

## Thoughts on America's "Catholic Moment"

*The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America.* By Richard John Neuhaus. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984). Referred to in the text as NP.

*The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World.* By Richard John Neuhaus. (New York: Harper and Row, 1987). Referred to in the text as CM.

Richard John Neuhaus is one of the most important political thinkers writing in and about America today. This assertion could be defended by chronicling the remarkable growth of his influence in shaping the revival of cultural conservatism as an intellectual and political force in America in this decade.<sup>1</sup> It could also be done simply by noting that he is one of the very few outstanding Protestant thinkers today who both is a supporter of at least most of the "Reagan Revolution" and is not a fundamentalist.

But the most cogent indication of Neuhaus's importance is that he is, and means to be, the heir to the great tradition of public theology in America, which seemed to have reached a peak a generation or more ago with the work of the Protestant Reinhold Niebuhr and the Catholic John Courtney Murray. It would not be misleading to say that his achievement is to see that some sort of judicious combination of the thought of Niebuhr and Murray must be the key to discovering the most plausible way of overcoming the crisis of America's liberal democracy. This crisis comes into existence whenever the American idea of liberty loses sight of its distinctively human purpose.

Neuhaus's argument is that the humanly satisfying interpretation of the purpose of America's liberal democracy is necessarily religious. There can be, he says, no other foundation. Hence the attempt to secularize totally public life and public discourse, to aim at freedom from religion or human autonomy, necessarily culminates in moral relativism or nihilism. Liberty becomes, among other things, anti-democratic and

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even anti-human. Its nihilistic elitism aims at the destruction of the true freedom and dignity of the person.

This way of thinking is not Neuhaus's alone. It seems to be everywhere where thoughtful Americans are found today. It is found in almost all of the most well-received commentaries on American politics and culture of recent years. Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*,<sup>2</sup> to cite the best-selling example, is a trenchant account and criticism of the process by which the nihilistic individualism of the intellectuals has emptied American democratic life of its moral content. But Bloom, while seemingly concluding that this process may well be nearing its anti-human completion, really knows of no credible way to overcome or reverse it.

Nihilism, for all moral and political purposes, Bloom seems to regard as true. For him, the only genuine community is the community of philosophers, which exists, properly speaking, for the very few liberated enough to exist outside moral and political life. The American citizen's devotion to liberal democracy is or was noble, but it is also rooted in "conviction" which Bloom cannot help but present as false.

Bloom says that he realizes that the vitality of moral and political life in the West, including America, has always depended to some extent on the credibility of the possibility of Biblical revelation. But the human experiences described in the Bible are not, in the decisive sense, credible to Bloom. Nor do they, in his view, shape in the deepest senses America's liberal and democratic self-understanding. Bloom never writes as if political liberty and democracy really can be rooted in the Biblical account of the experience of the person, an experience he virtually ignores. But Bloom does not show how they can depend on the philosopher's self-understanding alone. As many of Bloom's critics have noted, this understanding seems radically undemocratic, not to mention, as Bloom presents it, almost apolitical.

Next to Bloom's book, the most widely applauded study of contemporary American politics and culture has been Robert Bellah et al.'s *Habits of the Heart*.<sup>3</sup> Bellah opposes liberalism's anti-human abstraction of "ontological individualism" with the "social realism" that must ground human and especially democratic community. Human beings necessarily experience themselves as part of a community with a tradition, with

2. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987. For a more extended analysis of Bloom's book, see my "Bloom on Socrates and America," *Modern Age* 32, 1 (Winter 1988): 27-29.

3. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. This analysis of Bellah is drawn from my "Secular Humanist Extremism Versus Democratic Community," presented to the Center for the Study of the Constitution at the 1987 Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

its concrete practices and commitments. The American tradition, properly understood, is rooted in the idea of the equal dignity of all. Its deepest insight is that the Biblical commitment to this dignity is to be realized socially and politically.

Today, the antidote to the elitism and misery-producing anxiety of competitive individualism is nothing but a traditionally or religiously grounded commitment to more comprehensive or "economic democracy." The full dignity of the person is to be realized through the revitalization of "social movements." The Biblical tradition, properly appropriated to the contemporary situation, is wholly social or political. It no longer has anything to say about personal or even familial morality.

Bellah's appropriation of the tradition is strangely undemocratic in its devotion to democratic or egalitarian community insofar as it is a criticism of the largely unpolitical way in which most Americans have experienced religious truth. It has nothing to say, specifically, about the real existence of the personal God of the Bible. It in no way opposes the personal permissiveness of liberated individuals, and even its affirmation of tradition seems selective or even arbitrary, and hence not in accord with the spirit of tradition.

Bellah and Bloom, it is safe to say, both personally participate in the morally destructive elitism they so perceptively criticize. They deny the real truth of the religious conviction that they acknowledge, more or less, has been at the root of the typical American's experience of community and duty. Each is, whatever his religious sentiments, most truly an ontological individualist or secularist.

Neuhaus's distinctiveness is in his argument that orthodox, Biblical conviction, the belief in the personal transcendence of the creature made in the image of a personal God remains plausible and, in fact, has become more plausible in light of modern experience. This experience has shown that the moral hunger of "insistently particular" beings (NP 127) cannot be satisfied by political commitment or reform, as Bellah believes. It has also shown that the most powerful effect of enlightenment, or the attempt of philosophers to rule, has been to radicalize and to popularize the philosopher's anti-human tendency toward moral relativism or nihilism. According to Neuhaus, the world, and America in particular, has reached a moment when it is possible to affirm that human liberty depends upon the human person's transcendent experience of the existence of his or her personal Creator, as well as to realize that the anti-democratic movements in this century away from limited government have been based on a denial of the truth of that experience.

Neuhaus's thought has found its most mature expression in his two most well-received and recent books, *The Naked Public Square* and *The Catholic Moment*. Each of these books, in its way, seems to mean to be a

complete expression of his thought, which is aimed, above all, at a reinterpretation of American political life and culture. In *The Catholic Moment*, Neuhaus immerses himself in sophisticated theological controversy and, as a result, that book seems more universalistic in orientation. But it closes with special concern for the theological foundation of American renewal. *The Naked Public Square* is an account of the nihilistic pretensions of the secular bias of contemporary American thinkers, both political and theological. It means, as its subtitle suggests, to continue Tocqueville's defense of liberal democracy's dependence on religion against anti-human movements in thought (NP 141). But, like Tocqueville's analysis in his book on America in particular, Neuhaus's is readily applicable, to some extent or another, to all modern politics, culture, and theology.

It is not my intention to separate the arguments of the two books. I discuss Neuhaus's key themes, most of which are found in both books. My task is to clarify more than criticize, but clarification, of course, implies criticism. Neuhaus is a profound and perspicacious writer, but not yet a lucid one. Consequently, he is not yet as great an influence as he might become, because the genuine distinctiveness of his thought is not as widely or deeply appreciated as it deserves to be. I have succeeded if I have traced the nerve of his political thought, including the politically relevant dimension of his theology.

### The Catholic Moment

According to Neuhaus, now "can and should be . . . the moment in which the Roman Catholic Church assumes its rightful role in the culture-forming task of constructing a religiously informed public philosophy for the American experiment in ordered liberty" (CM 283). This statement is a surprising, even a provocative one, coming from a distinguished and politically involved Lutheran pastor. It is, as Neuhaus says, a very "arguable" statement, one that means to be contentious and thought-provoking. It is also a very dense one, and it cries out for very careful unpacking.

By Roman Catholic Church Neuhaus means the "post-Vatican II" Church, the one which is no longer unthinkingly or unreservedly anti-liberal or anti-modern, and which is now a friend, although not an uncritical one, of liberal democracy. He also means the Church represented by John Paul II, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, and John Courtney Murray, the ecclesiastical "establishment," so to speak.

Leadership can only come from the Church which still insists on its doctrinal distinctiveness and transcendent purpose while being open to ecumenical possibilities. This Church, it seems, understands what "or-

dered liberty" is. Protestant theology today, for the most part, does not. It has "become stalled in sterile contests between liberalism and traditionalism" (CM 286). These contests place the partisans of liberty at the expense of order against those who protect order at the expense of liberty.

The idea of "ordered liberty" is a highly nuanced one. It seems to require a large role for reason in determining the relation and proper balance between its, at first glance, antagonistic components. The Catholic theological tradition is distinctive in its emphasis on reason. It teaches that it is reasonable to be orthodox, and that orthodoxy is reasonable. For Protestants, generally speaking, reason and orthodoxy tend to be enemies. Their theologians divide too readily in ways which suggest that the key theological disputes are between those who are sophisticated or open to reason and those who truly believe (NP 226 47).

But, even with this affirmation of the superiority of Catholic thought, Neuhaus does not mean to embrace unreservedly the Catholic tradition. In his way, he remains a Protestant, a partisan of the Reformation. The proper relation between reason and orthodoxy, he says, is a "post-modern" discovery, one the Church has only recently affirmed. The core of Neuhaus's thought is the articulation of three key moments—premodern, modern, and postmodern—in the development of human reflection (CM 150; RP 17). This development is both logical and chronological; because it seems to depend upon reflection upon human experience. Neuhaus notes that "[i]n almost every field of thought *today* there is discussion about what it means to be postmodern or postliberal" (CM 126, emphasis added). *Now* is the Catholic moment because the Catholic Church, having, in its way, affirmed the modern or anti-authoritarian principle of religious liberty without destroying the authority of God or the Church is especially well-suited to lead America and the world into a "postmodern" or "postliberal" age which will avoid, having their experience in mind, premodern and modern excesses.

### **Premodern Thought**

For Neuhaus, premodern or pre-Reformation thought emphasizes orthodoxy at the expense of liberty. It protects excessively the "pretensions" or "presumptions" of the Church. It reduces authority to "authoritarianism," which results in "the abandonment of reason and personal responsibility, the handing over of our lives to heteronomous rule" (CM 278). It ignores "the limits of speaking of the Church as the body of Christ," because "criticism of its very historical and very human embodiment" is not "tantamount to criticism of Christ" (CM 142).

The Protestant Reformation rightly opposed such presumption, as

did "another reformation, namely the Second Vatican Council" (CM 142). Whatever the deficiencies of its doctrinal articulation, and Neuhaus sees many, this Council was an indispensable preparation for the Catholic moment. Through it, the Catholic Church acknowledged the human limitations of Churches as such, as well as the institutional consequences of the liberty of every human person. It made possible the "personalism" of John Paul II and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, both of which are remarkably free of ecclesiastical pretensions (CM 135, 164-71, 203).

### **Modern Thought**

Modern thought, including modern theology, is a rebellion against "authoritarianism" in the name of "autonomy" or self-sufficient human freedom (CM 126; NP 17-18). The emphasis is on freedom at the expense of orthodoxy. The new orthodoxy, more precisely, becomes anti-orthodoxy or liberal individualism. Hence "Christian teaching becomes an optional aid to individual self-realization" and nothing more (CM 153). It may continue to "add immeasurable depth and passion to commitment to our human projects," but it, in truth, in no way limits or directs those projects. Theology is with alleged candor reduced to anthropology by liberalism, because autonomous beings must know of nothing to limit or direct the free choices of individuals (CM 74-79). This understanding of liberty is childish or unrealistic, because autonomy certainly is not the liberty of self-conscious, sinful mortals.

Liberalism, in denying that any assertion of human limitations is anything more than authoritarianism, denies, above all, the consequences of the human realities of sin and death. Its unrealism comes from the inability of human persons to confront truly what their fate would be in the absence of God and grace. All human projects are, in truth, dissolved by time and distorted by sin. Yet it seems impossible to "relativize" properly their significance if one believes that they exhaust the human potential. The progress of liberalism, then, is not toward the truth, but toward the covering over of the limitations of human projects, especially political projects. This progress culminates in the comprehensive lie called totalitarian ideology (CM 204).

Within the Catholic Church, the movement from the excesses of authoritarianism to the excesses of liberalism was delayed, for the most part, until Vatican II. The exhilaration of their recent liberation still causes most American Catholic intellectuals not to feel or think the nihilistic conclusions of the modern project, including its theology. They do not yet see that the liberty they affirm is merely negative, and hence inappropriate for persons with dignity (CM 277-78). Even the

documents of Vatican II, Neuhaus thinks, with Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger, were too naive in their optimistic affirmation of the goodness of liberal direction of modern life (CM 91-92, 117). The Pope and the Cardinal are postmodern thinkers because they eschew such utopianism and see the nihilistic culmination of such movement, if unmoderated.

### Postmodern Thought

For liberals, "the world seemed all possibility," but experience has taught that not all possibilities are available to human beings and not all are worthy of them. "Postliberalism" or "postmodernism" comes into being with the recognition of the significance of the fact that the lives of persons are particular or limited ones (CM 158). It is, as a result, "the free acknowledgment of that by which we are bound" (NP 17). For sinful mortals, all authority cannot be authoritarianism. Human liberty is made possible by and bounded by culture, language, and tradition. "[F]reedom," in other words, "is made possible by rules," because, without them, "when nothing is established," human beings "are anxiety ridden and paralyzed." They can know and do nothing (CM 152).

Such rules suggest limits which cannot be overcome. But they are also ways of knowing, of leading the person to what is really true about God and the good (CM 150). Such knowledge is always, for mortals, limited or partial, but persons are ultimately free because they can know enough about what, to them, is most needful. Human beings are limited by the fact that they are not God, but they can know God. His transcendent judgment is what they experience as truly authoritative. Persons, by their nature, are properly "theonomous" (NP 17-18; CM 154).

Postmodern thought emphasizes, most of all, the distinctiveness or particularity of the person, and, by so doing, brings to mind or saves all particular or distinctive attachments that are indispensable for a fully human existence. One postmodern paradox, for Neuhaus, is that there can now be no denying that human persons must cultivate what is particular to experience, truly, what is universal. The necessary existence of particular churches and particular countries and cultures is rooted, finally, in the "insistent particularity" of the person. They cannot be denied without denying the existence of human liberty. Postmodernism opposes any universalistic or "ecumenical" movement toward unity at the expense of this truth (CM 121). Human liberty and human knowledge depend, contrary to the typical assertion of the intellect or the intellectual, on human particularity.

Neuhaus finds an exemplary manifestation of postmodern or postliberal awareness in the phenomenology of the philosopher-Pope John

Paul II (CM 163). In his analysis, the Pope "returns again and again to the specific, the concrete, the *particular*, the historical person," and he is "robustly skeptical toward the abstract 'man' of Marxist theory, and the abstract 'humanity' in the tradition of the French revolution" (CM 168, emphasis added). His account of the human person's rootedness in his culture is meant to oppose every form of reductionism or determinism, every anti-human abstraction or generalization. Against anti-human projects to liberate human beings from their particularity, the Pope's thought attempts to redirect the person's "passion for liberation" toward "transcendent hope . . . the deepest truth about humanity" (CM 169-70, 195-207).

The American Neuhaus does fault the Pope for not applying his way of analysis to his country and culture, for not considering it in its particularity, for criticizing it in terms of the excesses of the abstract principles of liberal theory. This criticism of capitalism is a "caricature," with little applicability to "democratic capitalism" as it actually exists (CM 202). In papal pronouncements, "[t]here seems to be little awareness of a democratic tradition that takes seriously the *particularity* of persons and communities in their *transcendent dimensions*" (CM 168, emphasis added). This tradition, according to Neuhaus, is the American experiment in "ordered liberty." Because the Pope has not studied this experiment in particular, his political analysis sometimes seems to point to what is, for all practical purposes, a nihilistic conclusion, as well as an untrue one, that America and the Soviet Union are both equally opposed to the true freedom of the person, equally directed by the anti-human excesses of the modern project. This misguided "way of being even-handed," which is achieved "[b]y juxtaposing a theory of which Marxism which is officially taught and practiced with a theory of capitalism which is nowhere taught and practiced" makes "the Pope . . . less persuasive than he ought to be," because it makes him seem to lack political astuteness and appropriately human partisanship (CM 202).

But Neuhaus's defense of America is sometimes too confusing to be persuasive. He seems to suggest that the American experiment, from its beginning, was "postmodern," that it never tended toward the liberal error of denying the fullness of human particularity or transcendence. But he also seems to suggest that postmodern thought originates in thoughtful reaction against the excesses of liberalism, which surely could not have been all that apparent to the pre-French Revolution American founders. Finally, he suggests that the American tradition may never have been properly interpreted, that the "task of constructing a religiously-informed public philosophy" on the basis of the American experience remains to be completed.

Neuhaus's pursuit of such a public philosophy is an example of his



"critical patriotism," of his particular devotion to America from a human or personal perspective. America is his country. He cannot help, when affirming his human limitations, but affirm his dependence upon and love of it. He rightly calls patriotism "a species of piety," and piety is the virtue of beings who know their limitations (NP 74). Persons exist within particular countries and cultures, and hence they have, by their natures, political responsibilities. They are not their highest loyalties, but they are real ones. "The piety of patriotism must be ordered by a more encompassing piety," but it is still properly human piety (NP 75). Universal or transcendent judgment does not destroy but directs particular attachments and responsibilities, and the particular provides the only human access to universal or transcendent reality (NP 55-77; CM 130).

To be liberated from patriotic devotion, then, is to be "liberated from duty, from honor, from country," for nothing in particular (NP 76). Such liberation is the particular pretension of beings who deny their particularity, or intellectuals. Those allegedly liberated American intellectuals, including most "mainstream" theologians, who cannot even perceive that the United States, especially in view of the real alternatives, is "a force for good in the world" are simply ignorant in their decadence. Neuhaus believes or hopes they lack the human vigor to play an important role in directing the postmodern future of American politics and culture (NP 72-77; CM 258).

### **Public Philosophy**

The articulation of a religiously informed public philosophy would properly originate postmodern American political life and culture by giving a full account of "ordered" or human liberty. Both "orthodox theology and clear reason," according to Neuhaus, are required for such an articulation, one which would defend persuasively the human goodness of America's liberal democracy (CM 228). "Public philosophy," as opposed, say, to "public orthodoxy," is a reasoned public consensus which forms a political community (NP 21). It is not possible if reason and orthodoxy are incompatible. It can exist only if reason does not necessarily destroy community or common sense, if reason can lead human beings to the same truth about the common good. The idea of a public philosophy opposes the individualistic idea that reason is merely a tool for the pursuit of one's own self-interest, a view held not only by secular "liberals" but by much of Protestant theology.

Part of the postmodern awareness is that public philosophy cannot stand by itself in the sense of being a product of autonomous reason having freed itself from orthodoxy (CM 154-56). It is always, ultimately, the articulation of the shared religious convictions of a particular communi-

ty. "Public philosophy," Neuhaus says, "is the mediating language between religious truth and public decision."<sup>4</sup> Hence it necessarily suggests a limit to religious pluralism; some beliefs and experience must be held in common for a reasonable discussion to begin (NP 145). The "naked public square," to use Neuhaus's famous phrase, becomes naked because the articulation of public purpose is impossible without some religious support.

In America's case, the lowest "religiously-based common denominator" can be no lower than a shared belief in a transcendent, personal God, who is the source of the human person's transpolitical dignity and hence his rights (NP 61, 65, 95, 118, 123). The articulation of a public philosophy begins with the premise that most Americans, with some measure of orthodoxy, believe in the God of the Bible. Only such conviction can inform "a morally explicit and morally convincing answer to what America stands for" (NP 14).

### Orthodox Theology

Orthodox theology, for Neuhaus, is, roughly speaking, the theology of St. Augustine. It criticizes the "natural theology" of the philosophers for being able to understand the human person only insofar as he is part of nature. This criticism, in Neuhaus's eyes, applies to the Americans who would revive the "natural religion" of classical political philosophy and to those who would interpret "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God" as both normative for human beings and free from Biblical-Christian presuppositions (NP 140-41).

Christian theology, for Augustine, also reveals the limitations of "civil theology," which understands the human being only insofar as he or she is a citizen. Neuhaus calls attention to the unamended Constitution's Christian inspiration by recalling that it protects "persons," not citizens (NP 127). The founders' relative lack of concern with and the reluctance to prescribe the methods of "political education" to inculcate virtue can also be interpreted as a reflection of their awareness that such education tends to hide the truth of the person from himself.<sup>5</sup>

Natural theology and civil theology are superficial or "reductionistic." They miss the person's true freedom and dignity as an "insistently particular" being who can only be recognized in his concrete particularity

4. Richard John Neuhaus, "From Providence to Privacy: Religion and the Redefinition of America," *Unsecular America*, ed. Neuhaus (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986).

5. See my "James Madison and the Metaphysics of Modern Politics," *The Review of Politics* 48 (January 1986), 92-115.

by a personal God (NP 127; CM 204). Only Biblical-Christian theology understands fully the significance of the person's consciousness of his particular existence and his concern for his particular fate. Only in the light of a personal God, it seems, can human beings tell the truth to themselves about the contingency of their earthly existence, which is otherwise covered over by pride (CM 209-11).

Human freedom and fulfillment in the most radical senses are not the product of philosophy, nor are they the product of political action or "commitment." Human beings are, in truth, aware that they cannot transform radically their sinful, mortal existences through their own effort. They have this awareness even when they pridefully deny it, when they act in thought or politics against it. The human desire for liberation points beyond politics altogether. What is called today "theology of liberation" is a lie or illusion, which cannot help but produce fanatical efforts to suppress the human ability to know the lie for what it is (CM 183).

This theology, for Neuhaus, is an inevitably human product of liberalism. The liberty achieved through liberal historical transformation cannot, in truth, satisfy the "religious impulse toward the transcendent" implanted within human persons. Yet liberalism denies that there can be any other kind of satisfaction for human longings. Consequently, it comes to deny the longing intrinsic to personal transcendence truly exists. It closes its account of human desire and purpose to this experience, "inprison[ing] human life in a cramped and fetid secularism," and "bestowing an absolute or religious legitimation" upon merely human accomplishments and projects (CM 168).

This absolutism is, in truth, a denial of the reality of personal liberty or openness to the truth. Hence it is "the ultimate sin against the human person." It results in the person's destruction in theory, including theology, and, eventually, if unchecked, in practice. The "denial of personal immortality," in the words of the Pope, "disposes one to seek a quasi-immortality in the collective life" (CM 168). The person, in other words, becomes disposed to want to lose or deny his or her awareness of the particularity of his or her existence. This disposition, without a doubt, is the true source of the attractiveness of the lie of ideology.

Orthodoxy has always opposed the lie of the politicization of the Bible's eschatological message as idolatrous and psychologically debilitating. Idolatry or the willful denial of the truth becomes virtually inevitable when human beings deny or are denied genuinely "transcendent hope." Orthodoxy teaches human beings to live well, under God, in hope and with their personal freedom and human limitations. It, as the example of Neuhaus shows, does not destroy human commitments to family, friends, and country. It gives them properly human propor-

tions by putting them in a comprehensive perspective.

The prospects for the success of the "Catholic moment" depend upon the continuing vigor of orthodox Biblical conviction in America. Neuhaus does not count on this moment to instill new, common belief, but only to produce the articulation of the political or public relevance of belief already shared. He says that most Americans still experience the source of moral and political duty in their dependence on the personal God of the Bible. He does not go into much detail concerning the depth or the content of the experience of Biblical conviction today (NP 185; CM 242, 259).

### Culture

Neuhaus' assertions concerning the continuing vigor of conviction seem, to many, to be rather incredible statements of faith.<sup>6</sup> But his deepest thought seems to be that "religion . . . is at the heart of culture."<sup>7</sup> More precisely, perhaps, religion *must* be at the heart of *any* culture. It would be "unnatural," contrary to the nature of human beings, to think of human culture in any other way.<sup>8</sup> Democratic culture and, in turn, democratic politics can only receive their "democratic legitimacy" from the Biblical understanding of the human person. The Biblical-Christian God is *the* God of democratic equality and freedom (NP 140 41).

When Neuhaus calls a "religiously-informed public philosophy" a "culture-forming task," he means that the political and cultural orders are interdependent. He is not denying but, in his way, affirming the modern doctrine that cultural order—a manifestation of transpolitical "ordered freedom"—is superior to the political order. "[P]olitics," Neuhaus says, "is a function of culture."<sup>9</sup> For him, the role of politics is really quite limited.

Moral vision is expressed by a particular people and learned by particular persons primarily through their culture. Hence culture is what sustains the true distinctiveness or particularity of human life above or "[a]gainst the sundry determinisms—economic, social, and biological" (CM 165). The heart of culture is a people's common awareness of their freedom under God. Cultural reality, a human creation, is shaped by transcendent or spiritual reality, which is not. The integrity of culture,

6. See, for example, Vigen Guroian, "Between Secularism and Christendom: Orthodox Reflections on the American Public Order," *The World*, 18 (Summer 1987): 12-15. Also, see the remarks of Ernest Fortin recorded in *Unsecular America*, 71.

7. "From Providence to Privacy," 61.

8. *Ibid.*, 51.

9. Richard John Neuhaus, "The Post-Secular Task of the Churches," *Christianity and Politics*, ed. C. F. Griffith (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1980): 1.

its independence from and limitation upon politics, depends upon the Christian doctrine of personal freedom. Consequently, it depends upon the Church maintaining the transcendent integrity of its spiritual doctrine (NP 234, 245).

Neuhaus emphatically does not mean to say that religion exists for the sake of culture. This reductionism, in fact, deprives culture of its vitality, its heart. The radically modern idea that cultural autonomy is to be promoted as a precondition for human ennobling in the absence of God is an artificial and hence humanly unsatisfying one. Both human reflection and history have shown that it cannot sustain itself.<sup>11</sup> It cannot help but lead to the absorption of culture by political life (NP 217-18, 241).

### **Political Pretentiousness Versus Liberal Democracy**

The perennial pretension of politics is that all of human reality is political. Any assertion of reality beyond politics is meaningless or merely "negative." All human content is, in truth, a political creation. The partisans of this pretension claim that the passion of liberal democracy, the passion to limit politics, creates nothing but meaninglessness. It "devalues" everything human; it reduces qualities to quantities, and so forth.

The cure for the destruction of humanity by negative freedom is political commitment or "positive freedom," which consciously replaces apolitical or contentless individualism with political or communal meaning. Neuhaus sees the logic of this line of thought as expressed today by Marxist critics. If the negative freedom created and protected by liberal democracy is for arbitrary, atomistic self-assertion and nothing more, even if such assertions are "conscientious" or sincere, then that freedom is not a human good and ought to be destroyed (NP 120; CM 166).

Liberal democracy cannot be defended adequately against the pretensions of politics, as, say, a "neoconservative" would, as simply a rejection of its tyrannical alternatives. The Marxist does correctly describe liberal democratic political purpose, at least to a great extent. Its goal is largely negative, freedom from political domination. The liberal political passion, paradoxically enough, really is the passion to limit politics. But this description of liberal politics only becomes a radical criticism when one asserts, with the Marxists and other radical or liberal sec-

10. See also Russell Hittinger, "The Two Cities and the Modern World: A Dawsonian Assessment," *Modern Age* 28 (Spring/Summer 1984): 197 with *The Catholic Moment*, 165, 168.

11. See Bloom, 186-93.

ularists, that the Christian idea that the human person is fundamentally a transpolitical moral agent is a lie. The affirmation of the truth of this idea, Neuhaus suggests, is the heart of the postliberal way of defending the human goodness of liberal democratic politics (CM 210-11).

The human goodness of liberal democracy, then, seems to depend upon the truth of "orthodox theology," and its presence at the foundation of transpolitical culture and community. It is too hard on persons to believe in and to know God as isolated individuals. The excessive "privatization" of belief ends up destroying the distinction between belief and insanity. Insanity, of course, is by definition sincere (NP iv, 80, 82, 86, 155).

The emptiness felt with the disappearance of the experience of the real existence of the personal God, combined with a moral revulsion against the philistinism of modern or allegedly secular culture, has produced in this century calls for the destruction of liberal democracy. The resulting "totalitarian" political "commitments" are the product of the combination of relativistic sophistication and moral hunger that characterizes intellectuals as a class (NP 186-89). Actually, intellectuals criticize what they in fact have created.

Their sophistication or liberation from orthodoxy, their liberalism in the precise sense, leads them at first to push aggressively for the secularization of public life in the name of their personal freedom or autonomy. This secularization, in its later stages, becomes a progressively more open partisanship on behalf of "moral relativism." Any opinion which is not relativistic is deemed religious and hence barred from public debate. The project to secularize totally or, in a way, "demoralize" public life cannot help but deform culture, especially as the role of government, acting, in particular, as educator, expands. If the public square is "naked," then the content of culture also tends to disappear. Both become lacking in moral inspiration for human beings (NP 47).

### **Political Commitment**

Viewing the world they have created as a class, intellectuals are disgusted. Their teaching of relativism has sucked the content out of even their own values. Given the emptiness of both culture and politics, they assert that they must be radically transformed. There is certainly no human reason any longer for asserting the autonomy of culture. Human reality must be conceived as a whole, to be transformed by political commitment (NP 85; CM 194).

12. See also Neuhaus, "Habits of the (Academic) Mind," *The Public Interest* (Spring 1986): 99-104.

Total political (or, for that matter, cultural) commitment suggests the overarching power of human creativity. It leaves no room for a transcendent, personal freedom. Human beings, the thought seems to be, are "spontaneously" or "by nature" atomistic or contentless individuals. They are given no human content or order by nature or God. They create their moral worth or human dignity for themselves through their "subjective" commitments, which unleash their true freedom, the freedom to create.

The very passion which makes commitment possible is somehow subjective. Commitment is radically arbitrary or free. From its perspective, all "real passions are low and selfish."<sup>13</sup> It is, it seems, a personal expression of indignation against the emptiness of reality in light of God and nature's indifference to human existence. It is an expression of the person's "insistent particularity," the passion to manifest one's freedom from impersonal or humanly unworthy determination. Commitment is what a person believes he or she must do to establish his or her personhood in the absence of a personal God.

Political commitment in this sense is idolatrous. It, in effect, undertakes the impossible task of replacing the Creator with the creature, an effort that occurs whenever the creature no longer experiences him- or herself as such. Commitment willfully suppresses criticism of what is required to achieve political success. The standard of transcendent, divine judgment disappears. More precisely, the tendency is to identify political success with divine judgment, because there is no transpolitical, critical standard by which one could say otherwise. The transcendent dignity- of the human person is exposed as a discredited illusion. It is replaced by real-human dignity achieved and recognized by political liberation, and rooted no longer in the Creator, but in human creativity invoking the name of God (CM 209-11, 220-31; NP 130-31, 236, 254).

To say that political or historical success somehow reveals divine truth is blasphemy, because "[t]ruth telling and the quest for power are incompatible." "[E]arthly power" always tends to subordinate truth to success and always tends, in its vulgar way, to call its success truth (NP 236). But human beings know, really, that historical success cannot satisfy their longing for truth, and that historical success is always deficient from the perspective of divine judgment. This thought ought not to keep human beings from achieving what they can achieve historically, nor keep them from judging historical accomplishments as better or worse from a transcendent standard, from proclaiming, say, the superiority of the United States to the Soviet Union, but it ought to

13. Bloom, 122.

cause them to separate clearly the historical or the human from the divine.

Total political commitment is also fundamentally undemocratic. The meaninglessness which it seeks to overcome is experienced with at least special intensity by those particularly devoted to the life of the mind. The awareness of ultimate groundlessness produced by the liberal way of thinking and the miserable experience of anxiety it, in turn, produces are the pride of the modern individual. It is not an experience commonly shared, and it would surely lose its perverse charm if it were. The ability to commit oneself politically in the light of the experience of the death of God becomes *the* point of pride. It generates a contempt for those who believe that they can still experience their createdness in modern times (NP 51, 178).

### Unsecular, Democratic America

The sophisticated pretensions of "secular humanism" and "political commitment" are elite claims to rule. They oppose democratic politics, community, and culture as they actually exist among human beings. According to Neuhaus, such partisans obstinately refuse to acknowledge the extent to which American politics and culture are still formed by the person's experience of being a creature of a personal Creator. They underestimate greatly the extent to which America remains "unsecular," as well as the extent to which democracy, not to mention human freedom, depends upon the religious or genuinely transcendent dimension of American culture (NP 139-40, 145). There is enough democratic or Biblical-Christian vitality left in America, Neuhaus hopes, to resist the naked public square and all it portends.

Accordingly, "[p]opular resentment against the logic of the naked public square is a source of hope" (NP 87). It is evidence of the health of American democracy, of its capacity not to be seduced by anti-democratic and finally anti-human misuses of reason. This "resentment," a characteristically human passion, is indispensable for protecting "civilization" from "barbarism," for protecting the normatively binding reality that constitutes American politics, religion, and culture. "Barbarians," Neuhaus says quite precisely, "are the party of emancipation from the truths civilized people consider self-evident" (NP 87).

This populist opposition to the barbarian emancipation from civilization expresses itself theologically, quite often, as "fundamentalism." Neuhaus readily concedes that there is also much barbaric about this theology. It is too obstinately opposed to reason to persuade most Americans about the truth of its account of transcendent reality. Its emphasis on rather idiosyncratic principles of Biblical interpretation which are not



open to argument or even, sometimes, reasoned articulation suggests the same subjectivism or atomism as does the individualism of the "militant secularists" they rightly oppose. Fundamentalism is also too much like political "commitment" in its radical subjectivism to be the antidote to its excesses (NP 15-16, 19, 37, 158; CM 155).

The fundamentalist theological method does not aim at discovering or articulating the common experience of transcendent purpose which is the unity limiting American pluralism. By suggesting that reason is the enemy of orthodoxy, fundamentalists concede far too much to their opponents. They also deny what Neuhaus holds to be a fundamental biblical doctrine: Human beings "are not atomistic individuals ... but persons of reason and conviction" (NP 112). The resentment of fundamentalism must be informed by reason before it can lead to postliberalism or postmodernism.

### **The Promise of Natural Law**

Neuhaus is attracted to the Catholic natural law tradition because its proponents seem to be erudite, sophisticated, and open to reason while remaining orthodox. They appear to be uniquely qualified to do what must be done to reinvigorate religious truth as a foundation for "democratic legitimacy." This truth "must be clothed, translated, and interpreted in a mediating language that makes its public relevant meanings accessible to all the public."<sup>14</sup> The Catholic theologian's willingness to undertake such a project comes from his or her belief that human reason leads human beings to an awareness of the Creator and their createdness by nature.

Neuhaus is attracted, above all, to John Courtney Murray's defense of the American "proposition" that the truth about human liberty and equality can be genuinely self-evident to a people, a political community "under God" (NP 188; CM 193-95, 250-51). Murray predicted or hoped that eventually thoughtful Americans would discover that only the Catholic natural law tradition could give an adequate account of this proposition, its understanding of "ordered liberty."<sup>15</sup> The "order" in which human liberty is rooted is the person's freedom from political domination for the discovery of his duties to his Creator.

According to Murray, "the dignity of the human person" comes from the fact that the person is a "moral subject," capable of free and responsible choice; his freedom and responsibility, in turn, "rooted in the given

14. Neuhaus, "From Providence to Privacy," 64.

15. John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 41-43.

reality of man as man." He is aware that he should act freely "in accordance with his nature." He is not free to choose to be whatever he pleases, to be "autonomous" in the ultimate sense. He is free from political coercion for conscientious "imperatives" given to him by "the transcendent order of truth."

The person is responsible to conform his personal, conscientious judgments with this transcendent order, which is accessible to him by his "given" nature, and to conform "his external actions with the inner imperatives of conscience." He is required, in other words, by his nature as a person, to establish his proper relationship with God. He is aware, according to this line of thought, of the moral responsibilities inherent in this relationship by nature, and, without this knowledge, it would be impossible for him to establish an adequate foundation for religious liberty. If religious freedom, to repeat, were simply for one's own sincere but ultimately merely subjective religious or conscientious experiences, it is not at all clear that it could be established as a good for human beings and hence a foundation for limited government.<sup>16</sup> According to Murray, the tradition of natural law was preceded and succeeded by the domination of the world by the passion for the political unity of human reality.<sup>17</sup>

Neuhaus's attraction to the doctrine of natural law is partly as a reasonable defense of limited government rooted in the transpolitical dignity of the human person. He also understands it as a defense of orthodoxy or the givenness of moral law in a particularly antinomian time. St. Thomas, after all, formulated the doctrine to curb the antinomian implications of dangerous doctrines in his time.

In addition to the potentially morally and politically explosive Aristotelian idea of nature, Thomas confronted two other threats to the traditions of Biblical and Roman law. One was the millenarian enthusiasm of certain kind of Christian extremism, which asserted that "gospel liberty had superseded all law."<sup>18</sup> The other was the barbarian opinion that vie-

16. John Courtney Murray, "The Declaration on Religious Freedom: A Moment in Its Legislative History," *Religious Liberty: An End and a Beginning*, ed. Murray (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 37-42. This way of rooting religious freedom in the dignity of the human person by nature is the one Murray believed the Vatican II Declaration ought to have followed, but did so only to some extent. See Francis Canavan, S. J., "Religious Freedom: John Courtney Murray, S. J. and Vatican II," paper presented to the 1985 American Political Science Association Meeting and Canavan, "Murray on Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom," *Communio* 9 (1982): 404-5.

17. See Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, passim on the "monism" of the Greeks and the post-Christian continental liberals.

18. E. A. Goerner, "Thomistic Natural Right: The Good Man's View of Thomistic Natural Law," *Political Theory* 11 (August 1983): 414. My account of the practical intent of Thomas's thought here is drawn entirely from this article.

tory in battle was a revelation of both the highest human excellence and the judgment of God. To a great extent, today's totalitarian temptation is a combination of these two dangers.

Thomas's guiding thought was that it would be contrary to the will of the God who created the natural inclinations of human persons and the intelligibility of the natural order to take simply the side or orthodoxy against philosophy or even the side of orthodoxy, insofar as it is rooted, finally, in Mosaic law, against what is distinctively Christian about the experiences of the person. Thomas's moderation would have been impossible had he not believed that human beings experienced themselves as creatures by nature and hence that a "creationist metaphysics" is reasonable. Natural reason does not contradict but points beyond itself to divine law or orthodoxy, because it is possible to show the reasonableness of believing that the world was created by a personal Creator.

### The Limits of Natural Law

Thomas's and Murray's crucial thought concerning the credibility of the doctrine of natural law is that the dignity of the human person is known by human beings according to nature, or independently of divine revelation. Neuhaus, finally, cannot accept this thought as his own, perhaps because Murray, in truth, makes no attempt to defend it theoretically, but accepts it as a given.<sup>19</sup> For Neuhaus, the truth about the person must be illuminated by reason, but it begins in orthodoxy or "conviction" that exists prior to reason.

Neuhaus, more precisely, remains to be persuaded. He always presents his criticisms of the natural law doctrine cautiously and rather indirectly, and always from the perspective of the democratic morality derived from the Biblical doctrine of the person. His suspicion is that every attempt to root human morality or purpose in nature is inherently elitist and ultimately incredible. Such attempts imply, at first, the rule of those especially gifted to discern nature's purposes, a natural aristocracy, and, eventually, they lead to the moral relativism or, more precisely, the "moral nihilism" of the naked public square.<sup>20</sup> Neuhaus views the history of the Catholic doctrine of natural law as intertwined with the Church's pre-Vatican II anti-democratic and anti-liberal ecclesiological pretensions. Murray's accommodation of that history to the claims of democracy and liberty Neuhaus admires as a sleight of hand (or as E. A.

19. See my "Natural Law and the American Regime: Murray's *We Hold These Truths*," *Communio* 9 (Winter 1982): 374-76, 386-87. Consider *We Hold These Truths* 192: "Christianity freed man from nature and hence taught him... his individual worth, the dignity of his own person...."

20. Consider Neuhaus, "From Providence to Privacy," as a whole.

Goerner says, a "noble, Platonic tale")<sup>21</sup> that owes more to the power of the Christian understanding of the person than anything intrinsic to the doctrine of natural law in particular. 22

Neuhaus also suggests that Jefferson's personal attempt to found America in the "self-evident dogmas" of the "Law of Nature and Nature's God" largely liberated from Biblical presuppositions begins a train of thought which culminates in the militantly secularist conclusion that there are no natural or divine limits to human choice, as expressed, say, in *Roe v. Wade*. To avoid this conclusion, Neuhaus interprets "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God" as a political expression of the Biblical-Christian consensus which motivated the founding generation and still motivates most Americans today.<sup>23</sup> The phrase, in Neuhaus's eyes, is an expression of democratic community rather than aristocratic liberation (NP 26-27). He, in a way, chooses the vision of most of the delegates at the Continental Congress over Jefferson's personal vision. Neuhaus invites a reconsideration of precisely what the American people regarded as self-evidence when acting politically in 1776 and 1787-88.

Beginning with the stirring Declaration, American public discourse has always understood "human ultimacies . . . with specific reference to the biblical, Judeo-Christian religion." Neuhaus also says, more generally, that "the American spirit is severely and unnaturally crippled if the religiously grounded values of the American people are ruled out of order in public discourse" (NP 51). His point seems to be that it would be unnatural, contrary to the nature of human beings, to speak of the law of nature, not to mention to some "humanism," as being at the foundation of "ordered" or human liberty. Such a conclusion seems to be an inescapable product of postmodern reflection on the experience of the nihilistic culmination of liberalism in the anti-human extremes of relativism and totalitarianism.

Neuhaus also notes that attempts today from various quarters to reinvigorate somehow the "religion of nature" or classical political philosophy are doomed from the beginning from the perspective of democratic legitimacy (NP 140, 176).<sup>24</sup> "Choosing classical religion over biblical religion," he contends, remains "an aristocratic enterprise" (NP 140). He affirms the perennial truth of Augustinian orthodoxy; the true freedom and dignity of the human person eludes the natural theologians. He

21. E. A. Goerner, *Caesar and Peter* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 182.

22. See Murray, "Maritain, Niebuhr, and Freedom," *This World* 14 (Winter 1986): 114.

23. See also Neuhaus, "From Providence to Privacy," 64.

24. See also Neuhaus, "The Bible, The American Revolution, and The New Revisionists," *The Religion and Society Report* 3 (May 1986): 1-3.

goes further; their view of the human being does not even do enough justice to human liberty to sustain liberal democracy.

Neuhaus's most comprehensive political thought is that all forms of Western rationalism which have been uninformed, in the decisive respects, by the Biblical-Christian understanding of the transcendence of the person, whether classical or modern, tend toward the legitimation of a gnostic aristocracy, a class that rules pretentiously by virtue of its allegedly special knowledge (CM 78-82, 182-86). All "secular canons of truth," apparently, lead to such aristocratic political conclusions. Neuhaus criticizes repeatedly and at length from a democratic and orthodox theological perspective, the "new class or the knowledge class" of American intellectuals, including theologians, (CM 73-78, 244-46; NP 226 47) and the more radical "Pelagianism" of the theologians of liberation, those partisans of a political movement led by a "revolutionary aristocracy" (CM 184-85).

Within any orthodox Christian community, he contends, there is a "cognitive equality" in the most important respect, because "[w]hen it comes to those things that matter most, the unsophisticated Christian 'knows' as fully as, and perhaps more fully, than his educated betters." Hence the "sophisticated," as persons, are no better than the "simple," and those charged with political rule do so in light of a "common faith, equally normative and true for everyone." This account of equality, Neuhaus suggests, is the only one which is worthy of human persons (CM 143-45). He goes as far as to say "the key ideas which made possible the development of modern democracy are inexplicable apart from the biblical tradition.

### **Reason Versus Orthodoxy**

Nature or the natural reason of human beings must be illumined by revelation for the understanding it produces to become morally salutary. Such an understanding is not simply or even primarily the product of natural reason. The sophistication with which Neuhaus defends this conclusion, and its implication that the ultimate human choice is between Biblical orthodoxy and moral nihilism, calls to mind the teaching of Leo Strauss. For Strauss, the vitality of the West is the tension between reason and revelation, and the vitality of morality or personal freedom depends on reason's inability to destroy the credibility of the choice for revelation or orthodoxy. The choice must remain alive, in principle, for each individual "between a truth that is good for the intel-

lect alone and a salutary and beatifying truth that represents the good of the whole person."<sup>26</sup> It is, in one way, the choice between aristocracy and democracy.

Presented this way, the choice seems easy. Human beings are not intellects alone. Any truth that cannot account for the whole person cannot possibly be completely true. To choose "reason" or "nature" is to choose a reductionism that destroys human freedom or distinctiveness, that denies the reality of the experience of the person. This thought is at the root of Neuhaus's fears concerning the human consequences of the success of the project to establish the naked public square.

But to show that revelation or orthodoxy is necessary for human freedom is not the same thing as showing that any particular orthodoxy is true. In fact, such a proof is impossible; orthodoxies are believed in or affirmed as a matter of conviction. It may be "unnatural" for human beings not to believe in truths which are "salutary and beatifying" from the perspective of their freedom and dignity. But it might well be as unnatural for the intellect not to be satisfied, to sacrifice itself in the name of doctrines it knows cannot be true. The totalitarian passion for the political unity of human reality is the passion to eliminate from the world all reality which offends the intellect, to destroy the allegedly "accidental" existence of the freedom of the person in the name of the truth, which is, by its nature, the intellect says, deterministic or homogeneous.<sup>27</sup>

Neuhaus defends the "democratic" perception of a moral order which exists independently of human making against the "aristocratic" or elitist passion for the liberation of the intellect and intellectuals. However sophisticated this defense becomes, it cannot escape altogether the appearance of being a vulgar defense of morality against reason or "enlightenment," a war of life against truth. Neuhaus, like Strauss, prays that the war will continue, and his efforts are salutary because he has taken the side of the adversary most in danger of devastating defeat.<sup>28</sup>

It is tempting to call Neuhaus a sort of Protestant Thomas Aquinas, using Murray as his Aristotle. Although he cannot agree with Murray's ultimate presuppositions concerning the relationship between nature and morality, and reason and revelation, he does see that human liberty

26. Ernest Fortin, "Rational Theologians and Irrational Philosophers: A Straussian Perspective," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 12 (May/September 1984): 356.

27. See my "Tocqueville on Democracy and Pantheism," *Tocqueville Observes the New Order*, ed. K. Masugi (The Claremont Institute, forthcoming) and my "Was Tocqueville a Philosopher?" *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy*, forthcoming. Also, John Courtney Murray, "The Church and Totalitarian Democracy," *Theological Studies* 13 (December 1952): 553.

28. NP, 160: "The victory of either the forces of secularism or the forces promoting an uncomplicated view of Christian America would be disastrous."

requires that orthodox conviction and natural reason be harmonized as far as possible. The urbane, philosophical dimension of Americanized Catholic thought can be used to counter the irrational and apolitical excesses of fundamentalist orthodoxy, and hence to apply orthodox conviction in a public, persuasive way in defense of liberal democracy.

Neuhaus agrees with Murray that orthodox Protestantism and Catholicism ally naturally against the irrational (as opposed to supra-rational or supernatural) and hence truly incredible faiths of the secularized messianism of "political commitment" and "evolutionary scientific humanism." Finally, Murray and Neuhaus come together in defending the proposition that the American idea of liberty originates in some way or another in the Biblical-Christian understanding of the person created by a personal God,

Neuhaus's argument is not finished, and he knows it. He boldly asserts that "Protestants have a particular responsibility to critically retrieve and resume ambitious synthesizing projects such as that represented by Thomas Aquinas" (CM 23). He is aware that this task would be easier if Murray's account of the doctrine of natural law were true. It is unsettling, to say the least, to suggest that what satisfies the intellect does not satisfy the person and hence to portray human existence as a war between conflicting human goods. Because each person possesses both reason and conviction, and regards them both as good, surely he or she would not want one to destroy the other. On the other hand, human beings cannot help but hate anything which suggests that the person is internally at war with him- or herself and be attracted to extreme doctrines which promise to bring the war to an end.

Murray may well be right to believe that human beings, and Americans in particular, need the doctrine of natural law, and there have been admirable Catholic efforts at its recovery. Above all, what needs to be recovered is the argument for the truth of a "creationist metaphysics," which was absolutely indispensable for Thomas. As Russell Hittinger has shown, this recovery requires nothing short of a science of nature that points to the Creator and shows how nature, even unilluminated by revelation, is normative for rational creatures or persons. Hittinger has also shown that contemporary Catholic natural law theorists sidestep the metaphysical or scientific issues and hence do not defend the proposition that human creatures know of their duties to their Creator by nature.<sup>29</sup> Yet not only did St. Thomas and Murray regard the truth of this

29. Russell Hittinger, "The Recovery of Natural Law," *This World* 18 (Summer 1987): 62-74. Hittinger is primarily critical of the approach of John Finnis and Germain Grisez.

proposition as the foundation of the goodness of religious liberty, so did James Madison, who described it in terms of a creature's apprehension by reason and conscience of his duty to his Creator.<sup>30</sup>

### The Postmodern Affirmation of Paradox

Neuhaus's thought at this point might be that perhaps the tradition of natural law and its quest for a creationist metaphysics aim at a certainty that is not given to human beings, that it is insufficiently "postmodern" in its awareness of human limitations. It may well be that even Neuhaus's sort of project must remain unfinished, and that it is a human good that it do so. Reality, in truth, is inescapably experienced by particular or human beings as paradoxical, as full of "tensions and contradictions." Those things "we are convinced are true do not jibe," and it is true that, as beings who possess reason, we are offended. As rational but particular beings, our reason is necessarily limited by our particularity, and hence our desire for rational satisfaction or consistency or unity can even cause us to deny the existence of particularity (CM 25, 193-95).

But the fact that this world as we experience it is full of "[i]nescapable paradoxes" gives us reason to hope, even reason to believe in a personal Creator. What we see is, reason tells us, marked by "incompleteness." Our deepest longings, including but not only our desire for truth, remain unsatisfied. Creation seems, by its nature, to be "longing." Human persons, in particular, cannot help but have the thought "that reality is still awaiting something." Faith becomes reasonable in light of our reasonable "dissatisfaction with all the available answers" (CM 25). Reason, Neuhaus suggests in a way reminiscent of Pascal, leads to the conclusion that there is something greater or more satisfying than what we have experienced as sinful mortals. The fact that persons remain dissatisfied with all they have discovered through reason about the answers to the questions fundamental to human existence gives us hope that our particularity is not accidental or absurd.

Neuhaus disagrees with Murray that God wills religious unity for human beings. Such a view is too "monistic" or insufficiently "eschatological" (CM 193). The human condition, in its particularity, is necessarily pluralistic, in all its forms. Pluralism, Neuhaus contends, "is written into the script of history to smash all idols" (CM 195), and hence to give human beings the longing for genuine liberation, which, is, among other things, liberation from history and historical standards and hence for an openness to the transcendent, to faith or revelation.