that the religious motives supplement other political rationales.

Others have attempted to emphasize the role of religion in the actions of selected U.S. presidents. In U.S. presidential history cases can be found when religion plays more important role than usual. Remarkably in this case, instead of the Republican-Democrat political division, a rather Idealist-Realist division should be introduced in order to organize the American presidents. The impact of religion on Woodrow Wilson's deeds is commonly recognized among American scholars. My later remarks will also trace religious motifs in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's rhetoric and actions. The role of religion in the activities, policies and actions of other American presidents are also examined.² Despite the interesting conclusions, due to the chronologically limited research in these papers, they can hardly answer the more general question on the impact of religion on the decision-making process in the United States.

The third group of scholars focuses on the American actions promoting religious freedom abroad and analyzing the implementation of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998.³ In this case, however, firstly, the consequences of the decision-making process are analyzed. Secondly, the rather pessimist conclusion made by Thomas Farr, that the implementation of IRFA provisions is not excluded from the mainstream decision-making process, which is much more realist and thus

² M. Magee, *What the Word Should Be*, Waco 2008. See also among the numerous studies on the impact of religion on the American presidents: D. Jason Berggren and N. C. Rae, *Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, Foreign Policy, and an Evangelical Presidential Style*, "Presidential Studies Quarterly" 2006, Vol. 36, No. 4, p. 606–632. See also Jeffrey Haynes's deliberations on Religious Fragmentation and Politics in *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, Pearson Longman 2007, p. 238–242; W. Dzielski, W. Michnik, *Religia w polityce zagranicznej USA – na przykładzie prezydentury George'a W. Busha*, "Teologia Polityczna" 2006–2007, No. 4: www.teologiapolityczna.pl/assets/numery_tp/tp4/dzielskimichnik_religia_w_polityce_zagranicznej_usa.pdf [29.10.2011].

³ T. F. Farr, *Word of Faith and Freedom, Why International Religious Liberty is Vital to American National Security*, Oxford 2008.

often these idealistic provisions are eschewed for other aims. Last but not least, this group of scholars actually neglects the fact that even the sole promotion of religious freedom abroad can be considered as a source of anti-Americanism.

None of these approaches embraces in a comprehensive manner the role of religion in American foreign policy. When I started discussing the subject with my colleagues, the first question that appeared was “what religion?” The United States is today described as a melting pot, hotchpotch or salad bowl. No matter what description serves our theoretical assumptions best, the United States is a conglomerate of various religious, denominational and sectarian strands. It is also true that in comparison to other parts of the globe, there is no more open and suitable ground for coexistence of various forms of praising the divine/transcendental.

Furthermore, before searching for the impact of religion on American foreign policy, comments of a more general nature need to be made. The uniqueness of American society includes the separation of the church and the state on the one hand, and the remarkable religiousness of the American society in general.

American society seems to be much more religious than its European counterpart.⁴ Unlike in Europe, however, religion is sealed in the private and local sphere and subjugated by the necessity for tolerance in the public sphere. Still, several arguments for the higher prospects for religious presence can be made. Firstly, large portions of Americans (approx. from 40 to 70%) regularly attend religious services. Secondly, strong ties exist between religious affiliation and ethnic identity in the U.S. Thirdly, there is a remarkable diversity of religious opinions in the United States. Because of these factors, religion is an important feature in defining terms of political competition in America.

Religion and American politics

As early as 1960, Luke Ebersole noticed that religious affiliation is not directly linked with political preferences. It cannot be ruled out that generalizations concerning the predominant support of particular religious groups for political parties exist. Explanations such as “conservatives vote for the Republicans” or “Jews vote for the Democrats,” and the even more general “the Democratic party is the party for minorities” can be heard during every election campaign. Even, if these generalizations indicate certain tendencies, they again do not say anything about the subsequent role of religion in the post-election political process and, in particular, on the practical impact of these votes on the policies of the particular administration. Is it that religious attitudes are blended in the political whirl and lose their transcendental halo, merging into the mainstream confrontation of interests?

⁴ Samuel Huntington emphasizes this aspect in a more diplomatic way, underlining the stronger religiousness of the Americans in comparison to the other industrialized countries. He does that several times in his chapter on the religious aspect of the American society in his book: S. Huntington, *Who We Are...*, p. 83–106.

Ebersole recalls a number of surveys from the late 1940s showing that although certain tendencies of religious political attitudes can be observed, they are neither steady nor decisive for the final results of election campaigns. Walter Russell Mead, although enthusiastic about the conservative revival during the Bush administration, summarizes that “Religion in the United States is too pluralistic for any single current to dominate”.⁵

A few years after Ebersole’s paper, in 1967, Robert Bellah systematized the role of religion in the United States. His essay “Civil Religion in America” structured the perception of religion’s role in society. Before analyzing Bellah’s theory, another observation needs to be made. What unites all research efforts concerning the role of religion is the obligatory mentioning of the legal framework of religious freedom in the United States. The constitutional provisions of the First Amendment prohibiting the establishment of official religion are underlined as a cornerstone of the American political system.⁶ This, supplanted by the famous “wall of separation” and the generally accepted principle of recognition of religious alternatives in American society, provide the necessary fundamentals for the flourishing of religious diversity. As Bellah rightly observes,

The principle of separation of church and state guarantees the freedom of religious belief and association, but at the same time clearly segregates the religious sphere, which is considered to be essentially private, from the political one.⁷

On the other hand, as Haynes notices,

[...] rooted in unique historical legacy, there is both religious pluralism and vibrancy in the USA. This is, Haynes says, quoting Steve Bruce, ...contrary to what the secularization thesis proposes: religious pluralism is associated in the USA with increased, rather than diminished, religious adherence.⁸

There is general agreement among scholars that one of the sources, if not the main one, of establishing the English colonies was the religious tensions in England and other European states.⁹ Various religious patterns of behavior, emphasizing more conservative or tolerating attitudes, were shipped to the United States and were among the constitutive elements of the basis for the American model of relationship between the state and the individual. Andrzej Bryk admits that the core

⁵ W. Russell Mead, *God’s Country?*, “Foreign Affairs” 2006, Vol. 85, No. 5, p. 41.

⁶ L. Ebersole, *Politics and Religion*, “Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science” 1960, Vol. 332 (Religion in American Society), p. 102.

⁷ R. Bellah, *Civil Religion in America*, Reprinted by permission of Dædalus, “Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences”, from the issue entitled *Religion in America*, Winter 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1, p. 1–21, available at: www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm [29.10.2011].

⁸ J. Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, Pearson Longman 2007, p. 239. See also: *Religion and Modernization*, ed. S. Bruce, Oxford 1992, p. 1–7.

⁹ Historians, political scientists, lawyers, sociologists and others agree and repeat unequivocally the religious impact on the new colonies. Z. Lewicki, *Historia cywilizacji amerykańskiej. Era tworzenia, 1607–1789*, Warszawa 2009, p. 215–238; H. Broghan, *Historia Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Wrocław 2004, p. 100–124.

of American religion is Protestant in its nature, with its eschatological mission¹⁰. Thus the faith in the new continent was further supplanted by the Calvinistic concept of predestination that played a vital role, since it provided that the Scriptures teach both the sovereign control of God and the responsibility and freedom of human decisions¹¹. They were additionally strengthened by John Winthrop's "city upon a hill" interpretation, which provided sufficient arguments for the settlers to consider themselves as citizens of "God's Country". These pillars of the American credo have a profound impact on the American foreign policy. They also provided fertile ground for the development of another, unique level of religiousness able to summarize the strongly individualist society, devoted to God in alternative ways. "Civil religion" is a unique American secularist-religious amalgamate.

Civil religion

The uniqueness of American religion is in its Judeo-Christian tradition. Mauk and Oakland rightly observed that this is a symbiosis of two main developments in American history. On the one hand, the early settlers' religious pluralism, although recently highly idealized, requires acknowledgment in comparison to the European attitude in the same period. It was based in the Protestant tradition, which naturally spurred tolerated¹² alternative approaches towards the relationship between the individual and God. It also searched for protective mechanisms against the potential religious conflicts well known from Europe. The alternative was a much softer and moderate acceptance of various transcendental explanations, as long as they were grounded in the Judeo-Christian theology.

The second element is the natural inclusiveness of the American society that required human capacity to subordinate the vast new territory. The uniqueness of the immigration to the United States until the late 19th century is its predominantly Judeo-Christian character, which did not require social mobilization against fundamentally alternative religious doctrines.¹³ Hence, Samuel Huntington's argument

¹⁰ A. Bryk, *Cywilizacja amerykańska*, www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/596/bryk596.html [27.10.2011].

¹¹ On predestination see: J. Herbold Rainbow, *The Will of God and the Cross: An Historical and Theological Study of John Calvin's Doctrine of Limited Redemption*, Allison Park 1990; P. J. Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career Of A Contentious Doctrine*, New York 2009; also M. Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths*, New York 2011.

¹² The word *tolerant* in this case means only comparatively wider margin of acceptance towards alternative Protestant approaches, and does not embrace the innate distrust for Catholics. The full lists of characteristic features of Mauk and Oakland's description of American religion and Huntington's definition of civil religion are published respectively in: D. Mauk, J. Oakland, *Cywilizacja amerykańska*, Wrocław 1999, p. 295; S. P. Huntington, *Who Are We?...*, p. 104. On civil religion in the Polish scholar literature see: M. Potz, *Granice wolności religijnej, kwestie wolności sumienia i wyznania oraz stosunku państwa do religii w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Wrocław 2008, p. 202–218; as well as: R. Małajny, "Mur separacji" – państwo a Kościół w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki, Katowice 1992, p. 323–329.

¹³ However, the anti-Catholic inclination of the Know Nothing party and the Ku Klux Klan should not be neglected. Although examples of hatred and persecutions were observed, their intensity was much lower than in comparison to the Asian immigration since the late 19th century.

on the religious base of the American society is rooted in the general conviction that whatever religious tensions appeared in the American society, they were always in the frames of the same creed.

These tensions required an overarching element binding the various approaches in one *ideal*, resistant to external influence. The American experience, inclusiveness and success grounded in the popular will provided the needed constituted parts for America itself to become a source of religion – the civil religion. Bellah explains that

[...] the civil religion expressed what those who set the precedents felt was appropriate under the circumstances. It reflected their private as well as public views. Nor was the civil religion simply ‘religion in general.’ [...] While generality was undoubtedly seen as a virtue by some, [...] the civil religion was specific enough when it came to the topic of America. Precisely because of this specificity, the civil religion was saved from empty formalism and served as a genuine vehicle of national religious self-understanding.¹⁴

Later, he says that civil religion is also

[...] certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling American civil religion.¹⁵

Bellah concludes

The God of the civil religion is not only rather ‘unitarian,’ he is also on the austere side, much more related to order, law, and right than to salvation and love,¹⁶

thus emphasizing the practical aspect of the religion’s social purpose. While, embracing Christianity in the widest possible terms, American reality used religion as a source of political and social organization. Remarkably, not in terms of uncompromising civil obligation characteristic in Europe since 1648, but rather as a source of common knowledge and guiding light for behavior. As it is often described,

[...] civil religion converts Americans from religious people of many denominations into a nation with the soul of a church.¹⁷

¹⁴ R. Bellah, *Civil Religion in America...*

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ The term “a nation with the soul of a church” can be found in numerous publications. It was in operation already in 1967, when S. E. Mead wrote the article titled *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, “Church History” 1967, Vol. 36, (September), p. 262–283, and was later quoted among others by D. O’Brien, in *American Catholicism and American Religion*, “Journal of the American Academy of Religion” 1972, Vol. 40, No. 1, p. 40. Recently S. P. Huntington also used it in his book, *Who Are We?...*, p. 106.

While focusing on the external aspect of civil religion, it should not be forgotten that, ultimately, it plays a much more important role at home. As Haynes acknowledges, civil religion

[...] was a fundamental requisite for stable democracy in America, given that civil religion made a positive contribution to societal integration by binding a fractious people around a common goal, imparting a sacred character to civic obligation. [...] civil religion also provided an important public manifestation of religion, as opposed to the more privatized orientations of particular faiths.¹⁸

The civil religion used the success of the American political experiment to unify the mixture of individuals called Americans. The source of their unification is not only religion per se but also the much more earthly pursuit of happiness and freedom from want that proved to be best achievable in the United States. Hence, the political mechanisms that provided the necessary environment to be successful were naturally elevated to a higher “semi-transcendental” rank for securing their existence. The Founding Fathers were “beatified” and their legacy idealized, because it proved to be moderate and wise, far-sighted and practical, pragmatic and flexible – thus providing a much wider spectrum of possibilities for the individual. Huntington embraces this in his fourth point describing civil religion, where he underlines the religious aura of such national celebrations as Thanksgiving or Veterans Day and the official celebrations of presidential inaugurations and funerals.¹⁹ There is probably no better proof of the power of American attractiveness than the constant flow of immigrants to the United States, which, although declining in the last decade as a result of the economic and political difficulties, even today does not cease.²⁰ Furthermore, America still remains an ideal, a promised land for those exploited and suppressed by other political regimes.

Although in 1975 Bellah’s disappointment with the partition of the American society on social, religious and international matters provoked the publication of “the Broken Covenant”²¹ as a negation of his enthusiasm of civil religion, his earlier observations seem to be accurate, at least in the realm of American foreign policy, also today. While Haynes presented the arguments for Bellah’s disappointment, such as the Vietnam War, the Watergate affair and the societal fragmentation over moral and ethical issues, Bellah’s conclusions seem coherent.²² What seems to be neglected by Bellah, though, is the overarching aspect of his concept. The 1980s, being a time of conservative revival, the ‘90s and the end of the Cold War, which affirmed American dominance worldwide, and ultimately 9/11 and the

¹⁸ J. Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*, Pearson Longman 2007, p. 237.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

²⁰ For detailed data on statistics on illegal immigration see the Department of Homeland Security Fact Sheet of July 2011, available at: www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois-apprehensions-fs-2005-2010.pdf [20.10.2011].

²¹ The electronic version is available online at: www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=3042 [28.10.2011].

²² J. Haynes, *An Introduction to International Relations and Religion*...

conservative revival described by Walter Russell Mead, brought a new updated meaning to his concept.

American religion and its impact on foreign activity

Samuel Huntington, David Mauk and John Oakland all emphasize the American self-portrayal as God's chosen nation. The concept of New Jerusalem that Huntington so colorfully explains by comparing Europe to Egypt and the Americans to the Jews²³ is supplanted by the conviction concerning the promised land that finds its argumentation in the miraculous survival of the first pilgrims to the New World and the establishment of colonies, thus providing sufficient transcendental fundaments for the civil religion. This miraculous salvation requires "evangelicalism"²⁴ as a tribute to God's mercy and obligation to spread his word in this world. The central question on such evangelism is what word? Mauk and Oakland link religion with democracy and liberty; however, it was Bellah who stressed the importance of these basic American values through the words of George Washington:

The propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained. The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty and the destiny of the republican model of government are justly considered, perhaps, as deeply, as finally, staked on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American people.²⁵

Thus, what was to be considered as an American experiment became a source of inspiration for American foreign policy. Unlike the 19th-century diplomacy of the European powers that was deeply rooted in the Machiavellian portrayal of the world, the United States introduced a unique approach towards the international environment. The distinctiveness of the American political experiment required consistency at home and abroad. Only such an attitude could guarantee that the new player in the international relations could gain recognition and respect. The consistency required sober evaluation of the American capabilities and a clear declaration of domestic values. Unlike the European states, the new state had not only to strengthen its position, but also to acquire respect for its alternative political system. Such a task required the firm adherence of the American foreign policy to the internal political norms that included respect for the individual and promotion of the American political system – republican democracy. Thus, the achievements that were rooted in the religious freedom of the Christian tradition became cornerstones of American activities abroad.

²³ C. Cherry, *Two American Sacred Ceremonies: Their Implications for the Study of Religion in America*, "American Quarterly" 1969, No. 21, p. 748, quoted in: S. P. Huntington, *Who Are We?...*, p. 104.

²⁴ See: D. Mauk, J. Oakland, *Cywilizacja amerykańska...*

²⁵ G. Washington's first inaugural speech, quoted in Robert Bellah. The text is also available at: www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=11&page=transcript [20.10.2011].

However, this evangelical enthusiasm was challenged by the 18th and 19th-century reality of international relations. The same George Washington, in his farewell address, was much more skeptical of the American role in international relations, where in a typically realist manner he recognized the limits of the new state and provided guidelines for a very pragmatic and moderate approach towards the important players on the international arena.²⁶ In this sense, a speculative conclusion can be made that even in the case of George Washington, his religious motivation was challenged by other external determinants that required a much more realist approach towards the international attitude of the New Republic.

The American notion of predestination was adjusting steadily to the international position of the United States. This conception can be traced in every direction of American expansionism, and was developed in the Manifest Destiny²⁷ and the following idealist programs coined by such leaders as Abraham Lincoln or Woodrow Wilson. Actually, a remarkable similarity can be found between the American idealism and the concept of predestination. This is reminiscent of the Christian approach towards suffering. Just as the Christians believe that suffering during the earthly life offers salvation, the American involvement in international relations was usually justified with the promising aura of a better future after the American engagement. The Spanish-American war of 1898 was supposed to offer brighter days for Cuba. The slogan associated with Woodrow Wilson of “a war to end all wars” is probably the most visible example of the American belief that the righteous cause will ultimately prevail. This pattern of moral involvement was subsequently affirmed by F. D. Roosevelt’s four freedoms. As Wiesław Waclawczyk²⁸ has noticed, this thus determined the ideological framework of the United States as a country devoted to the promotion of human rights worldwide²⁹.

²⁶ The full version of Washington’s farewell address is available at: www.avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp [20.10.2011]. For an evaluation of Washington’s farewell address see: Ł. Wordliczek, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Procedure and Substance*, Kraków 2005, p. 18; J. McCormick, *American Foreign Policy and Process*, Wadsworth 2005, p. 12–14.

²⁷ Among the literature on the subject worth mentioning are A. Stevenson’s, *Manifest Destiny. American Expansionism and Empire of Right*, New York 1996; F. Merk’s, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History*, Cambridge Ma 1995.

²⁸ W. Waclawczyk, *Swoboda wypowiedzi politycznej w USA do roku 1918*, Toruń 2011, p. 437.

²⁹ The term “human rights” requires a thorough analysis, due to the fact that it embraces too many notions that ultimately become the source rather of confusion than clarification. The American notion of civil liberties is much narrower and embraces the political and personal rights and freedoms from the Bill of Rights. The European, and international, meaning of the term “human rights” is much wider, and also embraces economic, social and cultural rights (2nd generation of rights), as well as the 3rd generation of rights. In the works of scholars like David P. Forsythe, Michael Ignatieff, and Andrew Moravcsik a certain feeling of disappointment at the limited notion of the American concept of individual entitlements can be noticed. Nevertheless, the American rhetoric on the subject does not take into consideration the social and economic dimensions of internationally accepted human rights, because it is not a characteristic feature of the American political system. Moravcsik explains this by the lack of a substantial socialist movement in the United States. For a broader discussion of his arguments see: A. Moravcsik, *The Paradox of U.S. Human Rights Policy*, [in:] *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*, ed. M. Ignatieff, Princeton 2005, p. 147–197; D. P. Forsythe, *US Foreign Policy and Human Rights*, “Journal of Human Rights” 2002, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 501–521.

The sources of American activism in foreign relations can be traced in the Protestant experience and its transposition to contemporary politics. Several notions play a crucial role in that regard. Firstly, the notion of “chosen nation”. There is no other country in the world that attracts such interest and is observed so closely. If John Winthrop’s concept of the “city upon a hill” in the 17th century was established for an internal purpose to unite the new community, today it has become a guiding light for suppressed countries and nations. The notion of predestination proved to be useful and necessary in every period of American history from the requirement to create and strengthen the nation, through the continental expansion and consolidation of the political structures, to the position of superpower in international relations.

However, this concept has a diametrically different understanding at home and abroad, and requires a short comment. For the United States, although predestination is hardly mentioned explicitly,³⁰ it offers sufficient moral explanation for the necessity of taking certain actions, even when popular approval is at stake. Actually, every major American intervention triggers the demand for a reasonable explanation of the U.S. involvement. Remarkably, since the Spanish-American war each U.S. intervention inclines an argumentation for a better future, based on the intrinsically American positive approach. It is grounded in the national experience that the rejection of oppressive systems and the transposition of power to the society is the key to a more promising future. However, this perspective is not unconditional, and also requires the incorporation of American values in order to be able to achieve the desired social and political results. Unfortunately, this additional requirement often proves to be the most sensitive aspect of American involvement, since the lack of appropriate cultural, religious, politically and socially experienced background often creates essential obstacles for the implementation of the “city upon a hill” know-how abroad. The desired outcome, however, often proves to be more difficult than expected, and becomes a source of disappointment and radical anti-Americanism³¹.

Concluding, all of the abovementioned aspects of civil religion, such as “God’s chosen nation”, the concept of predestination, and nationalist religiosity, have an impact on American foreign policy. They are exposed through the concepts of the republican form of government and liberty that are core pillars of the American foreign policy.

³⁰ Which does not mean that descriptively various presidents do not use it to justify particular actions in international relations.

³¹ The question of anti-Americanism and the impact of religion remains outside the scope of this research. However, it is a subject of deepened interest among scholars. See: G. Chiozza, *Anti-Americanism and the American World Order*, Baltimore 2009; *The Rise of Anti-Americanism*, ed. B. O’Connor, M. Griffiths, Routledge 2006.

The pragmatic nature of American foreign policy

The set of values promoted by America around the globe is based on the American experience, and not on utopian ideals. The U.S. foreign policy is much more pragmatic, in a sense of attempting to promote only these aspects of the national experience that proved to be efficient at national level. As James McCormick observes,

[...] the core American values are internal in their nature and are exposed in the Declaration of Independence as life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Although they are ‘abstract ideals’ that serve as ‘imperative’ for action, they provide sufficient ground for explaining the nature of certain actions in the American activities abroad.³²

Often in the official rhetoric these values are included in the more general notions of human rights and democracy or in a detailed enumeration of particular human rights dependent on the purpose.³³

Since then, the promotion of human rights and democracy by the United States all over the world triggers permanent accusations concerning the American hypocrisy on this matter. Michael Ignatieff has articulated it as a paradox that recently became a fundamental part of the evaluation of American foreign policy. Namely, why in some cases the American promotion of human rights was

[...] as if they were synonymous with American values, while under others, it has emphasized the superiority of American values over international standards.³⁴

Some part of this riddle is hidden behind the notion of predestination. Once the American perception of particular case matches the international concern, these values become universal. Recently, only the United States holds such remarkable cultural, political and spiritual attractiveness that is able to transform domestic values into international principles.

On the other hand, the established international standards aim at providing predictable patterns of behavior among *equal* players in the international arena.

³² J. M. McCormick, *American Foreign Policy and Process...*, p. 6.

³³ For example, Barack Obama enumerated what particular rights America will promote during his speech “New Beginning” at Cairo University in 2009.

³⁴ Michael Ignatieff makes the comment differently, and here we fundamentally disagree. He claims that “under some administrations, it has promoted human rights as if they were synonymous with American values, while under others, it has emphasized the superiority of American values over international standards.” I would argue that the development of international relations after the Cold War does not allow a generalization concerning human rights to be linked to particular administrations. The same Clinton administration became very active in Bosnia after 1993 and in particular in Kosovo in 1999 and at the same time passive to the slaughtering in Rwanda in 1994. The Bush record on human rights is overshadowed by the loss of civilians in Iraq, Afghanistan, the existence of Guantanamo and the violation of domestic civil liberties, but his administration’s efforts to promote human rights in the post-Soviet space, the active involvement in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution of 2004 and official promotion of democracy as a reply to the contemporary threats should not be neglected. For the Bush doctrine see the National Security Strategy of 2002. The quotation from Ignatieff is from the book *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*, ed. M. Ignatieff, Princeton 2005, p. 1.

However, in practice the world is not that simple, and the United States can hardly be equalized with other countries. Even the sole fact that in case of crisis, the world's eyes are turned towards Washington D.C. and demand more from the United States than the remaining international players requires an alternative approach towards their international obligations³⁵. While closely observing the American actions, the remaining players in international relations accurately expose every U.S. deed considered as inappropriate according to international law. This should be considered a natural self-protecting reaction aiming at limiting the scope of action of a stronger player that cannot be challenged otherwise. In this sense, every inconsistency and contradiction in American foreign policy, even if officially justified with human rights and democracy, is considered rather as a screen for U.S. imperialist activity. The criticism varies from accusations of hypocrisy to open challenging of American exceptionalism and non-compliance with international norms. However, instead of trying to answer the long list of negative comments on the U.S. record on human rights and democracy, it is worth analyzing what the U.S. actually promotes in practice. The short 1965 book *Religion in the United States* written by Benson Y. Landis, while seeking to provide the basic facts about the religious and denominational diversity in the U.S., reaches the following general conclusion:

[the] General Beliefs of Four Denominations (Judaism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy or Protestantism) ... believe in one God, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, whom they worship. They give allegiance to Him and they acknowledge that this allegiance is their highest. [...] They believe that the moral law should govern world order; that international institutions to maintain peace with justice should be organized and preserved; that the material resources of the earth have been entrusted to men by God for the benefit of all.³⁶

This rather simplistic perception of the particular denominations is dominated by the Protestant evangelism deeply rooted in American society. As the moral law appears as the guiding force of the majority of American society in its external relations, it will be based on the experience and achievements that make the Americans still “the city upon a hill”.

Recently, the majority of the promoted rights have been deeply rooted in the American experience. Personal rights in the United States were aiming to arm the individual with sufficient equipment for the “pursuit of happiness”. Religious freedom aimed to provide an alternative to the worst of human nature already experienced in Europe; ultimately, the political rights were to be cherished by those who

³⁵ Such an approach was presented during the period of cooperation between the United States and the United Nations after the adoption of the Rome Statute in July 1998 when, while the Clinton administration was still searching for accommodation of the American position in the lower-rank procedural documents of the prospective ICC, argued among other things that the international role of the United States requires privileged treatment by the ICC. See: S. Domaradzki, *Stany Zjednoczone a Międzynarodowy Trybunał Karny. Od polityki poparcia do zwalczania*, “Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2004, No. 4, p. 23–54.

³⁶ B. Y. Landis, *Religion in the United States*, Barnes & Noble everyday handbooks 1965, p. 78–79.

contributed to the society (no matter whether the Europeans like it or not).³⁷ The American concept of rights is also unique in its socially acknowledged origin that grants it with indisputable legitimacy at home and abroad.

The limits of American foreign policy evangelism

The evangelical nature of the American soul often sees oppression of society and individuals as a wrong state of affairs that requires replacement. This attitude of Americans abroad often neglects the local circumstances as misfortunate elements of a bad mechanism that requires amputation and replacement by well-functioning democratic prosthesis. This is often perceived abroad as an element of outright American arrogance and lack of respect of others. Although calls for a milder, more sensitive and, as Daniel M. Fraser called it in 1979, “non-confrontational diplomacy”³⁸ approach towards international relations have appeared in the United States, they are often silenced by the messianic hurrah-optimism supplanted by the American military power and cultural attractiveness.

The American involvement during the Balkan wars of the 1990s can be regarded as a case study of such an attitude.³⁹ The U.S. military and political involvement proved to be crucial for the end of the bloody conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Only the American diplomacy, while using political pressure and simultaneously allowing by silent approval the reinforcement of the weaker Croat and Bosniak forces, was able to bring the fighting parties to the negotiation table. Although the peace agreement brokered in Dayton and officially signed in Paris in 1995 brought an end to the over three years of war and more than 200,000 victims, it created an artificial peace that totally neglects the historical, cultural and religious reasons for the conflict. The recent “Frankenstein” creature on the European map is hardly considered as a reliable partner with a stable future, and even the American evaluation of its development is not optimistic at all⁴⁰. The European Union “hygienically” deals with the local authorities, and the controlled sovereignty under the supervision of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina has not resulted in stable domestic political structures.

Kosovo provides another – probably the most radical – example of implementation of core American values abroad. A bloody dictator suppressing his own

³⁷ For this reason the source of American civil liberties is not the “imaginable” human dignity, but is much more “pragmatic” and reflects the respect for the society’s subjective judgment about the individual contribution to the community.

³⁸ D. M. Fraser, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Some Basic Questions Regarding Principles and Practice*, “International Studies Quarterly” 1979, Vol. 23, No. 2, p. 183.

³⁹ Although more such examples can be analyzed, such as the war in Iraq since 2003 and the recent American involvement in Libya.

⁴⁰ P. C. McMahon, J. Western, *The Death of Dayton, How to Stop Bosnia from Falling Apart*, “Foreign Affairs” 2009, September–October.

citizens, whose guilt was only the fact that they belonged to another ethnic group, permanent instability, and the humiliation of the international community conducted by “the butcher of the Balkans,” as Slobodan Milošević was depicted, provided sufficient grounds for the military intervention. Only the United States⁴¹ possessed the necessary capacity to enforce international principles. Thus, the newly defined concept of “humanitarian intervention” was aiming to protect the civilian population and secure their basic human rights.

The ultimate recognition of Kosovo as an independent state nine years later was met with regret by almost every Balkan state, except Albania. Such arguments were ultimately confronted with the American belief that the fire in Kosovo was extinguished and that the new political structure would be able to prove the effectiveness of the military actions. Today, four years later, the international community rather tries to ignore the dramatic economic situation, spreading corruption, and ethnic tensions between the Serbian minority and the Albanians and to disregard the fact that the Kosovo case is still considered among the sources of instability in the whole region.

On the contrary, the argument that is most often used to argue in support of the American actions in both cases is the fact that, since then, no full-scale military conflicts have occurred, and despite the ethnic clashes in Kosovo, and increased stiffening of the nationalist political parties in Bosnia, no bloodshed and war has erupted. The answer continues that the decreasing interest in the region is a consequence of 9/11 and the new threats for American national security from the Middle East and Afghanistan. However, such an answer neglects the necessity for persistence, typical of any religion in order to achieve lasting well-being for the others. Furthermore, it totally neglects the Christian values of compassion and respect so fundamental to the notion of human rights. Therefore, the religious driving force hidden behind the values of human rights and democracy is subordinated to the list of American national interests that does not allow firm and equivocal promotion of moral values. As Morgenthau explains, ethics in international relations is situational.⁴²

...and President Obama

Barack Obama also provides interesting material for observation as an example of our research on religion’s impact on American foreign policy. It has already been acknowledged that American presidents often use a religious note in their speeches. Since former presidents have been screened in that regard by others, Barack Obama is the most recent example of this pattern of behavior. His “New Beginning” speech in Cairo in June 2009 provides a “civil religion” template for the future

⁴¹ Within the framework of the NATO-led operation “Allied force” that lasted from March 24 until June 10, 1999.

⁴² R. Jackson, G. Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, New York 2010, p. 70.

speechwriters of American presidents to come. While seeking to bridge relations with the Muslim world, shaken by the deeds of the Bush administration, Obama did not compromise the main American principles. While attempting to defuse prejudices and to emphasize the necessity for a more promising future, the speech is an all-embracing model of Bellah's description of civil religion. It includes quotations from the Gettysburg address and recalls the Declaration of Independence⁴³. It recalls Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson's thoughts as guiding principles for behavior. But most importantly, it underlines the universal value of democracy and human rights that leave the societies themselves to make decisions concerning their future. Last but not least, the religious inclination, bearing in mind also the context of the speech, emphasizes the similar attitude in Christianity, Islam and Judaism that legitimize the American efforts.

Slightly over a year later, the U.S. ambassador to Poland Lee Feinstein delivered a speech at the Jagiellonian University. Among the questions he had to address was one about the religiousness of President Obama. The ambassador replied briefly: "President Obama is a very religious man". There is no reason not to believe Ambassador Feinstein. However, how much of that religious devotion directs the actions the president needs to take in the course of his work in the Oval Office, I dare not say.

Conclusion

Concluding, American values, being the core of American foreign policy, are deeply rooted in the religious uniqueness of the United States and their remarkable historical development. The universalism of these values stems from the deep respect for the individual and the necessity to find an alternative, more humane, way of historical development. The Protestant eschatological tradition introduced messianism, exceptionalism and compassion as the driving forces of American foreign policy. The marriage of messianism and exceptionalism shaped the nature of human rights and democracy and guaranteed their position as the highest priorities in America's activities abroad.

The uniqueness of America's religious impact on foreign policy is in its inclusive character. The civil religion, as an overarching social semi-transcendental consensus, deprives the American religiousness in foreign policy of its fundamentalist inclination. Instead, it replaces the fundamentalism with persistence, charac-

⁴³ "So no matter where it takes hold, government of the people and by the people [my underlining – S.D.] sets a single standard for all who would hold power: You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party [...] and later 'No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation by any other'." See: President Obama's speech at Cairo University. The whole text is available online at: www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09 [27.10.2011].

teristic of the pragmatic attitude of the Americans, instead of imaginary emotionalism of other religions. The unique American position in international relations provides the necessary “channels of distribution” for American values to be spread. Just as the Judeo-Christian religion seemed to be universal for the colonists in the 17th century, so the American values of democracy and human rights seem to be universal to the global community today. As Obama stated in Cairo,

But I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn’t steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These are not just American ideas; they are human rights.

The question is, is it really so?

John Hayes

FROM CHRIST-HAUNTED REGION TO ANOMIC ANYPLACE:
RELIGION IN THE 20TH CENTURY SOUTH

“While the South is hardly Christ-centered,” Flannery O’Connor memorably declared in 1960 on the college lecture circuit, “it is most certainly Christ-haunted. The Southerner, who isn’t convinced of it, is very much afraid that he may have been formed in the image and likeness of God. Ghosts can be very fierce and instructive. They cast strange shadows.”¹ A Catholic in a regional sea of Protestants, a single woman in a patriarchal culture, a writer and intellectual living on a farm in rural Georgia, O’Connor in these remarks tersely and brilliantly evoked something elemental about the mid-20th century South: that its denizens—women and men, rich and poor, black and white—couldn’t imagine themselves in wholly secular, “modern” categories; they were shaped in indelible ways by theological imagination and longings for sacred reality. The South’s public square, as a basic consequence, was noticeably not “naked,” but clothed in all sorts of ways by the traces and trap-pings of religion, specifically Protestant Christianity.

With her first novel, *Wise Blood* (1952), O’Connor opened a window onto this Christ-haunted region. The protagonist Hazel Motes is driven by a relentless urge to repudiate the Christianity of his rural upbringing, and yet, try fervently and violently as he might, he can’t shake the faith that obsesses him. On the city streets he confronts traveling evangelists with stark admonitions to repent and pamphlets beckoning “Jesus Calls You,” while a drive into the countryside brings him to a roadside boulder that thunders to passersby in large white letters, “Woe to the Blasphemer and Whoremonger! Will Hell Swallow You Up?”² As a boy Hazel “saw

¹ F. O’Connor, *Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction*, [in:] *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, ed. S. Fitzgerald, R. Fitzgerald, New York 1969, p. 44–45.

² F. O’Connor, *Wise Blood*, New York 1962, p. 41, 75.

Jesus move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing,” and in the end, the wild ragged Jesus claims him as Hazel becomes a vivid Protestant ascetic and martyr, suffering in conscious imitation of Christ.³

Yet *Wise Blood* also portrayed what O'Connor meant when she precisely qualified the South as not Christ-centered, but rather Christ-haunted. No sentimentalist, but rather a grotesque realist who punctured regional mythologies, O'Connor showed in fiction how Christianity was much more a haunting, shadowy ghost than a cultural orientation point in the South of the mid-20th century. Hazel Motes is obsessed with belief and disbelief as he comes to the city of Taulkinham, and yet most people he encounters regard his open, public wrestling with faith as tacky and impolite, somewhat beyond the pale for respectable society. On a train in the opening scene of the novel, returning to the South after four years in the army, Motes sits across from a proper Southern lady, Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock. In the awkwardness of their forced intimacy, Hazel leans forward and hints at his disbelief with a taunt:

“I reckon you think you been redeemed,” he said.

Mrs. Hitchcock snatched at her collar.

“I reckon you think you been redeemed,” he repeated.

She blushed. After a second she said yes, life was an inspiration and then she said she was hungry...⁴

Beginning with this scene, much of the novel's overt humor comes from the wide disparity between Hazel Motes' deep-rooted assumptions about the regional culture he is trying to repudiate, and the actual culture as it responds to his flagrant repudiations. Motes assumes the culture is Christ-centered, and tries violently to destroy that Christian imprint, but instead he meets with widespread apathy, or puzzlement that someone would be so worked up about religion. In a climactic scene near the novel's end, Motes' landlady Mrs. Flood confronts him about his newly ascetic way of life. Horrified when she sees that he has wrapped his chest with barbed wire, she drops the lunch tray and cries out, “Mr. Motes, what do you do these things for? It's not natural.”

After a second he began to button the shirt. “It's natural,” he said.

“Well, it's not normal. It's like one of them gory stories, it's something that people have quit doing—like boiling in oil or being a saint or walling up cats,” she said.

“There's no reason for it. People have quit doing it.”

“They ain't quit doing it as long as I'm doing it,” he said.⁵

³ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 224.

Insisting that he does it because he is “not clean,” Motes speaks past Mrs. Flood in this confrontation. She responds with a sarcastic dismissal (which, ironically, more directly states Motes’ Christianity more than he does): “You must believe in Jesus or you wouldn’t do these foolish things.”⁶ For Mrs. Flood, Motes has taken religion to the level of fanaticism, behaving like an irrational saint from a more primitive, bygone era. Christianity has a place in her South, but its place is tightly circumscribed and contained within the bounds of good sense and respectability. Indeed it might be dangerous if the society were Christ-centered. Too much Jesus, by her reckoning, has driven Hazel Motes crazy.

This essay uses Flannery O’Connor’s writings, written and published in the 1950s and early 60s, as a point of orientation for exploring and explaining religion in the American South. O’Connor’s *oeuvre* appeared at a vital moment in regional history: when the once-marginal, heavily-agricultural, “solid” Democratic political economy was rapidly transformed into the booming, bustling “Sunbelt” of suburbs, industry, and Republicans; and when the long-established regional tradition of white supremacy came under open attack from the Civil Rights movement, making overt racism untenable for the first time, inaugurating a new officially “colorblind” social order. This vital moment also marked a watershed in regional religious dynamics, the demise of a world that had been a long time in the making, and the beginning of something quite new. In this time of flux, O’Connor observed and articulated the force that religion held in the South with unusual insight and depth of perception. She was of course a professional writer of fiction, not a journalist, sociologist, historian, or theologian *per se*, yet her fictional world (and the reflections on it she presented in lecture and essay) captured real-world phenomena of religion in the modern South without peer. As she insisted in a college lecture, beneath the violent grotesquery and mystical imagery of her fiction, she was a realist, a “realist of distances,” after a “deeper kind of realism.”⁷ Her fiction will thus be our entry point in making sense of religion in the modern South.

The essay will also interrogate two other foundational statements from the era—Walker Percy’s 1961 novel *The Moviegoer* and Martin Luther King’s 1963 “Letter from Birmingham Jail”—to bring into sharper focus religious phenomena that appear only in the periphery of O’Connor’s imaginative vision. Percy’s novel highlights just how much the region was changing, and points the way forward to the emergent Sunbelt, a world of optimism, amnesia, and anomie. King’s letter emphasizes how a seemingly-common religion could take radically different shapes in relation to regional white supremacy, and how and why the Civil Rights movement sought to provoke a crisis moment in regional religion. Juxtaposed with O’Connor, Percy’s novel and King’s letter delineate the basic factors in religion in the South at a vital moment in its history.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 225.

⁷ F. O’Connor, *Mystery and Manners*, p. 39, 44.

Together, and through the context they have established, these writings frame and elucidate religious life in the post-60s South, that of contemporary visibility and experience.

In Hazel Motes' confrontations with Mrs. Hitchcock and Mrs. Flood, we can catch a glimpse of two distinct, different strains of religion in the mid-20th century South: one urban, respectable, sensible, and domesticated, embodied in propertied women; the other rural in origin, at odds with social propriety, disruptive, demanding obsession, and manifest in an impoverished, uncouth man. Making sense of these distinct strains, both of which appear throughout O'Connor's subsequent writings, requires at least a thumbnail sketch of the region's religious history. Though the two strains are relatively modern (only coalescing in the late 19th century), to rightly characterize them one must begin with "the South" in its earliest manifestation—as a handful of colonies of England.

The colonial South was a satellite of the home country in a variety of ways, but none more so than its centering on the Church of England. With the parish as a basic unit of political order, churches placed strategically at centers of population density, taxes funding the maintenance of the church, and prominent gentry holding positions on the vestry, the Church of England dominated the southern colonial public square. These colonies embodied the traditional idea that a common, official religion was the glue that held a society together. The colonial South might aptly be called the Anglican frontier. But in the 1760s and 70s, two English dissenting groups, the Baptists and Methodists, began to appear and beckon people away from the official, established, public religion, and into close-knit, exclusivist communities marked by social withdrawal and austerity, inward piety and open display of emotion (in the community of fellow believers), and above all, a decisive conversion experience. In the classic categories of Ernst Troeltsch, these Baptists and Methodists were "sects," calling people away from the all-encompassing social world—even one with a very public church—and into smaller island communities of the truly converted, where genuine Christianity was to be found. In the social context of the South, a gentry-dominated milieu marked by inclusive public religion, the conviviality of the "pub" and the dance, the open competition of the horse race or cock fight, and the overt display of wealth and power, the exclusivist, austere, emotion-sharing, inward-focused Baptists and Methodists represented a "counterculture."⁸

This countercultural movement gained followers during the American Revolution and on its heels, and in a politics-makes-strange-bedfellows alliance with leading rationalist republicans like Jefferson and Madison, Baptists and Methodists

⁸ R. Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740–1790*, Chapel Hill 1999, p. 163.

pushed for the dismantling of established religion and the creation of a secular state. This strange alliance succeeded in its aims, first with Virginia's Statue for Religious Freedom (1786), then with the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1789), and then in a growing succession of states into the early 19th century. Despite these political victories and their growing numbers, Baptists and Methodists as of 1813 claimed as members less than 1/5 of the regional population.⁹ The reorganized Church of England, the Episcopal church, still enjoyed considerable power and prestige, especially among the planter elite, and so did the church that the growing numbers of Scottish and Scotch-Irish descendants sustained, the Presbyterian. Furthermore, many in the new republic, North and South, found secular pursuits—political office, amassing wealth through trade or agriculture, military glory—to be satisfying ends in their own right.

With widespread regional conversion to “evangelical” Christianity as their principal goal, leading Baptist pastors and Methodist bishops began to trim the more countercultural elements of their religion, and craft a movement more palatable to the person that held power in the antebellum South: the white male head of household who exerted patriarchal authority over his dependents—women, children, and, for planters and prosperous yeomen, slaves. In the late 18th century, evangelical (Baptist or Methodist) converts called each other “brother” and “sister,” women exhorted and prophesied as “mothers in Israel,” slaves and free blacks preached to biracial audiences, and unmarried, itinerant young men were the most publicly visible bearers of the evangelical message. In the early 19th century, male evangelical leaders sought to shift the movement away from these countercultural activities, downplaying the leveling language of “brother” and “sister,” circumscribing the leadership of women, separating whites and blacks into different meetings or even churches, and modeling the evangelical preacher into a settled, married, proper head of household, a gentleman. By the 1830s, Baptists and Methodists were founding colleges to train these new evangelical gentlemen, and by the 1840s, they were crafting extensive theological defenses of southern slavery as an institution ordained by God, within which the evangelical patriarch could show love and care for his inferior dependents.¹⁰

Yet even as the Baptists and Methodists changed themselves in various ways to conform to the shape of power in the South, even as they moved from counterculture to accommodation to and even overt defense of the regional status quo, even as they became the leading groups in sheer membership numbers, they did not make it into the center of the halls of power in the antebellum South. The leading planters who organized and fought for the Confederacy, for example, were overwhelmingly Episcopalian and Presbyterian—Methodists and Baptists were no more numerable in Confederate leadership than Catholics.¹¹ Antebellum southern

⁹ C. Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, Chapel Hill 1997, p. 265.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ J. Wakelyn, *Biographical Dictionary of the Confederacy*, Westport 1977, p. 529–533.

culture was still very much shaped by the conviviality of alcohol and dancing, by open competition, by an aggressive, violent code of honor, like South Carolina Rep. Preston Brooks displayed on the floor of Congress when he caned Massachusetts Sen. Charles Sumner in 1856, like secessionists manifested when they denounced Lincoln's election as the final stroke of dishonor they could stand, like W.J. Cash evoked when he wrote of the archetypal white Southern man that his deepest conviction was "that nothing living could cross him and get away with it."¹²

Only after the Civil War did Baptists and Methodists move into the centers of social and cultural power. The patriarchal planter in whose image antebellum evangelical leaders had sought to refashion themselves suffered, in a variety of ways, serious de-legitimization in the crisis of the Civil War: through the shame of military defeat, through the end of slavery, through the death and maiming of war, through new economic incentives that encouraged merchants and industrial entrepreneurs. In this time of flux and uncertainty, male evangelical clergy and evangelical women came to the forefront and became instrumental in crafting a "New South." They sought to fashion a new social order in the evangelical image, making their austerity the regional standard, curbing aggressive competition and the braggadocio of the code of honor, encouraging very public displays of piety and the decisive conversion experience.¹³ In the typology of Troeltsch, they sought to become the "church" of the New South.

Through the centralized bureaucracy of the denominations they built, the colleges they sustained and continued to found, religious newspapers and periodicals, voluntary organizations and women's clubs, and political lobbying, Baptists and Methodists largely succeeded in their goals. The austere ethos once regulated by internal church discipline became, in southern state after southern state in the early 20th century, the social norm and official law, most visibly in prohibition and Sabbath observance laws. Baptists and Methodists built imposing "First" churches in central places in the towns and cities that sprouted in the New South, and massive "revival" meetings calling for evangelical conversion became staple activities in the new urban landscape. Evangelicals transformed the old masculine code of honor into a new mode of "respectability:" the ideal person, man or woman, would display not power over others, but rather self-mastery, through the control of base appetites, wild urges, and profligate extravagances.¹⁴ By the early decades of the 20th century this evangelical New South-building was complete, as church membership (overwhelmingly in Baptist and Methodist congregations) became almost a prerequisite of social propriety and communal belonging.¹⁵ On the masthead of

¹² B. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, Oxford 1982; W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, New York 1941, p. 46.

¹³ T. Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South 1865–1920*, Chapel Hill 1990.

¹⁴ P. Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists 1865–1925*, Chapel Hill 1997, p. 77–106.

¹⁵ S. Hill, *Southern Churches in Crisis*, Boston 1966.

their newspaper *Our Home Field* the Baptists could depict evangelical Christianity as the sturdy pillars supporting the “temple” of the Republic, while Methodist millionaire and Coca-Cola founder Asa Candler, when donating \$1 million to the Methodists’ Emory College, could claim that evangelical Christianity in the South made for “a blessed civilization crowned with piety and peace.”¹⁶

Yet even as evangelicals fashioned the New South in their own image, even as they moved completely from withdrawn exclusivist sects to widely-embracing churches planted in the center of a “Christian civilization,” they were undergoing changes in identity. With new seminaries and divinity schools, and their expanded colleges, they took substantial steps to formally credentialize their ministers—inspired preachers made sense in the early days, but the New South minister needed to be a formally-educated professional, commanding respect in the ranks of lawyers, doctors, and teachers. The conversion experience became less and less mystical and more and more moral, a moment when the convert made a decision to live uprightly and shun idle conviviality and aggressive competition.¹⁷ Respectability as a new evangelical ideal was open to women and blacks in a way that the culture of honor never had been, and yet this new ethos was signified, not only by austere self-mastery, but also positively, through clean, refined clothing and upright, well-mannered comportment—true Christianity was not primarily inward anymore, but now could be and should be outwardly manifest in, ironically, an evangelical culture of display.¹⁸ In concert with national trends, evangelical imagery in song and sermon was becoming feminized and domesticated: mother and home appeared as dominant new metaphors in evangelical discourse.¹⁹ The feminized piety of New York Methodist Fanny Crosby’s gospel songs filled southern Baptist and Methodist hymnals, and the congregation could sing of being “safe in the arms of Jesus/safe on his gentle breast,” of how for each Christian “Jesus is tenderly calling thee home,” of the “blessed assurance” that came from knowing that “Jesus is mine.”²⁰ The “cult of domesticity,” that innovation of Northern evangelicals in the 1820s and 30s, spread in the newly-capitalist New South: competitive men would enter the amoral world of the market to provide for their families, pious women would rule the home and make it a place, coequal with the church, for Christian instruction and moral education. In addition to these feminizing and moralizing changes, Southern evangelicalism was showing a distinct new “bourgeois” or middle class imprint.²¹ The old ethos of austerity was reworked to emphasize thrift, frugality, and hard work as markers of “respectable” Christian behavior. Ironically, even as

¹⁶ “Our Home Field” 1899, Vol. 9 (July), p. 12; K. Bailey, *Southern White Protestantism in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1964, p. 35.

¹⁷ T. Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, p. 144–164.

¹⁸ J. Giggie, *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African-American Religion in the Delta 1875–1915*, Oxford 2008.

¹⁹ A. Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, New York 1977.

²⁰ *The Modern Hymnal*, Nashville 1926, p. 262, 331, 348; *The Cokesbury Hymnal*, Nashville 1923, p. 150, 201, 254.

²¹ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, Baton Rouge 1951, p. 171; P. Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, p. 78.

the region as a whole came to experience a new widespread poverty, leading Baptists and Methodists became vocal proponents of what Max Weber, across the Atlantic, called the “Protestant work ethic.”²² They assumed a basic economic justice in the world: that right living would bring prosperity and tangible blessing. Thus was evangelical Christianity, a countercultural alternative when it first appeared in the South in the Revolutionary era, reconfigured and reimagined as a pillar and foundation of the southern social order a century and a half later.

This evangelical New South, crafted in the half-century after the Civil War, was the society that prominent journalist H.L. Mencken observed and named the “Bible Belt” in the mid-1920s. The basic features of this Bible Belt were sustained into the 1960s, despite internecine theological division (the Fundamentalist/Modernist struggle), despite restorationist movements that beckoned people into new exclusivist sects (Holiness and Pentecostalism), despite the presence of smaller religious groups (Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Catholics, Lutherans, Jews, Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ), despite rival wings that pursued social reform/activism and those that shunned or denounced it, despite major structural change in the region beginning in the 1930s. So powerful was this Bible Belt, this evangelical South, that in the 1960s academic historians who were also lay evangelicals could lament that Baptist/Methodist churches were trapped in “cultural captivity,” that their social power had put them dangerously “at ease in Zion,” that unless these churches recovered a prophetic, sectarian voice, they would soon face a “crisis” for which they were badly unprepared.²³ The only regional analogue for this “Baptist-Methodist hegemony,” it seemed, lay in the Democratic party of the “solid South.”²⁴

O’Connor’s characters inhabit this Bible Belt: they live and move in a world where evangelical Christianity’s cultural place is a given. It is a constitutive, elemental social factor that needs no justification or defense; it is simply part of the way things are, a pillar of society. When Hazel Motes first approaches Mrs. Flood looking to rent a room, he tells her he is a preacher, of the “Christ Without Christ.” “Protestant?” she asks, “or something foreign?”—in unconscious satire that reveals both her religious apathy, and the ready regional assumption of Protestantism’s at-homeness in the South.²⁵ In “Good Country People” the Bible salesman Manley Pointer chides Mrs. Hopewell for lacking what many in the region proudly display, a family Bible in the parlor, even as, in “Revelation,” the radio in a doctor’s office

²² M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London 1930 [1904–1905].

²³ J. Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists*, Knoxville 1972; R. Spain, *At Ease in Zion: Social History of Southern Baptists 1865–1900*, Nashville 1967.

²⁴ S. Hill et al, *Religion and the Solid South*, Nashville 1972.

²⁵ F. O’Connor, *Wise Blood*, p. 106.

plays gospel music for all to hear: “when I looked up and He looked down...and wona these days I know I’ll we-eara crown.”²⁶ Julian’s mother in “Everything That Rises Must Converge” claims that she can demonstrate Christian “graciousness” towards anyone, and while her son acts with bitter spite and abstract notions of solidarity, she reaches out to people on the bus as neighbors, giving a little boy a penny in a display of Christian charity.²⁷ The Grandmother in “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” in the crisis moment of the story, implores the Misfit to simply “pray” and signify that he is, in fact, “a good man.” As he violently, verbally denies Christianity, her begging rises to a fever pitch: “Jesus! You’ve got good blood! I know you wouldn’t shoot a lady! I know you come from nice people! Pray!”²⁸ In these various instances, evangelical Christianity, niceness, goodness, graciousness, optimism, home, and at-homeness are all part of a well-woven cultural matrix.

In O’Connor’s only story set outside the South, “Judgement Day,” T.C. Tanner reveals the deep imprint of his southern imaginative framework as he struggles to make sense of life in New York City, where he lives with his daughter. She urges him to stop looking out the window and thinking morbid thoughts, and instead to turn around and watch the television, for “inspiration and an out-let.” “The Judgement is coming,” Tanner defiantly insists, shunning idle entertainment, “the sheep’ll be separated from the goats. Them that kept their promises from them that didn’t.” In his brief, tense encounters with his daughter’s neighbor, a black actor, Tanner continually insists that the actor must be another southern expatriate, that he is from south Alabama, that he is a preacher. In the violent climax, the actor has had enough of what he sees as Tanner’s racist patronizing, and he explodes, “I’m not no preacher! I’m not even no Christian. I don’t believe that crap. There ain’t no Jesus and there ain’t no God.” Tanner cannot imagine that this could not be so. “And you ain’t black, and I ain’t white!” he yells back in “tough as an oak knot” insistence that Christianity’s truth is as self-evident as skin color. Even at the end, as he is dying, Tanner begs the actor for help in the only cultural framework he can imagine. “Hep me up, Preacher. I’m on my way home!”²⁹

Even more than T.C. Tanner, Ruby Turpin in “Revelation” embodies the extent to which evangelical Christianity has become a constitutive, supportive factor in the southern cultural-social framework. As she sits with her husband Claud in the waiting room of the doctor’s office, mentally singing along to the gospel songs she knows by heart, Mrs. Turpin surveys her neighbors and fits everyone into a clear place. She talks easily with a “pleasant lady” like herself, tries to distance herself from a “white-trash woman” with bad manners and tacky clothes, and patronizes a black boy by talking to him as if he knows nothing of the world. Of the “white-trash woman” she thinks to herself, “if you gave them [poor whites] everything,

²⁶ *Idem*, *The Complete Stories*, New York 1971, p. 278, 490.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 407.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 131–132.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 541, 545, 549.

in two weeks it would all be broken or filthy or they would have chopped it up for lightwood... Help them you must, but help them you couldn't." To the "pleasant lady" Mrs. Turpin discusses the laziness of her black "help:" "We found enough niggers to pick our cotton this year but Claud he had to go after them and take them home again in the evening. They can't walk that half a mile... I tell you, I sure am tired of buttering up niggers." What Ruby Turpin says and does in the doctor's office is merely an extension of what she thinks to herself as she lies awake at night. In these moments, she thinks about the social types of the region as she sees it, "respectable" whites, "white-trash," and "niggers." These categories are the spark for Mrs. Turpin's gratitude to Jesus in prayer, for she realizes that

He had not made her a nigger or white-trash or ugly! He had made her herself and given her a little of everything. Jesus, thank you! she said. Thank you thank you thank you! Whenever she counted her blessings she felt as buoyant as if she weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds instead of one hundred and eighty.

Mrs. Turpin's gratitude that Jesus made her who she is flows into various behaviors and sayings. Smiling "just makes you feel better all over," she insists to the pleasant lady, and her eyes are marked by small wrinkles from "laughing too much." Though she judges people by clothing and comportment, she still draws distinctions between internal and external moral worth: "it was one thing to be ugly and another to act ugly." She sees herself as a charitable, generous woman, and "to help anybody out that needed it was her philosophy of life. She never spared herself when she found somebody in need, whether they were white or black, trash or decent." Mrs. Turpin is pretty sure that such good manners are a distinct southern virtue, traceable to the Christianity of the region—and notably lacking "way up north," with its secularized culture and college students who read books like *Human Development*.

Mrs. Turpin's physical heaviness is a marker, for the narrator, of her social and cultural complacency, one that has the explicit sanction of evangelical Christianity. To the "pleasant lady" she spills the private thoughts of her prayers into public conversation in the doctor's office.

"If it's one thing I am," Mrs. Turpin said with feeling, "it's grateful... I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it is! It could have been different... Oh thank you, Jesus, Jesus, thank you!'" she cried aloud.

At just this moment she is attacked by a college student home from Wellesley, the "ugly" girl who had been reading *Human Development*. "Go back to hell from where you came from, you old wart hog," the outraged girl whispers to Mrs. Turpin just before being sedated and pulled away from almost strangling her. Back on her farm, reflecting on this shocking outburst, Mrs. Turpin becomes full of righteous anger as she realizes that "this message had been given to Ruby Turpin,

a respectable, hard-working, church-going woman.” “What do you send me a message like that for?” she asks God, baffled and furious.

In this one character O’Connor has embodied all of the basic features of the evangelicalism of the post-Civil War New South, of the Bible Belt: the principle pious figure is a woman, a *lady*, secure in her social position, displaying respectability through clean clothes (even clean hogs on her farm) and good manners, living by the Protestant work ethic, demonstrating Christian behavior through church attendance, generosity towards neighbor, and gratitude towards the Jesus she knows in characteristic evangelical immediacy. Her evangelical Christianity is easily articulated in the public sphere: even in the publicity of the doctor’s office, she pours forth her private piety in conversation with the pleasant lady. And because Jesus made “everything the way it is,” she must confront Jesus for answers to everything, even the startling “message” He sends through the violent Wellesley girl.³⁰

As O’Connor has set up the story, the reader can immediately see the complacency and self-satisfaction that Ruby Turpin embodies and yet is utterly blind to. A proper evangelical in the Bible Belt, she is thoroughly “at ease in Zion.” The reader also can see past Mrs. Turpin’s conscious gratitude to her own unconscious anxiety for defining everyone’s proper “place”—with her own place being self-imagined as, unsurprisingly, on the top of society’s moral-religious hierarchy. Through the satire of the story’s plot and protagonist, O’Connor captures what the evangelicals both gained and lost when they transformed themselves, in the course of a century and a half, from countercultural “sect” to regional “church.” In crafting the New South’s Bible Belt they made respectability the dominant code of the region, imagined a Protestant work ethic and basic economy of just desserts, valorized the “lady” in the cult of domesticity, and gave their immediacy with the divine a feminized, pietistic cast. At the same time, they became defanged and declawed: their Christianity lost the power to bite, and became a sacred sanction for the *status quo*. It became a little too easy and too obvious; disruptive messages had to come from outsiders, in moments of violent confrontation. Inwardness—an original focal point of early evangelicals—had declined notably, and now external criteria (clothing, hygiene, manners) could mark “place” in the socioreligious hierarchy. The other basic focal point of early evangelicalism, the conversion experience, had become less and less the anxious sinner’s confrontation with God, and more and more the confident, willful self-inauguration of a life of upright respectability and social propriety.

What this evangelical hegemony also meant, O’Connor shows with a remarkable awareness of irony, is that Christianity in the Bible Belt became compartmentalized and confined. Upbeat gospel songs might play on the public radio, and Ruby Turpin might verbalize her grateful piety in a public place, but the more disruptive, disturbing, prophetic elements of Christianity got pushed to the regional margins. It is only back on her farm, away from others, with hogs and the countryside as

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 488–509.

her companions, that Mrs. Turpin can come to terms with her unsettling message from God. In *Wise Blood* Mrs. Hitchcock and Mrs. Flood had to similarly push Hazel Motes' taunting theological question and egregious ascetic display away from them. Disruptive religious questions, physical behavior that seemed to make no sense, had to be imaginatively marginalized. In "A Good Man is Hard to Find" the Grandmother—and indeed, everyone else who reads the newspapers—has to imagine the cold-blooded killer as "the Misfit." His sheer violence for its own sake is so far beyond the pale that he must be imaginatively dehumanized: he's not really a human being, but a monster.

The farm owner Mrs. May gives the most succinct expression of this ironic religious compartmentalization in "Greenleaf." On her dairy farm is a tenant family, the Greenleafs. Mrs. May has nothing but condescension for Mrs. Greenleaf, in particular, and she notes that

the yard around her [Mrs. Greenleaf's] house looked like a dump and her five girls were always filthy; even the youngest one dipped snuff. Instead of making a garden or washing their clothes, her preoccupation was what she called "prayer healing."

Mrs. May, like Mrs. Turpin, is a respectable lady, and she has named her sons after evangelical heroes, Wesley and Scofield. She looks down on the Greenleafs as "scrub-human," but what especially makes her recoil is Mrs. Greenleaf's tacky, enthusiastic, earthy Christianity. When she finds Mrs. Greenleaf in the woods, sprawled on the ground and praying passionately in a seeming trance, she is horrified and asks what in the world she is doing. Mrs. Greenleaf, still in the trance, simply groans "Jesus, Jesus."

Mrs. May winced. She thought the word, Jesus, should be kept inside the church building like other words inside the bedroom. She was a good Christian woman with a large respect for religion, though she did not, of course, believe any of it was true. "What is the matter with you?" she asked sharply.³¹

The narrator brings out the ironies of Mrs. May: that religion gets confined to church, (and also home); that one could be a good Christian woman, and yet not actually believe.³² Her respectable, domestic, official evangelicalism—that of the visible Bible Belt—has become what the early evangelicals said colonial Anglicanism was: officially all-embracing and yet practically compartmentalized, touching only some elements of life; external show rather than inward passion; a moral summons for social propriety rather than a transcendent, sacred, and possibly disruptive force.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 315–317.

³² See also L. Pope, *Millhands and Preachers*, New Haven 1942.

In characters like Mrs. May, Mrs. Turpin, Mrs. Hitchcock and Mrs. Flood, O'Connor shows how the Bible Belt South was actually not "Christ-centered," but rather organized by an ironic compartmentalizing of evangelical Christianity. This was one strain of religion in the South, certainly the most publicly visible and the one that has attracted the vast majority of scholarly analysis. Yet in the characters that confront these comfortable evangelicals—in Hazel Motes and Mrs. Greenleaf—O'Connor's fiction shows the powerful presence of another very different strain of regional religion. If in the first type of character we meet propertied people who speak well, have good hygiene, and good manners, in the second type we encounter impoverished folk with rough grammar, cheap clothes, and a lifestyle not too far removed from the earth. They live in the Bible Belt, and they are religious too, but their religion, like their place in the social hierarchy, is quite different. If in the first type of character we can see the dominant, most visible evangelicalism of the South, in the second type we can discern a less-visible, culturally marginalized, but actually more powerful "folk" form of evangelicalism.

The protagonists of O'Connor two novels, Hazel Motes and Francis Marion Tarwater in *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960), embody this folk religion, as do the Misfit in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," Bevel Summers in "The River," Mrs. Shortley in "The Displaced Person," Wendell and Cory in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," Manley Pointer in "Good Country People," the Greenleaf family in "Greenleaf," Rufus Johnson in "The Lame Shall Enter First," O.E. Parker in "Parker's Back," T.C. Tanner in "Judgement Day," and Mason Tarwater in *The Violent Bear It Away*. These folk believers share a number of common features: they are typically impoverished country people or from rural backgrounds, their speech is unpolished, they wear humble clothes like overalls or inexpensive suits, and their demeanor is rough and earthy. In the dominant social hierarchy as articulated by Ruby Turpin, these characters are "poor white trash." Yet it is precisely in such unrespectable characters that O'Connor fictionally explores the deepest struggles of Christian faith and unbelief. The real-world presence of these folk Christians, their actual tangible reality in the South, allowed for an unusual artistic alliance. O'Connor—a propertied, ostensibly proper southern lady, a well-read Catholic—made these impoverished folk Protestants her central characters. On the lecture circuit in 1963, she voiced her own sense of religious affinity with these folk Christians when she said of herself,

I think he [the Catholic novelist] will feel a good deal more kinship with backwoods prophets and shouting fundamentalists than he will with those politer elements for whom the supernatural is an embarrassment and for whom religion has become a department of sociology or culture or personality development. His interest and sympathy may very well go—as I know my own

does—directly to those aspects of Southern life where the religious feeling is most intense and where its outward forms are farthest from the Catholic...³³

A contemporary reviewer poked fun at O'Connor and her "God-intoxicated hillbillies," but the condescension belonged to the mainstream reviewer (and to proper Southern people of the class of Mrs. Turpin)—not to O'Connor.³⁴ "When the poor hold sacred history in common," O'Connor went on to argue the same lecture, "they have ties to the universal and the holy, which allows the meaning of their every action to be heightened and seen under the aspect of eternity."³⁵ Her fiction, grounded in a Catholic theological imagination that departed from dismissive ridicule and instead found kinship and sympathy with the region's Protestant poor, is one of the best sources we have for delineating the main features of Southern folk religion.

The Christianity of folk religion was not a pillar of the social order, not a constitutive element of the regional framework, but rather a transcendent, prophetic force that disrupted the order of the world. "Jesus thown everything off balance," the Misfit twice declares to the Grandmother, rejecting her appeals to pray and be nice and good, insisting instead that Jesus' world-disturbance calls either for utterly self-giving faith, or radical repudiation of faith through the dark hedonism of violence.³⁶ "Believe Jesus or the Devil! Testify to one or the other!" the folk preacher Bevel Summers cries in "The River," offering his hearers two radically different ways to live, both religious. He juxtaposes the "River of Life" in which he stands, which flows mystically into the "Kingdom of Christ," with the ordinary world, a world ultimately of death and alienation. When the little boy is thrust into his arms for baptism, the preacher tells him pointedly that once baptized, "you won't be the same again...you'll count," that his life would take on religious meaning that it hadn't gained from the ordinary patterns of society.³⁷ Summers, like the "prophet" Mason Tarwater, like the anti-preacher Hazel Motes, like the young preachers Wendell and Cory, like the faith healer Mrs. Greenleaf, doesn't have formal credentials. He is not a professionalized minister, but a mystically-inspired preacher of a transcendent word.

O'Connor situates many of her folk believers in settings that evoke this sense of Christianity as a transcendent, disruptive force. In *The Violent Bear It Away* Mason Tarwater lives in an isolated clearing in the woods, reachable only by a rugged footpath. From this clearing, Powderhead, he ventures forth into the wider world of "the city" to speak his prophetic message. Hazel Motes, though he seeks to actively repudiate the folk religion of his upbringing, similarly is out of place in

³³ F. O'Connor, *The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South*, [in:] *Mystery and Manners*, p. 207.

³⁴ "Time" 1960, Vol. 75, No. 9 (February 29), p. 118.

³⁵ F. O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners*, p. 203.

³⁶ *Idem*, *Complete Stories*, p. 131.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 168.

the city of Taulkinham—he has fled the vanished rural community of Eastrod where, he learns when he returns from four years in the Army, he doesn't have a place any longer anyway. Rufus Johnson in "The Lame Shall Enter First" and the Misfit in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" both signify through speech, dress, and manners that they come from folk religious backgrounds, and in both stories they appear as social outcasts who disturb convention and propriety. Similarly, Manley Pointer, another character from the folk religious background, is a drifter and enigmatic peddler who appears briefly to violently disrupt the Hopewell family.

Surely it is not accidental that most of O'Connor's folk believers are men. If the respectable Ruby Turpin symbolized domesticated New South evangelicalism, so a disruptive, prophetic folk religion is symbolized typically by jarring, often violent men. Theirs is not a soft piety grounded in home, mother, and an embracing Jesus, but rather one in which, as for Hazel Motes in lines already noted, Jesus appears as "a wild ragged figure," beckoning the folk believer "off into the dark" where, with ordinary categories disrupted, one could not be sure of one's footing. When, rarely, a folk believer seeks comfort and security in domesticated imagery, a prophetic word comes through to disrupt their sentimental longings. Near the end of "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," Tom T. Shiflet waxes nostalgic to try to escape his heightening sense of desolation. "It's nothing so sweet," he tells a poor boy hitchhiker he has picked up, "as a boy's mother. She taught him his first prayers at her knee...My mother was an angel of Gawd...He took her from heaven and giver to me and I left her." The poor boy responds violently, "You go to the devil!" and lunges out of the moving car, shocking Shiflet inadvertently into a genuine engagement with the Christianity he has been trying to avoid through sentimentalization.³⁸

The ominous turnip-shaped cloud that subsequently chases Mr. Shiflet with "guffawing" thunder and "fantastic raindrops" is emblematic of another basic feature of folk religion: that Christian living is not about the upright manners of respectability and propriety, but instead involves passionate, even obsessive engagement with the most elemental forces in life: God and the Devil. In the Misfit's simple, stark folk theology, if "Jesus thown everything off balance," the only two options left are the utter self-giving devotion of faith, or finding perverse pleasure in wreaking violent havoc on others:

If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him.³⁹

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 155–156.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

O'Connor's folk believers battle with God and the Devil despite the cultured disdain of regional intellectuals like Sheppard in "The Lame Shall Enter First" and Rayber in *The Violent Bear It Away*. When Rufus Johnson tells Sheppard that "Satan...has me in his power," Sheppard thinks to himself: "this boy's questions about life had been answered by signs nailed on pine trees: Does Satan have you in his power? Repent or burn in hell. Jesus saves." "Rubbish!" Sheppard fires back at Johnson, "we're living in the space age!"⁴⁰ As Sheppard is convinced that what Johnson needs is a healed foot, so Rayber is certain that Francis Marion Tarwater's troubles would be solved by constructive modern education and a caring father figure. Tarwater ultimately responds to Rayber's psychologizing with a darkly calculated act of sheer violence: he drowns Rayber's retarded son Bishop as Rayber watches helplessly from a distance. What Tarwater is acting out in dramatically violent ways is his inner struggle with the inescapable challenge voiced by the Misfit: utter faith or utter unbelief. Put differently, in his folk religious vision, the opposite of Christian living is not dissolute disorderliness, bad hygiene, and unrefined manners, but rather the stark negation of active, conscious violence and destruction.

In *The Violent Bear It Away* the folk religious Devil becomes an active character in the narrative, in a way that resembles Dostoevsky's *Demons* and the story of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*. The Devil says different things and takes different shapes for Francis Marion Tarwater, but beneath the differences the Devil is a force calling for repudiation of one's created givenness, urging acts of violent self-assertion and raw alienation. In "The Lame Shall Enter First" Rufus Johnson, though hauled off by the police, has the last word when the once-dismissive Sheppard realizes, to his horror, that in fact the Devil does have him in his power, that he has totally ignored his own son Norton in his quest to be a secular "Jesus Christ" to Johnson.⁴¹ Manley Pointer in "Good Country People" debunks stock clichés about simple, pure country folk when, in the climactic scene, he symbolically rapes Hulga Hopewell by taking from her the one thing that made her feel vulnerable, her wooden leg. Though the PhD Hulga had believed philosophically that "some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see," it is the anti-folk believer Pointer who reveals what "nothing" tangibly looks like. He, not she, is ultimately the nihilist, acting out his own negating repudiation of the folk religion he encountered as a child "out in the country around Willohobie."⁴² This seemingly-simple Bible salesman turns out to be an embodiment of the Devil.

O'Connor's two most-developed characters, Hazel Motes and Francis Marion Tarwater, wrestle with God and the Devil in very modern ways: they try to be radical nihilists by preaching a philosophy of nothingness and acting it out through murder. Both ultimately they fail to repudiate the folk religion of their youth. They return to it, and they signify their return in characteristically folk religious ways:

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 450-451.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 459, 481.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 279.

by earthy, physical displays of sacred reality. Hazel Motes puts rocks in his shoes, blinds himself, and wraps barbed wire around his chest, spending his last days walking the city streets, while Francis Marion Tarwater, in the novel's climax, throws himself to the ground and pushes his face against the dirt of his great-uncle's grave until he hears a prophetic command, a divine word meant for him. He rises from the grave, smears a handful of dirt on his forehead, and makes his way to the "dark city" where he will seek to obey the prophetic claim on his life.⁴³ Folk religion, though seemingly furthest from Catholicism as O'Connor noted, has a pervasive physicality, an earthy sacramentalism.

Mason Tarwater displayed this earthy physicality in his own struggles of faith. From the small clearing that was Powderhead he would disappear into the surrounding woods, sometimes for days at a stretch,

while he thrashed out his peace with the Lord, and when he returned, bedraggled and hungry, he would look...as if he had been wrestling a wildcat, as if his head were still full of the visions he had seen in its eyes, wheels of light and strange beasts with giant wings of fire and four heads turned to the four points of the universe.⁴⁴

The folk healer Mrs. Greenleaf cuts stories of death, of murder, abuse, and rape from the newspapers, takes these into the woods, and buries them. She then lies over the ground and "mumbled and groaned for an hour or so moving her huge arms back and forth under her and out again and finally just lying down flat."⁴⁵ The folk preacher Bevel Summers insists that in the ritual of baptism, the river he stands in has become the "River of Life," for "this old red river don't end here. This old red suffering stream goes on, you people, slow to the Kingdom of Christ."⁴⁶ In "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" the tent-show freak with a "country voice" insists to the reverent crowd that "You! You are God's temple, don't you know?," in the process giving genuine sacramental meaning to the girl's Catholic school joke about effective ways to protecting one's feminine "virtue."

Certainly the most vivid folk sacramental act is that of O.E. Parker, who for reasons he cannot really name, demands that the tattooist burn a huge, stern Byzantine Christ across his whole back. Parker originally wants to do this to spite his wife Sarah Ruth, to make her look at his body with sexual interest, but in the tattoo parlor, something about the image in the artist's book commands him, and he gazes at the Byzantine Christ's eyes while his heart beats "as if it were being brought to life by a subtle power." While Parker tries to sleep at night between sessions at the parlor, he is haunted by dreams of a burning tree, and he sees another "tree of light" when he returns to his house and Sarah Ruth. This return is not a reconciliation, though: a distanced Sarah Ruth berates him for wasting time and money, and then

⁴³ Idem, *The Violent Bear It Away*, New York 1960, p. 243.

⁴⁴ Idem, *Violent Bear It Away*, p. 8.

⁴⁵ Idem, *Complete Stories*, p. 316.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 166.

rejects the image that is now on her husband's back. It is "idolatry," she screams, because "God is a spirit," and the body, and matter more generally, cannot ever actively convey the sacred. The rigidly-moral Sarah Ruth speaks from within the categories of the dominant evangelicalism, with its obsessive concern for cleanliness, good hygiene, and stiff, refined dress. In her showdown with her husband, it is ironically the rough, profane O.E. who comes to grasp the deepest meaning of the Incarnation. As Sarah Ruth beats his back with a broom, blood flows down the face of the tattooed Christ, completing its folk sacramental meaning and leading O.E. to weep in the yard beside a lone tree. Like the dirt on Tarwater's forehead or the rocks in Motes' shoes, Parker's tattoo becomes the earthy means through which he connects with Christian sacred reality—precisely the sacred reality that the dominant evangelicalism (though it would be puzzled to learn so) implicitly denies with its modern Docetism.

These characteristic features of folk religion—its earthy Protestant sacramentality, its emphasis on the perpetual struggle between God and the Devil in each believer, its abiding sense of Christianity as a disruptive and prophetic force, its demand of obsessive faith or rejection of faith—mark it as a regional form quite different the dominant evangelicalism of the region. In Troeltsch's categories, southern folk religion sustained the spirit of "sect," confronting its folk (and the larger society of which they were a basic part) with a transcendent, prophetic message. Various observers of the 20th century South have noted some of these elements of folk religion, but they have then dismissed any real power it might have had by crafting a psychological explanation of why impoverished southerners sustained a spirit of prophetic "sect." In *The Violent Bear It Away* O'Connor gives us a succinct illustration of this reductionism, of the modern urge to regard religion as "a department of sociology or culture or personality development." There the schoolteacher and amateur psychologist Rayber studies his uncle Mason Tarwater for some time, asking him all sorts of questions about his folk beliefs. Rayber then writes a scholarly article in which he argues that Tarwater's religion is simply the product of unfulfilled psychological and social need. "His fixation of being called by the Lord had its origin in insecurity. He needed the assurance of a call, and so he called himself." Tarwater sees this article and is infuriated.

"Called myself?" the old man would hiss, "called myself!" This so enraged him that half the time he could do nothing but repeat it. "Called myself. I called myself. I, Mason Tarwater, called myself! Called myself to be beaten and tied up. Called myself to be spit on and snickered at. Called myself to be struck down in my pride. Called myself to be torn by the Lord's eye."⁴⁷

Tarwater (and through him, O'Connor) rejects the notion that "sect" type religion is mere psychological compensation. Why would anyone sign up for slander and persecution if psychological self-interest were their lone motive? Why, most

⁴⁷ Idem, *The Violent Bear It Away*, p. 19–20.

basically, would they submit to a religious message that challenged, not others, but themselves? Instead, O'Connor's fiction suggests, folk religion sustained a spirit of "sect" for cultural reasons: it held on to the basic stance of early evangelicalism. It was a "counterculture" in the New South and into the mid-20th century.

Robert Coles, Harvard psychiatrist and astute reader of O'Connor, found real-world manifestations of O'Connor's fictionalized folk religion in his fieldwork in impoverished areas of the South in the late 1950s and 1960s, particularly the Black Belt, Delta, and Appalachian regions.⁴⁸ He was personally moved by the religion he witnessed among black sharecroppers and white mountaineers and tenant farmers, and in a subsequent 1979 lecture series, he made the connection to O'Connor explicit. He called the people he encountered "her chosen ones—the South's impoverished, hard-praying, stubbornly enduring rural folk, of both races."⁴⁹ Importantly, Coles clarified something that was barely visible in O'Connor's fiction: that southern folk religion was a phenomenon that crossed the color line. All of the characteristic features noted above Coles found among poor whites *and* poor blacks. It was not just the religion of the region's "poor white trash," but rather of "the poor" in the broadest regional sense. Also importantly, Coles emphasized that the lives of the southern poor were changing rapidly—most basically, sharecroppers, tenants, and mountaineers were becoming extinct as mechanization transformed the South, dispersing the poor into the region's cities and out of the region altogether. In his lecture series Coles noted how O'Connor's "The Displaced Person" succinctly captured all of these sweeping regional changes. His fieldwork, then, is a vital document of folk religion before the "folk" disappeared.

Though other fieldworkers and folklorists have confirmed Coles' findings in their work with elderly people in the 1970s and 80s, the genealogy of folk religion remains unclear because its history had not been written. The present author's research reveals that regional folk religion was, as Coles argued, a cultural phenomenon among the poor of both races. It also shows that the folk religion O'Connor and Coles observed in the 1950s and 60s was a New South development, born of the late 19th century fusing of the early evangelical traditions of white plain folk and black slaves.⁵⁰ Folk religion was not "fundamentalist" in the strict sense (though O'Connor sometimes used that term colloquially). Fundamentalism was an urban, mainly non-southern movement that emphasized the Bible's literal interpretation and factual accuracy.⁵¹ Folk believers lived, by contrast, in what O'Connor called "sacred history," with the Bible as a meta-narrative that mystically framed present-day life. Nor was folk religion embodied in "Holy Roller" (Holiness and Penteco-

⁴⁸ R. Coles, *Migrants, Sharecroppers, Mountaineers*, Boston 1971.

⁴⁹ Idem, *Flannery O'Connor's South*, Athens: 1993 [1980], p. xxxi.

⁵⁰ For a historical narrative of folk religion, see J. Hayes, *Hard, Hard Religion: Folk and Poverty in the New South*, [forthcoming].

⁵¹ G. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870–1925*, New York 1980.

stal) churches. Their belief in the true Christian's perfection ("sanctification") was a striking contrast to folk religion's sense of perpetual struggle in the believer's soul and body. Holiness and Pentecostal churches were also peopled by those with some means—not the deeply impoverished.⁵²

In a 1960 letter to a friend, O'Connor wrote of her folk prophet Mason Tarwater, "The old man is very obviously not a Southern Baptist, but an independent, a prophet in the true sense. The true prophet is inspired by the Holy Ghost, not necessarily by the dominant religion of his region."⁵³ The dominant religion of the region, of course, was the evangelicalism that had gained a position of cultural ascendancy by the early 20th century. It was embodied in "First" churches and centralized denominations, like the Southern Baptist Convention. Mason Tarwater didn't belong to a "First" church, and the centralized Convention would have dismissed him as an unlettered, uncouth would-be preacher in need of a good formal education and a good scrubbing. But Tarwater would very likely have belonged to a rural, or urban working-class, Baptist or Methodist church, as the folk believers that Coles witnessed often did. Tarwater, and real-world folk believers like him, could claim to be a more genuine Baptist than those of the Convention, for his folk religion had roots in early evangelicalism too. The significant point of difference is that he had stayed closer to the spirit of early, 18th century evangelicalism, than they had—his Christianity was still a disruptive counterculture, still a "sect."

In O'Connor's provocative regional analysis, then, it was folk evangelicals who kept the South "Christ-haunted" much more than respectable ones. Their folk religion spilled over safe compartmentalization, and became a disruptive, ever-unsettling message. Rather than blessing the *status quo*, it put everything, even folk believers themselves, under divine judgement. Folk religion's insistence on obsessive faith or equally obsessive repudiation of faith made Christianity a cultural force that few southerners could escape: one way or another, they had to come to terms with it. O'Connor's stories show how not just the passionate, but also the indifferent and the complacent, were "haunted" by the "fierce and instructive" ghost of Christianity. From the Grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," to the boy Bevel in "The River," to the child in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," to Hulga Hopewell in "Good Country People," to Mrs. May in "Greenleaf," to Norton in "The Lame Shall Enter First," the comfortable and the apathetic are shocked into decisive engagement with Christianity because they live in a Christ-haunted region, one that folk believers have helped to make. In each of these stories, a folk Christian, or someone that has actively repudiated folk religion, becomes the spark of dramatic change: the Misfit, Bevel Summers, Wendell and Cory, Manley Pointer, Mrs. Greenleaf, Rufus Johnson.

⁵² R. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South*, Cambridge 2008.

⁵³ Flannery O'Connor to William Sessions, September 13, 1960, [in:] *Collected Works*, ed. S. Fitzgerald, New York 1988, p. 1131.

An emblematic instance of this comes in the last pages of *Wise Blood*. Though baffled and dismissive, Mrs. Flood can't quite get her mind off Hazel Motes and the grotesque spectacle of faith that he displays. When the police recover his body at the novel's end, Mrs. Flood is transfixed by his empty eye sockets. She stares into his burned-out eyes, searching for something she can't name, and then paradoxically closes her eyes to stare further into his. But then something quite unexpected happens. She "felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him moving farther and farther away, farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pin point of light."⁵⁴ In his self-flagellation and desire to suffer, Motes becomes for Mrs. Flood a haunting, beckoning figure, like the wild ragged Jesus that had gotten into his own mind's eye as a boy. Like Hazel from his earliest boyhood, Mrs. Flood was now Jesus-bothered too.

But the possibility of this religious jolting across class lines was receding in the South of the 1940s-60s, for the simple reason that the "folk" of folk religion were disappearing. With the declining numbers of small farmers, tenants and sharecroppers, coal miners and other impoverished folk, with their exodus from the countryside and dispersal into the towns and cities of region and nation, went a significant regional religious form that had embodied a transcendent critique. O'Connor captured this vibrant religion better than any other regional observer, in the very mid-century years that it was fading away.

Still, even in the absence of the folk, self-satisfied Ruby Turpin, demanding an explanation from God back on the isolation of her farm, has the cultural possibility of a critical, challenging word of judgment. At the story's end, she sees a mystical vision of a heavenly parade—but the parade is moving in an order radically different from her own placing of people in the doctor's office. "Poor white trash" and "niggers" are at the front of the parade, marching into heaven first, while she, her husband, and other respectable types are bringing up the rear. She looks closer to make sense of the vision, and sees the respectable types, people of "good order and common sense and respectable behavior," singing in key like the refined, well-mannered sort they have always seemed to be. But looking even closer, she sees "their shocked and altered faces," and "that even their virtues were being burned away." The Christian ordering of reality, Mrs. Turpin is given to understand, is radically other than that of her hierarchical southern society. And yet this startling insight—through a subversive, mystical vision—is possible, paradoxically, because of the presence of Christianity in regional culture. Ruby Turpin wants to believe that Jesus made "everything the way it is," but ultimately, it is precisely her longing for higher, divine sanction that provides the imaginative space in which she can see herself judged. She wants Christianity to support her acute sense of social place, to be a pillar of a hierarchy in which she is near the top, yet in the end it is Christianity that upsets her complacency and puts her in her real place, at the back of the sacred parade.

⁵⁴ F. O'Connor, *Wise Blood*, p. 232.

It was a similarly radical Christian reordering of Southern society that the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s was seeking, Martin Luther King argued in his 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail." A black evangelical, a Baptist minister raised in the New South city of Atlanta in the 1930s and 40s, King in his "Letter" envisioned substantive southern social change happening only with a heartfelt regional conversion experience. The public demonstrations, the sit-ins, boycotts, and marches, all ultimately had a basic goal: "to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which had constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue."⁵⁵ In the spring of 1963 that "community" was Birmingham, and "the issue" was the injustice and inhumanity of a racist social order. The created "crisis" and "tension" was not about bad publicity for the city, not about the power plays of politics, but rather went to the essential issue of a change of heart. The community, dominated by a "white power structure," needed to feel such moral/religious tension that it was provoked to change its basic character.⁵⁶ "Injustice must be exposed," King argued, "to the light of human conscience ... before it can be cured."⁵⁷ This experience of tension, this making-visible of the injustice that was normally invisible, would disturb and disrupt the "privileged" who benefitted from "maintenance of the status quo," sparking their conscience and pushing them, from an inward beginning, to change the very social order in which they were sitting in top.

Understanding King's call for and method of social change requires a basic sense of how southern evangelicalism was related to another very powerful cultural message, that of racism. In the same New South era of evangelical ascendancy, a modern culture of white supremacy took shape: that of segregation, or Jim Crow. The obvious question is how the two could develop in the same era, in the same region. How was the Bible Belt South also the Jim Crow South?

Ruby Turpin spoke for what King called the "white power structure" when she classified the different people of the region by an explicit racial and class hierarchy. Respectable whites were above "poor white trash" and "niggers," she knew, but as she classified people by type while lying in bed at night, she thought of various qualifications: some respectable people had lost their money and were now poor, and some trashy people had acquired a fair amount of money, but no manners. And, most disturbingly, not all regional blacks were poor or unrespectable: "there were colored people who owned their own homes and land as well. There was a colored dentist in town who had two red Lincolns and a swimming pool and a farm."⁵⁸ Puzzled by such thoughts, Turpin would then fade into sleep.

⁵⁵ M. Luther King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, [in:] M. Luther King, *Why We Can't Wait*, New York 1964, p. 81.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

⁵⁸ F. O'Connor, *Complete Stories*, p. 491.

Early evangelical churches had been countercultural, interracial spaces, but once white evangelicals began to actively differentiate themselves from black evangelical “brothers” and “sisters” in the early 19th century, they never really looked back. In the antebellum South leading white evangelicals became vocal defenders of slavery, and in the New South, they became active defenders of segregation. Like Ruby Turpin, they sought Christian sanction for the segregationist social order. If respectability, domesticity, and the Protestant work ethic were keys to their New South identity, they soon learned that categorically denying that black people could exhibit these traits was a highly effective way to support segregation and preserve one’s Christian conscience too. If all black people, inherently by their unchangeable race, were trashy, profligate, immoral, lazy, and shiftless, then the code of white supremacy was not dehumanizing, but rather a natural organization based on the hierarchy of the superior over the inferior. Some white evangelicals might doubt this modern racism in their private moments, like Ruby Turpin. And some, like Georgia Methodist Lillian Smith, might openly repudiate the white evangelical affirmation of Jim Crow. But, as King noted, “individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture, but . . . groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.”⁵⁹ At the end of the day, if they were bothered by pangs of conscience, most white evangelicals took the route of Ruby Turpin: they fell asleep and stopped worrying about it. They benefitted from racialized privilege, and their religion told them publicly that their privilege was not unjust oppression, but morally and religiously right. Thus their Bible Belt South went hand-in-glove with their Jim Crow South.

King hoped that the crisis created by Civil Rights activism would awaken the Christian conscience of white evangelicals, provoking their religious sense of self in critical judgment on their racial sense of self. “When I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama,” he wrote of the 1955 beginning of the movement, “I felt we would be supported by the white church. I felt that the white ministers . . . would be among our strongest allies.” He was acutely aware of the cultural power of regional evangelicalism:

I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at the South’s beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious-education buildings.

Clearly southern whites poured a lot of their wealth into their religion, clearly they seemed to tangibly be generously supportive of it. And yet, King went on to note, he quickly found that white churches, white ministers, and white Christians responded to black activism with both cautious indifference and outright opposition. When racist whites responded to movement activism with violent repression,

⁵⁹ M. Luther King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, p. 82.

where were the white Christians? Of the imposing buildings he saw, King asked, “what kind of people worship here? Who is their God?...Where were they when Governor Wallace gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred?” Why did the tangible Christian generosity of white evangelicals stop at the white church? Why did the Christianity of white Alabamians give silent—or even vocal—sanction to their segregationist governor? King registered, three times for emphasis, his “deep disappointment” with white churches. “There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love,” he noted of his position as an active evangelical and committed churchman. “Yes, I love the church,” he emphasized. But “so often the contemporary [white] church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an archdefender of the status quo.”⁶⁰

There can also be no deep disappointment where there is not deep expectation, and clearly King hoped that white evangelicals, despite their social comfortability and privilege, still had the religious resources—maybe pushed far away, to the margins and the subconscious—to respond to the crisis of Civil Rights with Christian conviction and religious principle. Their churches might take on the spirit of “sect” again, as they had back in the early days, challenging the *status quo* and casting a prophetic Christian light on the ordinary workings of segregationist society. As of April 1963 when he penned his “Letter,” though, they had not.

They had not because, as O’Connor’s fiction discerningly portrayed, the white evangelical goal of making evangelicalism a pillar of the New South social order had led, ironically, to its compartmentalization, to its safe defanging and declawing. King wrote:

I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. I have watched many churches commit themselves to a completely other-worldly religion which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.⁶¹

From different social standpoints and with different goals, he and O’Connor were observing the same South and the same dominant religion. Evangelical ideals of respectability, domesticity, and the Protestant work ethic had certainly shaped the 20th century South, and yet the capacity to make a prophetic, transcendent critique had been dangerously compromised. Faced with the disruptive message of Civil Rights activism, white churches responded with a mixture of pietistic hollowness, Docetic retreat, and imaginative compartmentalization. Getting entangled in active social disturbance, shining the light of Christian judgment across all aspects of life, simply wasn’t the church’s business. Doing so would mean acting like an obsessive sect too worked-up about religion.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 93–95.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 94–95.

White churches were only one player, of course, in King's drama of crisis. As his own background makes obvious, he was part of a different tradition—the tradition of black evangelicalism. In his own person, but also much more broadly through the behavior of thousands and thousands of people, black evangelicalism placed a distinct imprint upon the type of activism the Civil Rights movement displayed. Most basically, it showed “the more excellent way of love and non-violent protest.” Black evangelicalism taught black activists a model of Christian non-retaliation, of meeting violence with non-violence, of following Jesus and “turning the other cheek.” “I am grateful to God,” King wrote in striking contrast to his lamentations for white churches, “that, through the influence of the Negro church, the way of nonviolence became an integral part of our struggle.”⁶²

“The Negro church” of the 1950s and 60s had a genealogy that overlapped with white evangelicalism in many ways, yet which also deviated at critical points. These critical points were a) the conversion of Africans and African Americans to Christianity of the evangelical type, over the course of a century, and b) the formation of distinct black denominations (almost entirely Baptist and Methodist) in the era of Reconstruction. It was the appearance of evangelicals in the late colonial South that first prompted major religious change in the slave and free black population. They began to convert, in increasing numbers into the 19th century, from the Islam or polytheism of their African backgrounds, to Baptist and Methodist Christianity. Some slaves became evangelical preachers and exhorters, and some free blacks in the region's few cities organized their own Baptist and Methodist congregations. When white evangelical leaders began to steer the movement from counterculture to accommodation and apology in the early 19th century, black evangelicals preserved their own sense of religion. In the slave quarters, in secret meetings at night, and in the urban congregations, they practiced an evangelicalism that deviated from the larger trajectory of the movement. This African-American religion fused basic evangelical teachings with cultural patterns of sub-Saharan Africa. In this fusion, the emphasis was much more communal than individual, and there was not a sharp line between “sacred” reality and “secular” world.⁶³ This distinct religious form flourished despite both its invisibility to some whites, and the actual attempts of others to prevent it and control the religious life of blacks. In the classic phrase of E. Franklin Frazier, African-American evangelicalism was an “invisible institution” in the antebellum South.⁶⁴ In the songs that slaves created it was sometimes heard, and in the revolts of Methodist class leader Denmark Vesey and Baptist preacher Nat Turner, its revolutionary possibility was felt and feared. But the power and scope of the invisible institution was much greater than these notable public manifestations.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 90–91.

⁶³ J. Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, New York 1972; L. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, New York 1977; A. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South*, New York 1978.

⁶⁴ E. F. Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*, New York 1974.

One major consequence of emancipation was that the invisible institution became visible—in innumerable black Baptist and Methodist churches that the freedpeople built in the Reconstruction years. Paradoxically, as their institutional religious life became separate from that of whites, the major developments of black evangelicalism in the New South era paralleled those of their white counterparts. These were independent developments, not a matter of black imitations of white ideas, and yet in their New South transformations, African American evangelicalism became less African and more American. The distinctly African features—the communal ethos, and the interweaving of sacred and secular—were pushed to the margins as black evangelicals pursued the coalescing evangelical ideals of respectability, domesticity, and the Protestant work ethic.⁶⁵ The basic features of the thumbnail sketch of evangelical change in the New South/Bible Belt (pages 5–6) characterized both white and black evangelicals (though not folk believers of either race).

Yet there was a crucial difference as the “Negro church” became a visible institution. When black evangelicals embodied respectability, domesticity, and the Protestant work ethic, they were manifesting a visible, tangible critique of modern white supremacy. Their evangelical behavior openly challenged the dominant racism of the region. In striking contrast to white evangelicalism, black evangelicalism became an active, concrete critique of the racist *status quo*; their New South evangelical code offered not a justification for white supremacy, as it did for whites, but rather a living refutation of it. In this racial context, black evangelicalism, though emphasizing some of the same ideals as white evangelicalism, had the character of a prophetic “sect.”⁶⁶ It disturbed and disrupted the *status quo*, visibly demonstrating that the way things were was not the way things should be. When black evangelicals in the Civil Rights movement openly disobeyed “unjust laws” for the sake of obeying a higher “just law,” when they met white violence with concerted non-violence, they were living embodiments of a prophetic evangelicalism. Their sense of the sacred stood over and against the order of the world, in transcendent judgment on it. In a culture of evangelical respectability, their evangelical example sought to command respect, thereby dismantling the racist supports of the white power structure and inaugurating a new, more truly Christian, southern society. “We would present our very bodies,” King argued, “as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and the national community.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ E. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880–1920*, Cambridge 1993; P. Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era*, Chapel Hill 2005; P. Harvey, *Redeeming the South*; J. Giggie, *After Redemption*.

⁶⁶ D. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*, Chapel Hill 2004.

⁶⁷ M. Luther King, *Why We Can't Wait*, p. 80, 84–85.

What happened? The Civil Rights challenge, informed quite visibly by black evangelicalism, stands as an obvious measuring rod of just how Christ-haunted the dominant white culture of the South really was. We know that folk Christianity was becoming an extinct form by the 1960s, with the disappearance and dispersal of the "folk." As a coherent bloc of impoverished, marginalized people, with interracial commonalities in their poverty, they were ceasing to exist. But what of the respectable, propertied white evangelicals who continued to thrive, who were criticized by their own historians in the 1960s for being "at ease in Zion," stuck in "cultural captivity"? Faced in their public square with the nonviolent direct action of Civil Rights activists, how did they respond? When they couldn't help but see non-retaliating black Christians in the city streets, did such Jesus-like behavior jar their Christian conscience, provoking a conversion experience about their own oppression and a subsequent reordering of the *status quo*?

Southern whites did not substantively experience the crisis of conscience that the movement, according to King, had sought to provoke. There was not a widespread regional conversion experience, not a new birth into a more truly Christian social order. Instead, the South of the post-60s era became both less race-conscious and less Christian. What emerged after the vital moment of the 1950s and 60s was a society that was both officially "colorblind" and more secularized. The dominant culture of the new Sunbelt South was not haunted, either by the ghost of Jim Crow, or by the ghost of Jesus Christ.

Walker Percy's 1961 novel *The Moviegoer*, though it is contemporaneous with O'Connor's later work and King's letter, succinctly captures the basic features of the emergent Sunbelt. It suggests why the region became less Christ-haunted, why the Civil Rights movement did not provoke a regional transformation of Christian conscience. The protagonist Binx Bolling is a stockbroker living in the New Orleans suburb of Gentilly. His culture is that of the Hollywood movies he regularly attends, and of making money and finding great pleasure in it. He tells the reader near the beginning of the story:

My wallet is full of identity cards, library cards, credit cards. Last year I purchased a flat olive-drab strongbox, very smooth and heavily built with double walls for fire protection, in which I placed my birth certificate, college diploma, honorable discharge, G.I. insurance, a few stock certificates, and my inheritance... It is a pleasure to carry out the duties of a citizen and to receive in return a receipt or a neat styrene card with one's name on it certifying, so to speak, one's right to exist. What satisfaction I take in appearing the first day to get my auto tag and brake sticker! I subscribe to *Consumer Reports* and as a consequence I own a first-class television set, an all but silent air conditioner and a very long lasting deodorant. My armpits never stink... Yesterday a favorite of mine, William Holden, delivered a radio announcement on litterbugs. "Let's face it," said Holden. "Nobody can do any-

thing about it—but you and me.” This is true. I have been careful ever since.⁶⁸ As the passage makes clear, Binx Bolling embodies some of the basic ideal behaviors that evangelicals codified in the making of the Bible Belt: he has good hygiene, he cares about clean streets, he is a responsible and upright citizen, and he has a solid work ethic. And yet the framework in which these behaviors make sense has shifted notably. The overarching culture in which they have meaning is not that of evangelical Christianity, but rather one of money-making and movie-going. O’Connor in a 1963 lecture had noted how “it becomes more and more difficult in America to make belief believable,” how a theologically informed writer like herself struggled to craft religiously-obsessed characters that seemed credible, because the dominant national culture was shaped most basically by the twin poles of “Hollywood or Madison Avenue.”⁶⁹ Binx Bolling’s conscious identity is definitively shaped by the culture of these twin poles—and, one might add, also by that centered in Washington, D.C. He is a citizen, a moviegoer, and a money-maker/consumer. He lives in the Sunbelt South.

This new regional society was emerging in the very years that O’Connor was writing, though the phrase “Sunbelt” was not coined until the end of the 1960s. Through federal government programs beginning in the 1930s, increasing with mass militarization in the 1940s, outside capital was infused into the region, fostering a massive shift from agriculture to industry and service work, from impoverished national backwater to booming site of rapid development, from relative cultural isolation to full incorporation into the currents of national culture. The regional population that Ruby Turpin had carefully categorized was being altered altogether: blacks, both propertied and poor, were leaving the South in a cresting wave, and so were impoverished whites. Meanwhile, many from outside the region began to make their way in, finding it a pleasant climate and promising place of development. With new money in their pockets and a newly-felt purchasing power, many denizens of this emergent Sunbelt became eager consumers. Through this process of capital redistribution and newfound consumption, Washington, D.C., Hollywood, and Madison Avenue came to be powerful players in the lives of southerners, as they did for Binx Bolling.

Binx’s life in the new suburb of Gentilly is also emblematic of the basic shape that Sunbelt development took in the critical factor of residential place, of where Sunbelt southerners made their homes. They moved from the New South countryside and towns and cities, to the new, quickly-sprouting suburbs. Binx describes the appeal that living in Gentilly has for him:

Except for banana plants in the patios and the curlicues of iron on the Walgreen drugstore one would never guess it was part of New Orleans. Most of the houses are either old-style California bungalows or new-style Daytona cottages. But this is what I like about it. I can’t stand the old-world atmosphere of the French Quarter or the genteel charm of the Garden District.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ W. Percy, *The Moviegoer*, New York 1961, p. 4.

⁶⁹ F. O’Connor, *Mystery and Manners*, p. 200–201.

⁷⁰ W. Percy, *The Moviegoer*, p. 3.

Suburban life allows Binx to escape the ghost of history. But there is a danger in this escape. Binx fears that he could be “an anyone who is anywhere,” that he could slip “clean out of space and time,” that without the grounding of the past, he could lose identity altogether.⁷¹ The narratives of Hollywood movies, the tangible pursuit of money, and U.S. nationalism give Binx the identity he fears he may lose. They give him “certification.”⁷²

Thus, though Binx is living in the South, though he is descended from a long line of southerners and is well-aware of his family’s history, there is nothing distinctly regional in his conscious identity. He is not “an anyone who is anywhere,” but there is a subconscious anomie in his life, one that Gentilly tangibly represents. The basic action of the novel begins when this anomie becomes conscious one morning, when Binx wakes up and is strangely puzzled by his own identity, by the sheer fact of existence. So begins what he calls his “search.” It is a search for a more substantive identity, for meaning and a sense of true place. That a character in the South could be imagined as feeling a need for these things suggests, of course, just how radically the region was being transformed. Place, meaning, and identity were not clear in the Sunbelt South. One might get them from outside the region, or one might feel a need to search for deeper and more substantive sources. If O’Connor’s fiction and King’s letter were very much grounded in an older South where place and meaning were informed by a distinct regional culture, Percy’s novel points to the future of uncertain cultural messages. In this new Sunbelt of amnesia, atomization, and anomie, the old ghosts of southern history—the ghosts of religion and race—seem to have vanished. The Sunbelt South was “a world open and clean.”⁷³

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 64, 167.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁷³ *Idem*, *The Last Gentleman*, New York 1966, frontispiece [quoting R. Guardini, *The End of the Modern World*]. Arguing that the dominant culture of the Sunbelt South is both colorblind and secular is not at all to suggest that racism or religion has disappeared. Clearly, neither has. Politicized evangelicalism, or the “Religious Right,” has been a subject of scholarly analysis for thirty years now, with new works of analysis appearing with increasing frequency. The rise of Neo-Evangelicalism, most visibly associated with southerner Billy Graham, has also been an object of analysis for some time, and continues to be. “The black church” as an idea continues to exert power, and works by scholars in a variety of disciplines continue to explore how black churches have shaped African-American life in the South and the U.S. since the 1960s. The ethos informing the corporate giant Wal-Mart is distinctly evangelical Christian, and many outsiders to the region are still struck by visible displays of religion in the southern public square (though, many other scholars note, those displays are increasingly pluralistic and not solely evangelical Christian). Though all of these things are real, this essay argues that the dominant culture has shifted notably since the mid-20th century. No longer are Southerners of all categories “afraid” that they “may have been formed in the image and likeness of God.” No longer is the “ghost” of Christianity “haunting” the region as a whole. Hazel Motes may have been believable in the South of the 1950s and 60s, but today many in the region would be utterly baffled by such a person—not just disrupted and made uncomfortable. As Rayber did for Mason Tarwater, they would likely exorcise Motes’ ghosts with psychological theories of an unhealthy upbringing, and ideas of symbolic religious compensation for social lack: they would cancel out a theological sense of life and replace it with one entirely human and social.

David Lorenzo Izquierdo

ETHICS, TRADITION AND RELIGION

The aim of this chapter is to suggest a general approach to the relationship between ethics and religion, between moral principles and religious statements. For this, I will base my explanation on Alasdair MacIntyre's concept of "tradition"¹.

The Individual, Ethics and Community

In order to understand rightly the relation between ethics and tradition (and religion), we have firstly to think about the relation between ethics and community.

The MacIntyrean concept of "community" comes from the Greek "polis"². In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, he defines it as follows: "The 'polis' is defined functionally as that form of human association whose peculiar 'telos' is the realization of good as such, a form of association therefore inclusive of all forms of association whose 'telos' is the realization of this or that particular good"³. Therefore, MacIntyre defines "community" from its proper "function", which is the realization of good as such (its "telos").

¹ The bibliography used in this work is that published until 2005 (and attention is paid especially to A. MacIntyre's works published since 1981, when he published his famous book *After Virtue*). The complete information of the bibliographic references is indicated only the first time that the reference is cited. I thank Dr MacIntyre for his comments and conversations during a stay at Notre Dame University in 2004.

² A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, London–Notre Dame (Indiana) 1988, p. 122–123; idem, *Politica, filosofia e bene comune*, "Studi Perugini", Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 9–29. English version: *Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good*, [in:] *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. K. Knight, Cambridge 1988, p. 235–252. In this paper, I indicate the pages of the English translation but indicate the year of the original version.

³ A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 122–123.

Independently of this definition, the most important idea is that a human's development is possible only in a communitarian relationship, as communitarianism has emphasized. According to MacIntyre, the individual's development is a process of physical and intellectual development in which the individual develops faculties as a human being and also as an individual, something impossible without the help of others. In order to achieve maturity, the individual needs the care of many people (relatives, friends, etc.). Corporal and intellectual maturity would be impossible without this care. The individual starts learning about good, practices, virtues, etc. in that context. This is why MacIntyre says that the individual's morality is primarily a particular/communitarian moral⁴.

Besides this, once the individual has achieved corporal and moral maturity, there is always danger of damaging it. In the corporal field, the individual's integrity can be hurt at any time, even to the extent that he loses his natural independency. The same happens in the intellectual/moral field: the individual can always make mistakes that damage his development. This fact is called by MacIntyre "vulnerability": the individual always lives in a "vulnerability condition". That is why "disability" is an essential feature of the human being. Consequently, a human is always a "dependent" being. Vulnerability and dependency are, therefore, essential features of human existence⁵.

Apart from this, another important point about the relation between the individual and community is the concept of "practice". For MacIntyre, practices are the natural field or place where individuals act and live. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre defines a practice as "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended". Sciences, architecture, and farming are examples of practices⁶.

According to MacIntyre, the elements of a practice are three: goods, models of excellence (or authorities) and rules⁷. Regarding goods, the author distinguishes between two kinds: "external goods" and "internal goods". Internal ones are those goods referred to the proper excellence of a concrete practice. The best building and the best way to design it are internal goods to architecture. Moreover, the exter-

⁴ Idem, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, London–Notre Dame (Indiana) 1981, p. 265–267; 2nd edition (revised and with a new epilogue titled: *The Relationship of Philosophy to History. Postscript to the Second Edition of "After Virtue"*). In this paper, we indicate the pages of the second edition (1984) but the year of the first one.

⁵ A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, London–Chicago–La Salle (Illinois) 1999, p. 2–3, 72–73, 84–85, 91–92. It is worth paying attention to the title of this book: "Dependent" Rational Animals.

⁶ Idem, *After Virtue*, p. 187–188, 200–201.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 189–190.

nal ones are those goods not related directly to the proper excellence of a practice. This kind of goods can be achieved through many kinds of practices and can be independent of the achievement of the internal goods to the practice. These goods are money, power, prestige and so on. Therefore, internal goods are the proper or essential “telos” of a practice⁸.

Rules are necessary elements of a practice because they are the guidelines or the norms to be followed by the individual if he wants to achieve the internal goods to the practices⁹. Some rules have to be observed because they take the individual to excellence by practice. It is necessary for us, for instance, to train weekly if we want to make a good football team. Regarding models or authorities, MacIntyre thinks that they are necessary because the individual needs to know the rules and the goods of the practices, and he also has to learn to apply the rules and to realize the internal good. The individuals need some people to learn and to practice these elements: they are the models or authorities¹⁰.

Social and individual life are structured by practices, which take place in some institutions and in a specific history or tradition. Every practice is part of a history and a tradition. An individual life is composed of many practices: someone can act as a father, as a lawyer, as a member of different associations, and so on.

We have said that every practice has its own rules. The individual has to assume them and to follow them if he wants to achieve the internal good to the practice. But all the practices are part of a whole unity: the individual's life. Practices can be judged and understood only from this unity. Just as there are rules for practices, there are also rules for human development (for human life as a whole). These rules are the rules of natural law¹¹. The individual has to observe them in order to achieve his development as a human being¹². Just as life (as a whole) is the reference from which to judge practices, natural law is the reference from which to judge practices' rules.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 184–194; *Idem*, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*, The Gifford lectures delivered in 1988 at the University of Edinburgh, Notre Dame (Indiana)–London 1990, p. 64–65.

⁹ *Idem*, *After Virtue*, p. 194–195; *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 31–32.

¹⁰ *Idem*, *After Virtue*, p. 194–195.

¹¹ Natural law is a topic with which MacIntyre has dealt mainly through papers or articles.

¹² *Idem*, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 139; *Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues and Goods*, (1991 Aquinas Lecture at Univ. Dallas), “American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly” 1992, Vol. 66, No. 1, p. 3–20. Reprinted in: *The MacIntyre Reader*, p. 136–152. This reimpression is used in this paper but the year of the first edition is indicated (in this reimpression there are some small changes); A. MacIntyre, *How Can We Learn What “Veritatis Splendor” Has To Teach?*, “The Thomist” 1994, Vol. 58, p. 171–195; *idem*, *Wahre Selbsterkenntnis durch Verstehen unserer selbst aus der Perspektive anderer* (interview with Dmitri Nikulin), “Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie” 1996, Vol. 44, No. 4, p. 671–683 (Russian version: “Voprosy Filosofii” 1996, No. 1, p. 91–100); *Dependent Rational Animals*, p. ix–x; *The Privatization of Good. An Inaugural Lecture*, “The Review of Politics” 1990, Vol. 52, No. 3, p. 344–361. Inaugural lecture for MacMahon-Hank Chair of Univ. Notre Dame. Reprinted in: *The Liberalism–Communitarianism Debate: Liberty and Community Values*, ed. C. F. Delaney, Lanham 1994, p. 1–17. German translation: *Die Privatisierung des Guten*, [in:] *Pathologien des Sozialen: Die Aufgaben der Sozialphilosophie*, ed. A. Honneth, Frankfurt 1994, p. 163–183.

For MacIntyre, good is the sense of rules: without the idea of good to be achieved, rules do not make sense¹³.

MacIntyre tells us that, for Aquinas¹⁴, an essential feature of any precept which is a law is that it is a rule of reason directed to the common good. MacIntyre derives from this idea that, in order to define the good – and the goods – and the rules, the very inclinations of human nature are not enough. Perhaps it is better to start with actions, debates and discussions about goods and rules which happen in practices when people are concerned about any common good¹⁵. Reflection and enquiry come after this fact, the ‘fact of the practice’, and then goods and rules necessary for everybody are found by people involved in these practices¹⁶. In fact, MacIntyre thinks that this argument was proposed implicitly by Aquinas, since plain people do not at first derive natural law from metaphysical premises¹⁷. If human nature is known through its operations and through the actions realized by an individual, the practices are particularly important because they are the field or the context of those actions¹⁸. That is why the author concludes: “the recognition of natural law is a matter of how such practices are structured”¹⁹.

¹³ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 194–195; *The Privatization of Good. An Inaugural Lecture*, p. 344; *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 139; *Plain Persons and Moral Philosophy: Rules, Virtues and Goods*, p. 143; *Dependent Rational Animals*, p. ix–x.

¹⁴ *Summa theologica* I-II, q. 90, a. 1–2, transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols., New York 1947. Spanish translation used: *Suma de teología*, Madrid 2001.

¹⁵ A. MacIntyre, *Natural Law Reconsidered* (review of *Aquinas's Theory of Natural Law: An Analytic Reconstruction*, by A. J. Lisska), “International Philosophical Quarterly” 1997, Vol. 37, No. 1, issue 145 (March), p. 95–99.

¹⁶ *Idem*, *Después de “Tras la virtud”* (interview with R. Yepes), “Atlántida” 1990, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 87–95; *Theories of Natural Law in the Culture of Advanced Modernity*, [in:] *Common Truths: New Perspectives on Natural Law*, ed. E. B. McLean, Wilmington 2000, p. 91–115. MacIntyre mentions the role of the “sinderesis” (in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 194), but he does not analyze it.

¹⁷ *Idem*, *Natural Law Reconsidered*, p. 98.

¹⁸ *Idem*, *The “Theses on Feuerbach”: A Road Not Taken*, [in:] *Artifacts, Representations and Social Practice*, ed. C. C. Gould, R. S. Cohen, Dordrecht 1994, p. 277–290. Reprinted in: *The MacIntyre Reader*, p. 223–234. I indicate the page of this reimpression but the year of the first edition. MacIntyre, *Natural Law As Subversive: The Case of Aquinas*, “Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies” 1996, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 61–83; *Theories of Natural Law in the Culture of Advanced Modernity*, p. 94–95, 109–110.

¹⁹ *Idem*, *Natural Law As Subversive: The Case of Aquinas*, p. 80–81. Although MacIntyre does not talk about natural law in his paper published in 1978 – and published again in 1985 – *The Right to Die Garrulously*, he pays attention to the fact that rules exist in specific practices and communities (A. MacIntyre, *The Right to Die Garrulously*, [in:] *Death and Decision*, ed. E. McMullin, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Selected Symposium 18, p. 75–84. Reprinted in: *Moral Dilemmas: Readings in Ethics and Social Philosophy*, ed. R. L. Purtil, Belmont 1985). As an example of this argument, we can look at what MacIntyre calls “ethics of enquiry”, which is involved in the practice of moral and political debate. The author defines it as “an additional authority that is independent of moral standpoint” (*idem*, *Toleration and the goods of conflict*, [in:] *The Politics of Toleration*, ed. S. Mendus, Edinburgh, p. 6–7. I thank the author for a copy of this paper and also his comments on it. Reprinted in: *The Politics of Toleration in Modern Life*, ed. S. Mendus, Durham 2000, p. 133–155). And it is a part of natural law (*idem*, *How Can We Learn What “Veritatis Splendor” Has To Teach?*, p. 171–195). The liberty to express an opinion, the respect for people participating in the debate and so on: all of them are principles or virtues which form that “ethics of enquiry”. MacIntyre says that a true dialogue, a proper human dialogue, implies the acceptance of the ethics of enquiry. Perhaps someone does not define or state these rules explicitly, but he is implicitly accepting them when he joins a public debate on moral or political issues (*idem*, *Toleration and the goods of conflict*, p. 7).

We can thus understand the importance of the concept of “community” in MacIntyre’s thought. According to him, community is the natural context of human development. Without a community, the individual cannot achieve his whole development as a human being. According to what has been said so far, we can see that the individual depends on his community in many different fields or points: in his physical and intellectual development, in the practices where he acts and lives and, finally, in knowing and stating the rules related to his practices and his development.

Nevertheless, community cannot be understood on its own. According to MacIntyre, community (with its practices and concepts) can be understood only in the light of a particular history. MacIntyre deals with this fact through his concept of “tradition”.

Community, Tradition and Religion

According to MacIntyre, human reason cannot develop without a communitarian context. An individual can develop his rational abilities (language, arguments, etc.) only in particular relationships with others. He says in *Dependent Rational Animals* that “rational enquiry is essentially social”²⁰. And, therefore, “knowledge is possessed only in and through participation in a history of dialectical encounters”²¹. Human reason is both a “communitarian” and a “historical” reason.

MacIntyre expresses this idea through his famous concept of “tradition”. “We are, whether we acknowledge it or not, what the past has made us...”²² “We, whoever we are, can only begin enquiry from the vantage point afforded by our relationship to some specific social and intellectual past through which we have affiliated ourselves to some particular tradition of enquiry, extending the history of that enquiry into the present: as Aristotelian, as Augustinian, as Thomist, as Humean, as post-Enlightenment liberal, or as something else”²³.

In his book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre defines “tradition” with the following words:

an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition [...], and those internal²⁴.

The elements of a tradition are, therefore, three: an argument through time, some fundamental agreements, and conflicts (external and internal conflicts).

²⁰ Idem, *Dependent Rational Animals*, p. 156.

²¹ Idem, *Three Rival Versions*, p. 201–202.

²² Idem, *After Virtue*, p. 129–130.

²³ Idem, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 401–402.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 12–13.

For MacIntyre, tradition is the global context from which a community's concepts and practices can be understood. Community is a natural field of ethics, but ethics can be understood only as part of a tradition. A tradition explains the theoretical and practical concepts of a community. The individual learns about the good and carries out the realization of that good in a communitarian debate, which includes both theoretical and practical elements that can be understood only within a specific tradition²⁵. In order to achieve his development, the individual depends on a community, and, at the same time, depends on a tradition, which is “embodied” in his community.

According to MacIntyre, that fact implies clearly that theoretical and practical principles of human rationality are “principles” only within/for a specific tradition: they make sense only in this context²⁶. “The evidentness of those principles is always relative to the conceptual scheme which that particular theory embodies and by its success or failure vindicates or fails to vindicate”²⁷. In this sense, MacIntyrean “tradition” would be similar to Kuhn's “scientific paradigm”²⁸. At the same time, MacIntyre thinks that human rationality is a virtues-informed rationality. And individual virtues are developed in practices, which take place in a tradition. This is why MacIntyre says that every ethics is an ethics of a particular tradition²⁹: “Morality which is no particular society's morality is to be found nowhere”³⁰.

Although “tradition” can have a narrow meaning, related only to a specific field (science, arts, etc.), I think that it offers rather a “worldview”, that is to say, a global view of the human being and the world³¹. This view includes religious, scientific, practical, etc. elements. Because of that “global” character, some critics think that MacIntyre does not define accurately what a “tradition” is, but rather he only gives some examples related to different fields³². But moreover, some critics

²⁵ Idem, *Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science*, “The Monist” 1977, Vol. 60, p. 453–472. Reprinted in: (1) *Paradigms and Revolutions: Appraisals and Applications of Thomas Kuhn's Philosophy of Science*, ed. G. Gutting, Notre Dame (Indiana) 1980, p. 54–74; (2) *Knowledge and Postmodernism in Historical Perspective*, ed. J. Appleby et al., New York–London 1996, p. 357–367; *After Virtue*, p. 219–222; *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 201–202.

²⁶ Idem, *Are there any natural rights?*, Charles F. Adams lecture, delivered Feb. 28 in Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, President and Trustees – Bowdoin College, Brunswick 1983, p. 15; idem, *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*, Milwaukee 1990, p. 30. 2nd reimpr.: 1995. Reprinted in: *The MacIntyre Reader*, p. 171–201. Spanish transl.: *Primeros principios, fines últimos y cuestiones filosóficas contemporáneas*, transl. A. Bayer, Madrid 1993; *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 252–253.

²⁷ Idem, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 252–253; *Are there any natural rights?*, p. 15.

²⁸ J. De La Torre, Fco., *El modelo de diálogo intercultural de A. MacIntyre*, Madrid 2001, p. 115; R. Stern, *MacIntyre and Historicism*, [in:] *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. J. Horton, S. Mendus, Cambridge 1994; A. Llano, *Presentación to Tres versiones rivales de la ética*, 1992, Spanish version of *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p. 15.

²⁹ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 221–222.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 265–267.

³¹ “Worldview” would seem to be the best translation into English of the German concept “Weltanschauung” (“cosmovisión” in Spanish).

³² J. Annas, *MacIntyre on Traditions* (Review of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*), “Philosophy and Public Affairs” 1989, Vol. 18, No. 4, p. 388–404; J. Porter, *Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair Mac-*

think that, although he defines what a tradition is, he is not accurate in describing some specific traditions³³. I agree, to some extent, with these authors, although, on the contrary, I think – like Mauri³⁴ – that, through MacIntyre's examples and explanations (and the definition quoted above), we can reach (at least) a general view of what he means by "tradition".

MacIntyre does not use that concept ("worldview") but he uses the expression "a view on the human being and the world". Because of this global character, M. Murphy thinks – and I agree with him – that the concept of 'tradition' is related to the concept of "ideology", one analyzed by MacIntyre in *Against the Self-Images of the Age* in 1971³⁵. In this way, "tradition" would come from the concept of "ideology", tradition (as a concept) would be the heritage of ideology. In this book, he described an "ideology" with the following features.

1) It offers some general features of nature and society, and these features do not show only empirical and changeable characteristics of reality.

2) It provides the human being not only with theoretical concepts but also with practical concepts. It provides the human being with practical (moral) guidelines. In this sense, an ideology connects theory to practice.

3) It is followed by individuals in such a way that it defines their social and personal life³⁶.

In my opinion, this relation between ideology and tradition can help us to understand the global character of a tradition in explaining human life. In fact, because of this global extent of the concept of "tradition", some authors have said that this concept has been inspired by the concept of "religion" in MacIntyre's thought. In order to define his concept of "tradition", MacIntyre would have taken as a referential point the concept of "religion". The formal features of a tradition would be very similar to the formal features of a religion³⁷. This is a reasonable statement if we take into account the fact that religion and God have been issues about

Intyre, [in:] *Alasdair MacIntyre*, ed. M. Murphy, New York 2003, p. 38–69; P. De Greiff, *MacIntyre: narrativa y tradición*, "Sistema" 1989, Vol. 92 (M), p. 99–116.

³³ J. De La Torre, *El modelo de diálogo intercultural de A. MacIntyre*, p. 25; S. Mulhall, *Liberalism, Morality and Rationality: MacIntyre, Rawls and Cavell*, [in:] *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, p. 205–224; C. Thiebaut, *Los límites de la comunidad*, Madrid 1992, p. 111; M. Herrera, *Racionalidad y justicia: en torno a la obra de MacIntyre*, "Sistema" 1989, Vol. 91 (M), p. 45–56; J. Annas, *MacIntyre on Traditions*, p. 391–392; B. W. Ballard, *Understanding MacIntyre*, Lanham 2000, p. 59; A. Bielsa, *Crítica a MacIntyre: una lectura kantiana*, [in:] *Crisis de valores. Modernidad y tradición (Un profundo estudio de la obra de A. MacIntyre)*, ed. M. Mauri, B. Román et al., Barcelona 1997, p. 83–114; P. Kelly, *MacIntyre's Critique of Utilitarianism*, [in:] *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, p. 127–145; T. H. Irwin, *Tradition and Reason in the History of Ethics*, "Social Philosophy and Policy" 1989, Vol. 7, issue 1, p. 45–68.

³⁴ M. Mauri, *Autoridad y tradición*, [in:] *Crisis de valores. Modernidad y tradición (Un profundo estudio de la obra de A. MacIntyre)*, p. 7–21.

³⁵ M. Murphy, *Alasdair MacIntyre*, p. 8.

³⁶ A. MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy*, London 1971, p. 5–7.

³⁷ T. Nagel, *Agreement in Principle (Review of Whose Justice? Which Rationality?)*, "Times Literary Supplement" 1988, July 8–14, p. 747–748. Reprinted as: *MacIntyre versus the Enlightenment*, in his book, *Other Minds: Critical Essays: 1969–94*, Oxford 1995, p. 203–209. C. Thiebaut, *Los límites de la comunidad*, p. 121.

which MacIntyre has sometimes thought during his intellectual evolution³⁸. In fact, MacIntyre sometimes uses the word “conversion” to express how an individual can take or assimilate the truth existing in other traditions, which is not (or not always) a logical way³⁹.

There are, of course, some authors who think that the concept of “tradition” has rather a narrow meaning. Mulhall and Swift say that there can be moral or religious traditions (like Catholicism or humanism), political traditions (like Marxism), economic traditions, aesthetic traditions (like literary or pictorial tendencies), geographic traditions (which would depend on a specific country or culture) and so on⁴⁰. Moreover, there are some authors who think that the MacIntyrean concept of ‘tradition’ has a more general or wide meaning, so that it would have, at the same time, a narrow meaning and a wide meaning: there would be religious traditions (a Catholic tradition, a Protestant tradition, a Buddhist tradition, etc.), national traditions (like the Spanish tradition, or the English tradition), intellectual traditions (Aristotelism, rationalism, etc.), scientific traditions (depending on a specific field: history, biology, etc.), political traditions and aesthetic traditions⁴¹.

J. Porter says that the best way to understand the concept of “tradition” is to apply it primarily to science, so that it would mean different scientific theories or tendencies⁴². This view can be reasonable if we take into account the fact that MacIntyre sometimes talks about different *traditions*. For instance, in his famous paper “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science”, he talks about “*three kinds of tradition – religious, political, intellectual...*”⁴³. But I think that, in that paper, these kinds are rather examples of the concept of “tradition”. And it is clear that MacIntyre uses this concept in a more global and wide meaning in his later works (like *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* or *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*).

It would seem, therefore, that, when we talk about different kinds of traditions in a separate way, we tend to separate things that are united in reality, in the history and in the ordinary life of any community or society. There are, of course, many different theoretical and practical elements that define the values and practices of any community, and they can be called “traditions”, but only in a secondary way.

³⁸ For instance, MacIntyre dealt with the relation between Christianity and some political or philosophical tendencies in some books: *Marxism: An Interpretation* (1953, book revised in 1968 under the title *Marxism and Christianity*, and published again in 1995), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (1955), *Metaphysical Beliefs: Three Essays* (1957), *Difficulties in Christian Belief* (1959), *Faith and the Philosophers* (1964, where he writes *Is Understanding Religion Compatible With Believing?* and *Freudian and Christian Dogmas as Equally Unverifiable*), *Secularization and Moral Change* (1967) or *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (1969).

³⁹ A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 356, 396–397.

⁴⁰ S. Mulhall, A. Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, Oxford 1992, p. 90. Spanish transl.: *El individuo frente a la comunidad (El debate entre liberales y comunitaristas)*, transl. E. López, Madrid 1996.

⁴¹ J. De La Torre, *El modelo de diálogo intercultural de A. MacIntyre*, p. 25.

⁴² J. Porter, *Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, p. 53–56.

⁴³ A. MacIntyre, *Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science*, p. 461.

And what is the role of religion in a tradition, in a “worldview”? In order to answer this question, we have firstly to realize that, although there are many different theoretical and practical elements that define the values and practices of any community and tradition, very important is the fact that these elements are closely related to each other within a common framework, and, at the same time, they have, as a whole, an internal hierarchical order. And religion would seem to play an important role in shaping this framework and also in this hierarchical relationship.

In this sense, I think that the features of the concept of “ideology” (described above) could be applied, to some extent, to those of “religion” (as a concept). Of course, “religion” cannot be identified with “ideology”, at least in its political and usual sense. But it is clear that religion offers (or tries to offer) a global framework within which human existence can be explained in both its theoretical and its practical aspects (and, at the same time, those aspects can have an influence on religion).

We can see this in MacIntyre’s works. For instance, when he analyzes different traditions (both Western and non-Western traditions) and when he says, in his famous book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (and also in other works), that Thomism (a tradition depending on a religious frame) is the most coherent and strongest tradition⁴⁴. In the same book, he says that he is an “Augustinian Christian”⁴⁵. And, talking about the hierarchical relation between virtues, MacIntyre states that Charity (supernatural love) is the most important one, because it is the “form” of virtues, their “fulfilment”⁴⁶. But Charity, which is closely related to Faith and Hope, can be realized and performed by the individual only with the help of God’s grace⁴⁷.

Therefore, we can conclude that the most coherent meaning of “tradition” is “worldview”. And a worldview, because of its global character, does not have a meaning related only to one part of reality: it is a whole which unifies many kinds of elements, so that, at the same time, it is formed by them (scientific and ethical theories, practices, religion, etc.). But it is formed by them in such a way that religion plays an essential role in giving them a global framework and also in ordering them in hierarchical internal relationships.

⁴⁴ Idem, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 403; *First Principles, Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*, p. 47–48, 55–56; *A Partial Response to My Critics*, [in:] *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, p. 283–304.

⁴⁵ Idem, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 10–11.

⁴⁶ Idem, *Wahre Selbsterkenntnis durch Verstehen unserer selbst aus der Perspektive anderer* (interview with Dmitri Nikulin), p. 676–677.

⁴⁷ Idem, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 205; *Three Rival Versions*, p. 140; *Wahre Selbsterkenntnis durch Verstehen unserer selbst aus der Perspektive anderer* (interview with Dmitri Nikulin), p. 676–677.

Christopher Lazarski

**ENEMIES OR ALLIES: LIBERALISM AND CATHOLICISM
IN LORD ACTON'S THOUGHT**

Acton—*“a man who started in life believing himself
a sincere Catholic and a sincere Liberal;
who therefore renounced everything in Catholicism which was not compatible
with Liberty, and everything in Politics
which was not compatible with Catholicity.”*¹

Lord Acton is known mainly by his famous maxim that “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Those who are more familiar with him know that he was a great nineteenth-century historian and political thinker, a passionate lover of liberty who, unfortunately, failed to complete his long-term project—the history of liberty—and thus became the “author” of “the greatest book that was never written.”² Specialists in Victorian England, the British Catholic press and the Catholic liberal movement of that epoch are further aware that Acton was a very pious Catholic and an ardent liberal, who spent much of his life on failed attempts to reconcile Catholicism and liberalism. Some of them are puzzled, as were Acton’s contemporaries, how a man of his enormous erudition and political wisdom could have dreamt about succeeding in such a Sisyphean task. Liberalism, after all, was a child of the Enlightenment, hostile to any religion in principle and Catholicism in particular. The Catholic Church, in turn, blemished by centuries-old alliance with the throne and frightened to death by the forces of modernity, was not open to compromises either. On the contrary, it succumbed to a besieged fortress mentality, rejected any “novelty” and demanded from the faithful unconditional obedience to

¹ Acton to Lady Blennerhassett, Feb. 1879, [in:] *Selection from the Correspondence of the First Lord Acton*, ed. J. N. Figgis, R. V. Laurence, London 1917, p. 54, hereafter rendered as *Selected Correspondence*.

² M. Drew, *Acton, Gladstone and Others*, 2nd ed., Port Washington 1968, p. 7.

the arbitrary power of its hierarchy. Liberalism and Catholicism were implacable enemies, like fire and water, barely tolerating one another and, ultimately, wishing to destroy each other. How then could a reasonable man have entertained the idea of reconciling two deadly enemies? Was Acton utterly unreasonable, or does the clue perhaps lie in his own notion of liberalism and Catholicism? The thesis of this article claims precisely this, that in Acton's view true liberalism and true Catholicism were not incompatible but supplementary and, therefore, could have been brought into a close alliance. The article will briefly review Acton's understanding of liberalism and Catholicism, as well as present his unsuccessful efforts at their reconciliation.

Acton rejected the notion of liberalism founded on the concept of state of nature. Tracing "the rights of man"—mainly liberty and equality—to the original conditions that preceded civilization, was dogmatic and dangerous. As an abstract construct, the state of nature imposed arbitrary principles that were applicable to any people and totally ignored the laws, institutions and traditions of existing societies. It was as if history were abolished and, instead of dealing with real, living men and women, and their communities—the product of a slow, long and arduous process—the state of nature dealt with undifferentiated individuals, devoid of any particular characteristics, except for being human. The theory of natural rights was first put into practice in the French Revolution and brought disastrous effects on liberty. Abolishing the French past in the name of equality required a wholesale annihilation of the estates and institutions which personified inequality (the clergy, the nobility, the provinces, the Church and monarchy).³

The French Revolution's negative impact on continental liberalism also had a more lasting dimension in the area of constitutional law. Its first constitution (1791), created in the early, liberal phase of the Revolution, conceived omnipotent central authority which mirrored the absolute sovereignty of the people. This constitution was an attractive example for other European constitutions introduced throughout the nineteenth century, and the principles it espoused became a characteristic feature, a "brand mark" of continental liberalism. Liberty in this context meant parliamentary government, the right to vote, and certain civil freedoms, such as

³ Acton left no systematic exposition of his views on the state of nature, but only scattered remarks in various works. Cf. Lord Acton, *Nationality*, "Home and Foreign Review" 1, July 1862, p. 1–25, reprinted in J. E. Dalberg-Acton, *Selected Writing of Lord Acton*, ed. J. R. Fears, 3 vols., Indianapolis 1985–1988, Vol. 1, p. 411, 415; 428–429, hereafter referred to as SWLA; Lord Acton, *Review of Thomas Arnold's "Manual of English Literature"*, "Home and Foreign Review" 2, January 1865, p. 250–254, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 145, hereafter referred to as *Arnold's "Manual"*; Lord Acton, *Review of Thomas Arnold's "Public Life of Lord Macaulay"*, first published in "Home and Foreign Review" 2, January 1863, p. 257–260, reprinted in SWLA Vol. 1, p. 153–154, hereafter referred to as *Arnold's "Public Life"*; Lord Acton, *Mr. Goldwin Smith's "Irish History"*, "Rambler", n.s. 6, January 1862, p. 190–220, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 2, p. 76, 84; J. E. Dalberg-Acton, *Lectures on the French Revolution*, ed. N. Figgis, R. Vere Laurence, London 1910, p. 96–97, 100–101.

freedom of the press, speech and association. However, the French original and its continental offspring did not safeguard legitimate secondary, intermediate authorities and institutions (local self-governments, the Church, professional and business organizations), and reduced citizenship to an act of voting every few years. Acton viewed this political order as sham-liberalism, the old absolutism put into modern wrapping and, worst, lethal for true citizenship, which always originates in genuine self-government.⁴

Laissez-faire economics, originally an integral part of nineteenth-century liberalism, did not arouse Acton's enthusiasm either. Though he admired Adam Smith, Acton did not accept the cold-hearted, "liberal" attitude towards the poor and destitute that were derivatives of the *laissez-faire* outlook. The belief that the best thing for the poor is not to be born and the second best thing is to die in childhood cannot be deemed as liberal; in fact, it fundamentally contradicts it. For liberalism cannot approve an extreme selfishness of the wealthy at the price of dire poverty for the poor. On the contrary, it imposes duty to take care of "the crippled child ... the idiot and the madman."⁵ The utilitarian version of liberalism that gained currency around the mid-nineteenth century did not win Acton's approval either. The principle of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number" opened the door for social engineering and for the rule of the elite, who know better than ordinary man and woman what is best for them. As such, utilitarianism is akin to Machiavelli's "intelligent" government, Louis XIV's *L'état c'est moi*, or the eighteenth-century "theory of the public good." Furthermore, the chief utilitarian rule contradicted Acton's most cherished principle, that the aim of government is liberty.⁶ This last maxim brings us to Acton's own notion of liberalism.

"Liberty is not a means to an end. It is itself the highest political end," is perhaps the most celebrated statement of our author on liberty. This is the touchstone of how liberal the government is or how short it is from the ideal. A liberal government cannot deviate from recognition of liberty as its highest principle under the pain of losing its liberal character. This elevated position of liberty, according

⁴ Lord Acton, *Cavour*, "Rambler", n.s. 5, July 1861, p. 141–165, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 441–442; Lord Acton, *The Piedmontese Ultimatum to the Holy See*, first published in "Rambler", n.s. 6, January 1862, p. 277–281, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 463–462; *Lectures on the French Revolution*, p. 199; Lord Acton, *Report on Current Events, July 1860*, "Rambler", n.s., 3rd ser. 3, July 1860, p. 265–288, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 496–498.

⁵ Lord Acton, *Sir Erskine May's "Democracy in Europe"*, first published in "Quarterly Review" 145, January 1878, p. 112–142, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 81, hereafter referred to as *Sir Erskine*; Lord Acton, *Lectures on Modern History*, ed. H. Trevor-Roper, 3rd ed., Cleveland–New York 1967, p. 43; Acton Papers, Department of Manuscripts, Cambridge University Library, Additional Manuscripts 5399, p. 41, hereafter referred to as Add. Mss.

⁶ Lord Acton, *The History of Freedom in Christianity*, first published as *The History of Freedom in Antiquity and the History of Freedom in Christianity, Two Addresses delivered to the members of the Bridgnorth Institute at the Agricultural Hall, May 28, 1877* by Lord Acton, Bridgnorth, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 37, 43 (hereafter referred to as *Freedom in Christianity*); Lord Acton, *The Roman Question*, "Rambler", n.s. 2, January 1860, p. 136–154, reprinted in Lord Acton, *Essays on Church and State*, ed. D. Woodruff, London 1952, p. 423; *Report on Current Events, July 1860*, p. 496–497; *Sir Erskine*, p. 81; Lord Acton, *Colonies*, "Rambler", 3rd ser. 6, March 1862, p. 391–400, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 180; Lord Acton, *Nationality*, "Home and Foreign Review" 1, July 1862, p. 1–25, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 424.

to Acton, originates in God's will. Liberty is a providential idea, enjoying divine care, destined to grow and mature in time. Although a fallen nature of humankind prevents us from achieving perfect freedom, it is, on the other hand, never entirely effaceable. Because of divine sanction, the world's history revolves around freedom. Liberty is an axis of human progress and brings unity "indeed ... the only unity" to our past and, by extension, to our future, which otherwise would have been haphazard and without purpose.⁷

While liberty enjoys the highest protection conceivable, "up in heaven," down on earth it originates at the lowest and smallest level of human organization, i.e., in a parish, a village, a town or a county. Freedom and citizenship—the two things that go hand in hand—are not gifts coming from above, or fruits of an abstract theory, but the results of the mundane efforts of men and women to organize their local community, resolve their basic problems and decide how to run their daily life. In other words, freedom and citizenship begins in self-government. Acton is unequivocal in this respect and virtually equates liberty and self-government. Wherever self-ruling communities rise, freedom thrives, and as long as some forms of self-government persist, liberty and citizenship are not entirely erased, even in the worst circumstances, such as, for example, a municipal self-government in the late Roman Empire.⁸ Naturally, liberty and citizenship do not end in self-government, but extend to larger and higher layers of public authority, from regional to national government.

To be liberal in the Actonian sense, national government must be well balanced through the division of powers, be based on a fairly widespread franchise, respect all legitimate secondary (partial) authorities and the rights of various minorities, and observe freedoms that are typical for any liberal order. Such a regime must also safeguard national tradition and develop through a process of organic growth, responding to concrete needs and challenges. Any sudden reforms, especially when based on abstract principles (such as equality, for example), lead to enslavement rather than liberty. In this respect, Acton did not differ from Burke, "the teacher of his youth" and "of mankind." He did not condemn a violent change in principle, though. If a regime is autocratic, and its long tradition of despotism does not bode well for peaceful reform, then a revolution could be necessary. Such was the case of the *ancien régime* in France.⁹

⁷ Lord Acton, *The History of Freedom in Antiquity*, SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 5–7, 22–23, hereafter referred to as *Freedom in Antiquity*; *Lectures on the French Revolution*, p. 33; *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 26–27, 194–195; Add Mss. 5658; J. Bryce, *Studies in Contemporary Biography*, New York–London 1903, p. 396–397.

⁸ *Mr. Goldwin Smith's "Irish History"*, p. 85; *Report on Current Events, July 1860*, p. 497; Lord Acton, *The American Commonwealth*. By James Bryce, first published in "English Historical Review" 1889, No. 4, p. 388–396, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 399; Lord Acton, *The Protestant Theory of Persecution*, first published in "Rambler", n.s. 6, March 1862, p. 318–351, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 2, p. 99; Lord Acton, *Venn's Life of St. Francis Xavier*, "Home and Foreign Review" 2, January 1863, p. 188–189; *Sir Erskine*, p. 68; Add. Mss. 4870, p. 28.

⁹ Acton did not present his ideal of liberalism in one essay but left many scattered remarks, criticizing continental liberalism and praising Anglo-American liberalism. Recreating his ideal requires, therefore, a careful comparison and analysis of many passages in his writing, especially on the Whigs in England and on America. See Acton to Lady Blennerhassett, February 1879, p. 54; *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 207–208, 295; *Lectures on the French Revolution*, p. 25–26, 33, 36–37, 97; *Arnold's "Manual"*, p. 145; Lord Acton, *Political Causes of the*

Unlike Burke, Acton welcomed the French Revolution, even if he abhorred its outcomes. Our author rejected any arbitrary element in a liberal regime except one: higher law. A liberal order worthy of the name must have a constitutional law immune to sudden change of opinion. Of divine origins at first, natural law (first propounded by the Stoics and later perfected by St. Thomas) underwent a process of progressive secularization in the early modern period and, finally, it acquired in the eighteenth century the form of “the inalienable rights of man.” Such a fundamental law is indispensable to prevent, or at least restrain, arbitrary power in any form of government. It is of particular importance in regimes based on popular sovereignty, in which it plays the role of the last bastion against tyranny of the majority. Athenian democracy is the best example of how democracy without higher law can tyrannize minorities and ultimately, usher its own destruction.¹⁰

The last central element in Acton’s ideal of liberal regime is freedom of conscience. Conscience is a voice of God in us, dictating to us what our duties are. Since for Acton liberty means the right to do what one ought to (not what one fancies), freedom of conscience becomes crucial: while natural law provides us with a general guidance of what is right or wrong, conscience helps us to face everyday particular problems and challenges, and to do what we ought. Recognition of freedom of conscience, a cornerstone of individual liberty, is also for him a sign of the coming of liberal age. A regime may still have various shortcomings, such as severely limited franchise and slavery, but with the recognition of higher law, freedom of conscience, respect for national tradition, genuine self-government and limited authority, it enjoys mature liberty. Furthermore, self-regulating principles built-in in its order will in time remedy any deficiency.¹¹ According to Acton, England after the Glorious Revolution and colonial America on the eve of the Revolution achieved such early stages of mature liberty.

Since liberty is a providential idea, all who appreciate freedom and attend its growth are in some sense “liberals.” Thus liberalism in a broad sense reaches back to antiquity, to ancient Israel and Greece, and continues on its mission throughout ages. Liberalism in a strict sense, however, began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, at first in the struggle against the Stuarts and later in the organic development of English constitutionalism. Acton traced it to the Whigs, especially to its more conservative current that included such lawyers and politicians as

American Revolution, “Rambler”, n.s. 5, May 1861, p. 17–61 reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 225–229, hereafter referred to as *Political Causes*; Lord Acton, *The Civil War in America: Its Place in History*, a lecture delivered on January 18, 1866 at the Literary and Scientific Institution, Bridgnorth, published in the “Bridgnorth Journal”, January 20, 1866, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 265–265, hereafter referred to as *The Civil War in America*; *Sir Erskine*, p. 73, 84; *Nationality*, p. 424–429, 431–432; Acton to Mary Gladstone, April 24, 1881, [in:] *Letters of Lord Acton to Mary, Daughter of the Right Hon. W.E. Gladstone*, ed. H. Paul, 2nd ed., London 1913), p. 71–74; Add. Mss. 4945. Cf. chapters nine and ten of my forthcoming book *The Long and Winding Road: Lord Acton’s Study of Liberty*.

¹⁰ *Freedom in Antiquity*, p. 8, 11–15; *Sir Erskine*, p. 63; *Arnold’s “Manual”*, p. 145; *Arnold’s “Public Life”*, p. 153; *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 25, 197–198, 208, 289.

¹¹ *Freedom in Antiquity*, p. 7, 24–25; *Freedom in Christianity*, p. 47; *Sir Erskine*, p. 58, 64, 70–72; *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 25–26, 28, 42, 152, 161, 192–193, 197–198, 292–293.

John Selden (1584–1654), Baron John Somers (1651–1716), Lord William Pitt the Elder (1708–1778), Lord Charles Pratt (1714–1794) and Edmund Burke, before he switched to the Tories. He barely included John Milton and John Locke into the English current of liberalism because of their appeal to abstract principles. Genuine liberalism also had its roots in colonial America; in fact, a model of polity founded on self-ruling communities.¹² Since the colonies enjoyed liberal charters and self-government, safeguarded religious liberty based on freedom of conscience rather than on toleration, recognized the superiority of natural law (visible especially on the eve of the American Revolution, when the colonists appealed to the heavens against English “oppression”) and built up their order bottom up, they met nearly perfectly most of the Actonian requirements for liberty and true liberalism. Except for tolerating slavery, the early American Republic was the closest to Acton’s idea of a liberal regime. Its constitution applied all separations of powers, classical (*forma mixta*) and modern (Montesquieu), and invented federalism (a new form of division of authority between national and state governments), as well as balanced each branch of government against another. Anglo-American liberalism was thus the closest to Acton’s ideal, while continental liberalism, founded on abstract principles, was essentially illiberal, the side-effect and mirror of continental absolutism.¹³

Originally our author had a similarly haughty view of the Catholic Church and its mission. Christianity, for him, was naturally the only true religion, while the Catholic Church was its best emanation. Christ’s command: “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22: 21; Mark 12: 17) brought a revolutionary change in the relation between the secular and spiritual spheres, even if this change required centuries to have a full impact. First, the maxim rejected the unity of the state and the Church (“the Church and State in one,” as Acton terms it) that was typical in antiquity, Second, it demanded autonomy in spiritual life. The power of the state does not extend to the relationship of the individual with God. In this, the individual and religious groups are free, and civil authority has no right to interfere. For a despotic state and imperial power in Rome that was a new and subversive idea. Third, it endowed political authority with a divine sanction, a legitimacy to act in its own sphere. Another important factor brought by Christianity into state-church relations was the buildup of a power-

¹² *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 188–221; *Sir Erskine*, p. 72; *Lectures on the French Revolution*, p. 26, 29; *Arnold’s “Manual”*, p. 145; *Arnold’s Public Life*, p. 153.

¹³ *Colonies*, p. 180, 183, 184, 186; *Sir Erskine*, p. 72–75, 82, 84; *Protestant Theory of Persecution*, p. 131; *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 25, 189–192, 289–293, 295; *Lectures on the French Revolution*, p. 21, 23–24, 33–37, 97; *Political Causes*, p. 225–229; *The Civil War in America*, p. 264–265; *Reports on the Civil War in America*, first printed in “*Rambler*”, September 1861, p. 424–432, reprinted in *SWLA*, Vol. 1, p. 288; Acton to Lady Blennerhassett, May 1887, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 277, 280.

ful, hierarchical Church organization, which preserved its independence from the state. The sheer presence of such an organization, however loyal (even subservient) to civil authority, was a challenge for a despotic state. All these factors—as well as the Christian message of love and the Church’s mission centered on the ordinary people, not the privileged—put the new religion on the side of freedom and on a collision course with the power of the ancient state. As a passionate supporter of liberty, Acton did not fail to appreciate the positive role played by Christianity in the history of liberty in antiquity.¹⁴

As mentioned, the full implications of the new religion were felt not immediately but only in the long term. The new Church was overawed with the might of the Roman Empire, “too powerful to be resisted and too corrupt to be converted.” Christians, therefore, avoided the state, claiming to be citizens of another “commonwealth.” This attitude did not safeguard them against waves of persecution and even attempts at annihilation. Persecution was not, however, the worst thing that had happened to the Church and Christianity. After the emancipation of Christianity and the Church’s entrance into the Empire’s establishment, it was the Empire that corrupted the Church, rather than the Church that transformed and uplifted the Empire. The Church was harnessed into state service and gradually succumbed to a position of “a gilded crutch of absolutism.” This tradition of state-church relations survived and flourished in the Byzantine Empire, and, later, passed on to the Russian Orthodox Church. The West avoided that calamity, by undergoing a civilizational catastrophe, the collapse of the Western Empire and the purgatory of Germanic domination. From the point of view of liberty, Acton claims, this was a salutary development: the despotic tradition of imperial Rome was crushed, the power of newly established kingdoms was much weaker, while the Church won independence and a much stronger position vis-à-vis civil authority.¹⁵ Unlike in the East, the Church became a rival of the state, claiming at first autonomy and, in due time, even superiority over secular power.

The prolonged struggle that took place in the high Middle Ages between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, and the Church and state in general, was crucial for the development of liberty in the West. This struggle was, as it were, the medieval form of the division of powers, preventing each side from gaining the upper hand. “To that conflict of four hundred years, we owe the rise of civil liberties,” Acton stressed. Because both sides needed any support they could muster, they

¹⁴ *Freedom in Antiquity*, p. 27–28; *Sir Erskine*, p. 69; *Mr. Goldwin Smith’s “Irish History”*, p. 83; Lord Acton, *Political Thoughts on the Church*, first published in “Rambler”, n.s. 11, January 1859, p. 30–49, reprinted in *SWLA*, Vol. 3, p. 29, 31; Add. Mss. 5605, p. 47. Cf. G. Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics*, 2nd ed., Chicago 1962, p. 42–43, 136.

¹⁵ *Freedom in Antiquity*, p. 27; *Freedom in Christianity*, p. 30, 32; *Political Thoughts on the Church*, p. 26–28; *Venn’s Life of St. Francis Xavier*, p. 187; *Mr. Goldwin Smith’s “Irish History”*, p. 77–78; Lord Acton, *The States of the Church*, first published in “Rambler” n.s. 2, March 1860, p. 291–323, reprinted in *Essays on Church and State*, p. 89–92; Add. Mss. 5006, p. 78.

called the nations to their aid. The towns of Italy and Germany won their franchises, France got her States-General and England her Parliament ... and as long as [the conflict] lasted it prevented the rise of divine right.

Inequality and privilege were essential characteristics of the medieval notion of liberty, though, and Acton sees it as a fundamental weakness of freedom in that period. Still, the Middle Ages produced limited royal authority, allowed for urban and provincial self-government and guaranteed civic freedom in the form of estate and corporate privileges.¹⁶ Acton views all these developments as a part of a liberal (or proto-liberal) tradition within Western Civilization.

Early modern Europe did not continue medieval achievements in the area of freedom. A convergence of several trends—the Renaissance, Machiavelli's teaching, the rise of the modern nation-state and the Reformation—reversed the processes that began in the Middle Ages. The Renaissance secularized the spirit of the age, thereby weakening the Church; Machiavelli “released government from the restraint of law” and contributed to the rapid growth of royal power, and, finally, Luther subordinated the Church to civil authority. The re-emergence of “the Church and State in one” run parallel to the reappearance of the ancient state, “the greatest force on earth, bound by no code, a law to itself.”¹⁷ This principle applied equally to the new Protestant states as to the old Catholic countries. The Church ceased to be a counterbalance to civil authority and became “a useful ornament about the throne of absolute sovereigns.” The Byzantine-Muscovite pattern of church-state relations and absolute central authority triumphed in the West as well.¹⁸ With few exceptions (the Netherlands, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Swiss cantons), continental Europe succumbed to absolutism.

What saved liberty in the West from extinction was the religious fervor, if not fanaticism, of “the weak,” as Acton says, the ordinary men and women who were ready to do and sacrifice everything for the sake of their faith. When the main Churches failed (both Catholic and Protestant) and deserted their mission, Protestant sects stepped in and propped up the faltering freedom. On the European continent they lost, and their struggle did not increase religious freedom or tole-

¹⁶ *Freedom in Christianity*, p. 33–37; *Sir Erskine*, p. 69–70; *States of the Church*, p. 108–112; *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 86, 119; Lord Acton, *Döllinger on the Temporal Power*, first published in “Rambler”, n.s. 6, November 1861, p. 1–62, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 3, p. 84–85; Lord Acton, *The Political System of the Popes*, first published in “Rambler”, n.s. 1, January 1860, p. 154–165; 3, May 1860, p. 27–38; 4, January 1861, p. 183–193, reprinted in *Essays on Church and State*, p. 127, 153; Acton to Simpson, March 20, 1861, [in:] *The Correspondence of Lord Acton and Richard Simpson*, ed. J. L. Altholz, D. McElrath, 3 vols., Cambridge 1971–1975, Vol. 2, p. 136; Add. Mss. 4940, p. 293; 49–79, p. 218; 49–80, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Lectures on Modern History*, 19–20, 42–43, 62, 66–67, 74, 78, 85–87; *Freedom in Christianity*, p. 37; Add. Mss. 4982, p. 136; 4960, p. 319.

¹⁸ *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 115, 124, 127, 129, 176–188; *Freedom in Christianity*, p. 38–39, 43; *Political Thoughts on the Church*, p. 32; *Roman Question*, p. 146; *Nationality*, p. 416–417; *Protestant Theory of Persecution*, p. 100; *Report on Current Events, July 1860*, p. 496–497; Lord Acton, *Hefele's Life of Ximenes*, first published in “Rambler”, n.s. 3, July 1860, p. 158–170, reprinted in *Essays on Church and State*, p. 383–384, 394; Add. Mass 4428 p. 43; Add. Mss. 4959, p. 209.

ration. But in England and, especially, in the American colonies, they succeeded beyond any expectation, shaping the future course of liberty in the West. In the former, they were the driving force behind the Puritan Reformation that aborted the Stuarts' attempts at absolute power and contributed to the emergence of constitutional monarchy. In the latter, religious dissenters decisively influenced the shape of grass-roots democracy and promoted (though after some hesitation) religious liberty, and the separation of Church and state.¹⁹ Thus, by inciting anti-establishment revolt in England and by laying the foundations for American self-government and civic freedom, the sects were the distant ancestors of the genuine liberalism of the Anglo-American type, which Acton himself professed.

In 1857, after studies in Munich (1850–1854) and a series of foreign travels, the young Acton finally settled in his family estate in Aldenham, located on England's border with Wales. He was then twenty-three, and full of great plans and hopes for impacting the position of Catholics in England and for reconciling the Church with modern science and liberalism. In Munich, he had studied under the tutorship of Father Professor Ignaz von Döllinger, a Bavarian theologian and Church historian. The four years he spent with Döllinger imbued him with a liberalism of the kind espoused by Burke and Tocqueville, and with a love of history. They also convinced him of the urgent need for rapprochement between the Church and liberalism. The professor probably strengthened his pupil's natural piety, which Acton had acquired at home, and certainly shaped his work habits—studying at least one book a day remained Acton's practice until his death. A cumulative effect of his upbringing and education made our writer a liberal of a singular kind, one who passionately loved freedom, appreciated the role of the Church in the history of liberty and abhorred a doctrinaire brand of liberalism.²⁰ The Catholic Church in England and its faithful (discriminated against and pushed into a ghetto-like life) as well as the Catholic Church in general (compromised by humiliating service for the absolute state and assaulted by the forces of modernity), seemed as if they needed assistance, and Acton was eager to come to their "rescue." His self-imposed mission at that time was: to rediscover and expose the liberating tradition of the Church; to purify it from the superfluous and absolutist offshoots that stained the Church in the early

¹⁹ *Freedom in Christianity*, p. 41, 46–47; *Sir Erskine*, p. 58; *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 24–25, 47, 60, 136, 152, 188–198; *Nationality*, p. 410; *Döllinger on the Temporal Power*, p. 84, 91; Lord Acton, *Secret History of Charles II*, first published in "Home and Foreign Review" 1, July 1862, p. 146–174, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 2, p. 162. See also footnotes no. 12 and 13.

²⁰ The most up-to-date biography of Acton is Rolland Hill's *Lord Acton* (London 2000). Of a different nature is the old, but still current, intellectual biography of Acton by G. Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics*, first ed. in 1952. On Acton's intellectual development, see R. Hill, *Lord Acton*, p. 29–31; G. Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton*, p. 19–24, 69–73; R. L. Schuettinger, *Lord Acton: Historian of Liberty*, La Salle 1976, p. 26–28; O. Chadwick, *Acton and History*, Cambridge 2002, p. 12–13; D. Mathew, *Lord Acton and His Times*, Alabama 1968, p. 19.

modern period; to assist in putting the Church back on its natural tracks of supporting truth and freedom; and, finally, to educate English Catholics.²¹

To achieve his ends, Acton founded, co-financed, edited and contributed as a writer to several journals that voiced lay Catholic and liberal opinion. In chronological order, they were as follows: the bimonthly *Rambler* (1858–1862); the quarterly *Home and Foreign Review* (1862–1864); the weekly *Chronicle* (1867–1868), and finally the quarterly *North British Review* (1869–1871). The last journal coincided with Acton's impassioned but futile activity behind the scenes of the First Vatican Council.

While he sincerely loved his Church and believed in its power of liberating man and woman from political oppression and in teaching them their moral obligations, Acton minced no words if he noticed the Church's deviating from its mission, or still worse, its denial. Furthermore, he firmly upheld that true religion (of course, for him Catholicism was such) and its Church have nothing to fear from the truth, in both exact and social sciences. In history, which was Acton's main field, that meant historical truth (as allowed by research and knowledge), without the slightest attempt at covering up the bad cards in Church history. He was uncompromising in general and, in that which he considered to be historical truth, in particular. Thus, although his writing at the beginning of his editorial work started with what resembled church apologetics, by the end of this activity—after he had, on the one hand, uncovered numerous skeletons in church closets and seen the Church's intolerance and clinging to the old, arbitrary ways, and on the other hand, met with a stone wall of denials and accusations thrown at him—he came to the conclusion that the Catholic Church as an institution was utterly rotten. It seemed to him that the hierarchical Church had betrayed its mission on a wholesale scale, shown no will to mend its ways and, worse, insisted on continuing its current course.

In his early writing in *Rambler* Acton underlined Christianity's and the Church's positive role in the advance of liberty, both in theory and in practice, i.e., how freedom was understood and how it grew in history. To what has been said in this article so far, we can add that in terms of theory, he stressed the crucial position of conscience for religious as well as civil liberty.

The Christian notion of conscience imperatively demands a corresponding measure of personal liberty. The feeling of duty and responsibility to God is the only arbiter of a Christian's actions. With this no human authority can be permitted to interfere. ... The Church cannot tolerate any species of government in which this right is not recognised.²²

Though the Church itself was slow in comprehending the full implications of freedom of conscience—and Acton would point this out in his later writing—in antiquity and the Middle Ages this meant autonomy in the religious sphere, built

²¹ G. Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton*, p. 35; O. Chadwick, *Acton and History*, p. 11; D. Mathew, *Lord Acton*, p. 122–123; R. Hill, *Lord Acton*, p. 116.

²² *Political Thoughts on the Church*, p. 29; cf. *Protestant Theory of Persecution*, p. 130.

ding up a church structure independent of political authority and strengthening the institution of the papacy. Whatever imperfections of this understanding of freedom and of the policies which the Church pursued, the end result was beneficial for liberty:

The Church has succeeded in producing the kind of liberty she exacts for her children only in those States which she has herself created or transformed. Real freedom has been known in no State that did not pass through her mediaeval action. The history of the Middle Ages is the history of the gradual emancipation of man from every species of servitude, in proportion as the influence of religion became more penetrating and more universal. The Church could never abandon that principle of liberty by which she conquered pagan Rome.²³

Acton would later revise some aspects of his early very positive evaluation of the Church's role in antiquity and the Middle Ages (especially with regards to religious persecution), but he would not change his overall assessment. As far as liberty, progress and civilization are concerned, the balance sheet of the Church's mission until the early modern period was unequivocally positive, and no other force could rival its merits in this respect.

Initially, Acton also defended the Catholic Church's record during the Reformation and the rise of absolutism. The main villain was Luther, who subordinated religion and the Church to state authority. This weakened not only Protestant churches vis-à-vis civil authority, but undermined the position of the Catholic Church in countries that remained Catholic. For the example of the German princes—who fattened their treasuries with Church riches and won arbitrary power due to support of Protestant Churches—was followed by Catholic rulers.²⁴ The original impulse of accommodating the Church to absolutism was thus supplied by Protestantism, while the Church was only a victim:

In modern times the absolute monarchy in Catholic countries has been, next to the Reformation, the greatest and most formidable enemy of the Church. For here she again lost in great measure her natural influence. In France, Spain, and Germany, by Gallicanism, Josephinism, and the Inquisition, she came to be reduced to a state of dependence, the more fatal and deplorable that the clergy were often instrumental in maintaining it. All these phenomena were simply an adaptation of Catholicism to a political system incompatible with it in its integrity; an artifice to accommodate the Church to the requirements of absolute government, and to furnish absolute princes with a resource which was elsewhere supplied by Protestantism.²⁵

In his apologetics, the young Acton went as far as absolving the Church from persecuting religious dissenters in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, and condemning only the Protestant persecution. The medieval order had

²³ *Political Thoughts on the Church*, p. 29–30. Acton presented similar views in two other lengthy articles written in that early period: *The States of the Church*, “Rambler” n.s. 2, March 1860, p. 291–323 and *The Political System of the Popes*, “Rambler” n.s. 2, January 1860, p. 154–165; 3, May 1860, p. 27–38 and 4, January 1861, p. 183–193, reprinted in *Essays on Church and State*, p. 86–158.

²⁴ *Protestant Theory of Persecution*, p. 101–115; *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 107–108; *Freedom in Christianity*, p. 38.

²⁵ *Political Thoughts on the Church*, p. 32.

religious foundation (faith and the Church were inherently linked with state law and administration) and therefore required the preservation of religious unity. Differences in this respect aroused natural suspicions and often led to persecutions. In these circumstances, toleration was based on privilege, not right, and extended to small religious minorities, such as the Jewish and Muslim ones, who were outside of the Christian and political community. The Catholic persecution was therefore motivated by practical considerations of maintaining the existing political and social order, and religious unity. This was even more so because medieval heretics were also social revolutionaries that undermined the existing regime. Furthermore, it was the state rather than the Church which initiated and executed religious persecution, while the Church played a moderating role in this process and itself fell victim to state policies. For the state took advantage of the persecution to increase its power vis-à-vis spiritual authority and, ultimately, used its might to weaken the Church. The Protestant persecution was entirely different, according to our author. First, it aimed not at maintaining the existing order but at changing it and, second, driven by doctrinal considerations, it pursued dogmatic purity and made the state responsible for the suppression of errors.²⁶ Convergence of these two factors made the Protestant persecution particularly “aggressive and wholly unlimited.” It contributed to the emergence of a political order that was “worse than the Byzantine system,” and of spiritual power that was more arbitrary than the pope’s. For while the Byzantine emperors and the popes could use their authority only to enforce the existing faith, the Protestant princes possessed “the power to command and to alter ... religion” and acquired “a corresponding absolutism in the civil order.”²⁷

Acton did not change his acute judgment of Luther and Protestantism, in general. Until his old age, he held the view that, next to Machiavelli, they were the decisive contributing factors for the rise of absolutism. However, his perspective on Catholic responsibility for the emergence of “a studied philosophy of crime” (as runs one of the most striking of his definitions of absolutism), evolved a great deal, from absolving the Church from this sin to blaming it as a co-culprit.²⁸ Catholic culpability derives from two approaches, profoundly un-Christian in essence: first, that evil acts are admissible for the sake of religion and, second, that the pope enjoys unlimited power in the Church and ought to have strong, if not arbitrary, authority in the secular domain. Acton branded this attitude and policy as “ultramontanism” and made of the ultramontanists his principal enemies.²⁹

The beginning of the conflict between the liberal Acton and the Church authorities was not entirely of his own making. Prior to his joining *Rambler*, the jour-

²⁶ Döllinger on the Temporal Power, p. 87; *Protestant Theory of Persecution*, p. 99–100, 106–115, 130–131.

²⁷ Döllinger on the Temporal Power, p. 87.

²⁸ *Freedom in Christianity*, p. 38.

²⁹ Acton’s remarks on ultramontanism are ubiquitous in his writing. I provide just a few examples: Lord Acton, *Review of Félix’s Le Progrès par le Christianisme*, “*Rambler*” n.s., 2nd ser., 10 July 1858, p. 70–72, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 5–6; Acton to William E. Gladstone, undated [probably 1976], *Selected Correspondence*, p. 41–42; Acton to Lady Blennerhassett, February 1879, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 54–56. Cf. *Ultramontanism*, “Home and Foreign Review” 3, July 1863, p. 162–206, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 3, p. 149–194.

nal ceased to be an organ of Anglican converts (the Oxford Movement), and began to voice the opinion of liberal Catholicism. Its interim editor Richard Simpson (1820–1876) refocused the *Rambler's* attention to biblical research (including Protestant scholarship), scientific criticism of creationism, the development of Church dogmas in history (stressing the role of tradition over scholasticism) and continental (especially French) liberal Catholicism.³⁰ Acton's "guilt" was that he did not change this line after he became co-owner and co-editor, but fully supported it. A short period of editorship by John Henry Newman, the leader of the Oxford Movement, did not help either. The straw that broke the camel's back was Acton's review of Döllinger's book on temporal power of the pope. Following his professor, Acton pointed out that the papacy did not control any territory for the seven first centuries of its existence and that it could survive without it in modern times. The article published in 1861, when the pope was in danger of losing the rest of the Papal States for the sake of the new Italian state, was bound to provoke a strong reaction in the English hierarchy. To avoid Church censure *Rambler* was closed down.³¹

The new journal, *Home and Foreign Review*, was new only in name. In fact, it preserved the editors (Acton and, informally, Simpson), collaborators and the defiant line of its predecessor. And it was censured by the English primate Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman and by other bishops as soon as it appeared. In Wiseman's words, the new journal spread lies about him but, more importantly, like its predecessor (*Rambler*) it displayed "the absence of all reserve or reverence in its treatment of persons or of things deemed sacred" and showed "habitual preference of uncatholic to catholic instincts ... tendencies and motives."³² The journal's response was respectful in form, but remained unrepentant in its content. Prepared on the basis of Acton's instructions, it reiterated the editors' view that true faith has nothing to fear from science, even if science and politics have different interests than religion. Authority must defend freedom of conscience, even if heresy could be its outcome, while science must serve the truth even if its results seemingly undermine faith. Principles should never be sacrificed for what appears as expediency, for otherwise, by false protection, the Church could be corrupted. Besides, science and learning are now not hostile to religion as they used to be in the "unscrupulous falsehood of the eighteenth century" (the Enlightenment). Similar theses were published a few months later in a lengthy article titled "Ultramontanism."³³

³⁰ See J. L. Altholz, *The Liberal Catholic Movement in England: The "Rambler" and its Contributors, 1848–1864*, London 1962, p. 25–44, 63–82, and passim.

³¹ Lord Acton, *Döllinger on the Temporal Power*, "Rambler" n.s., 3rd ser., 6, November 1861, p. 1–62, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 1, p. 67–127. See also J. L. Altholz, *Liberal Catholic Movement*, p. 164–165, 181–186; R. Hill, *Lord Acton*, p. 133.

³² Wiseman's pastoral letter quoted in R. Simpson, T. F. Wetherell, *Cardinal Wiseman and "The Home and Foreign Review"*, "Home and Foreign Review" 1, October 1862, p. 501–520, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 3, p. 131. See also J. R. Fears, *The Essays in This Volume*, SWLA, Vol. 3, p. xxii–xxiii.

³³ *Cardinal Wiseman and "The Home and Foreign Review"*, p. 128–148; *Ultramontanism*, p. 149–194.

The *Home and Foreign Review* defended scholarly freedom not only in the sciences and history but also in theology, which enraged Church authorities even more. In January 1864 Acton enthusiastically reported on the proceedings of the Congress of Catholic theologians and biblical scholars held in Munich at end of September, 1863. Döllinger, who presided over the Congress, stressed that theologians cannot rely exclusively on scholastic reasoning but should include biblical criticism and historical development of Church dogmas. Christianity is not only a revealed religion, but history as well. This argument was in line with the doctrine of development, which both Newman and Döllinger advocated, and which assumed that Christian dogmas were not fixed once and for all, but their understanding evolved in history.³⁴ Although Acton could not know it, by the time he published his article, the ideas of scholarly liberty of Catholic scholars were already condemned by Rome. A papal brief addressed to the Archbishop of Munich, sent in December 1863 but published only in March 1864, left no doubt in this respect. Since the papal brief contradicted the basic premise of Catholic liberalism and the line of the *Home and Foreign Review*, and since submitting to Church censorship was not an option for Acton, the editors decided to close the journal down. Acton's "Conflicts with Rome," published in the final issue of the journal, attempted to justify that decision. He once more put forward the basic premises of Catholic liberalism that science and genuine scholarly research cannot contradict religious truth; that errors result from either suppression of truth or separation of science and religion; and that true religion must not be afraid of scientific, free inquiry.³⁵ The papal brief was still not the worst blow that Catholic liberals suffered from Rome at that time. The Encyclical *Quanta Cura* and the *Syllabus Errorum* published in December 1864 brought a definite end to any prospect for reconciliation between the Catholic Church and nineteenth-century liberalism. Liberalism, progress and modern civilization were listed among errors which the pope rejected.³⁶

The last two journals which Acton co-financed and supported by his writing could no longer be deemed as his attempts at reconciliation between the Church and liberalism. Rather, they were his efforts to preserve liberal thinking within Catholicism and to fight illiberal trends within the Church. To avoid ecclesiastical censorship, both journals did not claim to be Catholic, but were secular with close links to the English liberals. The first, the *Chronicle*, was founded three years after the collapse of its predecessor, as if Acton had needed some time to recover from the state of shock resulting from the papal Encyclical of 1864. The *Chronicle* was a short-lived enterprise, closed down less than a year after its foundation. The

³⁴ Lord Acton, *The Munich Congress*, "Home and Foreign Review" 7, January 1864, p. 209–244, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 3, p. 195–233. Cf. J. L. Altholz, *The Liberal Catholic Movement*, p. 220–221; G. Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton*, p. 23; R. Hill, *Lord Acton*, p. 47.

³⁵ Lord Acton, *Conflicts with Rome*, "Home and Foreign Review" 4, April 1864, p. 667–696, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 3, p. 234–259.

³⁶ *Syllabus Errorum* quoted by J. L. Altholz, *Liberal Catholic Movement*, p. 231; see also p. 232–235; G. Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton*, p. 60–66; R. Hill, *Lord Acton*, p. 174.

reasons for its failure were small readership—the journal was too Catholic for liberals and too liberal for Catholics—and the default of its potential sponsors, who did not keep their promise of financing it. The *North British Review* lasted somewhat longer owing to the funds provided by the Liberal Party—its last issue was published in January 1871.³⁷ For Acton it was a forum to write on foreign politics and to fight against the dogma of papal infallibility.

As said before, Acton's view of the Church and of its role in the history of liberty underwent a profound change. The full extent of this alteration is seen only in his later writing, during and after the First Vatican Council, but already in the late 1860s we see the first signs in Acton's production that illustrate this process. An article titled "Fra Polo Sarpi," published in 1867 in the *Chronicle*, gave him a pretext to attack the early modern papacy for its thirst for earthly power, for corrupting the Church and for aborting the true reform at the Council of Trent. Since Rome's intrigues prevented the Council from limiting the pope's authority and the Church's ambition for political power, "the only remaining force by which they could be permanently curbed was the State." In other words, Acton charged the Church rather than the state for the growth of absolutism and no longer considered it to be a victim of arbitrary royal power. Furthermore, he dismissed de Maistre's view that responsibility for the Spanish Inquisition rests only on the state and that the Roman Inquisition was, by comparison, a nearly innocuous institution. This was not true, according to our historian. Finally, he charged two saints, Pius V and Charles Borromeo, with believing that "the murder of a heretic was ... a meritorious action." If Acton's first two claims show the change of his attitude towards his Church, the third clearly displays a bias against it, since his last accusation was untrue and caused him some embarrassment.³⁸ The same attitude is exhibited by Acton in "The Massacre of St. Bartholomew," an article on the murder of thousands of the French Huguenots in 1572. Acton went out of his way to prove that the massacre was a premeditated act, sanctioned *ex post* (if not beforehand) by Rome. Herbert Butterfield later proved that he broke the basic rules of a historian's craft in composing this article.³⁹ The bias was unquestionable. It was as if Acton switched from apologetics to denigrating the Church. It must be added, however, that this bias did not remain a permanent feature of his writing. By the late 1870s, he regained a more balanced view of the Church's role in history, as his two essays on liberty—"The History of Freedom in Antiquity" and "The History of Freedom in Christianity"—show.

³⁷ J. L. Altholtz, *Liberal Catholic Movement*, p. 238–239; R. Hill, *Lord Acton*, p. 154–156; G. Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton*, p. 63–66; R. L. Schuettinger, *Lord Acton*, p. 66–67.

³⁸ Lord Acton, *Fra Polo Sarpi*, "Chronicle", March 30, 1867, p. 14–17, reprinted in *Essays on Church and State*, p. 253, 256, 258–259. Accusations against St. Pius V and St. Charles Borromeo led to a storm of protests, including that of Newman. Acton himself admitted he confused Pius IV with Pius V, while his assertions thoroughly rest on the unproven claims of the Italian historian Cesare Cantù. Cf. J. L. Altholtz, *The Liberal Catholic Movement*, p. 237; G. Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton*, p. 65; R. Hill, *Lord Acton*, p. 183–184.

³⁹ Lord Acton, *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew*, "North British Review" 51, October 1869, p. 30–70, reprinted in SWLA, Vol. 2, p. 198–240. Cf. H. Butterfield, *Man on his Past*, first published 1955, Cambridge 1979, p. 171–201; G. Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton*, p. 66–68; R. Hill, *Lord Acton*, p. 184–185.

The liberal ideas propounded by our writer and his work as an editor, historian and writer were not well received by the Catholic Church in England. Cardinal Wiseman and his successor Archbishop Henry E. Manning concerned themselves mainly with the restoration of the Catholic episcopate, the protection of the Irish Catholics and the integration of three streams of Catholics in Great Britain: the old English Catholics, the new intellectually minded converts gathered around the Oxford Movement and the discriminated Irish. In relation to these formidable tasks, Acton's preoccupation with liberty, liberalism, truth, history and progress seemed esoteric, if not idiosyncratic. Originally viewed as one of the Church's privileged sons, who would defend it against English anti-Catholic prejudice and discrimination, Acton was increasingly seen as a nuisance and, finally, as a traitor of the Catholic cause. The conflict became particularly acute during and after the First Vatican Council, when Acton barely avoided ecclesiastical excommunication. For he did not only openly side with the anti-infallibilists, but also became the most prominent figure among the laity actively opposing the dogma of papal infallibility.

The longest-reigning pope in history, Pius IX (1846–1878), began his office as a liberal, supporting Italian unification as well as liberalizing the Papal States, of which he was the sovereign. However, the Spring of Nations (1848) on the Italian peninsula became such a painful experience for the pope that it radically changed him. Italian nationalism, originally anti-Austrian, gradually turned against Italian rulers, who were viewed as an obstacle to unification. As a result, Pius had to flee from Rome and spent nearly two years in exile, residing in Gaeta, a border town in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. His return to Rome was not natural either (1849), for Pius owed it only to the French bayonets. These events turned the pope against nationalism and the forces of modernity in general. Maintaining his arbitrary rule in the Church appeared to him the best course in an unfriendly world. The time seemed not opportune for reforms and, if the pope entertained any, they went in the opposite direction to that postulated by the liberal Catholics. No one concerned himself in Rome with such matters as to whether liberty was essential for Christianity, whether (true) liberalism was a twine of Christianity in the secular sphere, or if science confirms rather than denies revelation. It was the ultramontanists, not the Acton-like liberals, who had gained the ear of the pope. The Encyclical *Quanta Cura* and the *Syllabus Errorum* illustrated this well. But the Church document which shocked liberal Catholics so much was not the last word of the pope as far as his grip on the Church is concerned. As of the mid-1860s, the Roman Curia increasingly began to work on the idea of a new dogma on papal infallibility and attempted to win the Catholic opinion to its side. When in June 1868 Pius IX finally called on the bishops for the next General Council to be open in December 1869, the great majority of the ecclesiastics were already in favor of the new dogma.

For Acton the notion of papal infallibility was an anathema. He understood it broadly, just as the ultramontanists meant it—whatever the pope says and does is infallible. This would make the pontiff a superhuman, while the authority he exercised would be unlimited and superior to any civil government. Such an elevation of the pope fundamentally contradicts liberty, but the matter would be still worse if infallibility were projected into the past. This would have made all previous popes infallible, a notion that defies reason, since history knows popes that were extremely corrupt and held heretical opinions. Acton, a pious Catholic at heart, could not watch idly as his beloved Church departed even more from the spirit of true Catholicism. He moved to Rome in November 1869, a month before the Council began its deliberations, and stayed there for seven months, i.e., as long as his cause was not entirely lost. His apartment became the focal point of the minority bishops who opposed the dogma, and the multilingual Acton served as a link among the disorganized delegates. In his feverish efforts, he also tried to enlist his friend, Prime Minister William Gladstone, to his cause and, by leaking confidential information from the Council to the press, he attempted to put pressure on the pope through public opinion. All this, however, was in vain, and the Council voted in favor of the new dogma. In the words of the English Foreign Minister Lord Clarendon, Pius IX “has stood alone against all the representation of the Catholic powers and all the opposition bishops plus Acton, who is worth them all put together,” but, nevertheless, he won.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the new dogma did not receive the meaning which the historian feared so much, but acquired the narrow, innocuous scope that the pope is infallible only when he speaks *ex cathedra* on matters of faith and morals, i.e., on very rare occasions, as subsequent Church history proved.

The Vatican Council was a traumatic experience for Acton. He wrote very little for the next quarter of century, failing to complete his most cherished project—the history of liberty—and no longer entertained any hopes for Catholic-liberal rapprochement. Only once, in 1874, did he become involved in a public controversy concerning the Church when, in reaction to Gladstone’s pamphlet questioning the loyalty of the Catholics, he wrote four open letters to the editors of *The Times*. He dismissed the charges that papal infallibility casts a doubt on the loyalty of the Catholics to civil authority. The new dogma did not change anything in this respect and, for that matter, in the scope and strength of papal authority. Even without infallibility, the popes had enjoyed immense power and, theoretically, could have deposed any “prince.” England therefore has nothing to fear as far as its Catholic subjects are concerned. The letter also gave Acton an opportunity to expose more bad cards in Church history. The aftermath of these publications was Acton’s serious trouble with Archbishop Manning, who took this opportunity to extract from him a clear statement as to whether he adhered to the new Vatican decrees or not. Since Döllinger was excommunicated for his refusal to accept the new

⁴⁰ Earl Clarendon quoted by R. Hill, *Lord Acton*, p. 223; see also p. 221–222; O. Chadwick, *Acton and History*, p. 90–102; G. Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton*, p. 106–107, 111–113.

dogma, the matter was serious. Acton used all his (in)famous skills in making his language as enigmatic and abstruse as he could, in order to avoid an explicit declaration. Since Acton's bishop found it satisfactory, Manning had to give up, and put the matter to rest. No longer involved in any controversy, Acton's reputation as a lapsed Catholic gradually dissipated and, two decades later, especially after Manning's death (1892), he was once more viewed as a distinguished Catholic, of whom his Church could be proud.

Had liberalism and the Catholic Church been as Acton wanted them to be, his efforts at bringing them closer would have probably been superfluous, for liberalism and the Church would have been natural allies in the cause of liberty in any case. But since in the nineteenth century they were as they were—liberalism inimical to religion and the Catholic Church as a matter of principle, and the Church fearing free inquiry and viewing liberalism as one of the main culprits of Christianity's predicaments—they remained irreconcilable enemies, and no effort on Acton's part could have changed this. Furthermore, neither did liberalism respect grass-roots democracy and local political tradition that grow organically, nor was Catholicism a religion of love, hostile to arbitrary power and Machiavellian politics. On the contrary, they were the very opposite of Acton's ideals. For his misconceptions Acton paid a high price: misunderstanding on the part of his fellow liberals, threat of excommunication from his beloved Church, and long silence, including on his most cherished project—the history of liberty.

But if today, more than hundred years after Acton's death, we asked the question which of the two forces, Catholicism or liberalism, has evolved more towards the ideals that Acton held dear and renounced its mistakes made in the past? Which has no objection to free scientific inquiry and seeks freedom of conscience? Which of them is now more open to genuine reconciliation and serves the common good? What would have our answer been to such questions? Would it be liberalism, with its disdain for any authority and extreme relativism, yet still aiming at reshaping individuals into its mould, by force if necessary? Or Catholicism, no longer self-assured and repudiating temporal powers, yet still insisting on a universal ethical code and demanding from individuals to do their moral duty?

Leonard Leo

**RELIGION, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM,
AND THE AMERICAN POLITICAL TRADITION**

Millions of believers cannot be indefinitely oppressed,
held in suspicion or divided among themselves,
without this involving negative consequences
not only for the international credibility of those States
but also for the internal life of the societies concerned:
a persecuted believer will always find it difficult to have confidence
in a State which presumes to regulate his conscience.
On the other hand, good relations between Churches
and the State contribute to the harmony of all members of society.
Pope John Paul II, 1996

Religion, Religious Freedom, and the American Political Tradition

Throughout American history, many of our nation's leaders and citizens have believed that the United States is an exceptional nation. The roots of American exceptionalism run deep, as far back as the early 17th century and John Winthrop's "city upon a hill" sermon. "The eyes of all people are upon us," said Winthrop. In one of his earliest political works, *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*, John Adams wrote that he "always consider[ed] the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in providence, for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth." The historical record contains many other statements in this vein.

What makes America exceptional? It is certainly, to some degree, at least, our unique commitment to human dignity, individual liberty, and a meaningful con-

ception of the rule of law, grounded in a deep respect for constitutional structure and the notion that our most basic rights pre-exist government. I am convinced that this climate is attributable in no small measure to the benefits we derive from recognizing a robust freedom of religion, conscience, and belief.

This is by no means a novel observation. Religious freedom has been so vital in informing our national identity that freedom of religion in America is often dubbed “the first freedom,” recognizing that the Founding Fathers consciously sought to preserve it in the first two clauses of what we now know as the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. As the historian William Lee Miller put it: “Religious liberty was more central to the nation’s original moral self-definition than is comprehended by a modern generation’s routine inclusion of (for example) ‘freedom to go to the church of your choice’ on the list (rather far down on the list) of basic freedoms ‘enjoyed’ by Americans ... Liberty of ‘conscience,’ meaning freedom of religious belief and conviction and activity, was near the center, or at the center, of the whole revolutionary American project.” Miller’s claim finds considerable support in George Washington’s famous Farewell Address:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation deserts the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

In short, a society that insists on divorcing morality from the public sphere threatens the very pillars of freedom and self-government. Noted social observer George Weigel has argued that that is precisely what has happened in Europe. In *The Cube and the Cathedral*, Weigel asks why, “in the aftermath of 1989, did Europeans fail to condemn communism as a moral and political monstrosity?” and why “do European statesmen insist on defending certain fictions in world politics: like the fiction that Yasser Arafat was interested in peace with Israel?” Weigel concludes that “European man has convinced himself that in order to be modern and free, he must be radically secular.” But, as Weigel explains, the exact opposite has happened. Europe’s increasingly secular culture has corresponded with a political climate that is increasingly hostile to freedom.

Europe is only the most recent case study that demonstrates a fundamental truth of human society: Guaranteeing freedom of religion is critical to the success of the democratic project. If a nation fails to protect its people’s freedom to practice religion, it will almost assuredly fail to preserve any other of their liberties. Weigel shows us the connection:

A thoroughly secularized culture from which transcendent reference points for human thought and action have disappeared is bad for the cause of human freedom and democracy because democracy, in the final analysis, rests on the conviction that the human person possesses an inalienable dignity and value and that freedom is not mere willfulness.

The Founders recognized these correlations centuries ago, and they wanted future generations to remember that democracy succeeds where personal responsibility and virtue flourish, and that religion is an institution that has a unique capacity to foster those attributes.

The United States and International Religious Freedom

Recognizing the great blessing of its own heritage, America's commitment to religious freedom and belief has not stopped at its own borders. To the contrary, the United States has played a significant role in the development and promulgation of international human rights laws that promote religious freedom for all of humanity. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Though the document broadly reflected the will of the "people of the United Nations," there is no question that the United States played a central role in its drafting and adoption.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

It is worth pausing to reflect upon these words, embedded in the U.N.'s foundational documents. The U.N. was a very different institution at the time. It was a convocation of nations that had shed blood and spent treasure to pass through one of the darkest periods in human history and defeat fascism. Member-nations had witnessed how a political system untethered by virtue—a system that fails to bridge natural and human law, or demand goodness—could pave the way for a war whose enormous scale was matched only by the devastating human rights abuses it would end.

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration was a seminal contribution to the global human rights agenda, because it legitimized the place of religious freedom and belief on the world stage. But if freedom and personal responsibility are mankind's natural condition, as the American Founders believed, shouldn't the freedom of religion and belief be legally secured against government intrusion? If this force that places a premium on discerning truth and recognizing the dignity and worth of every human person is found to foster the basic elements of social harmony, political stability, and security, isn't it also in a nation's national interests to protect it?

Drawing on its own rich history, the United States has answered these questions in the affirmative, taking significant steps to foster a legal culture and statutory regime that protect freedom of religion and belief abroad. In 1998, the United States Congress passed the International Religious Freedom Act unanimously in both chambers. Unanimity in the final vote did not, however, mean that the legislation was easy to pass or that it did not contain substantive and far-reaching provisions. To the contrary, passing the legislation required the cooperation and aggressive lobbying of a broad coalition of religious groups, including Catholics, mainline Protestants, Evangelicals, Jews, Buddhists, and others.

As Allen Hertzke writes in *Freeing God's Children: The Unlikely Alliance for Global Human Rights*:

Viewed as something of a miracle by partisans, the legislation was the product of an intense and sometimes bitter lobby campaign ... Many who gathered in front of the Capitol steps on October 10, 1998, to celebrate the passage of the IRFA saw this [final] unanimity as indeed providential because it placed the governments' unalloyed imprimatur on the cause of religious freedom around the world. Under a bright October sky there was a palpable sense of historic moment, as speaker after speaker directed often eloquent remarks to those abroad, to "tyrants who persecute" and "believers who suffer.

IRFA created key offices within the federal government – an ambassador for religious freedom within the State Department and a special advisor on international religious freedom within the National Security Council. The legislation also created an independent, bipartisan United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, which would have the flexibility and freedom to focus on promoting religious freedom with independence from the State Department, as its members believed best. According to Hertzke:

Created as a watchdog and policy advocate, the commission provides an independent assessment of the status of religious freedom, critiques the State Department [annual] report [on religious freedom], and offers detailed policy recommendations. Designed to produce "honest fact-finding" the commission is less constrained by diplomatic considerations than the State Department. It can "speak truth to power," not temporizing on the record of countries of strategic importance. Its reports on such places as Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, and North Korea, therefore, often read more cogently than official government documents.

These offices represent the infrastructure that embodies the American people's commitment to religious liberty, enabling the United States to pursue a global religious freedom agenda with "teeth." By focusing diplomatic attention on this vital issue, these offices can promote religious freedom abroad in a spirit of cooperation with other governments, or, when necessary, as a fearless voice for the human rights of oppressed peoples.

Current Challenges

We know through simple observation around the globe that there is a correlation between religious freedom and greater economic prosperity, lower levels of violence, better health, and enhanced educational opportunities. A rational national security policy for the United States must acknowledge that, without religious freedom, societies worldwide are more vulnerable to conflict and radicalism, which, in turn, makes our own country much less safe in an age of globalization and frequent trans-boundary effects. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan provide recent case studies.

Thus, it seems elementary that peace and stability around the world, and, in turn, our own national security interests, are inextricably intertwined with a foreign policy that promotes the freedom of religion abroad. That understanding of freedom of religion does not necessarily have to parrot what we have in the United States, but it must be meaningful and tangible rather than merely a pronouncement on parchment. We need to make it known that freedom of religion or belief is a deliverable in our bilateral and multilateral arrangements, both for the betterment of all mankind and for our own stability and protection in the homeland.

For a foreign policy agenda to comprehensively address the international freedom of religion or belief in a way that bolsters our own interests in freedom, peace, security and prosperity here at home, it must direct itself to three objects: (1) States that bolster religious extremism or jihad, (2) States that suppress religious freedom to prop up their totalitarian interests, and (3) States that embrace radical secularization with the end result of attacking religious freedom.

1. States that bolster religious extremism or jihad

States that support religious extremism and jihad are probably the most dangerous of all. They have created a legal and political environment within their borders that snuffs out pluralism, often punishing religious practice, expression or conscience that deviates even slightly from its theocratic prescriptions. This climate leads to intolerance and hate, and experience shows that these theocratic, repressive states are a breeding ground for terrorists who seek, at any cost, to replicate that oppressive environment throughout the globe.

Saudi Arabia and Iran are prime examples. There is no religious freedom in either country, and we can see from what has happened in those nations and others that forcing citizens to profess a certain religious faith against their will fuels violence, intolerance, aggression, and suspicion—not virtue in public life and governance. As James Madison succinctly argued in his “Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments,” religion is a beneficial institution when it is embraced freely, and most certainly not when it is compelled or used as a tool to repress minorities or dissenters.

In a nation such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, where there is no freedom of religion or belief, the rule of law is impossible. Instead, arbitrary and unequal treatment under the law is the norm. The people have license to ignore the individual worth and human dignity of some while the state turns a blind eye. And the state itself can use religious repression and tension to bolster its own power.

Severe religious intolerance extends into the Saudi Arabian educational system, teaching children at a young age of the supposed “evil” of all other religions besides Islam. Though the Saudi Arabian government claims to have revised its textbooks in this regard, the “revised” text is little better than the original. School children continue to be taught to hate all those who do not conform to the Sunni Islam faith. The texts go so far as encouraging the killing of “infidels.” As Freedom House concluded in a 2006 report, “Saudi Arabia’s Curriculum of Intolerance”:

These books continue to reflect a curriculum that inculcates religious hatred toward those who do not follow Wahhabi teachings. When the current school year ends, thousands more will graduate from Saudi public schools steeped in the belief that those of differing religious faiths are morally inferior and even evil. Their texts will have taught them that peaceful coexistence with so-called “infidels” is unattainable and that violence to spread Islam is not only permissible, but an obligation.

Jews are particularly singled out, and the textbooks purport to cite evidence “proving” that all of the world’s major wars and conflicts have been caused by the Jews. According to the texts, “You can hardly find an example of sedition in which the Jews have not played a role,” and “[t]he good news for Muslims is that God will help them against the Jews in the end, which is one of the signs of the hour of judgment.”

2. States that suppress religious freedom to prop up their totalitarian interests

United States foreign policy should also be deeply concerned about regimes that suppress or repress religion as a means of maintaining their totalitarian grip. Lately, the eyes of the world have been fixed upon one such example in Sudan. President Bashir took aim at Christianity and other minority religions of the southern region as a means of sparking the 30-year North-South civil war, resulting in 2 million dead and 4 million displaced.

In totalitarian regimes such as North Korea, China, and Vietnam, where the yoke of Communism cannot be borne if the people pledge allegiance to any authority other than the State, religion is suppressed or heavily regulated by the government as a desperate act of self-preservation. In the short run, to Communist party chairmen, this may seem to work. But it is a short-sighted and corrosive approach that induces social instability and stymies lasting and optimal economic growth. A people who cannot believe as they wish, and appeal to their Creator as they see fit, will find it very hard to develop a sense of purpose.

Southeast Asia's destiny, of course, is vital to the global economy, and the safety and success of the United States. China, for example, is home to the world's largest population, one of the fastest growing markets and economies, a large standing army, a growing navy and a cadre of intercontinental nuclear weapons, all being controlled by a Communist government trying to grow its economy while stifling political change.

In order to control the threat it perceives from religious believers, the Chinese government requires all religious groups to comply with the National Regulations on Religious Affairs, which oblige these groups to register with one of the seven government-sanctioned religious organizations. The registration process can include handing over the membership list of the religious organization (including all contact information), running all leadership decisions through the government, and gaining advance permission for all religious positions or activities. Any unregistered religious activity is considered illegal and is punishable by law. These activities are often portrayed as threats to national security, because they upset national solidarity.

3. States that embrace radical secularization with the end result of attacking religious freedom

There is, finally, a problem even closer to home, and that is the effect that radical secularization has had in Western Europe. The preamble of the draft European Constitution—which chronicles the formation of Western European civilization—is illustrative of the radical secularism that has taken hold in Europe, in that it contains no reference to God or Christianity. Out of this foundation of hostile secularism has grown a culture of religious intolerance. There are, for example, instances of hate speech prosecutions against Christian clergy in both England and Norway for speaking about homosexual conduct. And, in Germany, individuals who home-school children for religious reasons have been prosecuted.

The environment that has emerged in Western Europe is demoralizing and dispiriting. It strains the social fabric by creating division and discord. It stands in stark contrast to the axiom that there cannot be capitalism or democracy without morality—a morality that freedom of religion or belief plays a big role in fostering. And, finally, it is a form of intolerance that provides points of leverage for other extremists. It is no coincidence that, as Europe's radical secularization has stifled Western religion in the public sphere, radical forms of Islam have begun to thrive in Europe's capitals, and the leaders of those very capitals lack the credibility to speak out against the agenda of repressive defamation of religions that rears its ugly head in multinational forums.

European leaders and diplomats have defended the state of affairs, saying that, among our fundamental principles, there must be respect and tolerance in a society. But there also must be candor. That is how, in a civilized world, we seek truth. And it is that search for moral truth that is often at the center of the work of

religion, and often religion cannot carry out its goals without candid dialogue—dialogue that sometimes might be disturbing, critical or contentious. We should therefore perhaps be skeptical about rules or regulations that suppress expression by religion. It has become increasingly more popular to argue that much of what is labeled as intolerance and discrimination against Christians is nothing more than the normal friction of a society undergoing change.

When religious leaders or people of faith express certain convictions or express concerns that society is taking a wrong turn culturally, penalizing or seeking to suppress such expression on the part of government is not necessarily a manifestation of the normal friction of a changing society. It could be an indication that the state has decided to abandon the protection of certain religious convictions as society changes.

Conclusion

America's historical exceptionalism is closely related to its commitment to religious freedom and belief. That commitment did not end a few decades after the nation's founding, nor was it limited to our national borders. It continued through World War II and its aftermath, and well into the 1990s with the passage of the IRFA and the creation of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. In the years ahead, the Obama Administration must integrate religious freedom issues into our foreign and national security policy. It can do so by establishing policies that will help prevent the exportation of religious extremism by nations in the developing world, discourage state-sponsored hostility to minority religions, and incentivize states to beat back a climate of impunity where sectarian violence and conflict remain unpunished.

We must build on our nation's heritage of promoting religious freedom at home and abroad. The alternative is to adopt a lopsided view of transnationalism – one that imports the trends and international standards of countless other nations without exporting the best of our law and policy—an abiding commitment to the First Freedom.

Harvey C. Mansfield

PROVIDENCE AND DEMOCRACY

I stop the fast American whom I meet... and I ask him if he believes religion to be useful to the stability of laws and to the good order of society; he answers me without hesitation that a civilized society, but above all a free society, cannot subsist without religion... Those least versed in the science of government know that at least.
Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*

Alexis de Tocqueville was a liberal, but, as he once wrote, a “new kind of liberal.” For us, no feature of his new liberalism is more remarkable than the alliance between religion and liberty that he saw in America and proposed to be imitated, wherever it can, in every free society.

In liberalism today, there is a debate over whether liberal theory needs—or should avoid—a “foundation.” Tocqueville seems to take the anti-foundational side: he never mentions the “state of nature,” which was the standard foundation of 17th-century liberalism, and in *Democracy in America* he omits any reference to the Declaration of Independence with its ringing foundational assertion that “all men are created equal.” Yet, if he avoids laying a foundation in reason, he also thinks that religion is essential to political liberty because of the “certain fixed ideas” that it offers to ground the practice of self-government. These are doctrines of faith, since for Tocqueville “religion” means revealed religion, not a rational or natural religion.

These doctrines, however, include articles of reason encompassed in faith. Tocqueville was a strong opponent of divine right in politics and a strong proponent of the separation of church and state. Although he praised the Puritans highly as be-

ing the “point of departure” for democracy in America, he criticized their theocratic character. Personally, he seems to have suffered a crisis early in life when, as he recounts it, he came upon the books of 18th-century materialists in his father’s library and promptly and permanently (so far as we know) lost his faith, not only in religion but in “all the truths” that supported his beliefs and his actions.

Questions arise that are still with us: What does Tocqueville hold against the introduction of foundational principles in democratic politics, and how can they be kept out? What is the relationship between philosophy and religion, given the hostility of modern philosophers (particularly the French philosophes) to religion and his desire to make an alliance between the two? Just what essential support does religion supply to political liberty—the essential liberty according to Tocqueville—so that despite the separation of church and state necessary to political liberty, he can say, strikingly, that religion “should be considered the first of [the Americans’] political institutions”?

Mores

To see how Tocqueville understands religion one must look to his view of mores, for in *Democracy in America* (where his main discussion of religion can be found), he first treats religion as the most important of mores. Mores (moeurs), defined as “the whole moral and intellectual state of a people,” comprise both morals and customs. His definition comes from the ancients, and is related to their emphasis on virtue in human affairs, but it is virtue understood as typical, ordinary, or average, so that modern thinkers who seek laws or rules of social behavior, such as Montesquieu and Rousseau, could find the concept useful and congenial, too. Mores are connected in Tocqueville to another, newer concept of the social state (*état social*), the product (or union) of fact and laws, which then in turn becomes the “first cause” of most of a society’s laws, customs, and ideas. Mores and the social state are partly chosen by a society and partly not chosen—the two elements confused together. The consequence is the blurring of the early social-contract liberals’ clear view that politics is best understood as primarily a human choice made to escape the state of nature, which is not chosen by us.

Tocqueville declares in the Introduction to *Democracy in America* that democracy is a “providential fact.” It is a trend that began 700 years ago and only in his time has come to light as providential in the one country—America—that has adopted it and applied it fully and successfully. To call it providential means to deny that it is a human choice or discovery, for example the choice or discovery of John Locke, the philosopher who inspired the Declaration of Independence. Instead of Locke and the Declaration, Tocqueville begins with the Puritans. To be sure, the Puritans came to America with an idea: “They wanted to make an idea triumph.” But it was a religious and Christian idea, which led them to call themse-

Ives pilgrims. Yet the religious doctrine was blended with “the most absolute democratic and republican theories”—not merely of equality but also of self-government and public education, all of which were put into practice by the Puritans. In place of liberalism and its deistic or atheistic foundation in the state of nature, Tocqueville sets the Puritans—their religious idea together with their practices. It was they who first brought democracy into “broad daylight,” not as a foundation but active and complete as a way of life. They not merely offered an idea but also were able to live by it, transforming it into the mores of a social state that could be considered the “first cause” of American democracy.

Nonetheless, Tocqueville goes on to criticize them gently—without Puritan severity— but profoundly. They were after all puritanical in their “ardor for regulation” and their “narrow spirit of sect” and legislated against sin with abundant resort to penalties of death. Their excesses had to be and were corrected at the time of the American Revolution in what James Ceaser has called “Tocqueville’s second founding,” when many states abandoned the establishment of religion in favor of the separation of church and state.

Indirectly Under God

The puritan point of departure needed to be departed from, and replaced by the principle, or dogma, of “the sovereignty of the people.” Not wishing to offend religion or praise its enemies, Tocqueville doesn’t mention its disestablishment. He only says strangely that according to this new sovereignty, “the people reign over the American political world as God does over the universe”—as if somehow the people who are like God had replaced God. The people, strictly speaking, have no authority above themselves. They set an authority above themselves when they establish the Constitution, yet do not retain the power to unseat God as they do the Constitution. Indeed, “what makes a people master of itself if it has not submitted to God?” A people, like an individual person, makes itself more powerful, not less, with self-restraint. As political scientist Bryan Garsten has written, the American people turn religion from an external to an internal restraint.

Since religion has its influence in America through mores, it works more indirectly than directly. Even when considering religion “from a purely human point of view,” Tocqueville observes, it has an unfailing source of strength in human nature: “the desire for immortality that torments the hearts of all men equally.” When founded on this desire, religions can aim at universality, but when they become united with government, they, apply only to certain peoples. Religion should avoid attaching itself to earthly authority and forswear all reliance on divine right, using mores; to regulate democracy rather than relying, on laws as much as the Puritans did. Religion is more powerful if it is pure, and it is pure only if it avoids earthly attachments. Paradoxically, religion is more powerful politically if it stays out of

politics, if it does not appear as an authority in its own regard but under cover of the mores that the people practice and hold to.

These are Tocqueville's formulations, yet ever careful as he is to deprecate the role of philosophy and of the philosopher, he presents them as opinions of Americans; the paradox that the less religion is involved with politics the greater is its sway over politics is the perception, he reports, of American priests. Not that they have much choice: they perceive that the majority wants them to stay out of politics. There is another power with whom American clergy share their indirect influence, and that is American women. Religion, he says, does little to restrain the American man from his ardor for self-enrichment, but it "reigns as a sovereign over the soul of woman, and it is woman who makes mores." It was a commonplace of the philosophes that superstitious women were willing victims of the manipulation of superstition by the clergy, but when we consult Tocqueville, we find a contrary statement. He says that Americans give girls an education in reason as well as religion, and that they resort to religion for defense of their virtue only when „they have reached the last limits of human force." American women are not weak and credulous; they "display a manly reason and a wholly virile energy" yet "always remain women in their manners."

Here, as with the clergy, one may suspect that Tocqueville's description is idealized, masking a recommendation he would prefer not to give outright. He is as modest and as manly as the American women he pictures. It would not have surprised him, however, that in our time women have chosen to be manly and have abandoned the defense, if not the practice, of modesty.

Mediocrity and Materialism

In the second volume of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville turns to the question of the truth of religion as opposed to, or in addition to, its usefulness. His approach to the question is still through the usefulness of religion, but now we get a better view of just how it is useful and why American democracy has a stake in its truth. We also see better why he distrusts ideas and why philosophy needs to be concealed under religion.

Religion is useful mainly because it hinders the taste for material enjoyments that is endemic to American democracy, indeed to modern democracy as such. Religion is of course a brake on licentious liberty and on the sovereignty of the democratic majority. It opposes the "maxim that everything is permitted in the interest of society," an impious maxim, Tocqueville says, "that seems to have been invented in the century of freedom to legitimate all the tyrants to come." Yet the true danger is not in the occasional viciousness of democracy, but in the mediocrity of soul it produces in law-abiding citizens through the taste for material pleasures. This taste is surely bourgeois, but it comes from democracy, not from what we call capitalism.

When all are equal, no one has natural authority over anyone else, and when a democratic citizen looks for a guide to life, he finds no superior in whom to trust—and ends his search by looking to himself. To him there is no distant goal in life to which he can devote himself, for everything beyond the immediate is vague and beyond his ken. The only evident goods to him are palpable and available—material goods—and he devotes himself to goods that he and everyone like him (his semblables) can appreciate.

Religion, however, is a “form of hope” in human nature. Its most important practical teaching is that man has an immortal soul, which is therefore divine, and man’s natural hope is that he will live forever. To have an immortal soul is a possession of inestimable value, yet it is also universal and equal, hence democratic, its perfection not a goal of aristocratic honor that sets one above others. As a form of hope, religion is not primarily a form of fear (except insofar as one fears one’s hope for salvation may be dashed), as the early liberal theorists, particularly Thomas Hobbes, supposed. The fear of invisible spirits (said Hobbes) and the uneasiness of the self (Locke) turn one’s attention to the present; hope appeals to the future. In the future lies accomplishment in which one can take pride.

The early liberals believed human pride to be the source of trouble, especially the prideful notion that human beings are special in the universe because of their immortal-souls. This claim, which is so easy to make in general and so hard to specify in particular, leads easily to the tyranny of religion or to the miseries of religious civil war. But for Tocqueville, the reliance on worldly passions such as fear and material gain produces abject souls more fit for despotism than liberty, and the weaknesses of democracy are rather stability and stagnation than anarchy and rebelliousness. So for him religion promotes liberty by teaching men that they are special and that they deserve to take pride in their accomplishments. His most significant apparent departure from Christianity is from Christian humility. It is in regard to pride that he says, with apparently conflicting import, that religion is “the most precious inheritance from aristocratic centuries,” and yet that religion warms the hearth of patriotism in America.

The pride constituting the specialness of man emerges in Tocqueville’s insistence on the greatness of man. He seeks to rally the „true friends of liberty and human greatness,” and he puts the two together because liberty mired in mediocrity brings on the new sort of despotism he identifies at the end of Democracy in America, mild (*doux*) despotism. Mediocre souls trapped in material enjoyments will readily trade their political liberty for peace and security in those enjoyments. Such people suffer from the new democratic ill he identifies as „individualism,” which occurs when democratic citizens believe and feel themselves to be passive victims of large, impersonal, historical forces they cannot control or influence. In reaction, they withdraw from the public, forgetting they are citizens, and concentrate their lives on family, friends, and themselves. Losing sight of the public, they become oblivious to any distant goal and welcome the benevolent aid of big government, “the

immense being” that acts on it knows better and offers to take over responsibility for the „trouble of thinking and the pain of living,” Tocqueville says sarcastically.

Doubt and Materialism

Thus the only true liberty is political liberty, in which the goal and the result may sometimes be greatness but the practice of which exercises the soul, regardless. He remarks on Americans’ veneration for Plymouth Rock, a piece of matter that matters to them: „Does this not show very clearly that the power and greatness of man are wholly in his soul?” Religion provides a confirmation that men are not mere pawns of fate or of chance forces hostile or indifferent to them; it is a guarantee of greatness in human spirituality as it connects men to God. Religion combats the short-sightedness and fecklessness of democracy, and gives it something to be proud of, above the mediocrity of material enjoyments.

When this mediocrity reveals itself as the main enemy of democracy through the erosion of political liberty, we come upon the baleful influence of democratic ideas. We begin to appreciate why Tocqueville is so suspicious of philosophy. What he often simply calls „doubt,” so characteristic of democratic ages, is philosophic doubt of religion that issues in the suspense of belief—or in practice, when suspense is no longer possible, in denial of belief, and in materialism. The doubt in question amounts to a denial of the human soul and in consequence, of human agency (as we say today). The spiritual, not the material, is what is doubted—though in modern mathematical physics it turns out not to be so easy to define or grasp what matter is.

In the early liberalism Tocqueville rejects, men are liberated from prejudice and superstition only to be enthralled to the worldly passions of fear and gain; they are conquered or bullied into promising obedience (in Hobbes’s theory) or „quickly driven into society” (in Locke’s words) rather than freely choosing to give their allegiance. The model for liberty is the abstract, pre-political state of nature, which is only posited and may or may not exist, rather than the actual model of political liberty that Tocqueville finds in the township of New England. Early liberalism is apolitical; it supports politics with non-political motives and it betrays the goal of liberty with the passive and slavish means it specifies for achieving liberty. This is not liberalism with a soul, like Tocqueville’s liberalism, because it degrades souls by overwhelming them with fear and seducing them with incentives for material gain. It is not a liberalism that can sustain liberty.

Materialism teaches democratic peoples that they have nothing special in them to be proud of, and in the form of the scientific determinism powerful in Tocqueville’s time, that they are incapable of avoiding the fate that chance decrees and science uncovers and displays for all to see. But since pride is in human nature, materialists are unable to avoid taking pride in themselves. Their system might be

useful if it gave them and taught others to take a modest idea of oneself—all of us, including Nobel prize winners, being matter of little account—but materialists do not in fact draw or expound this lesson. When they believe they have proved that men are no better than brutes, Tocqueville says, they are „as proud as if they had demonstrated they were gods.” The scientific materialism that deprives citizens of their belief in the possibility of self-government is used to justify, instead, the rational control of citizens by experts with knowledge of such science.

The danger of materialist ideas in our democratic age is responsible for Tocqueville’s leery distrust of philosophical ideas, and for his selective trust in religious ideas. As we shall see, the religious ideas he presents have more to do with philosophy than with revelation. He approves of certain philosophical ideas, such as those advancing spiritualism, but without much discrimination. He would rather you believe your soul can migrate to the body of a pig than that you have no soul. He reserves his approval for whatever spiritual doctrine emerges from philosophy, and criticizes the usual effects of philosophical inquiry in democracy. Philosophical inquiry begins with doubt, but instead of truly doubting, people taught to doubt merely doubt the authority of others and then turn to themselves and their own authority. That is why he treats Descartes, the philosopher of doubt, as a teacher of democracy—a perceptive estimation one will not find in textbooks.

When Cartesian doubt is generalized and transferred from philosopher to citizen, the result is the democratic dogma that each individual has reason sufficient to run his own life. So Descartes’s thought is most perfectly realized in America where nobody has read Descartes because nobody needs to read him, where doubt of dogmatic authority has become the dogmatic authority of doubt. In the modern age the democratic propensity for material well-being, with its mediocrity, its individualism, and its mild despotism, renders philosophical materialism dangerous, and all philosophy dubious because in that age philosophy is likely to be materialist.

Faith and Philosophy

The debate over foundations in liberalism today is between those who insist on philosophical foundations of liberty, so as to exclude illiberal notions of virtue or salvation that are harmful and hostile to liberty, and those who argue that such foundations are an infringement of liberty and in any case difficult to prove and to gain consent for. Tocqueville stands on neither side of this debate but in a middle position of his own. Though opposed to philosophical foundations, he holds that America has and needs foundations in religious faith in order to keep its democratic liberty.

As to philosophy, Tocqueville writes: „Americans have not needed to draw their philosophic method from books; they have found it in themselves.” And as to religion: „Men... have an immense interest in making very fixed ideas for themse-

ives about God, their souls, their general duties.” In the first quotation we see Tocqueville rejecting the bookish influence of philosophers in favor of actual practice, by which citizens manage to make their way forward without the guide of a foundation prescribed by philosophy. In the second quotation, however, we see the need stated for „very fixed ideas” that do not arise from practice but precede and guide practice. These ideas must come from religion rather than philosophy. Any society, and especially a democratic one, must take account of what most people think, and most people have recourse to the dogmas of religion for guidance because they have neither the time nor the capacity for philosophizing. Even if they did or could philosophize, they would find that through the ages, philosophers „despite all their efforts... have been able to discover only a few contradictory notions.”

Those who try to rely on philosophy for the fixed ideas they need in their ordinary lives, Tocqueville says, do not find them but come to grief in doubt. „Doubt takes hold of the highest portions of the intellect and half paralyses all the others.” Each person becomes accustomed to hearing confused and changing opinions on matters of most interest to himself and people like him—vaguely troubling issues of the day, in which it is hard to follow the arguments. We throw up our hands, feeling defeated, and in cowardly fashion refuse to think. If people will not think, doubt „cannot fail to enervate souls,” thereby threatening the maintenance of liberty because enervated souls will not take the trouble to exercise liberty or defend it. Thus one of his memorable phrases: „I am brought to think that if [a man] has no faith, he must serve, and if he is free, he must believe.”

Here is a liberal who rejects liberal foundations in philosophy yet requires them in religion. But his statement against doubt blames it for preventing people from thinking, that is, from thinking practically and usefully. Philosophical thinking leads to paralysis of practical thinking, in which overmatched would-be philosophers are led ultimately to passive acceptance of things as they are. Philosophy may begin from the questioning of authority, but when it appears that all the questioning leads to no answers, it stops and finds rest in the conclusion that nothing can be done. Faith, then, is not a substitute for reasoning simply, but only for philosophical reasoning; it clears the way, and is actually the basis, for reasoning about one’s closest interests.

Tocqueville says that religion imposes a „salutary yoke” on the intellect by preventing the use of individual reason to raise doubt and by establishing „general ideas” about God and human nature that permit men to recognize “an authority.” Reason as philosophy gets in the way of reason as practice because the one attacks authority and the other requires it. Now what is the solution? Is it merely to declare that the two aspects of reason are antithetical, and that practice being more important than philosophy, the need for active practice must dominate the pleasure, if it is a pleasure, of speculating—that dogma must silence philosophy?

Tocqueville does not adopt that solution, though he may appear to do so because sometimes he seems to criticize all philosophy, philosophy itself. But he also shows appreciation for the contemplative life of the philosopher, praising the “ardent, haughty, and disinterested love of the true” one finds in Pascal and Archimedes’ lofty contempt for practice as “vile, low, and mercenary.” He distinguishes the science of the “most theoretical principles,” which may flourish in aristocracy, from science devoted to practical applications, which is characteristic of science in democracy. It is a weakness of democracy that it does not encourage “the contemplation of first causes.” Tocqueville himself warns his readers that he feels “obliged to push each of his ideas to all its theoretical consequences,” and he does not hesitate to speak of “first causes.”

Reasonable Religion

Religion, then, does not replace philosophy or science, but it serves as their public face and supplies the fixed ideas that men need to live in freedom. Servility of soul is not the consequence of religion, as the philosophes asserted, but of anti-religious materialism, which denies the soul by demeaning man into matter, or abases the soul by endorsing the democratic propensity to a life of material well-being.

At the end of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville discloses something of the character of the religion he recommends. It is not just any religion, as he seemed to imply earlier when speaking of religion as part of democratic mores. But a reasonable religion the confirms the intelligibility of nature and of the world.

In his own name he strives, like a philosopher, like the youthful Pascal but with a view to the intelligible, to enter into the comprehensive “point of view of God” in regard to democracy and aristocracy. God is approachable to man through His mind. Although Tocqueville speaks here of, “as it were, two humanities,” thus apparently distinguishing them profoundly, he also justifies the comparisons he has made continuously throughout the book by referring them to one superhuman whole in which they are joined. “God” is apparently a person, and clearly distinct from His Creation.

Tocqueville does not insist on the difference between revealed and natural or rational religion, and he had declared that “it was necessary that Jesus Christ come to earth to make it understood that all members of the human species are naturally alike and equal.” Revealed truth is distinct from the truth of nature, but revelation makes nature apparent to us in a way unassisted human realism cannot. Philosophy is the under a duty not overlook the difference between itself and revelation but also not to present that difference in a way hostile to the latter. The order that Tocqueville seen in or imputes to God’s mind leaves untouched the statements of God’s hidden character in Scripture without contradicting them.

Religion understood as the order of God's mind repels "two false and cowardly doctrines." What are they? We see them in what he writes of Providence: "Providence has not created the human race either entirely independent or perfectly slave." The first is the aristocratic criticism of democracy that it is anarchic; the second is the democratic idea that peoples "necessarily obey I do not know which insurmountable and unintelligent force born of previous events, the race, the soil, or the climate." Strangely, both of these may be found in liberal social-contract theories—the first in the state of nature in which men are anarchic and at war; the second in the means for escaping the state of nature, which play on fear and subject men to "insurmountable and unintelligent force," consisting variously of the laws or rules of sub-rational motivation discovered by history and social science. As opposed to these, religion can cement its alliances with liberty and with reason, all three together in the politics of democracy.

The two contraries of being entirely independent and perfectly enslaved stand for the two aspects of chance, unpredictability and subjection – "chance fate" – to which religion is opposed. Religion as Tocqueville portrays it tries to make our life predictable, but not so predictable that we can succeed without trying. And it sets limits to our intellect, our freedom, and our choice – but not such narrow limits that we can never succeed no matter how hard we try. The task of politics, which Tocqueville sometimes calls, in the manner of Plato and Aristotle, the task of the legislator, is to cooperate with religion and to guide our lives so that our virtue is rewarded and our freedom preserved.

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Wilfred M. McClay

**THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN THE AMERICAN PUBLIC SQUARE:
CHRISTIANITY, CIVIL RELIGION, AND THE ENDURING
CONTRIBUTION OF RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS**

It is a rather daunting task to address the place of religion in American public life. The question is so rich, so complex, and often so divisive, even contentious. It brings together the two things that American folk wisdom teaches us, from a very early age, that we should not discuss in polite company: religion and politics.

And indeed, one widely held, and widely respected, view of the matter is that one should say as little as possible in public about either religion or politics. While there are times when this is good advice, and represents the acme of prudence, it will hardly do for us as a general principle. A form of “civility” that is achieved only by our remaining studiously silent about the things that matter to us most, and are most fundamental to the health of our civil society, is not really civility, but merely an uneasy and impoverished social peace. Nor is this the kind of society that the American Constitutional order envisioned. The first item in our Bill of Rights makes it clear that the Framers placed religion in a very high place—not only as the first and most fundamental of our freedoms, but as a mental and moral and social right whose “free exercise” we also are promised.

The question can be made a little more manageable, too, by our making some distinctions. One can, to begin with, talk about the “place” of religion either descriptively or prescriptively, as the place religion occupies or as the place it ought to occupy. The two are impossible to separate, of course, and I will do some linking of them in what follows. But the distinction is a useful one to make at the outset.

Also, I have assumed in what follows that we are speaking of an American public square, although the title does not specify that. As you'll see, I am a typical historian in regarding these questions as being highly context-sensitive in character. I will have nothing to say about, for example, the issue of Turkish women being allowed to wear head coverings in public, or French women being proscribed from doing so. And I find it very difficult to talk about the particular texture of American religious life, and our view of religious liberty in this country, without taking into account certain highly particular aspects of American history and society.

Which brings one to a last distinction, revolving around the place of Christianity in one's thinking. One can talk about the "place" of religion in American life from the standpoint of an American citizen, irrespective of one's belief or unbelief. Or one can talk about the place of religion in American life specifically from the standpoint of a Christian believer. The two are not necessarily the same. Nor are they necessarily at odds. And there is a wide variety of points of view within each perspective. But it is useful to think about them separately, and sometimes to employ different language to do so.

What I will do in what follows is to try, in a very rough way, to do first the one, then the other. I should like first to address myself in a general and detached way to the phenomenon of religion in public, using the concept of "civil religion" to illuminate the way. Then I will take a look at the latter, how to think Christianly about the role of one's own faith in the public square, viewing the matter through a consideration of the career of the man who was mainly behind the emergence of the term "public square" in our discourse about these matters: the late Richard John Neuhaus. Then, finally, we can consider how the two different perspectives may combine, or clash.

I'll begin by thinking back to the situation approximately nine years ago. In the immediate wake of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Americans suddenly found themselves faced with an unexpected choice between radically different perspectives on the proper place of religion in modern Western society. The alternative perspectives were not new. But the urgency with which they were felt, and the intensity with which they were articulated, marked a dramatic departure. Coming at a moment when Americans had been gradually rethinking many settled precedents regarding religion and public life, it seemed to give a sharper edge to the questions being asked.

For many intelligent observers, there was only one logical conclusion to be drawn from these horrifyingly destructive acts, perpetrated by fanatically committed adherents to a militant and demanding form of Islam: that all religions, and particularly the great monotheisms, constitute an ever-present menace to the peace, order, and liberty of Western civil life. Far from embracing the then-growing sentiment that the United States government should be willing to grant religion a greater

role in public life, such observers took 9/11 as clear evidence of just how serious a mistake this would be. The events of 9/11 seemed to confirm their contention that religion is incorrigibly toxic, and that it breeds irrationality, demonization of others, irreconcilable division, and implacable conflict. If we learned nothing else from 9/11, in this view, we should at least have relearned the hard lessons that the West learned in its own bloody religious wars at the dawn of the modern age. The essential character of the modern West, and its greatest achievement, is its tolerant secularism. To settle for anything less is to court disaster. If there still has to be a vestigial presence of religion here and there in the world, let it be kept private and kept on a short leash. Is not Islamist terror the ultimate example of a “faith-based initiative”? How many more examples did we need?

To be sure, most of those who put forward this position were predisposed to do so. They found in 9/11 a pretext for restating settled views, rather than a catalyst for forming fresh ones. More importantly, though, theirs was far from being the only response to 9/11, and nowhere near being the dominant one. Many other Americans had a completely opposite response, feeling that such a heinous and frighteningly nihilistic act, so far beyond the usual psychological categories, could only be explained by resort to an older, pre-secular vocabulary, one that included the numinous concept of “evil.” There were earnest post 9/11 efforts, such as the philosopher Susan Neiman’s thoughtful book *Evil in Modern Thought*, to appropriate the concept for secular use, independent of its religious roots.¹ But such efforts have been largely unconvincing. If 9/11 was taken by some as an indictment of the religious mind’s fanatical tendencies, it was taken with equal justification by others as an illustration of the secular mind’s explanatory poverty. If there was incorrigible fault to be found, it was less in the structure of the world’s great monotheisms than in the labyrinth of the human heart—a fault about which those religions, particularly Christianity, have always had a great deal to say.

Even among those willing to invoke the concept of evil in its proper religious habitat, however, there was disagreement. A handful of prominent evangelical Christian leaders, notably Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, were unable to resist comparing the falling towers of lower Manhattan to the Biblical towers of Babel, and saw in the 9/11 attacks God’s judgment upon the moral and social evils of contemporary America, and the withdrawal of His favor and protection.² In that sense, they were the mirror opposites of their foes, seizing on 9/11 as a pretext for re-proclaiming the toxicity of American secularism. They were arguing for a separation of religious identity and national identity, from a position mainly concerned to preserve the integrity of religion.

¹ S. Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy*, Princeton 2002.

² Falwell and Robertson made their statements on Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network television show, “The 700 Club,” on September 13, 2001. Their discussion was covered the following day by J. F. Harris of the “Washington Post” in “God Gave Us ‘What We Deserve’, Falwell Says,” p. C03, also found at www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A28620-2001Sep14.

But their view was not typical, and in fact, was so widely regarded as reckless and ill-considered. The more common public reaction was something much simpler and more primal. Millions of Americans went to church, searching there for reassurance, for comfort, for solace, for strength, and for some semblance of redemptive meaning in the act of sharing their grief and confusion in the presence of the transcendent. Both inside and outside the churches, in windows and on labels, American flags were suddenly everywhere in evidence, and the strains of “God Bless America” seemed everywhere to be wafting through the air, along with other patriotic songs that praised America while soliciting the blessings of the Deity. The pure secularists and the pure religionists were the exceptions in this phenomenon. For most Americans, it was unthinkable that the comforts of their religious heritage and the well-being of their nation could be in any fundamental way at odds with one another. Hence it can be said that 9/11 produced a great revitalization, for a time, of the American civil religion, that strain of American piety that bestows many of the elements of religious sentiment and faith upon the fundamental political and social institutions of the United States.

Such a tendency to conflate the realms of the religious and the political has hardly been unique to American life and history. Indeed, the achievement of a stable relationship between the two constitutes one of the perennial tasks of social existence. But in the West, the immense historical influence of Christianity has had a lot to say about the particular way the two have interacted over the centuries. From its inception, the Christian faith insisted upon separating the claims of Caesar and the claims of God—recognizing the legitimacy of both, though placing loyalty to God above loyalty to the state. The Christian was to be in the world but not of the world, living as a responsible and law-abiding citizen in the City of Man while reserving his ultimate loyalty for the City of God. Such a separation and hierarchy of loyalties, which sundered the unity that was characteristic of the classical world, had the effect of marking out a distinctively secular realm, although at the same time confining its claims.

For Americans, this dualism has often manifested itself as an even more decisive commitment to something called “the separation of Church and State,” a slogan that is taken by many to be the cardinal principle governing American politics and religion.³ Yet the persistence of an energetic American civil religion, and of other instances in which the boundaries between the two becomes blurred, suggests that the matter is not nearly so simple as that. There is, and always has been, considerable room in the American experiment for the conjunction of religion and state. This is a proposition that committed religious believers and committed secularists alike find deeply worrisome—and understandably so, since it carries with it

³ P. Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State*, Cambridge MA 2002.

the risk that each of the respective realms can be contaminated by the presence of its opposite number. But it is futile to imagine that the proper boundaries between religion and politics can be fixed once and for all, in all times and cultures, separated by an abstract fiat. Instead, their relationship evolves out of a process of constant negotiation and renegotiation, responsive to the changing needs of the culture and the moment. It is, to repeat the term I used before, highly context-sensitive.

Experience suggests, however, that we would be well advised to steer between two equally dangerous extremes, which can serve as negative landmarks in our deliberations about the proper relationship between American religion and the American nation-state. First, we should avoid total identification of the two, which would in practice likely mean the complete domination of one by the other—a theocratic or ideological totalitarianism in which religious believers completely subordinated themselves to the apparatus of the state, or vice versa. But second, and equally important, we should not aspire to a total segregation of the two, which would in practice bring about unhealthy estrangement between and among Americans, leading in turn to extreme forms of sectarianism, otherworldliness, cultural separatism, and gnosticism, a state of affairs in which religious believers will regard the state with pure antagonism, or vice versa. Religion and the nation are inevitably entwined, and some degree of entwining is a good thing. After all, the self-regulative pluralism of American culture cannot work without the ballast of certain elements of deep commonality. But just how much, and when and why, are hard questions to answer categorically.

Let's take a closer look at the concept of "civil religion."⁴ This is admittedly very much a scholar's term, rather than a term arising out of general parlance, and its use seems to be restricted mainly to anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and historians and the like, even though it describes a phenomenon that has existed ever since the first organized human communities. It is also a somewhat imprecise term, which can mean several things at once. Civil religion is a means of investing a particular set of political/social arrangements with an aura of the sacred, thereby elevating their stature and enhancing their stability. It can serve as a point of reference for the shared faith of the entire state or nation, focusing on the most generalized and widely held beliefs about the history and destiny of that state or nation. As such, it provides much of the social glue that binds together a society through well-established symbols, rituals, celebrations, places, and values, supplying the society with an overarching sense of spiritual unity—a sacred canopy, in

⁴ An excellent introduction to current thinking on the subject is *Civil Religion in Political Thought: Its Perennial Questions and Enduring Relevance in North America*, ed. J. von Heyking, Washington 2010. Although the term "civil religion" generally traces back to Rousseau, its modern usage is grounded in the work of Emile Durkheim; see notably his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. C. Cosman, New York 2001.

Peter Berger's words—and a focal point for shared memories of struggle and survival.⁵ It can sometimes take on some of the spontaneous characteristics of a folk religion, but it also can be highly artificial and self-consciously wrought. Although it borrows extensively from the society's dominant religious tradition, it is not itself a highly particularized religion, but instead a somewhat more blandly inclusive one, into whose highly general stories and propositions those of various faiths can read and project what they wish. It is, so to speak, a highest common denominator.

The phenomenon of civil religion extends back at least to classical antiquity, to the local gods of the Greek city-state, the civil theology of Plato, and to the Romans' state cult, which made the emperor into an object of worship himself. But the term itself appears in recognizably modern form in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract*, where it was put forward as a means of cementing the people's allegiances to their polity.⁶ Rousseau recognized the historic role of religious sentiment in underwriting the legitimacy of regimes and strengthening citizen's bonds to the state and their willingness to sacrifice for the general good. He deplored the influence of Christianity in this regard, however, precisely because of the way that it divided citizens' loyalties, causing them to neglect worldly concerns in favor of spiritual ones. Christians made poor soldiers, because they were more willing to die than to fight.

Rousseau's solution was the self-conscious replacement of Christianity with "a purely civil profession of faith, of which the Sovereign should fix the articles, not exactly as religious dogma, but as social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen and faithful subject." Since it was impossible to have a cohesive civil government without some kind of religion, and since (as he believed) Christianity is inherently counterproductive to or subversive of sound civil government, he thought the state should impose its own custom-tailored religion, which provides a frankly utilitarian function. That civil religion should be kept as simple as possible, with only a few, mainly positive beliefs: the existence and power of God, the afterlife, the reality of reward or punishment, etc., and only one negative dogma, the proscribing of intolerance. Citizens would still be permitted to have their own peculiar beliefs regarding metaphysical things, so long as such opinions were of no worldly consequence. But "whosoever dares to say, 'Outside the Church no salvation,'" Rousseau sternly declared, "ought to be driven from the State."

Needless to say, such a nakedly manipulative approach to the problem of socially binding beliefs, and such dismissiveness toward the commanding truths of Christianity and other older faiths, has not attracted universal approval, in Rousseau's day or since. Nor has the general conception of civil religion. It is not hard to see why. One of the most powerful and enduring critiques came some two centuries later, from the pen of the American scholar Will Herberg, whose classic 1955 study *Protestant Catholic Jew* concluded with a searing indictment of what he called

⁵ P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Toward a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Garden City 1967.

⁶ J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, transl. C. Betts, New York 2009, p. 158–168.

the “civic” religion of “Americanism.” Such religion had lost every smidgen of its prophetic edge; instead, it had become “the sanctification of the society and culture of which it is the reflection.” The Jewish and Christian traditions had “always regarded such religion as incurable idolatrous,” because it “validates culture and society, without in any sense bringing them under judgment.” Such religion no longer comes to prod the indolent, afflict the comfortable, and hold the mirror up to our sinful and corrupt ways. Instead, it “comes to serve as a spiritual reinforcement of national self-righteousness.” It was the handmaiden of national arrogance and moral complacency.⁷

But civil religion also had its defenders. One of them, the sociologist Robert N. Bellah, put the term on the intellectual map, arguing in an influential 1967 article called “Civil Religion in America” that the complaint of Herberg and others about this generalized and self-celebratory religion of The American Way of Life was not the whole story.⁸ The American civil religion was, he asserted, something far deeper and more worthy of respectful study, a body of symbols and beliefs that was not merely a watered down Christianity, but possessed a “seriousness and integrity” of its own. Beginning with an examination of references to God in John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address, Bellah detected in the American civil-religious tradition a durable and morally challenging theme: “the obligation, both collective and individual, to carry out God’s will on earth.” Hence Bellah took a much more positive view of that tradition, though not denying its potential pitfalls. Against the critics, he argued that “the civil religion at its best is a genuine apprehension of universal and transcendent religious reality as seen in or ... revealed through the experience of the American people.” It provides a higher standard against which the nation could be held accountable.

For Bellah and others, the deepest source of the American civil religion is the Puritan-derived notion of America as a New Israel, a covenanted people with a divine mandate to restore the purity of early apostolic church, and thus serve as a godly model for the restoration of the world. John Winthrop’s famous 1630 sermon to his fellow settlers of Massachusetts Bay, in which he envisioned their “plantation” as “city upon a hill,” is the locus classicus for this idea of American chosenness. It was only natural that inhabitants with such a strong sense of historical destiny would eventually come to see themselves, and their nation, as collective bearers of a world-historical mission. What is more surprising, however, was how persistent that self-understanding of America as the Redeemer Nation would prove to be, and how easily it incorporated the secular ideas of the Declaration of Independence

⁷ W. Herberg, *Protestant Catholic Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, Garden City 1960, p. 254–272.

⁸ R. Bellah, *Civil Religion in America*, “Dædalus” 1967, Vol. 96, No. 1 (Winter), p. 1–21.

and the language of liberty into its portfolio. The same mix of convictions can be found animating the rhetoric of the American Revolution, the vision of Manifest Destiny, the crusading sentiments of antebellum abolitionists, the benevolent imperialism of fin-de-siècle apostles of Christian civilization, and the fervent idealism of President Woodrow Wilson at the time of the First World War. No one expressed the idea more directly, however, than Senator Albert J. Beveridge of Indiana, who told the United States Senate, in the wake of the Spanish-American War, that “God has marked us as His chosen people, henceforth to lead in the regeneration of the world.”⁹

The American civil religion also has its sacred scriptures, such as the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Gettysburg Address, the Pledge of Allegiance. It has its great narratives of struggle, from the suffering of George Washington’s troops at Valley Forge to the gritty valor of Jeremiah Denton in Hanoi, to the tangled wreckage of Ground Zero. It has its special ceremonial and memorial occasions, such as the Fourth of July, Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Martin Luther King Day. It has its temples and shrines and holy sites, such as the Lincoln Memorial and other monuments, the National Mall, the Capitol, the White House, Arlington National Cemetery, the great Civil War battlefields, and great natural landmarks such as the Grand Canyon. It has its sacred objects, notably the national flag. It has its organizations, such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Boy Scouts. And it has its dramatis personae, chief among them being its military heroes and the long succession of Presidents. Its telltale marks can be found in the frequent resort to the imagery of the Bible and reference to God and Providence in speeches and public documents, and in the inclusion of God’s name in the national motto (“In God We Trust”), on all currency, in the patriotic songs found in most church hymnals.

The references to God have always been nonspecific, however. From the very beginnings of the nation’s history, the nation’s civil-religious discourse was carefully calibrated to provide a meeting ground for both the Christian and Enlightenment elements in the thought of the Revolutionary generation. One can see this nonspecificity, for example, in the many references to the Deity in the presidential oratory of George Washington, which are still cited approvingly today as civil-religious texts. But there is no denying that civil-religious references to God have evolved and broadened even further since the Founding, from generic Protestant to Protestant-Catholic to Judeo-Christian to, in much of President George W. Bush’s rhetoric, Abrahamic and even monotheistic in general. But what has not changed is the fact that such references still always convey a strong sense of God’s providence, His blessing on the land, and of the Nation’s consequent responsibility to serve as a light unto the nations.

⁹ A. Beveridge, *In Support of an American Empire*, a speech delivered to U.S. Senate on January 9, 1900, which can be found at *Congressional Record*, 56th Cong., 1st Session, Vol. 33, p. 705, 711.

Every President feels obliged to embrace these sentiments and expresses them in oratory. Some are more enthusiastic than others. Yet it is clear, given the force-field of tensions within which civil religion exists, that it has an inherently problematic relationship to the Christian faith, or to any other serious religious tradition. At its best, it provides a secular grounding for that faith, one that makes political institutions more responsive to calls for self-examination and repentance, as well as exertion and sacrifice for the common good. At its worst, it can provide divine warrant to unscrupulous acts, cheapen religious language, turn clergy into robed flunkies of the state and the culture, and bring the simulacrum of religious awe into places where it doesn't belong.

Even today, over nine years after the attacks, a substantial flow of visitors continues to make pilgrimages to the former World Trade Center site in lower Manhattan. It remains an intensely moving experience, even with all the wreckage cleared away and countless pieces of residual evidence removed or cleaned up. One still encounters open and intense expressions of grief and rage and incomprehension, in the other visitors and perhaps in oneself. It has become a shrine, a holy place, and has thereby become assimilated into the American civil religion, which is one reason why the controversy over the building of a large mosque in the immediate vicinity has been so heated. Yet for five years the site's single most moving sight, its most powerful and immediately understandable symbol, was the famous cross-shaped girders that were pulled out of the wreckage, and raised as a cross. (The so-called Ground Zero Cross was moved in 2006 from the WTC site to St. Peter's Church, which is directly across the street, and is to be returned to the site when a planned WTC museum is constructed there.)

What, one wonders, did that cross mean to the people viewing it, many of whom were not Christians and not even Americans? Was it a piece of nationalist kitsch, or a sentimental relic? Or was it a powerful witness to the redemptive value of suffering—and thereby, a signpost pointing toward the core of the Christian story? Or did it subordinate the core of the Christian story to a more generic religious meaning, one that in some sense traduced its Christian meaning? Or, most important for our purposes, did it subordinate the core of the Christian story to the American one, and thus traduce its Christian meaning?

In addressing ourselves to such questions today, it is nearly inevitable that we have recourse to the ideas and terminology of Richard John Neuhaus, especially as expressed in his 1984 book *The Naked Public Square*—one of the most significant books published in the United States during the past thirty years, and a book whose

momentum is far from being spent.¹⁰ That does not mean, however, that it has always been adequately understood. When a book achieves the influence and visibility of *The Naked Public Square*, and especially when its marvelously evocative title has become shorthand in the discourse of most educated people, it is likely to face certain problems in this regard. These may look like “nice problems to have,” but that does not mean they aren’t genuine problems. Often such books become fixed in the public mind in their most stereotypical or capsulized form, associated with arguments or perspectives that are but a poor reflection at best of what the books actually argue, and influencing public opinion in ways that their authors never quite intended.

Having a memorably evocative title is an especially mixed blessing, since it can too easily become a way of compressing a complex argument into a oversimplifying sound bite. This is good for notoriety but bad for understanding. The next thing you know, your argument is being passed around far and wide, but sealed inside the potent simplification, like a celebrity who is condemned to live trapped inside the artificial bubble of his fame.

All which is a way of making the point that those of us who actually read *The Naked Public Square* often find it is not the book that we think we “know about.” It is a far richer, subtler, more nuanced work, at once more bold and more tentative than its now-familiar tagline can convey, a book defying easy summation, with no easy party-line reassurances to offer any of the combatants in our culture wars. Its perspective is lofty and its intellectual reach embraces almost every significant theological or political issue relating to the relationship between church and state over the past 2,000 years. As a consequence, it often operates on a very high level of abstraction. And yet it also crackles with insight into the nitty-gritty particulars of American politics and culture. Its wide scope reach did not come at the expense of a secure grounding in the specificities of time and place.

It was not, to begin with, a simple critique of secularism per se. Neuhaus’s arc of reconsideration was longer and more complex than that. For him, the task at hand was not the dethronement of science or the overturning of the Enlightenment, let alone the political defeat of garden-variety American liberalism per se. Instead, the goal was and is the decoupling of liberal democracy from the iron logic of secularization, and the recovery of an insight that, he argued, was apparent to most of the Founders of the American republic, but which liberal political philosophers and theologians have tended to bury and secular Europe has lost—that the health of democratic institutions depends as much on the free and vibrant public presence of the biblical religions, and their culture-forming influence, as it does on the constraints placed on that religion’s ability to exercise direct political power.

A right understanding of Neuhaus’s argument needs to balance both sides of this formulation. In other words, he argued, our choices should not be restricted—and in the end cannot be restricted—to either the complete privatization of religion

¹⁰ R. J. Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, Grand Rapids 1984.

or the complete integration of church and state. The separation of church and state is not, and cannot be, absolute, and it does not—and cannot—require the segregation of religion from public life. This is a complicated argument, and its working-out in public policy is bound to be complicated too. But it is a direct challenge to the idea that a commitment to official secularism as national policy is the logical, nay inevitable, consequence of our commitment to liberal democracy. That, I believe, is the key thrust of this book, and it stands as much in need of explanation and articulation today as it did twenty-six years ago.

But the book does something more. *The Naked Public Square* argues that liberal democracy is inconceivable and unsustainable without a prior commitment to a certain conception of the human person—a belief that men and women are created in the image of God, that their dignity and their rights arise out of this condition, as endowments from their Creator, and therefore are not to be conferred upon them, or taken from them, by the state or by anything or anyone else, including themselves. I don't think there is any way of getting round the fact that this is a fundamentally religious assertion. But it is an assertion to whose consequences many secularists would readily assent, circa 1984, since it undergirds the notions of universal human rights and human dignity that they, too, cherish. One can agree to disagree about the metaphysics, so long as the physics work out right.

But much has changed in twenty-five years. We now find ourselves in an era in which the process of manufacturing human beings strictly for medical and quasi-medical uses is no longer a futuristic pipedream but an activity that our major universities are eager to associate themselves with, and in which the concept of “transhumanity” is now being raised as a topic for serious discussion. It may be that the common ground is rapidly eroding. Why indeed, unless we have some religious reason for doing so, should we accept the notion of inherent human dignity, let alone human rights and human equality? Why should we continue to accept the notion of inherent human limitations, such as the inevitability of death and debility, and forgo the enhancements of strength, agility, intelligence, sexual prowess, and other characteristics that might be entailed in comprehensively remaking ourselves as individuals, or even as a species? And who is to decide when a blob of protoplasm is to be considered a person, and when it is to be deemed a mere blob of protoplasm? Can “public reason” provide a resolution of these matters, without making invoking—or negating—specifically religious assertions?

There is real reason to doubt whether it can do that. And this may help explain why, in moving from *The Naked Public Square* to what would be his final book, Neuhaus seems to have moved past the deployment of secular ideas, and begins to place the American story in a more Biblical context. The change was striking.

To begin with, we are talking about a book called *American Babylon*.¹¹ And its subtitle is *Notes of a Christian Exile*. But what did these things mean? “Are we in Babylon?” Neuhaus asked. “Are we in exile?” The answer, it turns out, is yes and no. No, America is not the Babylon of the world’s nations. Indeed America still is for him, with all its decadence and disorder, a very great and exceptional nation, the source and bulwark of much that is good in the world, a nation whose story is “part of the story of the world,” a world that is, for all its fallenness, worthy of our love and allegiance.¹² Neuhaus loved Lincoln’s formulation, that America was an “almost-chosen” nation, a formulation that satisfied him far more than it satisfies me. But he liked it because it conveyed how there is much to support the idea that America has a special role to play in history, but that it is not the Biblical Israel, and certainly not the New Jerusalem.

In this sense, Neuhaus would say that yes, America Babylon is Babylon in the sense that all the world is Babylon. Or in Neuhaus’s own words:

America is Babylon not by comparison with other societies but by comparison with that radically new order sought by all who know love’s grief in refusing to settle for a community of less than truth and justice uncompromised.¹³

To make sense of such a situation, one can no longer look to secular social science, which knows nothing about what it means to dwell in the living reality of the not-yet. It cannot explain what Neuhaus declares to be his fundamental purpose in writing *American Babylon*: “to depict a way of being in a world that is not yet the world for which we hope. . . . exploring the possibilities and temptations one confronts as a citizen of a country that is prone to mistaking itself for the destination.”¹⁴ Instead, he urges that we look to the prophetic counsel that the prophet Jeremiah related to the exiles living in the original Babylon:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.¹⁵

If we understand it rightly, the promise of what is to be, the world to come, only intensifies our commitment to the earthly city. We are to serve it faithfully and effectively. Yet, as in the story of the Biblical Daniel, himself an exile in Babylon,

¹¹ R. J. Neuhaus, *American Babylon: Notes of a Christian Exile*, New York 2009.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 30.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 15–16.

we can be faithful and effective servants only up to a point, the point where our worship is being corrupted or misdirected and we are commanded to serve false gods. Then a parting of ways, perhaps even eventuating in the fiery furnace, is our only choice. But the story of Daniel just as clearly teaches that one does not declare such things lightly, and one must be willing to go a very long way in patience before making that choice. For those whose primary allegiance is to the City of God, every foreign country is a homeland, and every homeland is a foreign country. America is our homeland, and, as the prophet Jeremiah says, its welfare is our welfare. America is also—and history testifies that this is too easily forgotten—a foreign country. Like every political configuration of the earthly city, American too is Babylon. And so as Christians we too must learn to live here, and to sing, as in Psalm 137, the songs of Zion in a foreign land—and not make the mistake of thinking that the civil-religious songs are interchangeable with those songs.¹⁶

So what Neuhaus is balancing is an intense love of America with an intense awareness of America's inadequacies, both general and specific. He expressed the love once in a famous sentence: "When I meet God, I expect to meet him as an American."¹⁷ In so speaking, and as a Canadian-born naturalized American, he was not being a jingo, but instead insisting upon the scandal of particularity, that what we are is inseparable from the very particular things that comprise our earthly identities. Indeed, Neuhaus severely faults the American tendency, which he ultimately traces to Protestantism, toward a Gnostic abstractionism, the presumption that one can escape one's time and place, including one's identity as an American. But he insists upon the importance of the place of the American experiment, as he liked to call it, in establishing an earthly realm in which the idea that we are creatures of God with inalienable rights with which we are endowed by our Creator. Thus is America an exceptional nation in the story of the world.

The general inadequacy of America is that inadequacy shared by all earthly nations: they are Babylon, every one of them, and are not, and cannot be, transformed into the City of God. In this respect, America is no worse and no better.¹⁸

But he acknowledges that there is a specific inadequacy of America, one peculiar to its makeup and history, and related to its prominence in the story of the world. It has to do with its tendency to exaggerate America's very real virtues, and its place within the story, and mistake its provisional goods for real and enduring ones, errors that lead America to the very grave error of "mistaking itself for the destination," for the world for which we hope, rather than the Babylon for whose welfare we strive but in whose ultimate perfectibility we fervently disbelieve.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 27–28, 55.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

This is a version of what Reinhold Niebuhr called “the irony of American history,” by which he meant the way in which the country’s genuine virtues were precisely the source of its genuine vices.

One final observation that stems from this, and suggests something very important that we as Christians, and particularly those of us who are Protestant Christians, can take away from this discussion. Neuhaus makes the shrewd observation in *American Babylon* that our tendency as Americans to confuse Washington with Zion may have something to do with the way that Christianity has been conceived and institutionalized here. “American theology,” he says, “has suffered from an ecclesiological deficit, leading to an ecclesiological substitution of America for the Church through time.”²⁰ That this would coexist with our Emersonian penchant for free-floating individualism is no paradox, but quite logical and consistent. That this would tend to support a disproportionately large role for the American civil religion seems almost inevitable.

I think Neuhaus had hold of something profoundly important here, one of the central riddles of Christianity in America. It is certainly the case that the American Protestant tradition, particularly in its evangelical form, suffers from a perilously weak ecclesiology, and has since the days of the Great Awakening. The energy of revivalism, a source of so much of its strength, is also a source of its vulnerability. Nothing has more severely impaired the Church’s ability to be a “people” apart from the culture in America, and thereby serve as a sign of contradiction and a signpost to Zion, than its inability to function as a cohesive institutional entity. When faith becomes radically individualized, it becomes far less culturally effectual, and ceases to be fully reflective of the Gospel in its wholeness and power.

And by the same token, a strengthened Church would give moral strength to the nation, precisely by counteracting its Babylonian tendencies and reminding it of its first principles. It should be able to speak those concerns in a way that respects the manner of discourse appropriate to the public square. But it should be able to speak those concerns openly and boldly rather than remaining silent about them.

It should be able to do so for two reasons. First, as a matter of freedom: because the genius of American pluralism at its best is expressed in the fact that, to very large extent, our deepest particular loyalties and our larger national loyalties are not viewed as mutually exclusive. Second, as a matter of virtue: because we serve the goal of responsible citizenship best by visibly upholding the principle that there are things higher and more important than merely being a citizen.

None of which means, however, that negotiating the twists, turns, and paradoxes of a faithful Christian life will ever be easy, or ever be reducible to a formula. The place of religion in the contemporary American public square will continue to be a vital but contested one, constantly under negotiation and re-negotiation, constantly shifting ground, rethinking precedents, and incorporating new and changing realities. It seems unlikely to go away any time soon.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

Alan Mittleman

THE THEOLOGICAL-POLITICAL PREDICAMENT OF AMERICAN JEWRY

Leo Strauss, in an autobiographical aside, spoke of being in the grip of a “theological political predicament” as a young man. He meant by this something like the following. For modern Jews the constellation of religious beliefs that seems to them reasonable and compelling—the theological horizon, so to speak—is constrained by the political horizon. They are spiritually indebted, to the point of dependency, on the values of the political system, which, for the lucky ones at least, derive from the Enlightenment. Judaism therefore depends on the Enlightenment. But what happens when confidence in the Enlightenment begins to wobble and Judaism, now weakened by its dependency, lacks the strength to make up the difference?

In Strauss’ day, this predicament took a particular form. Jews were wedded to a liberal solution to the Jewish problem: equal citizenship under the law was to have solved the perennial problem of Jewish suffering. They turned in hope to the realization of this ideal not in messianic time, but in their time. They had accommodated their religion, their traditional way of life, to suit the requirements of a liberal era. Their theological imagination had become liberal to its core. In the process, they lost the ability and the readiness to endure suffering as their ancestors had done. Jewish suffering became an anomaly for liberal Jews, an aberration in a liberal era rather than a metaphysical constant. The beliefs of the ancestors had become implausible, but the beliefs of the moderns, of the liberals, were also becoming implausible, and more so every day. Hence the predicament: with weakened faith in both traditional Judaism and in the possibility of a liberal solution there was almost nowhere to turn.

For American Jews, the theological political predicament is much less dire but it does nonetheless involve their long-term viability as a community. For many American Jews, no less than for German Jews, liberal norms, hopes, and convictions have become the substance and limit of their theological imagination. Let me illustrate this with two concrete examples. For many years, when I taught at a liberal arts college, every semester at least one of my students wanted to write a research paper on intermarriage. Typically, this student had a good Jewish upbringing and active Jewish involvement. Most likely the student had told his friends that he would only date other Jews and hoped someday to marry a Jew. His friends then chastised him, implying that he was guilty of prejudice or bigotry for discriminating against non-Jews as potential dates or mates. The student became confused and wanted to work through his conflicted values, his theological-political predicament writ small, in a paper.

Although this predicament sometimes took the form of adolescent peers asserting, in the name of personal freedom, their right to date whomever they wish, this was not always the case. What was at stake was not liberty or autonomy or expressive individualism, but a specific worry about discrimination. Choosing to date only Jews seemed to violate a deep-seated taboo. It made a distinction, thought to be invidious, between persons on the basis of religion or ethnicity. One might ascribe this to adolescent zealotry or confusion, but adult Jews appear to be no less zealous or confused. In a 2000 American Jewish Committee survey, 50% of American Jews answered that it was “racist” to insist that Jews marry only other Jews. This and other more recent surveys show an erosion of resistance to the very idea of intermarriage. Not only has intermarriage lost its taboo quality but many American Jews seem to affirm it as a triumph of open-mindedness and liberty over a discredited tribalism. American Jews seamlessly transfer liberal norms of conduct, fully appropriate to law and to civil society, to the Jewish sphere without hesitation. The theological horizon is constrained by the political imagination.¹

My second example is drawn from an interview in the *Forward* (November 2, 2001) with *Playboy*'s Miss November 2001, Lindsey Vuolo. Ms. Vuolo is a proud Reform Jew and chose to include a photo of her Bat Mitzvah in the montage of nude pictures. When asked about the compatibility of her *Playboy* exposure with her Judaism, she reflected: “Some people will look up to this as a positive thing. With all the Chandra Levy and Monica Lewinsky talk, it’s a bit weird. But I think what I’m doing is positive. I’m not doing anything religiously wrong. I’m not being exploited—it’s my choice.”

Although she began to have some qualms during Yom Kippur, she managed to quiet her conscience. As the *Forward* explains: “When she heard that her rabbi

¹ It is noteworthy, however, that in the same survey, 69% of Jews believe that the Jewish community has an obligation to encourage Jews to marry other Jews. The contradiction between the ascription of racism and the promotion of in-marriage is striking. This heightens the sense that deeply felt values are in conflict. For the complete survey, see: www.ajc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=ijIT12PHKoG&b=846741&ct=1042043.

knew about the [photo] shoot, [she said] “Watching him deliver the sermon, I almost felt wrong. I was there atoning for my sins, but I don’t feel like I’ve sinned [with *Playboy*]. I’m not hurting anyone.””

For Ms. Vuolo, what constitutes the categories of the “religiously wrong” or “sin”? It would be religiously wrong for someone to exploit—to use or take unfair advantage of—someone else. It would be a sin to hurt, which apparently means, to infringe on the freedom of action, of someone else. But since, on her account, she hasn’t done either of these things her moral conscience is clear. Perhaps her rabbi, whose sermons she watches rather than hears, never preached on *tzniyut* (modesty). Most likely the Judaism articulated in her temple makes no room for *tzniyut* because, in terms of the prevailing liberal paradigm, it would be a personal lifestyle choice rather than a feature of a Jewish public morality. The very idea of a public morality would appear to violate the liberal respect for the privacy and autonomy of persons. And so two millennia of Jewish law and custom drop from view, as religious rights and wrongs, sins and virtues are reconstituted along the moral lines of a competing, virtually hegemonic liberal culture.

We are now in a better position to get an idea of the American Jewish version of the theological-political predicament. Liberalism, deeply felt although perhaps poorly understood, has moved from the political sphere to the religious one. It has colonized the Jewish religious and moral imagination. The liberalism to which I refer is not contemporary liberalism, in the sense of that set of ideas and values to which contemporary conservatism is opposed. Rather, I refer to the ancestor of both contemporary liberalism and contemporary conservatism in all their variations—that stream of political thought that places individuals and their liberty, equality, and agency at the normative center.² There is much to celebrate in the liberal tradition. We are all its beneficiaries and almost no one, Jew or gentile, wishes to live under a non-liberal regime when he has a choice in the matter. Nonetheless, liberalism becomes a predicament or crisis for American Jews when its premises and cultural effects subvert or imperil the continued existence of the Jews themselves. Were the views of those Jews who believe that Jewish endogamy is racist or that Judaism is an afterthought of the principle of non-interference to become truly dominant, then it would be difficult to see what future American Jewry could have, or deserve.

The task then is to reconfigure the relationship between the liberal tradition and the Jewish tradition such that their respective spheres of influence achieve a proper relationship. In the past, this relationship has often been styled as one of universalism versus particularism. I believe that this is profoundly misleading. As if we were not already sufficiently aware of it, the events of September 11 remind us that the liberal tradition is also a particularism. Other streams of civilization, such as Islam, do not share its anthropological, political, and normative assumptions. Both liberalism and Judaism are particularisms with universal aspirations.

² D. Johnston, *The Idea of a Liberal Theory*, Princeton 1994, p. 17.

As particularisms, they ought to be able to find a mutually enriching co-existence. It is only when the universal intention of liberalism seeks to overwhelm Jewish particularism that trouble—both for the Jews and for liberalism itself—ensues. Or, alternately, trouble ensues when Jews equate the universal intention of liberalism with the universal intention of Judaism.

In the following, I will attempt to analyze how that co-existence has gone awry and how it might be made to work. My assumption is that the theological-political nexus of Judaism and liberalism cannot be severed, nor should it be. We must work from within the connection. Given the theological-political predicament, Jews are dependent upon liberalism. I argue that they must resist that upon which they depend. I also claim that liberalism will become more capacious and less monistic—to use Jean Bethke Elshtain’s terms—through the force of their resistance. In resisting monistic liberalism, Jews can draw on the resources of their own political tradition and perhaps enrich the liberal tradition in the process.

The liberal tradition is about liberty. There were, as Quentin Skinner points out, traditions of liberty before liberalism.³ Liberty before liberalism was grounded in Roman republican thought and appropriated by Renaissance neo-Roman thinkers such as Machiavelli. Such British thinkers as Milton, Harrington, and Sidney were advocates of liberty without being in the precise sense liberals. A tradition of liberty is also found in the Jewish political tradition. The Israelites are liberated from Egypt to serve God and to govern themselves or, at least immediately, to be governed by Him through His prophet. In both traditions of liberty, the emphasis is positive: self-rule and shared forms of life orient persons toward a common good. In the liberal tradition as such, liberty extends to individuals who are perfectly free to separate themselves from shared forms of life, public ideas of the good, and thick bonds of solidarity and sentiment. The idea of negative liberty, always in some state of tension with earlier republican currents of positive liberty, infiltrates the liberal tradition.⁴

Although Judaism seems plighted to a positive conception of liberty such that it could be on a collision course with liberalism, there is nothing in the liberal tradition that is necessarily subversive of Judaism. The liberal tradition, at least in the United States, mitigates its own emphasis on individual autonomy by constitutional protections of freedom of association. That is, liberalism understands that human sociality is not incidental to human individuality. Humans are radically social. The Constitution takes the freedom to associate with one another, and by implication, with one’s kind as a natural right. Nonetheless, the agents who are free to associate with one another are individuals. The Constitution does not take notice of primordial groups, of collectivities as the building blocks of political society. If there are such collectivities, they are, in the Constitution’s universe, the states.

³ Q. Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, Cambridge 1998, chapter 1 *passim*.

⁴ I. Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, New York 1969, chapter 3. For the best recent exposition of this often caricatured concept, see J. Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, Princeton 1996, chapter 1.

But the states are also unions of individuals. Nor does the Constitution have regard for the civil society institutions such as schools, families, and churches that generate the virtues which a democratic citizenry requires. The Constitution does not consider those forms of spiritual cement that weld individuals into a democratic political community. Thus, despite a generous space that American liberalism gives to religious and other primordial communities there is an underlying bias built in to the system in favor of the individual, the free, reasonable moral agent over the encumbered and implicated member of a primordial group.

The liberal ontology, which places individuals at the center, animates one of the canonical texts of the liberal tradition, Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*. In this text, we can find that bias in favor of the individual, which eventually creates a problem for groups like the Jews. In the *Letter* Locke finds a parallel between the church and the state. The Church, he writes, is a "free and voluntary association of individuals."⁵ Constituting a church is directly parallel to constituting a political community: it is an act of free and consenting adults. Both kinds of community are governed by a purposive rationality. The aim of the political community is civil peace; the aim of the religious community is the public worship of God for the end of the salvation of the individual soul. Individuals are free to judge whether the religious community suits their spiritual needs or not. If they remain within it, they are subject to its laws and discipline, although these have no positive or negative relevance to their civil status as citizens. The religious community is as easily entered as left. The free, rational person judges whether the community's reasonableness is compatible with his own.

Locke's construction of the religious community requires a sweeping de-emphasis on those bonds of sociality that are more primordial than rational assent alone. He is suspicious of loyalty and friendship; he sees them as potential allies of subservience.⁶ The idea that religious community might claim us before we as conscious agents choose it provokes anxiety. Locke's treatment of Islam in the *Letter*—Muslims are not just men of faith but servants of the Ottoman sultan and therefore sources of sedition within the state—suggests that religious communities which do not fit his secularized Protestant model of gathered community need not be tolerated. The Jews, I would argue, resemble Locke's Muslims more than his Protestant sectaries. Although neither then nor now citizens or subjects of a foreign sovereign, Jews nonetheless participate in an older, more metaphysically encumbering form of theological-political community than Locke would allow for. Participation in the Jewish covenantal polity precedes the entry of individual Jews into civil society and carries its own set of obligations.

As an example of this claim, consider Locke's statement in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Book II, Chapter XXI, para. 56) regarding one's choice of diet.

⁵ J. Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, [in:] *Treatise of Civil Government*, New York 1939, p. 175.

⁶ D. Kries, *Piety and Humanity*, Lanham 1997.

“All men seek happiness, but not of the same sort. The mind has a different relish, as well as the palate; and you will as fruitlessly endeavour to delight all men with riches or glory (which yet some men place their happiness in) as you would to satisfy all men’s hunger with cheese or lobsters; which, though very agreeable and delicious fare to some, are to others extremely nauseous and offensive: and many persons would with reason prefer the griping of an hungry belly to those dishes which are a feast to others.”

Locke writes about lobsters as if they were an illustration of the principle of “*de gustibus non est disputandum*.” It is merely a matter of taste in which reason has no share. The observation is part of a larger argument that deprives the classical, primarily Aristotelian, claim that there is a single standard of eudaemonia of its sense. There is no *summum bonum*, Locke assures us, no way of human flourishing common to us all. There are only particular goods or individual versions of happiness based on idiosyncratic choices. Some find lobsters and cheese tasty while others do not. The idea that God might prohibit us from tasting lobsters in the first place and that this prohibition binds us even before we were born, as it were, would strike him as bizarre. It is a “speculative opinion” about something that is at best “indifferent.” Jewish worship is, as he elsewhere puts it, “false” and “abominable.”⁷

Of less concern than Locke’s anti-Judaism is his construction of religious community as a purely consensual association of likeminded individuals. Since early modernity, Jews have attempted the transformation of the Jewish polity, with its covenantal dimensions of reciprocity, obligation and law, into a Lockean-liberal church. Beginning with Moses Mendelssohn, they have subtly replaced the language of covenant with its secular descendant, social contract, effacing although never quite obliterating the older political resonances of Jewish national solidarity. At the dawn of the liberal order, the choice was between remaining within an integral *kehillah*—the misnamed “state within a state”—or assuming the rights and duties of citizenship in a state that was supposed to transcend religious and ethnic particularities. That project is now complete, at least in the United States. Jews reconstituted their diaspora polity as a voluntary community, a free association of citizens of Jewish affiliation, with remarkable success. To the extent that pervasive anti-Semitism encompassed the liberal creation of a voluntaristic community, a certain continuity with older lines of group consciousness endured. With the welcome decline of anti-Semitism, however, the voluntarist project of Diaspora Jewry is left on its own to compete with other forms of private association in which persons may find satisfaction. It is not that Jewish life is a poor competitor—far from it. It is that Jewish life must continuously redefine itself in terms adopted from liberalism in order to appear intelligible and appealing to the denizens of a liberal order. The appearance of paid advertisements on the Op-Ed page of the New York Times in which prominent figures gave personal answers to the question “Why be Jewish?” is a sign of the times.

⁷ J. Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 218.

As Stephen Cohen and Arnold Eisen have essayed in their 2001 book, *The Jew Within*, the emphasis on voluntarism, individual choice, personal as opposed to public standards of meaning has eroded loyalty to communal institutions, indeed, to Israel, the most powerful symbolic locus of Jewish national solidarity.⁸ Contemporary Jews are increasingly drawn to an inward-looking, self-oriented search for meaning rather than to communal engagement and Jewish civic participation. The focus of their study is the private spiritual journey of what the authors call the “sovereign self.” The sovereign self is not animated by duties to other humans or to God, or by the aspiration to achieve what T.H. Green called the “best self.” It is merely an expressive self, in love with its own depths and fascinated by its own protean contours. The project of making this self is an end in itself. It signifies the ultimacy of freedom or, more precisely, the inability or unwillingness to posit a goal beyond freedom. Freedom is not to be ordered by higher goods. Rather, freedom, in the sense of the negative freedom to act without coercion, has become the highest good.

The Jewish tradition, as mentioned above, is no stranger to the value of freedom. Nonetheless, in the Jewish tradition there is a strong bias toward freedom as a positive and instrumental value. Freedom facilitates the pursuit of collective and individual holiness. Freedom allows for self-rule, for the project of creating a just and holy commonwealth. These ideas are resisted and—for the sake of civil peace in a pluralistic society—properly so by liberalism. Liberalism in its origins overcame both an aristocratic and a republican tradition that saw politics as a means to the achievement of public virtue. In the American version of liberal origins, the Puritan covenantal tradition was overcome in favor of an Enlightenment social contractarianism. American Jews, despite the bias of the Jewish political tradition in favor of positive liberty, came to share in the liberal disregard for aims allegedly higher than negative liberty. The bulk of their political engagement, advocacy for Israel excepted, has been devoted to projects of negative liberty, such as fighting discrimination and clearing the public square of the last vestiges of the Puritan covenantal tradition. American Jews have been piously devoted to what Richard John Neuhaus famously called the “naked public square.” By working to strip public discourse and civic life of older, republican and religious expressions of solidarity, Jews helped to advance a version of liberalism that valorizes individual autonomy, rights and freedom of choice over community, obligation, and prudence. Nonetheless, were it not for older countervailing forms of group solidarity, such as *tzedakah* (inadequately translated, charity), Jewish communities would not, most likely, have endured under the centrifugal forces of liberalism. *Tzedakah* is a project of positive liberty. It presupposes that individuals are encumbered rather than self-possessed; that they have duties to a collectivity that significantly impinge on their freedom of choice and their discretion over their possessions.

⁸ S. M. Cohen, A. Eisen, *The Jew Within*, Bloomington 2001.

The continued Jewish embrace of *tzedakah* is an example of how Jews resist assimilation to a purely liberal pattern of life without being aware of it.

The transformations that have given us Cohen and Eisen's impoverished "sovereign self" need not be seen as the simple outcome of a clash of cultures, of liberalism versus Judaism. On the contrary, they track a movement within liberalism itself, on which Judaism, caught in a theological-political predicament, depends. The transformation within liberalism has to do with the loss of liberalism's republican heritage, with an undue emphasis on individual rights and negative liberty, with a decline civic participation and social trust, as well as over-reliance on government and the courts to solve social problems. It also has to do with the increasing secularization of American society and the privatization of religion, processes which the Jewish community has done much to advance. These factors have had a leveling effect, which has diminished the moral authority of the liberal tradition and the Jewish tradition as well. The way back from this mutual diminution requires moral and spiritual renewal. It requires a new appreciation for the sources of moral and spiritual renewal, those local communities, especially religious ones, and the virtuous selves that they nurture. It requires a new appreciation of how the moral formation of citizens occurs in communities and in families, as well as for those thick traditions of moral life without which moral formation cannot occur.

For Jews this renewal will require a retrieval of older and more complex moral constitutions of selfhood and community than contemporary liberal doctrines of rights, agency and voluntarism allow for. Such concepts as covenantal liberty (as opposed to liberal natural liberty) and divine ownership of our persons (as opposed to liberal autonomy) will have to get a contemporary, morally cogent articulation. Politically, I would argue, Jews need to resist the leveling influence of liberal political culture by advocating those policies that strengthen communities and reverse the privatization of religion. This will cut against the grain of previous Jewish public policy advocacy.

Let us focus for the moment on a constitutional issue in which the Jewish community has been heavily invested, religious liberty and the separation of church and state. Michael Sandel calls our attention to the modern misreading of the religion clauses of the Constitution. On Sandel's account, the Founders based the right to religious liberty on the freedom of conscience while the moderns have transformed this into a freedom of choice. By "freedom of conscience" Sandel means the duty to worship God in a manner free from external coercion. In both Locke and Madison and Jefferson, religious liberty is necessary because conscience imposes duties on us that are prior to the claims of civil society. "Religious liberty," Sandel writes, "addressed the problem of encumbered selves, claimed by duties they cannot renounce, even in the face of civil obligations that may conflict."⁹ To the greatest extent possible, a decent and liberal politics requires that persons not be forced to violate their deepest, most constitutive convictions. For many, the convic-

⁹ M. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy*, Cambridge 1996, p. 66.

tion of faith is not chosen or willed: it is given by grace or, in the normal Jewish case, given by birth. Religious liberty is the acknowledgment that duties to God must be accommodated. It grows, as in Locke's *Letter* or Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance*, out of a consciousness still stirred by religion in which the advocate of toleration or of liberty understands that our duties to God are radical, real, and unique. The self is not sovereign; it is "encumbered." It does not fully possess itself. It is possessed by God, to whom it must give fealty.

By contrast, the modern, fully secularized approach to religious liberty treats it as a sign of respect for a species of personal choice. What religious liberty accommodates on the modern, voluntarist account is not duty but autonomy. What it preserves is not freedom of conscience, which can be the most demanding master, but freedom of choice, which seldom aspires to moral austerity. In Sandel's view, the transformation in our understanding of religious liberty is ultimately subversive of religious liberty. It is one thing for the state to have to accommodate the patterned duties of historic religious communities and their adherents. (The law, for example, eventually made room for conscientious objector status in order to accommodate Mennonites and other traditional pacifists.) It is another thing for the state to have to respect individual choices. On the former account, the state allows for religious exemptions precisely because they are religious. The state recognizes the importance of religious communities and their adherents for civil society. On the latter account, the state presumes a neutral stance between religion and non-religion. It forbears from recognizing religion as a public good. It aspires to a neutrality that respects persons irrespective of the content of their choices and beliefs. As such, it recasts the demands of religious conscience into mere personal choice. Since one person's choice is not necessarily more worthy of accommodation than another's, religion becomes just another lifestyle option, with no more compelling claim on the state for accommodation than trout fishing.

When the state of Connecticut sought to accommodate the religious beliefs of sabbatarians by allowing them, alone among all employees, to choose their day off, the Supreme Court overruled the statute on the grounds that Sabbath observers should not be given choices that others do not have. The law allowing Sabbath observers to choose Saturday as their day off unfairly discriminated against others who were not given the right to choose. So too, Captain Simcha Goldman was not allowed to wear distinctive headgear if all others lacked a similar right. Nor were Native Americans allowed to use peyote in defiance of otherwise valid drug laws. In every case, what was formerly thought a duty of conscience properly protected by the Free Exercise clause became a personal choice that can neither confer "special rights" on a few nor trump generally applicable law. The reduction of conscience to choice, of religious liberty to a species of freedom of expression erodes our cultural understanding of what religious liberty is for and imperils our support for it over the long term. The welcome reversal by the Court of some of these trends in *Good News Club v. Milford School District* was decided more on

free speech than free exercise grounds. Free exercise since Smith is an endangered right; free speech has more plausibility in contemporary jurisprudence. Indeed it has more of a “plausibility structure” beneath it than free exercise. The scanting and deformation of free exercise, abetted by a five decade long emphasis on unrealistically stringent establishment standards, serves neither the aims of liberalism nor of American Jews. The very existence of the Free Exercise clause and of the singular and distinctive position that religious liberty occupies in the Constitution should signal to us that religion does play a crucial role in civil society; that it must not be reduced to a lifestyle option or to the mere choice of private persons.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman, during the 2001 election campaign, called attention to this fact, quite controversially in the eyes of many Jewish leaders, when he said that the Constitution gives us freedom for religion rather than freedom from religion. Lieberman was, in his own way, resisting what the political theorist Jean Bethke Elshtain calls “liberal monism.”¹⁰ By liberal monism, she refers to a drive within liberal societies to bring discrepant standards of authority, reason and moral language under a single norm. A monistic approach to authority, for example, would force the Catholic Church, perhaps through legal challenges, to accept women as priests. It would force an Orthodox institution, such as a college of Yeshiva University, to accommodate gay partners as a married couple. A monistic approach to reason reads religious moral reasoning out of the public conversation as a defective, regressive or merely idiosyncratic expression. A monistic approach to moral language reduces all normative discourse to what Mary Ann Glendon calls rights talk, to claims and counter-claims of rights unmitigated by such frameworks as virtue or aspiration. Monistic liberalism, on Elshtain’s account, receives powerful support from the intellectuals and the media. It is also, I think, the preference of American Jews. It is this preference that Jews must learn to discern and resist.

Taking a cue from Sandel, American Jews need to recover the original liberal concept of the duties of conscience, which is not far removed from the Jewish concept of *mitzvot bein adam l’makom* (duties between man and God). It is out of respect for the duties that man has toward God that the liberal, constitutional state first circumscribed its own power. To take such duties seriously, as duties that claim us rather than as choices that we elect, reveals our embeddedness in an order that is metaphysically prior to the liberal order in which we dwell. It qualifies and relativizes our belonging to the polity. Alternately, it makes us morally serious and responsible persons who can serve the liberal polity with our learned habits of both loyalty and criticism. To retrieve a doctrine of the duties of conscience or of the *mitzvot bein adam l’makom* would help rescue contemporary Judaism from the platitudes of liberalism on the one side and the temptations of otherworldly or Gnostic spiritualism on the other. It would rescue Judaism from becoming a distinction without a difference. Here is a relatively recent example of how to assert a distinction, based on conscience, and resist monistic liberalism at the same time.

¹⁰ J. B. Elshtain, *Address Delivered at Radio Free Europe*, Prague 2000, www.becketfund.org.

The Orthodox Jewish community of Tenafly, NJ was ordered by the municipality and, on August 9, 2001, the U.S. District court, to remove an *eruv* that it had erected with the help of Verizon and a local cable company (*Forward*, November 16, 2001; www.becketfund.org). Needless to say, some of the members of the borough council were Jewish. They took the liberal monist view that for the state to endorse the *eruv* would be an impermissible violation of the Establishment clause. (Given the current state of Establishment clause jurisprudence, this may not be far-fetched.) Whether this constitutional quibble is a fig leaf for a darker bias against Orthodox Jews is unclear. At any rate, the Jewish members of the borough council who are Reform Jews were quite surprised when the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism filed a brief on the side of the *eruv* proponents, who have now brought the case to an appeals court. No one was surprised that the Orthodox Union or the Agudah filed amicus briefs but Reform's deviation from strict separationist dogmatism took the Jewish politicians off guard. This seems to me a salutary case of a religious movement almost wholly identified with contemporary liberalism stepping back from redundancy. In advocating a position that honors religious liberty and affirms that Shabbat observance, which is enhanced by an *eruv*, is a duty of Jewish conscience, the Reform movement resisted monistic liberalism.

The Jewish self, possessed by the mitzvot of Shabbat, is surely more complex and possibly more conflicted than the autonomous, expressive self of contemporary liberalism. I would argue that it is precisely such a self that liberalism needs if it is to become, in Elshtain's words, more capacious. Liberalism needs communities where such morally complex selves are formed. These are the so-called "seedbeds of virtue" where the habits of the heart, the habits of loyalty, respect for legitimate social authority, perseverance, altruism and independence are cultivated. Liberalism, as William Galston reminds us, needs its own virtues. A healthy liberal society cultivates virtues in its citizens. American Jews need to ask themselves whether the laws and policies they advocate cultivate the virtues and strengthen the communities that nurture them. The Jewish community's opposition to the faith-based initiative during the Bush years was not encouraging in this regard.

The Jewish community first tacked in the strict separationist direction: public funding to social services delivered by houses of worship would violate the Establishment clause. Insofar as there already were four years of experimentation under prior law, however, the community began to back away from this strategy by the end of 2000. (The endorsement by both Gore and Lieberman of some version of charitable choice also complicated the mainstream Jewish approach to the problem.) The next stratagem stressed the potential for discrimination against religious, ethnic or sexual minorities. The Title VII exemption permitting religious bodies to hire only their own members, if extended under charitable choice, would amount to state-sponsored discrimination. The prospect of religious ministries refusing to hire persons of other faiths or disapproved sexual orientation was thought to trump all other considerations. Additionally, the fear that Jewish agencies might face in-

creased competition for funds also played a role. In sum, Jewish groups, with the exception of the Orthodox, opposed charitable choice out of a mix of high principle and interest politics. Two full election cycles later, the Jewish community's attitude remains the same. The continued embrace of faith based solutions by some Democratic elites, including President Obama, poses a challenge for American Jews.

At the beginning of the debate, during the early Bush presidency, a clarifying moment for me occurred one evening on national television. A commentator was interviewing a rabbi and a black minister, who was—like most blacks—an advocate for charitable choice. At one point in their debate, the commentator interrupted and observed that there was a striking asymmetry in their positions. The minister was talking about urgent and debilitating human need and what could be done to alleviate it while the rabbi was talking about abstract constitutional principles. Even she felt a jarring disjunction between the worlds that the two sides represented.

This disjunction is emblematic of how the Jewish community treats such matters. It is so wedded to the liberal monist imperative of keeping religion private that it is unwilling to experiment with promising new possibilities for alleviating the misery of our most neglected citizens. While I would never fault the Jewish community for its philanthropy, its covenantal habits of *zedakah*, or for its public-mindedness, I do think that it is wrong on charitable choice and on a kindred idea, tuition vouchers. In both of these cases, community serving ministries and community enhancing schools might well be strengthened by an infusion of public funds. The long-term interest of the Jewish community as well as that of American liberalism lies in strengthening the institutions of civil society, both general and Jewish. Jews should seek alternatives to state monopolies; they should be on the side of local control and participatory democracy. There were, of course, good reasons for turning to the state and the courts, particularly in the 1960's. But do we not face a different set of problems today?

The way out of the theological-political predicament of American Jews lies in a double movement of retrieval. Not only Jews but all Americans must retrieve a fuller range of liberal possibilities than contemporary, anemic liberalism provides. For their part, Jews must also retrieve older ideas of Jewish selfhood, virtue, and polity; of the liberty that Judaism celebrated long before liberalism.

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Marta Młodzianowska

RELIGION AND RELIGIOSITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Considering the lack of attention paid to religious topics in European popular journalism and scholarly magazines, the noticeable interest in religiosity and passionate discussions on the issue in the United States is an interesting phenomenon. An inquiring observer of American religious life will easily notice that new publications on the topic are issued with an extraordinary frequency. This indicates that religion is an important part of various aspects of the American past and present reality. It constituted one of the fundamentals upon which the United States was built, determined the mentality of the first settlers and their descendants and was an influential factor in the social and cultural changes in the country. Moreover, religion has always interwoven with politics, from the period of the first colonial authorities up to today. An interesting characteristic of American religion is also its symbiosis with popular culture. It seems that church leaders are experts in benefiting from modern technologies, both in performing religious services and in attracting new members. All these issues make American religiosity an intriguing phenomenon from a sociological point of view. Therefore, I will investigate it in this paper. Nevertheless, there are numerous difficulties which come along with all the fascinating observations, mainly caused by the fact that there is simply no one dominant American faith. The times when Protestantism did not have rivals and shaped American culture are gone. Nowadays, the American religious scene is so diverse that it cannot be easily organised or classified. Bearing this fact in mind, I will attempt to sketch a general and to some degree simplified image of American religiosity which will, however, provide an insight into this absorbing topic.

An outline of American religious history

Faith has been a driving force from the very beginning of the existence of the North American colonies. It was the search for religious freedom which, together with more prosaic reasons, brought the Pilgrim Fathers to the North American coast in 1620. The first settlers were mainly Puritans running away from England, where an intolerant religious climate was not favourable to dissenters. Thus, when they found asylum in the New World, they considered it as their promised land, comparing themselves to “the Chosen Nation”, which was clearly expressed by John Winthrop in his famous sermon titled “A Model of Christian Charity” (commonly known as “City upon a Hill”)¹. This Messianism has become an indispensable element of American religiosity and, in a broader sense, American ideology, and would manifest itself on many occasions throughout the centuries.

Although the first religion on the American land was Anglicanism, which appeared together with the founders of the Jamestown colony in 1607, it was Congregationalism, Presbyterianism and Baptism which played the dominant role in shaping American culture in colonial times². The abovementioned Pilgrim Fathers, after arriving in the New Land and founding the city of Boston (which later grew into the colony called Massachusetts), created the first congregational community. Their faith and philosophy was based on Calvinism and was thoroughly Puritan. It implied belief in predestination, which had an immense influence on people’s mentality and behaviour. The predestination dogma consists in the conviction that God has divided people into those who will be saved and those who will be condemned. Since worldly prosperity was considered as a sign of being classified in the first group, the Puritans worked hard in order to achieve success and to convince themselves and others about their positive destiny. The whole life of the Massachusetts colony was determined by fervent religiosity and solemn customs. It soon turned into a theocracy which eradicated any dissent. The most famous heretic in Massachusetts was Roger Williams, who, being a Baptist, opted for the separation of religion and government and for freedom of religion. He was expelled from the colony, leading him to create a new settlement called Rhode Island and start the first Baptist community there³.

Apart from Congregationalism and Baptism, early American Protestantism was also represented by Presbyterians and Quakers. Presbyterians established enduring communities in Long Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and South Carolina, and were strengthened significantly by a wave of Scottish and Irish

¹ Vincent Ferraro’s Home Page, Resources for the Study of International Relations and Foreign Policy, www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/winthrop.htm.

² W. S. Hudson, *American Protestantism*, Chicago 1961, s. 18–20.

³ H. Katz, *Historia Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Wrocław 1971, s. 45–50; T. J. Zieliński, *Roger Williams – twórca nowoczesnych stosunków państwo-kościół*, Warszawa 1997.

immigration⁴. The second religious denomination, initiated in England by George Fox, was concentrated in New Jersey and Philadelphia (for William Penn, one of the Quakers, owned these lands and guaranteed his fellow believers freedom of religion on his possessions). Quakers rejected priesthood and rituals, as they had faith in personal contemplation and achieving illumination in this way⁵.

The mosaic of the first American churches was much more colourful, consisting also of Mennonites, Moravians, Lutherans and the Dutch Reformed Church among others. Nevertheless, American colonial religiosity was shaped to one dominant pattern. It was mostly of British provenance and Calvinist doctrine. First of all, the predestination doctrine constituted a source of strong faith, persistence and acceptance of the hard living conditions in the New World. Furthermore, American reality forced ministers to learn to run their parishes independently from superior ecclesial institutions, relying on their personal qualities, such as charisma and ability, to attract both public attention and financial support⁶. Generally, American Protestantism from its beginnings implied individualism. Due to denying the necessity of church institutions and priestly order on the way to salvation and considering the Bible as the sole source of faith, Protestants attached importance to individual prayer and personal contact with God. This attitude had a significant impact on the moral consequences of faith, as each person had to distinguish the good from the bad in his conscience, producing a sense of moral responsibility of each individual⁷.

Several decades after the founding of the first colonies and churches, religious enthusiasm started to fade away. And it was not until the 1730s that the First Great Awakening took place and turned New England's life towards God again. Spiritual passion was heated up by zealous sermons given by priests like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield⁸. Their efforts not only resulted in mass conversions among listeners, but they also initiated a new type of religiosity which stood in opposition to severe Calvinism. This is called Evangelicalism. It emphasizes the role of personal contact with God and the need for religious experience and conversion⁹.

On this new spiritual and revivalistic soil a new denomination took root. This was Methodism, created in England by John Wesley and transported to America. It postulated to replace cold rationalism with "religion of the heart" and a special "method" of piety, and to accept the idea of human free will instead of the predestination dogma¹⁰.

⁴ W. S. Hudson, *American Protestantism*, Chicago 1961, s. 21–22.

⁵ S. Markiewicz, *Protestantyzm*, Warszawa 1982, s. 96–101.

⁶ W. S. Hudson, *American Protestantism*, p. 22–26.

⁷ S. E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, New Haven–London 1973, p. 118–119.

⁸ C. Whittaker, *Great Revivals*, Basingstoke 1990, p. 23–26.

⁹ W. S. Hudson, *American Protestantism*, p. 30–32.

¹⁰ A. Tokarczyk, *Protestantyzm*, Warszawa 1980, p. 196–197; W. S. Hudson, *American Protestantism*, p. 32–33.

An important feature in American religiosity was evoked by the Constitution, which was the fruit of the American Revolution and Independence from the British monarchy. The First Amendment to the Constitution guaranteed that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”¹¹. This short regulation deprived churches of any support from the government and forced them to assure self-sufficiency. From then on, American churches adopted techniques to win financial support and became income-generating enterprises. This business-like approach has remained a characteristic trait of American religious groups to this day.

Victory in the war of independence gave the Americans a strong belief in their special status as being chosen by God. They were convinced of their mission to convert all of mankind to Christianity, starting with the “barbarian” people of the frontiers being integrated into the Union. Evangelisation of the western and southern frontiers, as well as the efforts to suppress deistic and rational attitudes promoted in urban environments by enlightened intellectuals, became the core of the Second Great Awakening. This dates back to the period between the last decade of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century. Typical traits of this new revival were the activity of circuit riders and farmer-preachers, organising camp meetings, and departure from the Calvinist ideology in favour of conviction about human free will¹².

Some sources claim that the Second Great Awakening resulted in a tenfold growth in numbers of the members of Protestant churches (between 1800 and 1850). Nevertheless, its most meaningful fruit was the triumph of the popular Evangelicalism and emergence of new Protestant denominations. Popular Evangelicalism was represented mainly by Methodism and Baptism – the two denominations which became dominant after the second revival. Their strength consisted in scant importance being attached to the doctrine and a focus on individual spiritual experience and conversion. In the middle of the nineteenth century new tendencies almost entirely replaced traditional Puritan ideology¹³. Moreover, the rise of religious enthusiasm led to the appearance of new sects and churches, such as Perfectionists (who believed in “Christian Perfection”), millennial sects (for example Millerism and Adventism, which focused on the anticipation of Christ’s second coming), Universalists (who claimed that Jesus died for all human beings, not solely for the chosen ones) and Spiritualists (who were close to various forms of occultism)¹⁴.

The first half of the nineteenth century also brought completely new types of spiritual communities. The most noticeable and enduring one was Mormonism, which was inaugurated by Joseph Smith after his revelation from the Angel cal-

¹¹ The United States Constitution Online. USConstitution.net, www.usconstitution.net/const.html.

¹² W. S. Hudson, *American Protestantism*, p. 74–78, 81–84, 90–95; National Humanities Center, www.nationalhumanitiescenter.org.

¹³ W. S. Hudson, *American Protestantism*, p. 90–101.

¹⁴ S. E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, New Haven–London 1973, p. 474–476.

led Moroni. Inspired by this vision, Smith wrote the Mormon Book and organised the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mormons believed in Christ's thousand-year reign on Earth and the necessity of baptism, even of dead people. Mormons also kept faith in the necessity of polygamy in order to win salvation, which drew severe persecution on them and forced the group to migrate through the country. Finally, Mormons found their asylum in the State of Utah, where they set up Salt Lake City and which is still the residence of this controversial religious community¹⁵.

Another spiritual form which appeared on the American lands was Pentecostalism. It derived from the notion of "Christian Perfection" and the Holiness Movement. The inauguration of Pentecostalism dates back to the first decade of the twentieth century, when two famous cases of glossolalia ("speaking in tongues") occurred (Topeka, Kansas in 1901 and Azusa Street, Los Angeles in 1906). Witnesses to these events described an impression of being filled with the Holy Spirit and claimed they were given one of the spiritual gifts (so-called "charismatas", therefore Pentecostalism is ranked among Charismatic Movements). Pentecostals give weight to self-perfectioning and developing spiritual gifts. Expression of their beliefs created an attractive form of cult, with ecstatic singing, dancing and crying. Pentecostalism was born in the bosom of Protestantism, but it spread out and influenced other religions, with Roman Catholicism inter alia. The reason for its popularity is its simplicity and emotionality, which stand in opposition to intellectual Christianity and meet natural human needs¹⁶.

The turn of the century is described as a period of the hegemony of Protestantism in the United States. Everyday life was soaked up with the Protestant spirit – churches were brimming, pastors were considered the biggest authorities and most of the schools had a religious provenance and orientation. What is more, churches turned towards social issues and combined evangelisation with social service (as an example we can take the YMCA, which not only promoted Christianity in urban environments, but also provided assistance in matters of employment and accommodation). This time of social activity is known by the term Social Gospel, which is used in relation to an intellectual current that postulated bringing into effect Christian teaching through combating poverty, crime, social disparities, racism or illiteracy¹⁷.

Stepping into the new century changed the American religious scene to a degree. It became evidently plural. The high immigration rate of non-Protestant European people and establishment of Catholic, Jewish and Orthodox churches constituted competition to Protestant congregations. Moreover, around the middle of the twentieth century the historical Protestant denominations weakened, giving

¹⁵ A. Tokarczyk, *Protestantyzm*, p. 222–228.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 256–258, 262.

¹⁷ W. S. Hudson, *American Protestantism*, p. 109–113, 124–127; G. M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, Fort Worth 1990, p. 118–120.

way to hitherto marginal communities. The most significant increase in strength was observed in the Lutheran church, due to the considerable immigration rate from Europe. In the 1960s, new spiritual movements connected with New Age also started to appear. They were an appealing and intriguing phenomenon, but did not manage to challenge traditional Churches. Furthermore, numerous divisions occurred in the bosom of Protestantism, creating a mosaic which now consists of thousands of religious groups. Thus, although Protestantism still remains the dominant religion in the United States, it can no longer be called the “national religion” and identified with American culture as a whole.

In order to have a comprehensive view of American religious landscape, it is worth examining the tables and listings placed below. Table 1 presents the main religious traditions in the United States, Table 2 indicates leading Protestant denominations, and Table 3 enumerates the top twenty religions, whereas the map depicts the geographical distribution of the denominations.

Table 1. Main religious traditions

Protestant	51.9%
Catholic	24.8%
Jewish	1.7%
None	16.5%
Other	5.0%

Table 2. Main Protestant denominations

Baptist	32.4%
Methodist	12.2%
Lutheran	7.5%
Presbyterian	5.1%
Episcopal	3.2%
Other	24.1%
No denomination	15.3%

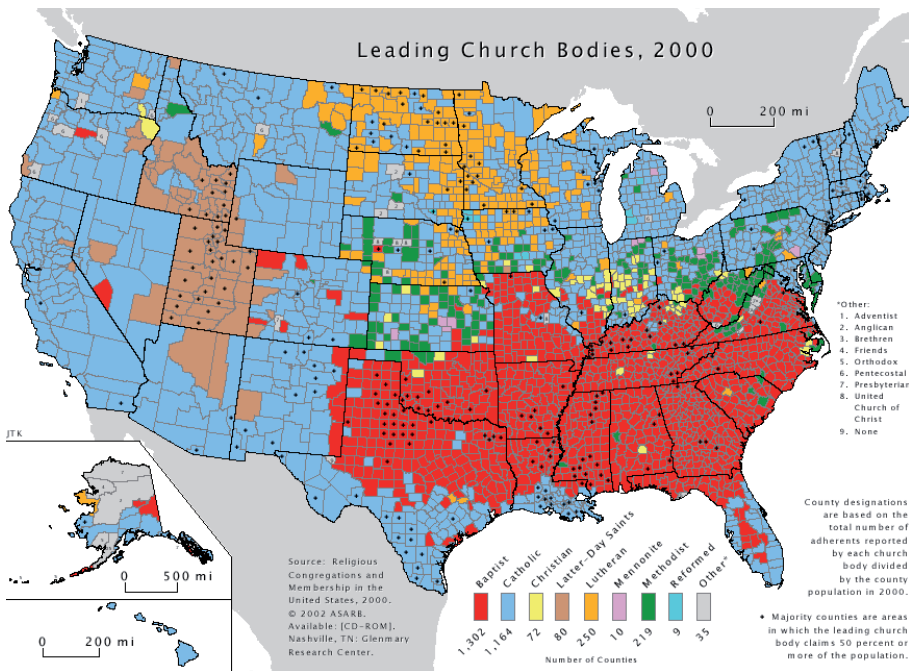
Source: General Social Survey 2006, http://www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_101.asp.

Table 3. Top Twenty Religions in the United States (self-identification)

Religion	% of U.S. Pop., 2000	Religion	% of U.S. Pop., 2000
Christianity	76.5%	Spiritualist	0.05%
Nonreligious/Secular	13.2%	Native American Religion	0.05%
Judaism	1.3%	Baha'i	0.04%
Islam	0.5%	New Age	0.03%
Buddhism	0.5%	Sikhism	0.03%
Agnostic	0.5%	Scientology	0.02%
Atheist	0.4%	Humanism	0.02%
Hinduism	0.4%	Deity (Deism)	0.02%
Unitarian Universalism	0.3%	Taoism	0.02%
Wiccan/Pagan/Druid	0.1%	Eckankar	0.01%

Source: American Religious Identification Survey, 2001 http://www.adherents.com/rel_USA.htm#religions

Map 1. Leading Church Bodies, 2000



Source: Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States, 2000; Associations of Statisticians and American Religious Bodies (ASARB), www.strangemaps.wordpress.com/2008/01/27/237-regionalism-and-religiosity

American modern religion. Televangelists and megachurches

Apart from changes in the American religious scene, the twentieth century also brought a significant change of another kind. This was an enormous modernisation of religion in the United States, connected with huge technological progress in general. American church leaders very quickly learned to benefit from all the inventions and novelties. Early in the twentieth century, American preachers discovered the freshly invented radio as a low-cost tool to reach out to a mass audience, as well as to evangelize in countries where propagating Christianity was prohibited. In the United States the progenitor of radio priesthood was S. Parkes Cadman. He started his career in 1923, and until 1928 was broadcasting a weekly programme on NBC which gathered together 5 million listeners by their radio sets. In the 1920s and 1930s Charles Coughlin, Bob Jones, Ralph W. Sockman and Charles E. Fuller also all succeeded as radio presenters. In 1946 the number of listeners to their broadcasts was estimated at 10 million¹⁸.

Radio turned out to be only a prologue to the real career of charismatic evangelists, which was made possible for them by television. Clergymen quickly took advantage of the instant development of this medium after the Second World War. The first televangelist was a Roman-Catholic archbishop, Fulton J. Sheen, who successfully transferred his teaching from radio to television in 1951¹⁹. Another pioneer of televangelism was Rex Humbard; nevertheless in those days nobody could compete with Oral Roberts, who dominated national religious TV channels.

In the 1960s and 1970s television ultimately won its rivalry with radio in the competition for priority in transmitting Christian teaching. At that time, the most famous of the evangelists was Billy Graham (on both radio and TV) but future stars such as Joel Osteen or Robert Shuller were already starting their careers. Nonetheless, the greatest triumph of televangelists did not come until the eighties. The most modest assessments indicated thirteen million regular viewers, others reported up to sixty million. The majority of the audience came from the South and Mid-East and was of average or low income²⁰.

The most popular in the 1980s were Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker with his wife Tammy Faye Messner, Jimmy Swaggart and Jerry Falwell. Most of the TV religious services were rooted in the Charismatic-Pentecostal tradition, which consisted in faith in obtaining the gift of the Holy Spirit, manifested by speaking in tongues and receiving healing power. Especially the latter effect was eagerly used by the televangelists. They promised to cure audience's diseases, foreshadowing coming wealth and success to them.

¹⁸ *Radio Religion*, "Time Magazine", January 21, 1946, [online], www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,934406,00.html.

¹⁹ Fulton J. Sheen's Official Web Site, www.fultonsheen.com/Archbishop_Fulton_Sheen_biography.cfm.

²⁰ G. M. Marsden, *Religion and American Culture*, p. 270.

Nevertheless, not all of the TV preachers can be identified with Pentecostalism. The second powerful trend is Fundamentalism and a return to moral and spiritual purity. This message was communicated by Jimmy Swaggart and Jerry Falwell. Their cases also demonstrate accurately the close relationship between conservative Christianity (Protestantism particularly) and the political Right. It is especially important to mention Jerry Falwell, who in 1979 founded a religious organisation called Moral Majority, that united political conservatives. It reported some important deserts, such as an impact in the election of Ronald Reagan as President in 1980. Apart from Falwell, Pat Robertson was also deeply involved in politics. In the years 1987/88 he took part in Republican primaries for the presidential office, but after receiving 10% of votes in most of the states he dropped out of the race²¹.

Thus, as can be seen, televangelists are very influential figures in American public life. Their activities arouse emotions and, as a result, numerous disputes. The first and main source of controversy is their efforts to raise funds from the audience. It is not rare to watch a TV preacher persuading people to buy books, CDs, DVDs or trinkets with, allegedly, wonderful properties. Moreover, they can skilfully convince spectators to pay money for the maintenance and development of religious programmes gratuitously. And they do not hesitate to claim God's support or to threaten with Heaven's punishment to strengthen their message! Let us mention merely Oral Roberts case from 1987, when he announced that God would "call him home" unless he raised 8 million dollars by March that year. He ended raising \$9.1 million²².

A scandal of this kind is nothing uncommon among televangelists. An even more unequivocal example is that of Jim Bakker, who was sentenced to prison for embezzlement. On the other hand, Jimmy Swaggart became infamous for another discrediting story. He admitted, in public, having had sexual intercourse with a prostitute. He was forced to leave his office. Nevertheless, later he came back to the pulpit and TV scene begging forgiveness and shedding crocodile tears²³.

Controversies over TV preachers do not refer only to outrageous scandals, but also to the nature of the message they convey. Many critics accuse them of spreading heresy by claiming healing skills and other miracles. Furthermore, the cult of richness and success created in the TV shows is considered by some observers as contradictory to the Christian doctrine. The same charge is stated in regard to the personal cult of these TV "stars", whose luxurious way of life, including impressive residences and private jets, cannot be associated with the commandment to follow Jesus.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 270–271.

²² D. Van Biema, *Oral Roberts to the Rescue?*, [online], <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1677098,00.html>.

²³ BBC On This Day, 1988: *TV evangelist quits over sex scandal*, [online], www.news.bbc.co.uk/on-thisday/hi/dates/stories/february/21/newsid_2565000/2565197.stm.

The sole content of televangelists' sermons is another debatable topic. For instance, storms were unleashed by Pat Robertson's and Jerry Falwell's statements in which they described the terrorist attacks of September 11th as God's punishment for Americans' sexual immorality. Robertson also provoked discussions in 2005, when he called Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez an enemy of the United States and said he should be "taken out", which was interpreted by some circles as a suggestion to assassinate Chavez²⁴. Moreover, many TV evangelists' public statements are rebutted as false prophecies.

The pageantry and modernity of American religiosity can be experienced not only by watching religious broadcasts, but also by attending one of the American megachurches. These institutions were first founded after 1955, but their fast growth did not start until the 1980s. Nowadays, the number of megachurches is estimated at 1200. Their main distinctive feature is an immense audience – a place of worship can be called a megachurch if it gathers two thousand attendees in a week. However, this number is usually much higher. Moreover, these temples are characterised by their location in the suburbs of big metropolises, noticeable denominational, social, racial and ethnical diversity, and a combination of conservative doctrine with a modern form of expression. As a result, services conducted in megachurches resemble more a great theatre performance or a mass concert than a traditional mass²⁵.

To recapitulate the topic of televangelists and megachurches, it must be admitted that it is a perfect example of combining traditional Christian values with modern media and marketing techniques. Secondly, the popularity of such religious shows and celebrities uncovers the need to fill the spiritual emptiness which tends to appear in developed, consumptive countries. Religious shows could also be treated as a microcosmos of America – on the one side glistening with lights and giant screens, drowned in luxury and with a Hollywood smile, and on the other, deeply rooted in austere Puritan rules and shaking in God's presence. Nevertheless, one needs to realise that tools are matched to given material, therefore this kind of religiosity in the most modern and commercialised country in the world does not surprise.

Religiosity of the American people

To learn more about the typical features of American religiosity, apart from those already mentioned in the paper, it is worth investigating social surveys related to religious feelings and behaviours. These have been conducted by several American

²⁴ CNN.com, *Robertson: U.S. should assassinate Venezuela's Chavez*, [online], www.cnn.com/2005/US/08/23/robertson.chavez.1534/index.html.

²⁵ Hartford Institute for Religious Research, [online], www.hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/megachurches.html.

opinion research centres, such as the Gallup Organization and National Opinion Research Centre. First of all, it is appropriate to examine what Americans think of their religion and religious affiliation. A Gallup poll from May 2007 proved that religion is very important to 56% of American citizens, fairly important to 26% and not very important to 17%²⁶. Another survey, from 2006, proved that 36.2% of respondents claimed strong religious affiliation, 10.8% somewhat strong, and 36.5% not very strong. Against this background, Protestants manifest the strongest devotion to their religion – 48.5% declared a strong affiliation, compared to 39.7% of Jews and 30.4% of Catholics²⁷.

A further investigation of the nature of American religiosity needs to be structured into several areas – ideology, experience, behaviour and knowledge. An insight into the religious ideology of Americans delivers fundamental information about their faith, as it answers the question what they actually believe in. The first and most important matter is faith in God. A Gallup poll from May 2008 showed that 78% of Americans believed in God, 15% claimed they believed in a higher power and only 6% did not believe in either²⁸. Another survey (Baylor Religion Survey) asked about belief in Satan. In this case 55% gave a positive unwavering answer²⁹. A comparable difference in percentage between belief in God and Satan occurs in the case of angels and demons (61.3% have no doubt that angels exist and 43.6% say the same about demons³⁰), as well as Heaven and Hell (64.3% were certain of the existence of Heaven and 52.9% expressed that certainty about Hell³¹). As this shows, Americans tend to keep faith above all in positive and rewarding aspects of religion.

Among other noteworthy beliefs of Americans, it is interesting to indicate that most of them deny the idea of man's evolution from earlier animal species, and instead claim that God created man in his present form or, at least, guided the process of evolution (Protestants are especially orthodox in holding this conviction)³². A considerable proportion expresses credence in life after death (72.9%, and 81.8% of Protestants³³). To sum up these ideological parameters, it needs to be mentioned that the majority of the American population derive their beliefs from the Bible, which they consider to be very important in everyday life. What is more, a third of them think of it as the actual word of God that needs to be taken literally, word for

²⁶ The Gallup Organization website – video report “Religious America”, www.gallup.com/video/28054/Religious-America.aspx.

²⁷ General Social Survey 2006, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_103.asp.

²⁸ George Bishop, *What Americans Really Believe and Why Faith isn't as Universal as They Think*, “Free Inquiry” 1999, Vol. 19, No. 3, [online], http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/bishop_19_3.html.

²⁹ Baylor Religion Survey, 2005, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_70.asp.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_71.asp, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_75.asp.

³¹ *Ibidem*, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_71.asp, http://www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_72.asp.

³² General Social Survey, 2004, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_22.asp, http://www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_23.asp.

³³ General Social Survey, 2006, www.thearda.com/quickStats/qs_106_p.asp.

word. Among Protestants, who rely doctrinally solely on the Bible, this proportion scores almost 50%³⁴.

Another important sphere of religious life is outer expression in the form of behaviours and rituals. The most common indicator of religious involvement is church attendance. The survey from 2006 proved that about 30% of people attended services once a week or more and about 47% declared attendance at least once a month (again, Protestants turned out to be the most conscientious church-goers)³⁵. Other indicators are the frequency of prayer, which amounts to 60% for those who pray at least once a day (70% of Protestants)³⁶, and the frequency of reading sacred texts, which comes to 37% for respondents who read the Bible, Koran, Torah or other once a month or more³⁷. An interesting factor which can be taken into consideration when studying the behavioural aspect of religiosity is the eagerness to evangelize others. Surveys show that during the month preceding the investigation 35% had at least once attempted to share their faith with friends (among Protestants the result was the highest – 48%) and 21% had attempted to evangelize strangers (29% of Protestants)³⁸. This indicator is undoubtedly worth mentioning, as evangelizing seems to be something typical of American Christians and rather uncommon in European countries, and the data confirms this phenomenon.

Less measurable but equally important indicators of religiosity are religious experience and feelings. The data concerning this aspect supports the thesis about the close personal contact of American people of faith with God. More than 42% feel guided by God every day or many times a day (another 14% feel it most days), 50% feel God's love directly at least once a day (another 14% – most days) and 37% feel God's love through others at least once a day (another 20% – most days). More than half of the respondents expressed a desire to be closer to God once a day or many times a day, and 55% claimed the impression of being spiritually touched by the beauty of creation with the same frequency. The most appealing among the spiritual feelings is the experience of being "born again". Generally 37% of Americans admitted to experiencing a turning point in their life when they committed themselves to Christ, but among Protestants this percentage reaches as much as 57%. Therefore, it can be stated without hesitation that this unique feature is typical of American Protestants.

The last parameter of the religiosity of Americans is their religious knowledge. A good source of information on this issue is the book of Stephen Prothero entitled "Religious Literacy: What every American needs to know – and doesn't"³⁹.

³⁴ Exploring Religious America, 2002, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_27.asp; General Social Survey, 2006; www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_107.asp.

³⁵ General Social Survey, 2006, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_105.asp.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_104.asp.

³⁷ Baylor Religious Survey, 2005, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_56.asp.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_66.asp; www.thearda.com/quickstats/qs_67.asp.

³⁹ S. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What every American needs to know – and doesn't*, San Francisco 2007.

This uncovers huge ignorance in relation to religious facts in the American nation. They are unable to present knowledge not only about world religions, but also about the principles of their own creed. To mention just the most glaring evidence of religious illiteracy, it can be indicated that 60% of American adults cannot name five out of the Ten Commandments, only 50% can name one of the four Gospels, less than 50% know that the first book of the Bible is the Book of Genesis, and 50% of high school seniors are convinced that Sodom and Gomorrah were a biblical married couple. Such ignorance can be attributed to the tendency to focus on individual experience and contact with God rather than on the doctrine, which has been a common approach in American Christianity since the Second Great Awakening. These results are truly appalling, especially in light of the fact that Americans are commonly considered to be such a Godly nation.

The image drawn above reveals the nature of the American religiosity, both in its outer, behavioural aspect and its deeper, emotional and psychological basis. However, this picture must be completed with examination of the interrelations between religion and other spheres of the American culture. A symbiosis which cannot be omitted in this context is the one between religion and politics, since the mutual influence of both domains is immense. This fact raises controversy especially in the secularised Old Continent, where politics and religion are considered as two separate spheres, leading Europeans to expect the same from a country where the separation between church and state is guaranteed by the Constitution. Nevertheless, complicated relations between church and state are deeply rooted in the ideology on which the United States was founded.

Religion and politics in the USA

The first expression of the symbiosis between religion and the public sphere was the Mayflower Compact – a document elaborated in 1620 by the Pilgrim Fathers before they landed on the new continent. It became the foundation of the political organisation of the Massachusetts colony. The Mayflower Compact constituted a covenant with God and included numerous invocations to Him. Religious zeal soon led to theocracy and intolerance towards dissenters from the Puritan faith. The apogee of Massachusetts religious orthodoxy occurred in 1692, when the trials of Salem took place. They ended with the execution of 13 women and 7 men accused of witchcraft. This event evoked common indignation among the people of New England and resulted in the ousting of the Puritans from government.

In the course of time, the overwhelming influence of religion on political life was mitigated and the country headed towards gradual separation of church and state, culminating with constitutional regulations. The Constitution itself did not refer to matters of religion; nonetheless, these issues were raised in the Bill of Rights (added in 1791). The First Amendment to the Constitution guaranteed that none of

the churches could be supported or discriminated against by the government. This record, though short (or because of that), has been a source of multiple controversies and disputes as it has been interpreted in different ways. Thomas Jefferson, who was a man of deep faith and was convinced that religion is a personal matter in which the government should not get involved, strived to enforce a strict separation of church and state. In 1802, he wrote a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in which he included the famous phrase about “the wall of separation between church and state”⁴⁰. An alternative attitude was represented by James Madison. As the historian Sydney Mead has indicated, Madison spoke not about the “wall” but about the “line” between these two domains⁴¹.

Although there were significant differences in approach to the relationship between religion and politics, most of the Founding Fathers tended to root the country’s ideology in Christian morality. John Adams claimed that “a Republic can only be supported by pure religion or austere morals”, and George Washington agreed with him, saying that “reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles”. The first president expressed the same confidence in his Farewell Address (1796): “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports”. This conviction was also reflected in the Declaration of Independence, where four references to God can be found⁴². The close relationship between Christian principles and public life in the young American republic could not pass unnoticed, especially by a European visitor. Alexis de Tocqueville, a French political thinker, pointed out that on arriving in the United States his attention was struck by the importance of religion to Americans, and he considered religion to be “the first of their political institutions”⁴³.

Treating religion as a political institution or political instrument has been the source of numerous debates. One of the most heated controversies concerns the Pledge of Allegiance – namely, the words “under God” which were added to the Pledge in 1954. Though most Americans do not see anything violating in the inclusion of this phrase and deem it correspondent to the intentions of the Founding Fathers, there is always a minority group which signals its unconstitutionality and brings this issue to the court⁴⁴.

Even though reference to God is omnipresent in the American public sphere, it does not indicate any particular God, neither the Christian one nor that of

⁴⁰ The US Constitution Online, Jefferson’s Wall of Separation Letter, [online], www.usconstitution.net/jeffwall.html.

⁴¹ S. Huntington, *Who we are: The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, New York 2005.

⁴² R. N. Bellah, *Civil Religion in America*, [online], www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm.

⁴³ S. Huntington, *Who we are*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*; Further on church-state relations in: S. Filipowicz, *Pochwała rozumu i cnoty: republikańskie credo Ameryki*, Kraków 1997; R. M. Małajny, “Mur separacji” – państwo a kościół w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki, Katowice 1992; M. Potz, *Granice wolności religijnej: kwestie wolności sumienia i wyznania oraz stosunku państwa do religii w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki*, Wrocław 2008.

other religions. The American God is undefined and is part of the so-called “civil religion”. This term was formulated by Rousseau, but it was Robert Bellah who applied it successfully to the American social reality. His famous essay “Civil Religion in America”, published in 1967, accurately described the American national ideology and its connection to religion. Bellah assumed the existence of a “common religion” in the United States which integrates all citizens in a specific form of sanctified patriotism, regardless of their particular denomination. American civil religion is also regarded as another version of the “American Creed” or “American Way of Life”. It is a set of beliefs, values and rituals referring to the American country and cultivated in a purely religious manner. For example, national holidays are considered both patriotic and religious, and symbols such as the flag, the Constitution or the Pledge of Allegiance are given a sacred dimension. Nevertheless, the core of civil religion is made up of the presumptions of being a nation chosen by God and of the divine right to the president’s authority⁴⁵. Especially the first conviction is very firm and deeply ingrained. The expression of this idea appeared as early as when the Pilgrim Fathers arrived in the New World in the form of John Winthrop’s sermon; however, its best reflection came with the conception of the Manifest Destiny. This was formulated in 1845 by the journalist John L. O’Sullivan in an article entitled “Annexation”, which sanctified the territorial growth of the United States with a divine mission to spread freedom, democracy and civilisation across the continent. This theory was later enriched with new elements and adapted to new circumstances as the New Manifest Destiny. It served as a justification of further expansion – economic, territorial, naval and cultural⁴⁶. Even though the Manifest Destiny concept is not used these days in public life directly, the conviction hidden beneath it can still be found in American foreign policy and the rhetoric of politicians.

Civil religion, in general, is manifested in politicians’ speeches. This long tradition of using religious rhetoric in public discourse was inaugurated by George Washington, who is acknowledged to have added the phrase “So help me God” to the presidential oath. And he was also the first American President who said, in his 1789 inaugural address, the following words: “It would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official Act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Councils of Nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes: and may enable every instrument employed in its administration to execute with success, the functions allotted to his

⁴⁵ R. N. Bellah, *Civil Religion in America*.

⁴⁶ The New Manifest Destiny consisted of the theories of Brooks Adams, Frederick Jackson Turner (*Frontier Theory*), Alfred T. Mahan (*navalism*) and Josiah Strong; R. Kłosowicz, *Documents and readings in American history: from the colonies to the end of the nineteenth century*, Kraków 2005.

charge⁴⁷. From that time, every president and every candidate to the presidential office is expected to believe in God and to invoke to God's grace⁴⁸. This assumption is confirmed by a survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life which indicated that in 2008 72% of Americans were convinced it was important that the president have strong religious beliefs⁴⁹. It is often said that Americans will sooner elect a President who does not belong to the Christian mainstream than an atheist.

Just how important religion and religious rhetoric is can easily be seen during the presidential campaign. While it is astonishing for European observers to see nominees giving speeches from church pulpits or participating in a TV debate that takes place in one of the country's biggest megachurches and is moderated by a prominent pastor, it is nothing rare for Americans⁵⁰. Every candidate intends to communicate his religious devotion, and special religion advisers responsible for assuring sufficient coverage on religiosity are employed to achieve this goal. The survey by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life on media coverage of religion in the primary phase of the last campaign showed the comparison between coverage on religion and other topics, such as race, gender, domestic issues or foreign policy. It turned out that, when so-called "horse-race topics" were eliminated (which refers to those about political strategy), religion played a fairly important role in media stories. From January 2007 to April 2008 it constituted almost 10% of all the campaign news, rivalling race and gender stories combined (11.1%)⁵¹. The significance of this result becomes clear when we consider the fact that race and gender had been exceptionally highlighted in the 2008 campaign due to Hillary Clinton's and Barack Obama's candidacies.

The master of "God talk" was undoubtedly the previous president – George W. Bush. As a "new-born" Christian, he enjoyed repeating the story of his conversion, which took place in 1985 thanks to a meeting with Billy Graham, which, as he claims, helped him to overcome alcoholism and start a new life. Further, he mentioned several times that his presidency was a mission sent to him by God, and cited Jesus when asked about his greatest political authority⁵². He even claimed that the war with Iraq was inspired by God, as He had told him to end Saddam Hussein's tyranny. Many similar examples of George W. Bush's religious rhetoric can be given. A good source of information about the previous president's religiosity is the book *La religion de la Maison-Blanche* [The religion of the White House] by the

⁴⁷ National Archives and Records Administration, Transcription of Washington's Inaugural Address, [online], www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/inaugtxt.html.

⁴⁸ R. N. Bellah, *Civil Religion in America*.

⁴⁹ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life Surveys, *More Americans Question Religion's Role in Politics*; The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, www.pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=337.

⁵⁰ The meeting in question took place between Barack Obama and John McCain on 16th August 2008 in the Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, and was moderated by Reverend Rick Warren.

⁵¹ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Study Finds Media Coverage of Religion in Primary Campaign Rivalled That of Race and Gender Combined*, www.pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=312.

⁵² S. Buttry, *Des Moines Register: Candidates Focus on Christian Beliefs*, [online], www.archives.cnn.com/1999/ALLPOLITICS/stories/12/15/religion.register.

French author Sebastien Fath. It is interesting not only because of the vast number of speeches and examples of behaviour confirming Bush's deep faith, but mainly with regard to the evidence of Bush's inconsistency in this field and hidden motives (such as the coincidence that the turning point in the life of an ex-alcoholic occurred more or less at the same time that his father, at the time in the presidential office, commissioned him to reach out to religious groups). However, putting aside all the concrete cases, it is sufficient to concede on this basis that religion is a powerful instrument that is eagerly used in all sorts of political games⁵³.

The importance of the religious factor was also acknowledged by Bush's rival in the 2004 campaign, John Kerry. Three years after his defeat he said he "could have done a better job explaining his faith"⁵⁴. This negligence was a lesson to the next Democratic candidate and present president, Barack Obama. In January 2008, during the CNN debate in Myrtle Beach, he expressed his intention to change the Democrats' policy towards religiously observant groups: "There have been times where our Democratic Party did not reach out as aggressively as we could to evangelicals, for example, because the assumption was, well, they don't agree with us on choice, or they don't agree with us on gay rights, and so we just shouldn't show up." And later he added: "(...) I think we can go after those folks and get them"⁵⁵. To achieve this ambitious goal Obama does not shun laying stress on his Christian affiliation, for example by releasing brochures entitled "Committed Christian", which showed Obama's picture at the pulpit in front of a big cross.

Obama has also managed to inscribe himself on a list of the most important speeches on religion and politics in 40 years (since John F. Kennedy's Houston speech declaring his independence from the Vatican). In his "Call to Renewal" speech, given on 28th June 2006, he expressed his views on using religious rhetoric in politics. He said "the discomfort of some progressives without any hint of religion has often prevented us from effectively addressing issues in moral terms. Some of the problem here is rhetorical – if we scrub language of all religious content, we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice"⁵⁶. In an address at the United Church of Christ General Synod in 2007 he developed this topic by referring to the age-long presence of religion in American political history and mentioning famous politicians like Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy, who used to seek inspiration in God in their speeches.

⁵³ S. Fath, *Religia w Białym Domu*, Warszawa 2007.

⁵⁴ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Transcripts, *Faith and the Public Dialogue: A Conversation with Sen. John Kerry*, November 1, 2007; The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, www.pewforum.org/events/?EventID=159.

⁵⁵ Marc Memmott, Jill Lawrence, comment on *Obama focus in South Carolina: 'Committed Christian'*, The USA Today blog, comment posted January 22, 2008, www.blogs.usatoday.com/onpolitics/2008/01/obama-focus-in.html.

⁵⁶ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Obama Religious Biography*, The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, www.pewforum.org/religion08/profile.php?CandidateID=4.

Nevertheless, using religion in his campaign did not bring Barack Obama solely benefits. It was the same man that opened his eyes to God more than 20 years ago who was the reason for a dangerous controversy over Obama's past. Rev. Jeremiah Wright Jr. is the pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ on Chicago's South Side, where Obama belonged for over 20 years, where he and Michelle Obama got married and where their children were baptized. But in March 2008 Rev. Wright became famous for other reasons. Some of his controversial sermons were posted online, which caused Obama a lot of trouble. Initially, the presidential candidate did not want to disown his "faith guide", but he had no alternative when Wright continued to consolidate racial divisions in American society and spread outrageous theories, such as the US government's responsibility for the 9/11 attacks. Obama ultimately condemned Wright's views and left his church. This example shows perfectly how religion turned out to be a double-edged sword.

Obama's focus on creating an image of a man of faith was described as part of the process of "closing the God gap", as the Democrats have traditionally tended to restrain from religious involvement. The party considered to be more "religion-friendly" has been the Republicans, since their conservative views on moral issues such as abortion and homosexual marriages go hand in hand with Christian teaching. This has invariably delivered them white evangelical Protestants' votes, which constitute about one-quarter of the electorate. Nevertheless, along with the increase of the Democratic candidate's religious involvement, the Republican demonstrated less interest in the topic of faith. John McCain, unlike the previous Republican leader, was rather reticent to talk about religion during the campaign. His biographer, Paul Alexander, explains that McCain's family background together with his military experience made him uneasy to express religious feelings⁵⁷.

Even though "John McCain has never been a religious exhibitionist", as Doug Koopman, a professor at Calvin College says, the presidential candidate was aware he could not avoid the topic completely. Usually, when asked about his faith, he referred to Judeo-Christian values, which he treated as his moral basis, and told a story about an experience in Vietnam which reinforced his faith (when imprisoned and tortured he was relieved in his pain by a Vietnamese guard who was a discreet Christian believer). Apart from this story McCain used religious rhetoric rather seldom. On McCain's official website a video entitled "Faith" could be seen, in which he explained his reticence on religion: "I don't advertise it [faith], and maybe I should, but the fact is the reason, the only reason why I'm here today is because I believe that a higher being has a mission for me in my life – a reason for me to be here"⁵⁸.

⁵⁷ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Religion News Service, *McCain's faith journey largely unspoken*, August 20, 2008; The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, <http://pewforum.org/news/display.php?NewsID=16302>.

⁵⁸ John McCain Official website www.johnmccain.com.

The last Republican presidential candidate, in contrast to his predecessor, was not white evangelicals' favourite man, and this was not only due to his discomfort in talking about God and religion. McCain's rocky relationship with conservative Christian activists has been far more harmful. It is significant that in 2000, when George W. Bush and John McCain both fought for the GOP nomination, the attitude towards religious groups played a decisive role. Bush's artistry in religious talk brought him powerful supporters such as the Revs. Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. At the same time, McCain not only avoided using religious rhetoric, but even risked criticising both of these church leaders. In a speech given in Virginia Beach (the headquarters of Robertson's broadcast empire) he described them as "agents of intolerance" and condemned their influence on politics⁵⁹. After that, McCain lost the primaries in Virginia and withdrew his national candidacy. It seems that this defeat taught him a lesson about the importance of "religious correctness" in the 2008 campaign.

In the recent campaign McCain tried to improve his relations with religious conservatives and gain their support. In 2006 he delivered a commencement address at Falwell's Liberty University, which was an act of reconciliation between McCain and Rev. Falwell after the 2000 incident⁶⁰. During the 2008 primaries McCain tried to use the support of two evangelical leaders – John Hagee from Texas and Rod Parsley from Ohio – but he decided to reject their endorsement after they were discredited by the media because of controversial sermons from the past (the first said that the Holocaust was part of God's plan for the Jews, and the second described the Muslim Prophet Muhammad as "the mouthpiece of a conspiracy of spiritual evil")⁶¹. Later on, in July, McCain went to see religious leaders in Ohio and made a much publicized pilgrimage to meet Billy Graham⁶².

The information and data presented above prove that religion is an inseparable part of the race to the White House and, therefore, of American public life. It can be discussed if talking about one's faith is, as John Kerry described it, the way to introduce oneself to the public (to inform about one's values and philosophy of life)⁶³ or if it is just a cleverly used instrument to reach out to religious people. From what I have investigated, it seems that using religion in campaigns is rather a hard-headed endeavour, precisely planned by groups of experts and carefully adapted to the time, place and target group.

⁵⁹ J. Connelly, E. Offley, *McCain and Bush clash over Revs. Robertson, Falwell*, "Seattle Post-Intelligencer Reporters", February 29, 2000 [online], www.seattlepi.nwsource.com/national/gops29.shtml.

⁶⁰ D. Balz, *McCain Reconnects with Liberty University*, "The Washington Post", May 14, 2006, [online], www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/13/AR2006051300647.html.

⁶¹ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *McCain Religious Biography*, [online]; The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, www.pewforum.org/religion08/profile.php?CandidateID=3.

⁶² S. Wayne, *McCain steps up efforts to woo religious voters*, "Dallas Morning News", July 6, 2008, [online], The Dallas Morning News, www.dallasnews.com.

⁶³ The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Transcripts, *Faith and the Public Dialogue: A Conversation with Sen. John Kerry*, November 1, 2007, [online], The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, www.pewforum.org/events/?EventID=159.

The image of American religiosity sketched in this paper was intended to be multi-dimensional, and I hope it meets this presupposition. It depicts the long history of the evolution of religions in the United States, indicating its changes and the characteristic spiritual traits of Americans shaped by various experiences. It presents an analysis of social surveys which provides information on different aspects of religiosity – ideology, feelings, behaviours and knowledge. Although some of the data may be surprising, many of the features emerging from the sociological data are understandable if one considers the historical background of American religiosity. Therefore, these two parts (historical and analytical) complement one another to a large extent. Further sections unveil other aspects of the American religiosity – its innate ties to public life and politics, and its modernness and spectacular nature. Recognizing these diverse perspectives is indispensable in order to make the study more comprehensive as well as more attractive.

Robert Uberman

WHY VALUES ARE PRECIOUS?

There is a long-standing superstition that values calls for sacrifices in real life to be compensated by God in the eternal one. Consequently the picture of an honest follower of certain moral rules has been strongly associated with poverty, while success in creation of business and wealth has had to be based on a cynical approach to life. This idea refers much more to corporations than to individual people, since the former are often viewed to a greater extent as mechanical constructions rather than groups of people. Even if business founders, like John D. Rockefeller, Andrew Carnegie or Andrew Mellon, claimed to follow clear moral guidelines, they faced an outcry from their critics, who insisted that such declarations were nothing but a mocking attempt to cover the reality of an undisturbed drive for money and power. Now, when some corporations, however changed, have existed and succeeded for more than 100 years, researchers can analyse in depth the foundations of their development, looking at the factors holding such organisations together and stimulating their development. This article attempts to show how the business sciences have evolved, starting from a completely technical approach to corporate structures and functioning, gradually recognising the importance of more tacit factors, and finally getting to the point at which values are considered to create the fabric of modern firms.

Chandler's influence on business conduct

With the creation of the first big corporations there was little scientific explanation as to what the factors were holding them together as entities and unifying all stakeholders in their efforts. The simplistic answer which came always pointed to a hunt for accumulation of wealth at the expense of others who happened not to function within a corporate influence as a foundation of their existence. Alfred D. Chandler's remarkable work *Strategy and Structure*, based on extensive research on several leading US corporations including General Motors and DuPont, gave a more sophisticated explanation of the issue in consideration. He, of course, did not question a profit-based motivation, but rightly pointed out that such desire had to be converted into a tangible, long-term plan of actions and supported by a complementary division of roles and responsibilities. A paradigm of congruence in between strategy and structure as a cornerstone of each company's existence was born. While Chandler focused on structures and was rather an administrator than a strategist, generations of business leaders and scholars treated his book as a guideline for strategy formulations. The right strategy was to be set, then followed and supported by carefully tailored structures filled with precisely selected people. The logic of perfect correspondence in between goals and resources had an intellectual appeal and tremendous impact.

The congruence introduced above had been understood as a necessary product of top-bottom strategy formulation and implementation. The idea that execution is distinct from formulation had become firmly ensconced in management thinking. Formulation was to be separated from implementation as totally independent processes run by two separate groups of corporate employees: managers and workers. Managers were expected to craft a strategy, design the necessary tools, teach subordinates what they were expected to do and, finally, control results. The last of these duties constituted almost the only acceptable source of internal feedback for strategy change. Recommendations from operations were not forbidden of course, they were just not expected¹. Basically the only group allowed to participate at the forming stage was external consultants.

Such a mechanistic² approach to organisations originated from the pioneering concepts of Taylor and Ford, who revolutionised production and operations, converting the chaotic efforts of numerous independent people into a system in which everybody had a precisely pre-designated role to fulfil. Any departure from established procedures was an oddity, posing risks and/or creating losses to an organisation. Companies were essentially to compete in two areas: efficiency of established rules, and ability to reinforce them into operations.

¹ A. C. Hax, N. S. Majluf, *Strategic Management. An Integrative Perspective*, New Jersey 1984; R. L. Martin, *The Execution Trap*, "Harvard Business Review", July–August 2010, p. 66–67.

² The term "mechanistic" was introduced by Burns and Stalker in 1961 as opposed to "organic". See A. C. Hax, N. S. Majluf, *Strategic Management*, p. 404–406.

Any failure had to be attributed either to bad strategy formulation or to its inefficient execution. Statements like “I’d rather have a first-rate execution and second-rate strategy any time than a brilliant idea and mediocre management” were accompanied by one stressing the key importance of a clear and appropriate strategy which could be almost automatically implemented³.

A corporation was nothing more than a set of procedures linking all the staff. And nothing else but “efficient” procedures was deemed necessary to develop and prosper. As summarised by Peter Drucker, traditional (or in another, more accurate word, mechanistic) corporations can be characterised by the following five basic points⁴ (expanded a little by the author):

- In almost all key relations a corporation had an unmatched bargaining power: with employees, suppliers and even clients (especially in the case of Business-to-Customer industries), based on almost fully controlled infrastructure, production capacities and product development.
- In the great majority of employees the pay they got for the job constituted their only source of income. This referred to some extent to suppliers. In certain cases also customers had become strongly dependent if not on one, then at least on very few corporations.
- The most efficient way to produce anything was to consolidate internally as many activities needed to turn out the product as possible in order to lower the transactional costs.
- Customers were deficient in product expertise so they had to rely almost solely on the suppliers’ brand and renown.
- Key technologies were exclusive to those industries which they served.

The properties described above created a perfect environment for creating knowledge and power pyramids, with executives on top, specialists in the middle and finally customers, suppliers and other stakeholders at the bottom.

From 1970 onwards, however – and this date can be established quite precisely – the environment turned upside down:

- Knowledge-based industries have become dependent more on the competences of employees and suppliers than on physical assets strengthening their bargaining power against corporations.
- An increasingly large part of the workforce has been made up not by full-time employees but by part-timers, temporary consultants and contractors whose dependence on the income coming from a given corporation constitutes a diminishing part of their total income.
- Knowledge has become both expensive and highly specialised, making it very difficult for one, even very sizable, corporation to support its development in all areas needed for the business. In addition communication channels have become significantly cheaper, leading to a decline in transactional costs. Both factors men-

³ R. L. Martin, *The Execution Trap*, p. 66.

⁴ P. F. Drucker, *Managing in the Next Society*, New York 2002, p. 271–277.

tioned above acted as a triggering cause for promoting disintegrating programmes such as lean management, outsourcing and so on.

– The internet and other communication tools have closed, at least partially, the information gap between corporations and their partners. The periods within which each single piece of information or product becomes widely available have shrunk so dramatically that the competitive advantage is built by an ability to effectively use rather than having access to them.

– Key technologies for many industries have been developed outside internal cycles of their leaders. Both telecommunication software and fibreglass cables were not created by telecom companies, but by those from related businesses.

In view of the above, managers learnt that the search for ideal procedures recalled the famous proverb about a dog attempting to catch its own tail. Given the time needed to develop, consult, approve and implement whatever procedure or other similar regulation it is almost certain that in the meantime the environment is going to change enough that at least some of the factors underpinning the carefully prescribed schemes and solutions deviate very much from the base, making at least part of it ineffective or even not applicable. Therefore every manager with some experience knows that there is no one top-bottom direction in such complicated processes as managing companies. Instead there is an intensive exchange of signals going both down and up as well as a massive amount of decisions and actions taken without any instruction from headquarters, based on “common sense”, “practical approach” and “case-by-case judgement” to name the explanations given most frequently where a formal cause for them is asked for.

Over the years people in business organisations, acting as described above, develop competences in both a planned and an unstructured way, consequently creating a unique intellectual and emotional capital. Moreover, this capital is based not only on themselves but also on relations formed with colleagues, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders. Collaborative, complex problem-solving constitutes its essence. These “tacit” competences – exchange of unstructured information, making quasi-intuitive fast judgements in exchanges with fellow workers, suppliers, and customers – have become a standard model for leading companies in various industries (see the results of research conducted by McKinsey: Fig. 1)⁵.

Interestingly, the percentage of “tacit” workers has a very strong impact on financial performance, widening tremendously the span of financial results. In industries characterised by the dominance of routine tasks the discrepancy between the best and worst companies tends to be relatively narrow. The McKinsey study showed that in the case of freight companies the EBITDA (earnings before interests, taxes and depreciation – a commonly used indicator of operational efficiency) per employee varied from \$7,000 to \$90,000.

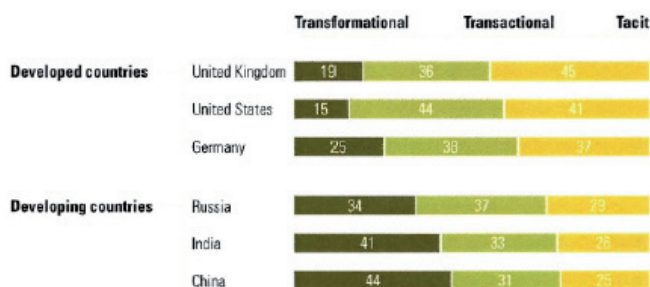
⁵ S. C. Beardsley, B. C. Johnson, J. M. Manyika, *Competitive Advantage from Better Interactions*, “McKinsey Quarterly” 2006, No. 2.

On the opposite side, in the case of one of the mostly interactions-based businesses – private banking – the same index spanned from minus \$82,000 up to plus \$805,000, eleven times more.

Figure1. Structure of positions in corporations regarding complexity of problem-solving

More jobs require tacit interactions

Composition of economies, 2004, % of workforce by job type¹



¹Categorized by predominant job activity: tacit = complex interactions; transactional = routine interactions; transformational = extraction or conversion of raw materials; 800 occupations studied.

While transactional or transformational jobs have to be administered quite precisely based on some sort of formally reinforced instructions and structures, “tacit” ones would lose their nature if managed this way. By definition “tacit” means something implicit and unspoken. Therefore “tacit” employees cannot be organised by any formal ruling, neither procedures nor structures. They require other type of drivers keeping them together and coordinating their efforts if a corporation is not to fall into total chaos and eventually break up. With all its cloudiness and apparent elasticity they have to be somehow organised around any kind of stable denominator which would simply keep a given company united.

Porras and Collins’s contribution

Jerry Porras and James Collins coined the terms: “visionary companies” and “visionary leaders” in their famous book *Built to Last*, first published in 1994. This outstanding work identified a set of corporations which had:

– managed to achieve a “crown jewels” status in their industries, being admired by both peers and stakeholders and significantly influencing their behaviour;

- prospered over a long period of time, through multiple product and economic cycles, generations of leaders (indeed some of them managed to survive the extinction of their once key markets);
- brought a return on investment, in a long-term perspective, significantly higher than even their closest competitors, not to mention the market average⁶.

Porras and Collins underlined that the key point for the visionary companies' success was that they were organisations (institutions) capable of surviving the passage of their most able leaders, greatest products and services, most widely admired business concept, somehow fulfilling Chandler's idea of the "perfect" business structure. Yet, their understanding of corporate basics was almost totally different from that of the respected author of *Strategy and Structure*. In the whole book it is in fact very difficult to find any reference to organisational charts as well as to communication and reporting lines. If these are irrelevant, what could hold these crown jewels together and make them so successful? The answer comes with a piece of advice to young leaders wanting to convert their company into a visionary one. They posted a question, simple but the most important: where should they begin? Here is the reply: "First and above all else, pin down your core ideology. Start by articulating your organisation's core values. And we mean *core* values"⁷ Then we can find a list of simple testing questions verifying whether the values being considered merit a status of core ones. Reading it through, one can compare such requirements to the attributes of the Ten Commandments that make them a cornerstone of Christian values.

The first criterion to be met is about upholding candidate values, even if obeying them causes a loss, financial or otherwise difficult to sustain. This requirement links value to sacrificing through expressing the very basic concept that values cannot be available for free, otherwise nobody would consider them valuable. The same applies to the Commandments. One very simple example shows how difficult it is for companies to meet this fundamental requirement. Corporate leaflets and reports are packed with declarations about honesty in dealing with customers. Yet how many companies compensate clients for the time lost while dealing with their defective products? In many cases a mere substitution with a new item is meaningless. For somebody who, say, paid 10 dollars for a CD to be played during his daughter's anniversary, which then turned out to be damaged, sending a new one a month later creates only trouble.

Or, more commonly, which bank is willing to return not only the value of a fake transaction but also pays interests on money mistakenly charged, not to mention other costs incurred? Of course one may argue that the acceptance of such

⁶ In fact a return on one US dollar invested in the twenty visionary companies' shares brought 6,356 dollars between Jan. 1st, 1926 and Dec. 31st, 1990, so over 65 years, while investing the same one dollar in shares of the twenty closest competitors gave only 955 dollars. In the same period of time General Market rose from one to 416 dollars only. See: J. C. Collins, J. I. Porras, *Built to Last. Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, New York 1994, p. 1–7.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 219.

costs would have affected profits. And precisely this is why honesty is valuable and so few can really be named honest.

The second criterion core values are to meet refers to their usefulness for stakeholders. The best way to check this is to ask the following question: "Suppose the corporation shut down, duly paying out all financial obligations, would the stakeholders be adversely affected? And if it does so 100 years from now will this also be true?" There are two components of this requirement. First, the core values have to be both valuable and unique, so stakeholders would not only regard their disappearance as substantially negative, but they would also not be able to easily find them, e.g. among the corporation's competitors. Second, the core values have to stand the test of time. This is especially important if a candidate value is linked to a product or service. The ability always to provide the fastest microprocessors available on the market might make sense. But what if microprocessors are replaced with other type of devices designed for the same purpose? It took humanity around 50 years to replace mechanical calculating machines with silicon based ones. This is two generations only.

Can the concept of core values work in business practice? Let us take a short look at American Express. This is in a way a strange company. It is most commonly known as one of the biggest credit card issuers in the world. Yet it is not a bank. And it does not even want to become a financial institution. It began life in 1850 as a regional freight express business. Thirty years later, facing a declining demand for cash shipping services due to the increasing popularity of postal money orders, American Express created its own money order named "American Express Order", which was made available not only at the company's premises but also at railroad stations and retail outlets. A decade later, the company was inspired by the difficulties faced by its own president during vacations in Europe who found it troublesome to cash his letter of credits. As a response to the boss's fatigue an American Express employee created the "American Express Travel Cheque", based on the simple principle of checking the congruence between two traveller's signatures, one made upon purchase and the second upon redemption. By chance a float was created, a source of additional income for the company, since in 1990 the outstanding balance of unrecalled cheques topped \$4 billion, generating interest of around \$200 million. Simultaneously, in serving mostly American travellers around the world it has developed another business area: travellers' assistance. Crowds of Americans have crammed American Express offices, primarily for checking cash, but considering it the almost only trustworthy institution in the otherwise unfamiliar environment, which led to it starting to share all sorts of other problems: mail service delays, ticket availability, scarcity of medical care and so on. To some extent American Express has also become a travel agency. Surprisingly the last evolution occurred against the explicitly announced will of the company CEO, who once said: "This company is not and does not intend going into touring business".

What may look like opportunistic exploration of business opportunities available by chance has in fact been a constant and long-term development and application of three core ideologies: heroic customer service, worldwide reliability of services and encouragement of individual initiative⁸ oriented towards serving travellers' needs. That is why American Express has not entered the mortgage business, although it has accumulated a lot of strengths almost warranting success if such a move occurs. Who else has obtained such a network of contacts with potential customers, detailed knowledge of their needs as well as experience in financial services? There was only one obstacle, albeit a decisive one. American Express's core values are not attractive in the mortgage business. Rather than the customer service being heroic, one expects it to be predictable, since decisions are taken after thorough evaluation usually within clients' own home premises. Worldwide reliability is usually not a need, since even wealthy families own no more than two or three properties. Individual initiative, in case of mortgages, is definitely not welcomed, since this business has to be, by its nature, highly regulated and based on clear and rigidly imposed procedures. Individual initiative here recalls much more fraud than heroism.

Core values have to be preserved and protected vigorously over time. There are many ways of doing this, but a cornerstone of all effort is created by translating ideologies into tangible mechanisms aligned to send a consistent set of various reinforcing signals such as:

- extensive in-house training programmes, often structured in the form of “universities” or official training centres (for example the McDonald's Academy, which was run in cooperation with the University of Indiana and granted regular credits);
- social events, celebrations and contests underlining the importance of common values;
- unique language, songs, cheers and affirmations promoting psychological commitment;
- incentive, advancement and promoting criteria explicitly linked to a given corporate ideology with strong preference for internal promotions⁹.

If successful, these efforts lead to the creation of a religious order – a kind of uniformity among employees and even partners. Joining IBM was presented as on a par with joining a religious order¹⁰, to such an extent that when, in 1979, the corporation created a spacious “Management Development Centre”, one of its employees said that it “might pass for a monastic retreat”, and continued by stating that the company had institutionalised its beliefs the way a Church did, converting employees into ardent believers.¹¹

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 88 and 142–143.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 88 and 134–136.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 125.

¹¹ R. Levering, M. Moskowitz, M. Katz, *The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America*, New York 1985, p. 163–168.

It is worth noting that even such a utilitarian and goal-oriented thinker as Machiavelli recognised that it is difficult to lay the foundations for long-term ruling without the support of religion, either adopted or self-created¹².

However, Porras and Collins pointed out one, in their view, fundamental difference between cult-like corporations and religious faiths and sects. They claim that the former are constructed around ideologies, not around cult leaders. This dissimilarity is much smaller if analysed in depth. Of course all major religions are attached somehow to their more or less historical founders. But this is so also in the case of corporations. Each of them was founded by a visionary, but no fictional leader. In both cases their real appeal in followers' eyes has been linked to the ideas they advocated and pursued. The only difference – but a crucial one – is that prophets claimed eternal support and origins of their teaching while corporate founders had no such privilege, at least directly. This is not to say that visionary leaders were not religious. On the contrary, most of them were active members of various Christian Churches, believing that their business efforts comply with God's expectations. What is often not told in the history of entrepreneurship is how many companies started with a vision that was informed by the religious faith of their founders, companies like Cadbury (Quaker), Herman Miller (Calvinist), Service Master (Evangelical), Dayton Hudson (Presbyterian), Cummings Engine (Disciples of Christ) to name a few of the most famous¹³. However, as regards corporate values, God was usually not claimed to be an original author.

Amazingly, strong ideological control is not an obstacle to, but creates an excellent environment for operational autonomy. It was its strong culture which allowed Nordstrom, a company renowned for excellent customer service, to write in its employees' manual the following instructions: "Rule #1: Use your good judgment in all situations. There will be no additional rules."¹⁴ Such brevity in approach may come as a shocking surprise to many employees of banks, telecoms and other service companies with voluminous "customer relationship management procedures" describing everything from a unified pattern of male staff ties up to a standardised size of welcoming smile, not to mention long reports filled in after each interaction with a customer. According to this approach's logic, customers should have encountered disorder and incompetence in Nordstrom shops and would have escaped from them disgustedly running to competitors' premises. Yet nothing like that happened. Clients actually took almost exactly the opposite direction, praising Nordstrom's level of customer attention and service. The secret of Nordstrom's success lies in two mutually supporting factors: Sale Per Hour (SPH) based performance indicator and secret shopper control. The former takes care of current

¹² See: H. C. Mansfield [in:] N. Machiavelli, *The Prince. Translated and with an Introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield*, Chicago–London 1998, p. xxi–xxii.

¹³ M. Naughton, J. R. Cornwall, *Culture as the Basis of The Good Entrepreneur*, "Journal of Religion and Business Ethics" 2009, Vol. 1.

¹⁴ J. C. Collins, J. I. Porras, *Built to Last*, p. 117.

financial results, while the latter takes responsibility for making sure that customers are served in a way which guarantees their return. The rest is left up to employees, as they are supposed to be much better at addressing individual customers' needs than any bureaucrat sitting in an "ivory tower". Nordstrom correctly recognised that each time a front-line employee responded to a customer request it was up to him to choose how to represent the company and his choice was directly related to the fundamental value proposition Nordstrom was offering¹⁵.

Values cannot be induced by any formal training. They do not resemble IT systems or re-engineered processes and cannot be copied easily, if at all. To be developed they require above all time spent in a given company, since almost always they are specific to a particular business context. Therefore they cannot easily, if at all, be purchased directly on the market. As a consequence, value-based corporations cannot afford to maintain Chandler's congruence between strategy and structures adjusting employees' tasks and benefits to a current set of goals. One of the most successful corporations named people who in other firms would hold executive titles "advisors". This bold step expresses the idea that it is not employees, but processes that are managed. The real interdependences in modern companies are not kind of master-servant relations but strongly competence based. A leading role is usually naturally assigned to a person with the highest intellectual and psychological ability to make the right decisions, which sometimes acquires formal confirmation in the form of "project leader" or "process leader" assignments. Asking experienced people to subordinate to any "most efficient" formal structure would then have a tremendously negative effect. They would either leave a company or intellectually withdraw themselves from activities they would otherwise contribute to. On the other hand, it would take new people, even technically very well prepared for assigned responsibilities, years to develop the "tacit" skills necessary to take effective actions in a complex and interrelated environment.

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, we are overwhelmed by the speed and profoundness of alternations. The notions of turbulent times and rapidly changing environment have become the new paradigm. Thinkers claiming that managers can either change or die are followed by crowds of believers. Is there any place for stable values now? Surprisingly it looks as though they have become not only obsolete, but even more necessary. With the accelerating pace of technological change, dramatically shorter product and market cycles the lifespan of any single business idea will only decline. The same applies to structures and procedures. The former become flatter, more decentralised and geographically dispersed, accepting much wider areas of individual autonomy and dependent on their knowledge. Homework also pays tribute to that, destroying the external attributes of hierarchies. The latter are challenged by the diminished role of formal powers, budgets and reporting lines. So what, then, is to keep corporations together? It looks like only core ideologies can do the job. They possess, if properly applied, several

¹⁵ R. L. Martin, *The Execution Trap*, p. 68.

unique features: Ideologies tend to be flexible enough to adapt to various technologies as they speak to basic and universal needs. Diseases have long accompanied humankind, as well as the means to cure them. Challenging them is an always valid mission, regardless of the means applied.

Surprisingly, in view of the above, ideologies can be precisely defined. Enough to be understood in pretty much the same manner over ages. The distinction between treatment of a disease and cosmetology, however heavily challenged, is clear to most of us, as well as for the ancient Egyptians. Even so, if the tools used in both areas have changed so much.

Ideologies rather catalyse than disturb innovations, since a changing environment faced with stable values creates unbalances which have to be checked by new business ideas and product lines. Such innovations are self-generated and continuous, building on previously developed strengths and upgrading them to a new level. In such a way an innovation becomes more a process than a case, upholding, not destroying, the basis of a corporation¹⁶.

Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever, after serving on the Management Boards of Procter & Gamble and Nestlé – all three of them operating in FMCG, definitely a rapidly changing business facing enormous challenges – made it clear that what made them great were strong values. The companies he has worked for are increasingly more appreciated for what they did to the economy. In Polman's opinion values permitted these companies to do the right thing in the long term, to operate with a high level of integrity and trust, to invest in their people, always wanting the communities where they operate to be as successful as the companies themselves.¹⁷ The opposite can be said about Enron, which went bankrupt in 2002 in a way which shocked America. It fostered innovation in an unprecedented way in otherwise mature and "boring" industries: electricity and gas supply, basically creating totally new markets. It lacked two other, as it eventually turned out, much more important features: focus and direction, proper values. And in this deficit the real reasons for its collapse can be found¹⁸.

Certainly, even companies based on strong ideologies can face troubles and fall into crises. No one is immune to them. And there is a strong temptation to depart from the core values when difficulties accumulate and old products and business practices become obsolete. But as recent interviews with 15 CEOs and chairmen of boards showed, a healthy company enjoys not only strong financials but also a culture and values that bind it together. The CEO of AutoNation, a car dealer network especially strongly affected by the troubles of the Detroit-based car makers, admitted that the most critical battle he waged when he arrived was destroying the "growth at any cost" culture and replacing it with entrepreneurialism paired with

¹⁶ J. C. Collins, J. I. Porras, *Built to Last*, p. 227–229.

¹⁷ A. Bird, *McKinsey Conversations with Global Leaders: Paul Polman of Unilever*, "McKinsey Quarterly", October 2009.

¹⁸ P. C. Fusaro, R. M. Miller, *What Went Wrong at Enron*, New Jersey 2002.

the highest standards of integrity. Over three years following his appointment he worked hard to nurture and recruit the right people for the company's top 350 positions and to purge the "high-performing money-makers whose risk profile would keep you awake at night." This amounted to a cultural revolution that has delivered a sustainable competitive advantage¹⁹.

The strength of visionary companies lies in the way they deal with adversities: by turning to their core ideologies. Let us review in brief IBM's recent history. "Big Blue", as it is also known, had for a long time been associated with PCs. In many countries IBM had become a synonym for a personal computer. Increasing competition from low-cost and sometimes more capable producers alongside the dominance of Microsoft on the software market brought this icon of the US computer industry almost to bankruptcy. Various attempts, for example based on taking over Lotus, the office software manufacturer second only to Microsoft, not only failed to return leadership but increased financial stress and operating problems. Then IBM decided to get rid of the PC business altogether (selling it to Lenovo) and focus on analysing and streamlining customers' processes, offering a wide range of outsourcing and consulting services. Now, in 2010, "Big Blue" is again a respected and profitable company, the number 2 software provider globally. But this shift meant no less than going back to the company's roots. After all IBM had started with offering calculating services aiming at simplification and cost effectiveness of customers' processes related to a huge accumulation of simple algebraic calculations, such as payrolls, to name one of the most popular examples.²⁰ Here, once again, "Big Blue" found the source not only of business competitiveness but also of advanced product development. The once innovative machine called the PC is passing by now, but process effectiveness is even more desired. So the IBM core ideology is separated from temporary slavery in a plastic box, which for a few years exemplified it.

As Chantal Delsol rightly pointed out, common values are in fact a language which serves two purposes: to bridge differences and to determine common meaning²¹. The latter expresses an everlasting dynamic impulse for constant change, yet preserving a certain call that every member of a corporate family can refer to in order to assure that his/her efforts are consistent with the actions of others.

¹⁹ D. Carey, M. Patsalos-Fox, M. Useem, *Leadership Lessons for Hard Times*, "McKinsey Quarterly", July 2009.

²⁰ R. Waters, *Big Blueprint for IBM Services*, "Financial Times" 2009, 3 March, p. 12.

²¹ C. Delsol, *The Unlearned Lessons of the Twentieth Century*, Wilmington 2006, p. 134–135.

Deficiencies of the financial approach to business: the cases of Enron and Lehman Bros

Chandler's well-known conclusions about the necessity of gathering meaningful data processed via clear-cut communication lines and authority leading to optimal allocation of resources²² not only guided them, but also drew a borderline of managerial sciences. Hence a business equalled business administration run by masters in business administration – cold technocrats able to solve problems and calculate risks. And the long-lasting search for hard evidence resulting from even harder data, creating the basis for right decisions, became a necessary foundation of any “strategic” decision.

Finally, McKinsey summarised this approach to business by stating that the managers' ultimate goal was to “gather appropriate information, evaluate it thoughtfully, and make choices that provide the best chances for the company to succeed, all the while recognising the fundamental nature of business uncertainty”²³. And among all business sciences there is no other more thoroughly based on hard data than financial accounting. Accountants have successfully claimed that the only universal language valid in the business world is their language: profits, costs, investments, equity are “hard”, “objective”, delivered by application of an array of specific rules to all businesses.

The two astonishing and gigantic failures of Enron (2002) and Lehman Brothers (2007) posed fundamental questions about not only the efficiency and limitations of financial reporting and audits but also the real value of technical, “hard” skills. In both cases we are talking about highly respected and supposedly successful corporations – stars of corporate America. The former won a string of prizes for being extremely innovative, creating new industry standards and even new industries. In fact it surpassed competitors tremendously in this area – for all its flaws, Enron was an important trading academy for the industry. Eight years after its collapse commodity markets still suffer from a tiny supply of skilled professionals²⁴. Enron's CFO, Jeff Skilling, came from McKinsey, known “the Firm” and recognised as the leading “strategy house”. The financial statements had been audited by the biggest and widely renowned accounting giant: Arthur Andersen. Moreover it would be unjust to state that these people deliberately caused Enron's collapse. After all they all paid a high price too²⁵. The latter earned credit for capital efficiency. In both cases they were believed to be run by highly professional

²² A. D. Chandler, *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of American Industrial Enterprises*, Boston 1962, p. 396.

²³ P. Rosenzweig, *The Halo Effect, and Other Managerial Delusions*, “McKinsey Quarterly” 2007, No. 1, p. 8–9.

²⁴ I. Kamińska, *Market for Traders is Hottest One of All*, “Financial Times” 2010, June 1st.

²⁵ Arthur Andersen lost almost all its customers and had to withdraw from the audit business as a whole. Its consulting branch underwent a thorough reorganisation and came back as Accenture. Several of Enron's top executives were sentenced to prison. At least one of them committed suicide.

management teams fenced by the most advanced combinations of regulations and audits. The financials, as presented in official filings, looked very strong. Months before their defaults anybody questioning credibility of these institutions would have become a good target for satirists. Yet both of them failed miserably.

First of all, they failed to recognise four reasons noted by Henry Mintzberg, which undermined the belief in deliberate strategy formulating based on hard data. These deficiencies were as follows²⁶:

- the hard information was limited in scope and often failed to encompass important non-economic and non-quantitative factors;
- much hard information is too aggregated for effective use in strategy-making;
- much hard information arrives too late to be of use in strategy-making;
- a surprising amount of hard information is unreliable.

At the end it turned out that Enron's operations were composed of a wide array of independent deals, each of them taken on the grounds of some research, but there was no research supporting decision-making and control at the corporate level. The process of creating financials reflected this problem very well. The CFO had no vision as to what to expect from reports in terms of at least a range of values. When they arrived a "dressing" process usually started, aimed at covering big problems. Surprisingly, at the first stage, the biggest negative impact had been coming from operations remotely related to the core business, for example from water deals in India²⁷. Only later, when problems mounted, did core activities follow.

Experienced managers know very well that making a good decision takes much more than data-gathering and analysing. It requires a subjective judgment based on previous experience and intuition. However, these tacit factors may play both in favour of and against corporate interests. If properly used they were a spur to excellence. But if flowed by bad will and desire to accumulate wealth at the quickest pace possible they led to disasters. Therefore the challenge lay in creating a controlling mechanism capable of identifying these two groups properly.

Traditional control and audit relies heavily on exactly the same principles Henry Mintzberg successfully questioned. They recognise two sources of managerial failures:

- either managers failed to collect enough hard data,
- or managers failed to process the collected data properly.

Consequently all decisions based on "tacit" factors must have been questioned on the grounds that they by definition must not be supported by objective evidences.

What, then, was the real reason of Enron and Lehman Bros' bankruptcies? Henry Poulson, a former US Treasury Secretary, noted in an interview given to the Financial Times that "*the key test of accurate financial reporting is trust*"²⁸. But

²⁶ H. Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, New York 1994, p. 257–266.

²⁷ P. C. Fusaro, R. M. Miller, *What Went Wrong at Enron*.

²⁸ "The Financial Times" 2007, May 17, p. 11.

how is this trust to be built if, as shown above, old-fashioned control and audit systems are more and more deficient in the modern world? In their attempt to construct new credible reporting standards Samuel DiPiazza and Robert Eccles²⁹ named the three necessary pillars on which the new trustworthy accounting system should be based. Anyone who expects them to be a new set of sophisticated financial indicators, cold computer-based algorithms and Monte Carlo simulations or something similar is profoundly wrong. DiPiazza and Eccles indicated:

- a spirit of transparency,
- a culture of accountability,
- people of integrity.

Corporations are simply the people who work in and manage them. When they, for various reasons, decide to hide something in practice the list of possible options to do so turns out to be almost unlimited. Nobody else but employees know best what is really going in a company, which decision or change in an environment has an important impact on corporate market value and which not. The growing complexity and volatility of modern business increases the information gap between insiders and outsiders. Therefore nobody, even the smartest supervisory board member or auditor, can quickly recognise an intentional fraud. The real protection must come from an ethos of responsibility, this internal controlling lamp which says independently from all procedures and regulations that a given behaviour is just wrong. Managers with such a lamp are best controlled and audited. Their whole complex business knowledge protects them better against possible misbehaviour or even fraud. Rules, regulations, laws, concepts, structures, processes, best practices and the most progressive use of technology cannot ensure transparency and accountability. This can only come about when it is based on people of integrity. Doing the right thing can never be compromised. Actions that purport to increase a return for shareholders at the expense of integrity ultimately betray both. Pointing out various roots of Enron's collapse Peter Fusaro and Ross Miller came to ethics and noticed: "many students are believed to view ethics as being about not getting caught rather than how to do the right things in the first place".³⁰

Integrity, as mentioned above, is about doing the right things. There is no other existing way to define what is right and what is wrong than turning to values. In his classic book about law John Finnis elaborated profoundly and convincingly on the necessary existence of natural law – commonly recognised values which need not be spelled out in any formal way but enable any practical and congruent execution of all prescribed rules³¹. Consequently only people sharing common values can communicate efficiently beyond formal regulations. And only common values can keep mutual understanding, the prerequisite for trust, existing

²⁹ S. A. Di Piazza, R. G. Eccles, *Building Public Trust. The Future of Corporate Reporting*, New York 2002, p. 3–7.

³⁰ P. C. Fusaro, R. M. Miller, *What Went Wrong at Enron*, p. 148.

³¹ J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, New York 1980.

regardless of any turbulent environment and the increased complexity of business information. So financial reports are not based on values reported – they are based on values shared by those who make reports and those who take actions resulting from analysing financials.

Therefore, to cut a potentially extremely long argument short, the real reason for Enron and Lehman Bros' defaults was the lack of commonly recognised and followed values by their key stakeholders.

Conclusion

The turbulent years 1990-2010 surprisingly showed the importance of values in business as a foundation of keeping corporations on the floor. They possess two key characteristics necessary for operating successfully: on the one hand they are flexible, allowing or even forcing adjustments of products, services and operations to constant changes, yet holding big organisations together around a certain common mission and vision. Organisational structures, formal allocation of power and resources are necessary, but if they are to be efficient it is crucial to develop them as a consequence of application of long-standing values to the current market situation. The decreasing ability of formal power and control systems to deal with risks resulting from a rapidly changing environment showed clearly how much modern corporations are dependent on very simple but extremely powerful factors: the honesty and devotion of their employees and partners. Both of them cannot be ruled out and controlled in any formal way. Honesty has always been based on a commonly shared belief regarding what is “good” and “bad”. People with substantially different views on this issue cannot cooperate differently than with use of formal power because somehow these discrepancies have to be checked within the organisation. A similar requirement is posted by devotion. One can devote part of one's life to something deemed valuable in more than a mere monetary way. When one finds other people with a similar purpose an organisation gets created almost naturally and continues its existence even if the founding generation passes by. When such a unifying purpose is missing all other tools and efforts utilised to keep corporations going bring only temporary results and rarely prevent them from a final break-up or collapse.

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George Weigel

THE END OF THE BERNARDIN ERA

Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin died on November 14, 1996, after a moving and profoundly Christian battle with pancreatic cancer that edified Americans across the political and religious spectrums. Fourteen years after his holy death, the cardinal is remembered primarily for his end-of-life ministry to fellow cancer sufferers, for his chairmanship of the committee that produced the American bishops' 1983 pastoral letter "The Challenge of Peace," and for his advocacy of a "consistent ethic of life." Those achievements were not the whole of the Bernardin story, however.

In his prime, Joseph Bernardin was arguably the most powerful Catholic prelate in American history; he was certainly the most consequential since the heyday of James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When he was in his early forties, Bernardin was the central figure in defining the culture and *modus operandi* of the U.S. bishops' conference. Later, when he became archbishop of Cincinnati and cardinal archbishop of Chicago, Bernardin's concept and style of episcopal ministry set the pattern for hundreds of U.S. bishops. Bernardin was also the undisputed leader of a potent network of prelates that dominated the affairs of the American hierarchy for more than two decades; observers at the time dubbed it the "Bernardin Machine." The machine's horsepower inevitably diminished after the cardinal's death. But it was still thought by many to have enough gas left in the tank to elect Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson (who had begun his episcopal career as one of Bernardin's auxiliaries) as president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) this past November.

It didn't. Bishop Kicanas was defeated for the conference presidency by Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York in a vote that left those bishops who still adhered to the Bernardin model speechless in disbelief. And if their stunned silence following the announcement of the vote did not conclusively demonstrate the point, the reaction to Archbishop Dolan's election in self-identified Catholic progressive circles—which ranged from bitterly disappointed to just plain bitter—confirmed that an era had ended and a corner had been turned in the history of Catholicism in the United States.

The Bernardin Era is over and the Bernardin Machine is no more. Understanding what that era was about, and what that machine embodied, is important for understanding the options that have now been opened for a different pattern of episcopal leadership in the Catholic Church in the United States and a different mode of engagement between the Church and American public life.

The era and the machine reflected the background, the perspective on the U.S. Catholic experience, and the ecclesiastical and political convictions of the man for whom both epoch and network were named.

Joseph Louis Bernardin was born in 1928 in Columbia, South Carolina, a son of Italian immigrants. Columbia was, and is, in the American Bible Belt, so Bernardin grew up in the least Catholic part of the United States—unlike, say, the prelates of his generation who were products of a vibrant Catholic urban culture in the Northeast and Midwest. Some of them may have lacked Bernardin's gracious manners and polish, but they never doubted that Catholics belonged in the United States. By contrast, an alert young man growing up in South Carolina in the years after the Al Smith presidential debacle could not have been unaware of Catholics being profoundly *other*, indeed suspect.

After briefly exploring a career in medicine, Bernardin discerned a call to the priesthood, studied philosophy at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore and theology at the Catholic University of America, and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Charleston in 1952. His ascent up the ecclesiastical ladder was swift, with Father Bernardin becoming Monsignor Bernardin only seven years after his ordination. In fourteen years in Charleston, Bernardin served four different bishops in a variety of administrative posts prior to being chosen auxiliary bishop of Atlanta. In April 1966, Bernardin received his episcopal ordination from the hands of Atlanta's first metropolitan archbishop, Paul Hallinan, the beau ideal of the post-conciliar bishop within the progressive wing of the American Church and one of the grandfathers of the Bernardin Era and the Bernardin Machine. The other grandfather, John Cardinal Dearden of Detroit, plucked Bernardin from Atlanta to become the first general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) in 1968.

Bernardin and Dearden were the two dominant figures in the formative years of what was then a dyad: the NCCB, known internally as "the body," and the United States Catholic Conference (USCC), the NCCB's public-policy arm. Dearden famously took counsel with the Booz Allen Hamilton management-consultant firm

in designing the dyad's structure and procedures. But it was Bernardin who, more than anyone else, defined the structure's bureaucratic ethos, which deferred to "the body's" authority while establishing a conference "process" that gave its bureaucracy significant power and influence in U.S. Catholic affairs. As the conference's voice increased, that of individual bishops tended to decrease.

Bernardin's sustained influence on the conference's approach to public policy was frequently linked to the considerable impact of the man who became one of the NCCB/USCC's most influential staff members: the Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, a Boston priest with a Harvard doctorate who arrived in 1973. Hehir and Bernardin shared an ecclesiology (sympathetic to the progressive wing of the post-conciliar spectrum, but careful not to appear radical); a politics (similarly tilted *à gauche*, but always with an eye toward "the center"); and a determination to put the NCCB and the USCC "in play" in American public life and keep it there. That determination, and the bureaucratic steps taken to give it force, were embodied in Bernardin's style of leadership, which was silken on the outside (for Joseph L. Bernardin was a thoroughly charming man) and quite tough on the inside (for Bernardin knew what he wanted the conference to do, knew how to make the conference do it, and knew how to get anyone who might be an obstacle out of the way).

Once Bernardin had finished his term as conference general secretary, Cardinal Dearden wanted him to have room to "operate," as the Detroit prelate once put it. And that, in Dearden's terms, meant that Bernardin ought to become the head of a large Midwestern diocese, en route to a traditional cardinalatial see. Thus in November 1972 Bernardin was named archbishop of Cincinnati, where he remained as metropolitan for a decade. But Bernardin's work was not limited to the city that specializes in chili with chocolate (a culinary curiosity that may have caused some distress to the archbishop, who knew his way around an Italian kitchen). In 1974, after a three-year interregnum in which Philadelphia's John Cardinal Krol served as NCCB/USCC president, Bernardin became the conference president, commuted regularly between Cincinnati and Washington, and put the Bernardin Machine into high gear. He was succeeded as conference president by five men (John Quinn, John Roach, James Malone, John May, and Daniel Pilarczyk) who were all members of the Bernardin Machine, and whose positions in the U.S. Church had no little to do with Bernardin's service on the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops (which Andrew Greeley once dubbed the "patronage office") and Bernardin's relationship with Belgian archbishop Jean Jadot, the Vatican representative in Washington from 1974 to 1980. In those halcyon days, Bernardin, master of the scene, could, with quiet confidence and no fear of contradiction, tell fellow American clerics that, "No, Jim Malone won't be the next archbishop of Cincinnati, but he will be the next president of the conference."

The Bernardin Machine's approach to governance within the Church was frequently described as "collegial," but those clergy and laity who, in their dioceses or in their interaction with the NCCB/USCC, felt the sting of authoritarian Catholic

liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s would likely demur. For the Machine was quite rigorous in enforcing its ecclesiology and its politics, and it was perfectly capable of withdrawing its favor when bishops once thought loyal club members showed signs of intellectual or ecclesiastical independence. One prominent example was now-retired Cardinal James Francis Stafford. Stafford was thought part of the Bernardin world when he was named a member of the U.S. delegation to the 1980 Synod of Bishops on the family. But he eventually took a different path, in part because of his unhappiness with how Bernardin, also a member of the Synod, quietly tried to maneuver that body's deliberations into a critique of Paul VI's teaching on the morally appropriate way to regulate births in *Humanae Vitae*.

Stafford was surprised at this, but he shouldn't have been. For the Bernardin Era and the style of governance characteristic of Bernardin Machine bishops were deeply influenced by the Roman-brokered "Truce of 1968," an ill-fated attempt to settle the disciplinary situation in the Archdiocese of Washington, where dissent from *Humanae Vitae* was widespread and public. Whatever the Vatican's intentions vis-à-vis the difficult situation in Washington, what was learned from the truce were two lessons that would shape an entire era of U.S. Catholic history. The first lesson was that the Holy See would retreat from rigorously enforcing doctrinal discipline if it could be persuaded of the danger of schism. The second lesson was that American bishops were ill advised to go out on a public limb in defense of Catholic teaching (as Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle of Washington had done by disciplining priests who had publicly rejected *Humanae Vitae*), for that could result in the Holy See sawing off the limb and leaving the bishop in question in a bad way.

Keeping peace within dioceses in the wake of the post-*Humanae Vitae* chaos thus became one of the prime imperatives of bishops adhering to the Bernardin model, even if that meant tolerating a measure of what Father Charles Curran liked to call "faithful dissent." Bishops who condoned "faithful dissent" were unlikely to be vigorous in enforcing catechetical standards or liturgical discipline. Their approach to problems of clerical indiscipline and malfeasance also helped shape the ecclesiastical culture in which bishops turned to psychology rather than moral and sacramental theology in dealing with cases of the sexual abuse of the young.

As for its interaction with American public life, the Bernardin Machine was constructed at a moment when few could imagine a former Hollywood B-movie actor as president of the United States and a Democratic majority seemed locked in place on Capitol Hill. Thus the USCC in its first decades came to be regarded in Washington as an adjunct of the Democratic majority in the Congress, even as the bishops took some tentative steps into the murky worlds of radical activism by creating the Campaign for Human Development, which began to support programs of community organizing modeled on or promoted by Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation.

Yet for all their occasional playing with Alinskyite fire, the politics of the bishops' conference during the Bernardin Era were more reflective of a determina-

tion to position the Catholic Church as part of a liberal vital center than they were of the politics of the American hard left. A fine example of Bernardin's cast of mind and method in moving the bishops to address contested issues this way may be found in his chairmanship of the special NCCB committee charged with drafting a national pastoral letter on war and peace after the unthinkable had happened, the B-movie actor was in residence at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, and fears of a Reagan-initiated nuclear war were considered quite rational in U.S. Catholic leadership, intellectual, and activist circles.

Archbishop Bernardin's shaping of the war/peace committee was a classic expression of his ecclesial and political style. As for the bishop-members of the committee, get the pacifist (Thomas Gumbleton) and the former military chaplain (John J. O'Connor) aboard in order to define the "extremes," then appoint two other bishops who could be counted on to follow the lead of Bernardin and the committee's chief staffer, Father Hehir, in defining the liberal "consensus." That was clever, if not terribly original, bureaucratic maneuvering. What was more telling was Bernardin's instruction to the committee members at the beginning of their work: namely, that the one policy option they would *not* consider was unilateral nuclear disarmament. For that option, adopted, would brand the bishops as cranks who would no longer be "in play" in the public-policy debate.

Yet, one wanted to ask at the time (and one wants to ask now), why not? If the bishops' committee on war and peace was an ecclesial body that would begin with moral theology and work its way to public policy from there, surely every policy option ought to have been on the table. Despite his insistence that the bishops were approaching this complex set of problems as "pastors and teachers" (a mantra of the bishops' conference), Bernardin's preemptive exclusion of the unilateralist option made clear that this was an exercise in which political criteria of viability would play a considerable role.

In the event, and despite all efforts to stay "in play," "The Challenge of Peace" quickly became a dead letter. Its recommendations on arms control were over-run by the debate inaugurated by the Reagan administration's Strategic Defense Initiative, as its assumption of the relative permanence of the Cold War became moot after the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989–1991. "The Challenge of Peace" sought to make a contribution to easing the undoubted dangers of the Cold War. By paying minimal attention to the potential of human rights activism in changing the internal political dynamics of the Soviet bloc, however, the bishops' letter missed what turned out to be the key, not simply to managing the superpower competition, but to freedom's victory over tyranny. (In his own reading of the undercurrents of history in the 1980s, Bernardin took a conventional liberal view. After a fellow guest at a dinner party in 1991 had spoken of John Paul II's pivotal role in the collapse of European communism, Bernardin, asked for his opinion, said that he thought Mikhail Gorbachev had been the key figure.)

Even during the years of its greatest influence, when Bernardin appeared on the cover of *Time* and his allies seemed fully in control of the bishops' conference, the Bernardin Machine was not omnipotent. Bernardin and those of his cast of mind seem not to have considered the possibility that, post-Paul VI, the College of Cardinals in 1978 would anticipate the American electorate in 1980 and do the unthinkable: elect a fifty-eight-year-old Pole with a sharp mind, a charismatic personality, and a firm will as bishop of Rome. It took some time for the effects of this dramatic change in the Vatican to be felt. Thus John Paul II, who seems to have had some doubts about the matter (perhaps because of that 1980 Synod on the family), nonetheless acceded to the wishes of the Bernardin-dominated U.S. hierarchy by appointing Archbishop Bernardin as archbishop of Chicago in 1982 and nominating him to the College of Cardinals in 1983.

But if John Paul was willing to have Joseph Bernardin in Chicago and in the College of Cardinals, he was not willing to have one of Bernardin's protégés (and his former deputy at the bishops' conference), Thomas C. Kelly, O.P., as archbishop of New York after Terence Cardinal Cooke died in 1983. Kelly seems to have expected the appointment; he reportedly remarked to fellow bishops at Cooke's funeral that St. Patrick's Cathedral would "take some getting used to." But in a surprise at least as great as the recent Dolan/Kicanas election, the post instead went to John J. O'Connor after John Paul II rejected the Bernardinian terna, or list of possible nominees, submitted by the Congregation for Bishops. (John Paul asked the secretary of the congregation, the Brazilian Dominican Lucas Moreira Neves, whether he was happy with the terna, on which Kelly's name presumably appeared in first place; Moreira Neves said he was not and pulled out the O'Connor file.)

O'Connor's staunch and unyielding pro-life activism as archbishop of New York was crucial in keeping that issue alive at a moment when the pro-life energies of the American episcopate showed some signs of flagging. In doing so, O'Connor, who had very little use for bishops' conference politics, set in place one of the markers that would eventually help displace the Bernardin approach to the Catholic Church's interaction with the U.S. public-policy debate. After being named a cardinal in 1985, O'Connor's work as a member of the Vatican Congregation for Bishops was also important in putting brakes on the power of the Bernardin Machine to reproduce itself episcopally.

A further sign that the ecclesiology and leadership style of the machine would not go uncontested during John Paul II's pontificate came in 1985, when the pope summoned an Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to mark the twentieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council and to consider the problems the Church had experienced in implementing the Council's teaching. The pre-Synod period was dominated by debate over a book-length interview with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, which was sharply critical of the kind of implementation of the Council that Bernardin and his allies favored (and led). In retrospect, though, the turning point that the 1985 Synod re-

presented for the Bernardin Machine and the Bernardin Era only came into focus in a press conference marking the Synod's conclusion.

The Synod Fathers had recommended to the pope that a new catechism be written. Asked by a reporter at the post-Synod press conference what he thought of that, Bishop James Malone, then the NCCB president and very much Cardinal Bernardin's ally, said that the reporter needn't worry, as neither one of them would live long enough to see any such catechism published. Seven years later, John Paul II issued the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which gave lay people throughout the Church an instrument with which to contest "faithful dissent," and which began a slow but steady catechetical revolution in which the adventure of orthodoxy would be stressed.

World Youth Day 1993 in Denver was another moment when a prescient observer might have sensed an ebbing in the Bernardin Machine's power. John Paul was eager to hold a World Youth Day in the United States; the bishops' conference and its Washington staff, which still reflected the default positions Bernardin had implanted during his years as general secretary and conference president, were dubious, to put it gently. But the pope insisted, so the conference proposed holding World Youth Day in either Buffalo (to take advantage of that city's proximity to Canada) or Chicago (Bernardin's base). John Paul, however, was intrigued by the idea of bringing World Youth Day to Denver, a self-consciously secular city where Archbishop J. Francis Stafford was working vigorously, and not without opposition, to bring the archdiocese of Denver out of the Bernardin Era. The Pope won the argument; World Youth Day 1993 in Denver was a tremendous success; and a marker was put down—the gospel without apology could be proclaimed with effect in a cultural environment that regarded the most challenging of gospel demands as bizarre. (Eleven years later, John Paul II was still chortling over his coup. Looking at photos of Rocky Mountain National Park outside Denver, the aged and crippled pontiff smiled, stabbed the photo album with his index finger, and said, "Denver! World Youth Day 1993. The American bishops said it couldn't be done. I proved them wrong!")

In the last decade and a half of his life, Bernardin continued to advance a distinctive understanding of Catholicism's engagement with American politics. Even as work on "The Challenge of Peace" was being completed, the cardinal began promoting the concept of a "consistent ethic of life," which linked issues such as abortion, capital punishment, and arms control in what was quickly styled the "seamless garment." As articulated by Bernardin, the "consistent ethic" rooted itself in the foundational Catholic social-ethical principle of the dignity of the human person and then suggested a moral symmetry between the defense of unborn life in the womb, the rejection of the death penalty, and resistance to the rearmament programs of the Reagan administration. Cardinal Bernardin was a committed pro-lifer; charges that he developed the "consistent ethic" approach in order to give cover to liberal (and pro-choice) Catholic legislators who were "good on capital punish-

ment and nuclear weapons” were false. Intentions aside, however, the “consistent ethic” did help buttress the Bernardin Machine’s “in play” approach to the Catholic Church and public policy, which inevitably blunted criticism of such determinedly pro-abortion Catholic politicians as Edward M. Kennedy and Robert F. Drinan.

Shortly before his death in 1996, Bernardin initiated the “Catholic Common Ground Initiative,” an ongoing forum for fostering conversation across the spectrum of what had become, in the Clinton years, an increasingly polarized U.S. Church—a polarization that now seems, in retrospect, to reflect the further decline of the Bernardin Machine and the beginnings of an alternative correlation of forces within the American hierarchy. Because the Initiative intended to include as full participants known dissenters from settled Catholic teaching, it was publicly criticized by former Washington archbishop William Cardinal Baum and James Cardinal Hickey, then the incumbent in the nation’s capital, for promoting a false irenicism that tacitly accepted the notion of “faithful dissent.” Bernardin died before the Initiative could achieve any significant critical mass; perhaps any such outcome was unlikely, given the changing theological contours of the U.S. Catholic scene in general and the American episcopate in specific. In any case, it was unlikely that “common ground” could be found with those dissenters who were in a state of psychological, if not canonical, schism, imagining themselves (as they did) the true Church of Vatican II. The Initiative nonetheless testified to Bernardin’s enduring conviction that the liberal/progressive consensus that informed the Bernardin Era remained at the fifty-yard line of the U.S. Catholic playing field.

Three years after Cardinal Bernardin launched the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, his successor as archbishop of Chicago, Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I., redefined that playing field conceptually, declaring the liberal Catholic project dead in an October 1999 lecture to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of *Commonweal*. Cardinal George’s remarks, which stressed a certain liberal Catholic surrender to the ambient culture, brought into synthesis several trends that had been underway in U.S. Catholicism throughout the John Paul II years, trends that ultimately undermined the Bernardin Machine and that would ultimately draw the curtain on the Bernardin Era.

One of these trends, which became a hallmark of Cardinal George’s own presidency of the bishops’ conference from 2007 to 2010, was an increased concern among bishops, clergy, and engaged laity about Catholic identity that touched issues as various as catechetics, liturgy, health care, and the relationship of Catholic institutions of higher learning to the local church and its bishop. A second trend was the emergence of pro-life activism as *the* cultural marker of serious Catholicism in America. That trend, it should be noted, was itself accelerated by the U.S. bishops’ 1998 statement, “Living the Gospel of Life,” which effectively replaced the “consistent ethic”/“seamless garment” metaphors with a new image: the “foundations of the house of freedom,” in which the defense of innocent human life from conception until natural death was understood to be fundamental, both theologically and

in terms of sound democratic theory, in a way that other public-policy questions engaging American Catholic attention were not. The third trend, most striking on campuses, was a willingness to reconsider, and in some instances enthusiastically embrace, the fullness of the Catholic ethic of human love, often by reference to John Paul II's Theology of the Body.

When John Paul II sent Archbishop Pio Laghi to Washington as apostolic delegate in 1980, the pope ticked off on one hand his concerns about the Church in the United States. He was worried about the effectiveness of the Church's evangelical mission, including the ways in which the sacraments were celebrated and religious education was conducted; he had serious reservations about the state of consecrated religious life in monasteries and convents; he thought priestly formation in seminaries needed to be tightened up; and he wanted a new approach to the appointment of bishops. The last amounted to a tacit instruction to dismantle the Bernardin Machine. It was an unlikely assignment for Laghi, who shared much of Joseph Bernardin's ecclesiastical sensibility; and while Laghi's arrival on Massachusetts Avenue did begin to blunt the capacity of the Bernardin Machine to reproduce itself by shaping the episcopal appointment process, it was the pontificate of John Paul II as a whole that proved the ultimate dismantler of the powerful ecclesiastical machine that Bernardin had built and operated with considerable skill.

John Paul II embodied a heroic model of the priesthood, and a heroic exercise of the office of bishop, that had a profound effect, over-two-and-a-half decades, on the Catholic priesthood and episcopate in the United States. The men who elected Timothy Dolan as USCCB president in November 2010 were men deeply influenced by the John Paul II model, as they were men intellectually formed by the Polish pope's dynamic magisterium on questions ranging from the Catholic sexual ethic to Catholic social doctrine. They understood, in a way that those who embodied the Bernardin Era did not quite seem to grasp, that it was important for the Catholic Church to be able to give a comprehensive, coherent, and compelling account of its faith, hope, and love in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, just as they understood that the reaffirmation of classic Catholic moral theology in *Veritatis Splendor* was an important weapon in the war against what John Paul II's successor called the "dictatorship of relativism."

And they were prepared to challenge the culture—and American politics—to rediscover the public-policy implications of America's founding commitment to self-evident moral truths; they were not interested, in other words, in finding an agreeable fifty-yard line. They had learned from John Paul II and the Revolution of 1989 in east central Europe that seemingly invincible forces could be defeated, and they were determined to defeat, not find an accommodation with, the cultural forces that, in their judgment, were at war with the gospel even as they were eroding the fabric of American life.

There was paradox here. Joseph Bernardin, growing up in that part of America where Catholics were most suspect, defined a style of engagement with American public life that put great stress on remaining “in play.” The bishops who ultimately brought an end to the Bernardin Machine and the Bernardin Era grew up comfortably Catholic and comfortably American—and then came to understand that their Catholicism could require them to be forthrightly countercultural in dealing with American culture and politics. The paradox underscored that a sea change had taken place, the effects of which were likely to be felt for generations.

The ecclesiastical sensibility that characterized the Bernardin Era can still be discerned in several parts of the complex reality that is the Catholic Church in the United States. That sensibility is perhaps most palpably felt in Boston, where Father Hehir has wielded considerable influence over archdiocesan affairs in recent years and has done so according to the Bernardin model. The Bernardin ethos is also felt within the bishops’ conference bureaucracy, as it is within diocesan bureaucracies. But if the Bernardin Era is indeed over, one should expect to see some continuing shifts of default position, not least within the bishops’ conference.

The conference might, for example, reexamine its habit of having a comment on virtually every contested issue in American public life. The late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus used to say that, when the Church is not obliged to speak, the Church is obliged not to speak; that is, when the issue at hand does not touch a fundamental moral truth that the Church is obliged to articulate vigorously in the public-policy debate, the Church’s pastors ought to leave the prudential application of principle to the laity who, according to Vatican II, are the principal evangelizers of culture, politics, and the economy. The USCCB’s habit of trying to articulate a Catholic response to a very broad range of public-policy issues undercuts this responsibility of the laity; it also tends to flatten out the bishops’ witness so that all issues become equal, which they manifestly are not.

In addition, the conference might reexamine its reliance on domestic policy default positions that were set as long ago as 1919, when the National Catholic War Council (which begat the National Catholic Welfare Conference, which begat the NCCB/USCC dyad, which begat today’s USCCB) issued the Bishops Program of Social Reconstruction. Echoes of that program, filtered through the liberal-consensus politics of the Bernardin Era, could be heard in the 2009 healthcare debate, with the bishops continually stressing the moral imperative of universal health care. That moral imperative exists; but it is not at all clear that meeting it requires a first, indeed primary, recourse to governmental means. Or at least that is what the core Catholic social–ethical principal of subsidiarity, with its skepticism about concentrations of governmental power, would suggest.

Putting that comprehensive vision—universality *and* subsidiarity—into play in the new healthcare debate that will unfold in the wake of Obamacare and the 2010 midterm elections would be a genuine service to the country, and a distinctively Catholic service. Catholics bring a cluster of concerns to the table of the heal-

thecare debate: They bring concerns about the unborn, the elderly, and the severely handicapped; they bring concerns for the poor and their empowerment; they bring concerns for maintaining a healthy pluralism in our national life through the principle of subsidiarity and the use of private-sector mechanisms for solving social problems. It would be a real sign of movement beyond the public-policy orientation of the Bernardin Era if that concern for linking universality to subsidiarity (which a few bishops began to articulate in 2009) were to achieve a higher prominence in the bishops' address to these issues, even as the USCCB continues to press hard on the pro-life agenda and the protection of the conscience rights of Catholic medical professionals.

Then there is the question of Catholic identity. Throughout his three-year presidency of the USCCB, Francis Cardinal George steered the conference toward a more intense focus on issues of Catholic identity as they touched on the work of Catholic colleges and universities, Catholic health care institutions, Catholic professional associations, and Catholic publications. Cardinal George's sense of urgency on these questions was primarily *ad intra*: It was important, he believed, for the bishops to take more seriously their roles as stewards of the integrity of Catholic identity.

But that internal concern also bore on a public matter the cardinal discussed in an important lecture in February 2010 at Brigham Young University: the tendency in some quarters to privatize religious freedom, reducing that first of human rights to a matter of personal conviction and worship. As aggressive secularists and their allies in government continue their efforts to drive religious communities and religiously grounded moral argument to the margins of the public-policy debate, the post-Bernardin bishops' conference will be required to be ever more vigilant in defending the rights of individual Catholics and the Church as a body to work within the democratic process according to religiously informed moral convictions.

Finally, the new era opening up at the USCCB might be the occasion to revisit one of the few enduring effects of "The Challenge of Peace," namely, its contribution to confused Catholic thinking about the intellectual architecture and purposes of the just war tradition. The country as a whole remains seriously disabled in its capacity to apply the canons of classic just war reasoning to the new world disorder; thus a fresh Catholic discussion of how Christians apply moral principles to world affairs would be an important public service.

The Bernardin Era was one of institutional maintenance and bureaucratic expansion in which a liberal consensus dominated both the internal life of the Church and the Church's address to public policy. It is not self-evidently clear what the post-Bernardin Era, just beginning, will turn out to be. But if the Church's ordained leaders look to John Paul II as their model, they will increasingly embody an evangelical Catholicism that is unafraid to be countercultural in its engagement with public life, even as it stresses the imperative of radical conversion to discipleship and friendship with Jesus Christ as the *raison d'être* of the Church's existence.

If they do so, these new-era bishops will help define a Catholicism in America in which the liberal/conservative taxonomy of the past two generations of Catholic life will crumble into irrelevance.

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Catherine H. Zuckert

MUSINGS ON MORTALITY

Death is a pervasive fact of human existence that both unites and divides us. The rational capacity that distinguishes human beings from other animals allows us to know—in a way more instinctively regulated creatures apparently do not, that we are going to die—and thus to take measure to forestall the inevitable. Many more human beings now live, on the average, much longer, than they did in the past—and yet, we still know, even better, if possible, that we are all going to die eventually, later if not sooner. The question thus arises, how do we live in the face of that fact—and, how should we?

The fact of human death is, indeed, rather peculiar, if not singular. We all know that all human beings are going to die—that's why we also call ourselves "mortals." The experience thus seems to be as general (and involuntary) as breathing. Everyone is going to die; everyone in the past has died. And yet, no one really knows what death is—or is like, because no one comes back, so to speak, to tell us. There is no one, therefore, truly to empathize, to sympathize with, or to share the experience of someone who is dying. No one else has the relevant experience or really knows what the dying person is going through. Although we all die—it is a universal fact of life on earth—Ernest Hemingway thus declared, we all die alone. One, if not the most general experience of living things thus also appears to be the most singular.

Religious people tend to answer the question, how do we live in the face of death, by orienting themselves by what they believe they know about the afterlife—salvation, eternal life, joy, rewards, damnation, punishment or nirvana. Because we cannot know on the basis of our own natural faculties, what, if anything

follows death, however, those who seek—or simply find it necessary in the absence of faith or grace—to direct their lives solely on the basis of reason think about our inevitable death not in terms of what may or may not come after. We do not and cannot know that. Such people, philosophers first and foremost, think about death by asking, how does human foreknowledge of the inevitable, inescapable end of our earthly existence affect our life or existence here and now? How should it?

I propose to reflect—or muse—on the two, in many ways diametrically opposed answers given to these questions at the beginning—and at the purported end—of the history of philosophy in the West. Those answers were given, in the first place, by Plato, and in the second, by Martin Heidegger. I begin, perhaps counter-intuitively, with the end—or, at least the purported in end—in the thought of Martin Heidegger.

Heidegger is infamous because of his Nazi connections. He was never a racist or an anti-Semite of the kind to be found at party headquarters, but he was a member of the party and spoke long after the defeat of Germany in World War II of “the essential truth of National Socialism.” Despite the death camps, Heidegger’s politics are not nearly as relevant to our “musings” about mortality as his role in founding what came to be called “existentialism.” Jean Paul Sartre popularized “existential angst” after the war, but he learned about “existential angst” and its significance before the war from Heidegger.

What then is—or did Heidegger argue was—the significance of “existential angst”? In *Being and Time* Heidegger argued, human beings are not the isolated “individuals,” “consciousnesses,” or autonomous subjects they had been said to be in earlier modern philosophy—be that Cartesian idealism, Lockean empiricism or Kantian critique. On the contrary, Heidegger observed, human existence or “dasein” involves not merely the awareness, but the fact of living in a “world,” that is, in the midst of a set of “things” which are related to each other as well as to us, primarily, but not exclusively in terms of their use, as well as, even more importantly, other people, from whom we learn about ourselves as well as about the world, first and foremost by learning a language. Precisely because we learn to think about ourselves, our lives, and our surroundings, primarily in terms or words taken from others, however, there is something external, acquired, conventional or, in Heidegger’s own terms “inauthentic” about the self-understanding we develop—perhaps I should say absorb—in this way. But, Heidegger also pointed out, individuals can come to a better, less conventional, less externally imposed or socially conformist understanding of themselves, if they reflect on the meaning and basis of a certain mood into which most, if not all of us inexplicably fall upon occasion. That mood is anxiety or, in German, *angst*. It is properly called “existential angst,” because it turns out to be, at bottom, not merely anxiety about our existence, but anxiety that is a necessary part or aspect of our existence. Heidegger explains: Anxiety or angst is not the same as fear. Fear has a specific object, e.g., the fear of violent death, as in Hobbes, or the fear of flying (which is obviously related, but not the same as

fear of death), fear of humiliation or fear of pain. Anxiety has no specific object; it is “uncanny” or strange and certainly uncomfortable, precisely because it does not appear to have a discernible, specific cause. Why then do we feel anxious—if there is no particular cause? If human beings reflect on the reason why we become anxious—for no specific reason or cause, in the absence of any determined threat to our existence or of pain—Heidegger suggests, we come to see something very important and true about our existence. It is not necessary. We could—people do, in fact—die unexpectedly and inexplicably, from natural as well as accidental causes, at any moment. A car crash could crash into us, a ceiling fall, we could trip and hit our head on the concrete sidewalk, and so on. Our generalized anxiety is a reflection of the fundamentally, truly uncertain character of our existence. The non-necessary character of our existence does not lie merely in the fact that our existence can end, unexpectedly at any moment, moreover. Once we become aware, as we usually are not aware, that our life or existence is not necessary, we also become aware, if we analyze the reasons why we continue to live, that we continue to live solely as a matter of our own choice. We do not have to—even if most of the time we are not aware of, or do not choose to think about the non-necessity of our own existence. We could choose not to live. Human beings can (and, unfortunately, at our time and place a regrettable number of young people do) choose to commit suicide. Even short of committing suicide, however, we recognize that we would slowly expire, if we did not act positively and intentionally—by eating, for example—to prolong our existence. Such actions do not guarantee that we will continue to live, of course. We cannot remove the fundamental uncertainty of or in our lives merely by acting so as to preserve them. We choose, indeed, to act to preserve them—in the face of this fundamental uncertainty. But, Heidegger emphasizes, if we analyze the causes of the generalized, indeterminate anxiety we sometimes feel, we will recognize not merely that our existence is uncertain, even precarious. If we face the ever-present possibility of our own death, instead of running away from this inescapable truth, by seeking security—in God, country or the acquisition of wealth—we will see and be able to affirm our own existence as a result of our own free choice. Our lives are not simply or fundamentally necessary, externally determined or “fated.” We can and must take responsibility for ourselves.

To say that our life or existence is the result of our own choice is NOT to say that we have the ability to choose whatever way of life we might imagine or like. Heidegger is NOT a liberal—classical or other. The life we choose to live—or not—is the life into which we have been thrown—born from parents we did not choose into circumstances, time and place, over which we had no control, and with respect to time, at least, that we cannot change. We choose to continue living, as who we are, not merely in the face of, but into an uncertain future. Our existence will, therefore, inevitably change, but we will not be able to control the way or direction of the change either. The existence we choose and affirm is our own particular, historically determined existence, but it is not simply ours as individuals. As you

may recall, I began by emphasizing Heidegger's critique of modern individualism or subjectivism. The life we discover is not necessary, but persists, consciously or unconsciously, because we choose it, is life in a "world" of useful things we share with other people who speak the same language and thus share the same understanding of their own place, life and times. In his early works, Heidegger argued that the choice, not merely to live, but to project one's own existence into the unknown and hence necessarily uncertain future required "resolution" and courage. Later, he emphasized not only the acceptance or choice, but also the cherishing of our lives, and thus of all the things that make up the world in which we find ourselves. Since nothing in this world necessarily exists, it continues to exist only and so long as we care for it. Recognizing the essentially transitory character of all worldly existence does not necessarily produce dejection, despair, hopelessness or melancholy. On the contrary, a true confrontation with the fact of the ever-present possibility of our inescapable death shows us that our continued existence is a product of our own free choice. It thus allows us not merely to affirm our existence as freely chosen but to understand that we can perpetuate this existence, our world, only by caring for it. It does not occur or persist on its own. Facing the necessity of death thus heightens our appreciation of life—even if that appreciation and care is momentary, even if we "fall" back into our ordinary, everyday fears of losing everything.

There is something appealing, I think, about the notion that we ought to cherish everything, recognizing that nothing will continue to exist if we do not care for it. This notion has or at least may have something in common with the belief that we ought to respect and care for everything in the world, because it is God's creation. There is, however, a fundamental difference. In Heidegger the 'care' is explicitly based on the recognition that there is nothing eternal. What has been called the "radical historicism" of Heidegger, that is, the contention that there is nothing eternal, including pre-eminently this and all other truth, as well as the problematic political associations, if not consequences, strictly speaking, of Heidegger's thought—the resolute self-assertion of nation as well as university he called for early on, and the apparent passivity of "Gelassenheit," or "letting things be" in his more poetic later works—should make us look for an alternative understanding of the significance of the distinctively human foresight into the fact of our impending death. We find such an alternative, I shall argue, at the beginning of the history of philosophy which Heidegger proclaims has ended in the works of Plato.

Unlike Heidegger—and, indeed, virtually all other philosophers, Plato did not write arguments, essays or books in his own name. Instead, he composed "dialogues" which are prose dramas; they have characters who speak to each other as well as settings and even, one might say, plots—although the action is usually not very dramatic. Because the interlocutors often respond to the leading speaker, usually Socrates, by saying, yes, no, so it seems, certainly, or probably, some impatient readers have gone so far as to declare that the dialogues are boring. What didn't Plato just come out and say what was on his mind? Why did he force his readers to

listen to an older, more philosophical character—usually named Socrates—lead or refute others? I won't be trying to answer that particular question in this brief essay, although it is a very important one. Instead, I will simply remind you that in most of his dialogues Plato shows a man named Socrates questioning others. In the most famous and arguably most dramatic of those dialogues Plato reports what Socrates said—first when he was on trial for his life and convicted of a capital crime, then when he was offered and refused an opportunity to escape, and finally on the day he knew that he was going to die. Upon another occasion I would contend, rather strongly, that it would be a mistake to regard these dialogues merely as historical reports. Here I will content myself merely with observing that, whether these accounts are strictly historical or partially literary invention, Plato pretty clearly presents Socrates' conduct in the face of his certain death as exemplary. The question is, exemplary of what?

In the *Apology* Socrates begins his defense speech by emphasizing his own inexperience speaking in court before a large group of people. He is making the speech, he says, because it is required by law. He does not expect to be able to convince the jurors of his innocence and to vote to acquit him, because there is a widespread prejudice against philosophy that has been applied, if inaccurately and unjustly to him. In the *Apology* Socrates thus emphasizes, he was a law-abiding citizen who did not take part in public debates or politics as it is usually understood, because he thought it would be dangerous. There is one exception to his law-abidingness, however. *If*, and he emphasizes the conditional, *if* the Athenians were to decide to let him go, if they voted not to convict and punish, on the condition that Socrates cease engaging in his philosophical conversations, he would not obey them. He would obey the god of Delphi, who, Socrates believes, has ordered him to interrogate and refute other human beings who claim to have knowledge of the most important things—namely, what is noble and good.

In claiming to serve the god as he had served the city of Athens in the military at the risk of his own life, Socrates might thus appear to exemplify the virtue of courage. At the very least, his defense reminds us, the possibility of human beings possessing and displaying this virtue depends upon our foreknowledge of our death. If we did not know that we can and will die, we would not be able to act “courageously” in the face of death. The significance of our foreknowledge of our death, in this case, would not be that it enables us to see or understand our life as chosen, therefore, but that it enables us to rise above our instinctive fear and thus to live virtuous or well.

In the *Apology* Socrates undermines himself as an epitome of courage, however, not merely by somewhat incongruously comparing himself, a seventy year old man who can expect to die of natural causes soon in any case, to the young hero Achilles. Socrates did serve in the Athenian army, but Socrates is not really anyone's image of a war hero. Socrates undermines his own claim to exemplify courage in the face of death—at least as courage is ordinarily understood—by declaring

that fearing death involves a claim to know what human beings do not know, i.e., that death is something bad. Socrates does not fear death, because he knows that he does not know whether death is something good or bad. It might be little different from a long sleep. But, if death is not to be feared, the person who risks losing his life by continuing to do what he is convinced is good and right no longer appears to be so courageous or heroic. Indeed, we might ask whether he is virtuous—or merely stubborn? We return to the question of what exactly is exemplary about Socrates.

In the defense speech Socrates gives to the Athenian jury he claims that he has been not only courageous but also just in dedicating his life to philosophy. Rather than accumulating wealth or taking care of his own family, Socrates has spent all his time and effort going around, like a gadfly, asking his fellow citizens why they fear death, and seek to enhance their reputations and wealth, rather than caring about the good of their souls by seeking truth and intelligence. As a result, he reminds the jury, he lives in 10,000-fold poverty. We later readers of Plato know, however, that Socrates did not persuade his fellow citizens that he was acting in the public interest and so justly as well as courageously and piously. They believed that the questions he posed to others had shown that he did not believe in the gods of the city, and that the example he had set for the young people who listened to him question their elders had corrupted the young as well.

Instead of pleading with the jury to pity him, an old man, and his family, who would be left destitute if he were convicted and killed, at the end of his defense Socrates resolutely declares that he will not act the way most of the countrymen do—by pleading for mercy. To ask the jury to vote on the basis of compassion rather than on the basis of what they think is just and right would be to corrupt them. He denies that he corrupts others, as charged. But the criticism of his countrymen implicit in the contrast Socrates draws at the end of his defense between their behavior when on trial and his—as well as his claims in the course of the speech to be the wisest and most pious, as well as the most just and courageous, man in Athens—have led some readers to conclude that Socrates provoked the jury into voting to convict by speaking so hubristically.

Whether hubristic or not, the contrast Socrates draws between his own behavior and that of his fellows should remind us of the fact we noticed earlier. Human beings would not be able to be virtuous or to display their virtue, if they did not know that there was a serious cost. In Plato's *Apology of Socrates* we thus see a version of the insight often attributed to the hero of the *Odyssey* after he visits Hades. Human life acquires its significance, its seriousness, or its meaning from our knowledge of our own mortality. If we were immortal, i.e., undying, like the gods of Olympus, we might suffer humiliation or even pain, for a time, but that negative feeling would persist only a moment—relatively speaking—in an eternal existence. Socrates may not have thought it was rational to fear death, but he leads those of us who learn about his life and death to take him—and what he did—seriously, precisely because he was willing to risk his life to maintain its goodness,

by insisting, not merely in effect but explicitly, that life is not worth living, if one cannot continue to philosophize.

If that were the “lesson,” so to speak, of Plato’s depiction of the trial and death of Socrates, Plato’s understanding of the significance of human knowledge of our own mortality would be, ironically, rather close to Heidegger’s. Confronted by the possibility of his own death, Socrates affirms the goodness of his own life in the face of future uncertainty. But that is not the lesson—or, perhaps I should say, not the only lesson—of the three dialogues—which being three look rather like a Greek tragedy—in which Plato presents the trial and death of Socrates.

Convinced that he had not done anything bad, Socrates refused, when given the opportunity, to propose anything he considered bad as an alternative to death. In particular, he refused to propose exile as an alternative to the death penalty, even though he suspected that the jury would have allowed him simply to leave Athens and thus to have continued living, and perhaps even philosophizing, elsewhere. “Noble indeed would life be for me,” Socrates declared, for “a human being of my age, to go into exile and to live exchanging one city for another, always being driven out! For I know well that wherever I go, the young will listen to me when I speak, just as they do here. And if I drive them away, they themselves will drive me out by persuading their elders. But if I do not drive them away, their fathers and families will drive me out” (37d-e).

In his refusal to propose exile, as in the third speech he gives after the Athenians vote to impose the death penalty, Socrates emphasizes the fact that he is seventy years old. The Athenians are not inflicting something on him that he will not suffer without their intervention very soon. They will acquire the opprobrium of having killed a wise man, he predicts. He, on the other hand, may experience something good.

Once again Socrates emphasizes the theme or conclusion with which I began: we all have to die, but no one knows what, if anything happens to human beings afterwards. Like Heidegger, Socrates emphasizes the fundamental uncertainty of human existence. The foundations—the causes and the effects and the end—of individual human lives are all unknown. The experience of death may amount merely to a cessation of consciousness; it may, in other words, be like a long, unending sleep. Perhaps, even better, we or our souls will continue to live on. If so, Socrates observes, he will be able to continue conversing the way he has while living with even more famous and potentially interesting interlocutors—like Homer and Hesiod, Palamedes or Ajax, Odysseus or Sisyphus. In any case, at the end of his defense Socrates reiterates what he reported in his first speech he had regularly told his fellow citizens. What is important is to stop fearing death. That is irrational. We all have to die in the end. What is important is to live well, and living well entails seeking the truth—about what is truly good and noble in human existence—and so acquiring intelligence. Like Heidegger, Socrates thus emphasizes, human existence involves an important choice. The choice is not merely whether to continue living

as we have consciously in the face of an uncertain future, however, or to expire. We have a choice, both as individuals and as peoples, of how to live. What we need most, therefore, is to discover what form of life is best.

O.K. we might respond to Socrates. Life is better if we don't fear death. Towards proverbially die a thousand times. But how exactly can or do human beings overcome what appears to be an instinctive reaction of aversion to, if not fear of, the unknown--if not of death per se? Socrates' answer to that question appears, in the first place, to be that we must recognize and accept death as a natural necessity. It is going to happen; it is inescapable. It is foolish to deny the plain fact. The question is how we live in the face of it, and the answer to that question is that we need to live so well that we can die looking back at our life with satisfaction. My life can't last forever, but is and was good so long as it lasted. The question, then, of course, is what makes it good?

The jury won't believe him, Socrates observes, when he tells them that the unexamined life is not worth living. Those of us who have had an opportunity—for centuries--to read and re-read the Platonic dialogues that depict Socrates' conversations with others can understand, however, why the search for ever more honor or wealth or life at any cost does not produce or result in lasting satisfaction. There is, indeed, nothing that mortals per se can achieve that is not itself mortal. Our families or progeny, our property, our cities, all of our "works" may last longer than we do as individuals, but they all perish in the end. Most of the things most human beings, like most of the Athenians, strive for, most of the time **are** essentially transitory and thus have to be repeated or reinstated, if they are to last. What, then, should we reaffirm and at least try to repeat? Socrates' answer to that question is that conversations of the kind in which he engaged, about virtue and the like, are a very great good for human beings. By repeating this claim Socrates says his audience won't believe Plato directs us, his readers, to investigate that claim. Why? What makes a life of philosophy good? It is not the product or result of the conversations, we note, that is affirmed. It is the goodness of the process, the communication and/or the activity itself that Socrates affirms and wants to see perpetuated. It is not the philosophical doctrine or argument per se that Socrates affirms as good; it is the life or vital activity of the philosopher in conversation with others.

In his *Apology* Socrates contrasts two approaches to the question of life and death. First and most common is the approach his fellow citizens take, fearing death and seeking to overcome that fear by amassing wealth and honor in search of worldly security or fame. Second and more rational, Socrates proposes, is to recognize that the fear of death is irrational. We don't know whether death is good or bad. We can, however, determine whether life is good. Of our own lives we have more knowledge. Understood merely to be the cessation of life, the goodness or badness of death depends on the goodness or badness of life. If, as Socrates claims, the unexamined life is not worth living, death should not be regarded as being something so terribly bad in most cases or most of the time. It signifies merely the

end of the ceaseless striving that characterizes most animals, including most human beings.

If life is good, however, death might then appear to be bad. Insofar as life is good, it makes sense to preserve and protect it. That is the reason human beings form, first, families, and, later, political associations. In the conversation Socrates has with his old friend Crito in jail after he is convicted, we thus see, Socrates stresses the obligations he and Crito have to obey the laws of Athens. The laws of the city made possible their birth and education; marriage laws are necessary to make families stable. As individual citizens of Athens Socrates and Crito also had an opportunity to consent or leave when they became mature adults. People ought to do what they have agreed to do. Socrates himself had stayed in Athens more evidently or observably than most of his fellow citizens, who took trips to other cities; he ventured abroad only as part of an Athenian army, i.e., as part of his civic duty. But, a critical reader could and should object, Socrates could have explained, although he does not, that he had stayed in Athens because Athenian laws, unlike the laws of most other cities, allowed him to philosophize. If he were not such an old man, it might, therefore, have made sense for Socrates to leave, after the jury declared, in effect, that Socratic philosophizing was a crime punishable by death. His decision to leave or not would and should have depended on whether he could find another city that would allow him to engage in philosophy. Socrates acknowledged that he had duties or responsibilities to his city and his fellow citizens, but we know from the *Apology* that he also insisted upon a limit to those duties: he would not obey a law that prohibited him from philosophizing. Again, a critical reader would ask, won't Socrates be unable to philosophize when he is dead? If he and his arguments were going to be consistent, shouldn't he have tried to escape?

Socrates agreed to stay, to stand trial, and to accept the death penalty for the same reason that he refused to propose exile. He was an old man who was going to die soon in any case; and there was no place nearby he could go and continue to philosophize without incurring opprobrium, if not persecution. Socrates thus used the opportunity created by his trial (and naturally impending death) to convince others—not only in Athens but also in other cities—that philosophers do not merely or always undermine the rule of law by encouraging their companions to raise questions about its justice or necessity. They also provide arguments showing why laws are necessary and should generally be obeyed. It was not his own particular existence he wanted to perpetuate, after all, but the activity called philosophy. He thus did what he could to persuade others to tolerate, if not themselves to engage actively in it.

Socrates recognized an obligation to obey the laws of his city insofar, but only insofar as they made a good and virtuous life possible. He did not try to escape from jail for the same reason he would not agree to remain silent if the Athenians agreed not to convict him. All forms of life, all forms of human existence are not worth living. He could not and would not have consent to the rule of Athenian law

if and when it prohibited him from philosophizing. Life, and hence the protection of life, is a necessary condition, but only a condition for living well. Socrates recognized that he needed the help and cooperation of others not merely to live, but to live well, that is, to philosophize. It is not possible to enjoy that very great good, to converse about virtue and the other matters Socrates talked about, all by one's self. A Socratic philosopher thus recognizes that he or she has debts to others, particularly to his or her fellow citizens, but a Socratic philosopher also recognizes that those debts should not be paid by sacrificing that for the sake of which the debts are incurred.

In the *Phaedo* Plato thus shows Socrates making yet another, a second defense of his decision to stand trial and accept the expected convicted and punishment. This defense is not directed to Socrates' fellow citizens. It is directed, instead, to his associates or companions, some of whom were not Athenian. The two young men to whom Socrates speaks most in the *Phaedo* were Theban. Having come from Thebes to Athens to converse with Socrates, they probably would have followed Socrates if he had fled to another city in order to continue conversing with him there. Having been told by Crito that Socrates did not have to stand trial in the first place and that he, Crito, had offered to help Socrates escape from prison after he was convicted, these young Thebans believe that Socrates is committing suicide by staying in jail and drinking the hemlock. They accuse him of illiberality, if not injustice for leaving them, his friends, bereft of his company and comfort, as well as of impiety, by taking his own life.

Socrates agrees not only to defend himself, but also to seek comfort for himself and his friends in the face of his own impending death by relating stories and arguments he has heard about what happens afterwards. Those who know the dialogue might object: didn't you begin by claiming that religious thinkers look to the afterlife, but that philosophers, like Socrates in the *Apology*, recognizing that we don't know what, if anything comes after death concentrate on the implications of our foreknowledge of our own mortality for this life? In the *Phaedo* most of the arguments and stories (literally *muthologia* or mythology) Socrates relates concern the afterlife; they are intended to "prove" the immortality of the soul.

I would like to respond to this objection at the outset by admitting that Socrates does present a variety of arguments and stories that are supposed to show that the soul is immortal. In fact, however, Plato also shows his readers that neither Socrates nor his interlocutors are convinced by these stories and arguments. There is very little unanimity among readers of Plato, but with regard to the "proofs" of the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo* virtually all commentators agree, they aren't any good.

If Socrates is not trying to convince himself and his associates that the soul is immortal on his last day on earth, what then is he doing in the *Phaedo*? I suggest the following. Socrates retells the stories and relates the arguments, beginning somewhat fancifully with the suggestion that philosophy itself consists in a search for

death, to show his associates (as well as Plato's readers) that people who engage in philosophical or scientific investigations do not and cannot take comfort in stories about the afterlife like those the Pythagoreans propagated. Because all parties to this conversation are sensitive about the feelings of others—Socrates to and for the grief his companions feel at his death, his companions for Socrates' presumed anxiety in the face of his impending death—neither he nor they announce their skepticism forthrightly. By relating and thus reminding his interlocutors of what others have said about the immortality or the soul—or the causes of life and what happens after death—Socrates makes his interlocutors (as well as Plato's readers) recognize that they cannot and really do not take comfort in such accounts. The problem or danger that thus emerges at the middle of the dialogue is not simply or merely that human beings fear death, because death is and will always remain something essentially unknown. The problem is that, in the face of the limits of reason that are imposed by our mortality, human beings will come to resent and thus to hate reason. Giving up even the attempt to live according to reason, they will give up all possibility of living the only form of human existence Socrates himself has found to be worthwhile.

In order to preserve his associates' belief not in the immortality of the soul, but in the possibility or potential of a human life based on reason, Socrates brings himself, his experiences or feelings and thoughts, forward as an example. He tells them how he tried and failed to discover the cause or causes of things not merely coming into being, but living. He then tells them how and why he was disappointed with the promise he saw in Anaxagoras' dictum that mind rules to explain why it is good that everything is as it is. He explains finally how and why, having been intellectually "blinded" by these attempts to discover or look at the cause of all becoming—or being—he then turned to investigating the arguments human beings make about them. Socrates admits, in other words, that human beings do not and will not ever know why we or other things come to be any more than we will ever know what precisely what or why things will happen in the future. He admits, in other words, the fundamental uncertainty that Heidegger emphasizes. But, Socrates suggests, human beings can live happily in the face of that uncertainty, not by resolutely denying that there is anything eternal or beyond human knowledge, or cherishing the world in which they happen to find themselves because all things are essentially transitory and will not last even a day if we do not care for them. Human beings can find direction and meaning in their lives if they adhere to his "safe" argument, the argument which famously claims that the sensible things we encounter in the world are as they are because and insofar as they share or participate in certain general characteristics or qualities—the ideas or forms. Socrates endorses this argument, because it enables him and others to continue asking, in particular, what makes human life good, noble, and just? It thus enables us to continue trying to find and to do what is good for our souls—whether these be understood in terms of mind or simply of life—and, even, to find provisional answers. It does not result in the possession of knowledge, because Socrates' safe argument does not even promise to generate

knowledge of the whole, and without knowledge of the whole, we cannot and do not have knowledge properly speaking. Indeed, Socrates' argument suggests that there is a persistent difference or gap between those things which never change and hence are purely intelligible, not sensible or bodily, and the sensible, bodily things we encounter in the world, including ourselves and other human beings. We cannot know why things come into being nor, despite the great efforts and improvements we have seen in natural science, can we trace all the complex interactions of subatomic particles that go on—perhaps infinitely. We must not forget, however, that the world as we first and most naively encounter it is not completely chaotic, constituted or constituting an unending flux or on-going series of interactions. It is, on the contrary, composed of different kinds of things. We can, do and should sort these things into kinds—basically and perhaps ultimately, according to whether they are good or bad for us. So we are led to ask, again, what is truly good? We ourselves appear to be a “kind,” though sensible, bodily, and thus not perfectly or completely intelligible, both like and unlike others. We are, to return to the theme of the lecture—and Plato's dialogue—mortal. We know that we are going to die, and we live well in the face of that knowledge, not merely or solely by admitting and confronting our limitations, but also and perhaps more importantly, by recognizing our potential. We may never possess complete knowledge, but we are aware and can gain greater knowledge of things that are greater, longer lasting, more intelligible, and more beautiful than we—whether we understand ourselves to be individuals, a people or a species.

As Socrates tells his associates, so Plato shows his readers in the *Phaedo*, it is impossible to die well or bravely, unless one has lived well. And to live well, Socrates urges his companions, it is necessary not only to recognize the limitations mortality puts on human life but also the powers or possibilities that inhere in our intelligence. Socrates does not care what happens to his corpse, he tells his old friend Crito, because he does not identify his existence with his body. He has a family to whom he bids farewell both at the beginning and the end of the last day of his life. He spends his final hours, however, conversing with his associates as he has in the past. Such conversations are a very great good for a human being, he told his fellow citizens at his trial. They are what has made his own life worth living and what he wants to see continue or continued by others after his death. Socrates left an inheritance, but his legacy was not biological or legal so much as intellectual or spiritual. He wanted and sought above all to perpetuate his philosophy by communicating the passion for it to others who were younger. Socrates did not die alone, Plato shows in the *Phaedo*. He died in the midst of the loving company of his friends, who were both Athenians and foreigners. Such conversations and friends made Socrates' life worth living, according to his own testimony, and, Socrates had reason to hope, what made his own life worth living, that is to say, his own vital activity, would be perpetuated by and in the lives of his associates. His own death did not mark the end.

ARCHIVE

Richard John Neuhaus

A NEW ORDER OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

More than he wanted to be remembered for having been President, Mr. Jefferson wanted to be remembered as the author of the Virginia “Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom.” In his draft of that bill he wrote: “The opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction.” In a republic of free citizens, every opinion, every prejudice, every aspiration, every moral discernment has access to the public square in which we deliberate the ordering of our life together.

“The opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction.” And yet civil government is ordered by, and derives its legitimacy from, the opinions of the citizenry. Precisely here do we discover the novelty of the American experiment, the unique contribution of what the Founders called this *novus ordo seclorum* a new order for the ages. Never before in human history had any government denied itself jurisdiction over that on which it entirely depends, the opinion of its people.

That was the point forcefully made by Lincoln in his dispute with Stephen Douglas over slavery. Douglas stubbornly held to the Dred Scott decision as the law of the land. Lincoln had the deeper insight into how this republic was designed to work. “In this age, and this country,” Lincoln said, “public sentiment is every thing. *With* it, nothing can fail; *against* it, nothing can succeed. Whoever moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes, or pronounces judicial decisions. He makes possible the enforcement of these, else impossible.”

The question of religion’s access to the public square is not first of all a question of First Amendment law. It is first of all a question of understanding the theory and practice of democratic governance. Citizens are the bearers of opinion,

including opinion shaped by or espousing religious belief, and citizens have equal access to the public square. In this representative democracy, the state is forbidden to determine which convictions and moral judgments may be proposed for public deliberation. Through a constitutionally ordered process, the people will deliberate and the people will decide.

In a democracy that is free and robust, an opinion is no more disqualified for being “religious” than for being atheistic, or psychoanalytic, or Marxist, or just plain dumb. There is no legal or constitutional question about the admission of religion to the public square; there is only a question about the free and equal participation of citizens in our public business. Religion is not a reified “thing” that threatens to intrude upon our common life. Religion in public is but the public opinion of those citizens who are religious.

As with individual citizens, so also with the associations that citizens form to advance their opinions. Religious institutions may understand themselves to be brought into being by God, but for the purposes of this democratic polity they are free associations of citizens. As such, they are guaranteed the same access to the public square as are the citizens who comprise them. It matters not at all that their purpose is to advance religion, any more than it matters that other associations would advance the interests of business or labor or radical feminism or animal rights or whatever.

For purposes of democratic theory and practice, it matters not at all whether these religious associations are large or small, whether they reflect the views of a majority or minority, whether we think their opinions bizarre or enlightened. What opinions these associations seek to advance in order to influence our common life is entirely and without remainder the business of citizens who freely adhere to such associations. It is none of the business of the state. Religious associations, like other associations, give corporate expression to the opinions of people and, as Mr. Jefferson said, “the opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction.”

It is to be feared that those who interpret “the separation of church and state” to mean the separation of religion from public life do not understand the theory and practice of democratic governance. Ours is not a secular form of government, if by “secular” is meant indifference or hostility to opinions that are thought to be religious in nature. The civil government is as secular as are the people from whom it derives its democratic legitimacy. No more, no less. Indeed a case can be made—and I believe it to be a convincing case—that the very founding principle that removes opinion from the jurisdiction of the state is itself religious in both historical origin and continuing foundation. Put differently, the foundation of religious freedom is itself religious.

“We hold these truths,” the Founders declared. And when these truths about the “unalienable rights” with which men are “endowed by their Creator” are no longer firmly held by the American people and robustly advanced in the public

square, this experiment will have come to an end. In that unhappy case, this experiment will have turned out to be not a *novus ordo seclorum* but a temporary respite from humanity's penchant for tyranny. Yet in the second century of the experiment, secularized elites in our universities and our courts became embarrassed by the inescapably religious nature of this nation's founding and fortune.

These secularized elites have devoted their energies to explaining why the Founders did not hold the truths that they said they held. They have attempted to strip the public square of religious opinion that does not accord with their opinion. They have labored assiduously to lay other foundations than those laid in the beginning. From John Dewey to John Rawls, and with many lesser imitators in between, they have tried to construct philosophical foundations for this experiment in freedom, only to discover that their efforts are rejected by a people who stubbornly persist in saying with the Founders, "We hold these truths." A theory of democracy that is neither understood nor accepted by the democracy for which it is contrived is a theory of democracy both misbegotten and stillborn. Two hundred years ago, and even more so today, the American people, from whom democratic legitimacy is derived, are incorrigibly religious. This America continues to be, in the telling phrase of Chesterton, "a nation with the soul of a church."

And yet there are those who persist in the claim that "the separation of church and state" means the separation of religion from public life. They raise the alarm about "church-state conflicts" that are nothing of the sort. There are conflicts, to be sure, but they are the conflicts of a robust republic in which free citizens freely contend in the public square. The extreme separationists will tolerate in public, they may even assiduously protect, the expression of marginal religious opinion, of opinion that is not likely to influence our common life. But they take alarm at the voice of the majority. In that voice it is the people that they hear; it is the people that they fear; it is democracy that they fear.

Mr. Jefferson did not say that the civil government has no jurisdiction over opinion *except* when it is religious opinion. He did not say that the civil government has no jurisdiction over opinion *except* when it is expressed through associations called churches or synagogues. He did not say that the civil government has no jurisdiction over opinion *except* when it is majority opinion. He said, "The opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction."

Many worry about the dangers of raw majoritarianism, and well we all should worry. The Founders worried about it, and that is why they devised a constitutional order for *representative* governance, and for the protection of minority opinion and behavior. But, without the allegiance of the majority to that constitutional order, such protections are only, in the words of James Madison, "parchment barriers" to tyranny. As Lincoln observed, without the support of public sentiment, statutes and judicial decisions—including those intended to protect citizens who dissent from public sentiment—cannot be enforced.

In our day, minorities seeking refuge in the protections of the Constitution frequently do so in a manner that pits the Constitution against the American people. That is understandable, but it is a potentially fatal mistake. We must never forget the preamble and irreplaceable premise of the Constitution: “We the people ... do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” That is to say, the Constitution and all its protections depend upon the sentiment of “we the people.” Majority rule is far from being the only principle of democratic governance, but it is a necessary principle. In the Constitution, the majority imposes upon itself a self-denying ordinance; it promises not to do what it otherwise could do, namely, ride roughshod over the dissenting minorities.

Why, we might ask, does the majority continue to impose such a limitation upon itself? A number of answers suggest themselves. One reason is that most Americans recognize, however inarticulately, a sovereignty higher than the sovereignty of “we the people.” They believe there is absolute truth but they are not sure that they understand it absolutely; they are, therefore, disinclined to force it upon those who disagree. It is not chiefly a secular but a religious restraint that prevents biblical believers from coercing others in matters of conscience. For example, we do not kill one another over our disagreements about the will of God because we believe that it is the will of God that we should not kill one another over our disagreements about the will of God. Christians and Jews did not always believe that, but, with very few exceptions, we in this country have come to believe it. It is among the truths that we hold.

Then too, protecting those who differ is in the self-interest of all. On most controverted issues in our public life, there is no stable majority, only ever-shifting convergences and divergences. Non-Christians, and Jews in particular, sometimes see an ominous majoritarian threat in the fact that nearly 88 percent of the American people claim to be Christian. As a matter of practical fact, however, that great majority is sharply divided along myriad lines when it comes to how civil government should be rightly ordered. Furthermore, a growing number of Christians, perhaps most Christians, have a religiously grounded understanding of the respect that is owed living Judaism. Those Christians who argue that “Christian America” should be reconstructed in conformity with a revealed biblical blueprint for civil government are few and marginal, and are likely to remain so.

Father John Courtney Murray observed that, while in theory politics should be unified with revealed truth, “it seems that pluralism is written into the script of history.” Some of us would go further and suggest that it is God who has done the writing. Pluralism is our continuing condition and our moral imperative until the End Time, when our disagreements will be resolved in the coming of the Kingdom. The protection against raw majoritarianism, then, depends upon this constitutional order. But this constitutional order depends, in turn, upon the continuing ratification of the majority who are “we the people.” Among the truths these people hold is the truth that it is necessary to protect those who do not hold those truths.

It is a remarkable circumstance, this American circumstance. It is also fragile. We may wish that Lincoln was wrong when he observed that “In this age, and this country, public sentiment is every thing.” But he was right, and in the conflict over slavery he was to see public sentiment turn against the constitutional order and nearly bring it to irretrievable ruin. We are dangerously deceived if we think that Lincoln’s observation about our radical dependence upon public sentiment is one whit less true today.

The question before us, then, is not the access of religion to the public square. The question is the access, indeed the full and unencumbered participation, of men and women, of citizens, who bring their opinions, sentiments, convictions, prejudices, visions, and communal traditions of moral discernment to bear on our public deliberation of how we ought to order our life together in this experiment that aspires toward representative democracy. It is of course an aspiration always imperfectly realized.

I noted at the start that the question before us is not first of all a question of First Amendment law. It is a question, first of all, of understanding the origins, the constituting truths, and the continuing foundations of this republic. That having been said, the question before us is also and very importantly a question of the First Amendment, and of the first liberty of that First Amendment.

The first thing to be said about that first liberty is that liberty is the end, the goal, and the entire rationale of what the First Amendment says about religion. This means that there is no conflict, no tension, no required “balancing” between free exercise and no-establishment. There are not two religion clauses. There is but one religion clause. The stipulation is that “Congress shall make no law,” and the rest of the clause consists of participial modifiers explaining what kind of law Congress shall not make. This may seem like a small grammatical point, but it has far-reaching jurisprudential significance.

The no-establishment part of the religion clause is entirely and without remainder in the service of free exercise. Free exercise is the end; no-establishment is a necessary means to that end. No-establishment simply makes no sense on its own. Why on earth should we need a no-establishment provision? The answer is that no-establishment is required to protect the rights of those who might dissent from whatever religion is established. In other words, no-establishment is required for free exercise. It is, one may suggest, more than a nice play on words that Mr. Jefferson’s bill of 1779 was called the “Bill for *Establishing* Religious Freedom.” The purpose of the non-establishment of religion is to establish religious freedom. It follows that any interpretation of no-establishment that hinders free exercise is a misinterpretation of no-establishment.

In recent history, especially in the last four decades, the priority of free exercise has been dangerously obscured. Indeed, one must go further. The two parts of the religion clause have been quite thoroughly inverted. One gets the distinct impression from some constitutional scholars and, all too often, from the courts

that no-establishment is the end to which free exercise is something of a nuisance. To take but one prominent example, Laurence Tribe writes in his widely used *American Constitutional Law* that there is a “zone which the free exercise clause carves out of the establishment clause for permissible accommodation of religious interests. This carved-out area might be characterized as the zone of permissible accommodation.”

There we have the inversion clearly and succinctly stated. Professor Tribe allows—almost reluctantly, it seems—that, within carefully pre-scribed limits, the *means* that is no-establishment might permissibly accommodate the *end* that is free exercise. This is astonishing, and it is the more astonishing that it no longer astonishes, for Professor Tribe is hardly alone. Scholars and judges have in these few decades become accustomed to having the religion clause turned on its head.

Once we forget that no-establishment is a means and instrument in support of free exercise, it is a short step to talking about the supposed conflict or tension between the two provisions. And from there it is a short step to the claim that the two parts of the religion clause are “pitted against one another” and must somehow be “balanced.” And from there it is but another short step to the idea that the no-establishment provision protects “secular liberty” while the free exercise provision protects “religious liberty.” When the religion clause is construed according to this curious inversion, it is no surprise that religious liberty comes out the loser. Any impingement of religion upon public life is taken to violate the “secular liberty” of the nonreligious. Thus has no-establishment become the master of the free exercise that it was designed to serve.

We need not speculate about the practical consequences of this curious inversion of the religion clause. The consequences are plainly to be seen all around us. In the name of no-establishment, wherever government advances religion must retreat. And government does inexorably expand its sway over the entire social order. In education, social services, and other dimensions of public life, it is claimed that, for the sake of the non-establishment of religion, Americans must surrender the free exercise of religion. Those who insist upon the exercise of religious freedom in education, for example, must forego the government support that is available to those who do not so insist. Thus is religious freedom penalized in the name of a First Amendment that was designed to protect religious freedom. Thus has the constitutionally privileged status of religion been turned into a disability. Thus has insistence upon the free exercise of religion been turned into a disqualifying handicap in our public life. The argument that public policy should not discriminate against citizens who are religious is said to be an instance of special pleading by those who have an interest in religion. That seems very odd in a society where over 90 percent of its citizens claim to be religious. It is more than odd, it is nothing less than grotesque, that we have become accustomed to the doctrine that public policy should not benefit religion. What is this “religion” that must not be benefited? It is the individually and communally expressed *opinion* of a free people. To say that

government should not be responsive to religion is to say that government should not be responsive to the opinion of the people. Again, the argument of extreme separationism is, in effect, an argument against democratic governance.

Once more, Mr. Jefferson: “The opinions of men are not the object of civil government, nor under its jurisdiction.” The state of current First Amendment jurisprudence is such that the opinions of men and women, when they are religious, have been placed under the jurisdiction of the government. According to the inverted construal of the religion clause, wherever the writ of government runs the voice of religion must be silenced or stifled—and the writ of government runs almost everywhere. No-establishment, the servant of the free exercise of religion, has become the enemy of the free exercise of religion.

To contend for the free exercise of religion is to contend for the perpetuation of a nation “so conceived and so dedicated.” It is to contend for the hope “that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Despite the perverse jurisprudence of recent decades, most Americans still say with the Founders, “We hold these truths.” And, with the Founders, they understand those truths to be religious both in their origin and in their continuing power. Remove that foundation and we remove the deepest obligation binding the American people to this constitutional order.

The argument here is not for an unbridled freedom for people to do whatever they will, so long as they do it in the name of religion. That way lies anarchy and the undoing of religious freedom in the name of religious freedom. There are of necessity limits on behavior, as distinct from opinion. But the constitutionally privileged and preferred status of religious freedom is such that, when free exercise is invoked, we must respond with the most diligent caution. The invocation of free exercise is an appeal to a higher sovereignty. The entire constitutional order of limited government is premised upon an acknowledgment of such higher sovereignty.

Sometimes—reluctantly, and in cases of supreme and overriding public necessity—the claim to free exercise protection for certain actions must be denied. Where such lines should be drawn is a matter of both constitutional law and democratic deliberation. It is a matter that engages the religiously grounded moral discernments of the public, without whose support such decisions cannot be democratically implemented. In other words, in this age and this country, the limits on the free exercise of religion must themselves be legitimated religiously.

A morally compelling reason must be given for refusing to allow people to do what is morally compelling. Those who seriously invoke the free exercise of religion claim to be fulfilling a solemn duty. As Madison, Jefferson, and others of the Founders understood, religious freedom is a matter less of rights than of duties. More precisely, it is a matter of rights derived from duties. Denying a person or community the right to act upon such duty can only be justified by appeal to a yet more compelling duty. Those so denied will, of course, usually not find the reason for the

denial compelling. Because they may turn out to be right about the duty in question, and because, even if they are wrong, religion bears witness to that which transcends the political order, such denials should be both rare and painfully reluctant.

We have in this last half-century drifted far from the constituting vision of this *novus ordo seclorum*. The free exercise of religion is the irreplaceable cornerstone of that order. In his famed *Memorial and Re-monstrance* James Madison wrote: “It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage, and such only, as he believes to be acceptable to Him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society.”

The great problem today is not the threat that religion poses to public life, but the threat that the state, presuming to embody public life, poses to religion. The entire order of freedom, including all the other freedoms specified in the Bill of Rights, is premised upon what Madison calls the precedent duty that is religion. When the American people can no longer publicly express their obligations to the Creator, it is to be feared that they will no longer acknowledge their obligations to one another—nor to the Constitution in which the obligations of freedom are enshrined. The free exercise of religion is not about mere “access.” The free exercise of religion is about the survival of an experiment in which civil government has no jurisdiction over the expression of the higher loyalties on which that government depends.

Debates over the niceties of First Amendment law must and will continue. We should not forget, however, that our real subject is the constituting vision of a constitutional order that, if we have the wit and the nerve for it, may yet turn out to be a new order for the ages.

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