



Culture wars : the influence of religion in public life according to Richard John Neuhaus  
by David Karl Weber

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in History  
Montana State University

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Abstract:

Historical analysis of the relationship of the Christian religion to general culture identifies the recurring (not constant) theme of the culture war. A culture war is that social conflict over the ideas and understandings that intend to shape and define a given culture. Accepting the understanding that contemporary America is embroiled in a culture war, this study investigates the descriptions, analysis and proposals of a principal religious author in America today, Richard John Neuhaus. The first chapter is a necessary prolegomena to this intellectual historical project as it addresses certain current academic notions that philosophically challenge the validity of such a project. The second chapter surveys salient features of the contemporary culture war. The third chapter discusses Neuhaus' tripartite division of the public square and his understanding of society being shaped within the tension due to the legitimate exercise of each of these public realms. The fourth chapter is an overview of the historical genealogy of this notion of tension, focusing on the thought of St. Augustine and Martin Luther. In the fifth chapter these understandings of the culture war are applied to the issue of abortion, for the sake of understanding the conflict and addressing possible solutions. Insofar as the contemporary American culture war is far from being a fiat accompli, historical conclusions are elusive. Therefore, as the historical denouement of this culture war remains ambiguous, Neuhaus proposes ways that publicly potent religion may exercise constructive influence in the civil community.

CULTURE WARS: THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION  
IN PUBLIC LIFE ACCORDING  
TO RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS

by  
David Karl Weber

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MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Bozeman, Montana

April, 1993

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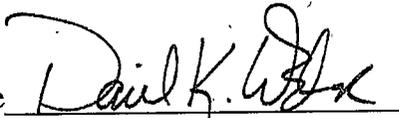
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1. IDEAS AND CONSEQUENCES .....	1
2. INTRODUCING THE CULTURE WAR .....	10
3. DEFINING THE PUBLIC SQUARE .....	17
Politics and the Rationality of Power .....	19
Freedom, Justice and Economics .....	26
Culture, Community and Conversation .....	35
4. THE GENEALOGY OF TENSION .....	49
The City of God .....	51
Luther's Two Kingdoms .....	67
5. ABORTION AND THE CIVIL COMMUNITY .....	90
The Genealogy of the Culture War .....	96
<i>Roe v. Wade</i> : The Heart of the Culture War .....	101
Discerning the Community .....	109
Defending the Community .....	124
The Orthodox Narrative .....	130
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	135

### ABSTRACT

Historical analysis of the relationship of the Christian religion to general culture identifies the recurring (not constant) theme of the culture war. A culture war is that social conflict over the ideas and understandings that intend to shape and define a given culture. Accepting the understanding that contemporary America is embroiled in a culture war, this study investigates the descriptions, analysis and proposals of a principal religious author in America today, Richard John Neuhaus. The first chapter is a necessary prolegomena to this intellectual historical project as it addresses certain current academic notions that philosophically challenge the validity of such a project. The second chapter surveys salient features of the contemporary culture war. The third chapter discusses Neuhaus' tripartite division of the public square and his understanding of society being shaped within the tension due to the legitimate exercise of each of these public realms. The fourth chapter is an overview of the historical genealogy of this notion of tension, focusing on the thought of St. Augustine and Martin Luther. In the fifth chapter these understandings of the culture war are applied to the issue of abortion, for the sake of understanding the conflict and addressing possible solutions. Insofar as the contemporary American culture war is far from being a *fiat accompli*, historical conclusions are elusive. Therefore, as the historical denouement of this culture war remains ambiguous, Neuhaus proposes ways that publicly potent religion may exercise constructive influence in the civil community.

## CHAPTER 1

*IDEAS AND CONSEQUENCES*

The notion of the *Kulturkampf* or culture war is a recurring theme in contemporary descriptions of religion's influence upon public life. It is, of course, not a war fought with bullets, rockets or missiles<sup>1</sup> but a war of ideas; a "struggle to define the America."<sup>2</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, a central religious character in the present *Kulturkampf*, fondly and frequently refers to Richard Weaver's maxim that "Ideas have consequences."<sup>3</sup> This seemingly prosaic and harmless observation, a first principle for any intellectual history project,<sup>4</sup> has been recently challenged and rejected by some very influential intellectual forces. To this rejection this introduction is addressed.

Presently, there appears to be no dominate consensus that governs the purposes of

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<sup>1</sup>"It may not be with bullets,' he (Weyrich) was once quoted by Viguierie as saying, ' and it may not be with rockets and missiles, but it is a war nevertheless. It is a war of ideology, it's a war of ideas, and it's a war about our way of life. And it has to be fought with the same intensity, I think, and dedication as you would fight a shooting war.'" E.J. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>James Davidson Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle To Define America*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>3</sup>For Neuhaus, moral accountability is a consequent of historical accounts as he writes, "The way to crimes against humanity was prepared by peculiar ways of thinking about humanity... '*Ideas have consequences.*' The Holocaust was, in largest part, the consequence of ideas about human nature, human rights, the imperatives of history and scientific progress, the character of law, the bonds and obligations of political community." Richard John Neuhaus, "The Way They Were, The Way We Are: Bioethics and the Holocaust," *First Things* 1 (March 1990): pp. 31-37.

<sup>4</sup>Gilbert points out that one of the pitfalls of identifying one's work as "intellectual history" is that the term does not itself have an extended genealogy. He states that the term "intellectual history" is unrecognized by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is given no entry in the *Cambridge Modern History*, and has no verbal equivalent in Italian, Germany or French. Nonetheless, the topics and concerns of intellectual history are liberally dispersed throughout a vast variety of historical inquiry. Felix Gilbert, *Intellectual History: Its Aims and Methods*, (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1972), pp. 141-142.

or the possibilities for intellectual history.<sup>5</sup> Gone are the days when historiographies like Philip Melanchthon's tidy bifurcation of history into *historia ecclesiastica* and *historia ethnica*<sup>6</sup> or the Encyclopedists' notion of progress would serve to organize vast amounts of historical data and matrix centuries of historical discussion. Even after Positivism had reduced history to an anti-metaphysical phenomenological study and Marxist materialism had all but reduced the phenomena to the economics of class struggle, there was an epistemological optimism concerning the knowable "relation between thought and action."<sup>7</sup> This optimism accepted the accessibility of historical data, the fixed quality of texts, and the hope of discovering objective connections between ideas and events. It is an optimism based on presuppositions that are no longer universally, perhaps not even widely accepted in the academic community.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>MacIntyre says that the medieval lecturer spoke to that consensus formed by an acceptance of authoritative texts and the "Encyclopaedist" of the eighteenth--nineteenth century were able to speak "*ex cathedra*" where "the audience came to hear and to learn from authoritative encyclopedic pronouncements..." But in the contemporary situation of "radical disagreements," MacIntyre sees the lecture, or in this case the theses as "an episode in a narrative of conflicts... between condemning parties... it is always a moment of engagement in conflict." Further commenting on the difference of the present to the past, MacIntyre notes that "The lectures...were to convey real knowledge of a kind 'which lies at the root of all well-being.' A summons to the hearing of such a lecture is very different from a summons to participate in a conflict over what the reality of knowledge consists in, *if anything*." Alisdar MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 32-33

<sup>6</sup>Gilbert, *Intellectual History*, p. 146.

<sup>7</sup>Furthermore, Gilbert cites as an example the works of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch which investigated the "relation of religious thought to social and economic activities..." and the common area of study of the influence of ideas upon politics. Felix Gilbert, *Intellectual History: Its Aims and Methods*, pp. 141-158.

<sup>8</sup>MacIntyre states that "...this history, being one of decline and fall, is informed by standards. It is not an evaluatively neutral chronicle. The form of the narrative, the division into stages, presuppose standards of achievement and failure, of order and disorder." The problem is that such notions of fixed standards have given way to "emotivism" which is "the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling..." Alisdar MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 3 & 11.

This study presupposes that historical ideas are knowable in some objective sense and their connection to the phenomenological world of events can be established, in some objective,<sup>9</sup> though not exhaustive, sense.<sup>10</sup> It is to assert that as the historian gives an account of the past, he or she can achieve what Notre Dame philosopher, Alisdair MacIntyre terms "accountability."<sup>11</sup>

According to MacIntyre, the two modes of accountability in Western thought are "dialectic" and "confession."<sup>12</sup> In a Christian liturgical form the penitent confesses to have sinned against God in "thought, word and deed." This kind of religious confessional

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<sup>9</sup>Both the religious and conservative roots of this assumption are nicely voiced by Frank Meyer as he writes, "Conservatism assumes the existence of an objective moral order based upon ontological foundations. Whether or not individual conservatives hold theistic views--and a large majority of them do--this outlook is derived from a theistic tradition. The essential point, however, is that the conservative looks at political and social questions with the assumption that there are objective standards for human conduct and criteria for the judgment of theories and institutions, which it is the duty of human beings to understand as thoroughly as they are able and to which it is their duty to approximate their actions." Frank Meyer et al., *Left, Right, and Center: Essays on Liberalism and Conservatism in the United States*, (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1965), p. 6

<sup>10</sup>"...historians are not content with the simple discovery of past facts: they aspire... not only to say what happened, but also to show why it happened. History is not just a plain record of past events, but what I shall call later a 'significant' record - an account in which events are connected together. And the question immediately arises what their being connected implies about the nature of historical thinking." W.H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 18

<sup>11</sup>Alisdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) p. 201f.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, "To be accountable in and for enquiry is to be open to having to give an account of what one has either said or done, and then to having to amplify, explain, defend, and, if necessary, either modify or abandon that account, and in this latter case to begin the work of supplying a new one. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle invented and perfected a dialectical mode of accountability, the Bible and Augustine a confessional mode." Furthermore, MacIntyre states that for such accountability to be a plausible category of human reflection, Greek philosophy and Christian theology share agreement on three preconditions of existence; an account of extended historical identity, the reality and centrality of the moral community, and a sense of teleological unity. (p. 196-197) Differences at these three points arise in making a defense for the integrity of intellectual history versus the critique from Deconstructionism/Genealogy.

accountability is possible because of a belief in objective,<sup>13</sup> open to reflection and knowable connections between past thoughts, words and deeds. Such accountability depends upon a sense of personal identity rooted in the belief in historical continuity, i.e., "I am...one and the same person throughout this bodily life...." Secondly, "I am responsible to a moral code and community." Thirdly, "My life is understood as a teleologically ordered unity." Therefore, thoughts, words and deeds impact one's whole life, are subject to community judgments and are conjoined in that kind of continuity that becomes a meaningful narrative.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, historical accountability, as with confessional accountability, must be centered in an equally optimistic epistemology about the accessibility of discernable connections between thoughts/ideas, words/texts and deeds/events.

In the present historical scene, deconstructionism's<sup>15</sup> "denial of the possibility of

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<sup>13</sup>The term "objective" should not be construed as an assertion of impartiality. Walsh writes, "Impartial history, so far from being an ideal, is a downright impossibility... the concept of historical objectivity is radically different from that of scientific objectivity." Walsh goes on to assert that while the historian is a factor in the historical project, bias and "tendentious work" is still distinguishable from principled historical inquiry. Walsh, *Philosophy of History*, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup>MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, p. 196-197. See also C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978) Lewis suggests that the main feature of a historiography amenable to Christian presuppositions is that "... all history in the last resort must be held by Christians to be a story with a divine plot." p. 176.

<sup>15</sup>D'Souza defines deconstructionism as follows. "Inspired by Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, deconstructionists hold that all literature is empty of meaning...that literary reality is an illusion, that fact dissolves into fiction, that literal meaning cannot be divorced from metaphorical meaning." Furthermore, D'Souza quotes the University of Chicago's Edward Shils who charges that deconstructionism is but a renewed manifestation of sophistry which leads to the absurd situation of academicians denial that truth is preferable to falsehood. Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p. 178-179. Similarly MacIntyre points out that Nietzsche's "preference for the sophists," over Socrates, Plato and Aristotle fits with the deconstructionists "perspectivism" and the "repudiation of the distinction between the real and the apparent..." *Three Rival Versions* p. 66-67.

objective knowing" and its tendency to "discredit the enterprise of history,"<sup>16</sup> are the greatest challenge to the notion of objective historical accountability. This cursory treatment of deconstructionism purposefully uses secondary and critical literature from active participants in the present *Kulturkampf*. The purpose is not to give a fair and unbiased account of deconstructionism which deconstructionism decrees is an impossibility anyway. Rather, it is to exhibit how this deconstructionism is perceived and criticized as an attack upon basic historical and intellectual assumptions. Dinesh D'Souza, concerned about the impact of deconstructionism on higher education, ties deconstructionism's low view of language to the spurning of objectivity. He states:

"Focusing on the distance between word and subject - 'signifier' and 'signified' - Derrida and de Man demonstrate that literary reality is an illusion, that fact dissolves into fiction, that literal meaning cannot be divorced from metaphorical meaning... by reducing all truth to the level of opinion they spurn the legitimacy of any distinctions between truth and error..."<sup>17</sup>

Discussing different senses of objectivity, W.H. Walsh writes that historical objectivity "is radically different from that of scientific objectivity..." because the notion of an impartial disinterested historian is "a downright impossibility."<sup>18</sup> Though historical objectivity is not about mathematical certainty, Walsh hints at historical accountability in stating that "every reputable historian acknowledges the need for some sort of objectivity and impartiality in his work..." In arguing for accountability, Walsh argues

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<sup>16</sup>In a review of David Lehman's, *Signs of the Times: DeConstruction and the Fall of Paul De Man*, Ben Meyer records Derrida's summary of deconstructionism. Two of these anti-historical ten commandments are, "The author is dead," and "History is bunk." Furthermore, Meyer shows that deconstructionism is a "denial of the possibility of objective knowing" and a tendency to "discredit the enterprise of history." Ben Meyer, *First Things* 22 (April 92): pp. 52-54.

<sup>17</sup>D'Souza, *Illiberal Education*, p. 179.

<sup>18</sup>Walsh, *History*, p. 22.

from the consequences of non-accountability when he asserts that one defining task of the historian is to "distinguishes history from propaganda, and [to] condemn those writers who allow all their feelings and personal preconceptions to affect their reconstruction of the past as bad workmen who do not know their job."<sup>19</sup> MacIntyre echoes this theme of the effects of the loss of objectivity by referencing back to Kant's moral philosophy:

"...emotivism entails the obliteration of any genuine distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations... For Kant... the difference between a human relationship uninformed by morality and one so informed is precisely the difference between one in which each person treats the other primarily as a means to his or her ends and one in which each treats the other as an end."<sup>20</sup>

Deconstructionism poses certain dangers in jettisoning the idea of accountability, not the least of which is the problem of history collapsing into propaganda. D'Souza, asserting that deconstructionism undermines liberal education, asks, "If education cannot teach us to separate truth from falsehood, beauty from vulgarity, and right from wrong, then what can it teach us worth knowing?"<sup>21</sup> In a somewhat different analysis, MacIntyre sees the crippling effect of genealogy upon education because of its view of language and texts. Without "any notion of the truth" and without a version of accountability that can determine what is and what merely seems to be, texts are open to "indefinite multiplicity of interpretative possibilities..." The result is the collapsing of fact into fiction.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Walsh, *History*, p. 21.

<sup>20</sup>MacIntyre, *After Virtue* p. 22.

<sup>21</sup>D'Souza, *Illiberal Education*, p. 179.

<sup>22</sup>MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, p. 205.

The collapsing of fact into fiction or history into propaganda is not merely a dangerous possibility, but a historical reality as manifest in the oft-cited instance of Paul De Man. The 1 December 1987 issue of the *New York Times* revealed that De Man collaborated with the Nazi's in writing propaganda articles, and in one case a bitterly anti-semitic piece in *Le Soir*. Ben Meyer notes that as deconstruction theory and practice demolishes notions of accountability, it is "... a theory calculated to wipe out the themes of guilt and confession..."<sup>23</sup> Showing how Deconstructionist theory related to De Man's life, David Lehman observes, it "is almost made to order for a worldview holding that language is 'an unreliable process of knowledge production.' In other words, the worldview was made to order for the life."<sup>24</sup>

Though MacIntyre graciously assents that genealogy is still giving an account of itself, and therefore may still be a viable intellectual movement, its repudiation of accountability remains troubling for reasons that are valid regardless of De Man's past. He observes that deconstructionism's use of language presuppose the very conditions of accountability (for others but not for itself), which actually and covertly presupposes "...the very kind of metaphysical thesis which it is the central aim of genealogy to discredit."<sup>25</sup> MacIntyre asks, "Is the genealogist not self-indulgently engaged in exempting his or her utterances from the treatment to which everyone else is subjected?"

Deconstructionism's rejection of categorical thinking, "a rejection designed to lay

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<sup>23</sup>Ben Meyer, *First Things* 22, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>25</sup>MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, pp. 205-206.

bare the multiplicity of differences unorganizable in terms of categories, species, and identity,"<sup>26</sup> is shameless about the internal inconsistency as it employs its own categories of judgments upon others.<sup>27</sup> Ben Meyer states, "One may propose the internally consistent statement: 'We cannot know what is really and truly so.' But look what happens when we make thematic the act of proposing this theme: 'I am telling you what is really and truly so, when I say that we cannot know what is really and truly so.' Here the speaker performatively affirms what he thematically denies." Meyer again exposes the irony of deconstructionists' denial of accountability *vis a vis* their disdain for the notion of correct interpretations of texts, while expecting their readers to grasp the "intended meaning" of their works and their complaints "...when readers failed to oblige..."<sup>28</sup>

If "ideas have consequences," then the history of ideas will at once set out to give an accurate account of ideas and consequences and hold the ideas accountable for the consequences they have produced. This thesis is concerned with both the idea and the historical manifestations of the *Kulturkampf*. It therefore, cannot avoid navigating through the dangerous shoals of moral issues and the clash of rival versions of right and wrong. While MacIntyre's analysis of our present "emotive" milieu is insightful if not incisive, he is not at all hopeful about the possibilities of political or moral consensus

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>27</sup>Meyer explains the shamelessness, "When one is confronted with the evidence of self-reversal, dismissal is the only alternative to retraction. The skeptics of antiquity were a more decent lot. They had only to speak, and there was Aristotle, convicting them of doublethink and reducing them to silence. Deconstruction had the (ultimately bad) luck of learning from Nietzsche and Heidegger to dismiss compelling argument with a cool flick of the wrist." Meyer, *First Things*, April 1992, p. 54.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

growing out of a culture that lives "after virtue." This project hopes that he is wrong, as it intends to give an account for the still- unfolding thoughts/ideas, words/texts and deeds/events of religion's impact upon public life.

## CHAPTER 2

*INTRODUCING THE CULTURE WAR*

The term *Kulturkampf* was coined by eminent scientist and liberal statesman Dr. Rudolf Virchow to describe the cultural division that resulted from Bismarck's miscalculated heavy-handed treatment of Roman Catholics in his effort to unify Germany into a nation-state.<sup>29</sup> He would, undoubtedly, be surprised at the mileage his word has returned in descriptions of contemporary American culture and most widely employed by cultural conservatives, including many Roman Catholics.

According to historian Margaret Anderson, The *Kulturkampf* was "a conglomerate of events, policies, public attitudes, and propaganda forays spread over a long period," designed by Bismarck and supported by the liberals<sup>30</sup> as part of a plan to achieve German national political unity.<sup>31</sup> Bismarck and the liberals in government perceived the Roman Catholic church as a threat to German unity and "tried by coercive measures to reduce, if not extirpate, the influence of Catholicism." According to Neuhaus, Bismarck "correctly believed that Catholicism placed a check upon his aspirations to

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<sup>29</sup>Otto Pflanze, *The Period of Consolidation*, vol. 2 of *Bismarck and the Development of Germany*, 3 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 205.

<sup>30</sup>"For this generation of German liberals the struggle with the Catholic Church actually was a fight for the spread of a modern culture," Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969) p. 262.

<sup>31</sup>Margaret Anderson, *Windthorst: A Political Biography*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 142. Also: "They, (liberals)...considered the formation of the Zentrum a provocation, an affront to their vision of a Germany that had overcome the selfish divisions of the past." pp. 145-146.

create a strong and cohesive state."<sup>32</sup> This reading of the *Kulturkampf* is reinforced by Anderson, who observed that Bismarck, along with other "state builders" from Henry VIII and Peter the Great to Richelieu and Cavour... "tried "to suppress or suborn the one significant remaining power--the institutional Church--that might contest their new state's unlimited sovereignty."<sup>33</sup> Otto Pflanze pointedly identifies the *Kulturkampf* "...to be a liberal...undertaking, a struggle of realists for the omnipotent state and of materialists against all Christianity..."<sup>34</sup> Judged by these assessments, the German *Kulturkampf* was a civil war carried on by other means.

While there are many important historical differences that make the *Kulturkampf* of the nineteenth century distinct from the present culture struggle, the term "culture war," continues to be employed in descriptions of American public life. Neuhaus comments, "It is no exaggeration to say that our society is embroiled in a *Kulturkampf*, a war over the meaning of American culture."<sup>35</sup> In a speech before the 1992 Republican National Convention, Patrick Buchanan gave a variation on the culture war theme when he asserted that this war is, at bottom, a religious war. It is a war, not necessarily of religion against the state, but religion against a cultural elite.<sup>36</sup> While Buchanan's

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<sup>32</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. xi.

<sup>33</sup>Margaret Anderson, *Windthorst*, p. 143.

<sup>34</sup>Otto Pflanze, *The Period of Consolidation*, p. 180.

<sup>35</sup>Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup>Neuhaus supports this version of the culture war as he writes, "Gallup and cooperating research agencies in Europe have done cross-cultural surveys of... 'religiousness' in various countries. Among the nations of the world...India is the most pervasively religious society. Very close to India is the United States. At the very bottom of the list is the most thoroughly secularized society, Sweden. Peter Berger... has drawn from these findings a memorable apothegm: 'America is a nation of Indians ruled by an elite of Swedes.'" Neuhaus, *America Against*

speech was intended to be a call to arms rather than invitation to serious debate, he did name some of the critical flash-point public issues (abortion, gay rights, funding for the arts, multiculturalism and so forth) that define the "meaning of American culture."<sup>37</sup>

The culture war was taken up in the 9 December 1991 issue of *Time*, which described the conflict as a cultural "backlash... a long time coming, but now... here with a vengeance." It is a conflict begun in the courtroom, now carried into the classroom,<sup>38</sup> and fought over such pivotal issues as free speech. Berkeley law professor Phillip Johnson, sums up a common frustration with the contemporary and "strange definition of free speech and religious liberty" that allows Angela Davis to address a high school graduation with the most rabid, dogmatic Communism, but proscribes a Rabbi's prayer at a similar graduation as a violation of the Constitution.<sup>39</sup> These and other battles are concerned with the legitimacy of the views that are allowed to inform public life. According to James Hunter's, *Culture Wars: A Struggle to Define America*, they are fought in the "institutional structures [in which] cultural conflict becomes crystallized," i.e., family, education, the popular media, law, and electoral politics.<sup>40</sup>

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*Itself*, p. xi.

<sup>37</sup>Hunter, *Culture Wars*, p. xi.

<sup>38</sup>Hunter notes also that education was a central battle ground in the German *Kulturkampf* because battles over "the moral character of the nation" will involve the institutions of education that are responsible for passing on this character to future generations. *Ibid.*, p. xii.

<sup>39</sup>Nancy Gibbs, "America's Holy War," *Time*, 9 December 1991 p. 61f.

<sup>40</sup>Hunter, *Culture Wars*, p. 174.

Neuhaus' assertion that "...our society is embroiled in a *Kulturkampf*,"<sup>41</sup> means that this is a battle about ideas and whether religious ideas have a legitimate place in the culture shaping debates of the public square.<sup>42</sup> Admittedly, to acknowledge that this culture war is a religious war is justifiably unsettling for a number of reasons.<sup>43</sup>

Neuhaus writes,

To those who cherish the democratic process, the model of politics as warfare cannot help but seem threatening....When it is the Lord's battle you are fighting, politics takes on an aura of deadly earnestness. [F]anaticism is contagious.... Nothing so sharply hones the edge as the frictions of religious passion. Pascal said it more than three centuries ago: 'Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.' Little wonder that more societies have tried to keep religion at once removed from the public square. History throws up too many instances in which the perfervid mix of religion and politics has destroyed the possibilities of civil discourse. That happened during the wars of religion in the seventeenth-century Europe, and the memory of that devastation was a major factor in shaping the secularist doctrines of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. When politics is conflicted by putatively divine revelations, there is little room for reasonable argument and compromise.<sup>44</sup>

Making a similar point, historian Jerry Muller argues that modern liberalism's open society began as a response to these religious wars, "as men judged that the cost of

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<sup>41</sup>Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup>"What is relatively new is the naked public square. The naked public square is the result of political doctrine and practice that would exclude religion and religious grounded values from the conduct of public business. The doctrine is that America is a secular society. It finds dogmatic expression in the ideology of secularism. I will argue that doctrine is demonstrably false and the dogma exceedingly dangerous." Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), p. viii.

<sup>43</sup>Rehearsing some of the more cacophonous calls to alarm against the influence of Christianity in public life, Neuhaus asserts that collapsing religious intention into theocratic designs upon the American public square is a distortion of the reality. If pluralism is to be real pluralism, it will have to take into account that "the American people have always been determinedly, some would say incorrigibly, religious." Richard John Neuhaus, *Commentary*, May 1985, pp.41-46.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

imposing a unified vision of the common good was too high,"<sup>45</sup> they sought a basis, other than religious orthodoxy, by which a society could be unified.

Those who suppose that religion is essentially a private affair,<sup>46</sup> the public influence of religious thought and the infusion of religious vocabulary into public discourse is met with uneasiness, confusion or even suspicion. T.S. Eliot, in *Murder in the Cathedral*, understood how "publicly potent religion"<sup>47</sup> could be perceived as detrimental to political unity because it threatens those occupying seats of power:

The moment that Becket, at the King's insistence, had been made Archbishop, he resigned the office Chancellor, he became more priestly than the priests, he ostentatiously and offensively adopted an ascetic manner of life, he affirmed immediately that there was a higher order than that which our King, and he as the King's servant, had for so many years striven to establish; and that-- God

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<sup>45</sup>"The hot and cold wars of religion that marked the early modern period were the turning point on the road to political liberalism, for as men judged that the cost of imposing a unified vision of the common good was too high, they sought to define a more restricted core of politically imposed obligations upon which men of differing ultimate commitments might agree, and hence live together without murdering or otherwise oppressing one another in the name of salvation." Jerry Z. Muller, "Minding Our Manners and Morals," *First Things* 2 (April 90): p. 28.

<sup>46</sup>Alfred North Whitehead writes that religion is "...what a man does with his solitude." William James states that "Religion... shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude." (Quoted in) Neuhaus, "Can Atheists Be Good Citizens?" *First Things* 15 (August/September 1991): p. 16. Writing specifically about fundamentalism, though the observation applies to a variety of politically active religious groups, Neuhaus states that "By asserting the public nature of its truth claims...fundamentalism serves notice that it is not content to confine itself to the privatized sphere of religion." Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, p. 19. Neuhaus locates this uneasiness toward religious influence in the fear of any authoritarian tradition. He writes, "This argument emphasizes that identifiably American thought s built on foundations..(with an) accent on the individual, the role of reason, limited government, historical progress, tolerance, and the free market of ideas. They are generally cool toward the notion of authoritative tradition, especially religious tradition, and tend to favor the privatization of the big questions about the meaning of life and death." Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 11. Yet, he asserts, religion has always informed public life. He writes, "What is relatively new is the naked public square. The naked public square is the result of political doctrine and practice that would exclude religion and religious grounded values from the conduct of public business. The doctrine is that America is a secular society. If finds dogmatic expression in the ideology of secularism. I will argue that doctrine is demonstrably false and the dogma exceedingly dangerous." Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, p. viii.

<sup>47</sup>Neuhaus writes, "If the myths of secularism are collapsing, and if there is a resurgence of publicly potent religion, we need to look for unprecedented ways of relating politics and religion.... The question is whether we can devise forms for that interaction which can revive rather than destroy the liberal democracy that is required by a society that would be pluralistic and free." Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 9.

knows why --the two orders were incompatible.... While the late Archbishop was Chancellor, no one, under the King, did more to weld the country together, to give it the unity, the stability, order, tranquillity, and justice that it so badly needed. From the moment he became Archbishop, he completely reversed his polity; he showed himself to be utterly indifferent to the fate of the country...<sup>48</sup>

These concerns notwithstanding, America is engaged in a culture war. And, insofar as this is a war over "competing moral visions,"<sup>49</sup> a struggle to define America, it will engage the most deeply held convictions concerning the meaning of human existence, which means that religion's participation is inevitable. For Neuhaus, moral terms such as "common good" and "ought," will in a democratic society, be largely informed by religion. Consequently, such "popular religion...is a force that cannot be ignored indefinitely. It is a force that should not be ignored at all."<sup>50</sup>

While it is important to recognize the problems that the clash of ideas may present, it is even more important to seek out the possibilities, promises and potential that such a public debate may offer for the prospects of "a more perfect union" in a just and free society. This study is about the influence of religion in American public life. It is specifically a study of the proposals and projects of Richard John Neuhaus, who believes that the ongoing American democratic experiment in ordered liberty is not only tolerant of the public influence of religiously grounded ideas, but is also sustained by the rationalities and view of reality created by religiously grounded morality. This study

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<sup>48</sup>T.S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963), pp. 81-83.

<sup>49</sup>Neuhaus points out the stakes of the *Kulturkampf* as some call for the wholesale abandonment of "the vital center" as students at Stanford University chanted "Hey, Hey, Ho, Ho, Western Culture Got To Go" while being cheered on and joined by student, faculty and societal leaders. It may be that the debate about how we ought to live in this culture has become a war over whether the culture ought to exist at all. Neuhaus, "Audacious Unoriginality," *First Things* 1 (March 1990): pp. 68-69.

<sup>50</sup>Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 41.

examines problems and the possibilities that the culture war offers American society.

In the following chapter, we deal with Neuhaus' definition of public, which becomes a foundational feature in his proposals for the place that religion plays in the *res publica*. The next chapter establishes the historical genealogy of Neuhaus' idea of the importance of cultural tensions and limitations. Following this, the issue of abortion, arguably the most divisive issue in American public life, will serve as the case study of how "competing moral visions" carry on in a culture war. The conclusion follows.

## CHAPTER 3

*DEFINING THE PUBLIC SQUARE*

Neuhaus' 1984 book, *The Naked Public Square* defines the major skirmish of the culture war, simply put, "Who, in a liberal democracy, can legitimately inform and shape American public life?" He defines the naked public square as the result of a novel "political doctrine and practice that would exclude religion and religiously grounded values from the conduct of public business," under the cultural hermeneutic that "America is a secular society."<sup>51</sup>

Antecedent to this concern over legitimate access to the public square is Neuhaus' concern for a proper definition of "public." He writes, "Public debate, in any society, is basically about three clusters of questions: the political, the economic, and the cultural..."<sup>52</sup> The notion of *kingdom*, a domain where regnant ideas rule the order of business conducted within the limits of that domain, is suggestive of Neuhaus' approach to defining the *res publica*. Each of the three spheres or domains possesses a regnant rationality that at once legitimizes and limits its particular jurisdiction and the jurisdiction of the other spheres. The alternative to this tripartite division of the public square is what Neuhaus calls monism.<sup>53</sup> Monism is the encroachment upon or the "absorption

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<sup>51</sup>Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, p. viii.

<sup>52</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, *Commentary*, September 1990, p. 47.

<sup>53</sup>Neuhaus quotes Claes Ryn who gives a litany of monistic movements: "Much currently fashionable political theory has a pronounced reductionistic tendency. Human nature is pressed into schemes of explanation which fail to do justice to the complexity and richness of life... Marxists would have us treat human motives solely in terms of economics, the Freudians in terms of sexuality, and those in the tradition of Machiavelli and Hobbes in terms

of" one sphere upon the other two domains with the imposition of an alien rationality.<sup>54</sup> This effects the usurpation of the other realms' regnant rationalities and the subversion of their proper functions. This anti-monistic version of the public realm stands in contrast to the dominate contemporary version of public which is the "perverse formula that public = government = secular."<sup>55</sup> By way of example, Neuhaus' critique of Marxism is that it tended toward economic monism; reducing every social problem and cure to economic factors.<sup>56</sup> He writes, "The economic is important... but it is not all-

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of the self-centered pursuit of power...these themes emerge, not from an openness to all aspects of experience, but from a selective and undue concentration on particular elements of life which are also prematurely defined." *Religion and Society Report*, February 1986, p. 4. Also, quoting John Courtney Murray: "The cardinal assertion is a thorough-going monism, political, social, juridical, religious: there is only one Sovereign, one society, one law, one faith. And the cardinal denial is of the Christian dualism of powers, societies, and laws-- spiritual and temporal, divine and human. Upon this denial follows the absorption of the church in the community, 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 and reality. It has its own absolutely autonomous ideological substance and its own absolutely independent purpose: it is the ultimate bearer of human destiny. Outside of this One Sovereign there is nothing. Or rather, what presumes to stand outside is 'the enemy.'" Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, p. 85.

<sup>54</sup>Neuhaus defines the religious monism as the desire for "a smooth coherence, a neat fit between Biblical proclamation and political implementation." The secular monistic version is the desire for the "smooth line of reasoning by which public life can be ordered without interference from other realms, other worlds, other authorities, other visions of what it means to be human." Richard John Neuhaus, "The Ambiguities of 'Christian America,'" *Concordia Journal*, July 1991, pp. 285-295.

<sup>55</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge To The ChristianCapitalist*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992) p. 274.

<sup>56</sup>"The unsatisfactory state of the way things were was attributed to 'capitalism.' It seemed necessary to many to have a 'systemic analysis' of what was wrong with the world. It was not sufficient to observe that the seven deadly sins - pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger and sloth - were pretty much ubiquitous throughout human history no matter how society was organized....Marxism... provided an explanation. The root cause was economic and it was summed up in one word - capitalism." Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, p.47 "...under the influence of Marxist thought, people became accustomed to describing entire social orders as 'capitalist' or 'socialist.' Contra Marx, however, those terms refer not to the entirety of a social order but only to the economic dimension of it." *Ibid.*, p. 49. This monism is not only confined to Marxism as Neuhaus' quotation of *Centesimus Annus* states, "It (capitalism) seeks to defeat Marxism on the level of pure materialism by showing how a free-market society can achieve a greater satisfaction of material human needs than Communism, while equally excluding spiritual values. In reality, while on the one hand it is true that this social model shows the failure of Marxism to contribute to a humane and better society, on the other hand; insofar as it denies an autonomous existence and value to morality, law, culture and religion, it agrees with Marxism in the sense that it totally reduces man to the sphere

important. The dimension we call political...is at least as important, and the cultural is more important than both."<sup>57</sup>

Resistance against monism is for Neuhaus a matter of sustaining a tension between the spheres. This means that it is, at once, necessary to make "distinctions--not, be it noted, separations,"<sup>58</sup> between the spheres while also attending to the "complicated ways" that the economic, cultural and political spheres "overlap and interact."<sup>59</sup> While the primary intention of this chapter is to define the regnant rationalities of each sphere, we shall here and in later chapters consider the overlap of the domains.

### *Politics and the Rationality of Power*

In his recent book, *America Against Itself*, Neuhaus identifies the aim of politics as "...the getting and keeping of power...the capacity to persuade or compel others to do what you want."<sup>60</sup> This view of politics as the exercise of power necessitates the tripartite division of public life because Neuhaus' notion of public order is a combination of coercive enforcement of the enforceable and free obedience to the unenforceable. And

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man to the sphere of economics and the satisfaction of material needs.'" Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 49. Also Neuhaus writes that "...this complicated interaction between the economic, the political, and the cultural... requires constant attention..." In calling this form of social organization "*democratic capitalism*" envisions the three spheres of activity with each "subjected to the robust and often raucous debate that is appropriate in a democratic polity." Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>60</sup>Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 15. Hunter expands on this definition: "The struggle for power (which is the essence of politics) is in large part a struggle between competing truth claims, claims which are by their very nature 'religious' in character if not in content." Hunter, *Culture Wars*, p. 58.

when he says that "civilization depends upon obedience to the unenforceable,"<sup>61</sup> he means to say that the fate of the *civitas* cannot be collapsed into the function of politics.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, as the preponderance of political activity is taken up with the exercise of coercive power, Neuhaus observes that the rationality of politics will be characterized by mendacity and imperiousness.<sup>63</sup>

By mendacity, Neuhaus means that in the strategy of gaining and keeping power, duplicity and deception are often employed if not mandated. By way of casting light on the plausibility structure that understands how the political serves the common good while employing lies, Neuhaus employs the metaphor of the game.<sup>64</sup> He observes that in a game, the quarterback is "under no obligation to signal his plays... On the contrary, his purpose is to conceal and, if possible, mislead."<sup>65</sup> In the logic of football, misleading and concealing are part of the game and do not lead to cynicism or condone a cheating that would undermine the "moral universe" of the football game. Because political deception is implicit in the logic of power and therefore accepted, it also necessitates that

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<sup>61</sup>Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 171.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>63</sup>One is reminded of the cynical description of one politician who would "...double-cross that bridge when he comes to it." (Source unknown)

<sup>64</sup>The ambiguity is in how politics, characterized by mendacity and imperiousness, can also be a moral enterprise. Rather than giving a full blown rehearsal of Niebuhr's thought, Neuhaus employs the metaphor of the game, (perhaps in contrast to Churchill's " Politics is not a game. It is an earnest business.") The similarity between the plausibility structures of the game and politics is supported in George Will's, *Men At Work: The Craft of Baseball* where he states that Baseball is "a small universe of rule-regulated behavior" which, "In the compressed time of a baseball game or season enacts the natural trajectory of human experience." George F. Will, *Men At Work: The Craft of Baseball*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990), p. 323.

<sup>65</sup>Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 16.

limits be placed upon the realm of the political, even as behavior acceptable in a football game is limited to the boundaries of the stadium and to the duration of the game. Thus the designation "political game" is instructive.

Along these lines, one might consider the politically brilliant move by Caiaphas, the high priest who presided at the trial of Jesus. There he convincingly covered the deviousness of his strategy to execute Jesus with the prophetic and pious one-liner, "It is better that one man should die for the nation than that the nation die for one man." (John 11:50) Though, history has not judged Caiaphas kindly for his attempt to cover political opportunism with the veneer of prophetic respectability, his understanding of the connection of mendacity to the will to power is beyond reproach.

Imperiousness, on the other hand, has none of the cheery, game-like qualities of mendacity. Political imperiousness is, for Neuhaus, the insatiable appetite for power and control. The trick, as we shall see, is to arrive at a rationale of , defined by lies and domination, that sustains a sense of moral legitimacy and service to the common good. A pluralistic public square is defined by the clash of conflicting ideas and their representative rival parties struggle over whose version of the common good will gain political hegemony.<sup>66</sup> Neuhaus does not conclude that these features de-legitimize , nor does he suggest that the political project must collapse under the weight of cynicism.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 16. Neuhaus also writes, "So far we have been assuming a measure of moral integrity on the part of all the actors involved. That is not a safe assumption. Not only must politicians conceal, mislead, and tailor the truth so that it becomes a *useful* truth, but they must also work with those to whom right and truth have little meaning." Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>67</sup>Luther, at least in this quote, appears to question the possibility of mendacity and legitimacy: "...there is no more harmful vice upon earth than lying and being untruthful, which disrupts all communion among men. First of all, lying and untruthfulness drive hearts apart. Once the hearts are apart, the hands also go apart. If the hands are apart, what can be done or accomplished? When merchants do not keep faith with one another, then the market

Rather, recognizing that politics operates according to the internal logic of power which necessitates coercion, the corollaries of mendacity and imperiousness must be accepted as significant features of this domain. The acceptance of this vision of power and its corollaries is the first step in recovering a philosophy of politics that carves out legitimate social space where the exercise of coercion serves the common weal<sup>68</sup> while being careful to limit the exercise of politics in public life.

Interestingly, if not paradoxically, Neuhaus' lower estimation of politics as an exercise of power draws upon the philosophic achievement of Friedrich Nietzsche's deconstruction of moral language. Neuhaus writes, "There is much to be said for the claim that Nietzsche's time has come round at last, for he prophetically saw the self-deceiving absurdity of continuing to speak about the good and the true after the death of the transcendent referents which alone make sense of such language."<sup>69</sup> Further bolstering this position, MacIntyre argues in *After Virtue* that "it was Nietzsche's historic

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crashes. If husband and wife are not faithful to each other, then the wife runs out of the back door and the husband out of the front... If a mayor, prince, or king does not maintain faithful leadership, then the city must perish; land and people must be destroyed... *For where fidelity and faith cease, there government must also come to an end.*" (Italics mine) Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms*, vol. 13 of *Luther's Works*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing Company, 1956), p. 218.

<sup>68</sup>This notion of politics, which Neuhaus calls "the modesty of political" represents a significant change in Neuhaus' thought. In an article series in *Christian Century* called "How My Mind Has Changed," Neuhaus mentions his one time disagreement with Martin Luther's doctrine of *Two Kingdoms*, "because it denied redemptive significance to politics." In accepting the "self-denying ordinance" of the two kingdoms vis a vis "the redemptive significance" of politics, Neuhaus sees that politics freed from such unreal expectation can get on with its real duty in its service to the common good. Richard John Neuhaus, "Religion and Public Life: The Continuing Conversation," *The Christian Century*, 11 July 90, pp. 669-673.

<sup>69</sup>Neuhaus, *America Against Itself* p. 38. Neuhaus quotes G. P. Grant's *English-Speaking Justice*, "Nietzsche's writings may be singled out as a Rubicon, because... he laid down with incomparable lucidity that which is now publicly open: what is given about the whole in technological science cannot be thought together with what is given us concerning justice and truth, reverence and beauty, from our tradition... Nietzsche's greatest ridicule is reserved for those who want to maintain a content of "justice" and "truth" and "goodness" out of the corpse that they helped to make a corpse." *Ibid.*, p. 182.

achievement to understand more clearly than any other philosopher...that what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will," which is fundamentally a will to power.<sup>70</sup> Understanding the attraction of government to this will to power, MacIntyre states that "in our culture we know of no organized movement towards power which is not bureaucratic..."<sup>71</sup> Concluding in fittingly aphoristic form, he sums up the internal logic of power, stating: "All power tends to coopt and absolute power coopts absolutely."<sup>72</sup>

Politics, defined by the imperious will to power and its attendant mendacious disguises, would seem to diminish the importance of the political. One wonders if "legitimate politics" is not an oxymoron. Anticipating this, Neuhaus writes, "In speaking about politics and mendacity...the point here is merely to second Reinhold Niebuhr's magisterially detailed analysis of politics as an enterprise of inherent moral ambiguity." Further on, Neuhaus states that his view of politics is shared by "morally reflective" politicians who "know something of the mendacity of the political" and therefore accept "the necessity of maintaining the limits of the political."<sup>73</sup>

The tyrannical legacies of Robespierre, Hitler, Stalin and Mao are historical icons and admonishments against the collapse of the *res publica* into the political, ostensibly

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<sup>70</sup>MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 113.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>72</sup>Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 107.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

to expedite monistic political solutions.<sup>74</sup> The formal principle of this political monism is Mussolini's description of totalitarianism: "Everything within the state, nothing against the state, nothing outside the state."<sup>75</sup> Admittedly anecdotal, the principle reached its lowest verbalization in Judge Roland Freisler's condemnation to death of a Nazi resistance member with the sentence, "He is a 'non-political man'--hence no man at all!"<sup>76</sup>

The threat when public=political is that a society's common life becomes fully subsumed under the regnant rationality of power,<sup>77</sup> and its negative corollaries. For Neuhaus, this collapse of the public into the political leans toward an Orwellian monistic society whose coherence depends upon "New Speak" mendacity and *Animal Farm*-esque displacement of freedom with coercion.<sup>78</sup> The alternative to monism is a public life

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<sup>74</sup>Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, p. 280. Neuhaus' contention with monism isn't merely a quibbling over political theory but a debate as to how "The monistic dream has, in the course of history and most especially in this most lethal of centuries, produced rivers of blood and mountains of corpses." *Ibid.* p. 263. Also, C.S. Lewis observes, "Useful," and "necessity" was always "the tyrant's plea." C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmens Publishing Company, 1970) p. 300.

<sup>75</sup>Neuhaus writes, "The constituting premise of totalitarianism is that there is only one society and it is embodied in the ruling party. There may be purely private 'societies,' but they are not public, they are not civil, they are not permitted to influence the *civitas*, which is the sphere that in totalitarian theory belongs exclusively to the party state." Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, p. 244.

<sup>76</sup>David Novak, "Germans Against Hitler: The Witness of the White Rose, *First Things* 2 (April 1990): p. 41.

<sup>77</sup>Neuhaus sees that this identification of public with government is "as the Marxists used to say, 'no accident.'" He writes, "...according to this theory, the knowledge class is enthusiastic about the expansion of government, notably through universities and government agencies in which they serve as *experts*. ...and the obvious way to do that is to expand the sphere of government programs and funding. Needless to say, this course is pursued in service of the 'public good' - it having been decided that 'public' means 'governmental.'" Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, p. 34.

<sup>78</sup>Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, p. 254-255.

which is created in the context of dialectical tension that effects the debunking of the "pretensions of the political."<sup>79</sup> Taking conspicuous etymological liberties with the term pretension, the pretentiousness of the political is that monistic assertion that rationalities of politics should operate prior (*pre-*) to the dialectical *tension* implicit in the tripartite definition of public. Therefore Neuhaus asserts that when politics is "reduced" or limited<sup>80</sup> by the legitimate exercise of economic and cultural rationalities, then "politics is elevated." That is, its limitation insures that it remains a "moral enterprise" which is *a* (rather than *the*) force for good in the deliberation of the question of how society orders its life in reference to the good.<sup>81</sup> As politics is further defined by its dialectical tension resulting from the division of the public square, the discussion turns to the economic and cultural spheres and the limitations implicit in this structure of the public square.

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<sup>79</sup>The debunking, Neuhaus asserts is the task of transcendent religion: "Religion intends transcendence. That is, it points beyond this world to realities utterly beyond the reality of ordinary, everyday life.... In pointing to the wholly other, religion *ipso facto* relativizes, puts in its proper place, all the realities of this world, including all institutions. This proper place, of course, is an inferior place - mundane, profane, penultimate. Religion, in other words, refuses to take with ultimate seriousness the solemn dramas of the social world: In the Biblical wording, God laughs at them - and the believer, by God's grace, is enabled to share in this laughter, even while he is still in this world, in anticipation of the final redemption which will be of the nature of comically comic relief." Neuhaus, *Religion and Society Report*, Volume 5 #1, p. 1. (Also see *First Things*, (March 1990) pp. 65-66.)

<sup>80</sup>Neuhaus, *America Against Itself*, p. 25. Neuhaus sees in the monism that results from the collapse of the rationality of love into the rationality of justice, under the auspices of politics that "The greatest crimes against humanity have been perpetrated in the name of the politics of communal cohesion- e.g., Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and all too many petty imitators. It is not only the monsters of history, however, who promoted the political monism that results from the confusion and conflation of justice and love." *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 20.

*Freedom, Justice and Economics*

Neuhaus' *Doing Well and Doing Good*<sup>82</sup> is an effort to "...think theologically about the free society, and about the free economy that such a society requires."<sup>83</sup> His is an ambitious project to provide a plausible rationality for the notion that "...there is not a necessary opposition between doing well and doing good, between taking care of business and taking care of one another."<sup>84</sup>

The task is recognized as difficult for three reasons. First, economics is a "very big subject...a reality so immense,"<sup>85</sup> that any discussion will isolate or ignore other aspects of economics. Neuhaus' argument focuses on the "soft factors" of economics (such as the consequence of religious ideas upon economics<sup>86</sup>) and all but ignores "hard" factors of investments and interest rates; the things many would consider the vital data.<sup>87</sup> Secondly, as economics is widely perceived to be beholden to dynamics in opposition or

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<sup>82</sup>*Doing Well and Doing Good* is also a conversation with and an evaluation of Pope John Paul II's economics encyclical, *Centesimus Annus* which is itself a conversation with and analysis of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*. While this adds historical depth to the discussion that there are times when John Paul's and Neuhaus' thoughts are indistinguishable.

<sup>83</sup>Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, p. 17.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>87</sup>"In conventionally distorted views of reality, something like the economic influence of the Church is thought to be a 'soft' factor, while, say, a change in the interest rates by the Federal Reserve Board is taken to be a 'hard' factor. It is further assumed that hard factors have more impact than soft. This is almost certainly a great mistake." *Ibid.*, p. 200.

indifferent to moral and religious truths,<sup>88</sup> his task of connecting the doing well with the doing good must overcome considerable sentiment to the contrary.<sup>89</sup> Thirdly, such attempts to apply theology to economics have been characterized by a monism implicit in the phrase "theology of economics," which offers decrees as the final word sanctioned by the Ultimate Authority rather than propositions for further conversation.

Contrary to a "theology of economics, *Doing Well and Doing Good* is "an invitation to think theologically *about* the free society, and about the free economy that such a society requires."<sup>90</sup> It is a moral/theological account of the regnant rationality of economics, i.e., "self-interest rightly understood,"<sup>91</sup> which aims at making a plausible case for the assertion that doing well and doing good are not only not in opposition to each other but need each other. Therefore, in determining the rationality of the economic sphere, we will first define the *self* of "self-interest," then define the *right* in "rightly understood."

Before self-interest can be rightly understood, the self must be rightly understood.

Neuhaus writes of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus Annus* that "its subject matter is the human condition and why that condition requires the free society and the

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 20. Neuhaus also writes, "At the heart of the sphere we call culture is the moral and the spiritual. And so, precisely because our subject is economic freedom, this is also a book about democracy and the moral truths by which freedom is - or can be- ordered to justice." Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>89</sup>Neuhaus writes of being interviewed on the radio, "...the host began with this: 'You write in favor of the free market. How can you morally justify greed, selfishness, and the exploitation of the poor by the rich?' At first we thought she was just being provocative, but it turned out that she appeared to be genuinely puzzled." Neuhaus, "Capitalists With A Bad Conscience," *First Things* 30 (February 1993): p. 66.

<sup>90</sup>Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, p. 17.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

free economy."<sup>92</sup> After the revolution of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Empire, one is tempted to say "of course" to the notion that freedom is a precondition of the civil and just society. Yet, for Neuhaus, the rejection of freedom by Dostoyevsky's character the Grand Inquisitor stands as a poignant reminder of the continued need for a rationality for freedom. Neuhaus writes, "The Grand Inquisitor... had a keen appreciation of humanity's limited appetite for freedom. He was correct in having little doubt that his banishment of Jesus, who talked so recklessly about freedom, would have been supported by democratic referendum."<sup>93</sup> John Paul, having lived most of his life under an imperious political regime, would not readily accept freedom as a given. Thus Neuhaus contends that "the ideas of freedom need to be thought through and given fresh expression with each generation, and never more so than now."<sup>94</sup> Not content to let the notion of freedom remain etherial, Neuhaus understands that a critical embodiment of freedom (though it, by no means, exhausts the discussion of freedom), is economic and the discussion of the free-market economy. That is, a definition of the self turns out to be "a moral account for freedom" that is wrapped up with questions of economics.<sup>95</sup>

One problem for this moral account is that the meaning of self-interest has been collapsed into the vice of selfishness. This miscalculation, contends Neuhaus, "disregards human nature" by ignoring the reality that "to act in self-interest, especially

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>93</sup>Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square*, p. 30.

<sup>94</sup>Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup>Neuhaus writes, "The free society... is not the obvious or taken-for-granted way of ordering public life...At Gettysburg, Lincoln reflected on the Civil War as a great testing of whether this nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure." *Doing Well and Doing Good*, p. 3.

when self-interest includes the interests of one's family and others for whom one is most immediately responsible...is not to be condemned as selfishness and pitted against the common good." The fundamental moral failure of communism/socialism/Marxism, identified in *Centesimus*, was "anthropological in nature." Rather than seeing "the subjectivity of society,"<sup>96</sup> writes John Paul, the individual was reduced to an element in the social organism that renders him "an object of anonymous social planning," that in turn deprives him "of his freedom and, therefore, of his human dignity."<sup>97</sup> Neuhaus points out that "while John Paul is highly critical of individualism, he is a champion of the individual as a moral agent,"<sup>98</sup> and the requisite freedom to exercise that moral agency.

*Centesimus* is such an important contribution to the conversation about human nature, economics and freedom because John Paul, as Pole and as Pope is keenly aware of the problems that the abuses of freedom have caused the working class. Yet the iatrogenic Socialist solutions that Leo XIII foresaw in *Rerum Novarum* and that John Paul experienced, have been falsified by the 1989 collapse of Communism, "... the chief alternative to the free society." Neuhaus states, "...it seems that the democracies have been vindicated with a suddenness and lucidity that almost nobody expected."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>The phrase was coined by John Paul in which he means that society, made up of individual human beings is bound to uncertainty and unpredictability. The mistake of socialism was to think that "society" or "economy" followed the same internal logic as the objectivity of the hard sciences thinking that "the good of the individual can be realized without reference to his free choice." *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

The point of this observation that needs to be stressed is that *Centesimus*' acceptance of the free-market is done with full awareness and full sympathy to those affected by the abuse of freedom. Because freedom is so central to this definition of the self, the free-market "is the economic order appropriate to humanity in all its ambiguity...endowed with reason, virtue, and grace...also wounded by sin and inclined to evil."<sup>100</sup> This assertion would claim that once freedom is accepted as the condition fitting the dignity of man, one must be prepared to accept the probability of the abuses of freedom and deal with these abuses in ways that do not assault the internal logic of the free self. Neuhaus states, "Freedom cannot remain real if the possibility for evil is not open."<sup>101</sup>

This version of the self and economic freedom must be held in tension by the imperatives of justice implicit in the phrase "rightly understood." Democratic acceptance of freedom can only be sustained by a plausible and culturally available rationality that supports the belief that the common good will not be overrun by the freedom of some exercised over others. Bentham understood that the abridgment of freedom was true of both tyranny and anarchy, and that people will always choose tyranny's abridgment of freedom over anarchy. Neuhaus' rationality for freedom and justice is grounded in what Michael Novak calls "order unplanned."<sup>102</sup> John Paul II is quoted in support of this

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-59.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>102</sup>Novak writes, "In terms of its formal principle, the liberal common good is "order unplanned... This liberal notion of the common good differs from the older one in that it does not assume that the social ordering of the common good must be the result of the conscious intentions, aims, and purposes of an organizing center, usually the state, and that the ordering must be uniform.... that the common good of modern liberal societies is dynamic, open, pluralistic, and serendipitous, appropriate to free persons who reflect and choose in close interdependence with other human beings." Robert Benne, "Liberalism and Catholicism," *First Things* 1 (March 1990): p. 55.

hope, as he writes, "Where society is so organized as to reduce arbitrarily or even suppress the sphere in which freedom is legitimately exercised, the result is that the life of society becomes progressively disorganized and goes into decline."<sup>103</sup> Whatever threat freedom poses, the answer is not the subtraction of freedom but the addition of justice.

While it would be all too easy to become bogged down in MacIntyre's argument about *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*,<sup>104</sup> it is sufficient to note that Neuhaus is conscious of MacIntyre's central thesis.<sup>105</sup> This thesis is that "justice" is a tradition-dependent term that must be defined and supported by the rationality of a particular tradition. When Neuhaus (or John Paul) speaks of "right" or "justice," it is understood in terms of the Western theological tradition. Consequently, the "rightly understood" will be informed not from a study of economics but of a moral tradition. Whatever else this concept means for Neuhaus, it certainly means a rejection of the Marxian version of justice.

The importance of the revolution of 1989 cannot be overstated for both Neuhaus and John Paul. In defining what the "rightly understood" means, it becomes important to scrutinize "the ideas that gave birth to the wrong."<sup>106</sup> Whatever else might be said about the perceptions of those who embraced Marxism as the way to a just society,

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<sup>103</sup>Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, p. 115.

<sup>104</sup>Alisdar MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, (Norte Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) Also, Richard John Neuhaus, "Traditions of Inquiry," Review of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, in *Commentary*, June 1988, pp. 64-68.

<sup>105</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, "Traditions of Inquiry," *Commentary*, June 1988, pp. 64-68.

<sup>106</sup>Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good*, p. 149.

























































































































































































































