

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

The Neoconservative Catholic Thought of Richard John Neuhaus, Michael Novak and
George Weigel as a Form of Public Catholicism during the Ronald Reagan Era, 1980-1988

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Disruption and disagreement within the American Catholic Church followed in the wake of Vatican II and the political and social upheavals of the 1960s. In the following decades a diversity of opinions on a variety of political and religious questions found expression in the Church, leading to the emergence of different forms of public Catholicism. This study examines the state of public Catholicism in post Vatican II America by focusing on one group of Catholic intellectuals in particular: the neoconservative Catholics.

Discussions about the neoconservative Catholics often focus on the level of policy, particularly in light of debates that raged over such issues as the U.S. bishops' pastoral letters, the Soviet Union and communism more generally, and the political struggles taking place in parts of Latin America. While this is an important element in their thought, the neoconservative Catholics also provided a critique of the bishops and church leadership that extended beyond the purely political. Their criticism of post-Vatican II American Catholicism is multilayered, with the political level being the most visible stratum for critique and discussion, albeit not the only one and perhaps not even the most important. A more fundamental disagreement was reflected in the neoconservative Catholic concern that large swaths of Catholic leadership had, during this period, embraced a flawed Catholic

theology and, in particular, a deficient and misguided ecclesiology. Understanding how their political and theological perspectives interconnect is a crucial, and often overlooked, approach to understanding their distinctive form of public Catholicism.

This study relies on the insights of David O'Brien's writings on public Catholicism as a framework to understand neoconservative Catholicism. It will also focus on an array of primary and secondary sources. The writings of Richard John Neuhaus, Michael Novak, and George Weigel are examined by way of a textual analysis from a historical critical perspective, focusing on publications up through George Weigel's *Catholicism and the Renewal of American Democracy* (1989). Throughout the dissertation we amplify and examine the dominant themes and motifs germane to neoconservative Catholic thought and analyze their relevance to American political thought and the American Catholic Church.

This dissertation by Todd Scribner fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in Theology and Religious Studies approved by Dr. William D. Dinges, Ph.D., as Director, and by William Barbieri, Ph.D. and Michael Kimmage, Ph.D. as Readers.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Nicole Pascua Scribner. For all the time that I have known her she has shown me unceasing support, not only for me as I write my dissertation, but in every aspect of our life together. I would be a shell of a man without her presence and I appreciate the warmth and love that she has shown me every day since we met.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Who are the Neoconservative Catholics?	2
What is public Catholicism?	9
Public Catholicism, Contemporary Trends, and the Neoconservative Catholics	15
PART I: Disintegration, Renewal, and Reconciliation	
Chapter 1	25
Introduction	25
Vietnam and the Antiwar Movement.....	29
The Effect of Vietnam on the American Intellectual and Political Classes.....	35
Michael Novak, the Second Vatican Council and the Changing Catholic Church	44
Richard John Neuhaus, the American Experiment, and the Threat of the Christian Churches	50
George Weigel: Vietnam, the Catholic Church, and the Collapse of Her Moral Teaching	57
Conclusion	62
Chapter 2.....	64
The State/Society Distinction and the Importance of Institutional Pluralism.....	67
The Neoconservatives, Civil Society, the State, and Mediating Institutions	69
From Institutional Pluralism to Political Philosophy	72
Michael Novak, Mediating Institutions and Democratic Capitalism.....	73
Richard Neuhaus, Religion, and the State	82
George Weigel, John Courtney Murray and the American Proposition	88
Chapter 3.....	97
Richard John Neuhaus: Christianity and the American Experiment	100
George Weigel: Up From the Middle Ages	114
Michael Novak: Catholic Social Teaching, The State, and Convergence	127
Human Rights and Catholic Social Teaching	129
Economic Development and Catholic Social Teaching.....	132

Conclusion	137
PART II: Politics and Ecclesiology in Neoconservative Catholic Thought	
Chapter 4.....	140
The Institute on Religion and Democracy, Reform of the Churches.....	157
and American Political Life	157
George Weigel, the Communist Menace, and the Christian Churches.....	170
George Weigel and the Problem of War.....	173
Conclusion	189
Chapter 5.....	191
Latin America, the Soviet Union, and the conservative critique	193
The Debate over Latin America in the Catholic Church	196
In Conflict with the Catholic Bishops.....	196
The Problem with the Catholic Press.....	204
Liberation Theology and the Latin American Church	214
The Neoconservative Catholic Critique of Liberation Theology	220
The Politico-Economic Critique	220
The Ecclesiological Critique.....	225
Conclusion	228
Chapter 6.....	230
Public Policy, the Neoconservative Catholics, and the Bishops' Pastoral Letters	233
The Challenge of Peace	233
Economic Justice for All.....	242
The Pastoral Letters, Ecclesiology, and the Neoconservative Catholics	252
The Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation: The Christian Churches and the Loss of the Transcendent.....	255
A Confusion of Roles: Lay Catholics and the Clergy.....	264
The Constantinian Temptation.....	271
Avery Dulles and the Progressive Church: The Neoconservative Catholic Critique Refined.....	276

Conclusion	284
Conclusion	286
The Neoconservative Catholics, Ecumenism, And Public Life	291
The Neoconservative Catholic Ecclesiological Critique of Church Leadership	295
Conclusion	303
Bibliography	306

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INTRODUCTION

Never a wholly monolithic entity in the pre-Vatican II world, the American Catholic Church nevertheless exhibited a distinctive subculture by the early twentieth century. Partly due to nativist sentiment among the Protestant majority and partly to hierarchical resistance to modernizing trends, this subculture helped to shape and define the American Catholic experience for decades to come.¹ A potent force for a time, this subculture was not lasting. Following World War II, a wide range of economic, cultural, and political factors contributed to its fragmentation. Shortly after the close of the Second Vatican Council it had largely disappeared, a demise that promoted notable changes in every facet of American Catholic life.

One place where a notable shift occurred was in Catholic intellectual life. Analyzing this dimension in the post-Vatican II American Church, Patrick Allitt noted that its once distinctive and widely shared intellectual worldview had undergone “gradual erosion.” One consequence of this erosion was an increase in the diversity of opinions on a range of political and cultural questions. The debates that followed focused on topics as varied as the extent of Marxist influence in Latin America, the relationship between church and state, and the bishops’ pastoral letters on war and peace and the economy. Liberal Catholics, conservative Catholics, traditionalist Catholics and others began to compete with one another

¹ On the emergence of a distinctive Catholic subculture and some of the ecclesial influences that helped shape it, see Joseph Komonchak, “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism,” *Cristianesimo nella Storia*, 18 (1997). For one of the classic studies on American nativism during this period, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

to define what constituted a Catholic worldview, thus making it nearly impossible to pinpoint a “Catholic position” on any given topic.²

What emerged was a diverse set of public Catholicisms that vied for influence in the American Catholic Church. This study will examine the state of public Catholicism in post Vatican II America by focusing on one group of Catholic intellectuals in particular: the neoconservative Catholics. Its purpose is to analyze and evaluate the neoconservative Catholic thought of Richard Neuhaus, Michael Novak, and George Weigel as a particular form of public Catholicism through the Ronald Reagan Administration. Before developing neoconservative Catholic thought in a more systematic fashion, it will help to cover some preliminary terrain. First, who are the neoconservative Catholics? Second, what is public Catholicism? And, finally, how ought we to begin to understand neoconservative Catholicism as a form of public Catholicism?

WHO ARE THE NEOCONSERVATIVE CATHOLICS?

Although neoconservative Catholicism has come to include a much broader constituency in recent years, during the 1980s this grouping was comprised of three primary people: Richard John Neuhaus, Michael Novak, and George Weigel.³

² Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 1-15.

³ George Weigel makes explicit reference to himself, Neuhaus and Novak as subjects of neoconservative Catholic identity in George Weigel, ‘The Neoconservative Difference: A Proposal for the Renewal of Church and Society,’ *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, eds. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 138. Throughout this dissertation we will refer to Neuhaus, Novak and Weigel as neoconservative Catholics and distinguish them from the broader, non-Catholic neoconservative intellectuals, and refer to them as political neoconservatives. Although there is some overlap

Richard John Neuhaus

A long time Lutheran pastor, Richard John Neuhaus served for seventeen years at a predominately black Lutheran church in Brooklyn, New York. During this period, the heyday of which occurred during the Sixties, Neuhaus became intimately involved in both the Civil Rights and anti-war movements. Working alongside other religious figures, including Daniel Berrigan and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Neuhaus co-founded *Clergy Concerned about Vietnam*, an organization that provided an important religious voice in opposition to the war in Vietnam. By the mid-Seventies he broke with many of his contemporaries with whom he once associated, as his own views began shifting to the right and many of his contemporaries continued on a leftward path. Although a supporter of Jimmy Carter during the 1976 election, he soon grew disenchanted with what Carter had to offer and eventually embraced a more conservative worldview.⁴

An initial objection to including Richard John Neuhaus in this study of neoconservative Catholics is the fact that for the time period under discussion Neuhaus was a Lutheran; he did not convert to Catholicism until the early Nineties. While not a convert to Catholicism until after the period covered in this book, it is still justifiable to include him here. Many of the pieces in his intellectual life were well in place by the mid Eighties.

between the two groups, the Catholic identity of the former adds an important dimension that is lacking among their non-Catholic counterparts.

⁴ For some biographical insights, see John Allen, "Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, Dead at Age 72," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 8, 2009, <http://ncronline.org/news/people/fr-richard-john-neuhaus-dead-age-72>, accessed March 2, 2009; Damon Linker, *The Theocons: Secular America under Siege* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006). In Linker's book, see in particular chapter 1. For ease of rhetoric, although Neuhaus was a Lutheran during this period, I will generally refer to 'Catholic social teaching' when referring to the neoconservative Catholics corporately all the while noting its general application to Neuhaus himself. When speaking of Neuhaus in particular, I may at times use more general Christian or Lutheran references.

Consequently, continuity exists in his thinking from his pre- to post-conversion experience. Further, his publication of *The Catholic Moment* in 1987 evidenced a growing sympathy toward the Catholic Church and, in hindsight, anticipated his eventual conversion. While perhaps not a perfect fit in terms of his religious affiliation, intellectually his thought was consistent with the ideas and influences at work in the broader neoconservative Catholic worldview at this time.

Michael Novak

Coming to prominence in the 1960s, Michael Novak had spent an extended period in the seminary, beginning in the late forties and extending throughout most of the next decade. After abandoning his studies for the priesthood he began graduate studies at Harvard, garnered a reputation as a left-wing Catholic intellectual, and published a range of high profile books.⁵ After leaving Harvard, Novak took a teaching position at Stanford and, in 1968, transferred to the State University of New York at Old Westbury. It was during his teaching stint at Old Westbury, along with his ongoing involvement with the antiwar movement, that he began to grow alienated from the far left-wing politics with which he had been associated for at least the previous decade. By the early Seventies Novak, like

⁵ Some of Novak's more important early works that often define his left-wing period include Michael Novak, *The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II* (New York, NY, MacMillan Publishers, 1964); Michael Novak, *Belief and Unbelief: A Study of Self Knowledge* (MacMillan Publishers, 1965); Michael Novak, *Theology for Radical Politics* (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1969).

Neuhaus, began to shift ‘rightward’ on the political spectrum. By 1980 he had abandoned support of socialism and eventually accepted the designation of neoconservative.⁶

George Weigel

George Weigel provides a slightly different portrait than either Neuhaus or Novak. Growing up in 1960s Baltimore, Weigel was a generation younger than both of them. A theology student in both college and graduate school during the late Sixties and early Seventies, Weigel did not become an active participant in the antiwar movement. He was not directly engaged in the theological disputes that raged in the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council, although his theological studies during this period certainly made him aware of the general tenor of the debate. After leaving a teaching position at a seminary in Washington State, he worked at the World without War Council, an institute headed by the pacifist antiwar activist, Robert Pickus. While never embracing pacifism, an analysis of his thought on the question of war highlights the influence that this line of thought had on his own worldview. As with his counterparts, Weigel eventually embraced the ‘neoconservative’ designation. That said, given the generational differences, his transition from liberal to neoconservative was not as publicly controversial as it was for Neuhaus or

⁶ The term neoconservative and what it entailed in the context of American political thought will become fleshed out in the next section. There are a variety of autobiographical accounts that Michael Novak has written for different contexts. For an initial introduction to his intellectual life and the changes therein see Michael Novak, *Confession of a Catholic* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row Publishers, 1983); Michael Novak, “Controversial Engagements,” *First Things* (April, 1999), http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=3136&var_recherche=controversial+engagements, accessed March 2, 2009; Michael Novak, “Errand into the Wilderness,” *On Cultivating Liberty: Reflections on Moral Ecology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 259-304. For a critical, yet generally fair account of Novak’s thought and development during this period and afterward, see Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993).

Novak.⁷ Given that each of the neoconservative Catholics eventually took for granted their status as “neoconservative Catholics,” how are we to understand political neoconservatism, which is in many respects a broader designation that came to include a Catholic variant?

Peter Steinfels was one of the earliest thinkers to provide a comprehensive analysis of neoconservatism, publishing a critical study of this perspective in 1979. Although a contingent of scholars followed his lead and examined political neoconservatism from slightly different angles, a fairly standard narrative has emerged concerning the emergence of this intellectual perspective.⁸ Typically the narrative begins with a group of New York intellectuals in the 1940s, some of whom, including Sydney Hook and Irving Kristol, flirted at one time or another with Marxist thought.⁹ A passing phase for those committed to this cause, this group of intellectuals soon positioned themselves as stalwart, liberal anti-communists and embraced a New Deal, Democratic worldview that became dominant in the post-World War II years.

In response to the political and cultural upheavals of the 1960s, the neoconservatives became disenchanted with the thinking of those on the left, who they worried had radicalized and had, from a foreign policy perspective, gone soft on communism and grown to embrace a

⁷ For a semi-autobiographical account of Weigel, see George Weigel, *Letters to a Young Catholic* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004).

⁸ Peter Steinfels, *Neoconservatives: The Men who are Changing American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979). Since Steinfel’s book, others commentaries on neoconservatism include John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1994* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); Gary Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture and the War of Ideology* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1993); Gary Dorrien, , *Imperial Designs: Neoconservatism and the Pax Americana* (New York, NY: Routledge Publishing, 2004); Murray Friedman, *The Neoconservative Revolution: Jewish Intellectuals and the Shaping of Public Policy* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2005).

⁹ Max Boot, “Myths about Neoconservatism,” *The Neocon Reader*, ed. by Irwin Stelzer (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2003), 45.

neo-isolationist foreign policy. On the domestic front, they developed misgivings regarding Lyndon Johnson's Great Society and the wider governmental "war on poverty."¹⁰ In addition to those named above, this group would also come to include Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, and Jeanne Kirkpatrick. In time, both Michael Novak and Richard John Neuhaus found a home in this intellectual camp.

Reacting against the political changes that occurred in the Democratic Party, by the early Seventies this camp shifted allegiance rightward and in doing so rejected the worldview of many of their friends on the left. In response to this shift the socialist Michael Harrington wrote an article in *Dissent* magazine in the early Seventies that applied and popularized the term "neoconservative" for this apparent band of traitors.¹¹ Throughout the rest of the decade, the neoconservatives remained staunchly anti-communist and called for a reassertion of American power in the world and the rejuvenation of American confidence at home. Writing a rather somber assessment of the state of American life at the beginning of the 1980s, Norman Podhoretz still managed to exemplify this general worldview when he stated that while he and his cohorts were often labeled as "neoconservatives," it might be more accurate to describe them as "neonationalists." This would be a more apt designation, he claimed, because it highlighted their positive view of the values embedded in the constitutional and institutional structure of American civilization and because of their

¹⁰ Joshua Muravchick, "The Neoconservative Cabal," *The Neocon Reader*, edited by Irwin Stelzer (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2002), 244.

¹¹ Gary Dorrien, *Imperial Designs*, 8. The article in *Dissent* in which Harrington popularized the term is Michael Harrington, "The Welfare State and its Neoconservative Critics," *Dissent* (Fall, 1973): 435-454.

conviction that the survival of liberty and democracy required a forceful American presence in the world.¹²

Like their political neoconservative counterparts, the neoconservative Catholics shifted from a left-wing political world view to a more conservative one by the mid-Seventies and embraced a strongly anti-communist and internationalist foreign policy. Furthermore, all three became avid supporters of the human rights tradition and democratic politics, and keen on revitalizing the American presence in the world following Vietnam. While in agreement on a number of points, what differentiated the neoconservative Catholics was the important role that their affiliation with the Catholic Church played in this emergent worldview. This is so for two reasons.

First, the neoconservative Catholics looked to the Catholic social teaching tradition as a support, if not a rationale, to their political worldview. Many of their political arguments were grounded on a Catholic ethic. Analyzing their political worldview absent consideration of their religious worldview provides a truncated understanding of their thought.

Second, and on a related score, events in the Catholic Church during the Seventies and Eighties were of vital importance in much of their writings. Just as the political neoconservatives had been alienated by a Democratic Party that they perceived to have moved sharply leftward in the post-Vietnam period, the neoconservative Catholics were alienated by elements in the American Catholic Church that they deemed to have radicalized following Vatican II. Recovering an authentic American Catholic tradition in the face of an American Catholic leadership that, they argued, too often capitulated to these radicalizing

¹² Norman Podhoretz, *The Present Danger* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1980).

trends, was both a difficult and central task throughout their work. At one point Weigel remarked that during this period, “in the name of an ‘open church,’ the liberal mainstream seemed to have effectively shut off critical debate within many of the key organizational structures of American Catholicism, imposing its own ‘correct’ positions with a vigor, indeed ruthlessness . . .”¹³

Changes to the American social and political scene following the turbulent Sixties and the seismic shifts that occurred in the Church after Vatican II were fundamental to the emergence of neoconservative Catholic identity. This political and religious thought did not develop in a vacuum. To situate the thought of neoconservative Catholics in the context of American Catholic history, it will prove helpful to take advantage of David O’Brien’s notion of “public Catholicism.” This term provides a useful framework that helps to make sense of the ways in which the Catholic Church has related to the American political, religious, and cultural milieu over the past two hundred years.

WHAT IS PUBLIC CATHOLICISM?

Popularizing the term ‘public Catholicism’ in a book by the same name, David O’Brien traced out the different ways that the American Catholic Church has expressed a public presence in the United States during the previous two centuries. In a forward to the original edition, the Catholic historian Christopher Kauffman wrote that public Catholicism explores the “divergent ways in which the Catholic Church has defined its role, explicitly and implicitly, in the shaping of public policy in accord with its self understanding within

¹³ Weigel, “The Neoconservative Difference,” 145.

democratic pluralism.”¹⁴ As contexts change, as the Church’s self-understanding alters over time, and as new personalities appear on the scene, the form of public Catholicism that becomes dominant at one point may recede into the background in another one. In the process, O’Brien isolated three distinct styles of public Catholicism in the American context, each of which took a more or less prominent position at different periods.¹⁵

The first style, republican Catholicism, initially dominated during the early decades of the American Republic. A minority population in a majority Protestant nation, Catholics sought to demonstrate their loyalty to the American political tradition, often with the hope of avoiding undue persecution due to their religious differences. Embodied most clearly in the likes of John Carroll, the first bishop and archbishop who served in the United States, republican Catholicism tended to downplay differences among Christian denominations, supported the separation of church and state, and minimized overtly public expressions of Catholicism. One benefit of this approach was that it helped the small Catholic community in America to avoid to political controversy.¹⁶ By the mid nineteenth century, however, circumstances in the United States began to change, enough so that the character of public Catholicism began to change with it.

One of the most distinctive features of this period was mass immigration, when thousands of Irish and other Europeans immigrated to the United States.¹⁷ Many of the

¹⁴ David O’Brien, *Public Catholicism* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), v.

¹⁵ For a more concise introduction to the various forms that American public Catholicism has taken, see David O’Brien, “Catholics and American Politics,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, Supplementary Series 4 (2008): 20-26.

¹⁶ O’Brien, *Public Catholicism*, 16-17.

¹⁷ For a more expansive analysis of immigration in the American Catholic Church, see James Olson, *Catholic Immigrants in America* (Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall Publishers, 1987). For a case study examining some of the

immigrants who came to America during this time were Catholic, thus swelling the ranks of the Church and forcing the hierarchy and leading Catholic intellectuals to reevaluate her public character. Given the large influx of Catholic immigrants, the American Church became more interest-driven and focused on helping to protect and provide for newly arriving Catholic immigrants. This tendency was reinforced in the face of an adversarial and occasionally violent Protestant community that emerged in response to mass immigration and the burgeoning Catholic community. The immigrant church that surfaced in reaction to the non-Catholic, nativist culture, often turned inward and sought to establish a protective haven for its constituency that would allow its people to practice its faith in a safe environment.¹⁸

By the mid-Nineteenth Century the American Catholic Church had grown considerably and was no longer a tiny minority in an overwhelmingly Protestant nation. Not surprisingly, the immigrant church functioned differently than that of a Catholic Church embodying a republican style. Willing to take a more confrontational approach to defend their interests, the immigrant Church tended to reject the more submissive style that tended to dominate republican Catholicism. O'Brien noted that "for Carroll the task had been to secure the place of the church in a potentially hostile but at least temporarily benevolent environment... after 1820 the emphasis changed. The task now was to preserve the faith and loyalties of these immigrants . . . in a society perceived as more threatening . . ."¹⁹ With the introduction of the 1924 quota system, which sharply reduced immigration levels, the

tensions at work between diverse ethnic Catholic populations, see Jay Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975).

¹⁸ O'Brien, *Public Catholicism*, 38-41.

¹⁹ O'Brien, *Public Catholicism*, 35.

immigrant Church's public identity again shifted as ethnic groups came to be more fully integrated into the broader culture.

Events during the 1960s, including the Second Vatican Council, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the threat of nuclear war contributed to the emergence of a new style beyond that of the immigrant church. O'Brien referred to this new form of public Catholicism that emerged as evangelical Catholicism. This style, O'Brien argued, exhibited weariness in the face of traditional political procedures and projected a prophetic tone that challenged the Church to distance herself from political fights and emphasize Biblical religion.²⁰ Evangelical Catholics "saw the fundamental message of the gospel as love, they set impossibly high standards they knew they could not reach without divine assistance, and they relied on grace and the power of good example, witness rather than politics and organization as methods of reform."²¹ In this style of public Catholicism Paul Hanley Furfey, Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement best embodied its underlying spirit.

While laying out these three general styles, O'Brien does not specifically analyze neoconservative Catholic thought. Others did. The Church historian R. Scott Appleby developed O'Brien's terminology to argue that the neoconservative Catholics are one example of a resurgent republican style Catholicism that "embraces American ideals unapologetically if not uncritically." He also asserted that this style maintained a public presence that "defines itself through an interior, privatized piety, on the one hand, and a

²⁰ O'Brien, "Catholics and American Politics," 23.

²¹ O'Brien, *Public Catholicism*, 188.

mutually correcting, public dialogue with non-Catholic Americans, on the other.”²² Such a view is generally consistent with O’Brien’s understanding of republican Catholicism and it is, at least to some extent, applicable to the neoconservative Catholics.

Like many of their fellow Americanists, as Appleby refers to them, the neoconservative Catholics affirmed American ideals through the use of the more neutral, non-sectarian language of the natural law. Further, they engage non-Catholic, yet like minded, Christians and other religious bodies as a way to help achieve their political and cultural objectives. While often using a neutral language to express their ideals, however, their faith is not expressive of an interiorized and privatized piety. As we will see, George Weigel held firmly to the position that the American constitutional system is rooted in the Scholastic, Catholic thought of the Thirteenth Century. His argument does not promote a gauzy and vague Christian foundation for the American republic, but an unapologetically Catholic one. It is hard to imagine that John Carroll would ever dare to make a similar claim. The point here is not that the neoconservative Catholics are evangelical in their faith, but that their Catholic identity is central to who they are and not deemphasized in the face of a suspicious, non-Catholic majority.

Opposite the danger of underestimating the public importance of their Catholicism is the danger of overestimating it. Damon Linker, the author of one of only two books that provides an historical analysis of the three neoconservative Catholics under study, runs the

²² R. Scott Appleby, “The Triumph of Americanism: Common Ground for U.S. Catholics in the Twentieth Century,” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, eds. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 40-41. In this framework, Appleby includes not only the neoconservative Catholics but also a wide swath of the liberal and conservative Catholics, referring to them in short hand as Americanists.

risk of falling prey to this temptation.²³ His basic premise is that the neoconservative Catholics want to create a Republican party that is rooted in a Catholic Christian ideological worldview and that expresses this worldview through the implementation of policies consistent with it. He wrote that his book

tells the story of how a small group of ‘theoconservative’ intellectuals has decisively contributed to the unprecedented rise of public religiosity in our time . . . The story ends with an examination of the ‘theocons’ deeply troubling vision of the nation’s future—a future in which the country is thoroughly permeated by orthodox Christian piety, and secular politics are driven out in favor of an explicitly theological approach to ordering the nation’s public life.²⁴

The primary sin of the neoconservative Catholics, argued Linker, is that they reject the ‘liberal bargain,’ which he believed is central to the American founders’ understanding of the relationship between church and state. As a way to avoid religious conflict and maintain public order, Linker argued that the founders established a system in which “believers are expected only to give up the ambition to political rule in *the name of their faith*—that is, the ambition to bring the whole of social life into conformity with their own inevitably partial and sectarian theological convictions.”²⁵ In this understanding of American political life,

²³ Damon Linker, *The Theocons: Secular America Under Siege* (New York City, New York: Doubleday Publishing, 2006). The second book that provides an historical account of the neoconservative Catholics is Betty Clermont’s *The Neo-Catholics: Implementing Christian Nationalism in America* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press, 2009). It is a conspiracy laden book that argues Pope John Paul I was murdered, implies that John Paul II knew about it and was aware of his impending election beforehand, and that Opus Dei, in coordination with the Knights of Malta and other individuals and groups effectively hijacked the Church. The other published work that specifically looks at Neuhaus, Novak and Weigel is Thomas R. Rourke, *A Conscience as Large as the World: Yves R. Simon versus the Neoconservative Catholics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997). Rourke’s book provides a philosophical analysis of their writings and examines many of the conceptual underpinnings of their thought.

²⁴ Linker, xiii.

²⁵ Linker, 224.

religion is and ought to remain a largely private phenomenon, in which people can worship God as they see fit without the danger of state interference.

In contrast to Appleby, who argues that the Americanist style of neoconservative Catholics downplays a clearly Catholic, theological identity in favor of affirming the American republican tradition, Linker claims that their exaggerated Catholic public presence results in the abandonment of the American republican tradition. Consequently, for Linker, the neoconservative Catholics are not, using O'Brien's terminology, republican Catholics. Their rejection of the liberal bargain signifies a rejection of one of the fundamental bases of the American political system. Throughout the course of this dissertation it will become apparent that in various ways each of these interpretations is deficient. In doing so I will provide an alternative understanding to both Linker's and Appleby's take on the neoconservative Catholics.

PUBLIC CATHOLICISM, CONTEMPORARY TRENDS, AND THE NEOCONSERVATIVE CATHOLICS

The central aim of this dissertation is to analyze and evaluate neoconservative Catholicism as a form of public Catholicism during the Reagan Era. The close of the Reagan Administration is a useful end point to such a study because it generally corresponded with the end of the Cold War. Until that point the ever-present threat of communism remained a central theme in the writings of the neoconservative Catholics. The demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War marked an important shift in neoconservative Catholic thought. With communism no longer an immediate threat, more attention was given to

questions concerning American power in a ‘unipolar’ world, abortion and other features that are commonly included under the umbrella of the ‘culture war’ paradigm, and that of intra-governmental dynamics such as the proper role of the judiciary.²⁶ As a way to narrow the exploration of their public Catholic character further, it is important to analyze how they construct their public Catholicism within the context of American society, primarily in the two decades following the Sixties.

Like the political neoconservatives, the neoconservative Catholics was interested in restoring and reconstituting American confidence both domestically and abroad. Unlike the former, the latter were deeply influenced by their Christian heritage and the importance of this tradition in the construction of their public identity. Throughout their writings, the neoconservative Catholics attempted to make sense of the relationship between Catholic social teaching and developments in American political thought. Their understanding of this relationship both influenced their own self understanding and laid the groundwork for the criticisms that they launched against those who held competing interpretations of Catholic and American life. In the process they sought to influence the formation of domestic and foreign policy as it was being developed in Washington, DC. They also sought to shape post-Vatican II Catholic identity, and thus aimed at convincing both clerical and lay Catholics that their vision of the Church was consistent with Catholic tradition.

²⁶ The idea of the unipolar moment was developed by Charles Krauthammer and its implications were examined over the next decade by political neoconservatives and neoconservative Catholics alike, Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 1990/1991, <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19910201faessay6067/charles-krauthammer/the-unipolar-moment.html>, accessed March 1, 2009. With the end of communism, America witnessed a notable increase in the culture war debates. Throughout the Eighties all three of the neoconservative Catholics wrote proportionally little on these issues compared to their growing interest on these issues the following decade.

The neoconservative Catholics shared in the conviction that it is possible to reconcile Catholic social teaching and the American political tradition and that the resources that the former provides should be used to help inform political decision-making. This is not in itself a controversial claim in the literature on the subject. That neoconservative Catholics affirm that these two traditions are complementary is widely accepted in the scholarly literature. What is often overlooked in this same literature is any recognition of the different ways in which Neuhaus, Novak, and Weigel conceptualized the relationship between Catholic social teaching and developments in American political life. Complicating any attempt to make sense of their public identity is that each of them affirmed differently how this is done and thus reveals that, while there are important similarities, there are also notable differences in their thought. Although they shared intellectual commitments on the level of theory, it is also on the theoretical plane that differences in the foundation of their thought also become clear, thus making it impossible to lump them together in some sort of shared a school of thought.²⁷ Tracing out their public identity will thus consist in highlighting intellectual commitments that they each share and pointing out how they take advantage of these commitments to argue against opposing points of view, all the while keeping in mind where they differ from each other.

²⁷ While the term “neoconservative Catholic” is misleading as it implies a straightforward school of thought or homogenous worldview to which each of its adherents belong, throughout the dissertation we will continue to use the term to refer to them corporately. It is a commonly used and generally fair term that can be used to make sense of their thought, particularly insofar as it differentiates them from other “schools of thought” in the American Catholic Church. More bluntly, it provides a useful shorthand to refer to the three of them when they are in agreement (as they often are) with each other on political and religious issues.

While claiming that there is a consistency between the American and Catholic tradition, they further argued that large segments of the American Catholic leadership in the post-Vatican II period often overlooked this compatibility and in the process regularly misappropriated Catholic social teaching as it applied to important policy questions of the day. Many of the discussions about the neoconservative Catholics focus on the level of policy, particularly in light of debates that raged over such issues as the U.S. bishops' pastoral letters, how to deal with the Soviet Union, and the struggles that were then taking place in parts of Latin America. While the substance of the American Catholic leadership's position on questions of policy was an important component of their public identity, the neoconservative Catholics provided a critique of the bishops and church leadership that extended beyond the purely political. Their criticism of post-Vatican II American Catholicism is multilayered, with the political level being the most visible stratum for critique and discussion, albeit not the only one and perhaps not even the most important.

A more fundamental disagreement was reflected in the neoconservative Catholic concern that large swaths of Catholic leadership had, during this period, embraced a flawed Catholic theology and, in particular, a deficient and misguided ecclesiology. Their embrace of a faulty ecclesiology, in turn, distorted their engagement with political affairs because of the way that it misconstrued the proper relationship between the Church's mission and political life. The intersection between the neoconservative Catholics' political and ecclesiological critiques of American Church leadership throughout the Eighties will provide an important theme throughout the dissertation.

To better elucidate the elements that comprise neoconservative Catholic public identity, it will prove helpful to break this dissertation into two parts, each of which will in turn be divided into three chapters. The first part will focus on three themes that surface in their writings during the Seventies and Eighties: disintegration, renewal, and reconciliation. Chapter one will highlight the theme of disintegration that threads throughout their writings. During the Seventies and Eighties, the neoconservative Catholics voiced concern that in the aftermath of Vietnam and the tumultuous Sixties American confidence regarding her role in the world had been shaken and the philosophical foundations on which her political identity had been constructed had fallen into doubt. This narrative intersects that of the broader political neoconservative thought whose alienation from liberalism corresponded with the political shifts that occurred during this same period. Peter Steinfels highlighted this concern when he noted that the political neoconservatives were worried that “a crisis of authority has overtaken America and the West generally. Governing institutions have lost their legitimacy; the confidence of leading elites has been sapped. Social stability and the legacy of liberal civilization are threatened.”²⁸

Unlike the political neoconservatives, those of a Catholic variety were also deeply concerned with what they understood to be a process of disintegration in the Catholic Church. This breakdown was primarily due to a failure of Church leadership to understand and properly apply the teachings of Vatican II to the life of the Church. While expressing general approval of the Council’s contributions, the neoconservative Catholics argued that the interpretation given to it by Catholic leadership and its implementation in the American

²⁸ Steinfels, 53.

Catholic Church had brought with it a great deal of confusion that tended to undermine any coherent Catholic identity. The threat of political and religious disintegration in the United States did not remain independent from each other, but intersected at important junctures. Because of their close connection, any attempt to address the social, political, religious and cultural ills of the day required that each be addressed and understood in relationship to the other.

Not content to sit idly by as the American political tradition slowly slipped away and watch as the American Catholic Church fall into a steady decline, the neoconservative Catholics promoted an intellectual vision that they hoped would contribute to the renewal of both the American Catholic Church and to the revival of the American political tradition. Chapter two will pick up on this theme of renewal, which functions as a counter to that of disintegration. It is at this point that both similarities and differences in their writings begin to emerge and the distinctive character of their individual worldviews begins to take shape. While Neuhaus, Novak and Weigel affirmed many of the same philosophical commitments, they each constructed an intellectual framework that they argued could function as a springboard for renewal. While not necessarily incompatible, these three frameworks highlight different points of emphasis that distinguish the three from each other. In short, Richard Neuhaus relied on a distinctive understanding of the relationship between religion and society and of the importance of moral consensus in a community, George Weigel looked to John Courtney Murray and his notion of the American consensus, and Michael Novak developed the idea of democratic capitalism.

The intellectual frameworks that the neoconservative Catholics proposed sought to counter the political and religious disintegration at work in American life. In the process, they further developed the distinctive philosophical framework highlighted in chapter two by grounding them in an historical narrative. Grounding their frameworks in a narrative of this sort helped to give their arguments a greater degree of credibility by decreasing their abstract character and linking them to a specific understanding of the American and Catholic experience. Through this narrative they sought to show that American political life and the Catholic social teaching tradition are reconcilable. The development of these narratives and how they relate to their distinctive intellectual frameworks will be the focus of chapter three.

Part II will begin to move away from the more theoretical account of neoconservative Catholic thought and look more closely at some of the concrete political debates that were taking place during the Seventies and Eighties. Focusing on these issues, which include debates over how to confront the communist threat, questions regarding liberation theology, and discussions involving socialism versus capitalism, will help to highlight the logic that drove both their political and ecclesiological critiques of the American Catholic Church during this period.

Central to neoconservative Catholic thought during this period was the threat posed by communism to the American political tradition and religious life. This is one of the primary reasons why this study closes on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Following the end of the Cold War, neoconservative Catholic thought shifted in a different direction. Issues pertaining to the culture war became more prominent as did questions

surrounding how America should function in a post-Cold War world. Needless to say, as communism occupied a central role in their thought during the Seventies and Eighties, it is important to examine how they understood this threat and what strategies they proposed to counteract its influence abroad. Chapter four will thus examine the communist threat from a macro perspective and the importance that it held for their understanding of both geopolitical relations and domestic politics.

Chapter five will move from the general to the more specific and will examine the way the neoconservative Catholics understood the political and social turmoil at work in much of Latin America as a product of Soviet interference. This occurred both directly, through Soviet support for revolutionary movements in the region and, more indirectly, through the promotion of Marxist ideology. The bulk of this chapter will thus analyze the neoconservative Catholics' take on the political and religious situation in Latin America during the Eighties and contrast their position with that of the American bishops.

The fourth and fifth chapters begin to flesh out their positions on some of the political and religious questions that dominated their thought during the Eighties. The final chapter will develop this further by focusing on the two major pastoral letters, *The Challenge of Peace* and *Economic Justice for All*, and examining their importance for neoconservative Catholic identity on multiple levels. These pastoral letters provide an opportunity to explore the public activity of the American bishops and analyze this activity from the perspective on neoconservative Catholic thought. The neoconservative Catholics expressed significant disagreement with many of the policy positions staked out by the bishops in the pastorals.

While important, the debates over public policy that ensued had the unfortunate tendency of obscuring a more fundamental criticism leveled by the neoconservative Catholics against many people who were actively involved in Church leadership.

For the neoconservative Catholics at least, the debate that raged over the pastoral letters exhibited an ecclesiological dimension that was more fundamental than the public policy one. Without the ecclesiological presuppositions at play in the bishops' thought, presuppositions that the neoconservative Catholics contend are flawed, the bishops would have acted very differently in relation to the public sphere than they actually did. By drawing out these ecclesiological presuppositions it will become possible to contrast neoconservative Catholic thought with that of the bishops not only in the political realm but in the theological one as well.

Throughout the dissertation it will thus be important to amplify and examine the dominant intellectual themes and motifs germane to the neoconservative Catholics and analyze their relevance to American political thought and the American Catholic Church. It is my contention that the secondary literature on the neoconservative Catholics has failed to understand who they are as an important subset within American Catholic life. As a consequence, this misunderstanding obscures not only their role in post-World War II American Catholicism but also to those intellectual and religious trends to which they were responding.

PART I

DISINTEGRATION, RENEWAL, AND RECONCILIATION

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In the late winter of 1982, George Weigel, along with about one hundred other church leaders, was invited by the Justice and Peace Center of the Archdiocese of Seattle to attend a day long retreat. Something seemed immediately amiss. Weigel recounted that the event opened with a prayer given by the Archbishop of Seattle at the base of a gigantic golden Buddha. They were summarily informed by the organizers that they were not there to think, but to get “in touch with their feelings.”¹ Nevertheless, throughout the course of the day participants were lectured from the perspective of a geopolitical and ethical worldview that was typically critical of America’s foreign and nuclear policy.

Weigel relayed this vignette to illustrate what he contended was the emergence of a counter-cultural Catholicism that had become pervasive throughout Church leadership in the post-Vatican II period. While on display during the retreat, this tendency was exemplified regularly in the foreign policy perspective embraced by the Seattle Archbishop, Raymond Hunthausen. In both public speeches and in pastoral letters, Hunthausen called for American unilateral disarmament, nonviolent resistance even against Soviet aggression, and tax resistance as a way to force changes in American foreign policy.² In a 1981 address to the Pacific Northwest Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, he proclaimed that American “willingness to destroy life everywhere on earth, for the sake of our security as Americans, is at the root of many other terrible events

¹ George Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 170-172.

² Ibid. In January, 1982, Hunthausen led by example and promised to withhold fifty percent of his income tax as a way to protest American’s involvement in the nuclear arms race.

in our country.”³ Such a take on foreign policy was, Weigel complained, out of line with the political realities that American faced on the international front and dramatically oversimplified the complex framework within which foreign policy decisions had to be made. Worse still, the policy positions that he employed were difficult to square with traditional Church teaching on issues of war and peace.

Commenting on the same retreat later that year, Michael Novak reiterated Weigel’s concern about the changing face of post-Vatican II American Catholicism. He was particularly worried that traditional Church teaching was being shunted aside for a new set of neodoxies, in which “new ideologies are replacing the historical Catholic faith in the teaching of many Catholic authorities, clergy and lay.”⁴ Understood within the context of the public square, these “new teachings” often included moral judgments on sexual morality, nuclear weapons, and foreign policy that were difficult to reconcile with traditional teaching.⁵

For the neoconservative Catholics, the tendency among Catholic leadership to affirm new moral teachings in place of traditional ones exemplified the confusion and loss of identity that was at play in the Church following the Second Vatican Council. It signified a process of disintegration from within. They contended that many who were in the ranks of Catholic leadership had abandoned traditional Church teaching in favor of a new understanding of what it meant to be Catholic. This concern was not unique to the

³ Ibid, 172. Weigel also referred with some disdain to Hunthausen’s statement that the Trident submarine base in Washington was “Auschwitz of Puget Sound.”

⁴ Michael Novak, “Liberal Catholicism Will Rise Again,” *National Review*, June 11, 1982, 694.

⁵ Ibid.

neoconservative Catholics. A contemporary of the neoconservative Catholics, while commenting on the two decades following the close of Vatican II, noted that “the dismantling of traditional Roman Catholic theology, by Catholics themselves, is by now a *fait accompli*.”⁶ The failure to remain grounded in a traditional Catholic identity opened the Church up to all kinds of theological and moral deformations and made it susceptible to influences that were antithetical to the Faith.

Such susceptibility became notable, they claimed, in the way that secular political movements influenced many Catholic elite. Neuhaus accused Catholic elites of the post-Vatican II era of having become obsessed with social justice movements popular in American culture and seduced by the political perspectives of, more often than not, liberal segments in secular political life. If the influence of Catholic leaders was negligible among the Catholic faithful, it might not be reason for concern. But, given that they were entrenched in positions of power, their personal judgments on policy questions were often confused with those of the Church.⁷

One arena within which these influences had a particularly pronounced effect was related to the crisis over Vietnam. As a political event, Vietnam challenged the American public to question their preconceived notions about American identity and eventually brought into doubt the legitimacy of the ‘liberal consensus.’ During the post-World War II period a shared set of assumptions related to foreign and domestic policy helped to

⁶ Thomas Sheehan, “Revolution in the Church,” *The New York Review of Books* vol. 21, no. 10, June 14, 1984, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1984/jun/14/revolution-in-the-church>, accessed December 24, 2010. This sentiment was expressed by conservative and traditionalist Catholics for decades after the close of the Council.

⁷ Richard John Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1987), 266-275.

create a general consensus “about the capacity of American capitalism, assisted by a moderate degree of economic management by the government, to create economic prosperity; the desirability of preserving and modestly extending the New Deal Legacy; and the necessity of combating (sic) the threat of world communism.”⁸ Largely due to the fallout from Vietnam, this consensus began to fracture and was replaced by competing perspectives regarding American identity and its role in the world. Parallel to their concerns related to the state of the Church in the post-Vatican II world, the growing skepticism surrounding the proper role of America in the international community signified a fracturing of American political identity.

Well into the Seventies both Neuhaus and Novak became involved in the debate over Vietnam and the antiwar movement, sought to reinforce an appreciation for the American political experiment in democracy, and took a particular interest in the Christian church’s general failure to join them in this effort. Not only did many in the Christian churches fail in their attempt to resist political breakdown all around them but many were supportive of elements that contribute to this breakdown. In an important sense, the neoconservative Catholics found themselves fighting a two front war. They were trying to counter left-wing elements in the secular political sphere that they believed were acting in ways detrimental to the American political tradition and at the same time attempting to root out radical and inauthentic elements in the Church Herself.

⁸ Iwan Morgan, *Beyond the Liberal Consensus: A Political History of the United States since 1965* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 2.

VIETNAM AND THE ANTIWAR MOVEMENT

Although peripherally involved since the mid-Fifties, the Johnson administration committed the United States to large scale military involvement in Vietnam beginning with the Gulf of Tonkin incident, which was soon followed by an extended bombing campaign in the early 1965.⁹ Early rumblings against the war could be heard in parts of the country at this time, but widespread antiwar sentiment did not become pronounced until a few years later. As the antiwar movement developed, a wide spectrum of groups sought to define its political character and philosophical makeup, including organizations of a liberal, radical and religious character. On the liberal side, at least in its early manifestations, was the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), which initially formed in mid-1957 and was interested in the nuclear threat and the dangers of nuclear testing. Following the passage of the Test Ban Treaty in 1963, a treaty that the group strongly supported, SANE successfully transitioned into a leading liberal voice in the antiwar movement.¹⁰

Alongside liberal oriented peace organizations such as SANE, organizations of a more radical bent were also taking shape in the early Sixties, typically because they were dissatisfied with strategies and goals promoted by their more moderate counterparts. While not very influential early on, their presence signified an underlying dissatisfaction with an American-style approach to domestic and international affairs. One of the more influential of these groups that formed in the first half of the Sixties was Students for a Democratic Society

⁹ For a useful overview of the Gulf of Tonkin incident and the events that followed, see Larry Addington, *America's War in Vietnam: A Short Narrative History* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 72-78.

¹⁰ Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam War* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 57-68.

(SDS-1960). The organization's political outlook was typified by the "Port Huron Statement" (1962), which called for a new politics that, while interested in issues of peace, also expressed a wide-ranging critique of American foreign and domestic policy.¹¹ As early as 1965 the antiwar movement had acquired many of its definitive characteristics and presaged its division into more clearly defined liberal and radical camps, "its layers of often disconnected dissent in various strata of society, the tenuous relationship to its liberal and radical wings, their deep seated differences, and the immediate issues that provoked their division..."¹²

Events in the spring and fall of 1967 highlighted the fault lines that had become more apparent in the antiwar movement. It was at this point that the more radical side of the antiwar movement became energized, a shift that had important repercussions for the movement as a whole. A vocal and sometimes militant faction "reinforced the image of the antiwar movement as a radical fringe and pushed it further to the political margin. By antagonizing the American center, the militants aggravated cultural and political polarization in both the country and the movement."¹³ The Johnson Administration, trying to maintain the support of the center, gladly took advantage of this image and launched investigations into the communist connections of antiwar groups while engaging in a general strategy of identifying the antiwar movement as a whole with its radical fringe elements.¹⁴ Such a practice, while politically expedient, unfairly characterized the pluralistic character of the

¹¹ "Port Huron Statement," reprinted in *The Sixties Project*, The University of Virginia, http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/Sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Manifestos/SDS_Port_Huron.html.

¹² DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 138.

¹³ Ibid, 188.

¹⁴ Ibid, 177-8.

movement. It was far more diverse and nuanced than supporters of the President cared to admit. Alongside the more secularly oriented liberal and radical antiwar groups, religiously based groups maintained an important presence during the Vietnam years.

At the behest of Richard John Neuhaus a meeting of prominent religious leaders convened in mid-1965 to discuss the situation in Vietnam and brainstorm strategies that could be used to oppose U.S. policy there. The meeting resulted in the formation of the National Emergency Committee of Clergy Concerned with Vietnam, an important coalition for religious based opposition to the war. Membership included a large cross section of religious leaders such as William Sloan Coffin, Rabbi Abraham Heschel, and Daniel Berrigan, each of whom wanted to address the dearth of peace movements that adequately reflected the interests of religious organizations.¹⁵ The organization's early activities typically consisted of traditional means of dissent including petitions, marches, and publications, which they hoped would sway public opinion and in doing so influence public policy.¹⁶

Events that took place early in 1965 presented a moment of promise for the organization's activities. President Johnson's call for a temporary bombing halt in late December of that year, which was intended to provide Hanoi a 'face saving' opportunity to

¹⁵ The most comprehensive study of CALCAV is Mitchell Hall, *Because of Their Faith: CALCAV and Religious Opposition to the Vietnam War* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press). See, in particular, chapter 1 for a detailed description of the organization's founding. Although signifying an important addition to the religious expression against the war, it was by no means the only avenue of expression. The Fellowship of Reconciliation, for example, was another peace organization that stretched back to the First World War and expressed an essentially Christian vision. See, DeBenedetti, 21-22.

¹⁶ One of their more successful events was the invocation of a conference that gathered together 5,000 area clergy to study the issue of Vietnam. Noticeably absent from the conference was Daniel Berrigan, who had been transferred to Latin America by his Jesuit superiors, behind whom stood Cardinal Spellman. Further, he was ordered to end his association with the group.

end the war, opened up the possibility of a negotiated peace. Applauding the move and in response to the bombing respite, Clergy Concerned immediately began a campaign for a permanent settlement, criticized the President for not acting earlier, and argued that the problem in Vietnam was not communist aggression but a domestic civil war. Failing to achieve a lasting settlement, the American bombing campaign commenced again after only a thirty-seven day pause. Disappointed, the group's leadership expanded their focus by consolidating the organization nationally and by mid-1966 included lay involvement in their political activities.¹⁷ With the introduction of lay membership, Michael Novak became involved in the newly renamed Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam (CALCAV).

In contrast to elements in the antiwar movement who argued that American involvement in Vietnam demonstrated imperialist tendencies, the leadership of CALCAV typically understood Vietnam as an anomaly in the American experiment. For such folks, Vietnam was misguided but did not exemplify the American experience.¹⁸ Within a few years of the founding, Daniel Berrigan, an early and active member in the organization, had begun to stake out a much more radical critique of the US policy and intentions in that region of the world. As time passed he, with his brother Phillip often at his side, issued increasingly condemnatory rhetoric against the United States' international and domestic policies.¹⁹

While the Berrigans developed a sharp critique of the American experiment as the Sixties moved into the Seventies, both Michael Novak and Richard Neuhaus grew

¹⁷ Hall, 22-24; Addington, 94-96.

¹⁸ Neuhaus, "American Religion and the War," 12.

¹⁹ For an overview of the Berrigan Brothers criticism of the United States and political liberalism in general see the relevant chapter in Michael C. Bivins, *The Fracture of Good Order: Christian Antiliberalism and the Challenge to American Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

increasingly disillusioned with the antiwar movement and its growing tendency toward radicalism. Rather than moving leftward with the Berrigans, they moved slowly to the right. That said, in the early years of the movement both Neuhaus and Novak flirted with, although never gave into, a radical approach to politics. In one article written for the journal *Cross Currents*, for example, Novak provided a sympathetic analysis of the political outlook of young Americans who were increasingly beholden to a revolutionary impulse. Even here he did not reject the underlying principles of democratic rule and political freedom, but took issue with the moral conscience that guided political decision making in America. He wrote that

The enemy in America... is the tyrannical and indifferent majority... So long as such a majority controls the destiny of America, it appears, the nation will remain militarist, racist and counterrevolutionary; the wealth of the United States will increase; conscience will be suffocated; the wretched of the earth will suffer yet more. The revolutionary problem is how to fight the moral sickness of the democratic majority.²⁰

Novak noted that what initiated his transition away from this rather pessimistic view of the American public occurred during his leave of absence from Stanford to work on behalf of the Democratic Party during the 1972 election. While on sabbatical Novak had the opportunity to travel across the country, work on the grassroots level, and better understand the political and cultural outlook of the average American. This activity contributed to his growing awareness of the ethnic diversity and the communal ties at work in neighborhoods across the country. His growing understanding of these diverse communities forced a

²⁰ Michael Novak, "Power, Disruption and Revolution," *Cross Currents* (Winter, 1969): 34. For a more complete analysis of his radical ideology of the time, see Michael Novak, *A Theology for Radical Politics* (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1969).

reevaluation of how he understood American politics and culture, a reevaluation that challenged his elitist tendencies and which initiated his move rightward.²¹ Although space does not allow for development of the topic further, his experience on the campaign trail can also be understood as one of the important events that led Novak to take more seriously the issue of ethnicity in American political life, most clearly addressed in his book, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*.²²

Like Michael Novak, Neuhaus flirted for a time with a more radical critique of American political and cultural life, at one point suggesting the possible need for a “just revolution.” Nevertheless, while sometimes expressing fairly heated rhetoric related to American policies, he never repudiated America with the consistency and vehemence of some of the more radical antiwar activists.²³ Part of his hesitancy is attributable to consistent confidence in the philosophical legitimacy of the American experiment. Even though the ruling order failed to live up to the obligations laid out in the constitutional order and the philosophical principles that underlie it, the principles themselves remained legitimate.

His refusal to condemn unconditionally America is further illustrated by his eventual rejection of the countercultural left. In a retrospective issued some years later, Neuhaus noted that he broke with CALCAV due to a sharp leftward turn and exaggerated anti-

²¹ Michael Novak, “Controversial Engagements,” *First Things* 92 (April, 1999): 21-29.

²² Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in American Life* (New Brunswick, U.S.S., 1996).

²³ Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *Movement and Revolution* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Company, 1970). Years later Neuhaus argues that the message in his *Movement and Revolution* was more of a warning regarding the seriousness of revolution and not a legitimization of it. Richard John Neuhaus, *America Against Itself: Moral Vision and the Public Order* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 62-3.

Americanism in the organization's ranks.²⁴ This leftward shift included the radicalization of the civil rights movement, the violent reaction to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and the growing tendency for those active in antiwar movement to hail the Vietcong and Ho Chi Minh as icons of liberation and social justice.²⁵

The changing mood in the antiwar movement and a growing skepticism over the Vietnam War and the cultural left also influenced the intellectual and political classes. Like other segments of American society, these groupings began to divide on a number of points. It is important to examine the splits that emerged politically and intellectually; these divisions will provide the backdrop against which one can understand the emergence of neoconservatism, in both its secular and religious forms.

THE EFFECT OF VIETNAM ON THE AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL AND POLITICAL CLASSES

Neoconservatism in general, and neoconservative Catholicism in particular, has never embraced populism as a political style, instead focusing most of their attention on the importance of ideas, with a particular interest in influencing the intellectual elite and political leadership. Consequently, while one could examine the affects of Vietnam on American identity by tracing changes in public opinion or the changing use of imagery in popular media, that is not of primary interest here. More important for our purposes is the role the Vietnam War played in shifting perspectives among the American intellectual elite and its

²⁴ For example, see Richard John Neuhaus, "The Public Square: Conservative Changes," *First Things*, www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=3591&var_recherche=calcav, accessed Nov. 15, 2007.

²⁵ Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, 57-62.

political leadership. Among the former, the intellectual consensus that emerged following the Second World War began to fracture in the face of a failed Vietnam policy. In its place remained a wide range of competing perspectives regarding American identity and its role in the world. For the latter, while generally supportive of the war in Vietnam in its early years, widespread support diminished as the war progressed. It was due to this dual breakdown, among the intellectual class and influential segments of American political leadership, that neoconservative Catholics responded to and, over time, tried to counter.

At the end of the summer of 1967, *Commentary* magazine published a symposium addressing the present state of liberal anticommunism. The symposium provided a wide range of voices, all of which were generally critical of the radical elements that contributed an increasingly influential voice in its ranks. In one essay, Robert Pickus criticized the emergent anti-anti-communism and the typical anti-Americanism that followed closely behind, and which he argued was at work in many left-wing political organizations of the period. Noting his surprise at the rapidity at which former anti-communist liberals, "...once persuaded to abandon a Communist devil, would adopt an American one," Pickus criticized the radical elements pervasive in many segments of the antiwar movement for their tendency to see America as the sole villain in World politics.²⁶

In the same symposium Richard Rovere, then Washington correspondent for the *New Yorker*, reinforced Pickus' point when he noted that the Vietnam experience brought about a dramatic change in the intellectual liberal community. Many intellectuals and activists in these circles had, even by this early date, engaged in what amounted to a virtual

²⁶ Robert Pickus, "Liberal Anti-Communism Revisited: A Symposium," *Commentary* (Sept., 1967): 60-61.

abandonment of the American creed.²⁷ In a recent study on the transitions in liberal intellectual thought during the Vietnam War, Robert Tomes reaffirmed both Pickus' and Rovere's observations regarding liberal intellectuals.

Throughout the Fifties, most liberal intellectuals shared a general consensus regarding the important achievements of the American past and a strong support for international anticommunism. Although they often differed on questions of the means, these differences were typically understood in the context of shared ends, which included an aversion to communism and belief in America's positive influence in the world.²⁸ The liberal intellectual assessment of Vietnam followed a similar arc to that of the wider peace movement. While the broader peace movement maintained a degree of solidarity into the mid-Sixties, by 1968 it had fractured into a variety of liberal and radical elements. This fracturing led to a wider range of differences related to Vietnam, the role of America in the Cold War, and American anticommunism. Robert Tomes neatly summarizes the geography of American intellectual life and the differences that emerged in this regard when he wrote that

the war transformed the consensus into an array of distinct intellectual groups-- neoconservatives, democratic socialists, New Leftists, disillusioned liberals, and conservatives, each of which approached the new postwar America with a fresh and unique outlook heavily influenced by their wartime experiences... Generally contentious toward each other, the new groups shared few of the old assumptions which had bolstered the consensus. These assumptions, like America's international responsibilities, faith in democratic institutions and a

²⁷ Richard Rovere, "Liberal Anti-Communism Revisited: A Symposium," *Commentary* (Sept. 1967): 67.

²⁸ Robert Tomes, *Apocalypse Then: American Intellectuals and the Vietnam War, 1954-1975*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998), 9-15. For one of the seminal works on the idea of the liberal consensus see Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955).

belief in capitalism as the inviolable economic system, became a springboard of disagreement.²⁹

Tomes' assessment of the changing intellectual climate during the war relied primarily on an analysis of an array of popular, intellectually oriented journals and magazines. On one end of the spectrum is a magazine like the *National Review*, whose criticisms of U.S involvement in Vietnam typically consisted in the claim that American policy was not aggressive enough in its pursuit of victory. From start to finish the *National Review* editorial perspective was unapologetically anticommunist and in favor of American involvement in Vietnam. On the other end of the spectrum one would find a journal like *The New York Review of Books*, which regularly published intellectuals sympathetic to the New Left, including Noam Chomsky and Susan Sontag. In a 1975 symposium published after South Vietnam's collapse, *The New York Review of Books* published a series of articles celebrating the U.S. defeat.³⁰

Just as the intellectual class was deeply affected by the events in Vietnam, leading some to reevaluate their commonly held assumptions about American identity, American political leaders were also shaped by the Vietnam experience. In the early years of the war, dissent in the Senate aimed at administration policies was a muted and marginal phenomenon. By the early Seventies, dissenting opinion on the war had become

²⁹ Ibid, 234-5.

³⁰ For a comprehensive account of the divisions that emerged among American intellectuals after 1968, see chapter 6 in Tomes, *Apocalypse Then*; for the *New York Review* symposium see "The Meaning of Vietnam: A Symposium," *New York Review of Books*, October 12, 1975; For an account of the editorial positions of the two most important Catholic magazines of the day, *Commonweal* and *America*, see David Settje, "'Dueling Catholic Periodicals: America's and Commonweal's Perceptions of the Cold and Vietnam Wars, 1964-1975,'" *Catholic Social Science Review* 9 (2004), www.catholicsocialscientists.org/cssrix/article--settje.pdf, accessed October 1, 2007.

commonplace, as much among the political classes in Congress as in the intellectual classes of universities, think tanks, and on editorial boards of influential magazines. It is useful to illustrate this change of tone on Capitol Hill by looking at the Senate and briefly develop the effect of three political events on political debate over the war: passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964, the Senate Foreign Relations public hearings on Vietnam in 1966, and the Cooper-Church and McGovern-Hatfield Amendments of 1970 and 1971.³¹

Except for a select group of U.S. senators, most Democrats and Republicans in Congress supported, at least tacitly, President Johnson's position on Vietnam up through the mid-Sixties.³² While a basic framework for dissent had been developed by 1964, widespread public support for U.S. policy in Vietnam made it difficult for dissenters to achieve legislative success on foreign policy questions at this time.³³ Even those suspicious of President Johnson's long-term intentions in Vietnam often fell into line when forced to vote on major foreign policy resolutions. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, for example, which effectively ceded control over the course of the war to President Johnson, garnered only two dissenting votes. Many who voted in favor soon expressed regret, but public pressure to support the president proved too strong for many of them to take on at that time.³⁴

³¹ Kyle Longley, "Congress and the Vietnam War: Senate Doves and their Impact on the War," in *The War that Never Ends*, eds. David Anderson and John Ernst (Knoxville, TN: The University of Knoxville Press, 2007): 289-311.

³² David Schmitz and Natalie Fousekis, "Frank Church, the Senate, and the Emergence of Dissent on the Vietnam War," *The Pacific Historical Review* 63, no. 4 (November, 1994): 575. Some of the early dissenters of Vietnam policy included Wayne Morse (D-AK), Frank Church (D-ID), Mike Mansfield (D-MT) and, eventually, J. William Fulbright (D-AR)

³³ Robert David Johnson, "The Origins of Dissent: Senate Liberals and Vietnam, 1959-1964," *The Pacific Historical Review* 65, no. 2 (May, 1960): 249-50.

³⁴ Longley, "Congress and the Vietnam War: Senate Doves and Their Impact on the War," 295-6.

Two years later Senator William Fulbright, then Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called public hearings on the topic of Vietnam. It was a move that marked a new phase in Congressional dissent over Vietnam. On the one hand, it provided dissenting Senators an important public forum from which they could engage in a sometimes forthright critique of administration policy. Senator Gore, Senator Fulbright, and others on the committee took the opportunity to confront and strongly criticize Secretary of State Dean Rusk and General Maxwell Taylor, both defenders of President Johnson's policies. The hearings also had the effect of providing dissent over the war a legitimacy it did not have previously. No longer was dissent over the war focused in the streets, but it now had explicit public backing from some of the most powerful political figures in America.

By 1970 disagreement over Vietnam and concerns related to its possible spread had moved from a marginal position to a more central position in the Senate. Senate doves clashed publicly with the Nixon administration's decision to invade Cambodia. Partly in response to President Nixon's attempt to quash legislation that would have cut appropriations for troops in Cambodia and limit the ability of the U.S. military to engage in military activities in that country. A similar amendment failed to gain passage when presented in the House some weeks later. A second amendment, sponsored by Senators Hatfield and McGovern, and which they attached to a military appropriations bill, called for the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam by the end of 1971. It failed to garner enough votes for passage.³⁵ While none of these legislative attempts actually ended the war, their publicly debated character highlighted an important segment of the Senate that was willing to pursue

³⁵ Longley, 300-305.

an aggressive legislative strategy against the expressed foreign policy of the Nixon administration in the region.

The debate over Vietnam was not simply a debate over partisan politics or disagreements over competing strategies in the fight against global communism, but became a question over American identity itself. In an essay discussing the affect of Vietnam on American life, one scholar remarked that “the Vietnam War, as perhaps no other event in U.S. history, caused us as a nation to confront a set of beliefs about ourselves that forms a basic part of the American character.”³⁶ One of the concepts that became popular in the aftermath of the war was 'Vietnam Syndrome,' a term that describes the “pathological aversion among American policymakers to the use of force as an instrument of foreign policy.”³⁷ While not universal in character, this growing aversion to international intervention signaled an important shift in perspective among influential foreign policy makers during the Seventies.

This shift became particularly apparent in segments of the Democratic Party. There was a growing concern among influential Democratic leaders that America's involvement overseas bordered on an imperialist impulse that was merely exemplified in Vietnam. Perhaps the most often used example of this transition is Senator George McGovern's failed presidential bid of 1972.³⁸ During the campaign, McGovern promoted a more cooperative

³⁶ George C. Herring, “The War that Never Seems to Go Away,” in *The War that Never Ends*, eds. David Anderson and John Ernst (Knoxville, TN: The University of Knoxville Press, 2007), 343.

³⁷ David L. Anderson, “No More Vietnams: Historians Debate the Policy Lessons of the Vietnam War,” in *The War that Never Ends*, eds. David Anderson and John Ernst (Knoxville, TN: The University of Knoxville Press, 2007), 13.

³⁸ One could point to a number of important Democratic leaders in the Senate who became increasingly concerned over American power overseas. In an essay on Southern Democratic Senator William Fulbright, for

and less confrontational approach to the Soviet Union. His campaign slogan “Come Home, America,” while targeted at the United States' involvement in Vietnam, was taken by some to be a call for a renewed form of American isolationism.³⁹ One group that was particularly vocal in the face of McGovern's call were the neoconservatives, who interpreted it “as a call to leave not simply Vietnam but much of the world as well...the McGovern vision seemed to suggest that America's active involvement in the world... was immoral, imperialistic, and corrupting.”⁴⁰ This concern had little to do with McGovern's opposition to continued involvement from Vietnam per se. Some of the emerging neoconservative intellectuals, including Michael Novak and Richard Neuhaus were opposed to America's military involvement in Southeast Asia. Even Norman Podhoretz, one of the leaders of the neoconservative movement, had by 1971 turned against American involvement in Vietnam.⁴¹ What was of great concern for the neoconservatives was what they perceived to be McGovern's vision for American involvement overseas, particularly in relation to the Soviet Union.

In response to McGovern's Democratic primary victory and subsequent drubbing during the general election, an array of alienated, Democratic intellectuals formed the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM). This organization was established to recapture

example, Randall Woods writes that during the war “Fulbright, anguished by what he perceived to be America's uncontrollable impulse to dominate, eventually sought refuge in a realism that bordered on neo-isolationism,” Randall Bennett Woods, “Dixie's Dove: J. William Fulbright, the Vietnam War, and the American South,” *The Journal of Southern History* 25 no. 3 (August, 1994): 533; for an analysis of other Democratic Senators' changing position related to American involvement in Vietnam, see Randall B. Woods, ed., *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition: The Politics of Dissent* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

³⁹ John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs 1945-1994* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 60.

⁴⁰ Jay Winik, “The Neoconservative Reconstruction,” *Foreign Policy* 73 (Winter, 1988-1989): 138.

⁴¹ Norman Podhoretz, “A Note on Vietnamization,” *Commentary* 51, no. 5 (May 1971): 6-9.

the Democratic Party from those sympathetic to the politics of George McGovern. Its membership included a range of Democratic intellectuals, such as Nathan Glazer, Penn Kemble, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, Michael Novak, and Norman Podhoretz, many of whom came to publicly support Ronald Reagan during his first presidential bid. While largely ineffective as a political force, the emergence of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority marked a split in the Democratic Party between an internationalist, anti-communist wing and the McGovern wing of the party.⁴²

The preceding commentary on the Vietnam War, the antiwar movement, and the breakdown in the liberal consensus helps to create the context for understanding the neoconservative Catholics. Given the importance of these events in American life and their contribution to the development of neoconservative Catholic political and religious thought, thought, it is helpful to examine intellectual currents in their thought during the Sixties and Seventies. While the social upheavals of the 1960s impressed upon them concerns related to the future of American political life, they were also deeply interested in issues of a religious nature, particularly as it relates to the health and well being of the Christian churches. Although some of their immediate interests in this regard initially diverged, it will be argued that their general conception of the problems confronting America and the Catholic Church during this period largely coincided. For the sake of clarity, we will look at each thinker separately, starting with Michael Novak.

⁴² Ehrmann, 60-61.

MICHAEL NOVAK, THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL AND THE CHANGING CATHOLIC CHURCH

The way in which Michael Novak understood the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath is significant for understanding the development of his intellectual thought. While Michael Novak wrote extensively on the Council as it happened, the competing interpretations of the Council's meaning following its close dramatically influenced his perception of the American Church and her activity in American politics.⁴³

Around the same time that the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution was passed and the U.S. was committed to war in Vietnam, a second conflict was already well underway. This one was fought not with guns and ammo, but with words and ideas. It did not occur between warring nation states, but within the Roman Catholic Church. Its source was the Second Vatican Council. While Vatican II marked an important turning point for the Church in its relationship to the modern world, competing interpretations of the Council contributed to the fragmentation of American Catholicism along political and ecclesial lines during the 1970s. In his essay “Interpreting the Council: Catholic Attitudes toward Vatican II,” the ecclesiologist Joseph Komonchak provides a useful framework for understanding the divisions that emerged during this period.⁴⁴

While noting the danger of oversimplification, Komonchak laid out the reaction to Vatican II in the context of two extremes. On the one side are the progressive interpretations

⁴³ For his most important essay on Vatican II, written while Vatican II was underway, see Michael Novak, *The Open Church: Vatican II, Act II* (New York: MacMillan, 1964).

⁴⁴ Joseph Komonchak, “Interpreting the Council: Catholic Attitudes toward Vatican II” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholic in America*, ed. R. Scott Appleby et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 18-35.

of the Council, which tend to “work with a sharp, almost black-and-white, disjunction between the preconciliar and postconciliar church,” with dismissive adjectives like “triumphalistic, legalistic, and hierarchical” defining the former.⁴⁵ On the opposite side of the spectrum, the traditionalist wing tends to affirm a similar dichotomy between the pre- and post-conciliar Church except, in this case, is critical of the post-conciliar church as having engaged in a systematic abandonment of the faith.⁴⁶ Neither Michael Novak nor the other neoconservative Catholics fit into either of the two extremes above, but instead occupied a middle ground which takes issue with the manner in which the Council documents have been appropriated since the Council.⁴⁷

Similarly to Komonchak, Novak understood the aftermath of the Council by initially positing two extremes of his own. On one side are the traditionalist Catholics, whom Novak accused of affirming the error of ‘non-historical orthodoxy.’ While admitting the traditionalist Catholic’s desire to be faithful, he criticized traditionalists’ understanding of the

⁴⁵ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 26-29; While impossible to demarcate clearly, progressive Catholics would be those Catholics, typically educators, academics, and activists who were involved in groups like Call To Action, NETWORK, and other groups supportive of liberation and feminist theologies that became popular during the Seventies. It is also not unusual for conservative leaning Catholics refer to lump professional organizations such as the Catholic Theological Society of America or the Catholic Biblical Association in the progressive camp. In her essay, “Catholic Women Theologians of the Left,” Susan Ross provides some markers that would typically characterize Progressive Women Catholics, see Susan A. Ross, “Catholic Woman Theologies of the Left,” *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. R. Scott Appleby et al., (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995). Traditionalist Catholics are more locatable and would include, for example, followers of Lefebvre. For more on Traditionalist Catholics and their religious self understanding, see For more on Traditionalist Catholics see William Dinges, “Roman Catholic Traditionalism in the United States,” in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); William Dinges, “We Are What You Were,” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. R. Scott Appleby et al., (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995); Michael Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81-120.

⁴⁷ Mary Jo Weaver, “Introduction: Who Are the Conservative Catholics,” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. R. Scott Appleby et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 12.

Faith. Rather than admitting a historical component, traditionalists approach the Faith as ahistorical, otherworldly, and abstract. The failure to recognize the historical nature of the faith, reflected most clearly in the historical nature of the incarnation, blinds them to the important developments that the Second Vatican Council signified in the life of the Church.⁴⁸ On the other side of this divide, Novak criticized the progressive wing of the Catholic Church of holding to ‘non-historical neodoxies.’ Like the traditionalists, progressive Catholics failed to appreciate the historical character of the faith. But there is here an important difference. For such Catholics, it is as though the nearly two thousand year history of the Christian Church never happened but rather came into being with the convening of Vatican II.⁴⁹

In the early Eighties, Michael Novak criticized progressive Catholics for embracing neodoxy, which signified a complete break from the Catholic intellectual tradition. For progressive Catholics, Novak argued, Augustine, Aquinas, Maritain and others were forgotten; “it was as if the world somehow started fresh yesterday, or in any case about 1965.”⁵⁰ In a similar fashion, George Weigel argued that in the pursuit of political and social relevancy, progressive Catholics had turned their back on the distinctiveness of the Catholic Tradition. This resulted in a complete misreading of the signs of the times and the religious realities confronting the Church.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Michael Novak, *Confession of a Catholic* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row Publishers, 1983), 43-5.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 45-6.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 46.

⁵¹ George Weigel, “The Neoconservative Difference: A Proposal for the Renewal of Church and Society,” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. R. Scott Appleby et al., (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 145-6.

While critical of both the traditionalist and progressive wings of the Catholic Church, Novak was particularly critical of the latter. His tendency in this direction has a good deal to do with the contrasting public character of both wings. Traditionalist Catholics tended to focus primarily on the internal workings of the Church and had less interest in overt forms of political activity. Where traditionalists, and other conservative elements of the Church, do engage in political activity, they tended to side with Novak and the other neoconservative Catholics.⁵² With the progressive wing, a different dynamic emerged.

In the decade following Vatican II progressive Catholics, while very much interested in theological questions, were also active politically. They developed a distinctive and often contrary form of public Catholicism to that of Michael Novak and his neoconservative Catholic counterparts. In the two decades following Vatican II, those typically identified as progressive Catholics underwent an important transition in their religious and political self-understanding. According to the religion scholar Mary Jo Weaver, during this period progressive-minded Catholics often shifted toward a more egalitarian and experiential understanding of the Church, moral deliberation, and their own faith. As a result, it was not unusual for these groups of Catholics to take an adversarial approach to the hierarchy on a range of moral and ecclesiological issues, and integrate feminist and liberation theologies into their political worldview.⁵³ By the early Eighties it was a commonplace for neoconservative Catholics to criticize liberal and progressive Catholics, which often included

⁵² R. Scott Appleby, "The Triumph of Americanism: Common Ground for U.S. Catholics," in *Being Right: Conservative Catholic in America*, ed. R. Scott Appleby et al., (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 55.

⁵³ Mary Jo Weaver, "Introduction," in *What's Left*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver et al., (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 3.

many of the American bishops, as being quasi-socialist, soft on communism, supportive of liberation movements, and beholden to a social justice agenda that was not rooted in a realistic understanding of political life.

In an essay on the Catholic Left, David O'Brien discussed the way in which men and women religious and lay Catholic social activists developed a heightened awareness of economic and political injustices both domestically and internationally in the decade following Vatican II. Domestically, these activists supported individuals like Cesar Chavez and his work for farm laborers, and also struggled to correct injustices they witnessed in run-down areas of the inner city and elsewhere. Internationally, they often lent support to liberation movements and called for fundamental changes to economic and political structures that supported injustice. Most telling, there was an ongoing suspicion that such injustices were a direct result of American support of authoritarian governments overseas and self-interest or indifference to those suffering on the home front. An emphasis on structural reform was typically recognized as an essential first step in addressing problems associated with international poverty and political upheaval.⁵⁴

For Novak, while these Catholic groups were claiming to seek justice, their solutions were as dangerous as the problems addressed and, further, were downright destructive of a true understanding of the Church. While seeking to bring justice to downtrodden regions of the world, progressive Catholics were doing little more than abandoning their own tradition for an alien one. Progressive Catholic political thought was, in too many instances,

⁵⁴ David O'Brien, "What Happened to the Catholic Left," in *What's Left? Liberal American Catholics*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver et al., (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 270-272.

predictably critical of the conservative and even the Western political tradition and all too sympathetic to socialist, and often Marxist, revolutionary political movements.⁵⁵ Patrick Allitt, author of *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985*, noted that by the early Eighties “Novak now lined himself up behind Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Ratzinger, and the forces of ecclesiastical counterrevolution, against feminist and liberation theology... and against what seemed to him the breakdown of all lines of Catholic authority.”⁵⁶

From the perspective of public Catholicism, Novak's critique of progressive Catholicism focused on two primary points. First, progressive Catholic support of liberation movements endangered the legitimacy of the Western political tradition and directly undermined the integrity of the Catholic social teaching tradition. Defending the integrity of the Catholic Church and simultaneously defending the Western tradition had become a common project. Second, the inherent danger of the Soviet Union had to be acknowledged from both a political and religious perspective and the social teaching tradition of the Catholic Church must be properly understood and applied to political life. Combating Marxism not only required political and possibly military confrontation with the Soviet Union but also a cleansing of American Christian Churches that had been seduced, largely unwittingly, by Marx's siren song.

If support for these radical causes was restricted to a few anomalous theologians, the threat would not be so great, but Novak believed that the progressive Catholic outlook had

⁵⁵ Novak, *Confession of a Catholic*, 172-4.

⁵⁶ Allitt, 288.

spread much farther than a few marginal intellectuals. As with Michael Novak, Richard Neuhaus grew increasingly concerned about the state of the Christian Churches in America and questioned their ability to provide a credible defense of the American experiment in the Seventies. He worried that the Churches strayed from their traditional faith, become unmoored in their understanding of political life, and lacked the intellectual resources necessary to capably confront the threat of totalitarianism and protect the American way of life.

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS, THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT, AND THE THREAT OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

In 1967, Richard Neuhaus reviewed the book *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience* and highlighted themes that he believed were representative of large segments of the religious antiwar protest. In addition to arguing that the religious protest provided a realistic and evenhanded assessment of the situation in Vietnam and was intellectually serious,⁵⁷ he emphasized that

While aspects of neo-isolationism crop up in every protest against the Vietnam conflict, I think it is fair to say that the quest for a new internationalism is more characteristic of the religious protest. The religious leadership here finds its concerns articulated, for instance, in Pope Paul's *Populorum Progressio* which calls not only for help from the richer nations to the poorer but also insists on the importance of people being 'the artisans of their own destiny. It is the failure to respect this last imperative that many religious leaders find most objectionable in U.S. Vietnam policy.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Richard John Neuhaus, "American Religion and the War," *Worldview* (October, 10, 1967): 10-11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

The failure in Vietnam partially reflected a failure of American leadership to recognize the proper role that it ought to play internationally; it expressed a kind of hubris and a lack of perspective in the capacities of American power to determine the course of international affairs. But, unlike radical segments of the protest movement, Neuhaus held that these failures signified an improper application of American influence internationally and not an inherent defect in the American system.⁵⁹

Although flirting for a time with a more radical tone in the late Sixties, Neuhaus never strayed far from his conviction that failures in American domestic and foreign policy were not systemic flaws but a misapplication of American values. The possible need for a revolution, an idea that he explored in *Movement and Revolution*, was intended as a mechanism to call America back to its founding ideals, rather than a call for a radical reconstruction of the American system.⁶⁰ The very fact that he expressed such a need betrayed a certain sense that ‘America’ had already strayed far from these ideals. The renewal of American ideals that would hopefully follow was particularly important given that, regardless of the outcome in Vietnam, the American presence in the world is not likely to diminish any time soon. Consequently, since America would likely remain a global superpower well into the future, it must embody and express as perfectly as is possible the values that make it what it is. It is thus essential for those interested in the problem of American power to redefine

⁵⁹ Ibid, 12.

⁶⁰ Peter Berger and Neuhaus, Richard John, *Movement and Revolution* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1970), 194.

The American Empire for the better. If the new politics of the 70s does not come up with a positive vision of American power in the Third World--a vision that answers the real needs of the majority of the people there--the practitioners of the old politics and their military corporation cronies will be glad enough to carry on as usual. The problem of world development is forbiddingly complex, but for the sake of our own and other countries it must stand high on the agenda of a new foreign policy...⁶¹

Neither the isolationist tendencies ascendant at the time on the American political left that emerged following Vietnam, nor the broadly amoral national interest, Realpolitik approach popular in the Nixon Administration are compatible with the framework promoted by Neuhaus. The former is incompatible with Neuhaus' explicitly internationalist perspective and the explicit link he makes between Third World development and America's moral obligation to assist in this process.⁶² The latter is incongruous with his emphasis on the importance of moral principle in political decision making, as opposed to the cold calculus of what is in the national interest. Like Novak, Neuhaus emphasized the moral obligation of the United States to the Third World, particularly in terms of assisting in its economic and political development.

America's failure to implement a just foreign policy is, for Neuhaus, not merely an example of bad policy formation but a demonstration of the loss of American identity that would otherwise inform the formation of such policies. This loss of identity was partly the result of a failure of the American Church, which for a long time had provided the intellectual resources necessary to reinforce the legitimacy of the American experiment. In an essay written for *The Annals of the American Academy*, Neuhaus wrote that "the

⁶¹ Neuhaus, "Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner," 479-80.

⁶² Richard John Neuhaus, "The Politics of Hunger," *Commonweal* 99, February 8, 1974, 460-463.

remarkable success of organized Christianity in America depends on the assumption that membership in a church is supportive of true Americanism. The American public values, similarly, depend upon belief commitments that are nurtured by church and synagogue.”⁶³ When one of these two elements loses its core resonance with the American people, as Neuhaus argued had occurred for many as a result of the Vietnam experience, American self-confidence weakened and a failure of will emerged. Given their importance as a legitimating force, it is largely the role of the churches to reformulate an American self understanding so as to empower it once again to take creative action in the world.⁶⁴ In the process, the United States must confront its own deficiencies, injustices in the American political system must be confronted and overcome, hope in the promise of America must be reestablished nationwide, and the American creed must be reaffirmed in both a social and political sense.

Sadly for Richard Neuhaus, the churches in America have fallen prey to the widespread disillusionment following the upheavals of the Sixties. Even religious organizations had begun to turn their back on the principles and values underlying the American creed. In an essay titled “Christianity against the Democratic Experiment” Neuhaus asserted that the American creed “reflects, albeit partially, a universal longing and (is) informed by those insights which we believe are revealed by God. Although in a severely provisional way, the American dream partakes of that absolute future promised by God. If this is true, and to the extent that it is true, betrayal of the American creed is linked

⁶³ Richard John Neuhaus, “The War, the Churches, and Civil Religion,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 387, The Sixties: Radical Change in American Religion, (January, 1970): 130.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 140.

to betrayal of the coming Kingdom of God.”⁶⁵ Given this framework, for the churches to turn their back on the Democratic experiment, as some are doing and others have done, is to turn their back on one of their fundamental public purposes: to assist in the fulfillment of humanity’s destiny.⁶⁶

In response to the loss of confidence in the American creed that Vietnam helped to bring about, Neuhaus argued for a renewed commitment to the American experiment: the experiment in democracy. Given the connection that he proposed exists between the democratic experiment and God’s plan for humanity, a crisis in the experiment of democratic politics is at its core a spiritual crisis. It was essential that the Christian churches reaffirm the value of the American creed and the democratic polity that flowed forth from it.

Another development contributed to what Neuhaus understood to be a fundamental crisis in American political life: the Christian churches themselves had either grown weary of the American creed, or were theologically and philosophically ill equipped to give it the support that it requires. For the former, many religious bodies, such as the World Council of Churches, had begun supporting revolutionary movements at odds with the democratic agenda and the liberation that these movements promise.⁶⁷ The latter often supported deficient theologies that are incapable of providing a defense of the democratic experiment because of their pessimistic and narrow minded conception of life. Such a worldview, he complained, promoted a static view of revelation, politics and human nature that is

⁶⁵ Richard John Neuhaus, “Christianity Against the Democratic Experiment,” *Cross Currents* (Spring, 1969): 133-148.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁷ Richard John Neuhaus, “The War, The Churches, and Civil Religion,” 135-6.

incompatible with the open-ended character that Neuhaus argued was an inherent part of human life and world history.⁶⁸

In contrast, Neuhaus promotes an understanding of Christian revelation, politics, and human nature that is inherently historical. Man is a historical being thrown into the world whose social identity is not complete without the shaping power of human society. His world is not simply a given from time immemorial, nor is his identity merely a product of his genetic code or of some primordial fall from grace. Rather, his creative activity in the world helps to create the world which he inhabits.⁶⁹ Static conceptions of the human person, of political life, and of religion are inadequate to the reality of human existence. Because of the open-ended quality of history, things can go radically wrong and societies can fall apart, but life can also be improved and more effective institutions put into place. From a political perspective, the historical nature of man requires political structures consistent with his character. Democratic politics is an experimental politics that is open to the uncertainties inherent in our historically conditioned world. It is the form of politics which best suits the nature and experience of man and thus ought to be affirmed and upheld in the Christian Churches.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Neuhaus, "Christianity Against the Democratic Experiment," 139-145. He criticizes the Catholic Church for failing to provide vigorous support for the democratic experiment because of its immigrant heritage. The Catholic Church, along with certain strains of Lutheranism, populates America with an immigrant population bred into authoritarian cultures that are incompatible with democracy. While absent from Neuhaus' argument is the traditionally heated, nativist rhetoric, the argument put forth does reflect a typical type of argument aimed at the Catholic population.

⁶⁹ Richard John Neuhaus is strongly indebted to the thought of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in this regard and their emphasis on the social construction of reality, see, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York, NY: Doubleday Books, 1966).

⁷⁰ Neuhaus, "Christianity Against the Democratic Experiment," 143-148.

A few years later, just after the end of the Vietnam War, Neuhaus built on this previous essay in a book titled *Time Toward Home*. Here Neuhaus reiterated many of the same themes put forth in some of his earlier essays: the link between the democratic experiment and the coming Kingdom, the responsibility of American leaders to apply American power in a way consistent with American values, the central role of the Christian churches as a moral guide in this entire process and, finally, the crisis of confidence plaguing many Americans regarding the value of the American experiment.⁷¹

In *Time Toward Home* he attempted to provide a preliminary corrective to this wide set of problems. In the next chapter we will see in greater detail the contours that this corrective took. Suffice it to say for the moment that Neuhaus emphasized the unavoidable and intimate link between religion and politics. While a good deal of attention has been given to his book *The Naked Public Square*, written in the mid-Eighties, with its denunciations of the tendency to split religion and politics into utterly separate spheres, Neuhaus had been arguing against this move beginning at least a decade earlier. *The Naked Public Square* further systematized the error of separating religion and politics, but the core argument was already present in *Time Toward Home*. Neuhaus' central claim is that “in the absence of an absolute point of reference that we speak of as God, some lesser and finally dehumanizing myth will be enlisted to serve the needs of communal identity and cohesiveness which will not go unserved for very long.”⁷² From this vantage point, to argue that religion has no place in public life overlooks the fact that something will function as

⁷¹ Richard Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home: The American Experiment as Revelation* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1975), 25-50.

⁷² *Ibid*, 49.

religion and, in doing so, create something resembling a God against which political and social behavior will be defined.

The recognition that in some form or other a religious or quasi-religious framework will emerge in every human community led Neuhaus to conclude that any attempt to separate the public square from religious sphere was an artificial and self-deluding exercise.

Religious ideas can and will inform the American political experience even if religious institutions are negligent in recognizing this fact. At this point Neuhaus reaffirmed a theme he promoted in one of his earlier essays, “Christianity Against the Democratic Experiment.” It is important to demonstrate to the Christian churches the general consistency of Christian thought with the American experiment and the need to renew the latter through engagement with Christian thought.⁷³ As we continue to develop Neuhaus’ counter narrative in the coming chapters, it will become clear that he relies heavily on the thought of Emile Durkheim as a primary support for his position. In doing so Neuhaus also hopes to demonstrate the legitimacy of his guiding premise: America reflects, even if only roughly and certainly insufficiently, the promise of the coming Kingdom of God.

GEORGE WEIGEL: VIETNAM, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND THE COLLAPSE OF HER MORAL TEACHING

Because of the time-frame under discussion, less will be made of the intellectual thought and political activities of George Weigel in this first chapter. Given the generational differences, George Weigel provided a different portrait than that of Richard

⁷³ Ibid, *Time Toward Home*, 49-54.

Neuhaus and Michael Novak. As the latter two were active in the antiwar movement in Vietnam, Weigel was attending a small college seminary in Baltimore, Maryland. While both Neuhaus and Novak were witnessing the closing days of the war on home soil, George Weigel had left the United States to pursue graduate studies in Canada.⁷⁴

Given that George Weigel was still in college while Richard Neuhaus and Michael Novak were actively involved in the antiwar movement, it should not be surprising that he did not produce a body of written material by the early Seventies. Nevertheless, in the mid-Eighties Weigel produces an extended commentary on the place of Vietnam in American life and highlighted the fallout from the war as a representative example of the stresses and strains that were placed on American identity during the post-Vietnam era. He also thought that the response to the Vietnam War by the American bishops signified a key turning point in the application of Catholic social teaching to American political life. This turn was, for Weigel, not for the better. Briefly examining this critique will help to highlight the way in which the theme of disintegration was at play in his thought and anticipate some of the ways in which he attempted to counter this process of decay. The counter-narrative that he provided in response will take center stage in the next two chapters.

⁷⁴ There is little hint that the war in Vietnam was, during the Seventies, an issue of deep reflection for Weigel, as it would become in later years. According to one of his more autobiographical pieces, one is left with the impression that his mind was often focused on more theological issues in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. He discussed his shift from a post-Vatican II liberalism, which would include an emphasis on a presumptuous class of theologians who understands themselves as a new teaching authority, and an approach to theology that relies more on sentiment and taste rather than revealed religion, Weigel, *Letters to a Young Catholic*, 69-82.

Weigel worried that Catholic leadership during Vietnam and in its immediate aftermath failed to show any evidence of either the analytical skills necessary to properly understand the “facts on the ground,” or the wisdom to take advantage of the Church’s moral heritage, which could in turn be used to guide their reflection on questions of war and peace.⁷⁵ In respect to the situation in Vietnam, he argued that many within the American Catholic leadership, which included lay and religious alike, consistently made empirically flawed judgments. He claimed that these failures included the strong Catholic support for the corrupt Ngo Diem regime and the failure to emphasize the importance of economic and political reform in the region. It included a mistaken analysis concerning the relationship between the North Vietnamese to the Chinese, Russians, and Vietcong. Further, the analytical errors included a selective condemnation of American atrocities, during the massacre at Mai Lai, on the one hand, and the relative silence regarding the massacres committed by the Vietcong during, for example, the massive civilian executions in the city of Hue during the Tet offensive.⁷⁶ In this analytical confusion, Weigel noted that “Cicero’s axiom, that in war, truth is the first casualty, was never more apposite than in Vietnam and in the American domestic debate over Vietnam. Selective outrage was matched by selective outrage; prisms of analysis often distorted facts, rather than being informed by them.”⁷⁷ In short, the failure to properly analyze the situation on the ground, while not an exclusively Catholic problem, severely retarded the ability of

⁷⁵ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 216.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 230-232.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 232.

Catholics to implement an alternative strategy rooted in the Catholic tradition of war and peace.

Exacerbating the analytical problems was an even worse error, the effective abandonment of the centuries-old Catholic war and peace tradition. The Catholic bishops released a series of statements related to Vietnam from 1966 through 1971, each of which grew progressively critical of U.S. involvement. The first, issued in November 1966 aimed at applying the teachings of Vatican II on war and peace to the Vietnam war and proceeded to assert confidence in the government's involvement. Over the next few years the bishops remained supportive of the war in Vietnam although cracks began to develop in their support for this cause. From a position of strong affirmation in 1966, the bishop's position included a growing sense of doubt regarding the war's legitimacy.⁷⁸

By 1971 their position on U.S. involvement in Vietnam had notably shifted from what they had held just five years earlier. In contrast to their vote of support for U.S. government policy then, the bishops now called for an immediate end to the war, although they did not come out in support for immediate withdrawal. As William Au notes, the experience of Vietnam "helped to move them in the direction of a greater willingness to address negative judgments against major government policies..."⁷⁹ This adversarial position was not exclusive to Vietnam, but became more common over the following years, particularly in the critical tone they took in their pastoral letters on war and peace, and the economy.

⁷⁸ William Au, *The Cross, the Flag, and the Bomb: American Catholics Debate War and Peace, 1960-1983* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 178-179.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 180.

While it was intellectually justifiable to question the ethical legitimacy of America's involvement in Vietnam, George Weigel criticized the position taken by the bishops in their 1971 document, *Resolution on Southeast Asia*, because it "failed to discuss how America might disengage wisely, or what the relevant moral standards to guide such a policy might be."⁸⁰ He claimed that the bishops' failure to provide a comprehensive framework for American withdrawal dramatically oversimplified the problems confronting any attempt to end the war. There was thus a failure by the bishops to take advantage of the Catholic tradition on war and peace and apply that tradition to important questions of foreign policy, in this case Vietnam. Rather than trying to come to terms with when the use of force and intervention overseas was a legitimate response, Weigel contended that large segments within the American Catholic leadership instead embraced a neo-isolationist approach to foreign policy, an all too common anti-anti-communist outlook, and an outright refusal to use military force to defend human rights.⁸¹

The failure of the bishops to maintain and apply their own teaching on war and peace had important consequences over the next decade, according to Weigel. First, its abandonment placed the American Catholic Church in a politically vulnerable position; it became increasingly difficult for the Church to provide an alternative to secular, or at least non-Catholic, political perspectives. Second, it became increasingly difficult for the leadership of the Church to promote authentic teaching as it related to the Church's tradition on war and peace. In the decade following the close of the Second Vatican Council, Weigel

⁸⁰ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 233.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 233-4.

argued that Vietnam signified a definitive turning point in which “the central components of a distinctively Catholic context for thinking about the moral problem of war and peace . . . were twisted and bent in such a way that the net effect was a virtual abandonment of the heritage as a horizon for moral analysis.”⁸²

CONCLUSION

Understanding neoconservative Catholic thought requires coming to terms with a number of themes that weave throughout their thought at different times and with different levels of intensity. One of the important themes guiding their writings was the notion that many of the mainstream American Christian churches, including the Catholic Church, were undergoing a troubling process of decline as they turned their backs on traditional church teaching. For both Novak and Weigel, the reception of Vatican II in American Catholic life resulted in a fragmented Catholic identity that proved incapable of dealing with political life in post-Vietnam America. Catholic leadership had, they worried, essentially abandoned their own moral teaching and thus embraced policy decisions that conflicted with an authentic Catholic moral ethics. This abandonment undermined the effectiveness of the churches ability to advocate on behalf of the American experiment that was rooted in a distinctive political vision. By the mid-Seventies, both Richard Neuhaus and Michael Novak affirmed the need to reinvigorate the American political tradition. Following Vietnam, this tradition had fallen into a state of doubt, with different political interests vying for sometimes competing ends. The task of recovery and renewal included the rescue of the Christian

⁸² Ibid, 235-6.

Churches from foreign and corrupting influences and the recognition that the same churches would be an essential component of this renewal process.

Although each of the intellectuals under discussion can be understood as inhabiting a shared intellectual framework, differences between the three will become apparent as we proceed. It is not unusual to notice what amount to a set of family resemblances on a wide range of issues, while simultaneously noticing the diverse sources in which their intellectual perspective is rooted. Consequently, throughout this dissertation it will be important to highlight the diversity in their thought while also pointing out their significant points of agreement.

Not content with merely marking what they believed was a steady process of decline in American political and religious life, the neoconservative Catholics also picked up on a theme of renewal. While in agreement on a general philosophical framework, each of them developed their own distinctive approach to what would be most effective in initiating this process of renewal. How they each do this will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Before the Presidential election of 1976, Richard Neuhaus endorsed Jimmy Carter and claimed that a Carter presidency would benefit race relations, help the poor, overcome a sterile and secular Enlightenment liberalism, and provide a new beginning for the democratic experiment.¹ In four short years he had grown disillusioned with Carter's leadership and increasingly drawn to a possible Reagan presidency.² As late as 1972, Michael Novak authored speeches for George McGovern, and yet by 1980 he supported Ronald Reagan's bid for the White House and eventually served in an appointed position to the United Nations.³ While there is no accessible public record of Weigel's support or dislike for either McGovern or Jimmy Carter during their heyday, he admitted in retrospect that during the early to mid-Seventies he had undergone a conservative shift in both his political and religious thought.⁴ In each case, whether through a self-revelation or a publicly identifiable shift, during the Seventies the neoconservative Catholics grew alienated from liberal Democratic worldview and more amenable to American conservative thought.

The last chapter examined the political, cultural and religious context that contributed to this shift. In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, both Neuhaus and Novak experienced a growing disillusionment with the state of American political life and moved rightward. It was during this time that they also expressed some concern with the condition of the

¹ Richard John Neuhaus, "Why I Am for Carter," *Commonweal*, Oct. 22, 1976.

² Linker, *The Theocons*, 41-46.

³ Michael Novak, "Why I Am Not a Conservative," *National Review*, June 26, 1981, 726. During his first term, Ronald Reagan named Novak to represent the United States on the Human Rights Commission.

⁴ Weigel, *Letters to a Young Catholic*, 77-82.

American Christian churches and their ability to respond effectively to this political decline. Novak focused primarily on the fallout from Vatican II, as it applied directly to the condition of the American Catholic Church, while Neuhaus grew increasingly worried about the way in which American Christian churches more generally had abandoned the American democratic experiment. Weigel did not express a great deal of angst over the political and religious situation in the mid-Seventies, although within a few short years he was regularly contemplating many of the same problems with which Neuhaus and Novak wrestled.

This chapter will further develop the political and religious vision of the neoconservative Catholics that emerged in the late Seventies and matured during the following decade. Rather than focusing on their misgivings about the current condition of the church and state, it will instead pick up their desire to bring renewal to both institutions. To understand how they envisioned this contour of renewal and what resources would contribute to this process, this chapter will develop central features in each of their thought that define their specific interests. It is in the context of these specific interests that the neoconservative Catholics developed an intellectual framework that, they were confident, could function as a foundation for American political and religious life. In short, Michael Novak focused on the idea of democratic capitalism, Richard Neuhaus began what became a rather thorough examination of the relationship between religion and public life, and George Weigel took up the cause of the “John Courtney Murray Project”.

Although each took on different ‘projects’ during this period, they share a number of common characteristics. Any attempt to understand the neoconservative Catholics requires that one pay attention to the important differences in their thought, while at the same time

recognizing the ‘family resemblances’ that function as a shared intellectual framework. Contrary to commentators who argue otherwise, the neoconservative Catholics do not represent a movement or shared project as such, even though they agree on important fundamentals that give rise to their distinctive perspectives.⁵ At one point George Weigel made this point himself, when he wrote that neoconservative Catholicism is “less a ‘movement’ than an ongoing community of intellectual conversation and cooperation.”⁶

One of the shared fundamentals that the neoconservative Catholics affirmed was the importance of institutional pluralism, which is itself rooted in the distinction between state and society. The importance of this distinction for the neoconservative Catholics is twofold. First, it provided platform from which they could argue in favor of institutional pluralism and for limitations on state power. Throughout their writings they voiced support for and adherence to the virtues of a democratic, pluralistic society, and resistance to the ever-present danger of decline into an authoritarian, monistic state.

Second, the state/society distinction is characteristic in important segments of twentieth century Catholic thought and thus linked them to a much broader intellectual tradition that they could draw on for support. Given its importance, this chapter will examine this distinction, look at their use of this distinction, and end by developing the political and religious worldview that emerged partly out of it.

⁵ The most obvious proponent of this position is Damon Linker, who in his book *The Theocons*, argues that the neoconservative Catholics form an ideological movement. He claims that Neuhaus is their “de facto leader and inspiration.” He is not; the three of them have very distinct political interests. He further argues that Neuhaus’ *Naked Public Square* functions as a manifesto. It does not; the neoconservative Catholics are far more diverse in their thinking than for what he allows.

⁶ Weigel, “The Neoconservative Difference,” 139

THE STATE/SOCIETY DISTINCTION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF INSTITUTIONAL PLURALISM

Although it has taken on more importance in modern times due to the rise of the modern, bureaucratic state, the state/society distinction has roots that extend to the early days of Christianity.⁷ While not voicing it overtly, early Christian political thought anticipated it through its conviction that the Church is an autonomous ‘society’ in the face of the ruling secular authorities. The distinction presupposes that there are, as the Catholic theologian John Coleman puts it, “free spaces” in society that remain independent of state power and which typically include institutions like unions, universities and other voluntary associations.⁸ With the rise of the modern bureaucratic state and the apparent threat that it posed to free institutions, this distinction found a home in important strains of modern Catholic political thought. Coleman further noted that “perhaps the clearest and most developed statement of this Catholic distinction between state and society is found in Jacques Maritain’s now classic book, *Man and the State*.”⁹

Consideration of space does not allow for a thorough analysis of Maritain on this point. Suffice it to say, he criticized the general failure of modern political thought to properly distinguish the role of the state vis-à-vis the “body politic,” or its conceptual

⁷ John A. Coleman, S.J., “A Limited State and a Vibrant Society,” *Christian Political Ethics*, ed. John A. Coleman (Princeton, NJ: 2008), 25-6.

⁸ Ibid, 23-27.

⁹ Ibid, “A Limited State and a Vibrant Society,” 37; another important figure who affirmed this distinction was John Courtney Murray who, as we will see, was a major influence on George Weigel. He argued in his influential book, *We Hold These Truths*, that one of the important principles underlying the American tradition of a free people among free institutions was the idea that “the state is distinct from society and limited in its offices toward society,” John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 49.

equivalent, civil society.¹⁰ It was in the latter that distinct, relatively autonomous societies related to the family, education, economics, politics, and religious life flourish. In pre-modern political thought the power of the state was, at least in theory if not always in practice, carefully delimited and was concerned primarily with “the maintenance of law, the promotion of the common welfare and public order, and the administration of public affairs.”¹¹ One of the fundamental problems with modern political thought, according to Maritain, is in its tendency to exaggerate the importance of the state and watch idly as it begins to co-opt responsibilities that once belonged to the various organs of the civil society.¹² For this reason, the Church’s insistence on the maintenance of this distinction is closely linked to the principle of subsidiarity, which has played an equally important role in modern Catholic political thought.

Concern surrounding the emergence of a Leviathan-type state functioned as an undercurrent in twentieth century Catholic thought that many of its conservative critics believed was exemplified in the Soviet Union and Fascist Germany.¹³ Long after the fall of Hitler and on the eve of the Soviet collapse, the neoconservative Catholics continued to express deep concerns over the creeping state and the totalitarian threat. Embracing the state/society distinction and building on this a theory of institutional pluralism provided an initial platform from which they could counter this ever-present danger.

¹⁰ D.Q. McNerny, “The Social Thought of Jacques Maritain,” *The Catholic Social Science Review* 12 (2007): 157.

¹¹ Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 2004), 12.

¹² Maritain, *Man and the State*, 21.

¹³ See, for example, Patrick McNamara’s study of Edmund Walsh in Patrick McNamara, *A Catholic Cold War: Edmund A. Walsh, S.J., and the Politics of American Anticommunism* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005).

THE NEOCONSERVATIVES, CIVIL SOCIETY, THE STATE, AND MEDIATING INSTITUTIONS

As early as the mid-Sixties Novak cited the importance of maintaining boundaries between the state and the wider civil society as a way to check the power of a state that is always seeking further expansion of its power.¹⁴ As we will see below, in his defense of democratic capitalism he differentiated various spheres of life to achieve this end. Neuhaus lamented the insidious tendency of modern man to equate the notion of state and society. What particularly concerned him was the penchant of many intellectuals, political leaders and even the everyday person's tendency to support the expansion of state power into spheres in which it once did not tread.¹⁵ Finally, in his book *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, Weigel remarked that "society, the natural human habitat, exists prior to the state. The state is at the service of society and not vice versa."¹⁶

The neoconservative Catholics carried this distinction into a theory of institutional pluralism. One of the earliest publications that they used to develop such a theory was in a short essay titled "To Empower People."¹⁷ Expressing concern over the current direction of American political life Richard Neuhaus, along with his co-author Peter Berger, noted that the 'state' has become an increasingly pervasive force in every facet of American life. As a potential check on state power, they called for a reaffirmation of "mediating institutions,"

¹⁴ Michael Novak, "Moral Society and Immoral Man," *A Time To Build* (New York, NY: McMillan Publishers, 1964), 354-369.

¹⁵ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 117.

¹⁶ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 115.

¹⁷ Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, "To Empower People," in *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, 2nd edition, ed. Michael Novak (Washington, DC: The American Enterprise Institute Press, 1996), 157-214.

defined as “those institutions standing between the individual in his private life and the large institutions of public life.”¹⁸

In a retrospective on the original publication of this text Novak commented on the importance of Neuhaus and Berger’s essay and argued that it signified an important shift in political discourse. He wrote that “until the appearance of the term (mediating institutions), public policy discourse in the United States tended to be pulled toward one of two polar notions: the *individual* or *the state*.”¹⁹ Confronting this dichotomy and taking advantage of alternative terminology gave Berger and Neuhaus an opportunity to move beyond the conservative/liberal mode that dominated American political discourse.

The themes promoted in “To Empower People” are in fact an extension of similar ideas found in the political theorist Robert Nisbet’s book *Community and Power*. His influence on Neuhaus’ thought here is unmistakable. Nisbet argued that modern man finds himself living in a kind of halfway house. Throughout much of history, humans were immersed in their local communities and established identities in relation to the array of organizations that made up these communities. With the growth of the modern state, intermediate institutions like the family, interest associations, the church and professional organizations have begun to decline in relevance. This is directly due to the tendency of the modern state to usurp the responsibilities and role-defining capacity that these intermediate institutions once exercised.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid, 158.

¹⁹ Michael Novak, “Introduction,” *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, 2nd edition, ed. Michael Novak (Washington DC, AEI: The American Enterprise Institute Press, 1996), 3.

²⁰ Robert Nisbet, *Community and Power* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

Tracing the developmental arc of modern political thought through thinkers like Bodin, Hobbes, Rousseau, and then Marx, Nisbet argued that this influential line of thought has, in its most extreme manifestation, culminated in the ‘absolute state.’ He wrote that “in this type of State, the basic needs for education, recreation, welfare, economic production, distribution and consumption, health, spiritual and physical, and all other services of society are made aspects of the administrative structure of political government.”²¹ In its most extreme form, the absolute state seeks to obliterate

“all the intermediate layers of value and association that commonly nourish personality and serve to protect it from external power and caprice . . . the political enslavement of man requires the emancipation of man from all authorities and memberships that serve, in one degree or another, to insulate the individual from external political power.”²²

The most obvious examples of the absolute state are to found in either the Soviet Union or in Germany under Hitler. But even where the absolute state has not yet become a reality, as in Western Europe or the United States, there are tendencies in that direction.²³ Following the breakdown of intermediate institutions, it is in the state that people have begun to feel their most basic sense of membership and belonging.²⁴ Nisbet argued that this tendency contributed to the rise of nationalistic movements in many parts of the world. It is against this nationalistic impulse that the neoconservative Catholics struggled to fight in the political sphere.

²¹ Ibid, 282; for his discussion of the ideological development of the modern, total state from Bodin through Hobbes and finally into Rousseau, see chapter 6 in particular. A particularly important element that led to the concentration of power in a centralized state was, for Nisbet, war, which had the natural tendency to do just this.

²² Ibid, 202.

²³ Nisbet, *Community and Power*, 70-4.

²⁴ Nisbet, *Community and Power*, 201-207.

Like Nisbet, Neuhaus and Berger are wary of the modern state and its tendency toward a more totalistic approach to modern life. Also following the lead of Nisbet, Berger and Neuhaus argued that it is important to reenergize mediating institutions as they “are the value-generating and value-maintaining agencies in society...” that will help to alleviate the “anomic precariousness of individual existence in isolation from society and the threat of alienation to the public order.”²⁵

The emphasis on mediating institutions in neoconservative Catholic thought sheds light on important themes that repeatedly emerge in their writings. First is the encroachment of the modern bureaucratic state in every area of life. This encroachment is exacerbated by the breakdown of the idea of civil society and the institutional pluralism that comprises it. Mediating institutions are an attempt to reassert the importance of the institutional pluralism that, according to the neoconservative Catholics, underlay healthy forms of community. Taking for granted the importance of institutional pluralism to Western political life, the neoconservative Catholics develop different, albeit often complementary, lines of thought.

FROM INSTITUTIONAL PLURALISM TO POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Novak’s most significant contribution during this period resides in his macro-level studies related to democratic capitalism and his attempt to provide a theoretical foundation for this economic and political system. His most prominent work during this period, *The*

²⁵ Berger and Neuhaus, “To Empower People,” 159-163.

Spirit of Democratic Capitalism, provided a moral and intellectual vision that sought to defend the relationship between capitalism, political democracy and a moral culture.²⁶

In contrast to the more macro-level perspective taken by Novak, Neuhaus' writings during the Eighties tended to focus on the micro-level. In particular, he examined the central role of one mediating institution in particular: religious institutions. Throughout American history, Neuhaus argued, the Christian Churches had played an indispensable role legitimating belief in the American political system. In post-Vietnam America many of the same churches that once defended the American political tradition now turned on it with a vengeance. Consequently, religious rhetoric often no longer functioned as a support for this tradition but instead undermined it.

George Weigel's intellectual vision shares much in common with both Neuhaus and Novak. Similar to Novak, Weigel tended to look at the big picture rather than isolating a specific mediating institution. But, like Neuhaus, Weigel is very much interested in the role that religion plays in political society, an interest that became particularly pronounced in his interest in the thought of John Courtney Murray.

Michael Novak, Mediating Institutions and Democratic Capitalism

The American Enterprise Institute (AEI), which originally published "To Empower People," followed its publication with a series of summer institutes that touched on many of the same themes. These institutes were subsequently published and titled, in consequential

²⁶ Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 2nd edition (New York, NY: Madison Books, 1991), 19-28.

order: *Capitalism and Socialism: A Theological Inquiry*; *Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry*; and *The Corporation: A Theological Inquiry*. In all three the idea of mediating institutions functioned as a backdrop and in each Michael Novak contributed an essay. The following paragraphs will focus on his contributions.

The first institute, titled *Capitalism and Socialism: A Theological Inquiry*, was held in the summer of 1978, just one year after Berger and Neuhaus' essay on mediating institutions. As the title suggests, the point of the institute was to analyze two economic systems in light of a theological understanding. Throughout, contributors focused on the moral and spiritual underpinnings of both, while pointing out strengths and weaknesses in each. Novak picked up on a theme that he continued to focus on in the later symposiums, namely the cultural underpinnings of institutions in a democratic capitalist society. Rather than examining specific institutions in detail, he used broad brush strokes in his analysis and argued that the cultural component to democratic capitalism is one of the most under-analyzed in elements in the Western capitalist system. While a great deal of focus has been given to the moral vision of socialism, the same cannot be said of a capitalist one.²⁷

Democracy and Mediating Institutions: A Theological Inquiry focused on the cultural, religious and moral characteristics of these institutions. Assigned with the task of summarizing the major themes presented at the institute, Novak repeatedly highlights the point that economic institutions cannot be understood simply from a dollars and cents

²⁷ Michael Novak, "Seven Theological Facts," in *Capitalism and Socialism: A Theological Inquiry*, ed. Michael Novak (Washington, DC: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979), 109-123.

perspective. Economic theories and the institutional structures that embody them are as much a function of culture as they are of the economic sphere.²⁸

The third institute focused specifically on “the corporation” as a mediating institution. With chapters including titles such as “The Development of the Corporation,” “Western Guilt and Third World Poverty,” and “The Social Critique of the Corporation,” the institute aimed at exploring the historical, economic, and even theological significance of this entity. In his contribution to the final product, Novak explored the theological dimension. Quoting Scripture and appealing to Christian tradition, Novak provided a flattering account of corporate life, declaring that participation in such an institution can function as a religious vocation.²⁹ Perhaps not surprisingly, this auspicious beginning sets a rather positive tone for the rest of the essay. In the first major section he explored the corporation as an example of God’s grace at work in the world.³⁰

One of the problems with Novak’s analysis is his marked tendency to downplay the political and social dangers that accompany the corporate model. Intent as he is on providing a defense of the corporation, particularly against those who criticize its ‘bigness’ and the concentration of power in such institutions, Novak remains largely unmoved. Although he provided a passing nod to these concerns he quickly shifted to the argument that the concentration of power and size in multinational corporations is quite possibly, in practice, a

²⁸ Michael Novak, “Changing the Paradigms: the Cultural Deficiencies of Capitalism,” *Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry*, ed. Michael Novak (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1980), 182.

²⁹ Michael Novak, “A Theology of the Corporation,” *The Corporation: A Theological Inquiry*, ed. Michael Novak (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1981), 203.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Novak, 207-212.

benefit.³¹ This is a surprising admission given that the point of this essay is the defense of mediating institutions. He does not address how a multinational corporation in its enormity can express anything other than an impersonal character matched perhaps only by the ‘state’. His failure to address this issue reflected a bias that both Berger and Neuhaus point to in their original text, “To Empower People.” Here they wrote critically of certain tendencies in modern conservative thought. In particular, “today’s conservatism typically exhibits the weakness of the left in reverse: it is highly sensitive to the alienations of big government, but blind to the analogous effects of big business. Such one-sidedness, whether of left or right, is not helpful.”³²

Moving beyond a defense of bigness in the context of corporations, Novak ended his essay by returning to a theme addressed in the earlier institutes: the idea of democratic capitalism. His interest during this time is less in a specific mediating institution than it is in the larger framework within which the mediating institutions make sense. Here he reiterated his claim that economic institutions cannot merely be understood through an economic or political lens. They are also cultural and political institutions.

It is in this shift to the idea of democratic capitalism that Novak focused most of his intellectual energy in the following years. Less interested in specific types of mediating institutions, he is instead intent on developing a larger theory about society, within which various mediating institutions from different spheres relate. Traditionally, the best defense of capitalism was its practical successes. What has been given less attention is the theoretical defense of democratic capitalism, one that seeks to demonstrate its compatibility with a

³¹ Ibid, Novak, 215.

³² Berger and Neuhaus, “To Empower People,” 162.

Christian worldview. To counteract socialist movements that, he argued, have not demonstrated many practical successes but have provided a powerful moral appeal, democratic capitalism is in need to also provide a moral vision that accompanies any practical-oriented defense.³³

Democratic capitalism promotes a vision of society that emphasizes “pluralism in pluralism.” On the broadest level, it affirms three general divisions in society: the political, the economic, and the moral/cultural spheres. Novak admitted to borrowing this model from Daniel Bell, who had promoted this idea a few years earlier in his writings.³⁴ While conceptually distinct from one another, these spheres regularly interact with one another, creating pressures and counter-pressures that balance off concentrations of power in any particular sphere. This is not to say that they do not have a shaping influence on each other at various junctures. He wrote that “each of these systems has its own special institutions and methods, disciplines and standards, purposes and limits, attractions and repulsions. Each has its own ethos. Each also creates problems for the other two. These tensions are desirable; a pluralist system is designed to foment them.”³⁵ It is in this creative tension that progress is constantly pushed forward.

Further, each of these spheres is pluralistic. The moral/cultural sphere is comprised of a wide range of churches, synagogues, mosques and even secularists, each of who are trying to spread their message to others. The economic sphere has unions, corporations, investors and others, who each struggle to establish themselves financially. In the political

³³ See in particular the introduction of Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 13-28.

³⁴ Novak, “Seven Theological Principles,” 112; Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1976).

³⁵ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 170.

sphere interest groups struggle to pass legislation conducive to their interests and politicians act according to interests of their own. The various spheres of government in the American systems function as a check on each other. While never perfect, the pluralism present on multiple levels helps to maintain a balance of power among and within these different areas of life.³⁶

Throughout his writings, Novak is careful to distinguish democratic capitalism from contrary social systems. The pluralism inherent in the democratic capitalist model is not, argues Novak, something that can be taken for granted; contrary visions constantly threaten it. It is under threat, on the one hand, by a traditionalist vision of society and, from the opposite direction, by a socialist vision. Rather than supporting pluralism, both promote a unitary order that concentrates power in the hands of a few.

Socialist forms of unitary order seek to subjugate the economic sphere to the political one. The fundamental source of injustice from this perspective is economic inequality, and the inevitable consequence, class conflict.³⁷ Its most obvious manifestation in the modern world is communism. Traditionalist forms of unitary order are often religious in nature; they are, writes Novak, typically “preoccupied by problems of order and stability . . . sins against order are regarded as sins against God.”³⁸

In both cases, whether socialist or traditionalist, one sphere of life co-opts the authority and responsibilities of one or both of the other spheres. This carries with it the threat of an authoritarian or even totalitarian type of power structure. Democratic capitalism

³⁶ Ibid, 172-186.

³⁷ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 83.

³⁸ Ibid.

provides a clear contrast since it posits tyranny as its primary enemy. Systems of checks and balances and of multiple concentrations of power counter attempts at consolidating power in one person or institution.³⁹ In practice, the decentralization of power raised questions concerning the proper relationship that religious institutions and leaders ought to have in relation to the political life.

On the one hand, Novak recognized the importance of religious institutions in the formation and continuing credibility of social systems. Such institutions have an important legitimating function in life. Nevertheless, his concerns about the threat of monism made him hesitant when assigning a primary role to the Churches in political life. His hesitancy on this question highlights a fairly important divide within the neoconservative Catholic camp that was made evident through a public disagreement between Michael Novak and Richard Neuhaus.

Taking pluralism as the indispensable starting point in his political thought, Novak shied away from any attempt to isolate a religious belief system as indispensable to an understanding of American political life. While admitting that Christianity has helped to shape democratic capitalism, he wrote that “in a generally pluralistic society, there is no one sacred canopy. By *intention* there is not. At its spiritual core, there is an empty shrine.”⁴⁰ Novak was not arguing that democratic capitalism and the Western political tradition was an invention of secular humanism or an irreligious Enlightenment philosophy. In a speech given on behalf of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in September 1980, Novak specifically repudiated this position and admitted that democracy owed many of its basic

³⁹ Ibid, 84.

⁴⁰ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 53.

moral energies to the Christian and Jewish traditions.⁴¹ Nevertheless, he was very nervous about attributing an irrevocable connection between the two, out of the fear that such a move would push the West toward a political monism that would not benefit democracy in the long run.

He further argued that Christians err when they assert that America is at its core a Christian nation. Americans are free to affirm whatever faith they might hold and take advantage of that faith in the public square, but no religious system can command the political system. It is the role of the state to protect a public forum that allows for vigorous debate among competing religious viewpoints, but without ever allowing a particular religious institution to impose a totalistic vision on the rest of society.⁴²

Neuhaus contended that Michael Novak's 'empty shrine' flirted with, if not embraced, the naked public square. The importance of the naked public square will become clear in the next section. Suffice it to say for now, it "is the result of a political doctrine and practice that would exclude religion and religiously grounded values from the conduct of public business. The doctrine is that America is a secular society."⁴³ Contrary to Novak, Neuhaus argued that the empty shrine is a direct threat to pluralism and the American way of life in so far as it removes the legitimating ground from the American way of life. Not only

⁴¹ This speech from which this argument was taken was eventually published in a book: Michael Novak, "Democracy Takes Sin Seriously" in *Solzhenitsyn and American Democracy* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1981), 9-15.

⁴² Ibid, 67-70.

⁴³ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, ix.

is the ground of the American political tradition religious, but it is specifically Judeo-Christian.⁴⁴

In a later essay, Novak indirectly responded to Neuhaus' basic accusation that he assumed, intentionally or otherwise, the idea of the naked public square in his thought. Novak wrote that "the solution of the 'empty shrine' does not entail a 'naked public square.'"⁴⁵ He argued that the Founding Fathers intentionally decided against creating a Constitution that explicitly upheld one religion over another so as to curtail the power of the state and to provide a forum in which rigorous debate can commence on important public issues. They intentionally kept alive a kind of 'openness' to the transcendent, one in which anyone can express their own self-understanding of that term. By not filling in its details, they avoided the dangers of creating an idolatry of the state, lest it impose an image of the transcendent that happens to affirm its own self image.⁴⁶

This disagreement provides a springboard into the thought of Richard Neuhaus. Part of the difference between Novak and Neuhaus is rooted in their different points of focus. Novak was intent on avoiding unitary orders that threaten institutional pluralism. Relating religious systems too closely to political ones carries with it the risk of blurring the difference between the religious and political sphere. Taken to an extreme, one runs the risk of identifying the two spheres and making an idol out of the latter. Neuhaus, on the other hand, argued that the very possibility of pluralism in a social and political sense is at risk if one does not recognize the close affinity between religion, politics, and culture.

⁴⁴ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 121-2.

⁴⁵ Michael Novak, "Three Porcupines of Pluralism," *This World*, no. 19 (1987): 37.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 37-8.

Richard Neuhaus, Religion, and the State

If only one theme clearly emerged in Neuhaus' writings throughout the Seventies and Eighties, it is that religious ideas and institutions play a definitive role in the health and well being of any society. This assertion becomes clear when he wrote that "religion is the heart of culture and culture is the form of religion. On this view, then, politics is a function of culture and culture, in turn, is reflective (if not a function of) religion."⁴⁷ There is a line that can be drawn from religious ideas and sentiments to the form that culture takes and the political ideas and structures to which it gives rise. For Neuhaus, in any given society religion is the most fundamental expression of how a people organize their life together. To marginalize the public presence of religious institutions and ideas risks cutting people off from one of the central legitimating forces of political life. It is the marginalization of religion from its public role and, worse still, the denial by some that it should have a public role at all that Neuhaus termed the rise of the naked public square.

While the idea of the naked public square acquired a kind of cultural capital with the publication of his book of the same name, the seeds of this idea can be found almost a decade earlier in his book *Time Toward Home*. Here Neuhaus already began expressing concerns about the slow disappearance of religious belief as a legitimating force in American life. Given his emphasis on the indispensable function of religion in any culture, he further argued that those who thought they were pushing religion out of the public square were mistaken. The loss of a Christian defense of the American democratic experiment would not lead to the

⁴⁷ For example, he refers to this notion in Richard John Neuhaus, "The Post-Secular Task of the Church" in *Christianity and Politics: Catholic and Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Carol Friedley Griffith (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1981), 1 and then again in his Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 132.

disappearance of religion, but only its replacement with something else. At a later point he wrote that “in the absence of the Absolute point of reference that we speak of as God, some lesser and finally dehumanizing myth will be enlisted to serve the needs of communal identity and cohesiveness which will not go unserved for very long.”⁴⁸ By the time he and Peter Berger wrote about religion as a mediating institution, just a few years later, they could write that “public policy is presently biased toward what might be called the symbolic nakedness of the public square.”⁴⁹

The concerns expressed in Berger and Neuhaus’ account are given their most well developed formulation in the context of the latter’s aforementioned book *The Naked Public Square*. His basic argument is as follows. The past century has witnessed the marginalization of religion and religious institutions in the public sphere. This has happened to such an extent that in the post-World War II period religion has been effectively banished from the activities surrounding political life. Much of this was a direct result of Supreme Court decisions and complimentary legislative action that affirmed a privatized view of religion and effectively forbidden religious belief systems from shaping policy. This has the unfortunate effect of cutting legislation off from the moral traditions that provide it legitimacy. On this point, he writes that if we continue down this road

there is nothing in store but a continuing and deepening crisis of legitimacy if courts persist in systematically ruling out of order the moral traditions in which Western law has developed and which bear, for the overwhelming majority of the American people, a living sense of right and wrong. The result, quite literally, is the *outlawing of the basis of law*.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 249.

⁴⁹ Berger and Neuhaus, “To Empower People,” 192.

⁵⁰ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 259.

If moral traditions that are rooted in religious traditions cannot play a role in the process of public discourse then, Neuhaus claimed, legislation loses its coherence in the eyes of large swathes of the population. The delegitimation of law through the marginalization of religiously grounded moral traditions has a further consequence: the normative foundation for our very democracy comes into question.⁵¹

The fundamental premise at work in such a vision is that every society needs some religious foundation to ground its moral claims and, consequently, its laws. In terms of Western society, the foundations include a Judeo-Christian worldview. Remove religion from its proper place in relation to political society and that society is left with a void. Such a situation is untenable. The naked square cannot remain naked. Reiterating something similar to what he wrote a decade earlier, Neuhaus wrote that “religious evacuation of the public square cannot be sustained, either in concept or in practice... when recognizable religion is excluded, the vacuum will be filled ersatz by religion, by religion bootlegged into public space under other names.”⁵²

Neuhaus’ vision in this regard is not one that he developed on his own, but has roots that sink deeply into a more secular sociological tradition. It is helpful when trying to understand the thought of Richard Neuhaus during this period to recognize the influence of Emile Durkheim. In an essay that he wrote some years after the period on which this study focuses, Neuhaus included Emile Durkheim on a list of thinkers who he claims are essential

⁵¹ George Weigel, “Public Nudity?,” review of *The Naked Public Square*, by Richard John Neuhaus, *This World* 9 (1984): 117.

⁵² Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 80.

to the telling of his life story.⁵³ While he does not clarify how Durkheim influenced his thought here, when taken with comments that both objectively appeal to Durkheim and those of a more subtle nature, it is possible to discern a couple of ways in which this influence played out in Neuhaus' thought.

First, as was already addressed above, mediating institutions played a central role in Neuhaus' political vision. In one essay written in the late seventies, he noted the important role that Durkheim played in establishing an intellectual support for these types of institutions.⁵⁴ In another essay, Peter Berger built on this association when he argued that Durkheim provided the "*locus classicus* of the concept" in the final pages of his work, *Suicide*, "where he describes the 'tempest' of modernization, sweeping away what he calls the 'little aggregations' in which people existed through most of human history, leaving only the state on the one hand and a mass of individuals, 'like so many liquid molecules,' on the other hand."⁵⁵ While both Neuhaus and Berger both picked up on the idea of mediating structures in a way that was similar to Durkheim, it was updated through the thought of Robert Nisbet.

A second way in which Neuhaus was influenced by the thought of Durkheim, particularly in the late seventies and up through the mid-eighties was in the way he conceptualized the relationship between religion and society. At one point Neuhaus wrote that what Durkheim said is true of all societies is most certainly true of America, that a moral

⁵³ Richard Neuhaus, "In Lieu of Memoirs," *First Things* (August/September, 2003), <http://www.firstthings.com/issue/2003/08/augustseptember>, accessed on June 5, 2010.

⁵⁴ Theodore M. Kerrine and Richard John Neuhaus, "Mediating Structures: A Paradigm for Democratic Pluralism," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 446, The Uneasy Boundary: Church and State (November, 1979): 11.

⁵⁵ Peter Berger, "In Praise of Particularity: The Concept of Mediating Structures," *The Review of Politics* 38, no. 3 (July, 1976): 401.

consensus of some form or another is required in every viable society; “there must be some ultimate value or truth which lays upon individuals and communities a claim that gives meaning to duty...”⁵⁶ For Neuhaus, and in an American context, this moral consensus to which Durkheim refers is most clearly represented by a religious system of thought, Protestant Christianity.

The importance of ‘moral consensus’ to every society was picked up on by Durkheim in his classic, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*.⁵⁷ In this pioneering book, Durkheim sought to understand the fundamental characteristics of religion in society. He isolated what he and others at the time thought was the most primitive form of religious life, that of the aboriginal inhabitants of Australia. This case study provided, Durkheim believed, access to the basic characteristics of religious life that were common to all religions yet most evident in the simplest examples.⁵⁸ Dismissing a variety of definitions pertaining to religion, Durkheim argued that one of its most fundamental features centers on the idea of the sacred, which stand in contrast to things profane. In contrast to the profane, which represents the regular and the banal, the sacred is set apart, superior and distinct from things of everyday life.⁵⁹

Examining the sacred in primitive aboriginal societies, Durkheim focused on what he refers to as the totemic principle, which is “simultaneously the symbol of both the god and

⁵⁶ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 204.

⁵⁷ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1995).

⁵⁸ Robert Nisbet, *The Sociology of Emile Durkheim* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1974), 166-7.

⁵⁹ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 37-8.

the clan, because both the god and the clan are really the same thing.”⁶⁰ The totemic principle provides a source of common identity and meaning; it binds a given people together in community. While more ‘advanced’ religions express a greater level of complexity, the same general principles apply. At all times and places, religious rituals and beliefs express a social content—the needs, the desires and the values of a given people.⁶¹ For this reason, Durkheim defined religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”⁶²

While not committing to the idea that religious belief can be reduced to society, as Durkheim did, Neuhaus did agree with Durkheim that moral consensus provides the substructure that gives rise to political and cultural belief systems.⁶³ To undermine and banish the given belief system on which a given society is built will inevitably lead to the disruption of the political and cultural ideas that give shape to that society. It is impossible to eliminate religion from the social order as something will always fill the role of religion, no matter how one might wish otherwise. For that reason there can never really be a naked public square.

Like other mediating institutions, Neuhaus notes, religious structures have become increasingly marginalized in the face of the bureaucratic state. What emerges is an inherent tension. The absence of a vibrant religious presence in the public sphere does not mean that moral values are no longer needed. A peoples’ search for social and political coherence

⁶⁰ Daniel Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (New York, NY, Oxford University Press: 1996), 104.

⁶¹ Ibid, 105-6.

⁶² Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 44.

⁶³ Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion*, 117-8.

continues. With the decline of mediating institutions, the state takes on the responsibility of providing publicly accessible forms of meaning in the public square.

When the value-bearing institutions of religion and culture are excluded, the value-laden concerns of human life flow back into the square under the banner of politics... If the state ordering of society is to exclude those institutions that generate and bear values, then the state must be prepared to assume the burden of meeting the human yearning for life that is not value-less. The totalitarian, whether Fascist or Communist, welcomes that burden.⁶⁴

For Neuhaus, the primary threat to American style liberalism is not from an external source, but internal. The evacuation of religion from the public square sets the conditions for the emergence of totalitarianism, or at least something approximating it. This is because religion is the only institution that can keep the state in check by placing it under transcendent judgment and, in doing so, relativize its authority.⁶⁵ This idea that religion has functioned as an important check on state power is a theme that Weigel picks up on, particularly as seen through his work related to John Courtney Murray.

George Weigel, John Courtney Murray and the American Proposition

While writing throughout the Forties on issues related to intercredal relations, John Courtney Murray is perhaps best remembered for his work on “church/state” relations in the fifties and, eventually, for his book *We Hold These Truths*. Murray tried to historicize the thought of Leo XIII by arguing that Pope Leo XIII held to various propositions that would validate religious liberty in an American constitutional context but condemn it in the

⁶⁴ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 157.

⁶⁵ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* Ibid, 118.

Continental European context of his day.⁶⁶ This was the case in Continental Europe because “while technically church-state doctrine was one of ‘separation,’ the effect of the doctrine was social monism, because Continental Liberalism banished religion to the realm of the private, leaving the state as the only social actor.”⁶⁷ The fallout from the French Revolution, in particular, had tainted the relationship between state and church from a Vatican perspective.

Leo XIII had little choice but to condemn religious freedom and church-state separation of a Continental European kind. But, argued Murray, the situation in the United States was different. Here the church, while technically separate, has a vital role in the shaping of society; it is not banished to the margins. Although initially silenced for his writings on these topics and for his views on religious freedom, Murray was eventually vindicated by the Second Vatican Council and the publication of *Dignitatis Humanae*.⁶⁸ The period from the time he was silenced until the late Fifties gave Murray an opportunity to broaden his analysis and look at larger questions of the relationship between religion and society. Out of this period of study came his work, *We Hold These Truths*.

It is his publication *We Hold These Truths* that is of particular interest to us here. Murray’s ideas relating to the American proposition were of lasting influence on George Weigel. It was largely through the thought of John Courtney Murray that Weigel made sense

⁶⁶ Todd David Whitmore, “The Growing End: John Courtney Murray and the Shape of Murray Studies,” in *John Courtney Murray and the Growth of Tradition*, eds. J. Leon Hooper et al. (Kansas City, KA: Sheed and Ward, 1996) vii-x; for. For a more in depth analysis of John Courtney Murray’s views on church/state issues and religious freedom than in Whitmore’s essay see William R. Luckey, “The Contribution of John Courtney Murray, S.J.: A Catholic Perspective,” in *John Courtney Murray and the American Civil Conversation*, ed. Robert P. Hunt et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1992).

⁶⁷ Whitmore, ix.

⁶⁸ Ibid, x.

of the American political tradition and the relationship of that tradition to Catholic thought. At one point he went so far as to declare that “John Courtney Murray stands as the great theological synthesis of the American Catholic experience.”⁶⁹ The fruits of this engagement are often referred to as the “John Courtney Murray Project.”

Weigel tried to further this project, arguing that “it is time to take up the task outlined, but never completed, in John Courtney Murray’s grand project: the articulation of a moral rationale for and defense of the American democratic experiment.”⁷⁰ At one point Weigel erred in claiming that he coined the term the “John Courtney Murray Project,” as the “Murray Project” was first used at least as early as 1976 in an essay in *Theological Studies* by David Hollenbach.⁷¹ Nevertheless, in this essay Hollenbach expressed an idea similar to that of Weigel when he wrote that “the entire Murray project . . . is based upon the hope that there is enough life in the American public philosophy effectively to establish justice, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for all.”⁷²

The idea of a ‘public philosophy’ is central to the thought of John Courtney Murray. It also embodied one side of an important historical debate in post-World War II America. In his book, *Believing Skeptics*, Robert Boot Fowler argues that political intellectuals, from 1945 through the early 1960s, took a skeptical stance in the face of political ideologies and any argument that based political perspectives on absolute truth claims. Important thinkers

⁶⁹ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 110.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 387.

⁷¹ George Weigel, “The Future of the John Courtney Murray Project,” in *John Courtney Murray and the American Civil Conversation*, ed. Robert P Hunt et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 275; David Hollenbach refers to the “Murray Project” in David Hollenbach, “Public Theology in America: Some Questions for Catholicism after John Courtney Murray,” *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 290-303.

⁷² Hollenbach, “Public Theology in America,” 297.

like Sydney Hook, Arthur Schlesinger, and Daniel Bell, among others, remained deeply suspicious of ideological outlooks, all of which were inherently dangerous.⁷³ Throughout most of the book, Fowler isolates the various reasons that large segments of the intellectual class during this period remained skeptical of ideology and other claims to absolute in political life.⁷⁴

In contrast to this group of thinkers, Fowler briefly addressed another class of intellectuals who focused on the importance of public philosophy and natural law as the necessary precursor to political thought. The proponents of this perspective “contended that the crisis of political justification could be resolved by recognizing that there was, in fact, no crisis, that all along there continued to exist natural standards for life and politics rooted in the eternities of the universe.”⁷⁵ Fowler focused primarily on the example of Walter Lippmann, who repeatedly emphasized the importance of natural law and public philosophy as a framework for political decision-making. Also mentioned in the same vein are thinkers like Reinhold Niebuhr, Jacques Maritain and Eric Voegelin.⁷⁶ Not mentioned, although certainly at home in this perspective, was John Courtney Murray, who pushed the idea of public philosophy in his major work, *We Hold These Truths*. This public philosophy is important because “its teachings are principles of the right order of a democratic society,

⁷³ Robert Booth Fowler, *Believing Skeptics: American Political Intellectuals, 1945-1964* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 3-8; for a brief overview of these contrasting perspectives see also Robert F. Cuervo, “John Courtney Murray and the Public Philosophy,” in *John Courtney Murray and the American Civil Conversation*, ed. Robert P. Hunt et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1992), 67-88.

⁷⁴ Fowler, see in particular chapters four and five.

⁷⁵ Fowler, 71-89.

⁷⁶ Fowler, 73-76.

principles self-evident to the reason of those trained in the study of the common good.”⁷⁷ At the core of the public philosophy for Murray was his idea of the American consensus.

The American consensus on which he depends presupposes a common set of principles through which the public philosophy finds expression in the life of the people. In short, the essential contents of this consensus include:

- the idea that there is a sovereign God that stands in judgment over all nations;
- the notion that there are truths that are publicly accessible through the natural law;
- an affirmation of the consent of the governed;
- the recognition that a free government depends on virtuous people who are inwardly governed by the moral law; and
- an acknowledgement that human rights are inalienable and inherent and precede any act of government.⁷⁸

Unfortunately, Murray argued, the American consensus had undergone a significant decline and the question as to whether it will endure had become a serious issue. Noting the contemporary tendencies of political philosophies to reject any underlying moral truth claims and to appeal to positivism and pragmatism as a basis for their political thought, he worried that the American people may soon follow suit. Such a decline would result in the dismantling of the multistoried mansion of democracy and replace it with a flat majoritarianism because it would no longer have a higher moral ethic that could ground such claims as human rights. If this is to be avoided, the American consensus might have to be rescued by the one segment of the American population that still takes it seriously: American Catholics.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Cuervo, “John Courtney Murray and the Public Philosophy,” 75.

⁷⁸ John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York, NY: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 44-53.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 53-57.

It is in the context of the American proposition, the centrality of Catholic tradition and the importance of its revitalization that Weigel developed his own thought. He argued that “what America lacks today, in our view and in Murray’s, is a religiously grounded public philosophy capable of informing and disciplining the public moral argument that is the lifeblood of democracy.”⁸⁰ Laying out this public philosophy, Weigel affirmed the elements the elements listed above. To clarify things further, Weigel argued that Murray’s thought can best be understood as three concentric circles.

In the first circle is Murray’s notion of religious freedom. From a political perspective, the importance of religious freedom becomes particularly acute in the context of a secular age in which religion is being forced to the margins. From a more specifically Catholic perspective, the Church’s recognition of religious freedom in the post-Vatican II era is important as a way to undermine the confessional state once popular in Catholic circles. The second circle focused on the compatibility of Catholic social thought with that of American democratic pluralism. Here Murray provided a defense of the Catholic Church and its pertinence to the viability of democratic pluralism. The third circle digs deeper by studying the moral and religious values that underlie the idea of American democracy. How can one hope to maintain the democratic experiment if the very values that support that experiment are stripped from political life?⁸¹

To understand Weigel’s take on Murray, it is important to briefly flesh out each of these circles and their relationship to each another. The declaration on religious freedom at the Second Vatican Council, which largely incorporated Murray’s thoughts on religious

⁸⁰ Weigel, “The Neoconservative Difference,” 155.

⁸¹ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 109-110; Weigel, “The Future of the John Courtney Murray Project,” 277-8.

freedom, legitimated the American experiment in religious liberty.⁸² But it had a more important set of consequences according to Weigel. Built on the idea that people have the inherent right to freedom of conscience, the Church's declaration on religious liberty is an inherently anti-totalitarian document. In a similar sense, this declaration "can be taken as a tacit, but critical, affirmation of democracy and democratic pluralism. Not only was the confessional state envisioned by apologetic Catholicism abandoned; the declaration clearly implied that democratic pluralism, under the conditions of the modern world, was the most appropriate embodiment of Catholic social theory."⁸³ The important question then, is how is Catholic teaching related to the democratic experiment?

In the face of anti-Catholic secularist voices of post-World War II America, perhaps embodied best by Paul Blanshard, Murray sought to demonstrate that Catholic thought was compatible with, and perhaps even essential to, the American proposition. At the time, Murray argued that American constitutionalism was rooted in the natural law tradition.⁸⁴ On this point Weigel concurred, but follows this agreement by lamenting the fact that after Vatican II the Church herself began to abandon the moral tradition that underlies the American experiment. In the Christian churches of the 1980s, Weigel argues that "religious social ethics has been beset by liberal faddishness in the generation since Murray: secular theology, the death of God, liberation theologies, Habermasian hermeneutics, and feminist deconstructions have followed each other at a dizzying pace (the common denominator

⁸² Joseph Komonchak, "Catholic Principle and the American Experiment: The Silencing of John Courtney Murray," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 17, no. 1, Americanism and Americanization: Essays in Honor of Philip Gleason (Winter, 1999): 41.

⁸³ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 106.

⁸⁴ Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 53.

among them being a profound dis-ease with the American experiment).”⁸⁵ Partially in reaction to this faddishness, Weigel claimed, a restorationist religious viewpoint has emerged that seeks to attack liberalism, religious freedom, and other elements of the democratic experiment.⁸⁶

It was not unusual for Weigel to thus criticize segments of the Catholic Church that he believed had strayed in a typically leftward (although in some instances a rightward) trajectory. In either case, what emerges is social and political monism, one on the left and one on the right. To rescue the American experiment it is crucial to trace a line between the left-wing faddishness, on the one hand, and the right-wing reaction on the other. This task requires a renewal of both church and society.⁸⁷

One of the important initial steps to do this is through an examination of the underlying values that make possible American democracy. This is the third and most encompassing circle. As with Murray, Weigel believed that the Catholic community has an important role to play in the revitalization of the American consensus. It is an error to assume that the American experiment is the product of Enlightenment rationalism. Rather it has its deepest taproots in Catholic medieval thought.⁸⁸ Reconnecting the Catholic tradition to the principles established in America’s founding documents is thus an important step in the revitalization of the American consensus. Making this process more complex, Weigel argued, is the American Catholic Church’s abandonment of its moral tradition following the close of the Second Vatican Council. On this point Weigel wrote that “the Church in the

⁸⁵ Weigel, “The Future of the John Courtney Murray Project,” 280.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Weigel, “The Neoconservative Difference, 145-7.

⁸⁸ Weigel, “The Future of the John Courtney Murray Project,” 282.

United States has not only failed to develop its heritage of thought over the past generation; the Church's most influential teaching centers have, in the main, largely abandoned their heritage."⁸⁹

Weigel's appeal to the "heritage" of the Catholic faith, which he believed large segments of the Catholic elite and hierarchy have abandoned, opened the door to a historical element to his thought. It is inadequate to understand George Weigel's reliance on Murray and his particular understanding of the Catholic tradition as merely a conceptual schema. The intellectual framework that Weigel used is embedded in a historical narrative that further fleshed out his philosophical, political, and religious worldview. Weigel is not alone in this. Both Novak and Neuhaus also ground their respective intellectual worldview in a broader historical narrative. The next chapter will explore the specific narratives that each of them used and the implications that arise out of it. Through these historical narratives, the neoconservative Catholics argued that the Catholic tradition, and in particular the social teaching tradition, is compatible with American liberal thought.

⁸⁹ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, ix.

Chapter 3

The previous two chapters traced the development of neoconservative Catholic thought in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and into the early Eighties. Throughout their writings a pair of themes came into tension. The first was that of disintegration, which was highlighted first in their concern that the United States was undergoing a period decline following the cultural and political turmoil of the Sixties. The neoconservative Catholic concern over political and cultural disintegration reflected a broader national public mood, which expressed “a much deeper pessimism about the state of America and its future, and a growing rejection of recent liberal orthodoxies.”¹ This was matched by their concerns with large segments of leadership in the Catholic Church who, they believed, had abandoned many of the fundamentals within their moral tradition in the decades following the Second Vatican Council. Their concerns over the condition of the Church were not exclusive to their own thinking, but reflected a much deeper malaise that found expression in many Catholic circles. It was further reflected in the fragmented and often contentious relationship between Catholics of different political and religious worldviews.

In contrast to this pessimistic strain in their writings, the neoconservative Catholics countered with a theme of renewal. While admitting that the cultural, political, and religious climate appeared somewhat bleak, they sought to reaffirm a worldview that would help to restore legitimacy to both American religious life and her political tradition. Chapter two

¹ Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

began to develop this more positive vision, a tradition that they thought could counteract the more negative strains existent in American secular and religious life. While all three expressed the theme of disintegration with slightly different emphases, it is in the formation of this more constructive vision that each of their intellectual interests diverged.

Neuhaus spent a great deal of energy on studying the relationship between religion and politics and, relying on Durkheim's sociological worldview, argued against any attempt to strip religion from the public sphere. He tried to make the case that Christianity was central to the American experiment in democracy and called the churches to reaffirm this connection. Weigel turned to John Courtney Murray, whom he believed offered the intellectual resources necessary to rejuvenate the American experiment. Finally, Novak sought to develop the idea of democratic capitalism, both as a counterpoint to socialism and as a way to win over skeptical Catholics to the market system. Focusing on their individual intellectual projects reveals their distinctive interests and brings into question claims that neoconservative Catholicism is defined by a monolithic project or constitutes a well-defined school of thought.

While different, there are overlapping interests that guide the distinct projects of each of the neoconservative Catholics. Each sought to contribute to the renewal of the American political tradition in an age in which the legitimacy of this tradition had come into question. In doing so the neoconservative Catholics sought to demonstrate that American political thought is consistent or at least compatible with the Catholic social teaching tradition. This "reconciliationist" approach marked a third primary theme in their writings that placed them

in the heart of the Americanist tradition in Catholic thought and which put them at odds with contemporary Catholic scholars who argued that these two traditions are fundamentally at odds with one another.²

Neuhaus' engagement with Durkheim, Weigel's embrace and development of the John Courtney Murray Project and Novak's exploration into democratic capitalism provided the mechanisms through which each attempted to achieve the above-stated goals of renewal and reconciliation. The conceptual schemes that each of the neoconservative Catholics use in this process are each rooted in a historical narrative that both ground and give credibility to their particular scheme. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore each historical narrative that functions as a backdrop to the conceptual scheme in question and examine the way in which these interpretative frameworks are situated in that narrative.

This will be helpful for several reasons. First, it will overcome any tendency toward abstraction that could occur with an ahistorical reading of their thought. Second, it will clarify their understanding of the relationship between the American political tradition and the Catholic social teaching tradition. Third, narratives can function as a way to tell a story that more effectively legitimate any sort of ideological or theoretical claims being made, than if such claims are merely on their own. That the neoconservative Catholics root, or at least strongly rely on a religious framework in the development of their narratives, makes it all the more enticing to those who already enmeshed within the prior religious narrative. Finally,

² Catholic proponents of the view that the republican tradition and the Catholic social teaching tradition are in tension if not in opposition would include scholars like David Schindler and William Cavanaugh. See, for example, David Schindler, *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996) and William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Christian Practices of Space and Time* (New York, NY: T&T Clark Ltd., 2002).

looking at the narratives that the neoconservative Catholics develop will draw out some of the challenges and difficulties inherent to each of their worldviews.

RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS: CHRISTIANITY AND THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

To understand the driving force behind Richard Neuhaus' thought during the Eighties it is important to recall the relationship that he understood religion to have with a society's cultural and political institutions. A quote taken from an essay he titled "The Post-Secular Task of the Churches" neatly sums up this relationship. Here he wrote that

religion is the heart of culture, culture is the form of religion, and politics is a function of culture. That way of putting things is reminiscent of Paul Tillich, but the assumptions behind the bias could as well be attributed to Durkheim or Hegel or even to the philosophers of antiquity. Religion, the binding beliefs of a people, is, generally speaking, the dominant factor in how they (a people) order their life together.³

This passage highlights a theme that he reiterated time and again in his writings: religious ideas and, more broadly a shared moral consensus, are primary factors in the rise of political values in a given culture. The historical narrative that emerges in his writings reflects the importance of this dynamic in an American context.

The relationship, as he understood it, between religion, culture and politics is a dynamic phenomenon. As religious institutions and ideas rise and fall or change in relation to the society around them, they can become alienated from the political ideas that they once legitimated. Because religious institutions tend to be one of the primary carriers of meaning in culture, a crisis of legitimacy can ensue following the alienation of religion that these

³ Neuhaus, "The Post-Secular Task of the Churches," 1.

political ideas once depended. Two general consequences can follow. First, a new set of institutional structures can fill the newly emergent void and in doing so provide a legitimate defense of these ideas. Or, the political and social system under question can undergo an upheaval and experience a significant amount of change and perhaps dissolution. This dynamic is of particular importance here because of the way he understands it to be at play throughout American history.

In the context of American political culture, Neuhaus emphasized the important role that Christianity had in relation to the American experiment in political democracy. As far back as the seventeenth century, the earliest settlers often expounded on the exceptional place and character of this new land. References to the ‘New Jerusalem’ or to the new world as ‘a city on the hill’ helped to shape the early American experience. Neuhaus maintained that these expressions demonstrated the conviction of the early settlers that “God had a hand in America’s beginnings and was guiding it to the fulfillment of his appointed purpose.”⁴ Echoing this sentiment on more than one occasion, he claimed at one point that the American experiment in democracy “participates, albeit partially, in that new community to which the Christian Gospel points in the coming of the Kingdom of God.”⁵

Over the course of about fifteen years, from the mid-Seventies to late Eighties, Neuhaus became more confident with the idea that the American experiment was, if not

⁴ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 208.

⁵ Neuhaus, “The Democratic Prospect,” *Worldview* 19 (July/August, 1976): 14. To be fair, Neuhaus never absolutized the idea of America’s exceptional character; the ‘chosen’ quality of the American experiment and the values that this experiment affirmed was never a given. Both its long term value and durability could only be judged in retrospect. There is no reason to assume that America today could not turn out to be a modern day Babylon. Nor, even if it is of value in the overall sweep of history, political, social, economic and religious changes could eventually undermine the strength and stability of the experiment.

directly under siege, undergoing a slow decay. But this process had a long back story, and one that Neuhaus was interested in exploring. To understand the current conditions of American political life in the late twentieth century, he thought it important to step back and understand the role that Protestantism had in this process, the changes that Protestantism underwent over the past century, and the consequences of its decline.

Neuhaus' take on the relationship between American religion and American political life become apparent in a series of essays he wrote covering a period from the mid-Seventies to the late Eighties: *Time Toward Home*, "The Post-Secular Task of the Churches," *The Naked Public Square*, and *The Catholic Moment*. At the center of this story is the rise and fall of the mainline Protestant Churches. His position can be summarized by the following:

For two centuries it (mainline Protestantism) provided a transcendent vision of the American possibility; in the social gospel movement it proposed wedding that vision to a very immanent program of social reform; in New Deal liberalism that marriage was consummated; amid the departure of New Deal confidence and the arrival of assassinations, Vietnam, and riotous discontent, the marriage was terminated.⁶

The first moment in this process focused on the importance of eighteenth and nineteenth century Christianity to American political life. Recalling the works of European visitors to America during the Nineteenth century, Neuhaus argued that there was at least a sense among scholars of the day that the Christian ethos was central to American culture and her political experiment in democracy. For better or worse the Christian sensibility of the

⁶ Neuhaus, "The Post-Secular Task of the Churches, 14.

American people shaped the American political vision well into the Twentieth Century.⁷ It was an impression that Neuhaus shared.⁸ While accurate insofar as he goes, there is another angle to this story that requires comment.

The religious historian Mark Noll noted that many laymen and leadership alike in the Christian Churches were hostile to the republican political tradition well into the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, by the American Revolution many theologically conservative Christians had grown to embrace and even champion many of liberalism's major tenets. This merging of a republican and Christian worldview was largely the result of efforts by leading Christian intellectuals' ability to fold these political ideas into a religious worldview.⁹ By the time of the Revolution, and certainly in the decades following, "religion was so deeply intertwined with revolutionary political ideology that it seems virtually impossible to distinguish between them."¹⁰

This fusion between republican and Christian worldviews makes Neuhaus' argument more complex and highlights some potential weaknesses in his analysis. First, Neuhaus was not naïve to the powerful influence that non-religious factors can have on a religious tradition. Nevertheless, throughout his writings his emphasis tended to focus on the foundational role that Christianity had in the emergence of culture and the American political

⁷ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 202-3; it is important to note that by arguing that the American people were a religious people, he does not mean necessarily a moral people, but rather that religious ideas and belief were ubiquitous phenomenon that saturated every sector of society.

⁸ Ibid, 209.

⁹ Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 55-75.

¹⁰ Ruth Bloch, "Religion and Ideological Change in the American Revolution," in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, 2nd ed., ed. Mark A. Noll et al. (New York, NY: The Oxford University Press, 2007), 53.

worldview. In reading Neuhaus, one is often left with the sense that while other elements certainly contributed to the formation of America, Christianity was the necessary condition in the process. But scholars such as Noll have pointed out that there was for some time a certain separation, if not a chasm, between the two traditions under discussion. Throughout his writings during this period Neuhaus did not make much of an effort to analyze the roots of liberalism independent of the Christian worldview that he argued underlay it.

Further, he does not directly wrestle with the significant ways in which ‘secular’ culture helped to shape Protestantism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The historian Nathan Hatch has argued in a similar fashion to Mark Noll, asserting the central importance of Christianity in the early American republic and its support for political idioms is consistent with the republican tradition. Yet it was a very American form of Christianity, distinct from its European counterparts, which came to support this political tradition. Through its development on American soil, large swaths of Protestant Christianity became “democratized” and, in the process, participated in the democratization of American culture in the decades following the Revolution.¹¹ Christianity was not merely a carrier of republican values that gained its full expression in the aftermath of the American Revolution but slowly became imbued by those values during its experience in America.

Although Neuhaus would need to flesh out his argument to account for this more complex interaction, he accurately noted that American Christianity did play an important

¹¹ Nathan Hatch, “The Democratization of Christianity and the Character of American Politics,” in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present*, 2nd ed., ed. Mark A. Noll et al. (New York, NY: The Oxford University Press, 2007), 102-4; a more extended version of this article can be found at Nathan Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1989).

role in providing a rationale for republican virtues for much of the period following post-Revolution America. As time passed, Neuhaus argued, the legitimating function fulfilled by the nineteenth century churches shifted to their twentieth century progeny, “who are today described as the mainline, liberal, or ecumenical Protestant denominations.”¹² The fundamental problem that Neuhaus highlighted in this shift was that by the mid-twentieth century the influence of the mainline churches had begun to wane, to lose adherents, and diminish in its political clout, thus leaving a void that needed to be filled. The decline in the influence of the mainline churches and the vacuum that remained constitutes the second major step in his historical narrative.

Recently, scholars in the sociology of religion have reaffirmed the slow decline of mainline Protestant churches over the past century. The reasons for this decline relate directly to their inability to maintain a healthy tension with the surrounding culture. Failure to remain distinct from the wider culture lessens the value that any religion holds for prospective members and thus diminishes the likelihood that it will attract new followers.¹³ Roger Finke and Rodney Starke, both of whom have championed this perspective, argue that “people tend to value religion on the basis of how costly it is to belong—the more one must sacrifice in order to be in good standing, the more valuable the religion . . . the more ‘mainline’ the church (in the sense of being regarded as respectable and reasonable), the lower the value of belonging to it, and this eventually results in widespread defection.”¹⁴

¹² Neuhaus, “The Post-Secular Task of the Churches,” 1.

¹³ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 249-255.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

While writing before some of the more important studies on this topic were published, Neuhaus puts a kind of theological spin on this argument. It was during the twentieth century, he claimed, and particularly the latter half, that the mainline churches began to abandon their theological distinctiveness in favor of political relevance. Rather than leading culture, the Christian churches all too often fell behind and began to allow secular culture to take the lead. It was, argued Neuhaus, a time of the “Great Accommodation.”¹⁵ At the core of Neuhaus’ critique of mainline Protestantism was that although it was “long an extremely influential force, it has lately been on the decline. Its membership is shrinking, and many of those who remain seem more committed to certain political and social objectives than to traditional gospel values.”¹⁶

The “Great Accommodation” became an increasingly evident phenomenon to Neuhaus as the churches abandoned a self confident Christianity that could function as a check on secular power. Instead, he argued that mainline church leaders were increasingly capitulating to secular political interests and in doing so were allowing the world to set the agenda for the Church, thus turning the proper order of things on its head. This tendency weakened the voice of the churches and, contrary to their intentions, limited any real influence they might have in shaping the political and social order.¹⁷

The marginalization of mainline Protestants in this process did not diminish the important role they played through much of American history as the primary legitimating

¹⁵ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 213-218.

¹⁶ William J. Gould, Jr., “John Paul and the Catholic Moment,” *The Washington Post*, Sept. 6, 1987, B2.

¹⁷ Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1977), 84-5.

forces of the American democratic experiment. With mainline Protestantism becoming increasingly irrelevant to this process, if the American experiment were to remain vibrant, this legitimating role had to be assumed by another group. To make sense of this, Neuhaus turned to Vilfred Pareto's idea of the "circulation of elites." This theory argues that

Social functions... are performed by groups that, after a while, constitute themselves as elites. After a longer while, the elite (whether economic, military, governmental, or religious) become flabby or disillusioned and no longer perform the function by which it acquired its privileged social position. When that happens, the function is not simply neglected. No, some other group, usually a quite different group, moves in to displace the old elite. And so elite functions circulate from one group to another.¹⁸

Surveying the religious landscape, Neuhaus tried to determine which religious group was in the best position to take the place of mainline Protestantism and examined three in particular: the fundamentalist Christians, the Lutherans, and Roman Catholics.¹⁹ He paid most of his attention to the fundamentalist and Catholic option.

Neuhaus first focused on the fundamentalist Christian churches that had reappeared in American public life during the previous decade. In an early essay Neuhaus noted their impressive use of technology and communications, and their effective electoral strategy in gaining political influence, but downplayed their chances of success given their tendencies toward apocalypticism and pre-millennialism. In important ways these latter characteristics were too far outside the mainstream to ever become a dominant vision guiding most

¹⁸ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 261-2.

¹⁹ Neuhaus also briefly looked at Protestant Evangelicals as a possible replacement but dismissed that option almost out of hand. We will thus not take the space to address his objections here.

American's lives. Even if they happened to win some elections, he thought it unlikely that they would ever win over many converts who did not already subscribe to their worldview.²⁰

A few years later, Neuhaus expanded on his critique of fundamentalist Christianity in his book *The Naked Public Square*. Here Neuhaus became more critical of fundamentalist Christianity's harsh tone and style and the intellectual substance of the Moral Majority and contemporary forms of right-wing Christianity. He further argued that its sectarian language both prohibited the development of a commonly shared public ethic and, in fact, tended to marginalize the value of religious language in the public square for those not already in agreement with a fundamentalist worldview.²¹ The Biblicism, literalism, and private interpretative framework at work in this worldview, while providing a comprehensive worldview to the individual believer, did not provide a useful vantage from which the believer can engage the non-believer.²² The narrowly defined rhetoric from which fundamentalists draw undermined any constructive public debate with those who disagree. Neuhaus argued that "by separating public argument from private belief, by building a strict separationism between faith and reason, fundamentalist religion ratifies and reinforces the conclusions of militant secularism."²³ In other words, the fundamentalist approach to the encounter between religion and political does little more than support the divorce of the one from the other.

²⁰ Neuhaus, "The Post-Secular Task of the Churches," 15.

²¹ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 36-7.

²² Ibid, 16-18.

²³ Ibid, 37.

With fundamentalist Christianity an unlikely successor to mainline Protestantism, Neuhaus turned his attention to Lutheranism. A Lutheran himself before his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1991, one might be inclined to think that he would hold Lutheranism as the likely heir to mainline Protestantism. This was not the case. A European style Lutheranism, he argued, with its two-kingdoms theology and tendency toward authoritarianism, does not have much to offer as it lacks a religious rationale that could be useful in defending a democratic style of government. American-style Lutheranism, which had moved beyond the limits of the European tradition, held some promise but had not matured enough to be ready to fulfill the responsibilities that were being slowly abandoned by the mainline churches.²⁴

Having discussed various options in the Protestant community, Neuhaus also looked at the possible role that Roman Catholicism could play in strengthening the idea of American experiment. From the mid-Seventies to the late Eighties, his assessment of the Roman Catholic Church as a viable alternative to mainline Protestantism shifted back and forth from a passing optimism, to a qualified suspicion to, finally, a strong conviction that only the Catholic Church could fill the role of mainline Protestantism. In one of his earliest discussions on this issue he noted, almost in passing, that “the quality of moral discourse in American public life depends, I believe, in large measure upon the nerve with which American Catholics join in the struggle to revitalize and redefine the terms of our common covenant.”²⁵ Whether this would occur depended largely on how American Catholicism

²⁴ Neuhaus, “The Post Secular Task of the Churches, 16-7.

²⁵ Neuhaus, *Time Toward Home*, 148.

adjusted its identity now that it had finally become ‘American’ in the post-World War II era. The Catholic Church now had an opportunity, in a way that it did not in earlier years, to engage and shape American culture directly.

In a later essay written in the early Eighties Neuhaus takes a more skeptical tone regarding the Catholic Church’s ability to provide a leadership role in the coming decades. The Catholic Church had only been welcomed into American society in recent decades and the anti-Catholic mentality, still alive and well in society, could alienate American Catholics from taking a leadership role.²⁶ He also expressed concerns over the credibility of current Church leadership and worried that the Catholic leadership had grown out of touch with its own tradition.

The Catholic leadership, so eager to be “Americanized,” has emulated mainline Protestantism to the extent that it too has struck out, but before it even got a proper turn to bat. A comparison of the public positions on both foreign and domestic issues of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops with the National Catholic Conference of Churches is not encouraging. And it is best not to even mention the captivity of influential religious orders and other organizations to the “liberationist” mentality, which—whatever its merits—disqualifies them from taking part in the redefining of America.²⁷

This critique presupposed that the Catholic Church leadership had abandoned a formative role and, like mainline Protestantism, merely accommodated itself to political positions put forth by the world. Not surprisingly, such a perspective hardly instilled confidence that the Catholic Church could step up and play an important role in the defense of the American democratic experiment.

²⁶ Neuhaus, “The Post-Secular Task of the Churches,” 16.

²⁷ Ibid.

At this point, Neuhaus did not seem hopeful that the Catholics, the Lutherans or the fundamentalists were likely to take the place of mainline Protestantism. This impression becomes overt when he closed out the essay with the assertion that “in this drama of relating Christian faith and public life, the old actors are exhausted and the new ones are impossible. Post-secular America has a religious role in search of religious leadership that has the nerve for it.”²⁸

Slightly revising his analysis of the condition of the Catholic Church that he staked out in the earlier essay, Neuhaus expressed greater optimism by the time that he wrote *The Naked Public Square*. Demographically the Church was in a position to play an important culture-forming role as the single largest religious group in the United States. He argued that by the mid-Eighties it appeared that the institutional Church seems to have “weathered the storm” that arose in the immediate aftermath of Vatican II although, he quickly added, there was still the threat that Catholics would replicate the behavior of mainline Protestantism. While he did not expand on the role of the Catholic Church in the United States at any great length at this point, it is notable that by the mid-Eighties he was already making reference to it being the “Catholic Moment.”²⁹

It was in his book *The Catholic Moment* that Neuhaus fully embraced the contributions that the Catholic Church could make to American political life. In his earlier works he often voiced concern about the Church’s capitulation to secular politics, particularly of a leftist variety. While he continued to express some unease in this regard, he

²⁸ Ibid, 18.

²⁹ Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*.

began to highlight competing trends that could function as a counterweight to these tendencies. Perhaps foremost of all stands the figure of Pope John Paul II and, at his right hand, that of Joseph Ratzinger.

Although Neuhaus only briefly mentioned the role that John Paul II might play in the Church in his earlier writings (and not a word on Ratzinger), in *The Catholic Moment* he spent an extensive amount of time on both. For our purposes here, their importance resides in the ways that they refocused the Church during the Eighties. One of the more important shifts was evident in the approach that John Paul II took in the face of controversial theologians and even bishops. No longer, according to Neuhaus, could Catholic theologians say what they wanted without consequences, given that theology must be done in a context wherein certain ideas are authoritative; there are, in other words, limits to theological speculation that have to be respected. This crackdown took on a public character with, for example, the dismissal of Charles Curran from the Catholic University of America and in the investigation of Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen of Seattle. In both cases there was the sense, particularly in conservative circles, of an attempt by the pope to reassert orthodoxy in a religious culture that had for too long been tempted to theological experimentation. The reigning in by John Paul II and Ratzinger of theological speculation run wild, claimed Neuhaus, was an act of *renewal* following a post-Vatican II period that witnessed a collapse of Catholic identity.³⁰ While focusing on the international Catholic scene, Neuhaus pointed out the important implications that this renewal process has for the American Catholic Church.

³⁰ Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment*, 97-110.

The task that John Paul II took up in relation to the Universal Church fit nicely with the concerns that Neuhaus had regarding the American one. Neuhaus highlighted John Paul II's call for the American Church

to resist the forces of modern accomodationalism. Accomodationalism can take the form of tailoring the truth to serve the civil religion of American democracy, or to gain respectability in the eyes of the secularized academe, or to advance the revolutionary struggle.³¹

Neuhaus' use of the word "accomodationalism" is the same term he used to describe the collapse of mainline Protestantism. During the Twentieth Century mainline Protestantism engaged in a "great accomodationalism" that effectively undermined its spiritual authority and made it little more than a partisan in political affairs. By reiterating this term here, he is linking certain trends in American Catholicism with the failure of mainline Protestantism and warning Catholics that their Church could meet a similar fate if they do not follow the lead of the pope. Neuhaus is also calling out segments of the Catholic Church who are, as he saw it, engaged in accomodationalist activities.

Within the larger context of his thought his accusation of accomodationalism consisted in a veiled criticism of the American bishops who too often, according to the neoconservative Catholics as a whole, engaged in partisan political bickering. In this vein, Neuhaus expressed his concern that "instead of being engaged in a new intensity of reflection... people on all sides of the political divides come to view the bishops as simply one more set of actors in the familiar play of politics as usual."³²

³¹ Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment*, 102.

³² *Ibid*, 275.

While Neuhaus did not oppose in principle the bishops' desire to engage in political life, he argued that they often go about it in the wrong way. Their primary responsibility is not to stake out positions on every pressing political issue of the day, but to work at forming culture by imbuing it with a Catholic worldview. Doing this would provide the Catholic Church an opportunity to take up the torch that was dropped by mainline Protestant churches in recent decades. It was for Neuhaus the "Catholic moment." At this point his discussion intersected with the thought of George Weigel. Highlighting a then recently published book, Neuhaus claimed that Weigel's *Tranquillitas Ordinis* provided a roadmap that would help American Catholics recover their tradition in the modern world and lead them to fulfill the role once occupied by mainline Protestantism. Weigel's arguments offered, Neuhaus believed, a framework that could help the Church understand what it means to be both Catholic and American.³³

GEORGE WEIGEL: UP FROM THE MIDDLE AGES

Richard Neuhaus' emphasis on the Catholic moment provides a useful transition into the thought of George Weigel. Similarly to Neuhaus, Weigel recognized in the Catholic Church an institution that has available to it the resources that could contribute to the renewal of the American experiment. In contrast to Neuhaus, who traveled a winding path to the Catholic Church that climaxed in his conversion, Weigel was a Catholic from birth. In one of his earliest published essays, he focused on the relationship between the Catholic theological tradition and the American civil religion tradition. Here he called for process of

³³ Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment*, 240.

mutual engagement, given that he believed that both traditions could use each other as a source of strength.

At the time, Weigel provided little detail into what he understood to be the Catholic tradition and how it would engage American civil religion or, more broadly, the American political tradition. In a few short years he began to flesh out this vision and took advantage of the thought of John Courtney Murray in doing so. The political and religious thought of Murray was a major influence in Weigel's development of a conceptual lens to analyze American life. His use of Murray committed him not only to a conceptual scheme that helped make sense of the world, but also to a historical framework that shed light on the American democratic tradition.

Throughout his writings, Murray looked at both the state of Catholicism in mid-twentieth century America and at the importance of medieval Catholic thought on American political life. During the nineteenth century one of the key debates that raged in Protestant circles was the compatibility of Roman Catholicism with American republican values. Protestants of this era often "charged that Catholicism was an irrational religion based upon blind submission to an arbitrary teaching authority" and held that "Catholicism and American republicanism were historically, practically and theoretically incompatible."³⁴ The supposed incompatibility between these two traditions dogged the Catholic community well into the following century. By the post-World War II period, the source of these criticisms began to shift. While plenty of Protestants remained skeptical of the Catholic Church, secularist

³⁴ Patrick W. Carey, "American Catholic Religious Thought: An Historical Overview," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 4, no. 2: Catholics and the Intellectual Life (1985): 126.

thinkers began to speak out more loudly against the activity of religious communities in the public sphere.³⁵

Murray's defense of the Catholic Church's involvement in the public sphere can be read as a two-front attack against both Protestant antagonists and their secular counterparts. At the core of this defense is the idea that "all that is best in modern democracy is a reviviscence of... 'the eternal Middle Ages.'"³⁶ In other words, he argued that one of the important tap roots for American republicanism rests in the intellectual resources that were nurtured and developed in medieval Catholic political thought.³⁷ Protestant claims to the contrary, not only is the Catholic Church compatible with American political thought, it was an important intellectual source for the emergence of American democracy. Because medieval Catholic political thought functions as a central support for the American democratic experiment, the secularist critique also becomes more tenuous. Secularists sought to banish religion from the public forum and, in doing so, replace the religiously grounded political tradition with a secular substitute. Doing this would, Murray contended, leave a spiritual vacuum that would open the door for a totalitarian-style government.

³⁵ Robert McElroy, *The Search for an American Public Theology: The Contribution of John Courtney Murray* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1989), 32-37. The most outspoken secular opponent of the Roman Catholic Church in the late forties was Paul Blanshard. See, for example, Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1949).

³⁶ Cited in McElroy, 24.

³⁷ According to Murray, the roots of American republican thought actually extend back as early as Pope Gelasius I and his formulation of the "two swords" idea but mature during the scholastic period, in what he refers to as the medieval synthesis. For a brief but useful overview, see McElroy, 20-25.

Without some form of spiritual substance that would reinforce the value system inherent in American republican thought, the only thing that would remain is the state.³⁸

The assertion that the scholastic period functioned as one of the fundamental sources for the American experiment in democracy is not novel to John Courtney Murray. This connection extends at least as far back as the early twentieth century. In his book, *The Survival of American Innocence*, William Halsey traced this link to the growing confidence and optimism of the American Catholic Church during this period. Halsey highlighted James Walsh's *The Thirteenth: Greatest of the Centuries* as one of the clearest and earliest examples of this attempt.³⁹ Walsh aimed at picturing "Catholicism as the inspirational element in the creating of universities, trade schools, libraries, Gothic architecture, literature, art and the early beginnings of democratic liberties."⁴⁰ In the decades following the book's publication, American Catholic intellectuals sought to demonstrate the extent to which their identity as Catholics was linked closely with their identity as Americans. Not only was Catholicism not an alien faith, but this viewpoint held that the American political tradition was rooted in a scholastic philosophical worldview.

³⁸ John Courtney Murray, "Contemporary Orientations of Catholic Social Thought on Church and State in the Light of History," *Theological Studies* 10 (June, 1949): 187, fn. 28. This argument is reminiscent of Richard Neuhaus and his idea of the naked public square. Whereas Durkheim provided an important backdrop to Neuhaus' intellectual development, by the mid-Eighties, Murray's influence on Neuhaus is unmistakable. In fact, there are times at which Neuhaus directly appeals to the dangers raised by Murray regarding the emergence of a spiritual vacuum in the public square, created by the removal of religion from it, Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 259.

³⁹ James Walsh, *The Thirteenth: Greatest of the Centuries* (New York, NY: Catholic Summer School Press, 1912).

⁴⁰ William H. Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment, 1920-1940* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 66-67.

This type of argument culminated in the writings of John Courtney Murray. More intellectually refined and less romantic than his precursors, Murray contended that one of the essential sources for the American constitutional system, or the American proposition as he often referred to it, was to be found in medieval Catholic philosophy and theology.⁴¹ According to Murray, “the heart of the Catholic social tradition could best be discerned in the medieval synthesis, and he saw in that synthesis compelling declarations of fundamental theological importance which had been recognized and enshrined in the American polity.”⁴²

The ideas that became enshrined in the American polity were reflected in what Murray referred to as the “public consensus,” which is “an ensemble of substantive truths, a structure of basic knowledge, and an order of elementary affirmations that reflect realities inherent in the order of existence.”⁴³ It was Murray’s contention that these elementary affirmations functioned as a commonly held framework through which political conversation in the public sphere was made possible. What troubled Murray was the growing sense that this consensus was slowly breaking down and what remained was an array of political opinions, the truth of which could not be measured by an appeal to some higher standard. The total breakdown of this consensus would, he worried, undermine the viability of the American experiment in democracy. This is in large part due to the concern that without a

⁴¹ Halsey, 76-7.

⁴² Robert W. McElroy, “Catholicism and the American Polity: Murray as Interlocutor,” in *John Courtney Murray and the Growth of Tradition*, ed. J Leon Hooper et al. (Kansas City, KS: Sheed and Ward, 1996), 6.

⁴³ Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 27.

higher and autonomous standard that can function as a check on political power and decision-making, political life would likely devolve into an interest-based, power politics.⁴⁴

By the late Sixties, the threat to this consensus had become more pronounced, as cultural, political and religious upheavals fractured political debate and further undermined any common ground that might have existed in earlier decades. Growing skepticism surrounding this consensus influenced Catholic intellectual life, as much as it did some of their secular counterparts. An early biographer of Murray explained that after Murray's death in 1967, the American Catholic Church lurched leftward and many therein grew skeptical of the American liberal tradition.⁴⁵ As Murray was a staunch defender of the public consensus and of the American political tradition, he began to be taken by some as quaint, irrelevant and perhaps even dangerous.⁴⁶ At one point Garry Wills noted that it was not uncommon for Murray to be considered as being impossibly passé during the height of the Sixties.⁴⁷ As late as 1978 another author wrote of Murray that, "time is moving him deeper into the shadows of memory and interest."⁴⁸ One reason for this dismissive accounting of John Courtney Murray's thought has to do with the significant changes that Church and society underwent in the decade following the Second Vatican Council. While certain segments of the Catholic left were rejecting Murray in favor of other worldviews, by the mid-Seventies other influential Catholic scholars were beginning to recognize the important

⁴⁴ Neuhaus, for example, expressed concern about the de-transcendentalizing of truth as it relates to culture. Doing away with the transcendent brings with it the illusion of a value free public sphere when in fact competing values are still pursued, albeit absent an overtly moral language, Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, 125-140

⁴⁵ Donald E. Pelotte, *John Courtney Murray: Theologian in Conflict* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1975), 189.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁷ Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment*, 255.

⁴⁸ John Deedy, *Seven American Catholics* (Chicago, IL: Thomas More Press, 1978), 152-3.

contributions that Murray made to American Catholic and political life. The sociologist John Coleman, for example, argued that John Courtney Murray was one of only three deceased American Catholic theologians worth reading at the time, given the insights that he provided on the intersection between Catholic theology and modern political life.⁴⁹ Shortly thereafter, David Hollenbach penned an essay expressing general agreement with Coleman and called for a “critical re-evaluation of the American civil liberties tradition which Murray brought into creative contact with the American Catholic social tradition.”⁵⁰ Three years later in 1979, an important symposium that focused specifically on the contributions of John Courtney Murray was held at Georgetown University. Participants included many of the thinkers who stood on the cusp of what would be the vanguard of the Murray revival.⁵¹ Other Catholic scholars arose to answer their call to reengage some of the questions advanced by Murray, George Weigel among them.

Weigel expressed general agreement with Murray that the public consensus provided an intellectual framework that made the American experiment in democracy viable. Further, he also agreed that the principles comprising the consensus had their roots in medieval political thought. These principles included the state/society distinction; the notion that America is ultimately a nation under God’s judgment; the principle of the people’s consent to be governed; the idea that virtue is the basis for freedom; the notion of human rights; and the

⁴⁹ John Coleman, “Vision and Praxis in American Theology: Orestes Brownson, John A. Ryan, and John Courtney Murray,” *Theological Studies* 37 no. 1 (March, 1976), 3-40.

⁵⁰ David Hollenbach, “Public Theology in America: Some Questions for Catholicism after John Courtney Murray,” *Theological Studies* 37 no. 2 (June, 1976): 291.

⁵¹ “Theology and Philosophy in Public: A Symposium on John Courtney Murray’s Unfinished Agenda,” *Theological Studies* 40, no 4 (December, 1979).

constitutional character of American political life.⁵² Given the intellectual sources of the republican tradition, Weigel was also convinced that the Catholic Church had the intellectual resources that could reaffirm the values inherent in American political life.

The problem, Weigel argued, was that while the Church possessed the resources to defend and revitalize the American experiment in democracy, Church leaders had in recent years turned their back on the Catholic tradition. In the preface to his book *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, he expressed his concern that the “Church in the United States has not only failed to develop its heritage of thought over the past generation; the Church’s most influential teaching centers have, in the main, largely abandoned that tradition.”⁵³ *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, as is evident from its subtitle, *The Present Failure and Future of American Catholic Thought on War and Peace*, has as its primary focus the Catholic understanding of war and peace. Nevertheless, there is a more fundamental issue at stake here.⁵⁴ There has developed within the Catholic tradition, Weigel argued, the notion of *Tranquillitas ordinis*, or the tranquility of order, which can be traced back to the thought of Augustine and Aquinas.

Weigel argued that the American experiment in democracy has, in the context of modernity, best embodied the rightly ordered political community that is implied in the idea of the tranquility of order. Weigel is not arguing that American style democracy is the only valid expression of this vision, but in a world that has been buffeted by totalitarianisms of every variety, it is a model that the Catholic Church should affirm. Further, it is not only

⁵² Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 112-122.

⁵³ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, ix.

⁵⁴ The next chapter will explore Weigel’s approach to just war theory, an approach that is deeply influenced by his time at the World without War Council, the fruits of which are given expression in *Tranquillitas Ordinis*.

consistent with, but it is a legitimate formulation of the Catholic political tradition that preceded it. His affirmation of republican political thought and its compatibility with Catholic teaching is not without some controversy. As Weigel noted, throughout much of the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, there was some resistance to the liberal political tradition. “Even if alone among Western institutions,” he wrote, the Catholic Church “would not accommodate to the intellectual challenge mounted by modern historical, literary, sociological, psychological, political, and scientific theory.”⁵⁵

Throughout this period, the Vatican expressed skepticism regarding liberal political thought and often viewed it as a threat to its own authority. On one level this reaction was understandable, for as liberalism spread across the European continent, anti-clerical sentiment found greater influence in many areas of society, and anti-Catholic feeling became pronounced. This overarching mentality often led the Church to react, in many ways harshly, to the tendencies of the modern world, and this view was often also paired with the intent of reestablishing her dominance. One of the goals “of the post-1815 Roman Church was to salvage what rights and independence it could in the face of an expansion of state power and influence.”⁵⁶

While caution and even animosity toward liberalism became a common reaction by the Church in Europe, Weigel argued that during the nineteenth century the American Catholic bishops became increasingly confident in the compatibility of these two traditions. They began to develop a positive intuition that “Roman Catholicism’s traditionally

⁵⁵ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 74-6.

⁵⁶ Gary Lease, “Vatican Foreign Policy and the Origins of Modernism,” in *Catholicism Contending with Modernity*, ed. Darryl Jodock (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 36.

incarnational... imagination about human history, and the social ethic derived from it, were not merely congruent with an experiment in democratic pluralism, *but in fact implied in it.*”⁵⁷ Consequently, the American bishops recognized that the experiment in democratic pluralism was not a Protestant or Enlightenment invention, however much they may have contributed to it, but was an extension and modern expression of an Augustinian/Thomistic tradition of what constituted a rightly ordered political community.⁵⁸

It is in this context that Weigel links Murray’s notion of the American proposition with his notion of the *Tranquillitas ordinis*.⁵⁹ The promise of this tradition was, according to Weigel, affirmed by most of the American Church up until Vatican II. But for all its promise, in the decade that followed the tradition became increasingly peripheral to Catholic thought and was, for all intensive purposes, abandoned by the American Catholic leadership. Similar to Neuhaus’ critique of the leadership in the mainline Protestant churches, Weigel argued that Church leadership had become more interested in prophetic politics and political relevancy than in affirming and upholding the millennia old Catholic tradition. He wrote that many of the Catholic intellectual elite “set themselves the task of delegitimizing the American proposition—although what many of them understood themselves to be doing was undertaking a ‘prophetic’ critique of the American system of political economy and of US foreign policy. . . .”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 52.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ George Weigel, “John Courtney Murray and the American Proposition,” *Catholicism in Crisis*, November, 1985, 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 12.

Weigel understood it as partly his responsibility to draw attention to this failure and call the Church back in the process. This process of recovery required that the Church reject the overtly prophetic, left-wing Catholicism that looks at America as worthy of condemnation for its inequities and sins. Weigel isolated the ideal example of this approach in the *The National Catholic Reporter*.⁶¹ Left-wing Catholicism was not the only threat to the American Catholic Church; the traditionalist wing that rose up in reaction to Vatican II must also be avoided. Holding up *The Wanderer* as a preeminent example of this temptation, he held that the traditionalist Catholics look to the post-Vatican II era as a period in which the “heresy” of Americanism and modernism had finally gained the upper hand and modernism infected the Church. What was needed was a new era of restoration that would bring Catholicism back to the Church of Popes Leo and Pius.⁶²

The stark divisions that had arisen in the Church and the problems associated with them are, for Weigel, not merely of ecclesiological importance because of the direct bearing these divisions could have on American political life. Given Weigel’s conviction that the Church had a useful set of resources that could help strengthen the American democratic experiment, the deep fissures within the Church prevented her from taking advantage of these resources in an effective manner. Furthermore, these divisions merely reflected the fractured state of society.

Turning to the writings of Alasdair MacIntyre, Weigel argued that modern Western society had effectively devolved into a state of moral chaos. Gone are any objective criteria

⁶¹ Weigel, *Catholicism and the Renewal of American Democracy* (Mahwah, NJ: The Paulist Press, 1989), 47-69.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 70-82.

that could function as the basis for a shared moral or political discourse. In its place are disconnected, subjective standards that are used by different people at different times and for different purposes.⁶³ In his book, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre wrote that lacking an objective framework to weigh moral claims, contemporary moral thought is essentially emotivist. “Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are emotive or evaluative in character.”⁶⁴ Such a condition is clearly untenable for someone like George Weigel, who argued that the American democratic vision is built on proposition that takes seriously a set of self-evident truths that are, in turn, affirmed as true in an American setting. The philosophical pluralism that underlies the moral relativism that both Weigel and MacIntyre hold is part of the modern condition and cannot account for such self-evident truths.

To counter this, Weigel argued that what the West needs to recover is an appreciation for natural law thinking, which would provide religiously neutral moral grammar that people of all faiths could use to analyze pressing moral questions. Drawing on the supposed neutrality of natural law and citing Murray, Weigel argued that at its core are three fundamental presuppositions: “that man is intelligent; that reality is intelligible; and that it (reality) be obeyed in its demands for action or abstention.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, he argued that almost all men and women of good will could use natural law as a basis for arriving at moral

⁶³ Ibid, 191-4.

⁶⁴ Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 11-12.

⁶⁵ Weigel, *Catholicism and the Renewal of American Democracy*, 93.

conclusions.⁶⁶ He goes so far elsewhere as to argue that it might be possible to argue that natural law thinking is inherent to the human condition and that, whether we realize it or not, we often times think in natural law categories.⁶⁷

It is at this point that his argument remains incomplete. Although Weigel admitted that he is not making a theoretical defense of natural law, it is this kind of defense that would need to be made to make his argument more convincing. Another book written by Alistair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality* helps to show why this is so. MacIntyre argued that the Thomistic moral thought on which Weigel depended is itself a tradition that, in a modern context, is in competition with other moral traditions. Part of this competition entails debates over the meaning of such terms of justice, rationality and, more specifically practical rationality.⁶⁸

With this in mind, it is important to note that justice and rationality are constituent to any understanding of the natural law. How someone understands these terms is dependent on the intellectual tradition to which one commits herself. MacIntyre wrote that “Aquinas’ account is only fully intelligible, let alone defensible, as it emerges from an extended and complex tradition of argument and conflict...” that included Aristotle and Augustine, not to mention the debates that occurred during the thirteenth century.⁶⁹ Further, Aquinas’ appropriation of these terms is at odds with the way in which competing traditions, such as liberalism, use these same terms. There is not space to go into the differences between these

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 199.

⁶⁸ Alisdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 205.

various traditions here. Needless to say, MacIntyre's position reveals why Weigel's argument, that "man is intelligent; that reality is intelligible; and that it be obeyed in its demands for action or abstention" is not in itself an adequate defense of the natural law.

Taking his lead from MacIntyre, Weigel took seriously the claim that moral discourse in the West was broken, with emotivism functioning as the standard lens through which moral debate typically occurred. This threatened the long-term viability of the American experiment in democracy because it placed the intellectual basis for the experiment on a foundation of sand. The solution he offered was a turn to the natural law, which could provide a more lasting foundation from which moral and political debates could ensue. What he glided over but did not confront directly here was the fact that the natural law is itself a tradition that depends on sets of assumptions that are not explicitly drawn out in his argument.⁷⁰ To make the case for the adequacy of natural law to address contemporary problems, he would need to develop a more systematic defense of this approach. Failing to do so here reveals, if not a deficiency in his argument, at least an opening where more work would have to be been done in the coming years.

MICHAEL NOVAK: CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING, THE STATE, AND CONVERGENCE

The historical narrative that Novak constructs signifies a notable departure from that of his neoconservative Catholic allies, insofar as he is hesitant to give religion as central a role in his political vision as they do. Already noted in the previous chapter, and to Neuhaus'

⁷⁰ To be fair, he indirectly noted this when recognizing that certain strands of Protestantism take the condition of original sin as having clouded man's rational faculty to such an extent as to make natural law thinking impossible. In response, he merely states that he thinks they are incorrect, Weigel, *Catholicism and the Renewal*, 201.

dismay, Novak argued that at the heart of American life is an “empty shrine,” a claim that sounded too much like the naked public square to Neuhaus. Even though Novak admitted that the Christian tradition had helped to shape the political and cultural vision in a Western context, Christianity was not for him at this time a necessary presupposition to the democratic capitalist experiment.⁷¹ His deemphasizing the role of religion in this way results in a subtle but marked contrast to the logic of his work when compared to that of Neuhaus and Weigel.

It will help to recall that both Neuhaus and Weigel argued that the American democratic experiment emerged out of the Christian political and social teaching tradition. Weigel held that the seeds of this experiment were planted in the medieval period and particularly in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. In the centuries following Aquinas, these ideas slowly matured and finally became the philosophical basis for the American experiment in democracy. While perhaps not as explicit as Weigel, and working out of a more general Christian framework, Neuhaus defended the idea that American political life is largely an expression of a Christian worldview. Political ideas are, in effect, the result of a shared moral and religious framework of a given people. In the case of Western society, Christianity became the primary resource out of which the ideas embedded in the Constitution emerged.

Novak’s writings during this period do not share this vision. He does not hold to the proposition that the American political tradition *emerges* out of the Catholic tradition. Instead, he essentially argued that over the course of the twentieth century the American

⁷¹ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 67-8.

political tradition slowly *converges* with the Catholic social teaching tradition. Although he voiced a different vision there is in all three an important correspondence: each holds to the idea that Catholic social teaching and the American experiment in democracy are not at odds with one another, but are complimentary. The convergence that Novak envisioned signifies a process of reconciliation, primarily due to an evolution in Catholic social teaching beginning in the late eighteenth century.

Two elements in this evolution are of particular importance to Novak. First is his contention that human rights have become central to modern Catholic social teaching. Second, poverty in the developing world has become a problem that the Church had to confront in a more forceful manner. This latter feature has become increasingly evident due to the growing importance that the issue of economic development had taken in the post-Vatican II Church. In sum, Novak wrote that “more clearly in the 1980s than in the 1890s, Catholic social thought now recognizes two overarching ideals. . . these are the ideals of ‘development’ and ‘human rights.’”⁷² Not only have these two elements become central to modern Catholic social teaching but, as we will see, he argued that they can best be promoted through institutions that are congruent with democratic capitalism.

Human Rights and Catholic Social Teaching

Novak was not alone among Catholic intellectuals of that period in promoting the idea that the Catholic Church had come to embrace the human rights tradition. In his book,

⁷² Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 29. By development, Novak is here referring in particular to economic development in political life and the central role that it has come to take in Catholic social teaching.

Claims in Conflict, David Hollenbach developed this notion and traced the Church's changing take on human rights during the previous century.⁷³ Her eventual embrace of human rights contrasted with what the Church held in an earlier age, when democratic self governance and free speech were condemned, religious freedom was scoffed at, and other liberties inherent to liberalism were held in low regard. From Pope Leo XIII, who laid the groundwork for the modern appreciation of human rights, through Pope Paul VI, this growing appreciation was rooted in the Church's concern for the dignity of the human person.⁷⁴

While not relying on him explicitly, Novak's thought reflected the general arc that Hollenbach laid out in his writings on the subject. The Church's resistance to the liberalism that emerged out of a European setting promoted skepticism in general over the rights and value system proclaimed by liberals everywhere. By the eve of the Second Vatican Council the Church's position on human rights and liberal forms of democracy had been turned on its head. Remarking on John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, Novak proclaimed that the pope had finally solidified the tradition of human rights, "many of them borrowed almost directly from the US Bill of Rights, into the universal patrimony of the church."⁷⁵ Given the central place that human rights have in neoconservative Catholic political generally, and Michael Novak's specifically, this assertion is of clear importance.

⁷³ David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Human Rights Tradition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 1.

⁷⁴ David Hollenbach, *Human Rights in Catholic Thought, America* (October 31, 2005): 17.

⁷⁵ Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 131.

Beyond a strictly theoretical engagement with the issue, one of his fundamental emphases during this period was on the importance of the institutionalization of human rights.⁷⁶ Such institutions would include, for Novak, structures that support a representative democracy, a free press, the proliferation of mediating institutions and a federal government that was kept in check, but by no means impotent. Not only are human rights important for their domestic significance; they also have relevance on the international plane. It was important for the U.S. government to challenge countries like the Soviet Union who currently do not have in place the infrastructure to support a human rights ethic. Such governments pose a continual threat to those countries, like the United States, who exalt such a framework.⁷⁷ George Weigel echoed this last concern of Michael Novak, noting that an important objective of the neoconservative Catholics during the Eighties consisted in the revitalization of the “American commitment to human rights . . . as the indispensable antidote to the poison of Marxism-Leninism.”⁷⁸

The Catholic Church’s slow embrace of human rights during the twentieth century signified to Michael Novak an important advance in her social teaching. This embrace not only expressed in a clear way the Church’s affirmation of the inherent dignity of the human

⁷⁶ Michael Novak, *Human Rights and the New Realism: Strategic Thinking in a New Age* (New York, NY: The Freedom House, 1986), 7. It is also worth noting here that shortly after Reagan was elected president, Michael Novak was named to represent the U.S. delegation to the U.N. Human Rights Commission. For a collection of his statements when he was on the Commission see Michael Novak and Richard Schifter, *Rethinking Human Rights: Speeches by the United States Delegation to the 37th Session of the United States Commission on Human Rights* (Washington, DC: The Foundation for Democratic Education, Inc., 1981). For a discussion of his time on the Commission see Michael Novak and Richard Schifter, *A Conversation with Michael Novak and Richard Schifter: Human Rights and the United Nations* (Washington DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1981).

⁷⁷ Novak, *Human Rights and the New Realism*, 17-24, Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 368-9; Richard Neuhaus, “What we Mean by Human Rights and Why,” *Christian Century*, December 6, 1978), 1177-1180.

⁷⁸ Weigel, “The Neoconservative Difference,” 139; see also Richard Neuhaus and George Weigel, “Could Glasnost Make a Difference in Human Rights?” *Wall Street Journal*, January 28, 1988, 22.

person, but also laid the groundwork for a deeper appreciation of democratic forms of government. This was particularly important in age that had witnessed the rise of totalitarianism as exemplified by the Soviet Union and the Marxist threat.

But, Novak argued, an appreciation and even embrace of the human rights tradition was not the only significant shift that occurred in Catholic social teaching this period. For democratic institutions to remain strong, and perhaps even take root in the first place, and for human rights to be taken seriously, economic development is an important correlative step. The poor must be lifted out of their poverty and provided the opportunities and resources that will allow them to become politically and socially proactive.⁷⁹ As the twentieth century progressed the Church began to take notice of this need and increasingly emphasized the need for economic development.

Economic Development and Catholic Social Teaching

Following World War II, Catholic social teaching began to take on a focus beyond Western Europe and turned toward the developing world. Partly as a consequence of this wider outlook, there emerged a more fully developed international perspective in her social teaching.⁸⁰ While even the earliest social encyclicals affirmed moral principles applicable to international relations, they typically favored topics of Western European interest. In *Rerum Novarum*, for example, Pope Leo XIII provided extended attention to the problem of an

⁷⁹ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 15.

⁸⁰ For an extended analysis of the internationalization of the common good in Catholic Social Teaching, see William A. Barbieri, "Beyond the Nations: The Expansion of the Common Good in Catholic Social Thought," *The Review of Politics*, vol. 63, No. 4 (Autumn, 2001): 723-754.

exploited working class and the responsibilities of both the working class and management toward one another.⁸¹ This emphasis reflected the heightened importance of labor relations at the end of the Nineteenth Century and the conflict between proponents of a socialist and free market economy.

One of the important characteristics of Leo XII's position on the economy was, according to Novak, his asymmetrical view of socialism and capitalism. While not a capitalist per se—although he did agree with certain principles of capitalism—Leo XIII supported capitalism in principle all be it with a number of reforms in their institutional practices. Socialism, on the other hand, was wrong in principle and thus no reform would make up for this fundamental deficiency.⁸² This asymmetrical analysis excluded socialism from being taken seriously by the Church, but left the door open for a more capitalist style economy.

As social, political, and economic conditions changed during the Twentieth Century, Catholic social teaching was regularly applied to newly emergent problems. One problem of particular importance during the post-World War II period was the growing interdependence of the international community. Partially in response to changing political and economic conditions, the Vatican began to address the issue of economic and political development and, along with it, globalization. In the years preceding the formation of the United Nations, Pope Pius XII called for the creation of international, institutional structures that would help

⁸¹ Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*.

⁸² Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 109-10.

to alleviate poverty worldwide.⁸³ Following Pius XII's lead, John XXIII further developed this focus on the international community and gave extensive attention to the promises and perils accompanying globalization, the growing interdependence of the world community, and underdevelopment.⁸⁴ He taught that it is the responsibility of more technologically advanced nations to assist their less developed counterparts in acquiring "the scientific, technical, and professional training they need, and to put at their disposal the necessary capital for speeding up their economic development with the help of modern methods."⁸⁵

Novak argued that while it was during the leadership of John XXIII that the political liberties inherent to the human rights tradition were emphasized, it was during the rule of Paul VI that economic development became a central theme. Novak cited in particular the final passage of *Octogesima Adveniens*, which states that "development is the new name for peace," and claimed that this pronouncement falls squarely in line with the worldview of Adam Smith, who asserted that "economic activists in the fields of commerce and industry would bring about the interdependence of the world, development, and peace."⁸⁶

Not only does Novak argue that democratic capitalism is the most effective mechanism to raise the poor out of poverty; he also asserted that the underlying philosophy embodied in democratic capitalism is reflected in recent developments in Catholic social teaching. Because the Church has embraced human rights and takes seriously the importance of economic development in the developing world, the Church is implicitly committed to the

⁸³ William Au, *The Cross, The Flag, and The Bomb: American Catholics Debate War and Peace, 1960-1983*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 163-166.

⁸⁴ Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, May 15, 1961.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, *Mater et Magistra*, #163.

⁸⁶ Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 137.

institutional structures that will realize these value commitments. Ideas alone are not enough. In a political context, for ideas to work they must become embedded in and find expression through institutional structures. To make value commitments viable, it is essential to move the discussion from the more abstract character of political theory to the concrete character of political and economic institutions that will help to realize these intellectual commitments.⁸⁷ With this in mind Novak argued that, while he may not have realized it at the time, Pope Paul VI's "commitments to human rights and to economic development commit him to liberal institutions."⁸⁸

Novak's affirmation of democratic capitalist institutions and his assertion that the Church had effectively committed herself to these institutional structures—given the value commitments she made during the twentieth century—were not without controversy. There were others in the Church who were more skeptical of the capitalist enterprise, and who instead thought it to be the source of many problems in the modern world. While Pope Paul VI's teaching signified an advance in some respects, Novak worried that, when paired with certain interpretations of the Second Vatican Council documents, the same teaching could be used for a more pernicious effect. Paul VI's establishment of the Vatican Justice and Peace Commission in 1967, followed by a series of Synods throughout the Seventies, and the Latin American Conferences at Medellin and elsewhere, both inspired and gave credibility to the rise of liberation movements.⁸⁹ Suffice it to say for the moment, liberation theologians

⁸⁷ Michael Novak, "Democracy and Development," *Catholicism in Crisis*, September, 1983, 41.

⁸⁸ Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 143-4.

⁸⁹ Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 144-148; Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 272-3.

generally held that the international structures that ordered economic were weighted heavily in favor of the developed world and to the enormous disadvantage of underdeveloped countries. Capitalism is, they argued, an unjust economic system that would best be overturned in favor of a system that is more equitable.

Novak argued that many of these movements had perfectionist and romantic tendencies that sought to wipe out sinful structures once and for all. They aimed at eliminating injustice and leveling hierarchies. They also often abandoned traditional Catholic teaching altogether. Worse still, for Novak, these aberrant tendencies were not restricted to a minority of Latin American theologians who were fighting against legitimate injustices all be it, according to Novak, while proposing the wrong solutions. It was not exclusive to a handful of academics in a few universities. The destructive tendencies at work in the Church following the Second Vatican Council had become influential among large segments of the Catholic leadership.⁹⁰ The “war to eliminate hunger, discrimination, war, and every human evil, that illusory war waged by our own idealism. . . the ancient name for such idealism as now suffuses so many of our elites in Western and non-Western societies is gnosticism.”⁹¹

Many of the American bishops, and Catholic leadership in general had, according to Novak, lost their way and failed to apply properly Catholic social teaching to the major problem areas of the day. While there were unfortunate trends in this direction, Novak remained confident that the development of Catholic social teaching was, from the

⁹⁰ Novak, *Confession of a Catholic*, 46, 183-206.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 193.

perspective of the Vatican, more congruent with his own teaching than it was with these heterodox teachings. By the late Eighties he was increasingly confident that John Paul II had taken concrete steps “concerning the importance of liberal democratic institutions to the fulfillment of Catholic moral teaching,” and thus once again put Church teaching back on firm ground.⁹²

CONCLUSION

From the neoconservative Catholics’ perspective, it is they who are aligned nicely with papal teaching, in contrast to much of the American Catholic leadership, including more than a few bishops, who stood in opposition to Church teaching. It should therefore come as no surprise that each of the neoconservative Catholics turns to John Paul II as a pivotal figure in the life of the Church. On one occasion Weigel declared of him that he was “standing firmly across the flood crested river of cultural collaborationism and appeasement and urging, ‘Stop.’”⁹³ The pope was the one who had, from their perspective, validated neoconservative Catholic concerns and given the seal of approval to many of their solutions. In this way neoconservatives engage in a process of triangulation. Criticizing the American bishops for many of their political stands, the neoconservative Catholics proceeded to argue that the Vatican and, more specifically, John Paul II held views that were largely consistent with their own.

⁹² Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 220.

⁹³ George Weigel, *Catholicism and the Renewal of American Democracy*, 41.

The struggle between these competing parties: the neoconservative Catholics on one side and progressive theologians and bishops on the other, took shape at distinct moments throughout the Eighties. The most apparent of these moments were in the debates surrounding the bishops' letters on the economy and on war and peace and in discussions related to Latin America and liberation theology. Not only were the neoconservative Catholics fighting to save the Church, they were doing so in the context of the Cold War. Turning to these points of conflict in section two of this dissertation will provide an opportunity to flesh out the contour of these disagreements and the more specific policy and theological positions held by the neoconservative Catholics.

PART II

Politics and Ecclesiology in Neoconservative Catholic Thought

Chapter 4

In June 1978, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn came to Harvard. With respect to the neoconservative Catholics, the address that he gave was important because it reflected many of the same themes that the neoconservative Catholics wrestled with during that same period. In particular, his speech highlighted the indispensable role that communism played as a backdrop in American foreign policy generally and, more specifically, in the thought of the neoconservative Catholics. This chapter will address the way in which communism and anti-communism influenced their thought well into the Eighties.

In 1978, the former Nobel Prize for Literature recipient had lived in the United States since his exile from Russia three years earlier and was invited to give the commencement address to that year's graduating class. His address, titled "A World Split Apart," leveled a series of forceful criticisms against the West and its failure to respond effectively to the threat posed by communism.¹ He argued that the world itself was split apart between the communist and non-communist world and that the United States and Western Europe had an obligation to respond forcefully to the aggression of the Soviet Union and its allies. Sadly, he complained, the former had in recent years begun to reveal weaknesses that hindered its ability to respond effectively to these threats. Solzhenitsyn warned that the Western world was slowly turning into a moral wasteland with pornography rampant, a press that was willing to distort facts if it was to their own personal benefit, and a people that had become

¹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "A World Split Apart," *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*, ed. Robert Berman (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980), 3-22.

soft, selfish and unwilling to make any personal sacrifice for the benefit of the greater good.² The underlying reason for this decline was the West's exaltation of the individual and belief in the "autonomy of man from any higher force above him. It could also be called anthropocentricity, with man seen at the center of it all."³

The thesis promoted by Solzhenitsyn in his Harvard address struck a nerve among many of the American intellectual elite. Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published editorials critical of his address. The former argued that Solzhenitsyn had revealed himself to be a religious enthusiast who "believes himself to be in possession of The Truth and so sees error wherever he looks," and who is promoting a holy war that "bespeaks an obsession that we are happy to forgo in this nation's leaders."⁴ The *Washington Post*, in its own editorial, declared that the speech was based on a "gross misunderstanding of Western society," and did not appreciate the importance of diversity and pluralism as a source of strength in Western culture. Further, Solzhenitsyn's single-minded campaign against communism and the Soviet Union was an attempt to summon the West to a "crusade" that will result in an endless Cold War.⁵ Still others followed suit, finding fault with his

² Ibid, 7-15

³ Ibid, 16. Five years after year the commencement address, in a speech given on the occasion of his acceptance of the Templeton Prize, Solzhenitsyn reiterated some of the same themes that he highlighted in the previous speech. He neatly summarized the primary foundations for the West's pending collapse and its teetering on the threshold of ruin when he declared that "men have forgotten God; that is why all this has happened." See Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Men Have Forgotten God," (address given on the occasion of his acceptance of the Templeton Prize, London, England, May 10, 1983), reprinted in the *National Review* (July 22, 1983), 873-874. Established in 1972, the Templeton Prize honors living persons who have provided important contributions to the affirmation of life's spiritual dimensions. Its first recipient was Mother Theresa; Michael Novak was awarded the honor in 1994.

⁴ "The Obsession of Solzhenitsyn," *The New York Times*, June 13, 1978, A18.

⁵ "Mr. Solzhenitsyn as Witness," *The Washington Post*, June 11, 1978, C6.

understanding of democracy and liberalism and failing properly to come to terms with the indispensable role that the idea of tolerance played in a Western context.⁶

While he had his detractors, Solzhenitsyn also tapped into important strains in twentieth-century American conservatism. The political commentator George Will came to his defense and, in contrast to both the *Times* and the *Post*, claimed that “compared to the long and broad intellectual tradition in which Solzhenitsyn’s views are rooted, the tradition of liberalism, or modernity, are (sic) short and thin.”⁷ Solzhenitsyn, Will concluded, drew on a much richer intellectual tradition than the editors of either paper. Solzhenitsyn depended on thinkers as diverse as Cicero, Augustine, Aquinas and Pascal in the formation of his worldview, as had the West had for its own intellectual development.⁸ In short, “Solzhenitsyn’s critique of the West was to large extent an internal critique of a society that had increasingly attenuated ties with the best part of its moral and political heritage.”⁹

The political historian George Nash further emphasized Solzhenitsyn’s importance to conservative thought, claiming that through “his searing indictment of atheistic humanism, and in his call for fundamental spiritual renewal transcending the ‘ossified formulas of the Enlightenment,’ he expressed with remarkable force themes espoused by American

⁶ See for example the critiques put forth by Arthur Schlesinger, “The Solzhenitsyn We Refuse to See,” *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*, ed. Robert Berman (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980), 63-74 and Mary McGrory, “Solzhenitsyn Doesn’t Love Us,” *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*, ed. Robert Berman (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980), 60-62.

⁷ George Will, “Solzhenitsyn’s Critics,” *The Washington Post*, June 18, 1978, B7.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Daniel Mahoney, *Alexsandr Solzhenitsyn: The Ascent from Ideology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 20.

conservatives from Whittaker Chambers to the Religious Right of today.”¹⁰ Reflecting a certain perspective shared by both Whitaker Chambers and the Religious Right, the significance of this speech was not lost on the neoconservative Catholics. The broad framework that Solzhenitsyn presupposed was appreciated by them, even though they disagreed on some of the details.

In neoconservative Catholic thought there developed a strong antipathy between Christianity and communism by the Eighties and an uncompromising attitude of opposition in the face of this ideology wherever it emerged. The threat of Marxism remained a central backdrop in most of their writing up through the end of the Cold War. Neuhaus, Novak and Weigel each voiced concerns regarding the threat that Marxism posed to the American way of life and emphasized how important it was for both secular and religious leaders in the United States to provide an intellectual counterpoint to this ideology. Along with Solzhenitsyn, they affirmed a fundamental split in the world. Nevertheless, while in agreement with this overarching point, there were places in which the neoconservative Catholics were quite critical of Solzhenitsyn’s worldview, although they remained amenable to the primary themes that ran throughout his thought.

On September 16, 1980, Michael Novak spoke at a dinner in Washington, DC that was sponsored by the Ethics and Public Policy Center (EPPC). Its official purpose was to launch a new book that analyzed Solzhenitsyn’s commencement address at Harvard and to which Michael Novak also contributed an essay. The book, titled *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*,

¹⁰ George Nash, “On Twenty Years of Great Conservative Thought,” *Policy Review* issue 84 (July/August, 1987): 1.

provided a reprint of Solzhenitsyn's address, a series of previously published articles that were written in the immediate aftermath of the address, and a collection of new essays that were written by specialists on important themes that emerged throughout the address. In his contribution, Michael Novak focused on its theological and religious importance. When taken together, the views that he presented in his dinner speech and related essay provided a mixed account of the value of Solzhenitsyn's political worldview.

While praising Solzhenitsyn as a man and honoring the personal example that he provided to the rest of the world, Novak's speech at the EPPC dinner took a much more critical tone of Solzhenitsyn's Harvard address than the views reflected in his contribution to the book. These criticisms focused on two related levels. . First, Novak wrote that a notable failing of Solzhenitsyn in his political commentary was his idealism, which focused too much on the importance of "soul," a notion that Novak used to symbolize a person's innate desire and drive to realize "the good" and too little on the concrete realities that are endemic to social life. He noted that Solzhenitsyn, "in concentrating so single-mindedly on soul, sometimes overlooks its necessary political, economic, and social artifacts. Human soul does not live alone. It is embodied in social, political and economic systems..."¹¹

Novak proceeded to argue that Solzhenitsyn's apparent disinterest in the concrete, and his more keen interest in the ideal objective toward which individuals and societies alike ought to strive, reflected the worldview of Karl Marx. He wrote that Solzhenitsyn had "turned communism inside out as a vision of effortless Christian civilization, populated not

¹¹ Michael Novak, "Democracy Takes Sin Seriously," in *Solzhenitsyn and American Democracy* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1981), 11.

by sinners but the virtuous, organized...by simple righteousness.”¹² Novak further claimed that Solzhenitsyn projected an ungrounded notion of the “City of God” on Western society and failed to recognize the necessity of institutions that would actually check evil and help to balance out concentrations of power. He expressed concern that Solzhenitsyn upheld the City of God imagery as the standard against which institutional structures in the City of Man ought to be judged and consequently rejected. Such a temptation worried Novak, as it demonstrated to him a troubling inclination in Solzhenitsyn’s thought to embrace a traditionalist view of the social order that was explicitly religious and quite possibly theocratic in practice.¹³

This critique led to a second one. Arguing that Solzhenitsyn failed to take into account the fallen nature of man and tended to superimpose over his nature a utopian vision of civilization, Novak expressed doubt that Solzhenitsyn understood the Western democratic tradition. Western-style democracy that is built on a system of checks and balances is an effective form of political governance because, as the title of Novak’s speech states, democracy takes sin seriously. In this vein, Novak emphasized that “democracy accepts the Jewish and Christian vision of human fallibility, bestiality, will-to-power, world, flesh and devil...Democracy may be too imperfect for Solzhenitsyn, but only if humankind is too imperfect for him. All cannot be heroes as he is.”¹⁴ The institutional structures that were created for a liberal society and which were embodied in the American Constitution have the capacity to check vicious behavior, but they also make possible virtuous behavior because of

¹² Ibid, 12.

¹³ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 51.

¹⁴ Novak, “Democracy Takes Sin Seriously,” 14.

the seriousness with which these institutional structures take liberty. In contrast to this rather critical account, Novak provided a much more positive outlook in his essay titled “On God and Man.”

In a somewhat jarring opening sentence, particularly when compared to the criticisms that he made during his speech, Novak declared that Solzhenitsyn’s address was “the most important religious document of our time, more shattering than *Pacem in Terris*, more sharply analytical of the human condition in our century than any word from the World Council of Churches,” and followed this by stating that “Solzhenitsyn’s claim seems classically Catholic.”¹⁵ Such high praise of the address contrasts sharply with his criticisms at the EPPC dinner; it would seem difficult to claim as he does that Solzhenitsyn’s words are reminiscent of Marx and yet, simultaneously, classically Catholic. One explanation is that in both his essay and speech, Novak is focusing on two different components of Solzhenitsyn’s address. In this essay Novak basically ignored the idealistic tendencies that he accused Solzhenitsyn of embracing in his speech at the EPPC dinner. His primary focus in the book was an analysis of the spiritual backdrop against which Solzhenitsyn developed his thought, with little attention paid to the institutional conditions that are essential for a functional society.

Novak generally agreed with Solzhenitsyn’s primary concern: in the modern West people have turned their back on God and embraced an anthropocentric worldview. While Novak readily admitted that exceptional men, both atheistic and agnostic, had lived

¹⁵ Michael Novak, “On God and Man,” *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*, ed. Robert Berman (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980), 131-2.

throughout the twentieth century, embodied virtue and expressed courage in the face of great evil, he worried how a society would cope when unbelief became the reigning standard.

While there is such a thing as a secular saint and although

brave and strong individuals continue to adhere to honesty, courage, liberty and compassion, and even to give their lives for values they make central to their being, a *society* based systematically upon the non-existence of God and upon man as the sole measure must, of human necessity, slide further and further into defenselessness and loss of will.¹⁶

His point was that a society that is predominately anthropocentric in its worldview would likely decline into relativism given the absence of a reliable basis outside of personal preference to make lasting value judgments. From Solzhenitsyn's perspective, this loss of will would make the West incapable of finding the strength to confront as great an evil as the Soviet Union, whose leadership appeared to believe that their way of life was far superior to any alternative vision. Echoing this concern, Novak argued that when a society abandons God and, in all likelihood, comes to embrace a 'do your own thing' ethic, it becomes increasingly improbable that such a society will have the will to defend itself against great evil. In all likelihood, he claimed, its members would likely not even know such evil for what it is.¹⁷

Novak took this analysis and applied it to what he was beginning to believe was one of the central problems facing the Christian churches in the United States. At their best, the churches have the capacity and the rich tradition to respond to the evils of Marxism.

Unfortunately, rather than functioning as a bulwark against communism, many of the

¹⁶ Ibid, 135.

¹⁷ Ibid, 139.

mainline churches had begun to embrace a vulgar Marxism and, in doing so, failed to counter the international threat that communism brought with it. He wrote that in the face of communism “it is the churches that preach disarmament, urge tolerance for the Gulag Archipelago (not directly, of course, but in effect), support the forces of organized authoritarianism if only they will call themselves ‘liberation forces,’ and spread the doctrine of appeasement under the cloak of Christian charity.”¹⁸

Although in this essay he primarily focused on the mainline churches and their supposed embrace of a vulgar Marxism, elsewhere he expressed concern over the influence of Marxism in the Catholic Church. In an editorial written for the *National Review* in 1985, he claimed that Marxism was no longer only an external threat in the Church but was “one of the largest and most rapidly gaining heresies in Church history.”¹⁹ His expectation and hope was that John Paul II would cleanse the Church of this threat through the selection of cardinals who would provide a hard line against this danger. In retrospect, the magnitude of this threat was clearly exaggerated, but this sentiment exemplified the deep threat that Novak thought communism posed to the Catholic Church in particular.

Novak’s concerns about the contemporary Church and communism are also interesting because they illustrate a definitive shift in his thinking. The most commonly noted shift in both the secondary literature and in his personal reflections on his intellectual development examine his break from socialism and eventual embrace of democratic capitalism. Overlooked in this same literature is a shift in his understanding of the

¹⁸ Ibid, 140.

¹⁹ Michael Novak, “Red Hats and Hinges,” *National Review*, May 31, 1985, 37.

relationship between communism and the Western political tradition. The hard-line approach that he took against communism by the mid-Eighties was of recent vintage. During the Sixties and into the Seventies Novak had embraced a much less militant, and occasionally even conciliatory, disposition toward Marxism. Over about a twenty-year period, his take on communism shifted from a position of skeptical accommodation to one that was increasingly hard-line.

One of the earliest accounts of Novak's take on communism surfaced in an essay that he wrote on America's involvement in Vietnam, titled "Stumbling into War and Stumbling Out."²⁰ In this essay, Novak provided a fairly critical account of the way in which popular American political culture evaluated Marxism in relation to the West. It was not unusual, Novak argued, for political commentary to assess the communist threat as a clearly defined war of good versus evil, an apocalyptic struggle set between a religiously grounded western worldview and an anti-western, atheistic, international conspiracy. In contrast, he argued that it is an error to conceive of communism as a monolithic force; there is no single organ that directs communist expansion.²¹ Further, while philosophically problematic on some levels, communism is not the primary danger confronting the West. Decolonization, the birth pangs of globalization, and advanced methods of communication have brought to downtrodden people throughout the world the promise of a better life. But at the moment it remains only that—a promise. In light of this, the primary threats to peace

²⁰ Michael Novak, "Stumbling into War and Stumbling Out," in *Vietnam: Crisis of Conscience*, ed. Robert McAfee Brown (New York, NY: National Board of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1967), 11-47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13-16.

are hunger, poverty, ignorance, disease. Communism and modified capitalism are two rival strategies for coping with these necessary and inevitable revolutions of our age. But neither communism nor modified capitalism are monoliths; both are capable of indefinite evolution and development, according to the individual genius of each nation. The more diversity and open development our government can promote by its flexible conduct in world affairs, the more it will assist in the evolution of communism in a direction more compatible with the interests and safety of our own people and all others.”²²

In contrast to the often militant and dichotomized worldview typical of American conservatism and the American Catholic Church of that period, there is no sense here of an ideologically driven opposition to communism. Communism and American capitalism are competing 'strategies' for dealing with a wider set of problems confronting humanity. A pair of essays written by Novak around the same time buttresses this point. The first, which appears to be a revised version of the article quoted above, reiterated his conviction that the primary threat to world peace was economic underdevelopment. Novak then situated the struggle against poverty in the context of the Cold War and added that

To some Americans, the following statement is obvious: 'We are engaged in a struggle to the death with communism, and the sooner we recognize that the better.' To others, among whom I count myself, the main struggle of our generation is against poverty, disease, and political, social, and economic underdevelopment. From this perspective, communism represents one family of responses by which heretofore underdeveloped nations can solve their grievous problems of reorganization.²³

Consistent with the earlier version of this essay, Novak held that communism constituted an alternative approach to underdevelopment and poverty and further noted that communism is not necessarily a metaphysical threat to the Western political tradition and

²² Ibid, 17.

²³ Michael Novak, "Our Terrorism, Our Brutality," *A Time to Build* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1967), 407-428.

should not function as the primary focus in American foreign policy. This downplaying of the communist threat is capped off by comments that he made in yet a third essay. In contrast to the ideological anticommunism that often consumed American political life throughout the Cold War and that pitted the Soviet Union against the West, Novak proceeded to claim that

there must be, one day, an alliance between cultures describing themselves as ‘capitalist’ and as ‘communist,’ for there is increasingly one world and there must one day be one culture. Such a culture must be rich in diversity, not homogenous. It must be open to alternatives and possibilities, not closed. It must be a culture of many philosophies, many theologies, many varieties of economic and political theory and practice. There is no need for all humans to be the same.²⁴

Novak’s openness to the existence of communism and competing political systems took on a more critical tone when he lectured many in the Catholic community who have engaged in “grievous sins of rabid anti-communism.” It is crucial, he added, to puncture the popular myths and eliminate the biases and prejudices in this regard, which have only led to unhealthy distortions in American political debate.²⁵ Such a vision holds out the hope, if not the necessity, that at some point in the future these competing cultures will have to work together if the problems confronting society are going to be effectively addressed.

The point of the above analysis is not an attempt to expose Novak as a closet communist; there is no evidence in his writings that he was personally sympathetic to the Marxist cause. Rather, his initial opposition to communism should be understood as a kind of soft opposition rather than the hard opposition of many of his conservative Catholic

²⁴ Michael Novak, “Introduction,” in *A Time to Build* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1967).

²⁵ Michael Novak, “The Emergence of Hope,” in *A Time to Build* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1967), 294.

contemporaries. Communism as such is not a total ‘other’ from the perspective of the West; there is room for both communists and capitalists to learn from the other. Over the course of the next decade, this nuanced view of communism receded and in its place a more hard-line approach emerged. This shift is itself directly related to his move away from socialism and toward democratic capitalism.

By the mid-Seventies, Novak made the slow shift away from the quasi-socialism with which he flirted throughout the Sixties in favor of a position that supported democratic capitalism. His transition to capitalism had its initial impetus beginning around the time of the 1972 presidential election, particularly during his studies of ethnicity that led to the publication of his book the *Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in American Life*. While still staunchly anti-capitalist during this period, his study of ethnic communities pushed him into a more detailed study of economic life because, as he wrote in the introduction to a recently published edition, he wanted to understand the economic vision of the ethnic communities on which he was writing. Shortly thereafter, he began to worry that his understanding of capitalism was “bookish” and “abstract” and failed to take into account the practical consequences of the capitalist and socialist economic systems.²⁶

His eventual transition was primarily due to the conclusion that capitalism provided the surest mechanism for both domestic and international development. He held to the position that it is the economic system that, works because it helps to bring about economic development and raise the standard of living. Socialism, in contrast, fails to bring about the

²⁶ Michael Novak, *Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in American Life*, 2nd edition (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992), xxviii.

promises that it makes as an economic system. In a retrospective on his intellectual development he wrote that during this period “as I surveyed the economic record of the socialist nations of Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa, and Cuba, I could find none that I admired or would choose for a model of the world. The socialist economic ideal did not work in practice, not anywhere.”²⁷ While there developed a certain theoretical basis to his argument in later years, his positive appraisal of democratic capitalism in its early form was primarily rooted in pragmatic criteria.²⁸

Concurrent with his growing suspicion of socialism as a viable economic system, Novak was also becoming increasingly estranged from his more radical roots. He experienced this sense of alienation partly because of the growing radicalism on college campuses across the country, partly as a result of the failed presidential bid by George McGovern, and partly because of the policy positions staked out by the Democratic Party during the aftermath of this failure. His growing alienation from mainstream democratic politics was reflected in his growing allegiance to organizations that were directly critical of the Party structure and the policy positions it staked out in the lead-up and aftermath of McGovern’s presidential bid. One of the more public of these organizations was The

²⁷ Michael Novak, “Errand Into the Wilderness,” *On Cultivating Liberty: Reflections on Moral Ecology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 276. This essay was originally published in a collection of essays published in 1988 that traced out the ‘conversion’ experiences of various intellectuals.

²⁸ During the mid-Seventies, as Novak commenced on his conversion to democratic capitalism, he repeatedly noted his admiration for socialism as a religious vision but emphasizes its failure empirically, see Michael Novak, “The Closet Socialists,” *Christian Century*, Feb. 23, 1977, 171-174; Michael Novak, “An Underpraised and Undervalued System,” *Worldview* (July/August 1977): 9-12. While socialism provides an admirable religious vision but fails to live up to it in real life, the problem of Democratic capitalism is that it works better at providing wealth to the many than any other system, but lacks anything near the equivalent of religious or moral vision. It became the intellectual mission of Novak to provide such a vision in much of his later writings. For an in depth study of this vision, see Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Lanham: Madison Books, 1991).

Coalition for a Democratic Majority, which sought to “take the Democratic Party back to the reformist, anti-communist policies of the vital center.”²⁹

Both his abandonment of his radical roots and the concurrent shift to democratic capitalism led to a more ideologically rigid opposition to communism. Concluding that socialism, which had communism as its preeminent example, was an empirically failed experiment, Novak was troubled by its continued popularity, particularly in intellectual circles. He concluded that for most supporters of socialism, its practical usefulness was not important at all. Socialism itself had become a religion, a competing piety that people hold to through a kind of faith. In one essay for the *National Review*, Novak proclaimed that the failures of Marxism, and socialism more generally, had led to a situation where its proponents are forced to simply yell louder, because their arguments do not match reality. All they have left are a belief in its myths.³⁰ In a second essay written shortly thereafter, he wrote that “. . . certain sorts of piety are immune to empirical tests. American socialists prefer piety to empiricism.”³¹

By the early Eighties Novak had further developed the claim that the intellectual assent to Marxism marked a piety ungrounded in pragmatism. In his book *Confession of a Catholic* he argued that Marxism was the most organized idealism in the modern world that was thoroughly anti-establishment and which sought, unrealistically in Novak’s eyes, a total transformation of social and political life.³² The idealism in which Marxism was rooted

²⁹ John Ehrman, “The Rise of Neoconservatism,” 61.

³⁰ Michael Novak, “Extremism as a Virtue,” *National Review*, November 9, 1979, 1427.

³¹ Michael Novak, “Pious Socialists,” *National Review*, February 22, 1980, 227.

³² Novak, *Confession of a Catholic*, 192-3.

embodied a kind of religious outlook. He argued that in all its forms Marxism promotes a utopian vision of world order that in reality translates into little more than a “gigantic organizing force of tyrannical power” that “preaches class struggle, violence, and hatred.”³³ The aggressively violent approach to social revolution that it espouses and its utopian, pseudo religious style can neither be ignored nor overlooked by members of the political, religious, and intellectual classes of the West. As late as 1988, Novak decried intellectuals who denied “the reality of Soviet power, the scope of Soviet ambition, and the record of Soviet deception,” as one of the marvels of history and further declared that “resistance to communism, principled and militarily effective, is morally obligatory.”³⁴

Throughout the Eighties Michael Novak and his contemporary neoconservative Catholics were critical of large swathes of the Christian Churches who, they argued, too often subscribed to a Marxist worldview, or were at least sympathetic to such a worldview. This commitment was often done in pursuit of social justice, although seldom through an appeal to an explicitly Marxist rhetoric. Nevertheless, their support for liberation movements betrayed this underlying commitment. While seeking to bring justice to downtrodden regions of the world, Christians of this sort were doing little more than abandoning their own tradition for an alien one.³⁵ The fight against Marxism thus took place on two fronts. Not only was this struggle political in nature, and quite possibly at some point military, but it was

³³ Ibid, 187.

³⁴ Novak, “Errand Into the Wilderness,” 298-299. These comments are somewhat revealing given that the essay in which they were penned was put in a book that was published in 1988. In all likelihood, Novak was writing this retrospective perhaps months before the fall of communism, thus partially accounting for the misjudgments related to the extent of the Soviet threat at that time.

³⁵ Ibid, 205

also crucial to cleanse the American Christian Churches, many of which had been seduced, largely unwittingly, by the Marxists' siren song. This effort focused on Church reform and became a central focus in their activities during the Eighties. It focused on the Catholic Church in particular but also on the mainline Protestant churches, which the neoconservative Catholics thought had strayed from the Christian Church tradition.

Not content simply to write articles and essays in this effort both to reform the Churches and also to influence policy formation, the neoconservative Catholics emphasized the importance of institutionalizing their own ideas in social structures that would help to further the realization of their ideals in public life. Because their political worldview was strongly influenced by the Christian identity and vice versa, their attempt to address one of these areas of public life often influenced the other area. While public argument, particularly as played out through magazine articles, journal publications, speeches and books, had an important role in this process of realization, their involvement in the founding of think tanks, associations and related political structures also played an indispensable role. Throughout the late Seventies and Eighties all three neoconservative Catholics became involved in a wide range of institutions of this sort. George Weigel became involved in institutions including The World Without War Council, the James Madison Foundation, and The Ethics and Public Policy Center. Michael Novak was a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, the religion editor at the *National Review*, and sat on the board of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. Finally, Richard Neuhaus was for a time the head of the Rockford Institute and also sat on the board of the Institute

on Religion and Democracy. This last institution provides a useful case study when discussing the neoconservative Catholics' political worldview in the Institute's early years, both because of its activities in political and church life and because of the subtle ways in which their own ideas became institutionalized through it.

THE INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY, REFORM OF THE CHURCHES AND AMERICAN POLITICAL LIFE

The Institute on Religion and Democracy (IRD) was initially formed as a reformist institution in the Methodist Church. In 1980 David Jessup, a newly minted member of the United Methodist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, authored a report titled "Preliminary Inquiry Regarding the Financial Contributions to Outside Political Groups by Board and Agencies of The United Methodist Church (UMC), 1977-1979." In his report, Jessup examined the spending of the United Methodist Church and affiliated institutions and accused them of promoting political agendas that were at odds with American national security and in direct support of its enemies. Jessup was concerned that religious funds were being funneled to communist organizations that took efforts to undermine American freedom.³⁶ Nearly a quarter of a century later Richard Neuhaus provided reflections on the Institute's founding and broadened this appeal, arguing that its establishment was a demonstration of a "Christian effort in the latter part of the twentieth century to retell the

³⁶ Thom White Wolf Fassett, "Purveyors of False Memory: Unmasking the Institute on Religion and Democracy," in *Hard Ball on Holy Ground*, ed. Stephen Swecker (North Berwick, ME: Boston Wesleyan Press, 2005), 41-2; "Religion: The Little Institute Facing Goliath," *Time*, March 28, 1983, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,923428-1,00.html>, accessed on November 8, 2010.

American story relative to God's providential purpose and most specifically to God's creation of human beings wired for freedom."³⁷

While Jessup's criticisms initially targeted the United Methodist Church, he soon received support from conservative-oriented religious quarters. Through these associations Jessup's central criticisms were broadened to target mainline Protestantism and, in particular, institutions such as the National Council of Churches. Perhaps one of the more important associations surfaced when Jessup encountered the Texas evangelist Ed Robb, who helped him put into place the early pieces that eventually became the Institute on Religion and Democracy.³⁸ Once the Institute was established, Robb and his associates used it as a platform to condemn the financial activities of mainline religious groups, including their apparent support for educational campaigns that glorified the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua and for "terrorist groups such as the African National Congress."³⁹

Soon thereafter two Washington, DC based researchers published their own report that questioned the motivations of the leadership of IRD. Erich Hochstein and Ronald O'Rourke, the authors of the publication, focused in particular on the links between IRD and other conservative political organizations and concluded that "the IRD is virtually a religious arm of the neoconservative political segment of the Democratic Party."⁴⁰ In particular, they emphasized the close relationship between the Institute and the Coalition for a Democratic

³⁷ Richard Neuhaus, *Reflections on IRD*, (October, 2005), <http://www.theird.org/Page.aspx?pid=1128>, accessed November 8, 2010.

³⁸ "Religion: The Little Institute Facing Goliath."

³⁹ "End Support for Controversial Church Councils?; Yes -- "The World Council Uses Money from its Churches to Advocate Socialism," *New York Times*, October 31, 1983, 55; "Nicaragua Defended," *The Christian Century*, November 7, 1984, 1031-1032.

⁴⁰ James Mann, "Neoconservatives Aim at Liberals," *The Christian Century*, November 4, 1981, 1115-1117.

Majority, an organization that was founded nearly a decade earlier by “Scoop” Jackson and other “neoconservative” democrats and in response to the nomination of George McGovern. When asked about this connection, Ed Robb responded that the linkages were incidental and that IRD was an independent organization with its own objectives. George Weigel, when asked the same question, responded similarly, declaring that the Institute was in no way a organization of the “New Right,” that it was attempting to reach out across the spectrum of church life, and that one of its primary emphases was the idea of human rights, which was itself a political stand that could not be pigeonholed into a partisan political perspective.⁴¹

Writing in an editorial for the *National Review* Michael Novak took issue with the study authored by Hochstein and O’Rourke, which he referred to as the “Snoop Report,” deeming more or less innocuous their claim that the Institute shared some membership with the Coalition for a Democratic Majority. This overlap, he claimed, was irrelevant given that the Institute’s mission which was not politically partisan.⁴² The IRD was, he pointed out, primarily a “religious organization of Christian clergy and laity concerned about the extension of democracy everywhere in the world—and about efforts by some church bureaucracies to funnel church funds and ideological support to non-democratic movements.”⁴³ In addition to this objective, the Institute was established as a way to provide financial transparency among church groups, so that people will know where their money was going and for what purposes. All religious organizations, he further claimed, ought to

⁴¹ Ibid, 1116-1117.

⁴² Michael Novak, “The Snoop Report,” *National Review*, December 11, 1981, 1488.

⁴³ Ibid.

be “fair, impartial, pluralistic, open and representative to a reasonable degree...” precisely because such organizations represent a wide range of people with varied perspectives.⁴⁴

In response, the long time editor of *The Christian Century*, James Wall, argued that while Novak called on the NCC and other mainline organizations to be representative and generally impartial in their political activities, Novak and IRD could be accused of this same failure. While Wall admitted that the religious left has at times idealized certain political agendas, the religious right has in effect committed the same sin, with their “strongly anti-Soviet, anti-socialist bias,” and concluded that “what we must watch for on the part of both left and right is in our religious commitment posing as religion.”⁴⁵

This disagreement pointed to a much wider trend that was taking place in American religion in the decades following the Second World War. One of the important shifts during this period was a decline in the importance of denominationalism as a defining marker of religious identity, and the increasing significance of where one fell on the progressive/conservative spectrum. As denominationalism became less important as a defining feature of religious identity,

religious leaders on both the right and the left have found it easier to recruit constituencies that cut across denominational lines... conservative Baptists and conservative Catholics may share more in common than conservative with liberal Baptists. And liberal Methodists may have greater empathy for liberal Baptists than they do for conservatives in their own denomination. With denominations in charge of many of the significant resources that church people need to promote their views... it may not be surprising, therefore, to

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ James Wall, “Reds: A Timely Film on Political Religion,” *The Christian Century*, December 23, 1981, 1331-1332.

see the kinds of conflicts and special interest groups that have sprung up in many denominations between liberal and conservative factions.⁴⁶

The factions that developed within religious institutions were not restricted to religious interests but often extended into the political sphere as well. IRD provides a telling example of this tendency because it was an explicitly ecumenical organization, with Catholics and Protestants of different stripes making up its leadership. Furthermore, its leadership regularly took conservative leaning positions on political matters pertaining to foreign policy.

Nevertheless, while often commenting on issues of political interest, Neuhaus expressed explicit agreement with Novak and contended that IRD was established as a partisan organization that would break down not along liberal and conservative lines, but between those who affirmed a fundamental connection between Christian faith and human freedom and those who did not.⁴⁷ Regardless of his intentions, the debates that ensued inevitably broke down along the former lines. Given the broader trends that were at work on the American religious scene during this period, this should not be surprising. The leadership of the Institute included Michael Novak, Richard Neuhaus, and George Weigel, all of whom at one point or another served on the board of the organization.⁴⁸ Twelve of the original board members were also members of The Committee for the Free World, founded by the neoconservative thinker Midge Decter, whose aim it was to “alter the climate of confusion

⁴⁶ Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 221. See, in particular, chapter nine for an expansive explanation as to the implications of this tendency.

⁴⁷ Richard John Neuhaus, “Christianity and Democracy,” *First Things*, October, 1996, 36.

⁴⁸ “Board of Directors,” Institute on Religion and Democracy,” accessed October 4, 2010, <http://www.theird.org/Page.aspx?pid=213>. Michael Novak remains on the board to this day while George Weigel and Richard Neuhaus are listed as board members emeritus.

and complacency, apathy and self-denigration, that has done so much to weaken the Western democracies in the face of a growing threat to their continued viability and even their existence as free societies” and made a commitment to “defend the non-communist world against the rising menace of totalitarianism.”⁴⁹ Given its leadership base, the Institute also maintained ties to other conservative oriented institutions. Already mentioned above were the connections to the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, but there were also ties to conservative-leaning organizations like the American Enterprise Institute and the Rockford Institute.

Beyond its membership base, IRD was also funded by foundations that typically supported conservative causes. During its first year, the Institute received one-third of its funding (\$65,000) from the Smith Richardson Foundation. It also received support during its early years from the Scaife Family Charitable Trust, the Earhart Foundation and the John M. Olin Foundation.⁵⁰ Each of these organizations gave significant amounts of money to other conservative-oriented institutes and centers during this period. The last of these, for example, provided millions of dollars in donations to conservative institutes such as the Hoover Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the Manhattan Institute, not to mention the countless conservative leaning scholars to which it provided support until its eventual dissolution in 2005. Perhaps the most important point of note regarding the Olin Foundation is that its executive director during this period, William Simon, became a close associate of

⁴⁹ Kathleen Teltsch “400 Intellectuals Form “Struggle for Freedom Unit,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1981, A19.

⁵⁰ Cynthia Brown, “The Right’s Religious Red Alert,” *The Nation*, March 12, 1983, 305

Michael Novak's during the Eighties.⁵¹ As we will see in a later chapter, together they formed the Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the Economy, which provided one of the major public voices contesting the bishops' pastoral letter on the economy.

In terms of institutional structures, IRD was closely intertwined with a wide range of conservative oriented individuals and institutions, many of which generally agreed on issues of political importance. Not surprisingly, some of the more outspoken critics of the Institute would typically be considered of a more progressive bent. A series of articles written for the *Christian Century* argued that the Institute was a thoroughly political institution that exploited religious language and institutions to push its this worldly agenda.⁵² The charge against the organization was led by James Wall, who in one essay claimed that IRD was in effect a mouth piece for the Reagan Administration and was taken seriously by the media as a credible outlet because both Neuhaus and Novak sat on its board, thus giving it immediate credibility.⁵³ He proceeded to quote Jim Wallis of Sojourners, who called IRD "the official seminary of the Reagan administration."⁵⁴

The sharp political debate that ensued in the early Eighties between representatives of the mainline Protestant churches and the leadership of the IRD was only exacerbated when

⁵¹ "Ex-Treasury Chief Simon Named Foundation Head," *New York Times*, March 2, 1977, 22.

⁵² Wall, "Neoconservatives Aim at Liberals," 1115-1117.

⁵³ James Wall, "Anticommunism Binds IRD to White House," *Christian Century*, November 28, 1984, 1115 and James Wall, "They Come to Listen in Cherry Blossom Time," *The Christian Century*, May 1, 1985, 44. Other essays critical of IRD in *The Christian Century* include James Wall, "Playing for Peace on the World Stage," *The Christian Century*, December 4, 1985, 1107-1108; James Wall, "Reds: A Timely Film on Political Religion," *The Christian Century*, December 23, 1981, 1131-1132; "IRD Denies Charge," *The Christian Century*, January 22, 1986, 64; Robert McAfee Brown, "One Sided Terms for Dialogue," *The Christian Century*, May 25, 1983, 530-531; James Wall, "The True Shame of IRD as Informant," *The Christian Century*, February 16-23, 1983, 139-140.

⁵⁴ Wall, "Anticommunism Binds IRD to White House," 1115.

the latter's accusations received extensive commentary both in a lengthy article published in *Reader's Digest* and a segment on *60 Minutes* in January 1983.⁵⁵ The *60 Minutes* segment, titled "The Gospel According to Whom?", examined the ways in which the NCC distributed funds collected during Sunday services at churches across the country. The point that Morley Safer suggested throughout the segment was "that officials of the NCC may be using Sunday offerings to promote Marxist revolutions."⁵⁶ The *Reader's Digest* article, which was titled "Do You Know Where Your Church Offerings Go?", levied a similar set of criticisms.⁵⁷

Defenders of the NCC argued that their critics were obsessed with the threat of Marxist totalitarianism, that they ignored the many institutions and organizations that they fund which are not in any way political, and claimed that that IRD was little more than a small band of conservatives who were distorting a religious message for overtly political ends.⁵⁸ Furthermore, while the IRD attacked certain funding priorities of the NCC, these targets represented only a small portion of the grants distributed and programs supported through NCC funds. According to a representative of the Council at that time, less than one-tenth of one percent collected during Sunday services each week was actually destined for

⁵⁵ James Mann, "More Red Controversy for Church Council," *U.S. News and World Report*, February 13, 1983, 36.

⁵⁶ Kenneth Woodward and David Gates, "Ideology Under the Alms," *Newsweek*, February 7, 1983, 61.

⁵⁷ Colman McCarthy, "The Council of Churches and an Attack from the Right," *The Washington Post*, February 27, 1983, H5.

⁵⁸ Paul Herbutt, "Church Council Policies 'Leftist,' Institute Charges in New Booklet," *Washington Post*, March 19, 1983, B6; Charles Austin, "Protestant Leaders Debate the Role of Religion in Public Affairs," *New York Times*, March 25, 1982, A16.

NCC coffers.⁵⁹ In other words, the IRD and its conservative critics of the NCC were exaggerating the activities of the latter organization, and of mainline Protestant churches more broadly, in an attempt to either undermine its credibility or pressure its leadership to move to the right.

In an article for the *Christian Century* following the airing of the *60 Minutes* episode, James Wall accused the production of containing an array of “distortions, innuendos and half truths,” and blamed the IRD as the primary source of information for these errors. Reporting on a discussion with a then-unnamed representative from IRD, Wall wrote that his correspondent claimed that the point of the *60 Minutes* segment and *Reader’s Digest* article was to help spur a “creative dialogue.”⁶⁰ Wall scoffed at the notion and concluded that the real intention of the IRD leadership was to damage the credibility of and undermine the unity of the mainline churches. What the IRD was trying to achieve was

a church stance that parallels U.S. foreign policy. The IRD strategy, both in its own publications and in its "leaks" to both the *Digest* and CBS-TV, is to support a Reagan foreign policy. Church groups have sought to build bridges to such communist nations as the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union and Poland, but IRD almost completely ignores these involvements. Instead it concentrates on precisely those smaller countries which the Reagan administration has chosen as its battlefields against communism.... it is quite clearly pushing a political foreign policy congenial to the Reagan White House.⁶¹

The correspondent to whom Wall referred was in fact Richard Neuhaus. Responding, in a letter to the editor, to the accusations of Wall, Neuhaus reiterated his desire for a

⁵⁹ Paul Taylor, “National Council of Churches Under Sharpest Attack Ever,” *Washington Post*, January 26, 1983, A25; see also Woodward, “Ideology Under the Alms.”

⁶⁰ Wall, “The True Shame of IRD as informant,” 139.

⁶¹ *Ibid* 140.

dialogue that could clarify the Church's role in the foreign affairs. Picking up on the *60 Minutes* episode, he admitted that it provided a highly editorialized account of the issue, but that there were nonetheless no glaring errors of fact. Standing by his participation in the segment that aired, Neuhaus reiterated his concern that there were operative assumptions against liberal democracy and toward totalitarianism at work in the NCC.⁶² It is this point, he claimed--namely to what extent the churches ought to defend and support democratic values--which should form one of the bases for a creative dialogue. Needless to say, Neuhaus was of the conviction that such a defense should be made forcefully and without apology. He concluded his letter by claiming that the strident criticism aimed at the IRD by their critics undermined any hope that the church might provide a collective social witness in defense of democratic values and in opposition to the totalitarian tendencies of Soviet Marxism.⁶³

The church's obligation to provide a strong defense of democratic liberties functioned as one of the fundamental principles in IRD's founding document. In the opening sentence to this document Neuhaus stated that "it is both politically and theologically imperative to assert that Marxism-Leninism promulgates a doctrine that is incompatible with a Christian understanding of humanity and historical destiny. Thus Christians must be unapologetically anti-Communist."⁶⁴ Originally penned by Richard Neuhaus in the latter half of 1981 as part of the charter for the Institute on Religion and Democracy, his words highlighted the key place that the communist threat played in neoconservative Catholic thought throughout the Eighties.

⁶² Richard John Neuhaus, "The IRD and Church Dialogue," *The Christian Century*, April 6, 1983, 317-319.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁶⁴ Richard John Neuhaus, "'Christianity and Democracy,'" 32.

The Institute's founding document provides a useful springboard to understand neoconservative Catholic anticommunism, and the relationship that it held to their political and religious thought encapsulated many of the themes affirmed in neoconservative Catholic political thought and previously reviewed in the last two chapters. At its core was the unwavering opposition that they held existed between a democratic polity and a totalitarian one. Understanding this opposition in the context of the Cold War, Neuhaus asserted that "the United States is the primary bearer of the democratic possibility in the world today. The Soviet Union is the primary bearer of the totalitarian alternative."⁶⁵

Neuhaus recognized that communism signified only one form, albeit the dominant one at the time, of totalitarianism. Throughout the twentieth century the totalitarian temptation had become a prominent fixture in political life around the world. Consequently, while the main focus of this document centers on the threat of Marxism-Leninism, given its role in world affairs at the time, his interests extended beyond this specific threat to the broader totalitarian temptation. At its core, totalitarianism signified for Neuhaus a form of political monism that eschewed pluralism of any sort and, that, to quote John Courtney Murray, led to the "absorption of the community in the state, the absorption of the state in the party, and the assertion that the party state is the supreme spiritual and moral, as well as political, authority."⁶⁶

Neuhaus's account of the process enunciated by Murray partly reflected themes held in mid-twentieth century Catholic political thought, with particular emphasis on the

⁶⁵ Neuhaus, "Christianity and Democracy," 34.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 31.

fundamental distinction between society and state and the importance of maintaining both in tension with one another. More influential to Neuhaus' account at this time were ideas that first found expression in an argument championed by Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus in their tract, *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy*. These arguments, in turn, relied less on Catholic political thought and more on mid-twentieth century conservative thought, particularly as expressed by thinkers like Robert Nisbet.

The breakdown of intermediate structures in society left its people without any buffer zone between themselves and the state. This breakdown, in turn, led to the glorification of the state and its predominance as a primary source of meaning in the lives of its citizenry. With the loss of intermediate associations, what remained was the individual, who typically stood alone in the face of an overbearing state. Absent the presence of intermediate associations and, in particular for Neuhaus, religious institutions that can function as a check on the authority of the state, democratic institutions are at severe risk of dissolution.

While economic and political organizations played an important role in offsetting the power of the state, religious institutions are, for Neuhaus, the primary mechanism through which the state could be kept in check. It is thus obligatory for those in the churches to function as a witness on behalf of democracy, to defend the moral principles that make democracy possible, and to "illuminate the relationship between Christian faith and democratic governance."⁶⁷ Religious institutions have the capacity to function as a constant reminder to the state that it is under transcendent judgment and that it is not an end in itself

⁶⁷ Ibid, 35.

but rather an institution that is called to be in service to its people.⁶⁸ The framework that Neuhaus developed here clearly anticipated the argument that he made a half-decade later in *The Naked Public Square*. Given the central role that he viewed religious institutions as playing in the protection of democratic principles, the elimination of such institutions seriously erodes any external constraint that would otherwise limit state expansion into areas into which it had not previously ventured.

The preceding commentary on the founding document of the Institute on Religion and Democracy is, in many respects, a reiteration of many of the political themes and principles affirmed by the neoconservative Catholics laid out in the two previous chapters. For this reason it is an important document because it signifies the intersection between the more theoretical political worldview of the neoconservative Catholics and the institutionalization of those ideas expressed as a part of that worldview in American political life.

In a symposium sponsored by the *Center Journal* in the summer of 1982, George Weigel authored a defense of Neuhaus's *Christianity and Democracy*.⁶⁹ He wrote that Neuhaus's essay provided a fresh perspective as to how the Church could address the communist threat, influence foreign policy, and shed light on the "current situation of the churches' address to questions of America's national security."⁷⁰ Building on Neuhaus' insights, Weigel expressed his concern that Christian churches in the United States had lost sight of the fundamental threat that the Soviet Union posed, going so far as to complain that a "vulgar Marxism" had become a dominant ideological influence among Church leadership.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 32.

⁶⁹ George Weigel, Untitled Essay, *Center Journal* vol. 1, no. 3 (Summer, 1982): 73-74.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 74.

He further argued that partly as a result of the tragedy of Vietnam, many of the elites in theological and church leadership circles had become skeptical of American intervention overseas and the destructive capacity of American power. What emerged was a posture of guilt ridden neo-isolationism that tended to exaggerate the failures of American policy both domestically and abroad, while championing liberationist movements that sought to counter American influence across the globe. In reaction to this perspective, a hawkish and sometimes belligerent patriotism emerged by the late Seventies, most often within conservative and evangelical circles.⁷¹ Between the neo-isolationists and the jingoists, Weigel sought to carve out an alternative vision for American foreign policy that would avoid the pitfalls of both while addressing the central problems confronting national security.

GEORGE WEIGEL, THE COMMUNIST MENACE, AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

George Weigel, along with his neoconservative Catholic counterparts, considered the Soviet Union to be a considerable menace to the Western way of life. With the emergence of total war and of weaponry that could devastate entire populations in an instant, the threat that the Soviet Union and its allies posed became all the more dire.

Taken together

war and its threat are the central moral and political problems of our time, not only because a general war would threaten to extinguish or alter seriously the human adventure, but because war and the threat of war now occupy the ground on which all the other pressing problems on the human agenda are to be solved—or left to fester. Poverty, ignorance, disease, tyranny—we can

⁷¹ Ibid, 73-4.

expect little progress on defeating these traditional enemies of mankind for so long as organized mass violence is the primary arbiter of international conflict.⁷²

Weigel turned his attention to World War I as the period in which this threat became pronounced and which only grew worse in the following decades. Not only did the Great War introduce to the world in graphic fashion the awesome destructive capabilities of war on a grand scale, but it also paved the way for the age of totalitarianism, exemplified in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution and the emergence of the Soviet Union.

What became particularly problematic for the makers of foreign policy, he further contended, was that attempts to counteract one threat (total war) risked providing an opening for the other (totalitarianism). On the one hand, discounting the usefulness of war as a foreign policy tool to keep one's enemies at bay risked betraying weakness, which was a particularly dangerous disposition in the face of an enemy that would not shy away from using force of arms to further their own ends. On the other hand, the invention of nuclear weapons and modern warfare could threaten disaster for any country that used military means to fight off foreign threats who were trying to expand their international influence. Weigel wondered whether or not it would be possible to avoid sliding into a state of total war if the West engaged in direct military confrontation with the Soviet-dominated Eastern bloc.⁷³

⁷² Ibid, 75.

⁷³ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 1-20.

The only choice that appeared to remain for Western society was a rather precarious either/or. The United States could resist totalitarian expansion at all costs, thus risking the possibility of total war and along with it destruction on an unprecedented scale. The other option was to downplay resistance to totalitarian aggression and reduce the risk of total war, all but guaranteeing totalitarian expansion. In popular parlance the United States seemed to be left with the foreboding choice between an international ethic of ‘better dead than red’ and one of ‘better red than dead.’ Weigel expressed concern that based on these grounds debates in the foreign policy realm were at an impasse. This led him to write that

between the fire of war and the pit of totalitarianism, moral imagination in the modern world is in schism. Our choices seem reduced to either/or propositions: either resist total aggression, even by war, or run the risk of a world in Gulag; either end the threat of war, even by appeasing totalitarians, or run the risk of global holocaust.⁷⁴

Such an either/or was in fact a false proposition. Weigel argued that an appeal to the Catholic tradition on war and peace provided a possible solution to this problem. Such a tradition possessed the resources to ensure that humanity is neither committed to totalitarian subjugation nor a condition of total war.

Weigel held that the Catholic just war tradition aimed, somewhat ironically, at peace. In other words, just war aims at the “reestablishment of a bond of community that will allow both attacker and attacked to resume their responsibilities for the common good of their peoples... just war is ordered to the common good, both of

⁷⁴ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 17.

one's own community and of the enemy.”⁷⁵ From this perspective, war and politics form an intimate relationship. War is an inherently political act that seeks a political solution. Consequently, to address the moral problem of war, political leaders must work to realize a “dynamic, rightly ordered political community” that relies on practical wisdom rooted in a perspective of moderate realism.⁷⁶ To understand the broader context within which Weigel developed his understanding of a “dynamic, rightly ordered political community,” it is crucial to return to influences that helped shape his thought and which became apparent in his writings during that period.

GEORGE WEIGEL AND THE PROBLEM OF WAR

Although a self-professed defender of the Catholic just war tradition, Weigel was deeply influenced by other strains of thought including, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the pacifist tradition. One of the more profound influences on his thought occurred during the time that he spent as a fellow during the late Seventies at the World Without War Council (WWWC), a think tank established by the pacifist Robert Pickus a decade earlier. In 2003, a quarter-century after they first met, Weigel referred to his initial encounter with Pickus as one of the most important meetings of his life.⁷⁷ While never fully embracing

⁷⁵ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 37.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 394-5.

⁷⁷ George Weigel, “Robert Pickus--A Life Lived Vocationally,” *The Catholic Difference*, November 5, 2003, www.eppc.org/publications/pubID.1926/pub_detail.asp, accessed September 1, 2007.

the pacifism of Pickus, Weigel integrated much of Pickus' philosophical framework into his writing on just war during the Reagan years.

Throughout the Cold War Pickus remained a staunch critic of what he viewed to be a faulty paradigm of American foreign policy--the reliance on military buildup and the consequent militarization of American foreign policy as an effective means of maintaining peace. In one interview he referred to the theory of deterrence as an “insane framework” since it centered the pursuit of peace on the threat of military destruction, rather than exploring new economic and political frameworks that could temper the appeal to mass warfare as a way to settle disputes.⁷⁸ While critical of American foreign policy, Pickus remained staunchly anticommunist throughout his life and refused to engage in an anti-American rhetoric that he believed permeated large segments of the peace movement.

His involvement in peace organizations in the decades following World War II was constantly in flux as discrete organizations consolidated, fractured, and sometimes disappeared altogether. Following a brief stint with the American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker peace group, during the late Fifties, Pickus became involved with an “organization called “Acts for Peace”... which became “Turn toward Peace” and then “Negotiation Now,” that finally became known as the “World Without War Council.”⁷⁹ It was through his involvement with the WWWC and, in large part through the influence of Pickus, that Weigel was able to secure a fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson International

⁷⁸Robert Pickus, “Full Turn Toward Peace,” *MANAS* XV, no. 6 (February 7, 1962): 3.

⁷⁹ Norman Podhoretz, *Breaking Ranks: A Political Memoir* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1979), 191.

Center for Scholars in Washington DC and have an opportunity to write one of his major works during this period, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*.

Tranquillitas Ordinis is the culmination of a decade's worth of research and writing on the question of war and peace. Tracing the development of his thought from his earlier work, and particularly during his time at the WWWC, will shed light on the ways in which both the secular pacifist tradition and the Catholic one influenced the development of his thought. In an early essay Weigel began to develop a broad framework that informed the way in which he would link the theological and secular components of his thought. This essay, titled "The Common Covenant: Catholic Theology and American Civil Religion," argued for the importance of initiating a conversation between Robert Bellah's "understanding of civil religion and the Catholic theological tradition."⁸⁰ Here Weigel noted the importance of engaging the Catholic theological tradition with the idea of American civil religion so as to flesh the latter out more fully and give deeper and more lasting meaning to American life.

Robert Bellah first promoted the idea of civil religion in an essay for the journal *Daedalus*.⁸¹ Rooted in the writings of Rousseau, the idea of civil religion embodied the social, political, and cultural identity of a people and, in Bellah's case, the American people. Civil religion is related to but distinct from that found in the formal religious institutions and

⁸⁰ George Weigel, "The Common Covenant: Catholic Theology and American Civil Religion," *Chicago Studies* 15 (Summer, 1976): 212.

⁸¹ Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (Winter, 1967): 1-21. A great deal has been written on civil religion, far more than we are able or need to cover in this essay. For a somewhat dated but still useful overview of the literature on civil religion and a periodization of the discussion surrounding civil religion, see James Mathisen, "Twenty Years after Bellah: Whatever Happened to American Civil Religion?" *Sociological Analysis* 50, no.2 (Summer, 1989): 129-146.

embodies characteristics similar to that of traditional religion. For Bellah, civil religion was expressed in the rituals and myths that exist in respect to sacred things and within the context of civil society. It is through an adherence to these “religious” elements that a common bond is created within a people living in that community.⁸² Both traditional and civil religion have their holy scriptures, with civil religion upholding the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Both have their holy days; American civil religion’s “high holiday” falls on July 4th, with supporting festivals on long dead president’s birthdays and Thanksgiving. These long-dead presidents and other heroes of American history are often looked at by the American populace as significant in the way that a biblical figure is upheld by the Christian churches.

Perhaps as important as any figure or document to the development of American civil religion is the constitutive role that God played in the nation’s self-understanding. In the country’s founding documents and in inaugural speeches, the idea of God had, since America’s founding, been a defining force. While not the Christian God, it was not thoroughly deist either. This God of the American civil religion is “actively interested and involved in history with a special concern for America... Europe is Egypt; America the promised land. God has led his people to establish a new sort of social order that shall be a light unto all nations.”⁸³ The celebration of America and the affirmation of her founding documents and national heroes is, at least in part, a celebration of America’s distinctive role in world history. From this self understanding came the complex and varied relationship

⁸² Ibid, 6-10.

⁸³ Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” 6.

between America and the rest of the world. Sometimes America tried to act as a light to all nations, while remaining aloof from involvement in other nation's affairs. At other times American policies actively sought control over the activity of other nations in the guise of spreading freedom and democracy.⁸⁴

Weigel proceeded to put the civil religion tradition in conversation with the Catholic theological tradition. This was made easier, at least initially, by what he noticed are shared characteristics between the two constructions. The first and perhaps most important characteristic is their shared emphasis on the transcendent judgment on the life of the nation and the historical character of this judgment. The notion of America under divine judgment is central to civil religion in that it holds "there is a transcendent dimension to the national life, that the nation has a horizon of self-understanding which acts as integrator, judge and vision for the future."⁸⁵

Civil religion provides a horizon that can function as both a critique of current behavior and a goal toward which a nation can strive. This function of civil religion can be enhanced when put into conversation with the religious traditions that make up the American scene. Those interested in the centrality of civil religion to American identity need to take seriously the ways in which it has become embedded and found expression throughout American history—national holidays provide a sense of sacredness to American life, the inauguration of Presidents that function as a kind of religious ritual, the founding documents, etc.—but at the same time use the religious traditions and their own self-awareness as a way

⁸⁴ Ibid, 20-21.

⁸⁵ Weigel, "The Common Covenant," 216.

of feeding into the symbolic system that provides a common American identity. In light of this, Weigel wrote that “Catholic theologians in the United States must be in conversation with the vision and values which emerge from the civil religious tradition, if they are to be able to speak to their own roots in a national history. Sociologists must be open to the insights which may emerge from Catholicism’s ongoing confrontation with its historicity, if they are to be able to develop the symbols... so that it continues to offer a vision of the future.”⁸⁶

The importance of this engagement consisted in the possibility that the theological tradition might be able to point out and address blind spots and weaknesses in the civil religion tradition.⁸⁷ On a more constructive level, engagement with the Catholic theological tradition might help the civil religious tradition move beyond these weaknesses so that it might better live out its own calling. The first step was the recognition of the American civil religious tradition and the extent to which this tradition shed light on our common social experience and in how it helped to create a commonly held American identity. The second step consists in the engagement of this tradition with the Catholic theological tradition. The integrity of each of these traditions must be respected and honestly appropriated in its encounter with the other. Because both of these traditions emerge historically and in discrete communities and these communities share, by virtue of breathing the cultural air of the other (Christian communities develop in the wider American community and the American

⁸⁶ Ibid, 230.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 228. Weigel notes that not only is it important to engage American civil religion from the perspective of the Catholic theological tradition, but that anthropologists, philosophers, and literary critics ought to do the same thing. Given the dark side of civil religion and the closely related notion of American exceptionalism, it is important to constantly engage it from different perspectives, so as to avoid pitfalls and blind spots.

community is deeply influenced by these discrete Christian communities), there are points of contact that can be exploited as a basis for conversation.

What Weigel specifically meant when he wrote of the Catholic theological tradition at this time is not entirely clear. While underdeveloped here, his understanding of this term and its application to American political life, and American civil religion which stood as a backdrop, became more fully developed in the decade following the publication of this essay. One area in which this connection became pronounced was in his writings on war and peace.

In one of his earliest essays on the problems confronting America in the foreign policy realm Weigel picked up on the question of disarmament and examined the best approach to making general disarmament possible. His analysis betrayed an idealistic vision that was evident when he wrote that “the goal of American policy must be general, universal, complete and inspected disarmament in the context of a world order in which war is no longer an acceptable means of conflict resolution, because other alternatives are available.”⁸⁸ While he recognized that, this side of the Kingdom, conflict in human relations will never disappear, he remained confident that for at least the next decade political structures and strategies could be put into place that make unnecessary an appeal to mass, organized violence—war—as a viable strategy to resolve conflict. In this early essay Weigel began to lay out such a plan, to which he referred to as a “peace-initiatives strategy.”

Such a strategy would avoid extremes, including unilateral disarmament, proponents of which, Weigel argued, tended to blame American militarism for the arms race and many of the other sundry evils in the world. Weigel was also suspect of a strategy that relied on

⁸⁸ George Weigel, “Hard-Nosed Idealism: A Model for Disarmament,” *America* 137, October 1, 1977, 186.

mutually assured destruction, which would in all likelihood only escalate the arms race and in doing so jeopardize any possibility for a long lasting and reliable peace.⁸⁹ In a later essay Weigel recognized that for some four decades a deterrence strategy based on a mutually assured destruction strategy had worked, but “working” does not necessarily make something morally legitimate. It might be the most useful strategy for the moment, but in the long run there must be put into place a strategy that directly addresses the arms race and emphasizes the importance of arms reduction.⁹⁰

This was one of the primary objectives of what Weigel referred to as a “peace initiatives strategy,” as it would commit the United States to initiatives that would build momentum toward peace. Such initiatives would consist in a series of carefully determined steps that anticipated reciprocation by the international community and thus provide an opportunity for additional steps that could further the process of disarmament. So, for example, Weigel suggested that the United States unilaterally halt underground nuclear testing and call on the Soviet Union and other nuclear states to do the same. If reciprocation ensued then the United States could take further measures, such as halting the test firing of I.C.B.M’s and calling for further reciprocation. Such an approach would take small steps that would result in significant changes to both geopolitical relations between the United States and the Soviet Union and would lead to the establishment of new safeguards against

⁸⁹ Ibid, 187-8.

⁹⁰ *Peace and Freedom: Christian Faith, Democracy and the Problem of War* (New York, NY: Institute on Religion and Democracy, 1983), 20-30. This “peace initiatives strategy” was taken directly from the thought of Robert Pickus, who defined it as a policy that “recognizes that any final settlement must be based on common consent, but asserts that there are situations in which only independent action taken without prior agreement can create a situation in which agreement becomes possible,” see Robert Pickus and Robert Woito, *To End War* (Berkeley, CA: World Without War Council, 1974), 188.

armed conflict. He pointed to successes in the past where this approach had born fruit, such as with the Partial Test Ban Treaty, a success that gave him reason to believe that such a strategy could work again in the future.⁹¹

The obvious drawback to this approach is that absent reciprocation, the strategy dies a quick and early death. Given that there was no overarching political structure that could help manage political relations on the international plane, individual nations functioned within what was a de facto state of anarchy in relation to each other. In an essay published in 1979, Weigel summed up the fundamental problem related to such a condition when he wrote that

the fundamental reason why nations rely on military means of security is that there is, at present, no viable, credible alternative means of nonviolent international conflict resolution... work for disarmament must simultaneously be work for alternative means by which the inevitable conflicts among sovereign states are processed, adjudicated, and resolved without resort to the mechanism of mass, organized violence—war.⁹²

In another context he reiterated a similar sentiment, writing that “the root cause of the problem of war today lies in a system of independent nation states, each claiming absolute sovereignty over its own affairs, and none accountable to a transnational political authority.”⁹³ A strategy that depended on mutual cooperation alone would probably not provide an adequate, long-term framework to secure peace. It could thus function only as an intermediate stage until a broader strategy could be implemented. Weigel contended that structural changes needed to be introduced into the international framework that would constrict and channel decision-making on a national level. In the following years he began to

⁹¹ Ibid, 188.

⁹² George Weigel, “The Catholics and the Arms Race: A Primer for the Perplexed,” *Chicago Studies* (Summer, 1979): 176.

⁹³ Weigel, *Peace and Freedom*, 61.

flesh out these structural issues and, in doing so began in earnest to draw on the thinking of both Robert Pickus and twentieth century Catholic thought.

In a small booklet that was published by the Institute on Religion and Democracy, George Weigel argued that to achieve a lasting peace it was important to understand what was meant by the term, peace. When speaking of peace in a public context, he emphasized that he was not talking about an inner peace that is brought about through a right relationship with God, nor was he speaking of a peace conditioned by a complete absence of conflict. Such a peace is utopian and presupposed that humans could bring the Kingdom of God to earth. The peace of which Weigel spoke was constituted by a public order secured through a common authority in which social and political structures are put into place that provide rational, non-violent ways of dealing with conflict on the international level.⁹⁴

Weigel insisted that this revised international structure would not replace the current system of nation states but instead complement it. It would be the role of this common authority to deal with specific sets of problems that are international in nature and not attempt to solve every problem in the world. One such problem was the problem of war. With this in mind, Weigel sought to develop a framework within which relations between nation states could be managed more effectively and in such a way as to eliminate the need to appeal to violence to solve disagreements. It was a framework that had a fourfold structure.⁹⁵ In short, a world without war “would be a disarmed world, under law, where there was a sufficient minimum of political community to sustain that law, and in which the political and

⁹⁴ Ibid, 46.

⁹⁵ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 197.

economic development problems of the Third World were being solved.”⁹⁶ Weigel thought it crucial to establish an international order that will help to dissipate the need of nation states for war-making.

It is here that we can see the strong influence that the peace activist Robert Pickus had on the thinking of George Weigel. In an interview given in 1962, Pickus stressed the importance of eliminating war as a viable alternative to solving conflict between nation states. The goal of his efforts was “total and general disarmament” that would be achieved through a “growth toward world law,” and a “sense of community adequate to sustain world law.” This would be further matched by American support for “economic and political policies that challenge colonialism and feudalism.”⁹⁷ Just a few years following this interview, Pickus summarized these interconnected themes more concisely in a book he co-authored, titled *To End War*. Here he wrote that

a world without war is a world in which agreement on universal, complete and enforceable disarmament has been achieved and put into effect. But disarmament is not a sufficient objective, for it cannot be maintained without alternate procedures for resolving conflict and establishing justice in world affairs. It cannot be maintained without law. But there can be no law without the sense of a world community.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ George Weigel, *The Peace Bishops and the Arms Race: Can Religious Leadership Help in Preventing War?* (Chicago, IL: World Without War Council, 1982), 24. Although the United Nations would seem to be a logical candidate for this international structure, Weigel at times expressed disappointment in its effectiveness, possibly because he thought it attempted to achieve too much as an institutional body. Even so, it is difficult to get past Weigel’s heady optimism regarding the likelihood of his call for international structures that he promoted that would actually function much differently than a United Nations like institution. With such political, religious and cultural diversity around the world, it would seem unlikely that such an institution would emerge any time soon.

⁹⁷ Pickus, “Full Turn Toward Peace.”

⁹⁸ Robert Pickus, *To End War*, 181.

Furthermore, as those in third-world countries will likely be little concerned about laws governing international affairs so long as their condition remain poor, it is essential that there are put into place effective mechanisms for economic development.⁹⁹

In addition to the four themes listed above, Weigel also emphasized the importance of democracy as a principle that ought to guide affairs both nationally and internationally, because “the advance of democracy is the advance of peace.”¹⁰⁰ The American experience of democratic institutions had proven, with the significant exception of the Civil War, to be an effective mechanism that had been used to support non-violent conflict resolution and could function as a model for international institutions. The problem of war was at its core a problem of political institutions; the establishment of political institutions that have been shown to have a track record for avoiding violence as a solution to conflict could go a long way in undercutting the need for an appeal to war on the international plane.¹⁰¹ Further still, in the context of the Cold War, the rhetoric promoted by and the example of democratic societies could provide a strong moral voice against the political rhetoric churned out by the Soviet Union.¹⁰²

While clearly influenced by the thought of Robert Pickus, Weigel’s worldview also overlapped with that of the political neoconservatives, particularly in his emphasis on the usefulness of democratic institutions in an international context. The political neoconservative Joshua Muravchik provided perhaps the most overt defense of this principle

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Weigel, “Christian Century Foundation Colloquium,” *Catholicism in Crisis*, May 1983, 25.

¹⁰¹ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 144-46.

¹⁰² George Weigel, “Exorcising Wilson’s Ghost: Morality and Foreign Policy in America’s Third Century,” *The Washington Quarterly* (Autumn, 1987): 38.

in his book *Exporting Democracy*. Here he held that in a post-communist world, the spread of democracy would be more likely absent the presence of competitive ideologies and war would be less common as he held that democracies tend not to go to war with one another. Further, spreading democracy ought to be one of the principles upon which the logic of American foreign policy should be based.¹⁰³

Writing about the neoconservative political philosophy, Max Boot, a military historian and current Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, emphasized that the neoconservatives are in this respect similar to Woodrow Wilson. This is not because they are invested in the value of international institutions or the efficacy of international law as a guiding force in geopolitical affairs. They were, according to Boot, “hard Wilsonians” who appreciated the usefulness of power to spread American ideals. This is particularly true with regard to the spread of democracy, “not only out of sheer humanitarianism but because the spread of liberal democracy improves American security.”¹⁰⁴

From what we have already seen, this signified a disjunction between Weigel and the political neoconservatives. Both valued democracy and believed that as a political philosophy it was generally superior to the existing alternatives. George Weigel and the political neoconservatives further stressed the benefit that it would bring to American security in particular and international relations more generally if it were to be embraced by nations that were not currently democratic. Nevertheless, unlike his political counterparts, Weigel strongly and repeatedly reaffirmed the value of international institutions and law if

¹⁰³ Joshua Muravchik, *Exporting Democracy* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1992), 7-12.

¹⁰⁴ Boot, 49.

such institutions were constructed properly. His entire thesis regarding the possibility of creating a “world without war” depended on the creation of such institutions. So, how does one account for his positive appraisal for these sorts of structures?

For starters, it is not because he felt a great deal of affection toward Wilson. In more than one instance Weigel accused Woodrow of embracing a naïve, if not dangerous, moralism.¹⁰⁵ In one essay, Weigel wrote that Wilson “embodied a specific form of American Protestant moral sensibility that has been the entry point for, as well as the chief defect of, the morality and of foreign policy ever since April 1917.”¹⁰⁶ He accused Wilson and many of his contemporaries of embracing a flawed understanding of the application of Scripture to political life, in which one would take a biblical text of choice and apply it directly to the policy arena as though there were a one-on-one correlation. This approach tended to turn on a subjective morality that did not take seriously the capacity of human reason to determine moral norms that would in turn be applicable to foreign policy questions.¹⁰⁷

Whether or not Wilson was actually guilty as charged is beyond the scope of this discussion. What become evident, however, is that Weigel did not hold Wilson as an icon to whom he looked for the former’s positive defense of international structures as integral component of foreign policy. One reason why Weigel held international systems in such high regard is because of the influence of Robert Pickus on his thought. But he was not the only influence. The Catholic political tradition, particularly as expressed in modern papal

¹⁰⁵ See, Weigel, “Exorcising Wilson’s Ghost,” and George Weigel, “The Margin Makes the Difference: John Courtney Murray on Morality and Foreign Policy,” *Catholicism in Crisis*, December 1985, 6-9.

¹⁰⁶ Weigel, “Exorcising Wilson’s Ghost,” 32.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 96-7.

teaching is also an important source for his positive appraisal of international institutions. While Weigel was critical of Pope John XXIII on some accounts, including a failure to properly spell out human rights and develop an adequate understanding of the relationship between peace and justice, he provided a largely favorable account of many of the themes that emerged in the pope's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. Of particular note, at least for our interests here, is the approval Weigel gave to John XIII's attempt to link "the goals of disarmament, international organization and law, human rights, democracy and economic and social development. This was an important advance over previous Church teaching on peace as dynamic political community."¹⁰⁸

It is important to emphasize that for Weigel this emphasis by John XIII constituted an advance and not something new. One of the central premises of Weigel's book *Tranquillitas Ordinis* is that the notion of rightly ordered political community extended as far back as Augustine was further developed in the thought of Aquinas and further advanced with the founding of the United States. While the importance of international institutions in political affairs became pronounced during the papacy of Benedict XV, it was with Pope John XXIII that Weigel claimed a turning point occurred.¹⁰⁹ Pope John pushed the idea of a rightly ordered political community a step further toward the recognition of the importance of this type of community on an international level.¹¹⁰ This trajectory from Augustine to the United

¹⁰⁸ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 91.

¹⁰⁹ For a review of Pope Benedict XVI's view on the international political order, see in particular chapter 5 in - Frank Coppa, *Politics and the Papacy in the Modern World* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing: 2008), 77-98.

¹¹⁰ The first part of Weigel's book, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, developed his argument in more detail and traced certain lines of his thought as having its source in Augustine and up through the present.

States and finally through John XXIII obviously oversimplifies the deeper argument that Weigel made, but it reaffirms the point made in the last chapter, namely Weigel's conviction that the American experiment is rooted in a Catholic political and moral worldview that extends far back into Christian history.¹¹¹

The important step now is to take that tradition and develop it even further by projecting it internationally. Consequently, Weigel's call for the establishment of democratic institutions internationally was not, at least in theory, based on the sheer projection of American power and American interest, but rather signified the next phase in the unfolding of the Catholic political heritage that began, at the very latest, with Augustine. He claimed that in a modern context this heritage "proposed an approach to the problem of international political community that allowed international institutions to control the bellicosity of nation-states without requiring their abandonment or abolition... it persistently argued that the peace of political community was a necessity on the international level, and thus had to be created."¹¹²

But just as this new development was beginning to take hold, Weigel lamented, things began to fall apart. It was at this point, just as Catholic leadership was beginning to recognize the importance of advancing her teaching on war and peace into the international sphere, that this same leadership effectively abandoned the tradition. While the bishops continued to embrace an international perspective, Weigel argued that over time this perspective became unmoored from the broader social ethic that the Church had nurtured and

¹¹¹ Ibid, 52.

¹¹² Ibid, 142.

helped develop over the course of centuries and which, in the modern period, found its most complete expression in the American system of government. This abandonment was in large part due to the way in which the Vietnam War played out and the way leadership in the American Catholic Church responded to the war. This process of decline was already explored in the first chapter. To reiterate briefly, for Weigel, Vietnam functioned as the “vehicle for abandonment.... (that) occasioned the virtual abandonment of the American Catholic heritage of *tranquillitas ordinis* in the decade after the Second Vatican Council.”¹¹³ With the loss of this tradition as a guiding force, many of the bishops and those associated with them veered dramatically off course. Divorcing their political analysis from this moral tradition led to a wide range of erroneous conclusions, particularly in the arena of foreign policy. With this conviction in mind, it is not surprising that Weigel sought to resuscitate this tradition and, in doing so, influence the Church’s approach to policy and help to shape the way in which she engaged the public sphere.

CONCLUSION

In a review of Weigel’s book, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, Richard Neuhaus expressed strong agreement with Weigel’s assessment regarding the failures of Catholic leadership during that period and further expressed his dismay that “activists and archbishops alike have traded in a tradition of careful moral reasoning for the highs of prophetic heavy

¹¹³ Ibid, 216.

breathing.”¹¹⁴ All of the neoconservative Catholics worried that Catholic leadership, and the Christian churches more generally, had lost their way and were floundering about without any firm foundation upon which to make political, theological, and cultural judgments. Their concern became apparent on the broad issue of communism and the threat of the Soviet Union, as will become clear when we turn our attention to the neoconservative Catholic critique of the bishops’ pastoral letters on war and peace and on the economy in Chapter six. Before doing so, it is also important to highlight their criticisms of Catholic leadership on issues like Latin America, liberation theology, and economic policy. The neoconservative Catholics wrote extensively on an array of policy issues and became very active in political affairs, helping to establish institutes and think tanks as a way to counter the influence of the bishops in the policy arena. They also became increasingly vocal about the rhetoric and policy prescriptions posed by the bishops in the public square and sought to use their influence in a way that would guide Church leadership to embrace a more authentic expression of the faith.

¹¹⁴ Richard Neuhaus, “No-Fault Prophecy,” *National Review*, April 10, 1987, 44. Novak also spoke glowingly of Weigel’s book, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, saying that it “is a masterpiece of detail, intricate analysis, and powerful argument.” See Michael Novak, “A Theology of Peace,” *New York Times*, June 7, 1987, BR35.

Chapter 5

In chapter four we explored the central place that the Marxist threat and the Cold War played in the thinking of the neoconservative Catholics. While taking the Cold War as a general backdrop, this chapter will open up an opportunity to further specify these concerns by focusing on the communist threat in Latin America and the emergence of liberation theology. In this way we move from a broader understanding of the threat posed by communism and the Soviet Union to a concrete manifestation of that threat as perceived by neoconservative Catholics. While the political conditions in Latin America, and particularly Nicaragua, will prove essential to this discussion, policy considerations are only one element that became important in their thinking. The policy-oriented interests of the neoconservative Catholics were paired with concerns that focused on the broader Catholic Church's response on these issues. Notable differences of opinion emerged between the neoconservative Catholics and the large swathes of Catholic leadership on the events in the Latin America and the Latin American Church. As with other issues of contention, the neoconservative Catholics found themselves fighting a two-front war, one against the more secular liberal political wing in American politics, and the other against what they considered to be a more liberal wing within the Church itself.

As the debate tended to break down along largely partisan lines, it will prove helpful to situate the neoconservative Catholics in the context of an American conservative political outlook as it related to U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. For the most part, the concerns

in conservative circles were directly related to the geopolitical concerns surrounding the Cold War. There was an abiding sense that following Vietnam, America had lost its political will and had become too passive in the face of an aggressive Soviet-style Marxism. With Castro firmly ensconced in Cuba and revolutionary movements emerging in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and elsewhere, the threat from the Soviet Union was no longer overseas but had arrived at our back door.

For the neoconservative Catholics in particular, the passivity of American political leaders in the face of this threat was compounded by troubles in their own Church. It was feared that too many American Catholic bishops had underestimated the Soviet threat and misconstrued the problems confronting Latin America and, thus, the United States. Worse still, the neoconservative Catholics worried that many Catholic intellectuals had come to celebrate the widespread revolutionary movements, often clothing them in a religious garb, which was a move that threatened United States security in the region.

The struggles within the Catholic Church on this issue were thus not only of a secular character. The emergence of Latin American liberation theology and its influence in the region signified a religious dimension to the conflict that extended beyond policy decisions instituted by the Reagan administration. Often critical of American involvement in the developing world, liberation theologians provided a religious foundation for many of the revolutionary movements at work in countries like Nicaragua and El Salvador. Strongly opposed to these elements, the neoconservative Catholics worked at undermining liberation theology's legitimacy both domestically and abroad.

LATIN AMERICA, THE SOVIET UNION, AND THE CONSERVATIVE CRITIQUE

Inspired partly by the example of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) formed in 1961 with the expressed purpose of overthrowing the authoritarian Somoza-led government in Nicaragua. Within two decades the Sandinistas evolved from a guerrilla organization based in northern Nicaragua to the ruling party following their overthrow of the Somoza government in July, 1979.¹ Many conservative organizations and intellectuals, including the neoconservative Catholics, interpreted the Sandinista revolution as illustrative of the Soviet threat to the Western world. This perception reinforced concerns regarding policies implemented by the Carter administration, and underlay calls for the implementation of a more aggressive foreign policy by the Reagan administration in the face of an expansionist Soviet Union.

In the months leading up to the 1980 election a group of established conservative intellectuals published a report titled *A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties*, in which they expressed concern that Central America could be lost to the Soviet Union.² This document argued that the Carter Administration had abandoned American commitment to the Monroe Doctrine and offered confused leadership in foreign policy, particularly in the face of Soviet aggression.³ What the United States faced in the region was not simply a difference

¹ For a detailed overview of the rise of the FSLN and the conditions in Nicaragua after its takeover of the government, see Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977-1990*, (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996).

² The authors of this report included L. Francis Bouche, Roger W. Fontaine, David C. Jordan, Gordon Sumner, Lewis Tambs, some of whom were given appointed positions in the Reagan administration. Lewis Tambs, for example was named the U.S. ambassador to Columbia in the early years of the administration

³ The Committee of Santa Fe, "A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties," republished in *Vital Interests: The Soviet Issue in U.S. Central American Policy*, ed. Bruce Larkin (London, England: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988), 16-19.

on the level of political interest, but a metaphysical challenge to the Western way of life.

America's failure to realize this had led to a moment of great peril that threatened the arrival of a *Pax Sovietica*, absent a more aggressive presence in the region by the United States.⁴

While sometimes criticized as a 'discredited' and 'right-wing' manifesto even by proponents of a strong military presence in the Caribbean and Latin America, this document expressed foreign policy themes consistent with the wider Republican critique of President Carter's Administration during the 1980 election cycle.⁵ The 1980 Republican Platform used a foreign policy rationale similar to that of the Committee in its criticism of Carter.⁶ In a section written on the Americas, the platform declared that "the Carter Administration stands by while Castro's totalitarian Cuba, financed, directed, and supplied by the Soviet Union, aggressively trains, arms, and supports forces of warfare and revolution throughout the Western hemisphere...", and called for a policy that directly counteracted all Soviet and Marxist activity in the region.⁷

The election of Ronald Reagan signified a shift in American foreign policy aimed at Central America. Reflecting on this shift, Carter appointee Robert Pastor remarked that while the Carter administration saw in the Sandinista regime a potential ally, Ronald Reagan saw a Marxist threat. Whereas Carter tended to approach the problems in Nicaragua with an eye toward diplomacy and economic aid as a way to ease tensions, Reagan took a more hard-

⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁵ Bruce Larkin, "Forward," *Vital Interests: The Soviet Issue in U.S. Central American Policy*, ed. Bruce Larkin, ed. (London, England: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988), 3.

⁶ Glenn P. Hastedt and Anthony Ekserowicz, "Perils of Presidential Transition," *Seton Hall Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, (Winter/Spring, 2001): 75

⁷ Republican National Committee, *Republican Platform of 1980*, Adopted in Detroit, Michigan, July 15, 1980.

line approach, eventually cutting off all economic assistance and providing military support to the FSLN's opponents.⁸

The differences in perspective had a clear affect on policies promoted by Reagan and Carter administrations. Money was channeled to the Contra movements, regularly referred to as "freedom fighters" in the Reagan White House, even after such activity was explicitly prohibited by Congress. Economic, military, and political support was also given to authoritarian regimes in the region who found themselves in their own fight against what the Reagan administration understood to be Marxist-inspired revolutionaries.⁹ The birth of the Reagan doctrine, which called for the support of anti-Marxist guerrillas who aimed to bring about democratic reform, or at the very least struggle against Soviet influence, informed Reagan's support of such guerrilla movements in Latin America.¹⁰

Alongside conservative intellectuals and more mainstream Republican pundits, political neoconservatives voiced a similar criticism of Carter's Latin American policy. Jeanne Kirkpatrick, the eventual United Nations representative under President Reagan, voiced an opinion that was widely accepted by her neoconservative counterparts. In one essay she asserted, in a manner similar to the Committee of Santa Fe, that Carter had abandoned the Monroe Doctrine as a guiding principle in American foreign policy.¹¹ In probably her most influential essay, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," Kirkpatrick went

⁸ Robert Pastor, *Condemned to Repetition: The United States and Nicaragua*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 230-231.

⁹ Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008*, (New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 165-7.

¹⁰ Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle*, 209-212

¹¹ Jeanne Kirkpatrick, "U.S. Security & Latin America," in *Vital Interests: The Soviet Issue in U.S. Central American Power*, ed. Bruce Larkin (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 1988), 51

so far as to argue that Carter's misguided policies in Latin America had effectively undermined American interests while simultaneously enhancing those of the Soviet Union.¹²

Like their political counterparts, the neoconservative Catholics took an abiding interest in the problems confronting Central America and the threat of communism in the region. George Weigel, for example, insisted on America's obligation to help Latin American countries resist the geopolitical interests of the Soviet Union and to help build governments that are responsive to the wishes of their peoples.¹³ Deeply concerned about the threat that the Soviet Union posed in Latin America, the neoconservative Catholics were equally interested in the debate taking place in their own Church on the same topic, a debate that also raged in other Christian churches. Understanding the nature of this debate will help to clarify the links between the neoconservative Catholics' political and religious identity.

THE DEBATE OVER LATIN AMERICA IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In Conflict with the Catholic Bishops

The differences between the competing positions promoted by the neoconservative Catholics and the American Catholic bishops on the issue of Central America are stark. The framework each used to interpret the underlying issues in the region differed, as did the solutions promoted to counter these problems. While it would be impossible to determine definitively whose analysis is correct in the space available here, laying out these differences

¹² Jeanne Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships and Double Standards," *Commentary*, (November, 1979): 34-45.

¹³ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 310

will help to place the neoconservative Catholics in relation to the bishops while further clarifying their public identity.

By 1975 a well developed opposition to the Somoza regime had emerged in Nicaragua that was rooted in a reaction to the oppressive and corrupt measures instituted by this regime. Radical and moderate forces inside the country began vocally to oppose the Somoza family and began to work together for its downfall. Simultaneously, segments of the Nicaraguan Catholic Church, which was traditionally of a conservative political bent, began to voice discontent with existing conditions and at times cooperated with these revolutionary movements.¹⁴ By the late 1970s the Catholic bishops of the United States began to voice opposition to the abuses of the Somoza government. In a June 12, 1979 statement, Bishop John Quinn condemned with “utter disgust and horror... the ruthless terror being visited upon the people of Nicaragua.”¹⁵ One month later the Somoza regime fell and in the coming years the Sandinistas solidified control over the country.

The first major document issued by the American Catholic bishops on Nicaragua in the aftermath of the Sandinista revolution was a product of their 1981 national meeting. In this statement the bishops laid out a framework for understanding the problems in the region. The core principle held that geopolitical factors are at best a secondary contributing factor in regional conflicts and asserted that “the dominant challenge is the internal conditions of

¹⁴ Manzar Foorooohar, *The Catholic Church and Social Change in Nicaragua*, (New York, NY: State University Press, 1989) 211-214. Manzar further argues that the massive earthquake that hit Nicaragua in 1972 functioned as the catalyst that pushed Nicaraguan Catholics against the Somoza leadership. In the aftermath of the earthquake foreign aid aimed at helping the Nicaraguan was largely embezzled by the Nicaraguan government, leaving many people to suffer needlessly, 94-104.

¹⁵ Bishop John Quinn, “U.S. Policy and the Conflict in Nicaragua,” *Origins* 9, issue 6 (June 28, 1979).

poverty and the denial of basic human rights which characterize many of these societies. These conditions, if unattended, become an invitation for interventions.”¹⁶ Rather than interpreting the conflicts plaguing the region as a product of the Cold War and a sign of communist aggression in Latin America, the bishops asserted an economic and humanitarian basis to the problem. While not denying the presence of foreign influences, the bishops believed that these influences took advantage of underlying revolutionary impulses that emerged in reaction to economic and social injustices already present. From Bishop Quinn’s letter cited above, to at least the mid-Eighties, the bishops’ position remained consistent in this conviction.¹⁷

By the 1980s the neoconservative Catholics became convinced that in Latin America Soviet-Marxist aggression and not economic injustice was at the core of problems in the region. Throughout his writings, Novak emphasized the influence that Marxist-inspired and Soviet-funded revolutionaries have had on the political and economic turmoil in the region. Philosophically, Novak argued, the Sandinista government in Nicaragua and the revolutionaries throughout Central America who looked to them as an example are little different from any Marxists of the Soviet bloc.¹⁸

¹⁶ United States Catholic Conference, “U.S. Bishops’ Statement on Central America,” *Origins* 1, issue 25 (Dec., 3, 1981): 3.

¹⁷ For examples of this reiteration see Archbishop James Hickey, Archbishop Patrick Flores, and Archbishop Peter, Gerety, “Fact Finding Mission to Central America,” 12, issue 38 (March 3, 1983); Archbishop John Roach, “Toward a Diplomatic, Non-Military Solution in Central America,” *Origins*, 13, issue 10 (August 4, 1983); Archbishop James Hickey, “U.S. Catholic Conference Testimony on Central America,” *Origins* 12, issue 41 (March 24, 1983); Father Bryan Hehir, “Testimony on Central America,” *Origins* 13, issue 43 (April 5, 1984) .

¹⁸ Michael Novak, “On Nicaragua,” *Catholicism in Crisis* 1, no. 8, July, 1983, 1-3.

As with Novak, George Weigel rejected the bishops' conclusion that endemic poverty was the primary disruptive force in Latin America. Widespread poverty was nothing new but was, in fact, a chronic condition of the region. Instead, he argued that while socio-economic conditions were perhaps a necessary condition for the present turmoil, it was not a sufficient condition to explain these problems. A crucial element that gave rise to revolutionary forces in places like Nicaragua and El Salvador was Marxist aggression, which was typically fed through Cuban, and thus Soviet, activity. He argued that while religious leaders spent excessive energy criticizing the 'external aggression' of the Reagan administration's foreign policy in Latin America, they erred by overlooking Soviet contributions.¹⁹

Given their competing analyses, it should be no surprise that both the American bishops and the neoconservative Catholics provide contrasting solutions to the problem. Opposing President Reagan's policy positions on Nicaragua in one statement after another, the bishops criticized his perceived dependence on a military solution to the problems in Central America. In contrast, they argued that funding of counterrevolutionaries could easily prove destabilizing to the entire region. The bishops supported a two-part plan to deal with the problem. First, the administration ought to resume carefully monitored economic aid that would address the underlying problem of underdevelopment. Following the resumption of economic aid, the United States ought to abandon any attempts at unilaterally solving these difficulties and rely on a regional approach to negotiations that would include participation of countries throughout Central American. A unilateral approach, the bishops argued, would likely fail because the United States was a partisan in the debate and would thus be unduly

¹⁹ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 307-8.

biased in any negotiations. While many of these ideas can be found in a range of bishops' documents, the most systematic explanation of this position is in Cardinal Hickey's testimony before the Kissinger Commission.²⁰

The Kissinger Commission, the popular name for The National Commission on U.S. Policy in Central America, was established to investigate the problems in Central America and report to the president and to Congress on solutions to these problems.²¹ Reflecting on the Kissinger Commission some months later, Fr. Bryan Hehir testified that while the

report's style of stressing the complexity of the region's multiple crises—political, economic, military—rather than reducing the problem immediately to its geopolitical element, is a welcome shift of official statement... the inner logic of the report reaffirms and intensifies the basic direction of a policy which stands in the need of fundamental redirection.²²

The primary failure, according to Hehir, was the Commission's continued support of a policy that would emphasize a military strategy at the expense of a diplomatic and economic solution.²³ In important respects, the central role that the bishops claimed economic development would play in the creation of a stable region was never rejected by either Novak or Weigel. In fact, the importance of development was repeatedly emphasized by the neoconservative Catholics as an important component in American foreign policy both in this situation specifically and in international affairs more generally. In one instance, George Weigel wrote that "America should help facilitate the emergence of economically

²⁰ Archbishop James Hickey, "Steps Toward New U.S. Policy in Central America," *Origins* 13, issue 22 (November 10, 1983).

²¹ Kissinger Commission, *The Report of the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, (New York, NY: 1984).

²² Fr. Bryan Hehir, "Testimony on Central America, 3-4.

²³ *Ibid.*

viable societies in Central America” as a way to meet the basic needs of the people there and establish the conditions where human rights could thrive.”²⁴ Michael Novak’s extended treatise on democratic capitalism is in one respect a critique of failed socialist economic policies and a call to institute capitalist reforms that he insisted would help lead to economic prosperity both domestically and abroad.²⁵

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the neoconservative Catholics emphasized the importance of economic development, particularly in the developing world. In many respects their economic internationalism reflects an approach to economic development reminiscent of John F. Kennedy. These parallels will become more explicit below when we turn our attention to George Weigel’s stance on the Alliance for Progress, an economic policy promoted by Kennedy for the development of Latin America. By the Seventies, Weigel would argue most forthrightly in his book *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, the collapse of this foreign policy approach and its abandonment by many Catholics worldwide signified a further breakdown in the liberal Catholic tradition that had been most clearly embodied in the thought of someone like John Courtney Murray.

Alongside their support of policies promoting development, the neoconservative Catholics emphasized the importance of American power, particularly when confronting Soviet communism. Given their conviction that the root problem in Central America was Soviet activity and influence, they consequently supported, at least in principle, the usefulness of a military threat and the importance of military support for allies in the region.

²⁴ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 310.

²⁵ Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, (Lanham MD: Madison Books, 1982).

Worried that Marxists were seeking to make a home for themselves in parts of Latin America, Novak was skeptical of the value of negotiation and argued that an over-reliance on such a tactic misunderstood the Soviet threat.²⁶ By its very nature Marxism was inherently imperialistic and would inevitably use whatever means necessary to spread its ‘gospel’ message. Given the aggressive nature of communism, conflict of some sort was a likely consequence on the international plane.

Nevertheless, Novak’s position on the use of military power is at points unclear. In an article for the *National Review*, for example, Novak argued that Christians may confront this threat head on with military power since the Communist leadership of Moscow, Havana and Managua will “pay attention, alas, only to power. It is our moral and Christian responsibility to ‘dialogue’ with them in the only language they understand.”²⁷ However, in an interview given to *The New York Times* a few years later, he admitted that he did not think that military action in Nicaragua was an appropriate response.²⁸ However his position is ultimately defined on the use of the military in Latin America, he expressed skepticism regarding the efficacy of diplomatic discussions with Marxist governments and a willingness to use power in some form to achieve U.S. policy goals.

Like Novak, Weigel also recognized the legitimacy of force, at least under certain conditions, and admitted that a military response might be a legitimate avenue in response to

²⁶ Michael Novak, “To Fight or to Appear,” *National Review*, July 22, 1983, 878.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Bernard Weinraub, “On the Right: Long Wait for Foreign Policy Hero,” *The New York Times*, July 12, 1985, A12.

problems in Central America.²⁹ The bishops' resistance to the possible use of the military or military aid to allies betrayed, according to Weigel, a form of "soft neo-isolationism," that, if popularized, would undercut Reagan's ability to use American power for good in the region.³⁰ In promoting such an approach, the bishops failed to provide a nuanced understanding of the situation and never provided a fertile ground that could result in a workable solution to the problems confronting the region. As a result, Weigel argued, they failed to "create a new spectrum of morally sensitive public debate capable of leading to a more humane future in Central America . . . rather than being creators of a new debate, (the bishops) had simply become partisans at one pole of the debate already underway in American political culture."³¹

In effect, Weigel argued that rather than promoting a distinctive Catholic understanding of the problems in Latin America, the bishops had capitulated to a left-wing political perspective. Michael Novak extended this critique when in a 1981 article for the *National Review* he accused the National Catholic Conference of Bishops' Latin American expert Thomas Quigley, and by extension the Conference in general, of functioning as a mouth piece for a left-wing political perspective on Latin America.³² Both argued that this signified the abandonment of a distinctive Catholic voice and a capitulation to a pre-established, secular political perspective. In the eyes of both Novak and Weigel the National

²⁹ George Weigel, "How the U.S. Catholic Bishops Missed Their Chance to Be a Force for Peace," *This World*, no. 13 (1986): 8-10.

³⁰ Ibid, 22.

³¹ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 312.

³² Michal Novak, "The Moral Minority and the Savior," *National Review*, March 6, 1981, 228.

Catholic Conference was not the only Catholic group guilty of embracing left-wing political perspective, large segments of the Catholic intellectual class and Catholic press did the same.

The Problem with the Catholic Press

Another target of the neoconservative Catholics' ire, besides many in the American Catholic hierarchy, was the writers and editors of left-leaning Catholic magazines. Among most of these journals there was widespread disapproval of President Reagan's Latin American policies. In his book examining the Catholic Press' coverage of Central America in the Seventies and Eighties, Edward Brett wrote that "throughout the 1980s, publications such as the *National Catholic Reporter*, *America*, *Commonweal*, *Our Sunday Visitor*, and the *Catholic Worker* held firm to their primary focus, that is, to demonstrate their belief that U.S. policy toward Nicaragua was illegal and immoral and therefore needed to be changed."³³ In contrast, magazines typically considered more conservative than not, both religiously and politically, tended to present an outlook largely favorable to these same policies. These magazines include *The Wanderer*, *The National Catholic Register*, and Michael Novak's very own *Catholicism in Crisis*.³⁴

Both in the pages of the journal he co-founded, *Catholicism in Crisis*, and in his essays written for magazines like the *National Review*, Novak gave particular attention to the *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR), declaring this publication full of inaccuracies and misrepresentations of the situation in Central America. Throughout this period *NCR*

³³ Edward Brett, *The U.S. Catholic Press on Central America* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 109.

³⁴ Seen in particular chapter 7 in Brett, *The U.S. Catholic Press on Central America*, 123-157.

emerged as one of the more vocal Catholic critics of Reagan and the most sympathetic supporter of left-wing governments like the Sandinistas.³⁵ Novak not only expressed an unfavorable reading of the *NCR*'s political worldview but, as he did with the bishops, he also tried to paint Catholic intellectuals sympathetic to the *NCR* as affirming a leftist secular worldview.

In one essay fairly representative of his thought, Novak isolated a series of articles published by *NCR* in mid-1983 and accused them of accepting the Sandinista government's interpretation of events in Nicaragua.³⁶ In a cover story written in mid-1983 Arthur Jones, one time editor of *The National Catholic Reporter*, accused the Reagan administration of engaging in outright deception regarding the relationship between Nicaragua and the Soviet Union. Contrary to presidential rhetoric, argued Jones, Nicaragua was not a Marxist totalitarian regime. The Administration was also in error regarding the relationship between Nicaragua and El Salvadoran revolutionary movements—Nicaragua had stopped the flow of arms across its borders to these movements when Reagan threatened to cut off aid early in his administration. Finally, Jones accused Reagan of distorting the facts to provide an excuse to use military action, covert or otherwise, against an unfriendly regime.³⁷

Perspectives of this sort were, Novak implied, in large part a product of their over-reliance on Sandinista-friendly secular interpretations of the conflict, including ideas promoted by organizations like the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA).³⁸ Founded in

³⁵ Ibid, *The U.S. Catholic Press on Central America*, 116.

³⁶ Michael Novak, "On Nicaragua," *National Catholic Reporter*, July, 1983, 1-3.

³⁷ Arthur Jones, "U.S. Policies Built on Deception," *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 1983.

³⁸ Novak, "On Nicaragua," 1.

1975, COHA is a self-declared independent research organization in Washington, DC with a focus on inter-American affairs.³⁹ While non-partisan, the organization took a consistently antagonistic approach to the Reagan administration's Latin American policy.

At one point, COHA claimed that Reagan's activity in the region amounted to an act of international terrorism and that the Reagan administration had solidified itself as the leading exporter of terrorism worldwide.⁴⁰ At another point, COHA accused the administration of engaging in a campaign of deception that would allow the administration to continue its "classified, undeclared war against Nicaraguan innocents and the civilian Nicaraguan economy. . ."⁴¹ While criticizing the Reagan administration, COHA showed a great deal more sympathy for the Reagan administration's foreign opposition, including the Sandinista government. At various times COHA rebutted and rejected conservative accusations that the Sandinistas were running arms to El Salvador in support of revolutionaries, that the Sandinistas had aggressive intentions towards their other neighbors, that the Soviet Union was providing military assistance to the Sandinistas, and that they were engaging in widespread human rights abuses.⁴²

³⁹ Council on Hemispheric Affairs website, <http://www.coha.org/about-coha/>

⁴⁰ Council on Hemispheric Affairs, Press Release, "Administration Engages in International Terrorism, (April 13, 1984), accessed March 10, 2009, http://www.coha.org/Press%20Release%20Archives/archives_index.htm.

⁴¹ Council on Hemispheric Affairs, Press Release, "Senate to vote on Funding Today for Interdiction of Non-Existent Sandinista Weapons Shipments to Salvadoran Guerrillas," June 25, 1984, http://www.coha.org/Press%20Release%20Archives/archives_index.htm

⁴² COHA, "State Department's 1982 Latin American Human Rights Report," February 11, 1983, http://www.coha.org/Press%20Release%20Archives/archives_index.htm; COHA, "House Vote Well Intentioned by Misguided," July, 29, 1983, http://www.coha.org/Press%20Release%20Archives/archives_index.htm; COHA, "Commensurate with its Security Needs," February 28, 1985, http://www.coha.org/Press%20Release%20Archives/archives_index.htm; COHA, .

By associating certain segments of the Catholic intellectual class and hierarchy with left-wing organizations and intellectuals, Novak helped to create a clearly identifiable opposition against which criticisms could be raised. When doing this, however, Novak runs the risk of pigeonholing himself and the neoconservative Catholic movement in the same way, except on the opposite side of the political spectrum. We have already seen the extent to which their political perspective on Latin America fits neatly in the context of the wider political neoconservative and conservative thought. In both cases religious identity runs the risk of being downplayed while political identity becomes the primary determinant for the positions that one takes on a range of issues.

Similarly to Michael Novak, George Weigel criticized the left-wing, Catholic, intellectual class, particularly as found in magazines like *Commonweal* and *America*. Also in agreement with Novak, he claimed that these Catholic journals all too often singled out both United States policy, primarily promoted by Reagan, and allied leadership in the region as the primary culprits that helped give rise to a revolutionary sentiment throughout Central America.⁴³ Broadly speaking, Weigel's criticisms focused on Catholic intellectuals and Church leadership, who had, he argued, abandoned the liberal Catholic tradition. This tradition, according to Weigel, affirmed "economic development coupled with political reform aimed at the creation of stable, democratic, peaceful societies capable of providing freedom, bread, and nonviolent means to settle claims of injustice."⁴⁴

⁴³ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 297-8.

⁴⁴ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 293.

Weigel's emphasis on economic development and political reform in Latin America mirrored the framework of U.S. foreign policy during the Fifties and the Sixties. On this point at least, Weigel's thought in particular, and neoconservative Catholic thought in general, fits nicely within a post-World War II perspective on foreign aid and American involvement overseas. During the 1950s, the Eisenhower administration slowly came to take seriously the importance of providing economic aid to Latin American countries, primarily as a way to inhibit the spread of communism into the Western hemisphere. While always a danger, for a long time the communist threat was far enough removed so that Latin America had been largely overlooked.⁴⁵ Following the Cuban revolution the U.S. government could no longer take for granted Latin American security now that communism was, in a very real sense, at America's back door.

Near the end of his term, Eisenhower was able to secure passage of the Social Progress Trust Fund, whose intended purpose was to increase aid to Latin America and, in doing so, to promote economic reform and development in the region. While the Fund proved largely unsuccessful, it did establish a framework that was further developed by the Kennedy administration.⁴⁶ Following Eisenhower's initial push to provide economic support to Latin America, President Kennedy introduced a program called The Alliance for Progress, a \$20 billion dollar aid package that was to be distributed over a ten-year period. As with the

⁴⁵ Michael Adamson, "'The Most Important Single Aspect of Our Foreign Policy'?: The Eisenhower Administration, Foreign Aid, and the Third World," in *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War*, ed. Kathryn Statler et al. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006), 48-59.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America*, (New York: New York: Routledge Publishing, 2007), 19-20.

Social Progress Trust Fund, the Alliance was motivated primarily by the desire to counteract Soviet expansion in the region. While Cold War interests were a central impetus for foreign aid to developing countries, this foreign policy approach presupposed a much broader philosophical worldview.⁴⁷ Popularly known as modernization theory, this worldview held that “economic aid for modernization—which was often called development aid—could be used to transform societies so that they could politically, ideologically, and economically harmonize with the United States of America.”⁴⁸ Through development aid the United States would not only keep communism at bay, but would also make the recipients of aid more like America.

George Weigel remarked that at the time of its introduction there was a great deal of support for the Alliance for Progress in Catholic circles. Its implementation would provide an important counter to Castro, who continually used Latin American poverty as a rhetorical tool to build resentment against the West.⁴⁹ Further, with the exception of certain activists, in the early 1960s the American Catholic community took for granted that “America had a responsibility to actively intervene in the world... the necessity of engagement was accepted as a first principle.”⁵⁰ While military intervention might at times be necessary, a program such as the Alliance for Progress was a peaceful form of economic intervention aimed at helping Latin American reformers.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy*, 43-5.

⁴⁸ Mark Haeefe, “Rostow’s Stages of Economic Growth,” in *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War*, ed. David Engerman, et al. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 97, ft. 1.

⁴⁹ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 292.

⁵⁰ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 190.

⁵¹ Ibid.

While the hopes for such a program were high, the Alliance for Progress is largely deemed to have been a failure. Competing political interests, bureaucratic infighting, cultural differences and growing distrust between Latin American governments and the United States tended to undermine the long-term goals of the Alliance.⁵² As the 1960s progressed, disillusionment with American intervention became more pronounced. As already noted elsewhere, part of the shift against American intervention had to do with the fallout from Vietnam and a growing disenchantment with America's role in the post-World War II world. Many Americans began to question their nation's international presence and many others began to doubt the value of the American experiment that had for some time been taken for granted. In light of these changing perceptions of American life, the Alliance at times took on the cast of imperial overstretch rather than a sign of well meaning developmental aid as it was initially intended to be.⁵³

At the core of this critique was a new economic worldview was a theory of underdevelopment that asserted that the "peripheral" countries of the world economy could not develop as long as they remained enslaved by Third World were unjustifiably made dependent on the economic and political power of the First World. Dependency often theorists argued that developed nations, in control of the international capitalist engine, took advantage of the developing world's natural resources, labor force, and other economic assets for their own benefit. Radical versions of this theory held that capitalist activity thus consigned the developing world into a permanent state of underdevelopment and total

⁵² Piki Ish-Shalom, "Theory Gets Really Real and the Case for a Normative Ethic: Rostow, Modernization Theory, and the Alliance for Progress," *International Studies Quarterly* 50 (2006,): 302-5.

⁵³ See in particular Chapter 8 in Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy*.

dependency. Milder versions held that the benefits accrued by economic growth would be dramatically weighted toward the developed world at the expense of the developing ones, thus relegating them to a state of relative dependency.

Interest in dependency theory was not simply a pastime of secular intellectuals but was also embraced in some Catholic and non-Catholic Christian intellectual circles, both domestically and abroad. In this context, dependency theory helped to form a religious and philosophical worldview as much as it reflected a purely economic calculus. Providing a positive assessment of the Alliance for Progress and other foreign aid programs that he judged to be in line with a proper understanding of Catholic political thought, Weigel strongly criticized Catholics who took a more pessimistic line of thought. Analyzing the abandonment of American Catholic support for economic intervention overseas, he isolated two essays in particular that signified this shift. Both were written in the magazine *America* and both provided a skeptical assessment of the American presence in Latin America.

The first essay, written by a former USAID worker from Brazil named Denis Goulet, was titled “A Missing Revolution.”⁵⁴ Throughout his essay Goulet developed a sharp critique of Western involvement in Latin America. He argued that while programs like the Alliance for Progress preached the virtues of democracy, economic development, and national self-reliance, in reality they do little more than export a crass materialism that tended to benefit already established right-wing governments and corporations. These American-friendly institutions in turn do little more than support American foreign policy positions that

⁵⁴ For the reference in Weigel’s work, see *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 202. For the article citation, see Denis Goulet, “A Missing Revolution,” *America*, April 2, 1966, 438-440.

are unfriendly toward anything leftist and downright disdainful of anything smelling of communism or socialism.⁵⁵ For the developing world to flourish it was important that America shift its sights away from immediate, self interested political goals and enter into a relationship of true solidarity with foreign powers. America must undergo a kind of moral conversion that rejects an economy based solely on self-interested acquisitiveness and excessive wealth. Failure to do otherwise will result in a system beneficial to those in the developed world at the expense of those in the developing one.⁵⁶

Following the logic of the first essay, the second essay of importance cited by Weigel, titled “The Seamy Side of Charity,” traced out the ways in which American political and economic power can be expressed and reinforced through cultural and religious structures.⁵⁷ Ivan Illich, the essay’s author, argued that while done in good faith, missionary movements from the United States and other Western countries to Latin America come at a cost. Although beneficial in some respects, missionaries necessarily bring with them a political culture “that colors the public image of the Church... the Alliance (for Progress) appears directed by Christian justice and is not seen for what it is: a deception designed to maintain the status quo.”⁵⁸ In doing so, Illich argued, Church leadership had married itself to a political regime and an economic program that distorted the Gospel and reinforced American political power in the region. While the American political regime expressed interests in the life of the average Latin American, it had a more abiding interest in its own short-term

⁵⁵ Goulet, 438-9.

⁵⁶ Ibid, “The Missing Revolution,” 439-40.

⁵⁷ For Weigel’s citation see *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 292. For the article, see Ivan Illich, “The Seamy Side of Charity,” *America*, January 21, 1967, 88-91.

⁵⁸ Illich, 90.

political goals: namely, its struggle against communism.⁵⁹ Taken together, both essays reveal a deep skepticism over American power expressed internationally and an American Church that provides an all too willing defense of that power.

Laying out their viewpoint so as to reject it, Weigel argued that both Goulet and Illich are representative of an increasingly large segment of the Catholic Church that claimed

...the fundamental problems were not in Latin America, but in North America. Latin American poverty was caused by North American greed and acquisitiveness. Foreign aid was a sop to guilty consciences at best, and an imperial instrument of control at worst. A radical transformation of the economic system of the North was the precondition to any genuine progress.⁶⁰

Growing skepticism of American foreign policy aimed at the developing world was not restricted to domestic academic discussions in either Catholic or secular circles. A sharp reaction also occurred, and was in some respects born, in the developing world itself. In the Latin American Catholic community this reaction to U.S. foreign policy was perhaps most notable in liberation theology. While indebted to dependency theorists, liberation theology was not merely a product of an economic or political worldview but emerged following the Second Vatican Council and applied an interpretation of the Council to a distinctly Latin American milieu. In the final section of this chapter we will explore how throughout much of the Eighties liberation theology proved to be a constant thorn in the side of the neoconservative Catholics, who viewed it as both a distortion of the Catholic faith and representative of an unworkable and unrealistic political agenda.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid, *The Missing Revolution*, 91

⁶⁰ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 202

⁶¹ Philip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond*, (Oak Park, IL: Pantheon Books, 1987), 64-68.

LIBERATION THEOLOGY AND THE LATIN AMERICAN CHURCH

John XXIII's invocation of the Second Vatican Council marked an important turning point in the life of the Catholic Church that renewed engagement with the world, a world with which the Church had often been at odds with since at least the onset of the French Revolution. While at times halting, throughout the twentieth century the Church began slowly to reconcile herself to the modern world and, during the post-World War II period, actively engaged a variety of features that she had until recently deemed irreconcilable with the Faith. While debates raged over the Second Vatican Council's proper interpretation, the Council helped to legitimate this process of reconciliation in the eyes of many Catholics.

The Council signified not only a renewed engagement with the modern world in general, but also a recognized that the world with which the Church was engaged extended beyond a European context. While modern Catholic social teaching is often said to have begun with Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, its focus was largely centered on European concerns; the non-European world was of peripheral interest. Throughout the encyclical he primarily addressed issues related to labor/employer relations, capitalism and socialism, and other concerns that, while applicable to a broad audience, were primarily focused on a European one.⁶² By the 1960s the situation had changed dramatically. In an essay on the Vatican II document *Guadium et Spes*, the theologian David Hollenbach wrote that at the Council

the presence of Asian, African, and Latin American participants highlighted the need to avoid viewing Christianity as a European religion to be exported to the rest of the world along with European culture. The challenge now was

⁶² Pope Leo XII, *Rerum Novarum* .

to relate Christianity to the diverse cultures of the world in ways that respected their differences and avoided domination or manipulation in the name of the gospel.⁶³

Following the close of the Council many of the non-European Catholic bishops applied a particular interpretation of the Council to their own political, economic and cultural contexts. This tendency was evident with the Latin American bishops during their 1968 conference at Medellin. In contrast to a traditional approach that tended to take moral principles or theological concepts and then apply them to a given set of social conditions, the bishops at Medellin took into account the political, economic, and social conditions in Latin America and understanding the Faith in light of these conditions. This approach rejected a deductive based theological approach and instead emphasized the distinctive circumstances confronting a historically situated society. Within the context of the Catholic Church in Latin America, this tended to lead them to an overt condemnation of unjust economic and political structures that oppressed large segments of the population.⁶⁴ The Medellin Conference, along with the critical perspective of modern society that it provided, helped lay the groundwork for the emergence of liberation theology.⁶⁵

Liberation theology was not only influenced by developments in the Church that were taking place in a Latin American context; developments in Europe also had an important influence. In the post war years, most of the leading liberation theologians studied in one or

⁶³ David Hollenbach, S.J., "Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*," in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth Himes et al. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 285.

⁶⁴ Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 27.

⁶⁵ Hollenbach, 286-8. In addition to its Latin American influences, it is important to note that liberation theology is also heavily indebted to European 'political theology,' particularly as is found in the writings of Johann Baptist Metz.

more of the major academic centers in Europe, and were thus not all that different from their contemporary European counterparts, at least at the outset. Gustavo Gutierrez, for example, was sent to study philosophy at Louvain and, following that, theology in Lyons, France. Here they would have been exposed to some the social sciences and various theories related Marxism and Evolution.⁶⁶ Theologically, it would also not have been unusual for the liberation theologians to become familiar with, and even influenced by, European theologians like Jurgen Moltmann and Johannes Baptist Metz, “both of whom theological theories intended to relate theology more directly and critically to the problem of the modern secular world.”⁶⁷ For example, the liberation theologian Jose Ignacio Gonzalez Faus at one pointed admitted that “Metz deserves undeniable credit for having opened our eyes to.... ‘bourgeois religion,’” which emphasized an individualistic spirituality that undermines and weakens the communal nature of the Faith.⁶⁸

Given the multifaceted character of liberation theology it is impossible to explore it fully here. Liberation theology is a varied and multifaceted school of thought and a comprehensive understanding would require an in depth reading of other Latin American theologians, including Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, Hugo Assman, Juan Luis Segundo, Jon Sobrino, and others. Given considerations of space we will use Gustavo Gutierrez’s views on liberation theology as a guide. In particular, his *A Theology of Liberation* will function as

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Klaiber, “Prophets and Populists: Liberation Theology, 1968-1988,” *The Americas* 46, no. 1 (July, 1989), 4-5. It was during his studies in Louvain that Gutierrez did his licentiate on Freud.

⁶⁷ Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Cross Roads: Democracy or Revolution* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 32.

⁶⁸ Jose Ignacio Gonzales Faus, “Anthropology: The Person and the Community,” *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria et al. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 506-509.

the primary resource in this endeavor; it is for all intensive purposes one of the seminal work for liberation theology.⁶⁹ While Gustavo Gutierrez's writings provide some of the key insights to liberation theology, it would be a mistake to assume that his thought somehow encapsulates liberation theology as such.

Three elements related to Gutierrez's writings will be briefly summarized. The summary will start with an examination of his methodological outlook, move to his economic worldview, and end with an analysis of his theological perspective that links his political worldview to his ecclesiology. While interested in basic questions related to the economy and political theory, it will be important to notice that while Gutierrez emphasized, for example, an economic program of sorts, this program is taken up within the context of a larger theological vision. At its core, liberation theology is providing a religious vision and not simply a politico-economic vision for which it is often criticized. This summary will be followed by the neoconservative Catholic critique of Gutierrez' thought in particular, and liberation theology in general.

From the very first page of the introduction to his work, *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez rejected a theological method that relies on deduction. Instead, he engaged in a theological approach that begins from the shared experiences of his people and uses this perspective as a springboard to develop a theological framework to make sense of these experiences. It is in the context of *praxis*, which is the critical analysis of human experience and, for the Latin American Church, the experience of the poor in the light of God's word

⁶⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

that guides the thought of Gutierrez.⁷⁰ It is in this context that his emphasis on “preferential option for the poor” becomes so vital. In an essay written some years after his *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez remarked that while this term is a fundamental characteristic of the Christian message, it is the Latin American Church that has reinvigorated the term for the Church in the modern age.⁷¹

On the economic front, Gutierrez mixed a Marxist analysis within a Christian framework. He called for a complete reconstitution of the international economic system, one that he claimed had only served to maintain those already in power and further oppress those who are already powerless. Rejecting the prevailing international capitalist structures already in place, Gutierrez called for the implementation of a socialist economy that would assist in lifting up the poor and the downtrodden.⁷² To do this, however, the system must be turned on its head. He wrote that the poor are beginning to realize that “their own development will come about only with a struggle to break the domination of the rich countries . . . only a radical break from the status quo, that is, a profound transformation of the private property system . . . that would break this dependence would allow for a change to a new society . . .”⁷³ In this radical reworking of the world’s economic system, the Church ought to step forward and play a primary role.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Ibid, 5-10

⁷¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, “Renewing the Option for the Poor,” in *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity and the Americas*, ed. David Batstone (New York, NY: Routledge Publishing, 1997), 69.

⁷² Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 13-26.

⁷³ Ibid, 17.

⁷⁴ For a well developed outline of liberation theology ecclesiology, see T. Howland Sanks and Brian Smith, “Liberation Theology: Praxis, Theory, Praxis,” *Theological Studies* 38, no. 1 (March, 1977).

From Gutierrez's perspective, this pursuit does not amount to a worldly ethic garbed in religious clothing, but reflects a theological imperative rooted in the mission and identity of the Church. This theological outlook rejects the 'separation of planes' distinction that tends to remove the Church from having an active role in political life. The modern tendency to separate the role of the Church from secular political life is, according to Gutierrez, in need of reevaluation. Abandoned is a passive Church that lay prostrate in the face of political powers, or which functioned as an apologist for the prevailing political system. Affirmed is the recognition that while the Kingdom is not of this world it can partially be realized in this world and the Church should be at the forefront of this disclosure.⁷⁵ The religious activity of the Church and the question of social justice can no longer be distinguished so totally as to inhibit the Church and its members, both lay and clergy alike, from working for a more just world.⁷⁶

Gutierrez's association between the building up of a more just society as a task of the Church in the world grounded his economic position in the context of a theological vision. It is through 'liberation' from injustice of every sort that God is encountered.⁷⁷ By recognizing her own cooperation with unjust systems in the past, repenting for that cooperation, and becoming politically involved so as to overcome any modern day injustices, the Church will live out her mission more completely.⁷⁸ Gutierrez argued that the Church ought not sharply distinguish secular activities from religious ones and instead recognize her responsibility as a

⁷⁵ Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 28-929.

⁷⁶ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 41-6.

⁷⁷ Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 26.

⁷⁸ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 63-5.

religious institution to “take a stand against the established order and publicly and continually denounce specific forms of economic exploitation and violation of the rights and dignity of the poor.”⁷⁹

While not opposed to every feature promoted by Gutierrez, the neoconservative Catholics took issue with much of what he put forth. Disagreements include a politico-economic critic that focused on both the sociological underpinnings of liberation theology and the more theoretical political philosophy that they promoted. They also took liberation theologians to task from the point of view of the latter’s ecclesiological considerations. Each of these critiques will be briefly spelled out below.

THE NEOCONSERVATIVE CATHOLIC CRITIQUE OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The Politico-Economic Critique

Although critical of liberation theology on many points, one important point of agreement consisted in the liberation theologians’ and Novak’s affirmation of the “preferential option for the poor” as a fundamental moral principle that ought to guide the Catholic Church’s social teaching and action.⁸⁰ Given that both expressed agreement on this option, the question that emerged centered on the most effective mechanisms that will benefit the poor and lift them out of poverty. On the answer to this question, the neoconservative Catholics and liberation theologians differ dramatically.

⁷⁹ Sanks, 16.

⁸⁰ Michael Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions: Freedom with Justice*, second edition (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 192.

We have already seen above that liberation theologians tended to place much of the blame for Third World poverty on the international capitalist system that creates systems of dependence that benefit rich nations at the expense of poor ones. Novak, on the other hand, argued that capitalism, properly understood and applied, will in the long run benefit the poor. In his book, *Will it Liberate*, Novak notes that his objections to liberation theology are not primarily theological in nature but rather rooted in what he believed were flaws in political economy.⁸¹ These ideas are developed in a series of books that he has since referred to as his trilogy on political life, which include his *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, and *Will it Liberate*.⁸² Taking for granted the socialist worldview assumed by many liberation theologians, Novak argued that this kind of system is inadequate when it comes to diminishing poverty and promoting economic development. While liberation theology promoted a preferential option for the poor, the economic system it promoted was detrimental to its stated objectives. If this were not enough, Novak argued, liberation theology tended to remain in the arena of rhetoric. In other words, while liberation theologians talk a good game about justice and oppression, they do not engage in the hard work of envisioning what institutional structures would be adequate to further their moral vision.

The first line of argument he uses against liberation theology is a practical one, namely that the economic theory that liberation theologians presuppose will not benefit the poor. As an economic theory, Novak argued that socialism has failed to be a reliable source

⁸¹ Michael Novak, *Will it Liberate: Questions about Liberation Theology* (Manwah, NJ: Paulist Press: 1986), 30.

⁸² Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, xvii.

for economic development. He contrasts the failure of socialism with the successes of democratic capitalism. In the introduction to his book *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Novak examined some of the successes of capitalism, declaring that “the invention of the market economy in Great Britain and the United more profoundly revolutionized the world between 1800 and the present than any other single force.”⁸³ Socialism, in contrast, has proven time and again to be “blind, inefficient, constantly in excess or in shortage, and discouraging to invention.”⁸⁴

A second, and related, criticism that Novak unloaded against liberation theology was of a more theoretical nature. In its early formulations, liberation theology placed a great deal of emphasis on dependency theory. This theory held that through the international capitalist system developed nations, the ‘center’ creates systems of dependence that ensnares the underdeveloped world, the ‘periphery’, in a cycle of poverty. While keeping the developing world in a cycle of dependence, rich nations benefit from cheap resources that will fuel their own economic growth. Thus, the poverty of Latin America has less to do with Latin America and more to do with the rich Western worlds’ economic imperialism.

Novak rejected dependency theory as a reliable guide to understanding the economy. While noting the underdeveloped state of much of Latin America, he argued that the problem with this region is, in effect, not too much capitalism, but too little. For centuries, both Church and state in Latin America have tended to resist capitalist enterprise, and, according to Novak, thus resisted the economic system that has shown successes in bringing about

⁸³ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 17.

⁸⁴ Novak, *Will it Liberate*, 174-5.

development.⁸⁵ The failure of the Latin American economy is thus not dependence on the developed world but in the failure to nurture an economic system that would help bring about development.

To buttress his point, Novak turned to the example of Japan, which, at the end of World War II, was in shambles. Given its lack of natural resources and reliance on the United States in the decades following World War II for its economic recovery, one would imagine that its conditions would, today, be similar to that of Latin America, if not worse. He noted that many countries of the Asian rim have in fifty years time been demonstrably more successful at overcoming poverty than Latin American countries and proceeded to ask how this apparent discrepancy could be explained in light of the assumptions built into dependency theory?⁸⁶

A final criticism of liberation theology is sociological in nature. Novak claimed that, while liberation theology expresses a kind of prophetic condemnation of capitalism and injustice that brings with it a revolutionary excitement, liberation theologians too often speak in generalities and vague propositions.⁸⁷ Socialism functions as an exciting symbol to encapsulate what liberation theologians envision after the collapse of international capitalism, but without further development or some concrete demonstration as to what socialism entails institutionally, it remains an empty concept. At its core liberation theology “has no concrete vision of political economy. It refuses to describe the institutions of human

⁸⁵ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 276-280.

⁸⁶ Michael Novak, “The Case Against Liberation Theology,” *The New York Times*, Oct 21, 1984, SM86; Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 189.

⁸⁷ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 113.

rights, economic development, and personal liberties that will be put in place after the revolution . . . ”⁸⁸

Underlying Novak’s critique of liberation theology is the notion that, when discussing economics and political theory, specificity matters. While one can speak of social justice and the evils of international capitalism, if there is not a clear conception as to how the proposed solution will actually be institutionalized, one is left with very little on which to stand. Novak argued on this point that “The move from ‘social justice’ to ‘political economy’ is crucial. For the principles of social justice represent a very high degree of abstraction... but the principles of political economy move decisively toward concretion. To choose a political economy is to choose a fundamental *ordo* or ordering of basic institutions.”⁸⁹

Liberation theologians, according to Novak, continually failed to lay out a clearly defined institutional framework that will ground their broader economic and political worldview. Too often the liberation theologians remained vague regarding the institutional structures that would embody the ideas put forth. One could find multiple examples of this criticism in his writings; two brief mentions will suffice here. In one place Novak claimed of liberation theologians that “one finds in them minimal concrete descriptions of persons, events and institutions. Their tone is inspirational and hortatory . . . Liberation theology is remarkably abstract.”⁹⁰ In another place he stated that “one of the most striking things about

⁸⁸ Novak, *Will it Liberate*, 31.

⁸⁹ Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 35.

⁹⁰ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 293; .

the writing of liberation theologians is its abstractness. Far from being descriptive, concrete and practical, it is intricately speculative, ideological, and academic.”⁹¹

For the neoconservative Catholics the failure of liberation theologians to properly address the importance of institutional structures is not a problem that is strictly relegated to the political and economic spheres. They further argued that in the writings of the liberation theologians there are serious problems related to the way in which they understand how the “Church” ought to be institutionalized in the world. Turning to this problem the neoconservatives provide an ecclesiological critique of liberation theology, claiming that liberation theology promoted a distorted vision of the Church by relegating it to the role of a partisan actor with a mission that is all too much of the world.

The Ecclesiological Critique

Shortly after Gustavo Gutierrez penned his seminal work, *A Theology of Liberation*, Richard Neuhaus authored a review of it in the journal *Worldview*, titled “Liberation Theology and the Captivities of Jesus.”⁹² Noting the importance of the work and the stature of Gutierrez the theologian, Neuhaus provided a rather critical account of the dangers that his theology entails. Initially, he admitted to what is in effect an inevitable consequence of theology: the tendency to compartmentalize the Christian message in the context of a given culture or historical period. This is, he argued, what Gutierrez does when he uses Latin America as his starting point in the development of his theology. Noting this, Neuhaus

⁹¹ Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 186.

⁹² Richard John Neuhaus, “Liberation Theology and the Captivities of Jesus,” *Worldview* (June, 1973): 41-48.

warns of the “captivities of Jesus,” and the dangers that emerge insofar as our historical and geographical place helps define our understanding of a given faith. Nevertheless, while a danger, Neuhaus claims that no matter what the theological perspective there is always “a degree of inevitability in our tendency to take the gospel culturally captive.”⁹³

In this respect, at least, Gustavo Gutierrez’s theology is not exceptional. What is exceptional, Neuhaus insisted, is Gutierrez’s tendency to become so mired in the parochial conditions in Latin America that he distorted the universal claims of Christianity that would otherwise function as a counterbalance to these ‘captivities.’ Gutierrez’s struggle against what he sees to be imperialist capitalism and his application of the Christian faith to that struggle led him to an identification of the Church’s mission with this revolutionary struggle.⁹⁴ This identification of the Church’s mission with the revolutionary struggle against the developed world leads Gutierrez to a vision of the Church that is no longer “a meeting place where understanding can be sought, ideas shared and communion celebrated among those on opposite sides of the barracks. The Church must decide, must make an unambiguously partisan commitment.”⁹⁵ In claiming this, Neuhaus is arguing that such a vision radically distorts the role of the Church in the world and the mission she is called to live out.

Some fifteen years after the publication of this review essay, Neuhaus expanded on many of the same themes in Part IV of his book *The Catholic Moment*. A summary of his argument follows. At the core of his critique is his assertion that liberation theologians lay

⁹³ Ibid, 42.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 46-7.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 48.

the groundwork for an overly partisan church. On this point George Weigel was in agreement, declaring that “liberation ecclesiology was self consciously at the service of a partisan church. The Church must be a partisan in the creation of a this worldly utopia, the Kingdom of justice that would result in peace.”⁹⁶ In this respect, Neuhaus argues, liberation theology is straightforward. He wrote that for liberation theologians “the Christian Gospel is a message of social justice; social justice is measured and established by the role of the poor; identification with the poor means identification with their struggle for justice, which is a struggle for socialism.”⁹⁷ Identifying liberation theology with a political agenda is not an inherently misguided venture. Where it becomes problematic is when the long view of history, wherein the Kingdom is still to come, becomes lost in light of a secular political vision.⁹⁸

The over-identification of the Church with a political agenda runs the risk of losing the Church’s spiritual identity to a political one. This is, he claims, what happened with liberation theology. In the pre-Vatican II era, the Church often flirted with right-wing political entities that resisted the revolutionary fervor sometimes found in places like post-revolutionary France and pre-unified Italy. But in this case the reemergence of Christendom is not reflected in the marriage of the church to right-wing authoritarians such as Franco in Spain, but to left-wing ones such as Marxists in Nicaragua.⁹⁹ Rejecting a ‘distinction of planes’ model that would enable the “church to liberate itself from its misalliance with the

⁹⁶ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 289.

⁹⁷ Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment*, 176.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 184-5.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

regimes of the earthly,” Neuhaus argued that adherents of liberation theology had, more often than not, aligned themselves with left-wing movements that distorted the proper relationship between Church and state.¹⁰⁰

The allegedly improper Church/world relationship that emerged was little different from the right-wing Constantinianism prevalent in earlier decades; it is inherently monistic.¹⁰¹ If we recall our discussion in Chapter Two, one of the principles reiterated time and again by the neoconservative Catholics is the inevitable fact of pluralism in the world. The promotion of a monistic view of the world, intentionally or otherwise, inevitably leads to a distorted view of the Church. In drawing this contrast to liberation theology, Neuhaus goes so far as to argue that pluralism is not merely an accidental condition of our time but is part of the providential purpose of God. One could assume, following this logic, that a monistic conception of the Church and the world affirm something contrary to this providential purpose.¹⁰²

CONCLUSION

Writing in his *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, Michael Novak expressed the concern that the path marked out by liberation theology is one that “is ill-defended against state tyranny, is vulnerable to a new union of church and state (this time on the left), and is likely to lead to economic decline.”¹⁰³ While the neoconservative Catholics provided a potent criticism of liberation theology on the basis of the latter’s political and economic theories, at

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 192.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, 193.

¹⁰³ Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*, 314.

the core of their criticism is the contention that the liberation theologians presuppose a bad ecclesiology. This failed ecclesiology opened the door for a political activism that is inconsistent with the proper role for the Church in the world. In short, if the liberation theologians properly situated the Church in the world and understood the relationship that the Church was called to have with the world, it would be much more difficult to promote the political theology that the liberation theologians do promote. In this way, their ecclesiological critique is prior to their political and economic ones. The neoconservative Catholics emphasis on the primacy of ecclesiological issues is not restricted to the liberation theologians. They level a similar critique against the U.S. Catholic bishops as it relates to the involvement of the bishops in political affairs. In the next and final chapter the bishops' political activities will be examined in more detail and the ecclesiological critique that the neoconservative Catholics use against the bishops will be fleshed out more completely.

Chapter 6

The looming threat of communism and the political turmoil in Latin America and elsewhere were flashpoints that led to contentious debates both inside and outside the Catholic Church during the Eighties. With the election of Ronald Reagan and the emergence of conservatism as a vital national force, liberal economic policies that had been on the upswing since at least the New Deal came under increasing criticism. The Catholic hierarchy's publication of the pastoral letters on war and peace and on the economy, taken alongside their commentary on liberation theology and Central America, placed them in the midst of debates that subjected them to rhetorical fire from both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Given that the last chapter already covered the issues relevant to Central America during this period, this chapter will focus in particular on the bishops' pastoral letters *The Challenge of Peace* and *Economic Justice for All*.

Important as the pastoral letters might have been to the wider debate, they were especially important in helping to demarcate competing political perspectives and policy differences in the American Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, much of the commentary on the letters has focused on policy differences in the different segments of the Church and civil society. While this is an important point of discussion, it has the unfortunate tendency to obscure a logically prior and at least equally, if not more, important issue. For the neoconservative Catholics at least, the debates that raged over the pastoral letters exhibited an ecclesiological dimension that was more fundamental than its public policy one. This claim may be somewhat surprising given the amount of attention that the neoconservative

Catholics gave to the policy implications of the letters. Michael Novak wrote extensively on, and often against, the economic pastoral. He became actively involved in organizations that opposed the bishops' policy proposals, and was never shy when it came to criticizing the various draft statements on war and peace. George Weigel, while not as deeply involved in discussions over the economic pastoral, was very engaged in the one on war and peace, both before and after its publication. Richard Neuhaus is a bit of an exception in this regard. He did not become as involved in either debate, although when he did comment, his statements tended to mirror those of Novak and Weigel. Regardless of their varying points of emphasis, all three neoconservative Catholics developed an overlapping ecclesiological critique that challenged the Church's engagement in secular affairs. This tendency was exemplified in, although not confined to, their response to the production of the pastoral letters.

The ecclesiological critique of Neuhaus, Novak and Weigel, and its importance to post-Vatican II Catholic identity, was exhibited in their contention regarding three shifts that they said occurred in the two decades following the Council. These shifts created the conditions that informed and shaped the bishops' political activities and perspective on public policy. First, the neoconservative Catholics were deeply concerned that in the aftermath of Vatican II the institutional Catholic Church had become preoccupied with political issues, a tendency that they claimed was the direct result of the "loss of the sense of the transcendent" among many of the leadership in the Church. While an obvious generalization, this problem was not specific to the Catholic Church but widespread in the American Christian Churches and rooted in important sociological changes that occurred in

the post-World War II world. It was in reaction to these changes that Richard Neuhaus helped to pen *The Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation* in 1977, an ecumenical document that expressed distress regarding the loss of the transcendent in religious life and a growing obsession with secular affairs on the part of the churches.

Second, having become so enmeshed in worldly political affairs, the Catholic Church had allegedly begun to form a clergy that was preoccupied with secular politics, which led to a confusion of roles and responsibilities of the clergy compared to those of the laity. These concerns had gained popularity as early as the mid-Seventies in some Catholic circles and in declarations like the *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern*. While not directly related to the production of this document, the neoconservative Catholics embraced some of the themes expressed therein and developed them more fully during the following decade.

Finally, as a result of their political activism, the clergy had succumbed to what might be called the Constantinian temptation, in which they took sides and embraced a politically partisan perspective. More distressing still for the neoconservative Catholics was that the partisanship to which much of the leadership in the Catholic Church expressed solidarity was more often than not left-wing. Concerns over this left-leaning Constantinianism received initial expression in the founding of the journal *Catholicism in Crisis*.

Although ecclesiological considerations are in a sense more fundamental to the neoconservative Catholic critique of the bishops' production of the pastoral letters and of their political activity generally, it would be a significant oversight to leave out some discussion of the bishops' statements and their relation to public policy, particularly given the

importance of these letters in American Catholic political life during this period. That said, the public policy positions of the bishops and the general framework of the pastoral letters have received significant attention in other venues, and will thus receive only brief consideration here.¹ Rather than rehashing ground that has already been covered, this chapter will begin by examining the context of the pastoral letters and particularly the involvement of the neoconservative Catholics in this process. We will then look at the ecclesiological crisis that the neoconservative Catholics argued the Church was experiencing at the time and how that played into the development of the bishops' pastoral letters.

PUBLIC POLICY, THE NEOCONSERVATIVE CATHOLICS, AND THE BISHOPS' PASTORAL LETTERS

The Challenge of Peace

¹ For examples of commentary produced on the bishops and the economy, see Eugene Kennedy, *Re-Imagining Catholicism: The American Bishops and Their Pastoral Letters* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1985); Thomas Gannon, ed., *The Catholic Challenge to the American Economy: Reflections on the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987); J. Peter Grace, "Facts, Credibility, and the Bishops' Economic Pastoral," in *Private Virtue and Public Policy: Catholic Thought and National Life*, ed. James Finn (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990); Chapter four in Camilla Kari, *Public Witness: The Pastoral Letters of the American Bishops* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004). For examples focusing on the neoconservative Catholics and the pastoral, see chapters two and three in George F. McCarthy and Royal Rhodes, *Eclipse of Justice: Ethics, Economics and the Lost Traditions of American Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992); M. McCartan, "American Catholic Reception of the Bishops' program of Social Reconstruction 1919-1986: The Continuing Conflict between Catholic Social Teaching on Economic Rights and the American Way" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 1994); J. Nash, "Economic Rights: The Status of the Debate in the United States" (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1990). For commentary on the war and peace pastoral, see Chapter three in Camilla Kari, *Public Witness: The Pastoral Letters of the American Catholic Bishops* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Jim Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1983); Eugene Kennedy, *Re-Imagining Catholicism: The American Bishops and Their Pastoral Letters* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1985), 59; James E. Dougherty, *The Bishops and Nuclear Weapons: The Catholic Pastoral Letter on War and Peace* (Hamden, CT: Archon Publishers, 1984); James Kelly, "Catholicism and Modern Memory: Sociological Reflections on Symbolic Foundations of Rhetorical Force of the Challenge of Peace," *Sociological Analysis* 45, no. 3 (Summer, 1984): 131-144.

The decision to write a pastoral letter on war and peace was initiated at the November 1980 meeting via a request that Auxiliary Bishop P. Francis Murray made to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' leadership the previous summer. Over the next few years the bishops released a series of drafts, one during the summer of 1982 and a second that following November. A final draft was completed and voted on in May 1983, passing with 238 votes in favor and only nine against.

During the three-year period during which the pastoral letter was being developed, the bishops engaged in extensive consultation with experts in the field. While the bishops were engaged in their consultation process, a contingent of politically conservative-leaning Catholics headed by James McFadden formed the American Catholic Committee, which they hoped would provide a forum to respond to the bishops' political positions. Within the context of this committee a subcommittee was formed which was given the responsibility of drafting a lay letter that would respond to the bishops' pastoral on war and peace. No lay letter ever materialized from within this subcommittee. However, following the publication of the bishops' first draft, Michael Novak picked up on this idea and, with help from his contacts in the American Catholic community, engaged in a parallel set of deliberations that resulted in the production of his own "counter-pastoral."²

This publication, titled "Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age," was authored by Novak and co-signed by more than one hundred prominent American Catholics. It critiqued the

² Michael Novak, "Reflections on War and Peace," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 4, no. 1, American Catholics: Patriotism and Dissent in War and Peace (1984): 94. Michael Novak was a member of the American Catholic Committee, although he was not connected to the subcommittee that was initially given the responsibility to write a lay letter.

bishops' vision on war and peace and in the process provided an alternative to it. It was widely circulated, initially published in Michael Novak's magazine, *Catholicism in Crisis*, republished in the *National Review* and eventually admitted into the *Congressional Record* in both the House and the Senate by Rep. Vin Weber (R-MN) and Sen. Robert Kasten (R-WI).³ Shortly after the final draft of the *Challenge of Peace* was issued, Novak's statement was published in book form with a series of other essays written by him on related topics.⁴ In the introduction to the book, William Buckley gushed over the statement's importance and declared that, in relation to the bishops, "what will prove historically most important about their own pastoral letter, is that it engendered Michael Novak's *Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age*."⁵

Novak's "counter-pastoral" and related writings were critical of the bishops' approach to questions of war and peace, both on the grounds of tone and substance, and anticipated some of the themes expressed in the later writings of the neoconservative Catholics that discussed the pastoral letter in its finished form. Novak criticized many of the bishops for their prophetic tone and for engaging in what he referred to as a kind of religious "enthusiasm," which relies more on emotional excitement than on reason. Novak is particularly critical of religious leaders like Bishops Hunthausen and Gumbleton, whose calls for "unilateral disarmament" presupposed a worldview that Novak complained was out of

³ Michael Novak, "Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age," *Catholicism in Crisis* vol. 1, no. 4 (March, 1983); Michael Novak "Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age," *National Review*, April, 1, 1983.

⁴ Michael Novak, *Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age* (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 16-17. Henceforth, all references to this publication will refer to this citation.

⁵ William Buckley, Introduction, *Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age* (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 15.

touch with reality. Their pacifistic tendencies and prophetic muttering in the face of the Soviet threat, said Novak, revealed a naiveté that led the post-Vatican II generation of American bishops to be “breathtakingly cavalier about the small fragile band of democracies left in the world, about the fate of its flock, about oppression.”⁶

Weigel signed onto this critique and argued that the primary motivation behind the *Challenge of Peace* was fear and that it embraced a “survivalist ethic,” which emphasized above all other goods the value of sheer physical survival. Their approach reflected, he continued, both a popular mood that had infected American life during the Seventies and an ascendant New Testament-style apocalypticism.⁷ The bishops had, from this perspective, engaged in a flight of “reason into panic” that Michael Novak warned against in his “Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age.” It was important, Novak argued, to refrain from a visceral reaction to the nuclear threat. Throughout the Biblical tradition God had threatened to destroy the world by fire, plague and pestilence, and the prophecies contained in the book of Revelations exceeded the horrors visited on man throughout the twentieth century. We should not, in other words, consider our generation as somehow unique.⁸

Rather than reacting from a position of fear, the neoconservative Catholics argued that it would be more productive if the bishops provided a level-headed analysis of the threat of nuclear war. They criticized the bishops’ pastoral for not doing this, and for instead

⁶ Michael Novak, “Born Again Bishops,” *National Review*, August 6, 1982, 960.

⁷ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 281-2.

⁸ Novak, “Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age,” 25-6.

focusing too extensively on the nature of nuclear weapons.⁹ Weigel commented that using weapons themselves as the starting point “distorted their entire analysis... the prism of a nuclear weapons entry point for moral discourse, resulted in the bishops’ painting a flawed portrait of contemporary reality.”¹⁰ The bishops were, according to this view, overly obsessed with nuclear weapons and failed to take into account the context within which nuclear weapons functioned. It further overshadowed any proposed solutions that could deal with the broader problem of Soviet totalitarianism.

According to the neoconservative Catholics, the bishops’ failure to provide the proper context from within which these issues could be addressed skewed their analysis of a number of other issues. This included debate over the legitimacy of no “first use” of nuclear weapons, the relationship between the just war tradition and pacificism, and a proper understanding of the notion of “peace” and its application to political affairs.¹¹ Of particular note was the debate that emerged over the legitimacy of deterrence as a foreign policy strategy, over which the bishops expressed concern.

The core of the concern on deterrence centered on considerations related to the long standing tradition of just war theory. One of the central tenets of the just war was the notion that it is illegitimate to target and kill innocent civilians. Given that it would be difficult if not impossible to use nuclear weapons in a limited fashion or in a way that isolated military targets and avoided predictable civilian casualties that would likely follow the usage of

⁹ Michael Novak, “The Fourteen Families,” *National Review*, October 1, 1982, 1222; Michael Novak, “Reconciliation and the Russians,” *National Review*, July 27, 1984, 37.

¹⁰ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 281-2.

¹¹ Michael Novak, “Mahonyism,” *National Review*, July 9, 1982, 838.

weapons of mass destruction, it would be hard to justify their use in the context of a war. Given that reality, could it be moral to possess nuclear weapons as a deterrent force and intend to use them under certain circumstances?

While supporting a deterrence strategy, Michael Novak admitted that such an approach presents a moral problem in light of the just war principles of discrimination and proportionality. But, he continued on, to abandon deterrence in American foreign policy would constitute an abandonment of the duty to defend innocent life, preserve the Constitution and keep safe the idea of political liberty. In this case, he argued, the decision concerning the legitimacy of the deterrence did not center on whether or not deterrence constituted the use of an evil means (intentionally and directly threatening civilian life through mass destruction) to achieve a good end (preventing nuclear war), but a moral choice that will prevent a greater evil.¹²

Echoing Weigel, Novak was concerned that opponents of deterrence significantly underestimated the evil intentions and nature of the Soviet Union and Marxist ideology. A foreign policy that rejected deterrence could very easily increase the likelihood of war. Lacking the threat of retaliation, and keeping in mind Novak's concern over Soviet Union's bad intentions, the lack of a strong nuclear deterrent might provide the impetus for Soviet aggression. If a strategy of nuclear deterrence could decrease the likelihood of either a conventional or nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union, Novak argued that that a deterrence strategy should at least be tolerated for the time being.¹³

¹² Novak, *Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age*, 58-62.

¹³ Michael Novak, "Making Deterrence Work," *Catholicism in Crisis*, November, 1982, 4-5.

From earlier statements to the third draft of the pastoral, the bishops' modified their approach to the strategy of deterrence and embraced, by the final draft, a view that was more compatible with that of the neoconservative Catholics. The Second Vatican Council document, *Guadium et Spes* warned that while the arms race was a "treacherous trap for humanity," that likely only served to aggravate the causes of war, they noted that many experts regard the deterrent function of nuclear weapons as promoting "peace of a sort."¹⁴ Pointing this out, the Council stopped short of condemning deterrence as a temporary measure until disarmament can begin in earnest.

Ten years later, the American bishops moved beyond this cautious critique of deterrence in their pastoral letter *To Live in Christ Jesus*.¹⁵ Here they stated that it was wrong even to threaten to use nuclear weapons, thus undercutting the very use of a deterrent strategy if embraced politically. In his book, *The Bishops and the Bomb*, Jim Castelli wrote that the "declaration that it is wrong to even threaten to use nuclear weapons against civilians was the most dramatic change in church teaching on nuclear war since the council."¹⁶ While not unequivocally condemning deterrence in the second draft, the bishops reiterated the claim made in the earlier pastoral letter. This argument was dropped in the final draft.¹⁷ From the second to the third drafts the bishops express a subtle shift in their thinking. They continued to hold that "mutual deterrence is seen as a dangerous state of affairs, to be escaped

¹⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Guadium et Spes* (Vatican City: Vatican, December 7, 1965).

¹⁵ The United States Catholic Conference, *To Live in Christ Jesus* (Washington, DC: The United States Catholic Conference, 1976).

¹⁶ Castelli, 22.

¹⁷ Robert McKim, "An Examination of a Moral Argument against Deterrence," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 13, no. 2 (Fall, 1985): 284.

whenever possible, but it has lost some of its moral repugnance, which to some extent depended on claims about the wrongness of threatening or intending to do what it is wrong to do.”¹⁸ While tentatively accepting deterrence as a viable interim strategy, limitations remained. In particular, they held that “it is not morally acceptable to intend to kill the innocent as part of a strategy of deterring nuclear war.”¹⁹

While Novak to some extent took credit for changes in the pastoral statement, the more significant source of change, he admitted, was a consequence of an informal Vatican meeting held on January 18- 19, 1983 and in coordination with the European and American bishops. The point of the meeting was to discuss the proposed American bishops’ pastoral letter on war and peace. While closed to the public, a communiqué released by the Vatican at the end of the meeting reaffirmed the moral authority and responsibility of the Church to comment on issues related to war and peace, deterrence and nuclear weapons, and highlighted the importance of this joint meeting as a way to ensure that such teachings were in continuity with Church tradition.²⁰

The Vatican-sponsored meeting forced the American bishops to rethink and revise some of the positions laid out in the draft statement. This process benefited the neoconservative Catholics as it played into a strategy of triangulation that they used over and over again throughout the Eighties. Through this strategy the neoconservative Catholics would publicly stake out a position on a given issue, proceed to argue that their position was

¹⁸ Ibid, 285.

¹⁹ The United States Catholic Conference, *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response* (Washington, DC: The United States Catholic Conference, 1983), #178.

²⁰ Vatican Press Office, “Vatican Communique on the Informal Consultation on the War and Peace Pastoral,” *Origins* (February 3, 1983).

more consistent with papal teaching, and then pit the latter teaching against that of the bishops'. One consequence of this strategy led them to conclude that the American bishops had strayed from Church teaching and thus supported positions that were not consistent with that teaching, while the neoconservative Catholics allegedly supported a more authentic vision that ought to be supported.

In light of this unspoken strategy, it is not surprising Novak would claim in hindsight that, "with the help of the laity and the Vatican, the U.S. bishops have produced a valiant text."²¹ Less overtly, Weigel echoed this view when he referred to the Vatican consultation as a "moderating influence," and noted that it was a "crucial part of the overall deliberative process."²² Given the exceedingly critical tone that the neoconservatives had for the earlier drafts, one is left with the impression that the bishops had veered well off course and it was only thanks to Vatican leadership and lay opposition to certain points in their pastoral that the bishops had been dragged back into line on Church teaching.

In a follow-up article on the pastoral letter, Novak noted that quite a few changes were made to the statement during the drafting process, many of which were to his liking. These changes included a more forthright opposition to Soviet intentions, a conditional acceptance of the deterrence strategy, a clearly defined distinction between the bishops' authority on matters of universal moral principles on the one hand and a more tenuous level

²¹ Novak, "The Bishops Have Spoken," *National Review* (June 10, 1983), 681.

²² Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 280.

of authority on issues of prudential judgment, and a downgrading of the documents' utopian tendencies.²³

Economic Justice for All

This triangulation strategy was not unique to the peace pastoral. It is also at work in their critique of the bishops' economic pastoral released three years later. During the 1980 annual gathering of the bishops, Bishop Peter Rosazza of Hartford, Connecticut, proposed that they produce a statement on the issue of capitalism. This was particularly important, he thought, given that a pastoral letter on Marxism was released during the same meeting and it would be fruitful to comment on the primary alternative to a Marxist worldview.²⁴ A decision to move forward on an economic pastoral was agreed to during the same meeting that the bishops initiated the development of a pastoral letter on war and peace. While the latter was completed more than three years before the economic pastoral letter, the bishops' intention to publish one on each topic was decided on at the same time.

The bishops' pastoral on the economy, like the *Challenge of Peace*, went through a series of revisions in coordination with widespread consultation with experts from across the country. Their first draft was released in November 1984, just after the presidential election was held. There was some concern that releasing it earlier would run the risk of politicizing

²³ Michael Novak, "Rescued from Disaster: The Bishops Speak Out," *Moral Clarity in the Nuclear Age* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1983), 116-117.

²⁴ Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, "The U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter 'Economic Justice for All' Twenty Years After," 3rd Annual University of St. Thomas Summer Institute (June 6, 2006). Bishop Ramirez errs in his speech when he claims that Rosazza's proposal followed another proposal to commit to writing a letter condemning Marxist socialism was accepted by the bishops. The latter letter was in fact issued at the 1980 meeting.

the document and that it might come to be regarded as a partisan effort to influence the election. A revised version came out nearly a year later in October 1985, and this was followed by a finalized statement the following June. It was accepted by the body of bishops by a vote of 225-9 during their annual gathering in November. Engaging in such a public process in the development of the pastoral letter also opened them up to a great deal of criticism during the years that the pastoral was under discussion. One of the most overt critics of the bishops during this period was the “Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the Economy.”

The Lay Commission was formed in March 1984 by the American Catholic Committee, the same organization of conservative-leaning Catholics that had been critical of the bishops’ pastoral on war and peace.²⁵ It was headed by William Simon, a former Treasury Secretary under Nixon, who was active in conservative think tanks like the Olin Foundation in the late Seventies, and Michael Novak who co-chaired the committee. Included among its other members were prominent Catholics such as Alexander Haig, Clare Booth Luce, and James Q. Wilson. The Commission published two major documents during this period. The first, titled *Toward the Future*, was issued just days before the first draft was released by the bishops.²⁶ *Liberty and Justice for All*, the second statement, was released following the final vote on the document *Economic Justice for All*.²⁷

²⁵ George Cornell, “Catholic Group Praises U.S. Economy Prior To Bishops’ Critique,” *The Associated Press*, November 7, 1984.

²⁶ Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, *Toward the Future: Catholic Social Thought and the U.S. Economy* (New York, NY: American Catholic Committee, 1984).

²⁷ Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, “Liberty and Justice for All,” reprinted in *Private Virtue and Public Policy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990). The United States Catholic Conference, *Economic Justice for All* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1986).

The Lay Commission's statements tended to praise free-market solutions to economic problems, although they did recognize a limited role for government and thus eschewed a more libertarian approach. This emphasis accompanied objections to the more state-centered approach to the economy that they believed was promoted by the bishops. Stylistically, Novak criticized the bishops' economic pastoral as reading more like a party platform than a pastoral letter. Substantively, he accused the bishops of promoting an "unabashedly statist" economic vision in their first draft, one that marked a distinct departure from both his and the Commission's view of the economy.²⁸ Where specific solutions were proposed, Novak expressed concern that many of them had in the past already been tried and had failed. The most significant and troubling proposition in the economic pastoral, according to Novak, was the idea of "economic rights" that, if put into practice, would dramatically reshape the U.S. economy by greatly increasing the role of the government in economic affairs.²⁹

From the first draft onward, the bishops made an appeal to economic rights and their central place in a just society. Along with civil and political rights, economic rights would provide for the minimal conditions needed for life in community. In sections #80-84 of the pastoral, the bishops appealed to the importance of economic rights and argued that they included the rights to food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. They concluded that access to these elements was "essential to human dignity and to the integral development of both individuals and society and are thus moral issues. Any denial of these rights harms persons

²⁸ Michael Novak, "The Bishops and the Poor," *Washington Post*, November 13, 1984, A15.

²⁹ Michael Novak, "The Two Catholic Letters on the U.S. Economy," *Challenge and Response: Critiques of the Catholic Bishops' Draft Letter on the U.S. Economy*, Robert Royal, ed. (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1985), 30-32.

and wounds the human community,” and further stressed that new economic arrangements will be necessary to ensure access to these fundamental rights, noting that all levels of society, including the private sector and government, will have a role in this process.³⁰

The Commission’s first publication, *Toward the Future*, did not explicitly tackle the question of economic rights, primarily because their document was issued just prior to that of the bishops. While not addressing the issue directly, they did criticize any economic vision that would significantly expand the reach of the state, even if that meant limiting the ability of the state to provide expansive welfare services to those in need. One of the fundamental questions that the Commission wanted to raise early on, even if not specifically on the topic of economic rights, was “how to help the poor and the needy without generating an incapacitating dependency” on the state.³¹ This question would turn into one of the central criticisms of the bishops’ support for economic rights, given the Commission’s view that the promotion of such rights would in all likelihood require a significant expansion in government services.

Their second publication, “Liberty and Justice for All,” expanded on the theme of the pastoral’s apparent statist tendencies and on the bishops’ appeal to economic rights. While noting that the pastoral was not a socialist document, they claimed it did have statist tendencies. In contrast to what they understood to be the bishops’ economic vision, which included a sympathetic view of a top-down approach to economic activism through political intervention, the commission argued that “economic development begins from the bottom up,

³⁰ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, #80-84.

³¹ Lay Commission, *Toward the Future*, 58-60.

through empowering the poor, not from the top down through extending political privileges.”³² In another forum, Novak argued that if the state were to take responsibility for providing the economic rights listed in the economic pastoral to everyone in need, and not merely to a select class of poor who are incapable of providing for their own needs, it would soon cease being a limited state.³³

During a speech in which he commended the Lay Catholic Commission’s publication, “Liberty and Justice for All,” Richard Neuhaus echoed their concerns, claiming that sectors of Catholic leadership had unfortunately followed the path of mainline Protestantism and begun to embrace socialist-leaning economic policies.³⁴ Both Neuhaus’ and the Commission’s criticisms of the bishops held a political vision that presupposed the importance of a limited state and that maintained a clear distinction between the responsibilities of government in economic affairs and those of privately run social and economic institutions.

This division between the Lay Commission’s and the bishops’ views on the role of the state in economic affairs, the idea of economic rights, and related phenomena signified a fundamental point of disagreement. Novak complained at one point that the bishops did not include in the conversation the more market-friendly perspective expressed by the Lay Commission, a perspective Novak claimed was shared by millions of other American

³² Lay Commission, “Liberty and Justice for All,” 9.

³³ Michael Novak, “The Future of ‘Economic Rights,’” in *Private Virtue and Public Virtue*, ed. James Finn (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 74-75.

³⁴ Richard Neuhaus, “Economic Justice Requires more than Economic Justice,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 24, no. 3 (Summer, 1987): 379.

Catholics.³⁵ This objection helps to explain why, following the publication of the Commission's second statement in 1986, both Novak and Simon were so bold, if not presumptuous, as to request that the bishops append "Liberty and Justice for All" to the bishops' final pastoral letter. Doing so would presumably help to soften the bishops' conclusions and partly relativize these conclusions by pointing out to the public that there were multiple "Catholic" approaches to the economic questions being addressed. Needless to say, the Conference declined the offer.³⁶

In addition to the specifically political arguments made by Novak and the Lay Commission, they also took aim at the bishops and their pastoral letter from a larger overarching strategy. As with the *Challenge of Peace*, the neoconservative Catholics initiated a triangulation strategy in which they played off comments of the Vatican and recent popes against those of the bishops. The Lay Commission argued that the American bishops misappropriated the teaching of Pope John XXIII when they made use of his idea of economic rights as expressed in *Pacem in Terris*, and did so by confusing an important distinction between the notion of "economic rights" and what the Commission referred to as "welfare rights."

According to Novak and the Lay Commission, "economic rights" included the rights to private property, to healthy working conditions, to the opportunity to achieve work comparable to their talents and to work that will provide a decent standard of living. These rights point to the development of institutional structures that will protect individuals from a

³⁵ Robert Di Veroli, "Catholic Bishops, Laity Debate Role of Capitalism; Documents Illustrate Two Approaches to Economic System," *The San Diego-Union Tribune*, March 2, 1985, A12.

³⁶ Ari Goldman, "Catholic Bishops Criticized on Poor," *The New York Times*, November 5, 1986.

dependency on the state and also on oppressive economic institutions that might do the individual harm. “Welfare rights,” on the other hand, refer to those basic needs of life that are essential to its proper development.³⁷ Pointing to *Pacem in Terris*, they noted that in the section pertaining to welfare rights, John XXII claimed that persons have the right to food, clothing, medical care and the like, and thus had “the right to be looked after in the event of ill health; disability stemming from their work; widowhood; old age; enforced unemployment; or whenever through no fault of his own he is deprived of the means of livelihood.”³⁸ The Commission stressed the final phrase in this quote, that a person has the right to be looked after “*whenever through no fault of his own he is deprived of the means of livelihood.*”³⁹

The Commission argued that the bishops err in their tendency to collapse what they refer to as “welfare rights” into the same category as “economic rights.” The welfare rights to which John XXIII pointed were restricted to a subset of the entire population, those people who *through no fault of their own are deprived of the means of livelihood*, whereas in the bishops’ pastoral the failure to distinguish between these two categories of “rights” confused things completely. While the Commission was not opposed to government involvement in the economy when it applied to this subset of the population, failing to make this distinction brings with it the risk of introducing a soft tyranny upon society or, as Novak put it, “the state obliged to provide for the daily welfare of all its citizens gains over them exquisite control.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Lay Commission, “Liberty and Justice for All,” 11.

³⁸ Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (April 11, 1963), #11.

³⁹ Lay Commission, “Liberty and Justice for All,” 11-13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 13.

In short, in both “Liberty and Justice for All,” and in complementary articles written by Novak, the Lay Commission held the position that in the final draft pastoral the bishops misappropriated the teaching of John XXIII and, in doing so, misunderstand the proper application of Catholic social teaching to the economy. This argument asserted that the bishops had veered away from papal teaching properly understood and that the Commission, in calling the bishops to account, was proposing an economic vision that is in line with the social teaching tradition. In a later essay Novak is somewhat more sympathetic to the bishops but still holds the general position laid out in the Commission report. Here he argued that the bishops continue to confuse welfare rights and economic rights in their initial examination of the topic, namely in sections 80-84, but in later sections do demonstrate a more proper understanding of these terms. Regardless, their failure to tease out this distinction in the initial formulation opens the door wide for misunderstanding, confusion, and misinterpretation of Church teaching.⁴¹

Michael Novak extended this type of criticism by appealing to what he referred to as Pope John Paul II’s creation theology. He applied this critique initially to a liberationist approach to theology that was active in the early Eighties, and eventually to the broader economic worldview of the bishops. Examining Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, Novak contended that the pope “shifts the point of view of Catholic social thought away from ‘liberation’ and toward ‘creation.’”⁴² The pope’s emphasis on ‘work’ and the importance of work for individual identity and the formation of community is important for

⁴¹ Novak, “The Future of ‘Economic Rights,’” 70.

⁴² Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 150/

Novak because he argues that it stressed the creative dynamic that is at the core of economic life. Economically and politically, innovation and invention in the modern Western world has propelled society forward; it is what has led to the great technological advances over the past two centuries. Theologically, the notion that creation functions at the center of economic life reflects the principle of the *imago dei*: man is created in the image of God and, being created in that image, becomes a co-creator in the world.⁴³

This embrace of creativity as the driving force behind all aspects of life, once embraced, provides a critique of liberation theology. According to Novak, creation theology “overcomes a nagging difficulty in liberation theology, which rhetorically announces an ‘option for the poor’ without in any way conceiving of an economic system creative enough actually to raise up the economic standing of the poor.”⁴⁴ Novak extended this argument to cover, albeit more indirectly than not, the American bishops’ worldview in a lengthy section written in the Lay Commission’s publication “Toward the Future.”⁴⁵ Here they reiterated the same themes first expressed in the article Novak wrote to comment on *Laborem Exercens*. Instead of focusing on liberation theology, the commission instead emphasized the importance of creative initiative on the level of the individual person in community and rejected an overbearing, over-regulating, distributive-oriented government that would only kill creativity.

⁴³ Ibid, 161.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 163). See also Michael Novak, “With Rousseau in Latin America,” *National Review*, August 23, 1985, 23 for a similar take on the problems of liberation theology in light of the creation theology that Novak espouses.

⁴⁵ See in particular pages 25-52 in Lay Commission, “Toward the Future.”

While giving lip service to the notion that the bishops had, by their final draft, begun to affirm the role of creativity in economic life, the Commission's publications mention this shift only in passing.⁴⁶ Instead, they proceed to criticize the bishops for embracing the overbearing style of government that would tend to undermine the creative impulse in the first place. At one point they go so far as to argue that the bishops engage in a 'preferential option for the state.' One is left with the impression that the drafters of the Commission's response were not completely sold on the bishops' commitment to the creative dynamic in economic life and were more interested in the effectiveness of state intervention to solve the ills of society.⁴⁷ Further, just a few pages later the Commission expressed disappointment that the final draft failed to recognize the Madisonian idea that "a regime of personally directed liberty, attracted by incentives, would be more beneficial to unleashing a tide of invention and discovery."⁴⁸ Invention, discovery, liberty and creativity: these are the very terms that Michael Novak used to develop his notion of creation theology in some of his earlier writings. These are the same terms that the Commission, with which Novak was intimately involved, accused the bishops of largely overlooking.

The neoconservative Catholics clearly took the theological and political implications of the bishops' pastoral letters seriously. They wrote extensively on the implications that these statements had in regard to the bishops' incorporation of the Church's moral tradition for policy debates, particularly in the context of Cold War concerns. The immediate backdrop to their criticism of both pastoral letters was some variation on the communist

⁴⁶ Lay Commission, "Liberty and Justice for All," 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 8-10.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 18.

threat, whether explicitly in their concerns over US/Soviet relations, or more subtly, as regards their concern with creeping statism and the threat of socialism. Something similar was at play in their writings on liberation theology; the communist threat was not only on America's back step in Latin America, but an influence even in the Church, through liberation theology. While these criticisms are of notable importance, both for the debate that occurred in the Church and secular society as a whole, there is a deeper concern for the neoconservative Catholics that has received very little attention in the secondary literature. This deeper concern touches on the ecclesiological dimensions that arise with the bishops' involvement in secular political affairs. For the neoconservative Catholics it would not be much of an exaggeration to argue that the ecclesiological dimensions contribute to a kind of crisis in the Church that the neoconservative Catholics are trying to correct, as much as they are trying to correct any political positions that the bishops might take on a given issue.

THE PASTORAL LETTERS, ECCLESIOLOGY, AND THE NEOCONSERVATIVE CATHOLICS

In a speech given to the American Bar Association in 1984, Cardinal Bernardin discussed his view of the role that religious leaders ought to play in the development of public policy.⁴⁹ This presentation was particularly timely given the recent release of the peace pastoral and upcoming distribution of the economic one. Bernardin's insights in this regard are useful because they help to highlight similarities and differences with those of the neoconservative Catholics. His comments also provide a springboard from which

⁴⁹ Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, "Role of the Religious Leader in the Development of Public Policy," *Journal of Law and Religion* 2, no. 2 (1984): 369-379.

neoconservative Catholic concerns about the ecclesiological crisis in the American Church become clearer.

During his presentation, Bernardin highlighted three fundamental points. First, he argued that religion ought to have a formative role on society and, consequently, on the formation of public policy. This is clearly something on which the neoconservative Catholics would agree, as evidenced by their apprehension regarding a naked public square. Even Novak, who did not emphasize the formative role of Christianity in relation to American political life to the extent of Neuhaus or Weigel, stressed the importance of religion in the moral-cultural sphere and the latter's importance to the formation of economic and political life.

In his second point, Bernardin addressed and affirmed the society/state distinction, a distinction that is also central to neoconservative Catholic thought. Bernardin claimed that while the Church should remain separate from the latter, she could not remain separate from the former and still live out her mission to the world. One of the fundamental roles of the Church was in the formation of society and, through that formation, influencing the contours within which political debate took place.⁵⁰ On the first two points there is not much divergence of note between the positions staked out by Bernardin and those of the neoconservative Catholics.

Where disagreement becomes evident is in relation to Bernardin's third point. Assuming that the Church's moral vision ought to at least inform public policy decisions, he proceeded to lay out a case for an overt public role of the hierarchy in this process. He

⁵⁰ Ibid, 369-374.

argued that “the Catholic bishop’s role in the development of public policy is an extension of his teaching role in the Church...,” the pastoral letters on war and on the economy being the preeminent examples of this in recent decades.⁵¹ While the neoconservative Catholics did not assume that the hierarchy ought to remain mute on questions of public policy, they grew increasingly uncomfortable when the clergy played a prominent role in this process. One can trace in their writings an argument in which excessive involvement in public policy questions by the clergy was indicative of a much deeper problem in the Church.

The general outline of this problem can be encapsulated in Michael Novak’s complaint that the American Catholic Church had “in the last two decades largely imitated the failures of mainline Protestantism. Activists and archbishops alike have traded in a tradition of careful moral reasoning for the highs of prophetic heavy breathing,” and have too often ended up becoming “pathetic appendages to partisanship already well established.”⁵² In effect, the bishops had become seduced by the temptations of political relevancy and in the process put at risk the reputation of the Church, turning it into little more than an interest group. This led, for all intents and purposes, to the downgrading of their ministerial and sacramental role in society. To understand the conditions that the neoconservative Catholics believed led to this state of affairs it will help to isolate three shifts.

The first shift consisted in what they understood to be the growing obsession that Church leadership had with secular political affairs, oftentimes at the expense of the spiritual priority of their station. Second, as the priorities of the Church changed, the behavior of the

⁵¹ Ibid, 376.

⁵² Michael Novak, “No Fault Prophecy,” *National Review*, April 10, 1987, 44.

clergy began to adjust accordingly. With political issues receiving a higher priority in the life of the Church, the clergy increasingly immersed themselves in political affairs. Third, in doing so, the clergy began to take clearly staked out positions on political issues, positions that often reflected a left-wing perspective. This led to what the neoconservative Catholics believed was an emergent Constantinianism, which posed a significant threat to the Church. An analysis of each shift follows.

The Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation: The Christian Churches and the Loss of the Transcendent

The Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation was a joint project initiated by Richard Neuhaus and Peter Berger and issued in Hartford, Connecticut in January 1975. It was an ecumenical document that, while authored by two Lutherans, was eventually signed by some twenty individuals from 18 different Christian denominations. Given its ecumenical nature, the principles that it laid out avoided doctrinally contentious topics and instead focused on what the signers understood to be broad, and generally destructive, trends that were currently affecting the Christian Churches in the modern world. Avery Dulles, one of its cosigners, noted that the general tone of the *Appeal* was “clearly negative and admonitory. It may be described as a common attempt by Christians of various traditions to identify certain widely pervasive assumptions that are in fact undermining the vigor and integrity of Christian faith, witness, life and action.”⁵³

⁵³ Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1977), 73.

Its critical tone functioned as a call to renewal and a plea for the churches to return to some of the fundamental principles that they had slowly abandoned over the course of the twentieth century. While presumably applicable to a large swath of the Christian community, given its ecumenical approach, the neoconservative Catholics were obviously most interested in its application to the American Catholic Church. Reflecting on the importance of this document for the Church, George Weigel claimed that the *Hartford Appeal* “marked one of the points at which Catholic theology in America began to reground itself in the Church’s ancient and ongoing tradition, rather than imagining that theology (and everything else, for that matter), had started all over again with the Second Vatican Council.”⁵⁴

Implied in Weigel’s quote is a theme that emerged over and over again in the writings of the neoconservative Catholics: following Vatican II, the American Catholic Church had veered away from traditional teaching, not because the teachings of the Second Vatican Council were misguided, but because they were too often misinterpreted and poorly applied by Church leadership to contemporary events. This tendency was made easier because large segments of Church leadership had lost sight of their primary calling, which was sacramental in nature and directed toward the Kingdom of God. This primary calling had been slowly marginalized since the close of the Council and one of the primary reasons for this marginalization functioned as a core theme running throughout the *Appeal*: the American Christian Churches had largely lost the sense of the transcendent and had thus

⁵⁴ George Weigel, “Remembering Avery Dulles, S.J.” *Denver Catholic Register*, January 28, 2009.

abandoned the distinctive voice that brought clarity to the tasks to which God has called them.

In an essay titled “For a World with Windows: Hartford in a Sociocultural Context,” Peter Berger sought to understand some of the sociological causes for this loss of the transcendent and, in doing so, made a pair of distinct yet complementary arguments. First, he attempted to make the case that this loss in the churches was “a direct result of the increasing tendency toward secularization in the West.”⁵⁵ This is not the place to explore the intricacies of secularization theory. Suffice it to say that its proponents held that as society moved into modernity, religious beliefs would become increasingly untenable as socially binding agents and would eventually be displaced by the functional rationality of modern capitalism, the proliferation of the modern sciences or some other modernizing tendency. This would, in turn, marginalize religion to the private sphere of the individual and undermine its social power. Berger had been for some time a strong proponent of classical secularization theory and, while his acceptance of it softened notably over time, it still held sway when writing this essay.⁵⁶

While promoting secularization theory as a possible explanation, his growing discomfort with it by this time led him to back away from it as an explanatory factor, going

⁵⁵ Peter Berger, “For a World Without Windows: Hartford in a Sociocultural Context,” in *Against the World For the World: The Hartford Appeal and the Future of American Religion* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1977).

⁵⁶ For Berger’s early take on secularization theory, see Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967). For his more recent take, in which he expresses a far more nuanced understanding of the effects of secularization see Peter Berger, “Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today,” *Sociology of Religion* 62, no. 4, Special Edition: Religion and Globalization at the Turn of the Millenium (Winter, 2001): 443-454. For a useful overview of secularization theory, see Olivier Tschannen, “The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 4 (December, 1991): 395-415.

so far as to argue that the apparent trend toward secularization may just be a momentary trend and not a final destination.⁵⁷ In some respects the concern over the “loss of the transcendent” anticipated the notion of the naked public square, a period in which religion became increasingly marginalized in social and political life.

While downplaying secularization as a theory to explain the apparent loss of the transcendent, he held to his contention that secularism was a potent force in this process. He asserted that since the end of the Second World War there had emerged the “new class,” which has had a notable affect on American political culture.⁵⁸ His argument posited that the intellectual milieu of academia, media, governmental institutions and similar forums tended to be far more secular than the rest of society. While a minority compared to the general population, these people had an influence that was out of proportion to their size. This is in large part due to their ability to tap into and take advantage of channels that are linked to the “knowledge industry.”⁵⁹ Through these channels of influence, this group of elites has entered into the business of creating culture and “is in control of many of the institutions that produce and disseminate cultural symbols, notably in the educational system and the communication media.”⁶⁰

Berger contended that because this class of intellectuals and bureaucrats had become so influential in the construction of society and culture, they had an undue influence on the ways in which even religious people understood the world. He argued that their influence

⁵⁷ Berger, “For a World Without Windows,” 11-12.

⁵⁸ For a useful early exploration into his understanding of the new class, see Peter Berger, “Ethics and the Present Class Struggle,” *Worldview* (April 1978): 6-11.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁰ Peter Berger, “Reflections of an Ecclesiastical Expatriate,” *The Christian Century*, October 24, 1990, 966.

had become so prevalent that even many who affirmed a religious worldview had embraced a secular bias in which religious ideas had become reinterpreted in light of normative standards that were alien to a religious outlook. In this case the new normative standard is a secular definition of reality. Consequently, “the transcendent elements of the tradition are de-emphasized or put aside completely: transcendence is translated into immanence,” and thus the churches tended to focus more on secular political, social, and personal activities.⁶¹

The vision promoted by Berger paralleled a larger interpretive framework that was popular during the Seventies. While he advanced a sociological explanation for the “de-transcendentalization” of American life others, like Christopher Lasch, were promoting a psychological account of this process. Regarding the state of religious sensibility, he wrote that “the contemporary climate is therapeutic, not religious. People today hunger not for personal salvation. . . but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health and psychic security.”⁶² In other words, there was in modern Western experience a tendency to experience religion not according to its traditional framework, but in the context of personal fulfillment.

Whether one looks at this situation from a more psychological or sociological perspective, the results are symptoms of what was seen to be a larger problem at the time. The neoconservative Catholics reflected both tendencies. Writing some years later, for example, George Weigel noted that the precipitous decline in Catholic participation in sacramental life, and particularly in confession, denotes the widespread embrace of the

⁶¹ Berger, “For a World Without Windows,” 12-13.

⁶² Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton Company, 1979), 7.

therapeutic society in which there is an unhealthy embrace of counseling at the expense of religious experience.⁶³ While flirting with some of the psychological explanations of a therapeutic society, the neoconservative Catholics were more interested in its sociological underpinnings and, as such, directly embraced Berger's concerns surrounding the idea of the new class.

On the one hand they also worried about the influence of the new class on the American political tradition. In one of his earlier commentaries on the value of democratic capitalism, Novak discussed the dangers that the new class posed to America's political culture. Since the Second World War, he argued, the new class had grown in power and strength, largely due to the emergence of social instruments and media that are perfectly suited to their needs. Novak asserted that members of the new class tended toward their own aggrandizement often to the greater harm of the political, economic and cultural systems of the American tradition.

In other words, as the knowledge industry became increasingly important in modern society, and academia, government and the media became central to the proliferation of ideas, it was in the interest of elites to ensure that these institutions remained a dominant force in everyday life. This could mean, for example, taking the necessary steps to ensure the continued influence of government power in the economy and cultural affairs. To maintain their influence, elites needed to ensure that their positions of power were maintained. For someone like Novak, this ran the risk of unduly strengthening certain

⁶³ George Weigel, *The Truth of Catholicism: Ten Controversies Explored* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 89.

segments of society (i.e., government institutions) at the expense of others and, in doing so, throwing off the careful balance of power that existed between various segments of society. At its core, the very tripartite structure of society that Novak espoused in his writings on democratic capitalism came under threat from the worldview embraced by the new class.⁶⁴

While the neoconservative Catholics expressed some concern about the new class' affect on the broader society, they also expressed concern that the new class represented a vision that was detrimental to the life of the Catholic Church. Weigel, for example, asserted that "the rise of a new social elite whose power base is the knowledge industry—is a fact of life in contemporary American Catholicism."⁶⁵ This Catholic new class found expression in the expansion of Church bureaucracy and particularly in the proliferation of justice and peace networks that focused increasingly on social justice issues. Rooting their activities in a particular reading of the conciliar documents, this new class had become preoccupied, or at least sympathetic, to a variety of activist and liberationist movements. In recent decades, according to the neoconservative Catholics, this new class had proliferated throughout the church, particularly in academia, in the teachings of some bishops, and in the bosom of many of its religious orders.⁶⁶

As already noted above, Weigel accused the Catholic bishops of the United States of being complicit in this political shift. While he recognized that the hierarchy had long been engaged in questions of public policy, it was in the aftermath of Vatican II that this

⁶⁴ Novak, *The American Vision*, 29-34.

⁶⁵ Weigel, *Catholicism and the Renewal of American Democracy*, 48-9.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 51-62.

engagement became pronounced.⁶⁷ In the two decades following Vatican II, Weigel interpreted this increasing shift toward political engagement as a move that put Church leadership in the position of being little more than a lobbyist for one political cause or another. He wrote that “the official Church in the United States, and most of its vocal elites, did not help shape a more intelligent, less demagogic, morally sensitive public debate capable of advancing peace and freedom. Rather, the official Church, following many in its intellectual and journalistic elites, became a protagonist at one pole of public argument already underway.”⁶⁸

He further argued that the bishops’ excessive interest in public policy and legislative success in Washington, DC distorted one of the central missions of the Church, which is to shape society according to a Catholic moral worldview.⁶⁹ This perspective was in large part shared by Richard Neuhaus. In an essay titled “Let the Church Be the Church,” Neuhaus claimed that the institutional churches in the United States too often abandoned their religious calling in favor of a political one. Rather than emphasizing the salvific role of the Church as the defining feature of the church, many religious leaders absolutized the political. At its core, this represented a “crisis of faith,” in which the Church capitulated too easily and too often to an agenda set by the world, rather than an agenda of its own making.⁷⁰ Neuhaus reiterated his concern that the Church leadership was undergoing a crisis of faith in an article written specifically on the importance of the *Hartford Appeal*. Here he wrote that

⁶⁷ Ibid, 139.

⁶⁸ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 329-30.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 349-50

⁷⁰ Richard Neuhaus, “Let the Church Be the Church” *Center Journal* (Fall, 1983): 35-38.

the crisis in Christian social ethics today is, far more than anything else, a crisis of faith. We must indeed find better, more careful, more credible ways to articulate religiously-grounded truth in the political realm, but our most important contribution as believers is to relativize the realm of the political. Our engagement in the provisional politics of the present must be informed by our commitment to the radically “new politics” of the promised Kingdom.⁷¹

Neuhaus’ point was not that the Christian churches ought to disengage from the world. Rather, he was calling on the churches to maintain their distinct voice when discussing questions related to the world. The fundamental problem was not so much that the church was involved in secular politics, but rather that church leadership too often did so according to the standards of secular society. Neuhaus held that the “abandonment of Christian particularism... was a collapse of faith in the face of what was thought to be the superior weight of modern thought and its dogmas of secularism.”⁷² This picture of the capitulation of the churches to modern thought and to the dogmas and standards of secularism anticipated the arguments that Neuhaus made regarding the naked public square. Under such conditions, religion would be stripped from decisions of political and social importance. This is a problem that would only be exacerbated when the churches themselves capitulated to this tendency.

Although an important vocation in Christian life, secular politics ought to be subservient to a much broader agenda that includes proclamation of the Gospel, seriousness about devotional life, prayer and contemplation. It was Neuhaus’ contention that taking seriously these non-secular activities would, in fact, further the political message of the

⁷¹ Richard Neuhaus, “Speaking for the Church to the World,” *The Cresset* 46, no. 8 (September, 1983), 4.

⁷² Richard Neuhaus, “Calling a Halt to Retreat,” ed. Peter Berger et al. (New York, NY: the Seabury Press, 1976), 138-164.

Church more effectively than if Christians were to focus primarily on a social justice agenda.⁷³ In a presentation given at the Rockford Institute, whose president at the time was Richard Neuhaus, Avery Dulles echoed Neuhaus' concerns regarding the supposed secular agenda of the Catholic Church, saying that he deplored "the politicization of the Gospel and the tendency to equate the Kingdom of God with the results of human efforts to build a just society." Dulles insisted "on the utter transcendence of the kingdom and on the primary duty of the church to proclaim the Gospel of eternal life."⁷⁴ On a similar note, Novak noted how unfortunate it was that "the church we Catholics experience in 1982 is also far more clerical than it was before Vatican II. These days "the Church" is often a lobbying agent on Capitol Hill. It issues more and more statements on foreign policy in Central America, military budgets, nuclear weapons, specific policies on jobs and welfare . . ."⁷⁵

The above quote by Novak links the first moment in the neoconservative Catholic argument regarding what they understand to be the Church's ecclesiological crisis to the next one. When the bishops become immersed in questions of policy, not only do they risk becoming entangled in the ambiguities of mundane politics, and giving the impression that the church is simply one more interest group among many, they also threaten the proper distinction of roles between the laity and the clergy.

A Confusion of Roles: Lay Catholics and the Clergy

⁷³ Ibid, 152-161.

⁷⁴ Avery Dulles, "The Gospel, The Church, and Politics," *Origins* (February 19, 1987).

⁷⁵ Michael Novak, "Liberal Catholicism will Rise Again," *National Review*, June 11, 1982, 694.

In December 1977, a group of Chicago Catholics came together and signed what came to be known as the *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern* to address this problem. The neoconservative Catholics were not active participants in the development of the *Chicago Declaration*. However, the document highlighted ideas that the neoconservative Catholics wrestled with well into the Eighties. The primary theme running throughout the document is the notion that the roles of the laity and clergy had become blurred in the aftermath of Vatican II. This blurring had taken place in two related ways. First, the signers held that in the decade following the Council excessive lay involvement in Church activities, including pastoral ministry, religious education and liturgy, had distracted them from secular pursuits that more properly defined their vocation.⁷⁶

Complementing this shift was the signers' contention that while the laity was spending more time in the churches, the clergy and Church hierarchy was spending more time in the world and, in doing so, co-opting the responsibilities of their lay counterparts. On this point, the *Declaration* expressed concern that

during the last decade especially, many priests have acted as if the primary responsibility in the Church was uprooting injustice, ending wars and defending human rights rested with them as ordained ministers. As a result they bypassed the laity to pursue social causes on their own rather than enabling lay Christians to shoulder their own responsibilities. These priests and religious have sought to impose their own agendas for the world upon the laity.⁷⁷

One consequence of the *Declaration* was the founding of the National Center for the Laity the following year, which was eventually housed in Mundelein College. Its primary

⁷⁶ "The Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern" in *Challenge to the Laity*, ed. Russell Barta (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), 21-2.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 22.

responsibility was to keep alive the message of the *Declaration* by highlighting the central role that the laity is to have in the world on issues of secular importance. This was in turn followed by the convening of a national conference called the National Assembly of the Laity, which was held at the Center for Pastoral and Social Ministry at Notre Dame in 1979. The conference was convened to discuss the “larger tasks, both theoretical and practical, which will have to be accomplished in order to develop and sustain the vision of the laity as articulated by the *Chicago Declaration*.”⁷⁸ At its close the “Report of the National Assembly of the Laity” was adopted, the findings of the *Chicago Declaration* were reaffirmed and the central role that the laity was called to play in secular life reemphasized.⁷⁹

One of the presenters at the Notre Dame conference was Michael Novak. His paper, published in a later book, reiterated and reaffirmed many of the themes expressed in the *Declaration*. He began by reflecting on the Lay Catholic Congress of 1889, and argued that the American laity of the late twentieth century were bearers of the lay confidence expressed nearly a hundred years earlier. Although embodying a vision similar to that expressed in the lay Catholic Congresses, the changing demographics of the Catholic Church in the post-World War II world had issued new challenges while offering new possibilities.⁸⁰ Particularly following Vatican II, the laity were finally given an opportunity to fill a prominent leadership role in American affairs that reflected their true vocation in the world.

⁷⁸ Russell Barta, “Introduction,” *Challenge to the Laity*, ed. Russell Barta (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), 12.

⁷⁹ “Report of the National Assembly of the Laity” in *Challenge to the Laity*, ed. Russell Barta (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), 125.

⁸⁰ Michael Novak, “What the Laity Can Teach the Church,” in *Challenge to the Laity*, ed. Russell Barta (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), 45-50.

This vocation was expressed in their “special responsibilities for evolving, through trial and error, institutional expressions of Catholic witness in the development of humane, social, economic, and political institutions.”⁸¹ While finally able to fulfill this important lay function, Novak expressed concern that this opportunity was slipping by before it fully became a reality. Threatening the lay vocation was a “confusion of roles” that occurred when the clergy attempt to usurp that which properly belongs to the laity, leading once again to an expansion of clericalism in the Church. While not a preordained end, this was understood to be a growing trend in the life of the Church and thus a preeminent threat to its proper functioning.⁸²

A few years after the close of the conference, Novak further highlighted this theme in an editorial that he wrote for the *National Review*. Here he argued that

it used to be thought that laymen and laywomen had a special vocation in the church, a vocation to make Christian conscience present in the world, in temporal matters. According to this view, the clergy are not to be confined to the pulpit or the sacristy, but they do have a special sacred role, crucial in nourishing the laity. They laity, however, in all their splendid variety, are expected to be the primary dealers with the contingencies and fruitful polemics of the temporal order. This was, for quite a long time, the liberal Catholic view.⁸³

Although Novak noted that this distinction in roles between the clergy and the laity had for “quite a long time” been the liberal Catholic view of things, it is important to note that the liberal Catholic view of things was itself of relatively recent vintage. While extolling the virtues of this distinction, Novak failed to point out that it did not emerge in full force

⁸¹ Ibid, 56.

⁸² Ibid, 52-57.

⁸³ Novak, “Liberal Catholicism will Rise Again,” 694.

until the mid-twentieth century. For a very long time the laity was generally relegated to a status that was subservient to clerical leadership. In his study of the development of authority in the Church, Yves Congar noted that since at least the reforms of Leo IX in the early eleventh century, the pope began to claim sovereign rights not only over the Church but also over that of the kings and their kingdoms throughout Europe. While risking an unnecessary oversimplification, there was from that point on a tendency to subjugate the laity under the authority of the hierarchy and in doing so, identify the “Church” with the hierarchy, thus making it in many respects juridical institution.⁸⁴ This tendency extended well into the twentieth century with the emergence of “Catholic Action” movements that sought to “empower” the laity to act in the world, but only under the watchful eye of the clergy.

Although this hierarchical structure remained a dominant force up until the eve of the Second Vatican Council, there were countertrends at work in the Church by the first few decades of the century. During this time lay Catholics sought to establish their voice with relative independence from hierarchical control. This became particularly apparent in the period between 1920 and 1950 through, for example, the launch of *Commonweal* magazine, the emergence of the Catholic Worker Movement, the establishment of Friendship Houses and the Christian Family Movement. By the fifties this growing awareness among the laity led to a growing autonomy from direct clerical oversight. This was in large part due to the changing demographics in the Church, and a more highly educated, economically

⁸⁴ Yves Congar, O.P., “The Historical Development of Authority in the Church: Points for Christian Reflection” in *Problems of Authority*, ed. John M. Todd (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1961), 136-144.

independent and confident laity when it came to secular affairs.⁸⁵ Taken in relation to the clergy, one commentator writing in the early Sixties claimed that whereas the laity once looked to the priest “for wisdom on the whole gamut of life’s problems, he is now expected only to provide guidance on the more narrowly ‘spiritual’ problems. In Church, the priest is indispensable, outside of Church, he is simply one more person with one more opinion.”⁸⁶

It is within this context that one has to understand neoconservative Catholic identity, which very much reflected a 1950s Catholic outlook. Lay independence in the face of an intrusive clergy was understood by the neoconservative Catholics as being validated during the Second Vatican Council. George Weigel is explicit on this point:

the clear teaching of the Second Vatican council is that the laity, by reason of baptism as a special ministry “in the world”... a reclericalized Church, in which priestly and Episcopal prescriptors are the primary fashioners and chief public exponents of the official Church’s prudential judgments... would not be a church in accord with the vision of Vatican II.⁸⁷

Within years of the close of the Council the distinction between the clerical and lay roles was, to the chagrin of the neoconservative Catholics, being increasingly ignored and overlooked. The clergy, and the bishops in particular, were becoming vocal on issues of political importance. Their excessive attention to political affairs was distracting the clergy from their primary responsibilities, which related directly to the preaching of the Gospel and the sacramental character of the priesthood.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 238.

⁸⁶ Daniel Callahan, *The Mind of the Catholic Layman* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1963), 127.

⁸⁷ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 352; the neoconservative Catholics often highlight the Second Vatican Council Document, “The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity” as an important source to buttress their claims regarding the laity’s distinctive vocation to the world and their call to translate and apply Catholic teaching to secular issues, as can be found in public policy debates.

At this point the first two shifts in the neoconservative Catholic ecclesiological critique of the clergy had come to a head. First, they argued that there was among the clergy a growing obsession with secular political affairs, which had taken their eye off of the transcendent character that defines their primary responsibility in the world. This led to a blurring of roles between the laity and the clergy. As political issues became an increasingly important priority for Church leadership, the activities of the clergy adjusted accordingly. The clergy became more involved in secular political affairs, which resulted in the cooptation of these responsibilities from the laity, where such affairs rightly belonged. Michael Novak put this pointedly in his *Confession of a Catholic*, when he wrote that since the Council “the new clerics include politics in their vocation, serve as foreign minister or minister of culture, sprinkle blood, lead demonstrations, and in general expand the mission of the clergy until it threatens to dominate every aspect of the social culture.”⁸⁸ It became all but inevitable that a politically active clergy would, sooner or later, begin to take positions on concrete questions of public policy. It is on this point that the third shift under discussion became a factor in the neoconservative Catholic critique of Church leadership.

This shift became public no later than November 1982 when Michael Novak, in cooperation with Ralph McInerny, founded a new magazine called *Catholicism in Crisis*, which was some years later renamed simply *Crisis*. It looked to the popular journal *Christianity in Crisis* as its model, but restricted the focus primarily to the Catholic Church. Novak titled the first editorial published in the journal, which he also wrote, “The Present

⁸⁸ Novak, *Confession of a Catholic*, 9.

Crisis.”⁸⁹ Perhaps not surprisingly, the present crisis to which he alluded was directly related to the public role that the American Catholic clergy took in relation to secular political affairs. More specifically, it is a crisis of power, wherein clerics overstep their authority and engage far too much in the affairs of the world. This reflects the content of the previous shift, although here Novak extended this argument when he wrote that

the church seems in danger of losing its true, original, and profound identity, in order to become what it is not, an instrument of temporal power. Nearly always today, this temporal assertion of the church is leftward in force, as in former times it was often rightward. Yet whether tilting to the left or to the right, the fundamental theological error is the same.⁹⁰

In the post-Vatican II world, according to Novak, not only has the clergy tried to assert temporal power far too often in the pursuit of political ends but, worse still, the political ends for which this power is being used are almost always in favor of left-wing causes. This is a tendency which might best be referred to as the Constantinian temptation.

The Constantinian Temptation

The politicization of the Church had brought with it, according to Neuhaus, an unfortunate consequence: religious identity in modern America had become less about the Gospel and more about the political positions of a person’s given denomination. This trend dramatically altered the way in which Christians related to one another. As he put it,

⁸⁹ Michael Novak, “The Present Crisis,” *Catholicism in Crisis*, November, 1982, 1-2. The founding of this journal, if not the initial editorial itself is clearly of lasting importance to Novak. As of 2009, in his office at the American Enterprise Institute, a copy of the editorial was blown up to poster size and hung on the wall behind his assistant’s desk.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 2.

there is, in sociological jargon, an elective affinity among Christians who address public affairs. As often as not, the affinity is based more on one's politics than on one's Christianity... we have arrived at the sorry state where innumerable Americans choose their church by their choice of politics. The makes a mockery of the notion that the church should inform the political decision-making of its members. It also makes ludicrous the notion that the church has anything of significance to say to the public order. To that notion, the obvious question is, "Which church?"⁹¹

The Christian Churches in twentieth-century America had for Neuhaus been thoroughly politicized. Political identity had become the primary factor in the formation of religious identity. This critique highlights the culminating point in the neoconservative Catholic concerns related to the ecclesiological crisis that they felt confronted the American church at this time. This third step focused on what might best be described as the Constantinian temptation which was constituted by the tendency of Church leadership to become overly committed to a set of political biases or to political groupings that have the power potentially to institutionalize these biases. With this, the Churches had largely abandoned their distinctive religious identities and capitulated to preexisting political programs.

This tendency to cooperate closely with political interests and institutions was not something that was unique to the post-Vatican II Church. In the pre-conciliar Church, although typically the non-American Church, it was not unusual for the hierarchy closely to align herself with governments and related institutions that showed favor to the Church and Church interests. During the early modern period the Church closely associated herself with monarchical forms of government outside the Church, particularly through the use of

⁹¹ Neuhaus, "Let the Church be the Church," 40

“concordats that guaranteed the rights of the church, including religious uniformity and financial support, and special rights in the areas of education and marriage.”⁹² For much of the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, the Catholic Church was resistant to liberalism as a political movement and resisted both internally and externally any forces that tended to internalize freedoms that were deemed incompatible with the Church’s political vision.

Typically conservative in orientation, many of the popes during this period were interested in maintaining or regaining their moral influence in political decision-making and resist the inroads that liberal oriented governments were making on this authority. The example par excellence of this tendency was Pius IX, whose *Syllabus of Errors* and other writings rejected liberalism as an erroneous political theory.⁹³ As late as 1953, Cardinal Ottaviani, Secretary of the Holy Office in the Roman Curia during Vatican II, defended a policy in Spain that respected non-Catholic worship only in the private sphere.⁹⁴ Well into the twentieth century the Latin American bishops tended to defend and support a more traditionalist style of government that protected Church interests.

The neoconservative Catholics showed little sympathy in their writings for these closely regarded alliances between church and state, whether of the right or the left. What was most worrisome was the fact that these political/religious alliances were once again beginning to become important in the Church. In an editorial written for *Commonweal* in the

⁹² Paul Sigmund, “The Catholic Tradition and Modern Democracy,” *The Review of Politics* 49, no. 4 (Autumn, 1987): 534.

⁹³ Michael Novak, *Catholic Social Thought and Liberal Institutions*, 19-24.

⁹⁴ Sigmund, 545.

early Eighties, Michael Novak provided a pointed critique of the bishops and of what he saw as their tendency toward an overly politicized, and noticeably left-wing, approach to political issues.⁹⁵ Following Vatican II, he argued, Church leadership had become increasingly involved with divisive public policy questions. It had become increasingly apparent during the previous two decades, he claimed, that the “‘progressives’ had seized nearly all places of authority in seminaries and chanceries, church agencies and publications. The old authoritarian style, however, has not much changed.”⁹⁶

The neoconservative Catholic claim that the Catholic bishops had lurched to the left on policy issues became more apparent in relation to a letter to the editor that Neuhaus wrote in defense of Pope John Paul II. In the winter of 1979, the *New York Times* published an editorial that criticized John Paul II for comments that he made related to the involvement of the clergy in political life. The editors commented on a recent speech given by the pope to the Latin American bishops in Puebla, in which he spoke out against liberation theology and reiterated that the Church’s mission is “religious and not social or political.”⁹⁷ The editorial proceeded to declare the speech “disappointing” and instead affirmed a perspective that held it to be the clergy’s role to stand out as a voice against political oppression and to lay claim to a more aggressive political activism.⁹⁸

Neuhaus’ response highlighted the issue of clerical involvement in political affairs by pointing to Pope John Paul I’s refusal to be crowned with the Papal tiara as a demonstration

⁹⁵ Michael Novak, “A Closed Church, Again,” *Commonweal*, February 5, 1982, 113.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Editorial, “A Voice against ‘Liberation Theology,’” *New York Times*, January 30, 1979, A18.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

that the pope himself had rejected such identification. This refusal officially marked an end to the Constantinian tendency, which sought to establish through political intervention what the Church believed to be representative of a just and Christian social order. Having moved beyond the Constantinian temptation, at least in an official capacity, the appeal of liberation theology in Latin America and the call for a politically active clergy ought to be disconcerting, noted Neuhaus. It would be a shame, he further stated, to be witness to the Catholic Church's rightful abandonment of "its alliance with the Constantines and Francos of history to resume its old habits now in partnership with Marx."⁹⁹

While hinting at a similar idea, George Weigel used different language when accusing the bishops of engaging in an overly biased and unhelpful approach to policy debates. In a commentary written on the *Challenge of Peace* and the various issues that the document raised, Weigel accused a sizeable, albeit unnamed, number of bishops as belonging to what he referred to as the "Mennonite caucus." Because of the more progressive angle of their pronouncements, their judgments tended toward a generalized denunciation of American society, economy and polity.¹⁰⁰ This criticism reinforced the neoconservative Catholic critique that at least a notable number of bishops had turned on the American experiment by the early Eighties and presupposed the typically left-wing point of attack.

At one point, the neoconservative Catholics had become so convinced that a large segment of the hierarchy had embraced a partisan bias that Neuhaus went so far as to declare that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) had become "the Democratic

⁹⁹ Richard John Neuhaus, "Letter to the Editor," *The New York Times*, February 12, 1979, A16.

¹⁰⁰ George Weigel, "Beyond the Challenge of Peace: Quaestiones Disputatae," *Center Journal* (Winter, 1983): 108-110.

Party at prayer.”¹⁰¹ To show how closely the neoconservative Catholics were aligned on this point, Michael Novak used this same description of the NCCB in a different forum.¹⁰² Such a view is itself rather tendentious given that it overlooked the positions of the bishops on “pro-life” related issues such as abortion, none of which would have been considered Democratic. Still, this accusation against the bishops by the neoconservative Catholics provides insights into their priorities during that time. Certainly there were moments during the Eighties, and particularly during the presidential election in 1984, at which abortion became a publicly important topic. Nevertheless, while the bishops were, and continue to be, solidly pro-life, the dominant issues of the day typically centered on communism and the economy.

EVERY DULLES AND THE PROGRESSIVE CHURCH: THE NEOCONSERVATIVE CATHOLIC CRITIQUE REFINED

To better understand the neoconservative Catholic critique of the “progressive church” and the dominant ecclesiology upheld by this group in the post-Vatican II American Church, it will prove helpful to take advantage of Avery Dulles’ *Models of the Church*.¹⁰³ Although the neoconservative Catholics only indirectly apply Dulles’ models in a critical manner to their opponents, certain applications of Dulles’ framework to their opponents can be teased out from the above discussion. Two models in particular stand out as most clearly applicable to the “progressive Church,” at least as we might understand it from the

¹⁰¹ Richard John Neuhaus, “Letter to the Editor,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 12, 1979, A16.

¹⁰² Novak, “A Closed Church, Again.”

¹⁰³ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York, NY: Image Books, 1974).

perspective of the neoconservative Catholics: the “Church as mystical communion” and the “Church as servant.” There is no reason to believe that the neoconservative Catholics would take issue with either of these models in principle, but would have reservations when certain aspects of either model were taken an extreme. We will examine each in turn.

Dulles notes that the Church as mystical communion tends to “emphasize the immediate relationship of all believers to the Holy Spirit, who directs the whole Church.”¹⁰⁴ Given this initial starting point, it is not surprising that from this perspective the institutional aspects of the Church tend to be downplayed and remain important only in a subsidiary way. This way of looking at things stands in sharp contrast to one of Dulles’ earlier models, “the Church as institution,” which holds as essential the external characteristics of the Church and further holds those institutional characteristics as primary for understanding what the Church is.¹⁰⁵

In contrast, those affirming the Church as mystical communion model tend embrace a more democratic vision of authority that in turn diminishes the power of the hierarchy. As Dulles remarks, the hierarchical character of the Church and the external authority of the clergy in this model brings with it the risk of making its hierarchical structure superfluous.¹⁰⁶ In this vein, R. Scott Appleby can remark that the “neo-Americanists of ‘the left’ believe that Apostolic authority resides in the Spirit-inspired community of baptized Catholics.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 53.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 60.

¹⁰⁷ R. Scott Appleby, “The Triumph of Americanism,” 49-51. He also highlights the tendency in certain progressive circles to affirm the democratization of the Church structures, thus decentralizing power.

From the perspective of the neoconservative Catholics, certain of the latent themes embedded in the “Church as mystical communion” model could prove problematic when taken to an extreme. There is, in short, the concern that the Tradition of the Church might come under fire as Catholics, and particularly those in leadership circles, lose sight of the authoritative principles that ought to guide the Faithful. This could occur when the sources of authority in Christian life become focused primarily in each individual or in the Catholic community, rather than in an external source like Tradition. Not only could this easily lead to calls for the democratization of Church structures, as hierarchical forms of authority become increasingly foreign, but also the pronouncements of external authority figures come into question as well.

In his book *Confession of a Catholic*, Novak expressed concern that “some theologians would seem to conduct themselves as freelancers, bound by the canons of peer review far more than apostolic authority.”¹⁰⁸ While admitting that a free thinking class of theologians is not all bad, Novak claimed that such a tendency too often falls prey to faddishness that has plagued the post Vatican II church. What has been lost is a connection to the Tradition of the Church, a tradition which ought to function as a basic guide in the doing of theology. It is useful here to recall Novak’s concerns, already expressed in an earlier chapter, regarding his accusation that the progressive Church all too often abandoned the tradition in favor of what he refers to as neodoxies, or new teachings.

Like Novak, Neuhaus also worried that the authoritative tradition of the Church was becoming increasingly marginal in the lives of Catholics, thus unmooring Catholic teaching

¹⁰⁸ Novak, *Confession of a Catholic*, 129.

from that which gave it its credibility. In its place, theologians in particular had embraced a posture of autonomy that became less and less connected to the Church's history and fundamental teachings. This posture only highlighted what Neuhaus thought to be a central problem in modern Catholic theological thought. What was of greater interest, according to Neuhaus, "than the question of how far one can stretch autonomy and still be recognized as a Roman Catholic theologian is the question of what the theologian, in order to be a theologian, recognizes as authoritative?"¹⁰⁹ What ought to be authoritative, as Neuhaus saw it, was the tradition within which the Catholic theologian rooted his studies. For Neuhaus

authority in the Church... is the authority of the Church, not the authority of the authorities in the church... the tradition of the community—its doctrines, devotions, and loyalties—contain its own authoritative logic... it is only in the exceptional circumstance, only at the margin, that 'church authorities' should have anything to do... if a theologian must be officially corrected, it is because he has failed to understand the internal logic of the tradition or has broken faith with the community.¹¹⁰

For this reason it is important to recognize that for Neuhaus, as for Novak and Weigel, the fundamental crisis facing the post-Vatican II is not a crisis of authority, as it is for other conservative Catholics, but a crisis of faith. Neuhaus was explicit on this point when he wrote that "the crisis of this time is unbelief."¹¹¹ Contra people like Ralph McInerny, who argued that the fundamental problem confronting the Church is a failure by its leadership authorities to exercise their authority over the flock, the neoconservative Catholics argue that that which should be authoritative in the Church—its tradition and its creeds—has been marginalized in recent decades through a process of accomodationalism to

¹⁰⁹ Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment*, 147.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 148-9.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 284.

modern trends by theologians whose job it is to do theology in cooperation with long standing Church teaching.¹¹²

The concern over accomodationalism brings to the forefront the second of Dulles' two models that are of use to us here, that of the "Church as servant." The primary characteristic that differentiates this model from most of his others is that the others give primary emphasis on the Church in relation to the world. The Church as mystical communion, as institution, and as sacrament, for example, each focused on how we as Christians understand the Church and how it manifests itself in history.¹¹³ The Church as servant model, in contrast, places a much greater emphasis on the "world" and the Church's role in relation to the world. The mission of the Church from the perspective of this model is "not primarily to gain new recruits for its own ranks, but rather to be of help to all men, wherever they may be," and that, through its divine calling, "the Church is able to discern the signs of the times and to offer guidance and prophetic criticism."¹¹⁴

For the neoconservative Catholics, this tendency is clearly apparent in the progressive church, particularly insofar as it becomes overly engaged in political affairs and prophetic condemnations of American foreign policy. This point has already been covered well enough above, and we will thus not rehash in any detail the basis for their criticisms here. Needless to say, the neoconservative Catholics are clearly concerned about what they see as

¹¹² For an clear delineation of the 'crisis of authority' approach, see Ralph McInerny, *What Went Wrong with Vatican II: The Catholic Crisis Explained* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1998). For Weigel's view, see Weigel, "The Neoconservative Difference," 147-8. Here Weigel also made the explicit point that "the crisis of authority in the Church is, in fact, an expression of a deeper crisis of faith."

¹¹³ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 89-90

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 97-98.

an exaggerated tendency within the Church, and particularly among the bishops, to engage in political prophesying to those with whom they disagree. One final point will help to round out this critique by the neoconservative Catholics of the progressive.

Without going into too much detail, Richard Niebuhr provides a useful framework for understanding the different ways in which the Church, in different times and places, understands its relationship to the world. In his book, *Christ and Culture*, he develops five different ways in which this relationship can play out, the most important of which for our purpose here is that of “The Christ of Culture.”¹¹⁵ For Niebuhr, the Christ of culture paradigm is one in which Christians “feel no great tension between church and world, the social laws and the Gospel, the workings of divine grace and human effort, the ethics of salvation and the ethics of social conservation or progress.”¹¹⁶ In this framework there is a strong identification between the values upheld by the Church and segments, and perhaps even dominant segments, of the wider culture.

It is in recent times best represented by early twentieth century social gospel movement and, flowing out of that, at least is popularly perceived, mainline liberal Protestantism. Niebuhr himself highlights thinkers such as Harnack, Ritschl, and Rauschenbusch as representative figures of this perspective.¹¹⁷ While it would be an exaggeration to claim that large swaths of Catholic Church leadership have capitulated to modern culture in its entirety, insofar as the neoconservative Catholics accuse institutions

¹¹⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1951). The other four frameworks include Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of paradox.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 83.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 98-101.

such as the NCC as being the “Democratic Party at prayer,” they are clearly concerned that the bishops have conceded far too much to cultural realities. Taken to an extreme, we are again reminded of the neoconservative Catholic concern that this leadership had, in many instances, abandoned the tradition that they were called on to uphold.¹¹⁸

Given the critical approach that the neoconservative Catholics took to their opponents on ecclesiological questions, how might one begin to formulate a neoconservative Catholic ecclesiology? Just as Avery Dulles provided useful insights to above, he also provides a useful resource when developing a contrasting conception of what could form the basis for a neoconservative Catholic ecclesiology. A few remarks on this point are in order. In a revealing passage, Weigel highlighted the various models that Dulles used in his writings on this topic and asserted that “because the Church is a sacrament of Christ’s presence to the world, the Church is witness to the divine intention for humanity revealed in the Incarnation and the Resurrection.”¹¹⁹

The Church as sacrament model, from the perspective of Dulles, is a church that is a visible embodiment of God’s grace that is in the process of coming to fulfillment. Dulles wrote that “the Church becomes an actual event of grace when it appears most concretely as a sacrament—that is, in the actions of the Church as such whereby men are bound together in grace by a visible expression.”¹²⁰ In the context of such a model, the Church’s primary responsibility is to further enable those within the Church to better articulate and live their

¹¹⁸ It goes without saying that the models that Dulles proposes and the frameworks that Niebuhr provides are ideal types that no worldview perfectly fits into. Using them as a way to flesh out the neoconservative Catholic critique is an attempt to isolate certain trends that they would argue mirror their opponents’ worldview.

¹¹⁹ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 354.

¹²⁰ Dulles, “Models of the Church,” 69.

lives in the light of their faith. The primary responsibility of the Church is thus not expressed through political activity or the pursuit of social justice.

In another setting Neuhaus stressed this point, making the claim that the political mission of the Church is of secondary importance; it is not the primary role of the Church to erect a just and prosperous society.¹²¹ Given his critical attitude toward liberation theology on the whole, it is perhaps not surprising that he makes this point in a chapter that specifically focused on this topic. His indictment of liberation theology is clear: they have in effect subordinated the proper role of the Church to a political one. So, what is the proper role? While not as explicit as Weigel in his commitment to the Church as sacrament, he opens the door for such a position when he positively relays Ratzinger's claim of the importance to recognize that "God was in Christ and is in Christ in the form of his Church."¹²² The Church is called on to be a public witness to God's grace that is revealed in the incarnation and resurrection.

In its call to embody the grace of God, there is by necessity an evangelical component, as the Church seeks to bring witness to the Gospel message. For Neuhaus, by the late eighties it was the Roman Catholic Church's responsibility to take the lead in this role. Through the proclamation of the Gospel, the Church will have the chance to assume its "rightful role in the culture-forming task of constructing a religiously informed public philosophy for the American experiment in ordered liberty."¹²³ In taking this approach, Neuhaus and, the neoconservative Catholics at large, remain convinced that the Church will

¹²¹ Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment*, 189-191.

¹²² *Ibid*, 142.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 283. Developed further this could perhaps all take into account Dulles' model of the Church as herald.

in fact be more effective in shaping political debate than their opponents because the Church will help shape the culture within which such debate occurs. An added benefit, from their perspective, is that the Church will also protect its identity as the Church and not sacrifice it to a political identity.

CONCLUSION

It is not uncommon when reading commentaries on the pastoral letters to end up mired in a debate over the public policy positions taken by the bishops, followed closely by a series of criticisms that derive from either a more conservative or more progressive point of view, depending on the author in question. In addition, existing literature oftentimes examines the bishops' statement from a moral perspective and, in doing so, examines the legitimacy of capitalism versus socialism, or of the strategy of deterrence and "first use." Seldom does the conversation ever move to a discussion regarding the ecclesiological implications of the pastoral letters specifically and of the bishops' activity in the public policy realm more generally. As interested as the neoconservative Catholics were on the political side of the equation, they were also interested in the ecclesiological dimension of these debates. In fact, it is one of the primary contentions of this dissertation that for the neoconservative Catholics, the activity of the bishops in the public square during the post-Vatican II period was expressive of a specific ecclesiology that was at work, consciously or not, among large segments of Church leadership. The public policy positions staked out vis a vis those of the bishops was secondary to their ecclesiological concerns. Without the

ecclesiological presuppositions at work in the Church, which the neoconservative Catholics contend are flawed, the bishops would have acted very differently in relation to the public sphere than they actually did. To put it another way and to turn the point of focus in another direction, while the neoconservative Catholics are typically critiqued for their public policy positions, their ecclesiological positions are more fundamental to their thought than are their political ones.

Conclusion

Disruption and disagreement between competing factions of the American Catholic Church followed in the wake of Vatican II. Among these groups, the neoconservative Catholics staked out a public identity that was neither shy to criticize those with whom they disagreed nor hesitant to be vocal in speaking out on their understanding of the state of the Church in American society. The first part of this dissertation examined dominant themes in their writings that helped to frame this public character. On the one hand, this vision took on a rather pessimistic hue. One can trace in their writings a concern over the threat of disintegration, both in the broader political culture as a whole and in regard to the health and well-being of the Church herself. In the aftermath of both Vietnam and the Second Vatican Council, the neoconservative Catholics grew increasingly worried that American political and religious life had lost its bearings and was falling quickly into a state of confusion. On the other hand, there was a sense that the American experiment in democracy was under attack and at risk. On the other hand, Catholic identity had fractured following Vatican II and it lacked the stability that it would need to maintain its prominent place both domestically and internationally.

While the theme of disintegration was an important component to their thought during the seventies and eighties, it was countered by a theme of renewal. The neoconservative Catholics each formulated a political and religious vision in response to their concerns. During this process they began to develop a conception of the Church, its ethical

teaching tradition, and the American political tradition through which they hoped to counter any ongoing tendencies toward disintegration that might be at play in the wider society.

Through their writings many shared assumptions become apparent, but it is in the context of these broader conceptual schemas that each of the neoconservative Catholics developed that important differences emerged. In short, Michael Novak focused on the idea of democratic capitalism, Richard Neuhaus began what became a rather thorough examination of the relationship between religion and public life, with a particular emphasis on the thought of Emile Durkheim, and George Weigel took up the cause of the “John Courtney Murray Project.” These conceptual worldviews that each of the neoconservative Catholics embraced were the focus of the second chapter.

While an important step in the development of their public identity, these conceptual frameworks did not remain in the realm of the abstract. Rather, the neoconservative Catholics embedded these worldviews in a narrative format and in doing so grounded them in a distinctive understanding of the American political tradition and the Catholic social teaching tradition. Chapter three picked up on this point and argued that through these narratives the neoconservative Catholics were engaging in a process of reconciliation that was directly related to the political and religious worldviews that each embraced. More specifically, they sought to claim that American political philosophy, as embedded in its founding documents and subsequent developments, could be harmonized with the moral principles espoused in the Catholic political tradition. Contrary to some of their contemporaries, the neoconservative Catholics held fast to the position that their political

philosophy was compatible with, if not a product of, the Catholic political tradition. Both Weigel and Neuhaus took a strong position on this, in effect arguing that the American experiment in democracy emerged out of the philosophical principles originally embraced in centuries-old Christian political tradition.

Novak took a somewhat softer stance in this regard and instead argued that developments in both the Catholic social teaching tradition and in the American political tradition led to convergence of the two traditions by the mid-twentieth century. In other words, the moral and philosophical commitments that recent popes had made in their public teachings on human nature and political society committed the Church to institutional structures that would help to realize these commitments in history. From the perspective of Novak, these institutional structures were most clearly found in liberal institutions embodied in American political life.

While prolific writers who spent a great deal of ink developing their political and religious visions, the neoconservative Catholics were not mere academics who remained ensconced behind a desk, publishing one book or article after another. They were each deeply involved in American political life through their activity in a wide array of politically oriented institutes and think tanks around and beyond the Washington, DC region. Through their involvement in these organizations, the neoconservative Catholics took aim at their secular and religious counterparts who maintained competing positions on any number of policy questions.

To do justice to this fact, the second part of this dissertation moved away from the specifically thematic considerations of “disintegration,” “renewal,” and “reconciliation” to the more politically concrete issues with which the neoconservative Catholics wrestled during the period under study. One of the overarching topics that functioned as a backdrop throughout most of their work and political action was concerns over the Cold War and the threat of communism. Whether they focused on liberation theology in Latin America or the pastoral letters produced by the Catholic bishops of the United States, there was an ever-present awareness of the Soviet Union and the influence that it brought to bear on American domestic and foreign policy.

Through an analysis of the concrete debates that emerged during this period, it became increasingly apparent that their writings pertained to three primary areas, each of which contributed to the formation of their public identity and distinguished them from their Catholic contemporaries. First, and already alluded to above, were arguments that took place on the policy level (e.g., what specific political strategies and policies would be most effective in the fight against communism?). This set of issues is the most explicit and, for the most part, has been the most widely remarked upon by commentators.

The second area consisted in their frequent cooperation and engagement with their Protestant counterparts. While much energy was consumed by the neoconservative Catholics as they criticized Catholic leadership in the United States, almost as much was spent assailing intellectual viewpoints and political activities that originated in typically mainline and more liberal oriented Protestant circles. Further, the criticisms of the neoconservative

Catholics were typically advanced in tandem with their like-minded, more politically conservative Protestant counterpoints. In some respects this was natural for someone like Neuhaus, who remained committed to Lutheranism until the early nineties, but such criticism was not foreign to Novak or Weigel either.

Finally, a third area of importance in their writings focused on theological concerns. In contrast to their writings related to their politically oriented discussion, these theological concerns typically took specific aim at Catholic leadership in the American Church. They were convinced that not only American political life but the American Catholic Church was in need of renewal following a period of decline in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Taken as a whole, their theological reflections amount to a fairly stinging critique of large segments of the Church's leadership, who are taken to task for misunderstanding and misapplying the teachings of Vatican II, and the Church's theological tradition more generally, to the late twentieth-century American Church. These criticisms became particularly pronounced on ecclesiological matters.

Given that debates covering secular political affairs have already received a good deal of attention in this dissertation and elsewhere, there is no need to further address it here. Instead, the remainder of this study will provide a brief commentary on the second and third areas mentioned above. These have often been overlooked and underappreciated elements in the neoconservative Catholic public identity and thus deserve more explicit attention in the closing paragraphs. It is important to stress, however, that all three areas discussed above

function as an indispensable component to this identity and should not be considered of marginal importance in relationship to the other elements.

THE NEOCONSERVATIVE CATHOLICS, ECUMENISM, AND PUBLIC LIFE

It was not unusual for the neoconservative Catholics to engage actively with and just as often criticize their Protestant counterparts, a tendency that was the result of at least two factors. First, since the end of World War II one of the traditional defining features of religious identity—denominationalism—had become less important as a defining marker for religious identity.¹ In its place, where one landed on the political spectrum became a more relevant marker of religious identity. Consequently, it was not unusual for conservative Catholics to have more in common, and thus co-operate more extensively in the public sphere, with a conservative Protestant than with liberal Catholics. While the neoconservative Catholics maintained a strong Catholic sensibility throughout this period, they were not exempt from this tendency. Examining the makeup of the debates in which they participated reveals that they often sided with conservative-leaning Protestants while eschewing the positions of their more liberal brethren.

Second, while this feature of their thought was generally alluded to only indirectly, the neoconservative Catholics were strong proponents of the ecumenical movement that emerged in force after Vatican II. Throughout the eighties and beyond, they regularly sided with evangelical Christians in the political fray. The relationship between then-Lutheran

¹ Wuthnow, *The Social Reconstruction of American Religion*.

Neuhaus on the one hand and the Catholic Novak and Weigel on the other, points to this dynamic at play. Their work with the Institute on Religion and Democracy, which was initially a Protestant-based organization that focused predominately on the mainline churches, is another example of this tendency. While cooperation between Protestant groups and the neoconservative Catholics often focused on specifically political concerns during the eighties, ecumenical specific concerns became even more pronounced the following decade.²

In 1992 Richard John Neuhaus, Charles Colson, and a group of other Catholic and evangelical theologians convened to discuss the violent relations between Latin American evangelical and Catholic groups. This encounter resulted in the formation of “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (ECT), a grouping of Christian scholars from different religious perspectives that sought to establish a deeper solidarity that transcended the current religious divisions at work in the Church. The first statement produced by this initiative, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millenium,” was released in 1994 and focused primarily on the aforementioned theme of unity in a diverse world.³ In subsequent years ECT, the exact membership of which varied over time, released a series of other statements, each of which focused on key themes in the Catholic and Evangelical dialogue.⁴

² For a useful examination of the often contentious and sometimes cooperative relationship between the American Catholic and American Evangelical communities see William Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³ Evangelicals and Catholics Together, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millenium,” *First Things*, May 1, 1994, 15-22.

⁴ These statements included “The Gift of Salvation,” *First Things*, January 1, 1998, 20-23, which focused on trying to develop a common understanding of salvation; “Your Word is Truth,” *First Things*, August 1, 2002, 38-42, which focused on the issue of revelation and the relationship between Scripture and Tradition; “The Communion of Saints,” *First Things*, March 1, 2003, 26-33, which focused on, as the title suggests, the

These statements primarily focused on difficulties that plagued relations between Catholic and Evangelical Christianity and thus typically maintained a theological undertone throughout. Nevertheless, political motifs did emerge at various junctures and thus the documents could be read for their political and social significance. For example, in the first statement published on Christian mission in the third millennium, the authors focused on the universal call to Christian unity and, to some extent, interreligious dialogue. But also included was a positive appraisal of the market economy and, in language reminiscent of Michael Novak's tripartite political imagery, a call for the "careful balancing between economics, politics, and culture."⁵ One of their later statements, "That They May Have Life," promoted a political vision that sought to defend human dignity in the public square and thus not surprisingly promoted a strong pro-life vision through which they hoped to influence secular affairs.

Particularly as it pertained to their shared political outlook and activities, there was a kind of complementarity at work in the relationship between Catholics and Evangelicals more generally. In his widely discussed book, *The Closing of the Evangelical Mind*, Mark Noll lamented the failure of Evangelical Christians to contribute extensively to modern intellectual life. His opening sentence summed up this concern when he wrote that the

communion of saints; "The Call to Holiness," *First Things*, March 1, 2005, 23-26, which examined the transforming power of the love of God and our participation in it; "That They May Have Life," *First Things*, October 1, 2006, 18-25, which reiterated the Christian mandate that we must protect life from conception until death; and, finally, "Do Whatever He Tells You: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Christian Faith and Life," *First Things*, November 1, 2009, 49-59.

⁵ Evangelicals and Catholics Together, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," 20.

“scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.”⁶ While he admitted toward the end that there was evidence of a renaissance in evangelical thought, he also stressed that some of the “most interesting evangelical politics, for example, comes in the self-conscious borrowing from,” among others, “the neoconservative Catholicism of Richard John Neuhaus, Michael Novak, and George Weigel.”⁷

In his exceedingly critical account of Neuhaus’ thought, Damon Linker voiced something similar when he wrote that the original statement produced by Evangelicals and Catholics Together brought “the intellectual heft of Catholicism together with the zealous religiosity of the evangelicals...”⁸ Richard Neuhaus rejected this sort of an analysis and, as a participant on a panel called to explore the dynamics of anti-Catholicism, claimed that “commentators who believe that a ‘threatening theological insurgency is engineered and directed by Catholics,’ with evangelical Protestants merely as the movement’s ‘foot soldiers,’” was often a subtly expressed anti-Catholicism of the left.⁹

Even though the neoconservative Catholics provided an intellectual vision that was taken seriously by both opponents and proponents alike, and in the process did help to shape the intellectual landscape, it is likely an exaggeration to assume that their influence extended much beyond a contributing factor in evangelical circles. Where their influence was more potent was in the context of the Catholic Church, both in the time period under discussion

⁶ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), 3.

⁷ Ibid, 227.

⁸ Linker, 85.

⁹ Sewell Chan, “Is Anti-Catholicism Dead?” *The New York Times*, January 23, 2008, <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/07/23/is-anti-catholicism-dead/>, accessed January 13, 2010.

and in the years following. This is in large part due to the fact that, while always seeking to influence the secular political world, they consistently linked a political worldview to a Catholic-oriented one.

THE NEOCONSERVATIVE CATHOLIC ECCLESIOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Taking advantage of their versatility in political and religious rhetoric and ideas, each of the neoconservative Catholics created distinctive historical narratives that in turn led to the emergence of paradigms through which they understood and experienced the world. The paradigms that they in effect produced maintained a certain gravitas that carried a good deal of influence in Church circles. While their overarching worldview was politically effective, these types of arguments also extended into the realm of theology. It is important to read the neoconservative Catholics on multiple levels; the first and most obvious was on issues focused specifically on policy and politics. Typically, and not surprisingly, these issues received most attention in the secular press, even when their debates revolved around issues contained in the bishops' pastoral letters on the economy or nuclear war. While their political vision is crucial to understanding their public identity as Catholics, equally important were their arguments that pertained more specifically to theological issues.

One place where their theological considerations became particularly important was in the context of ecclesiology. Some years after the period under study here, Weigel remarked in an essay that "the American Catholic neoconservative perspective emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s out of religious, indeed theological, and specifically

ecclesiological concerns,” and was particularly interested in the way that the Church’s ecclesiological identity had grown increasingly murky in the post-Vatican II Church.¹⁰ This was particularly apparent in the neoconservative Catholic belief that there had emerged during this period a confusion of roles, wherein the clergy were in many cases improperly living out their own calling. Too often they meddled in secular affairs which, according to the neoconservative Catholics, did not properly fall within their purview. Such interference also threatened to undermine the laity, who were explicitly called to engage in political life, and to do so independently from the clerical oversight. The independence of the laity from direct clerical oversight in secular matters, while upheld as a fundamental and guiding principle by the neoconservative Catholics, was in fact a relatively new phenomenon in the Catholic experience.

Throughout American history there was a tendency for the hierarchy to exert its control over the activities of the laity. This is not to say that lay Catholics did not play an important role in the development of the American Catholic Church. One can look to the early American Church, when large segments of the Catholic population were compelled to keep the faith without the benefit of the clergy. In the early nineteenth century when lay trusteeism was widespread, members of the laity often held leadership roles in the growing American Catholic Church. Historically, the important role of the laity in political and secular affairs is also evident in charismatic lay leaders like Terence Powderly, Mother

¹⁰ Weigel, “The Neoconservative Difference,” 138.

Jones, Orestes Brownson and his son Henry, the last of whom helped to organize the lay congresses in 1889 and 1894.¹¹

However important these lay leaders contributions were, they were to a large extent dependent on ecclesiastical support. The Knights of Labor, founded by Powderly, depended on Cardinal Gibbon's intercession at the Vatican in order to avoid the organization's suppression.¹² The Lay Congresses, to provide another example, dissolved after 1894, in large part because of a lack of hierarchical support. Support for lay independence was lacking because some bishops feared that the laity would develop a power structure that was independent from their own, thus instilling among some bishops a resistance to the tide of a rising lay consciousness.¹³

The hierarchy's attempt to assert control over the lay Catholic population, and in particular its political activities, continued into the early decades of the twentieth century. In his book discussing the first decade of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), Douglas Slawson highlighted some of the conflicts that arose between the church hierarchy and lay organizations at this time. One of the major impetuses for the foundation of the Conference arose because of concerns some bishops had in relation to the growing independence of the Knights of Columbus, a group that had been very active during World War I and sought to continue its social activities independent of clerical oversight and control. Many of the Church hierarchy, and particularly those in leadership positions in the

¹¹ Patrick Carey, "Lay Catholic Leadership in the United States," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 8, no. 3(Summer, 1990): 224-5.

¹² Thomas Shelley, "Biography and Autobiography: James Cardinal Gibbons and John Tracy Ellis," *U.S. Catholic Historian* vol. 21, no. 2, Memory and History (Spring, 2003): 40-41.

¹³ Carey, 233.

NCWC thought it important to reign in the Knights of Columbus and guide their activities according to the interests of the institutional Church.¹⁴

Another example of the bishops' attempt to control lay activity in the secular sphere becomes evident with the establishment of the Department of Lay Activities in the NCWC. In 1901 the American Federation of Catholic Societies (AFCS) was established with the aim of defining and asserting a Catholic viewpoint on important political questions of the day, particularly in the defense of Church rights and the pursuit of social justice issues. By 1917, its leadership sought to enroll every Catholic layman in a local diocesan association.¹⁵ One of the primary goals of the Department of Lay Activities, which was established in 1920, was to subsume the AFCS within the NCWC, thus ensuring that activities of the Federation would have direct clerical oversight. This attempt eventually resulted in the emergence of the National Council of Catholic Men and the National Council of Catholic Women, both of which helped to coordinate lay activities on the diocesan level under the direct leadership of the local bishop.¹⁶ Writing on the establishment of these two lay organization, the Church historian Patrick Carey noted that "both groups represented lay activity under the supervision of the hierarchy—a precursor to Pope Pius XI's Catholic Action."¹⁷

Following on the Americanist crisis, church historian David O'Brien reports, the hierarchy came to believe that "what was needed was lay action that would not undermine the subordinate role of the laity within the church... The mission of spreading the message of

¹⁴ Douglas Slawson, *The Foundation and First Decade of The National Catholic Welfare Council* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 53.

¹⁵ Ibid, 13

¹⁶ Ibid, See in particular chapter V and 76-81.

¹⁷ Carey, 234.

the gospel and ‘restoring all things in Christ’ had been given by Jesus to the apostles and their successors, the bishops and priests. Only under their direction was lay action officially Catholic.”¹⁸ In 1937 the Archbishop of Milwaukee, Samuel Stritch, called together a conference that focused on Catholic Action and its continued importance in the life of the Church. Mrs. George Fell, a member of the Toledo Council of Catholic Women and a speaker at the closing banquet, expressed sentiments that were fairly common among the laity of the day. In her speech she emphasized the leadership role that the clergy was called to embody and, in like fashion, the role of the laity as devoted followers of this leadership. Members of the laity were called to be soldiers of Christ and to dutifully follow the course of action outlined by Church leadership.¹⁹

During this pre-Vatican II period, according to the sociologists of religion James Davidson and Dean Hoge, the laity tended to espouse a cultic view of the clergy in which the former looked to the latter as a group set apart, in both their spiritual and their administrative authority. Members of the laity were, in somewhat simplified terms, called to “pray, pay, and obey.”²⁰ While an appeal to hierarchical control of lay action was a dominant theme in the first half of the twentieth century, it was neither lasting nor the only one. By the 1920s countertrends had emerged in which the laity was pursuing independent action from that of Church leadership; by the fifties independent lay action that was divorced from the clerical oversight became increasingly commonplace. The promulgation of the Vatican II documents

¹⁸ O’Brien, *Public Catholicism*, 208.

¹⁹ Mary Irene Zotti, “The Young Christian Workers,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 9, no. 4, Labor and Lay Movements: Part Two (Fall, 1990): 391.

²⁰ James Davidson and Dean Hoge, “Mind the Gap: The Return of the Lay/Clerical Divide,” *Commonweal*, November 23, 2007, 18-19.

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem) and *Lumen Gentium* contributed to the empowerment of the laity.

In contrast to Catholic Action, which largely subjugated the laity under the oversight of clerical guidance, these documents partially liberated the laity from this authority and recognized an intrinsic integrity in secular matters for such Catholics. In this regard, the Council Fathers remarked in *Lumen Gentium* that

the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God... since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.²¹

The neoconservative Catholics took this vision to heart and seldom commented on the fact that, in the life of the Church, this sort of lay independence was in fact a novel phenomenon. For this reason, the neoconservative Catholics, at least from the perspective of their political theology, embraced a relatively contemporary perspective. They have of course important precursors and for that reason they do not stand alone, but they did affirm a vision of the role of the laity in the world that was marginal well into the twentieth century. This emphasis on lay participation in political life and its preeminence in secular affairs also helps to lay the groundwork for a potent critique of the clergy, and in particular the American bishops during the post-Vatican II period.

The neoconservative Catholics never went so far as to argue that the clergy had no role in political affairs; such a position would be untenable given the fact that after his

²¹ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II, November 21, 1964, #31.

conversion Neuhaus himself remained very outspoken on political affairs and yet remained a priest. Nevertheless, one of the central criticisms that the neoconservative Catholics made of the American hierarchy in the decades following the Second Vatican Council pertained to the overt political activity that the bishops and clergy engaged in and the way in which this behavior usurped the proper role of the laity and also distorted the proper role to be played by the clergy. For this reason it is at times unclear whether or not the neoconservative Catholics objections to clerical involvement in politics had more to do with the political positions of their clerical opponents or more to do with deep seated ecclesiological concerns. Their rhetoric on this topic often times suggested an ecclesiological angle. Michael Novak, for example, summed this angle up in an essay authored for the *National Review*, when he wrote that

It used to be thought that laymen and laywomen had a special vocation in the church, a vocation to make Christian conscience present in the world, in temporal political matters. According to this view, the clergy are not to be confined to the pulpit or the sacristy, but they do have a special sacred role, crucial in nourishing the laity. The laity, however, in all their splendid variety, are expected to be the primary dealers with the contingencies and fruitful polemics of the temporal order. This was, for quite a long time, the liberal Catholic view.... liberal Catholicism will rise again.²²

While the neoconservative Catholics insisted on the importance of lay activity in the secular world, they continued to maintain a very high regard for the clergy and the role of the bishops in the life of the Church. While they were intent on protecting lay prerogatives, they were also concerned that excessive involvement by the hierarchy in political affairs would damage the long-term integrity of the Church. By sullyng themselves in ongoing political

²² Novak, "Liberal Catholicism Will Rise Again," 694.

debates the bishops in particular ran the risk of diminishing the stature of the Church in the eyes of others; political activity by the bishops carried with it the possibility of contributing to the construction of a public perception that the Church is just one more interest group among many. Never do the neoconservative Catholics express the concern that an aggressive lay Catholic presence in political life would have the same effect.

One is sometimes left with the impression that for the neoconservative Catholics the hierarchy both embodies and reflects the sacred character of the Church in ways that the laity do not. To the extent that this is the case, the neoconservative Catholics embrace a traditional view of the clergy that sees them as occupying an exalted position in the Church, while at the same time they manifest a very contemporary view of the laity that stresses their relative independence, particularly in political affairs, from clerical oversight.

The “confusion of roles” that ensued in the post-Vatican II Church between lay and clerical activities in the public sphere is, for the neoconservative Catholics, merely demonstrative of a much more widespread problem. At the core of the neoconservative Catholic concern with the bishops was a concern over ecclesiology. The faulty ecclesiology that the American Catholic leadership had consequently internalized resulted in confusion and signified a fundamental break from the teaching of the Second Vatican Council specifically and Church tradition more generally. Many of the bishops, not to mention those in religious orders and other leadership positions, had according to the neoconservative Catholics lost their bearings and embraced a public presence that was not consistent with their role as priests and religious.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this dissertation was to develop and explain the public character of neoconservative Catholic identity as it developed up to the end of the Reagan administration and the close of the Cold War. It is impossible to understand the Catholic and public character of their identity without recognizing its multilayered character. First, and most obvious, the neoconservative Catholics tackled a wide range of policy questions and in doing so provided pointed criticism of both their secular and religious opponents, whom they often accused of embracing an all too progressive political worldview. On this layer, debates often raged on questions related to the most effective and just forms of economy, on nuclear weapons, on the most effective approach to stop the Soviet Union, and the problems confronting many Latin American countries.

Their political involvement also anticipated ecumenical developments that became increasingly apparent in the nineties. Initially, the neoconservative Catholics engaged Protestant groups on a policy and through cooperation with them tried to counter those who held opposing viewpoints. While political cooperation continued following the end of the Cold War, the neoconservative Catholics and their Protestant counterparts shifted into what would be considered more traditionally oriented ecumenical activities. This could be seen, for example, in their activities related to *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* in the nineties and beyond. Here there was more emphasis placed on doctrinal questions that divided Catholics and Protestants. From a distance, it appears as though one of the driving forces behind this push was Neuhaus' conversion to Catholicism.

That said, the theological concerns of the neoconservative Catholics were not restricted to the level of ecumenical engagement that became pronounced in the early nineties. They also developed a pointed theological critique of the American Catholic bishops, prominent Catholic leadership and, to a lesser extent, many of the mainline Protestant Churches that still held sway in modern American life. For the sake of brevity we will focus only touch on their critique of their Catholic opponents and highlight two levels on which this took place. First, the neoconservative Catholics accused many of the American bishops and Catholic leadership of embracing a distorted and inadequate conception of Catholic social teaching and its relationship to American political life. George Weigel went so far as to argue that large swaths of this leadership had effectively abandoned guiding principles of the Catholic political tradition that he claimed extended as far back as Augustine. This inadequate and distorted conception of the Catholic social and political teaching, as they understood it, provided the foundation out of which many of the Church's leadership's faulty policy decisions emerged.

This problem was exacerbated by what they took to be an inadequate ecclesiology by their opponents in the progressive Church. They often worried that Church leadership had become infatuated with being politically relevant and, in the process, sacrificed Catholic identity for political ideals that were not consistent with Church tradition. Furthermore, leadership within the "progressive Church" misunderstood what it meant to be "Church" and thus they were motivated to engage political life in such a way such that it lost its unique place as the Church of God. In the process the Church was debased and failed to live out

their primary *public* role as a Church, which is to shape the culture within which policy debates occur. George Weigel stressed this point when he wrote that “the gravest temptation in contemporary American Catholicism is to reduce the Church’s role to that of lobbyist for particular policies,” a move which is a fatal flaw, since that “society comes before polity is not an abstract affirmation of political theory; it is a fundamental fact of life in American political culture.”²³ In short, for the neoconservative Catholics, leadership within the American Church has their eyes on the wrong prize. They too often looked to shape policy in Washington, DC, rather than shaping the culture to which Congress responds, and in doing so risked becoming little more than one political interest group among many.

²³ Weigel, *Tranquillitas Ordinis*, 349.

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