DAVID WALSH AND LIBERALISM
AS THE CHRISTIAN REFRACTION OF POLITICS

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I. Liberalism and Christianity

The title of the Panel on which this Paper is given, "Stress and Strain Within Liberal Democracy," is redundant. The Panel may just as well have been called "Liberal Democracy," for to invoke the liberal political order, as it may exist at any time and in any place, is necessarily to invoke stress, strain, and sometimes worse. But that is not to condemn liberal democracy. On the contrary, the tensions inherent in a liberal political order reflect the tensions of reality itself in which we have been left free by our Creator, like the characters in a play, to work out our own destinies, usually only by learning, as Christianity teaches most clearly, through undergoing the suffering that freedom necessarily entails. And so liberalism is, as David Walsh maintains, "a Christian refraction of politics" because the light that somehow penetrates our public medium, a medium that seemingly becomes more and more opaque, is still the light of the cross. Further, notwithstanding what some of the legions of modern critics of liberalism say, liberalism, insofar as it is related to Christianity, as Walsh argues it must be, is not only not an ideology, it is the only form of political order on current display that is not an ideology.

The title of this Paper, "David Walsh and Liberalism as the Christian Refraction of Politics" is taken from an essay Professor Walsh wrote called "Are Freedom and Dignity Enough? A

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Refection on Liberal Abbreviations," first published in 2003 and reappearing as the first of a group of essays on liberal democracy in his 2020 collection of essays, *The Priority of the Person: Political, Philosophical, and Historical Discoveries* (Walsh 2020). That essay can serve as an introduction to his approach to liberalism generally.

He began by citing Oakeshott to the effect that "Political language . . . consists of a set of abbreviations for a far more concretely extended knowledge," and remarking that "Nowhere is this characterization more apt than in the liberal language of rights, which appears to have carried the principle of compression to its limits" (29). The compression of the language of liberalism, it turns out, is both its weakness and its strength, its weakness because "liberal politics tends to teeter perpetually on the brink of incoherence and collapse" (ibid.), its strength because at the same time it is able to both evoke the deepest insights of our culture as to the meaning of the human person while still holding our fractured polity together.

"What is striking" about the abbreviated language of our liberal political order, Walsh says, "is that, when language has reached its limits, the abbreviations of politics succeed in saying what cannot be said" (12). Walsh's paradoxical expressions, like this one, which are found throughout his later writings on liberalism, modern philosophy, and personalism, and which will appear throughout this Paper, may be off-putting to the rationalist in each of us, until we realize that paradoxical language may be the best way to convey the paradoxical structure of the deepest realties themselves, upon whose disclosures we must both ever seek but always wait. "Paradox, said Henri De Lubac, "is the reverse of what, properly perceived, would be synthesis. But the proper view always eludes us." (De Lubac 1987, 9) Quoting a Latin proverb, De Lubac continues:

> In the field of facts as of spirit, synthesis can only be sought. 'As long as we live, we deem it essential ever to seek.' Paradox is the search or wait for synthesis. It is the provisional expression of a view which remains incomplete, but whose orientation is ever towards fullness.

. . .
. . . paradox exists everywhere in reality, before existing in thought. . . . Paradox, in the best sense, is objectivity.
. . .
Paradoxes: the word specifies, above all, then, things themselves, not the way of saying them. (9-10)

What then, according to Walsh, is the amplitude over which liberal abbreviations, paradoxically, float? "[T]he liberal order," Walsh maintains,

is the closest approximation of the Christian valuation of the human being. Liberal democracy cannot be regarded as a Christian political form, not only because no political expressions can adequately incarnate the spirit of Christ, but also because it is no longer explicitly connected with its Christian inspiration. A liberal order of rights is more appropriately viewed as a Christian refraction of politics. Like a light penetrating a medium that remains largely unaware of its source, Christianity nevertheless radiates its illuminative effect. Liberal democracy is a political form that no longer knows the inspiration from which it lives, but yet it has nevertheless absorbed that inspiration within its minimal principles, Like much else in our modern world, liberal politics is an expression of an anonymous faith. What matters is that the Christian resonances continue to be evoked through a language that bears intuitions no longer fully articulate within it.
From this recognition [it] follows . . . that a liberal political order represents in a more profound sense the most adequate political expression of Christianity. (Walsh 2020, 49)

This statement may be said to contain in miniature Walsh's larger project insofar as it touches on our liberal political order.

First, we see here his deepest defense of it, namely, that it represents "the closest approximation of the Christian valuation of the human being," and "the most adequate political expression of Christianity" insofar as it may be appropriate, if it is appropriate at all, to say that Christianity may be expressed in any political form.

Second, Walsh's statement that "liberalism is a Christian refraction of politics" is a penetrating description of *our modern liberalism*. Thus he refers to the fact that liberal democracy "is no longer explicitly connected with its Christian inspiration," that it "remains largely unaware of its source," that it "no longer knows the inspiration from which it lives." It is "an expression of

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an anonymous faith." Again we see both the weaknesses and the strengths of our "liberal abbreviations" in modernity. If there is a disconnect between liberalism and its animating Christian inspiration, that at least permits liberalism to function as our political order in a pluralistic society containing not just Christians, but religionists of all stripes and of none, including among the latter those who, while ascribing to liberalism, would deny vehemently that its inspiration has anything to do with any religion, especially Christianity. And even in the face of this public disconnection, as Walsh maintains, "Christianity nevertheless radiates its illuminative effect," liberal democracy "has nevertheless absorbed that inspiration within its minimal principles," and "What matters is that the Christian resonances continue to be evoked through a language that bears intuitions no longer fully articulate within it."

Third, the disconnect between any political form and that which animates it is always a matter of abiding concern, as political scientists since Plato and Aristotle have known. It is a matter of special concern for an order that, like liberalism, "tends to teeter perpetually on the brink of incoherence and collapse," as Walsh puts it. Walsh, in fact, is the farthest thing from a starry-eyed liberal. His writings on liberalism contain some of the sharpest critiques leveled against it in modernity, and suggest that in its present form, it may not even survive. How long, after all, do "anonymous faiths" last? And so Walsh's defense of liberalism calls ultimately for the reestablishment of the connection between it and its Christian sources. Walsh's project along these lines is suggested by the title of his only book-length treatment of liberalism, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* (Walsh 1997). The title is ambiguous, for the book itself suggests not only that modern liberalism has grown form a Christian heritage, which many would deny, but that the soul of modern liberalism thus formed must continue to grow or be extinguished.

To sum up, we might say that for Walsh, while the light of Christianity may always be refracted, to a greater or lesser extent, in our liberal political order, it is a light that somehow must also be kept lit. Walsh's project on liberalism is anamnetic.

We will consider Walsh's fuller treatment of liberalism later. To put it in context, we want first to consider the protean nature of the subject; the two types of contemporary attacks on liberalism, with some examples of each; what some of its earlier defenders said about it; the roots of liberalism in the Bible and in Christian theology and philosophy; and its adoption in modern Catholic Social Teaching.

II. Liberalism Attacked

David Walsh has entered the lists on the side of those who support liberalism at a time when liberalism itself is under attack as perhaps never before. And his defense of it takes us to its depths as few others do.

It is not easy to defend liberalism, or to attack it for that matter, because in a sense there is no such thing as liberalism. Just try to define its essence. It seems not to have one. There is not so much "liberalism" as there are "liberalisms," and a great variety of them at that, each with its own theorists, supporters, and critics. Liberalism is perhaps the most protean and confounding subject in contemporary political philosophy. A veritable buffet of liberalisms are spread before us. There is classical liberalism, progressive liberalism, enlightenment liberalism, and neoliberalism, to name just a few. There is pre-modern liberalism and modern liberalism. Leo Strauss reminds us that we have both ancient and modern liberalism. (Strauss 1995) It is within liberalism that we find both "liberals" and "conservatives," the two types of politicians who used to exhaust that category in happier times. Then there is secularism, which is not liberalism but which is somehow related to it. One's head spins.

In any event, and despite all of that, it is at least clear that this thing called liberalism somehow has formed and continues to form the very basis of our own Western political order despite, or perhaps precisely because of, our inability to pin it down. It is our overarching political order.

As an American born in the middle of the twentieth century and growing up in an America much different, for good and for bad, than our current America, I rejoice in the fact that America still clings to its basic form as a liberal political order, the form in which it was founded, but worry about its will to retain that order. Will depends on reason, and it is hoped that by advancing reasons in support of the liberal political order, as David Walsh has done, that order may be not only preserved but strengthened.

When considering whether the American liberal political order can be saved, and indeed whether it deserves to be saved, Americans are reminded of remarks by two of our Founders.

After the close of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, asked by a woman what form of government the Founders had devised, Benjamin Franklin replied, "A republic—if you can keep it." The American Founders recognized that a liberal political order requires, more than any other, the presence of certain virtues in its citizenry for its sustenance. Does our republic still nourish those virtues? Does it even still believe in virtue?

Seventy-six years later, in the midst of the greatest threat to the American liberal order, Abraham Lincoln asked at Gettysburg whether a nation, or any nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, can long endure. That question haunts us again.

It is very difficult to give a single coherent account of the nature of contemporary attacks on liberalism, for several reasons.

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First, because of the protean nature of the subject, already mentioned.

Second, because liberalism is protean, and assumes various forms, it is possible to attack a form or forms of liberalism without attacking liberalism as such. That is, one can love or support certain forms of liberalism and hate or critique others. Examples of such lovers/haters would include the American Founders, the Catholic Church, and David Walsh. Or think of Eric Voegelin, who was relieved to have found himself in America following his escape from the Nazis, but who could never bring himself to think very highly of John Locke. On the contemporary scene we have, for example, Michael Sandel (Sandel 1984, 1996, 1998, 2010), a brilliant critic of certain forms of liberalism, including the very influential version espoused by John Rawls, but who himself seeks to move liberalism more toward community than autonomy. It seems to us that most of the serious thinking about liberalism is done by thinkers like these, because the nature of liberalism itself, to the extent we can say that it has one, lends itself to critiques from within, critiques that do not seek to destroy liberalism but to convert it by bringing it back to what each liberal thinker conceives to be its roots. And any liberal political order, like the thought that birthed it, will not be static, but subject to constant change, to innumerable fits and starts. In this also liberalism, as a political order, mirrors the nature of reality itself.

Third, there are those who attack liberalism itself, who mount a total critique of it no matter its form. These "total critiques" themselves are of two types, conceptually distinct but necessarily related. It is difficult to keep them apart because liberalism is not just an idea, but the actual political order of particular societies.

One type of "total critique" of liberalism is mounted not against any particular society which may embody some form of liberalism, but against the idea of liberalism itself. This critique

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does not seek the reform of liberalism, or the replacement of one of its forms with anther, but its elimination, although those who mount this type of critique are not certain of an alternative.

The other type of "total critique" is the more familiar one from the side of ideology or gnosticism, which seeks a "total transformation" of liberal society itself, not because of any injustice in particular, but because the entire structure is deemed to be corrupt. This attack seeks to replace the present liberal order with an altogether different particular order, such as Anarchism, Fascism, Communism, or Socialism. The attack may be progressivist or utopian. See, for example, Voegelin 1969a, 1990a, and 2007, and Niemeyer 1971. The attack is not on liberalism as an idea but on society as such which just happens to have adopted a variant of liberalism as its political form. An ideological attack may of course be mounted against any existing society, whether or not liberal, but it is usually mounted against liberal societies because most existing societies in the West that have not been attacked or taken over by ideologists are liberal.

These two "total critiques" are often related insofar as the first one may be birthed in a liberal society which has failed to prevent its own destruction by ideological forces. That appears to be a reason why we have seen so many criticisms of our own American liberal political order of late. It has often been remarked that America, in contrast to Europe, was, at least until the 1960s, remarkably free from the influence of modern political ideologies. This no doubt had to do with the earliest American history and the nature of the American Founding itself. America was founded as a liberal political order, but in conscious recognition of its Biblical and classical roots. But America is now infected with ideologies that threaten that order, and part of the defensive reaction has been not so much to criticize the ideologies as the liberal order which has seemed powerless to prevent or check them.

Before returning to the subject of the attacks on liberalism, we turn to three thinkers who saw in the liberal order in which America was founded much to celebrate.

III. Murray, Maritain, and Voegelin on the American Liberal Political Order

The most important thing for any form of liberal political order to get right is the relationship of politics and religion. Even secular liberals understand that, although their form of liberalism may, or may not, call for the elimination of religious considerations from the pubic square altogether.

Over sixty years ago, John Courtney Murray noted that it was customary to put to American Catholics what was supposed to be an embarrassing question: "Do you really believe in the first two provisions of the First Amendment," the religion clauses, which provide: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof"? (Murray 1988, 48) Father Murray answered the question by concluding that the religion clauses were not articles of faith, in which case the Church would have been subordinate to the State, if not entirely absorbed into it, but rather articles of peace, required for a nation in which persons of all faiths, and of none, were to live together. The religion clauses were therefore not theological propositions, but merely, and thankfully, good law. The United States, Murray affirmed, was "a good place to live in . . . But it is not a church . . . It is simply a civil community, whose unity is purely political, consisting in 'agreement on the good of man at the level of performance without the necessity of agreement on ultimates' . . . As regards important points of ultimate religious belief, the United States is pluralist. Any attempt at reducing this pluralism by law, through a process of reading certain sectarian tenets into the fundamental law of the land, is prima facie illegitimate and absurd." (54)

Nor did Murray regard his support for the American experiment back then as "taking low ground." (60) "Such a case," he said, "does not appeal to mean-spirited expediency nor does it imply a reluctant concession to *force majeure*. In the science of law and the art of jurisprudence the appeal to social peace is an appeal to a high moral value. Behind the will to social peace there stands a divine and Christian imperative. This is the classic and Christian tradition." (Ibid.) Murray may have had in mind the first great Christian thinker to make this point, Augustine. Referring to Matthew 13:30, and citing Pius XII's reference to the parable in his discourse to a group of Italian jurists on December 6, 1953, Murray said that it is not up to man to separate the wheat from the tares. (61) The Pope, Murray noted, rejected the idea that "Religious and moral error have no rights and therefore must always be repressed when repression of them is possible." (Ibid.) As opposed to 'the abstract order of ethics or theology . . . the highest and most general norm [in the concrete order of jurisprudence] is the public peace, the common good in its various aspects. This is altogether a moral norm." (62)

Murray insisted that Catholicism rejected both theocracy, wherein the state was absorbed into the church, and Erastianism, wherein the church was absorbed into the state. (64) Both cases resulted in a limitation upon freedom. And, said Murray, "The dualism of mankind's two hierarchically ordered forms of social life had been Christianity's cardinal contribution to the Western political tradition. . . . Perhaps equally with the very idea of law itself it had been the most fecund force for freedom in society." (Ibid.) To make the church and civil society one "is to violate the nature of the church and also the nature of civil society, as this latter had been understood in the liberal Christian political tradition." (66) In incorporating these principles into the American Constitutional order, the Founding Fathers built, as Murray, said, "better than they knew." (Ibid.) And while their solution, seemingly simple, has been beset by difficulties caused by the fact of

"the intimacy with which religion is woven into the whole social fabric," and the subsequent expansions of the powers of government, the American Constitution at least "embodies in a special way the traditional principle of the distinction between church and state" (67), which is the basis of all genuinely liberal political order, in contrast to the sectarian "liberalisms" ushered in, for example, by the French and Russian Revolutions, illiberal "liberalisms," if we may even call them "liberalisms," that were really ideologies.

The Jacobin thesis of "sectarian Liberalism," or "totalitarian democracy," based on "the principle of the primacy of the political, the principle of 'everything within the state, nothing above the state,'" was not only opposed by the Church, but

> utterly rejected by the founders of the American Republic. The rejection was as warranted as it was providential, because this thesis is not only theologically heterodox, as denying the reality of the Church; it is also politically revolutionary, as denying the substance of the liberal tradition. The American thesis is that government is not juridically omnipotent. Its powers are limited, and one of the principles of limitation is the distinction between state and church, in their purposes, methods, and manner of organization. The Jacobin thesis was basically philosophical; it derived from a sectarian concept of the autonomy of reason. It was also theological, as implying a sectarian concept of religion and of the church. In contrast, the American thesis is simply political. It asserts the theory of a free people under a limited government, a theory that is recognizably part of the Christian political tradition, and altogether defensible in the manner of its realization under American circumstances. (68-69)

The American dualistic order guaranteed the freedom of the Church, from which many other freedoms sprang, while the monistic order of the modern political ideologies denied not only the freedom of the Church but, and not coincidentally, freedom generally. "[T]he American affirmation of the distinction between church and state . . . is made through the imposition of limits on government, which is confined to its own proper ends, those of temporal society. . . . It is legally recognized that there is an area which lies outside the competence of government. This area

coincides with the area of the divine mission of the Church, and within this area the Church is fully independent, immune from interference by political authority." (70)

In his collection of essays first published in 1960, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (Murray 1988), Father Murray generally celebrated, not without concerns, the fact that what he thought of as the American liberal public consensus or philosophy, which he saw as based in natural law, could be subscribed to by Catholics. America's Founding Declaration, after all, proclaimed, as Murray put it, that "'There are truths, and we hold them, and we here lay them down as the basis and inspiration of the American project, this constitutional commonwealth.'" (viii-ix) American democracy, Murray was able to affirm, "is compatible with Catholicism." (x) America was pluralistic, but in its public life, cohesive. "On any showing," said Murray, "the First Amendment was a great act of political intelligence." (xi)

Another serious Catholic thinker in the twentieth century, Jacques Maritain, also celebrated, like Murray, the common sense in which the American liberal order had been founded, saying:

> Far beyond the influences received either from Locke or the XVIIIth Century Enlightenment, the Constitution of this country is deep-rooted in the age-old heritage of Christian thought and civilization. . . . Peerless is the significance, for political philosophy, of the establishment of the American Constitution at the end of the XVIIIth Century. This Constitution can be described as an outstanding lay Christian document tinged with the philosophy of the day. The spirit and inspiration of this great political Christian document is basically repugnant to the idea of making human society stand aloof from God and from any religious faith. (Maritain 1966, 183-184)

Eric Voegelin also noted the good fortune that attended America upon its Founding:

> The American Revolution, though its debate was already strongly affected by the psychology of enlightenment, also had the good fortune of coming to its close within the institutional and Christian climate of the *ancien régime*. In the French Revolution . . . the radical wave of gnosticism was so strong that it permanently split the nation into the laicist half that based itself on the Revolution and the

conservative half that tried, and tries, to salvage the Christian tradition. (Voegelin 1969a, 188)

IV.   The Ideological Attack on Liberalism

We left Murray in a generally celebratory mood. He continued his argument that the First Amendment passed the test of good law by saying that "In support of it one can adduce an American experience. One might well call it *the* American experience in the sense that it has been central in American history and also unique in the history of the world. This experience has three facets, all interrelated." (72)

The first such facet was that "America has proved by experience that political unity and stability are possible without uniformity of religious belief and practice, without the necessity of any governmental restrictions on any religion." (Ibid.) While "the United States has displayed to the world the fact that political unity and stability are not necessarily dependent on the common sharing of one religious faith" (ibid.), Murray cautioned that some more narrow moral consensus was necessary. "But," he added, "this is a further question, for the future to answer." (73)

Murray described his "second facet" as follows:

> The second American experience was that stable political unity, which means perduring agreement on the common good of man at the level of performance, can be strengthened by the exclusion of religious differences from the area of concern allotted to government. In America we have been rescued from the disaster of ideological parties. They are a disaster because, where such parties exist, power becomes a special kind of prize. The struggle for power is a partisan struggle for the means whereby the opposing ideology may be destroyed. It has been remarked that only in a disintegrating society does politics become a controversy over ends; it should be simply a controversy over means to ends already agreed on with sufficient unanimity. The Latin countries of Europe have displayed this spectacle of ideological politics, a struggle between a host of "isms," all of which pretend to a final view of man and society, with the twin results of governmental paralysis and seemingly irremediable social division. In contrast, the American experience of political unity has been striking. (Ibid.)

The third, and to Murray the "most striking aspect of the American experience consists in the fact that religion itself, and not least the Catholic Church, has benefited by our free institutions, by the maintenance, even in exaggerated form, of the distinction between church and state." (73-74) The American government, in contrast to some others, "has not undertaken to represent transcendental truth in ant of the versions of it current in American society. It does indeed represent the commonly shared moral values of the community. It also represents the supreme religious truth expressed in the motto on American coins: 'In God we trust.'" (74) America was in Murray's time "religiously pluralist" (ibid.), but, as Murray said, it is not the function of government to resolve disputes among religions. Rather, "As representative of a pluralist society, wherein religious faith is—as it must be—free, government undertakes to represent the principle of freedom. In taking this course American government would seem to be on the course set by Pius XII for the religiously pluralist international community, of which America offers, as it were, a pattern in miniature." (74-75) The American "experience" manifested "precisely the practical attitude which Pius XII recognizes as right, as the proper moral and political course." (75)

The American approach to government was eminently practical, not ideological. Murray cites the *Federalist Papers* with approval, and quotes Professor Boorstin: "'. . . we should be inspired that in an era of idolatry, when so many nations have filled their sanctuaries with ideological idols, we have had the courage to refuse to do so.'" (78)

As the reader must have guessed, these comments of Murray are presented to show how far America has come from Murray's time. Think just of the second of his "facets" of the "American experience," the stable political unity made possible by the absence of "ideological parties." The American liberal political order is now under attack precisely by ideologies. It would not be possible in these pages to trace the history of ideologies in America. As many have noted,

ideologies, principally of the Left, began to make their presence strongly felt in American public life in the 1960s, and today they occupy virtually all of the high ground of our culture. Our political arguments are no longer "over means to ends already agreed on with sufficient unanimity," but over the ends themselves. We are, in Murray's sense, "a disintegrating society," in which ideological parties struggle for power and the destruction of their foes. We pursue a whole host of "isms," some invented just the day before yesterday, with resulting "governmental paralysis and seemingly irremediable social division." Murray's "further question, for the future to answer" as to whether the "American moral consensus" he experienced could survive appears to have been answered in the negative, at least as things currently stand.

To mention only a few examples of the ideological attack on the American liberal political order, a significant percentage of our population, indeed one of our major political parties, now appears to have embraced socialism as a preferred alternative to liberalism, thus validating Leo Strauss's observation "that a nation, defeated on the battlefield and, as it were, annihilated as a political being, . . . [may yet] deprive[] its conquerors of the most sublime fruit of victory by imposing on them the yoke of its own thought." (Strauss 1968, 2) American may have won the Cold War, but it seems to have inherited the ideology of its enemy.

Another example is that our political discourse is infected with Wokeism and our educational institutions at all levels are devoted to Critical Race Theory, variants of Marxism that deny original sin and draw the line separating good and evil between contending classes, races, and genders. There are "victims," and there are "oppressors." It is as though we are split into tribes, a situation perhaps best described in Tom Wolfe's novel, *Back to Blood* (Wolfe 2012). Tribalism precludes unity.

Again, the demand to "defund the police" reminds us of the metastatic faith of the prophet Isaiah, who "appeal[ed] to King Ahaz in the hour of danger to place his trust in Yahweh rather than in military preparations for the clash with the Northern Kingdom and Syria." (Voegelin 1969b, 476-477) Where the police have been defunded, the inevitable consequences have followed.

Speaking of our political rhetoric and of metastatic faith, recently many, including even some political leaders, have promised to do all they can to "fundamentally transform" America, sometimes saying or at least implying that in its present condition it does not deserve to survive, and even going so far in some cases as to simply call for the destruction of the present order. These are the types of "total critiques of society" of which Gerhart Niemeyer wrote (Niemeyer 1971), representing what Camus called "metaphysical rebellion" (Camus 1956), and Voegelin the desire to immanentize the eschaton (Voegelin 1969a). A society that gives up religion will often turn to magic.

Again, our nation, which began with an appeal to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God," has changed the very definitions of words previously thought to refer to the most essential aspects of nature, such as "marriage," "family," and "gender." These changes have come upon us with startling speed, and those objecting have often been silenced. We often forget that those seeking to change the structure of reality often start with the most basic social unit, the family, and work from there. Recall that Frederick Engels wrote a book called *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels 1970), looking to the eventual fall of all three institutions, and in that order, in the dispensation of history and revolution.

Finally, while the *Dobbs* case was a victory for those opposed to the American abortion holocaust, even the *Dobbs* majority could not bring itself to the moral point of the issue any more

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than the majority could in *Roe v. Wade*. The Attorney General of the United States could not bring himself to enforce the federal law designed to protect Judges and Justices in the carrying out of their official duties. The Senior Senator from Massachusetts demanded that the many crisis pregnancy centers that support pregnant women in their decision-making processes, many supported by religious organizations, be shut down, leaving abortuaries as the women's only alternatives. "You should not be able to torture a pregnant person like that," said the Senator in reference to the centers. And the mainstream media, an arm of the American Left, picked up her theme that the fact that crisis pregnancy centers counseling against abortion outnumber abortuaries is a national disgrace.

These examples, many more of which could be cited, are from the ideological Left, which, in what is referred to as our "Culture War," has seized virtually all of the high ground, stranding not only those referred to as "conservatives," but also those referred to as "liberals," the two camps whose now relatively mild-seeming debates used to structure our politics. The American polity is split as it has not been since the Civil War. Can our liberal political order survive? Should it?

I believe that if Murray, or for that matter Maritain, were alive today, they would insist, as would their Church, that the answers to both of those questions should be in the affirmative, with the proviso that we must work to return that order to its Christian roots, to the extent that we are capable. And while I do not know what David Walsh's views are on the current particulars of American politics, and would not presume to speak for him on such matters, I believe he would also answer both of those questions in the affirmative, with the same proviso. Walsh's work, coming several decades after Murray's and Maritain's, and at a time when the defense of liberalism is more difficult than it was for them, should take rank with their work as a significant contribution in the attempt to save, to restore, a genuine liberal political order.

V.   Examples of Non-Ideological Attacks on Liberalism

We mentioned two types of attacks on liberalism. We have given examples of ideological attacks in the preceding Section. Those types of attacks are relatively clear. The attacker wishes to replace liberalism with some variant of a dream world.

Now we turn to the other type of attack on liberalism, which we called the attack on liberalism as such. These attacks are more complicated, and it is against them that David Walsh's defense of liberalism is principally mounted. Some of them are by scholars of great learning, and many of their points must be taken with the utmost seriousness. There is also often a tangle in these attacks, as some clearly attack liberalism itself as an invalid form of political order; some attack liberalism more for its tendency to give way before ideologies; some claim to be attacking liberalism, and use that name as the subject of their attacks, but are really attacking some form of ideology, often progressivism, which is not part of all forms of liberalism; and some mix all of these things together.

We mentioned Murray, Maritain, and Walsh as defenders of liberalism because of its roots in Christianity. But some Christian thinkers are on the opposite side.

Ernest L. Fortin

Many are in agreement with Walsh's concept of the origins and roots of liberalism in Christianity, including thinkers as various as Hegel, Tocqueville, and Nietzsche. However, perhaps unsurprisingly, this view is not shared by all. An example is another Catholic political philosopher, Father Ernest L. Fortin, a Straussian rather than a Voegelinian. In a 1984 article entitled "Is Liberal Democracy Really Christian?," Fortin, answering with a resounding "No!," said:

> The widely held view that democracy was summoned into existence or decisively shaped by Christianity is of relatively recent vintage and is open to serious question. From the first, liberal democracy was marked by a latent but profound hostility to the Christian faith. Its earliest and perhaps still greatest

theorists did not draw their inspiration from the works of their Christian mentors, for which they had little use even if they occasionally quoted from them, and they knew better than to try to ground their principles in the religious tradition, which offered little support for them. One probes their theory of society in vain for anything that cannot be explained without recourse to that tradition. (Fortin 1996, 49)

While Fortin recognized the consonance of freedom and Christianity, he lamented "the uses to which [it is] being put": "As for our much vaunted freedom, it seems to have become practically indistinguishable from a permissive egalitarianism that guarantees everyone the right to think and choose as he pleases. . . . The new wisdom is that there is no wisdom. Since all absolutes are ruled out, only freedom is left—absolute freedom, of course." (53) This is perhaps the charge most frequently leveled against liberalism. Freedom untethered to any moral conception of the good leads to anarchy. The argument is as old as Plato and Aristotle. But while the form of liberalism here attacked by Fortin is a commonly recognized one, it is not the only possible form, and many supporters of liberalism, probably including Walsh, would blame liberalism, as Fortin does, to the extent that its concept of liberty is merely libertine. A more tempered liberalism rules out what Fortin calls "absolute freedom" in favor of "ordered liberty."

Fortin goes on to disparage the idea that "rights" are of Christian origin, and to complain that "rights" have replaced "duties" in our common moral life, to its great detriment. Modern Catholic Social Thought would, however, disagree with Fortin as to the origin of rights (see also, Moyn 2015), and Walsh insists that rights have become fundamental to our common moral life.

Despite his sharp criticisms of liberalism and rights, and his argument that liberalism is unrelated to Christianity except by way of opposition, Fortin, perhaps recognizing, as Walsh does, that liberalism is the only political order we have on tap, eventually says: "The purpose of these remarks, as you may have guessed, is not to denigrate liberal democracy—enough people are doing that as it is—but to suggest that all is not well with it and that Christians ought to be as eager to

improve it as they sometimes are to praise it." (55) With that sentiment Walsh would be in complete agreement, as he would be with Fortin's concluding suggestion that we "take a leaf from that important segment of the nonreligious academic community that in recent years has brought to light the hidden roots of our modern consciousness and taught us how the wisdom of the past can be made to serve the needs of the present." (56) Here we suppose Fortin is referring to the recovery of the ancients in the work of Leo Strauss and his disciples. Walsh, as a disciple of Voegelin, is also interested in that recovery. Perhaps, then, the difference between Fortin and Walsh on liberalism has something to do with the fact that while Strauss saw philosophy and revelation as discontinuous, Voegelin saw them as continuous.

Integralism

Other Catholics attack liberalism in the name of something called "integralism."

A blog or website devoted to integralism is *The Josias*, which describes itself as follows:

> WHAT IS THE JOSIAS?
> The Josias was founded by a small community seeking to articulate an authentically Catholic political stance from which to approach the present order of society. Our goal is to make this site a working manual for those who wish to bring their faith into the public square and resist the tides of liberalism, modernism, and ignorance of tradition which have, in the past century, so harmed the Church and tied her hands in the struggle to advance the social reign of Christ.
>
> Contributions to the working manual are organized in the Table of Contents, which orders them according to their place in the division of sciences. A truly Catholic account of politics cannot be understood except with reference to the whole perennial wisdom of practical and speculative philosophy and to the integral tradition of Sacred Theology. We reject the liberal separation of politics from concern with the end of human life and hold that political rule must order man to his final goal. In the natural order, therefore, politics is the principal part of practical science. Man is by nature a part of domestic society, which has its own common good and its own sphere of activity, and therefore domestics (or economics in the classical sense) is a distinct part of practical philosophy. But in the order of proceeding, practical science begins with what is most known to us: namely the order of individual human persons to their ends, which is the subject of ethics. Since man has both a temporal and an eternal end we hold that he ought to be ruled by two powers: a temporal power and a spiritual power. And since man's temporal end

is subordinated to his eternal end, the temporal power must be subordinated to the spiritual power. This view of politics may be called "Catholic Integralism" and "Gelasian Dyarchism." (Augustine 2022)

One of the editors of the Josias, Edmund Waldstein, O.Cist., gave a further description of it in an article written in October of 2018 (Waldstein 2018). The article referred to a seminar offered that semester at Harvard Law School entitled "Law and Catholic Thought: Liberalism and Integralism," co-taught by Robert P. George of Princeton, a liberal, and Adrian Vermeule of Harvard, an integralist. The differences between them were described as follows:

> George is certainly not a "liberal" Catholic in the sense in which that term is opposed to "conservative"—he is indeed one of the standard bearers of conservatism in the American Catholic Church. But he is a liberal as opposed to an integralist, because he thinks that political authority exists for the sake of the protection of individual rights, that one of the most important of those rights is the right of religious liberty, and that political authority should therefore not officially favor one religious confession more than others. Vermeule, on the other hand, is an integralist in the sense that he sees political authority as ordered to the common good of human life, that rendering God true worship is essential to that common good, and that political authority therefore has the duty of recognizing and promoting the true religion. Indeed, Vermeule has even contributed to thejosias.com, a website that I edit along with Joel Augustine and E. M. Milco, which is devoted to the elaboration and defense of a revived Catholic integralism.

Waldstein continued by saying that "One way of seeing the debate between Catholic liberalism and integralism is as an argument over the proper response of the Church to the secularization of the modern world," and he turned to "One of the most sophisticated accounts of how the modern world was secularized and what exactly is *meant* by secularization [namely] that developed by the philosopher Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*." Waldstein referred to Taylor's distinction among the three main meanings that people give to secularization. In the first, modernization involved the separation of the various spheres of social life from religion. "Thus," said Waldstein, "political life was once ordered toward and by God, but now it supposedly follows its 'own inherent rationality' without reference to the divine. And a similar point can be made

about the economic and artistic spheres—they too are differentiated into autonomous spheres with their own internal rationality, separate from religion." With religion banished to the private realm, religious practice and belief declined, the second meaning of "secularization." Taylor's third meaning of secularization, the one "in which he is primarily interested [is] that the *conditions of belief* have changed in the modern world. Whereas in pre-modern Europe it was nearly impossible *not* to believe in God, in the modern 'West' belief in God is one among several options, and perhaps an embattled option."

Taylor posited ways in which at least some of these developments might be reversed in favor of religion.

> The first is [one] in which the Catholic faith is supposed to form all of social life. The second is . . . one in which there is no official religion, but the political action of the citizens is informed by a broad religious consensus across various denominations—this was the case in the United States when a broad Protestant consensus informed their politics. Finally, the third constellation is when politics has become fully unhooked from religion. Taylor sees this as already holding in much of the West, and of being its inevitable future. In this final arrangement the differentiation of different social spheres leads to an "unbundling" of different areas of life *within* individual persons: public religious worship, private devotion, sexual ethics, works of mercy for others, and political action a[re] no-longer linked together, but become separate. Thus, a contemporary Catholic person in Western Europe might attend church for Christmas services, baptisms, weddings, and funerals; for her private meditation she might follow a Westernized form of Buddhist practice; in her sexual ethics she might be a post-Freudian; in her charitable work she might support some secular society for aiding refugees; and in politics she might support a (traditionally anti-clerical) left-liberal party. Taylor admits that something is lost in such unbundling, but he also thinks that certain valuable freedoms are gained. As a soft-Hegelian neo-modernist, Taylor thinks that it is not our task to cry over spilled milk, but rather to make the best of what the development of human consciousness has given us.

"But," Waldstein maintains, "Catholics who wish to adhere without reservation to the teachings of the Church on faith *and* morals cannot fully accept such an unbundling." There are two forms of reaction to the differentiations Taylor describes:

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Robert George and Catholic proponents of classical liberalism in general . . . desire a restoration of a 'moderate' liberal society in which a broad consensus exists among believers of various denominations and religions on the dignity of the human person, and in which political institutions are understood as being for the sake of defending that dignity and the rights that follow from it. On the other hand, Adrian Vermeule, and Catholic integralists more generally, wish to establish something more like the paleo-Durkheimian arrangement of the baroque confessional state. Or, perhaps even more radically, they wish to work towards something like High Medieval Christendom. In that arrangement, as Andrew Willard Jones has shown in his masterful book *Before Church and State*, it makes no sense to distinguish Church and state as separate spheres at all; rather there was one single kingdom in which spiritual and temporal authorities cooperated. Thinkers who promote such an integration do not necessarily want to emulate the Middle Ages in other respects. Vermeule, for instance, argues for further development of a robust administrative state, of a sort that St. Louis IX could never have imagined. But the crucial point is that integralists want an ordered relation of temporal and spiritual power in the deliberate pursuit of the good for human beings.

What do integralists do with *Dignitatis Humanae*? Catholic liberals of course argue that their view of things was accepted by the Church in that document. But, says Waldstein, integralists counter with the work of a philosopher named Thomas Pink, "who has argued that the traditional teaching of the Church, requiring temporal powers to recognize and promote the true Faith is irreformable, and that (properly understood) *Dignitatis Humanae* did not deny that teaching." While that may seem a stretch, Waldstein is not through. "Moreover," he continues,

we integralists argue that the nature of human action demands integralism. All political agents, whether they admit it or not, imply some definite conception of the good for man in their action. As Leo Strauss used to tell his students, all political action is concerned with change or preservation. When it is concerned with change it is concerned with change for the *better*. When it is concerned with preservation it is concerned with preventing change for the *worse*. But the concepts of *better* and *worse* imply a concept of the *good*. Therefore, all political action is concerned with the good. . . . There is not and cannot be a neutral "political rationality" that reduces politics to a technique of achieving certain penultimate objectives. For, such penultimate objectives can only become objectives pursued by human beings when they are ordered to an (implicit) ultimate objective. And if the ultimate objective is not the true end of man, the City of God, then it will be a false end, the diabolical city.

Waldstein rejects the possible Catholic liberal rejoinder "that this stark alternative can be dissolved by recalling the distinction between nature and grace," referring again to an argument of Tom Pink to the effect that since all nature "was wounded by the fall and made subject to the devil . . . Every part of the world has to be converted and exorcised in order to liberate it from demonic power. This includes political institutions. As long as political institutions attempt to remain 'neutral' towards the Church of Christ, they will in fact be under the power of the Prince of this World."

Waldstein concludes as follows:

> . . . Secularization in the sense of the separation of social spheres from religion acts against the practice of the true religion. By doing so it acts not only against supernatural virtue, but against natural virtue as well. If one looks at the world today it is not difficult to see the influence of the Prince of this World: in the unjust distribution of wealth, in the exploitation of the poor, in the dominance of usurers, in the reckless pollution of the natural environment, in the slaughter of millions of innocents in abortion clinics, in unspeakable sexual perversions, in the lying propaganda of progress, and in so much more. To fight the spiritual battle in which we are engaged therefore includes fighting against the separation of social spheres from religion, which hands those spheres over to such influence. Taylor would claim that such a struggle is useless; the historical process is irreversible. But Taylor's opinion rests on an unreasonable reification of history. Human social life is formed by the ends that we pursue in common. Which ends we pursue are certainly formed by our common habits, traditions, technologies, and experiences, but they are also formed by example, witness, persuasion, and decision. If our social life today is ordered to the wrong ends, it is not too late to correct it. Today, as at any time, the Gospel of Christ has the power to transform every part of human life.

One can certainly agree with the integralists' concerns over the state of our culture, including our politics. But at the same time one cannot help but be startled by their proposals. It is not just that they have no hope of being enacted. It is that they stand opposed to the modern tradition of Catholic Social Thought, the tradition in which liberals like Robert George and David Walsh stand. Integralism tends to disregard the Christian differentiation between the temporal and the sacred. Even apart from what integralists say about *Dignitatis Humanae*, how do they get

around the distinction between the things of God and the things of Caesar? St. Augustine on the limits of politics? Modern Catholic Social Thought? The faith that Christ has overcome the Prince of this World?

We are of course unfair to integralism in not devoting more time to it and how, if at all, it might answer our questions, but these concerns jump out. "The Prince of this World" may stand behind some political decisions, but more often, we suspect, it is just some hack politician who lacks the virtue of political prudence, among the others.

We note the continuing relevance of integralism. The June/July 2022 issue of *First Things* featured an article by Ross Douthat entitled "A Gentler Christendom," with a response by Edmund Waldstein and a reply by Douthat. (Douthat and Waldstein 2022)

D. C. Schindler

Professor Schindler's *The Politics of the Real: The Church Between Liberalism and Integralism* (Schindler 2021) is a virulent attack on liberalism by a Catholic scholar of great learning. Schindler claims that it is "a generally acknowledged historical fact . . . that liberalism arose in opposition to Christianity in its properly traditional sense, which is to say, in opposition to the Catholic Church." (xvii) Schindler seeks the restoration of the political order that he maintains Catholicism united, the three traditions of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Jews, which, he says, were mediated by Catholicism to each other, "thereby giving rise to a novel whole." (Ibid.)

Schindler argues that "While liberalism is indeed a political phenomenon in one respect, and a political philosophy in another, it represents in both respects a judgment regarding ultimate questions, not only the serious existential question of the meaning of human life, but also those regarding the nature of reality and of God." (5) He continues:

> The thesis we will propose [in the book] is the following: at the theological core of
> liberalism is the most radical rejection of Christianity possible, became it posits and

enacts an undoing of the very thing that defines Christianity, that makes Christianity Christian, namely, the Incarnation of the Son of God, which is an "extension" of God, so to speak, into time and space, through an assumption of nature in its deepest reality, an extension-through-assumption that aims ultimately to embrace the whole of reality: the cosmic liturgy. As a political phenomenon, which is to say as a form of life and a way of organizing human existence, liberalism is the very incarnation of this disincarnation. (8-9)

Later Schindler says that "there is literally *nothing good* about liberalism *per se*—there is *nothing good* about it because, first of all and according to its essence, it is as total a rejection of Christianity as is possible . . . it is not a reality, as we have seen, but a negation of reality, or perhaps a contrived conspiracy to negate reality. . . . liberalism is evil as a political form." (38) Schindler especially castigates the form liberalism took in this country, as expressed in "liberalism's founding document, the Declaration of Independence." (41)

But other than that, what did you think of the play, Mrs. Lincoln?

What Schindler proposes is, as indicated by the subtitle of his book, different from what integralists propose, but seemingly close to it.

We do not have time or space to consider Professor Schindler's book in the detail it deserves. It does present the sharpest critique of liberalism we have encountered, certainly from a Catholic perspective. But it also strikes us as outside the Catholic tradition of political thinking represented by a thinker such as, for example, St, Augustine, the Father of the limited state, and by modern Catholic Social Teaching.

Patrick J. Deneen

Perhaps the book with the most "lift" in the current spate of books criticizing liberalism is Professor Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed?* (Deneen, 2019) While it contains many penetrating criticism of the modern world, it is not clear to us that those aspects of modernity are either variations of liberalism or traceable to it.

Rod Dreher

Dreher's book, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (Dreher 2017), is not so much a critique of liberalism per se as an argument that, given what Dreher considers the virtually complete secularization of American culture, it is time for Christians to consider leaving it. By leaving it, Dreher means doing what St. Benedict did in the chaos of his time, building communities that are countercultural. The criticisms leveled at the proposal have mostly been those suggesting that what Christians need to do is actively engage the culture in an attempt to convert it, as Walsh's work on liberalism seeks to do, rather than leaving it. I believe Dreher would argue that his proposal does not rule out the possibility of broader cultural conversion even beyond, and perhaps because of, the communities he thinks should be formed.

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput

In *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World* (Chaput 2017), Archbishop Charles J. Chaput argues that America has become different in kind, not just in degree, from what it once was, what it was, for example, when John Courtney Murray wrote, and urges a Christian response. The book is not so much a critique on America's liberal political order as a critique on modern American culture.

We do not have time to discuss other books that have influenced our thinking on liberalism, and which cover a broad array of approaches, but we cite some of them here: Beiner 1995; Canavan 1995; Cherniss 2021; Eliot 1977; Esolen 2017; Grasso 1995; Hallowell 2013; Kekes 1999; MacIntyre 1981, 1988, 1990; Sandel 1984, 1996, 1998, 2010; Wolfe 1994.

VI.   The Biblical (and Following) Roots of Liberalism

Most current discussions of liberalism dwell on its modern philosophical forms. David Walsh argues that the roots of liberalism, which he hopes to recover, are in much deeper soil than

that of modern thought. It is Walsh's recognition of these deeper roots that distinguishes his treatment of liberalism from that of many others, and it forms the basis of his support of liberalism in the midst of so much criticism of it. Most of Walsh's discussion of liberalism, however, concerns its modern manifestations. Below we say something about the roots of liberalism in the Bible itself, and its subsequent specifically Christian history.

We begin by noting that most significant cultural forms in history are rooted not in discursive thought-systems but in stories. It is only in modernity that whole peoples have lived not by stories but by thought-systems, as in the thought-systems of modern political ideologies, and things have gone very badly for them. The stories out of which liberalism grew are Biblical. In the Bible, the unity of the temporal with the sacred that we find in the myths by which archaic man lived was differentiated, and the liberal political order can be said to have been birthed out of that differentiation.

Myths

To begin at the beginning, archaic man lived by the stories recounted in myths. All human activities, Mircea Eliade tells us, had mythical prototypes. "[F]or the traditional societies, all the important acts of life were revealed *ab origine* by gods or heroes. Men only repeat these exemplary and paradigmatic gestures *ad infinitum*." (Eliade 1959a, 32) It is difficult for us, living in a desacralized world, to imagine the life of archaic man, thus oriented within the cosmos, for whom

> The cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany.
>
> The man of the archaic societies tends to live as much as possible *in* the sacred or in close proximity to consecrated objects. The tendency is perfectly understandable, because, for primitives as for the man of all pre-modern societies, the *sacred* is equivalent to a *power*, and, in the last analysis, to *reality*. The sacred is saturated with *being*. Sacred power means reality and at the same time enduringness and efficacity. The polarity sacred-profane is often expressed as an opposition between *real* and *unreal* or pseudoreal. (Naturally, we must not expect to find the archaic languages in possession of this philosophical terminology, *real-*

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unreal, etc.; but we find the *thing*.) Thus it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires *to be*, to participate in *reality*, to be saturated with power.

> Our chief concern in the follow pages will be to elucidate this subject—to show in what ways religious man attempts to remain as long as possible in a sacred universe, and hence what his total experience of life proves to be in comparison with the experience of the man without religious feeling, of the man who lives, or wishes to live, in a desacralized world. It should be said at once that the *completely* profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit. It does not devolve upon us to show by what historical processes and as the result of what changes in spiritual attitudes and behavior modern man has desacralized his world and assumed a profane existence. For our purpose it is enough to observe that desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies and that, in consequence, he finds it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions of religious man in the archaic societies. (Eliade 1959b, 12-13)

The sacred and the profane were not differentiated for archaic man, not even in the realm of politics. As Eric Voegelin described it, human law itself, to the extent that it was real, to the extent that it was "the law," participated in the sacred. He noted the equivocal use of "the law" in our own everyday language in the sense of valid rules made by organs of government and "the law" that somehow pervades the existence of man in society, which is often called the "natural law," and said:

> What is preserved in this pale equivocation of our everyday language is the profound insight, rarely to be found in contemporary legal theory, that "the law" is the substance of order in all realms of being. As a matter of fact, the ancient civilizations usually have in their languages a term that signifies the ordering substance pervading the hierarchy of being, from God, through the world and society, to every single man. Such terms are the Egyptian *maat*, the Chinese *tao*, the Greek *nomos*, and the Latin *lex* [*ius*?]. The Egyptian *maat*, for instance, signifies the order of the gods who, by virtue of their *maat*, create the order of the cosmos. Within this cosmic order, the term then applies specifically to the order of the realm of Egypt, which order is created by virtue of the divine *maat* that lives in the Pharaoh. From the Pharaoh that *maat* streams through the social body, mediated by the royal administration and the hierarchy of officers, down to the judge who decides the individual case. Since the mediation of *maat* requires its understanding and intelligent articulation, the term acquires the meaning of "truth" about order; and since the knowledge of that truth is not a monopoly of the administration, the law as administered can be measured by the common knowledge about the truth of

order, and the subjects can protest vehemently against deviations from the *maat* and criticize the conduct of officials. (Voegelin 1991, 24)

The Old Testament

In ancient Israel, of course, the law also had a divine origin. But the first request of a people for something like temporal rather than divine rule of which I am aware occurs in 1 Samuel 8.

The Book of Judges recounted the disorder of the Israelites following their entry into the Promised Land. Moral relativism and subjectivism characterized the era. We find the words, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes," at Judges 17:6 and as the very last lines of the Book (Judges 21:25). "In the larger scheme of biblical history, the sacred author is preparing the reader to understand and accept the kingship, which will be established with Saul but will reach its high point under David." (Bergsma and Pitre 2018, 322) But there is a great tension here. The Israelites are under God; He is their King. And so the saying, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes,"

> . . . is an apology for the kingship: although theocracy is the ideal, kingship appears to be a practical necessity to maintain social and religious order. . . .
> . . .
> . . . the whole point of the book of Judges was to emphasize the moral relativism of the era before the rise of the Davidic monarchy.
> . . .
> Judges marks the point in the biblical narrative where it becomes apparent that the economy of the Mosaic covenant, even in its final Deuteronomic form, is inadequate for the flourishing of God's people. The sacred author begins to turn our attention forward, toward the anticipation of a king who will inaugurate a New Covenant (2 Sam 7:1-17; Ps 89:19-37) that will not replace but, rather, assimilate and even transform the Mosaic covenant. (333, 336, and 338)

The prophet Samuel, son of Hannah, who prefigured Mary, was the last of the judges. "Yet his sons did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after gain; they took bribes and perverted justice." (1 Sam 8:3) And so the elders of Israel went to Samuel saying:

> "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they

said, "Give us a king to govern us." And Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds which they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, hearken to their voice; only, you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them."

So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking a king from him. (1 Sam 8:5-10)

The list of problems a king would cause follows (1 Sam 8:11-18), and overtaxed citizens of modern liberal democracies can only read Samuel's warnings with grim recognition. But they fell on deaf ears:

But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No! but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles." And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Hearken to their voice, and make them a king." Samuel then said to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city." (1 Sam 8:19-22)

And Saul became Israel's first King.

Bergsma and Pitre point to

. . . two striking aspects of why the Israelites want a king (and not a judge or prophet). First and foremost, they want to have a king because they want to be "like the nations." This is a striking rejection of their call from God as "first-born son" (Ex 4:22). Instead of being a kingdom of priests called to lead the nations, Israel now wants to follow the pagans. Second, and even more telling, they want a king who will "fight their battles." In other words, they want the *military power* that comes with an earthly king, so that they can feel protected. In other words, God's protection is not enough for them. They no longer trust the Lord to fight their battles for them. They have given in to fear of their enemies in general and the Philistines in particular. (Bergsma and Pitre 2018, 358)

Voegelin notes the significance of the establishment of the monarchy: "The change from a government by judges to a government by kings is more than a change of political forms in the secular sense. It is a break with the theopolitical constitution of Israel as a people under Yahweh,

the King." (Voegelin 1969b, 243) And: "The antiroyalist version of Saul's kingship has created one of the most important symbolisms of Western politics. Through the reception of the Bible into the Scripture of Christianity the relation between Samuel and Saul has become the paradigm of spiritual control over temporal rulership." (245)

Saul disappoints, and is replaced with David, one of the principal figures in the Old Testament, and, for Christians, probably the central figure of the Old Testament. It is from his line, after all, that the "Messiah" (Greek *Christos*), the anointed king of Israel, will come. While granting His people's request for a king, God

> . . . already prepares for a reconciliation in which his own desire to rule his people directly will coincide with the people's desire for a human king. This reconciliation takes place in the Davidic covenant, in which the monarch is both son of David and also son of God (2 Sam 7:14), but more perfectly in the New Covenant, in which the monarch is true God and true Man. The New Israel participates in the kingship of Christ and so regains the royal priesthood once lost (1 Pet 2:9.). (Bergsma and Pitre 2018, 359)

Samuel anoints David, a "pivotal moment in Israel's history [in which] we see a visible expression of what it means to be a 'messiah of the LORD' (Hebrew *meshiah-YHWH*), an 'anointed' king." (Ibid.) "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward." (1 Sam 16:13) And the Lord later entered into a sacred covenant with David (the Davidic Covenant):

> "'Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.'" In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David. (2 Sam 7:11-17; see also, Psalm 89:19-37)

It is perhaps ironic to see that even in history's greatest theocracy, God's Chosen People, living directly under God, still demanded a king, not a temporal ruler in the modern sense, but a non-divine ruler nevertheless. The split between the sacred and the profane appears in politics for the first time. The Israelites are still a people "under God," but they are now also under a king. And, apart from David, and even with David, kingship does not always go well for them. Indeed the ambivalence of the matter is reflected in the fact that royalist and antiroyalist accounts appear together in the Bible. The tension is certainly reflected in 1 Samuel 8 itself. But from the standpoint of our modern liberal political order, we might read Samuel as suggesting that something in man demands more than divine rule, indeed demands human rule. We cannot say that we find the first liberal political order in the Books of Samuel, but we do see things pointing in that direction, in the direction of a differentiation between the sacred and the profane, in the direction of the distinction that Augustine will later draw between the City of God and the City of Man. A tension between spiritual and temporal order appeared.

Voegelin saw the matter like this: "The compact symbol of the Chosen People could never be completely broken by the idea of a universal God and a universal mankind. Yet the problem of the church, however imperfectly differentiated, was inherent in the situation as soon as a temporal polity was built into the Yahwist theopolity, with the national monarchy. Hence the monarchy of Saul, indeed, marked the beginning of the theocratic problem." (Voegelin 1969b, 248)

As we have seen, the Israelites wished for a king so that they could be like the other nations and so that their militarily power could be established on an immanent basis. Their wish for a king was related to their lack of faith in God. And they wished for a king, a Messiah, to establish and secure an earthly kingdom. That wish was to be sorely disappointed, and at the same time paradoxically absolutely fulfilled, in the New Testament, to which we now turn. For it is in the

story of Jesus the Christ, and in the understanding of his nature, that liberalism finds its deepest roots.

The New Testament

In the Old Testament, the Jews looked forward to the coming of the "Messiah," the Jewish hope for the future, primarily spoken of in political terms. Oscar Cullmann said that "Messiah" was "…first and foremost an eschatological concept. We need only recall that the adjective 'messianic' is almost a synonym for 'eschatological.'" (Cullmann 1963, 111) "Messiah" "…became more or less the crystallization point of all New Testament Christological views." (Ibid.) "Messiah" is "Christ" in Greek. (113) "Jesus-Christ" means "Jesus-Messiah"; it is not a proper name but a title, and from this title the religion of Christianity took its very name. (112-113)

While at the time of Jesus, Judaism had no "single fixed concept of the Messiah," the prevailing type was the "political Messiah." (111-112) The Jewish title bore a "strong political stamp." (113)

> The Hebrew participle *mashiach* means "anointed one." In this sense it designates in particular the *king of Israel*. He is called "the anointed one of Yahweh"—an allusion to the rite of anointing the king (I Sam. 9.16; 24.6.)….
>
> …The Jews took it for granted that an earthly kingship would be necessary in order to introduce future salvation….Here is an eschatological hope to be fulfilled in a completely earthly framework….
>
> …Pss. 2 and 72 proclaim that all nations will have to subject themselves to the king appointed by Yahweh.
>
> The *Apocalypse of Ezra* shows clearly the political character of the messianic kingdom. The messianic king destroys the evil and deals graciously with the good who wait for the last things. Also in the *Apocalypse of Baruch* the king destroys the enemies of Israel. He establishes a condition of perfection on earth: nature is more fruitful, animals are no longer vicious, the elect enjoy long life and good health.
>
> …Whether it is of peaceful or warlike character, the work of the Jewish Messiah is that of a political king of Israel. (113-117)

Summing up, Cullmann said: "…at least the authoritative Jewish circles at the time of Jesus expected the Messiah to play a political role, to fight and conquer the enemies of Israel, and to make Jerusalem the centre of his government, which was understood in a purely this-worldly sense." (43) However, Cullmann adds this, the crucial point: "Such a conception completely contradicts the role which Jesus ascribed to himself." (Ibid.) Cullman points to three places in the New Testament where Jesus refused the title "Messiah" meant in a political, this-worldly sense.

The *first* text is at Mark 14:61 ff. and parallels. (117-121) There, during the trial of Jesus, Caiphas, the high priest, plainly puts the question to Jesus: "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?" By this question, Caiphas hopes to trap Jesus. If the answer is yes, Caiphas can turn Jesus over to the Romans as a political rebel. If the answer is no, Caiphas assumes that Jesus will be discredited among the people and that they will leave Him. In the event, Jesus's answer was neither affirmative nor negative. He answered Caiphas as follows: "You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Cullmann interprets this scene to mean that Jesus did not identify Himself with "Messiah" in the political sense at all. Rather, Jesus preferred the title "Son of Man" to characterize his mission:

> …His saying about the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of God and coming again on the clouds of heaven is not derived from the [political] concept of the Messiah we have described in the last section. The Son of Man is a heavenly being, not an earthly king who will conquer the enemies of Israel and exercise an earthly sovereignty….
> …Jesus deliberately corrected the high priest's question by substituting the "Son of Man" for the "Messiah." Jesus knows that the specific ideas relating to the Jewish Messiah are of a political nature, and nothing is more foreign to his conception of his calling….
> …the claim to be the Son of Man in the sense of Daniel's heavenly being coming on the clouds may be considered even more radical than the claim to be a political Messiah. Jesus rejects only the political role of the Messiah-king. (119-121)

The *second* text is at Mark 15:2 ff. and parallels. (121) Jesus now stands before Pilate, who, translating the designation "Messiah" into the Roman terminology "King," the only designation that could concern Pilate, asks Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus answers: "You say so." (Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:4) Cullmann noted that in these Gospels, Pilate does not react at all to Jesus, and that:

> He would certainly have done so, had he understood Jesus' answer to be an affirmation. It is especially significant that after Jesus' answer in the Lucan text, Pilate issues the verdict, "I find no crime in this man" (Luke 23.4). Could he have said that if he had understood Jesus' answer as a direct affirmation? Would he not have ended the hearing immediately, since the complaint was already proved? In the name of the Roman state, would he not have had to suppress and punish any illegal claim to authority in the province he governed? (Cullmann 1963, 121)

Cullmann continues by noting that this conclusion is supported in John's Gospel, where there is a dialogue between Pilate and Jesus in which Jesus says specifically that His Kingdom "is not of this world." (John 18:33-38)

The *third* text is at Mark 8:27 ff. and parallels. (Cullmann 1963, 122-125) Here the scene is at Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus asks his disciples who they say He is. Peter answers: "You are the Christ ["Messiah"]." (Mark 8:29) Jesus, said Cullmann:

> …neither affirms nor denies Peter's messianic confession. He says nothing at all in answer to this explanation, and (as in the other passages we have considered) speaks instead of the *Son of Man* who must suffer many things. When Peter rebukes him for such an idea, Jesus flings at him the terrible accusation, "Get behind me, Satan" (Mark 8.33). This means nothing less than that Jesus considered as a satanic temptation the conception of the Messiah which Peter implied by his rebuke and clearly intended when he confessed Jesus to be the Messiah. The same Satan who met Jesus openly in the wilderness after his baptism and tried to impose upon him the role of a political Messiah—that Satan now uses the disciple Peter to prevent him from fulfilling his real task and again to persuade him to play the role of a Jewish political Messiah. The extraordinary vehemence with which Jesus rejects this demand in Caesarea Philippi indicates how deeply the temptation of Peter affects him. He does not want to be the king of Israel in this way; he has the firm conviction (probably since his baptism) that he must fulfill his task in suffering and dying, not in establishing a political kingdom. (Cullmann 1963, 122)

Cullmann noted the significance of Satan's messianic temptation of Christ coming immediately after His baptism. "Satan comes immediately to resist" Christ's conviction that He had to suffer and die for His people. (123) Satan "…knows that the fulfilment of that task means the end of his own rule; and on the other hand, he knows that the other way, the way of the political Messiah-king, would really make Jesus his obedient servant." Jesus answers Satan's last temptation, to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, the way He answered Peter at Caesarea Philippi: "Begone Satan!" (Matthew 4:10) "Satan's offer to give Jesus sovereignty over all the kingdoms of the world corresponds exactly to the official Jewish hope for their expected Messiah." (Cullmann 1963, 123)

Jesus Himself, says Cullmann, must have considered this role of political savior Satan proposed to Him to be "an especially great temptation," something that must have been "attractive" to Him, since "[A] man is only tempted by something to which he feels drawn." (Ibid.)

> …the fact that Peter wants to force a political role on his master indicates also how common—even self-evident—this conception was even in Jesus' immediate environment. As in all things, Peter is only the representative of the other disciples in this case. . . . Jesus knew very well that all his disciples had the secret hope that he would assume the political Messiah's glorious kingly role. That function also had consequences for the role his disciples would then play. The disciple of a powerful Messiah-king is quite different from the disciple of one condemned to death. The argument of the sons of Zebedee concerning their rank in the future kingdom is enough to show what thoughts were in the heads of the disciples. Their desertion of their master when he was arrested and their flight was not only the result of an understandable human cowardice, but also the result of disappointment that Jesus did not resemble in the slightest the expected Messiah-king.
>
> It is probably not incorrect to seek the subjective reason for Judas Iscariot's betrayal in this disappointment. (123-124; this is the way Judas is portrayed in the movie, *Jesus of Nazareth*)

The only title Jesus applied to Himself in the New Testament is the "Son of Man," which "…embraces the total work of Jesus as does almost no other idea." (Cullman 1963, 137) He never

called Himself "Messiah"; rather, "…he openly and purposefully replaced that designation with 'Son of Man.'" (Ibid.)

The Gospels present Jesus in all His humility, often in contrast to the political events of the world around Him. His birth was a function of a census ordered by Caesar Augustus, which led to His being born in a barn. Upon His birth, His family was forced to flee to Egypt to avoid the murderous designs of King Herod, for whom the birth of another potential king could mean only a contest for power. His disciples were a rag-tag band of persons of very little consequence in the world. When He perceived that people were coming to take Him by force to make Him king, He withdrew into the hills by Himself. (John 6:15) He declared the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek to be blessed. He opposed the things of this world to the things of His Father's kingdom, which he claimed had dawned with him. He drew a bright line between the things of God, and the things of Caesar. The powerful opposed Him, and ultimately succeeded in arranging His suffering and death. His followers all deserted Him, one betraying Him. A crown was placed on His head, but of thorns. In the greatest of ironies, when Pilate presented Jesus to the Jews as their king, they called for the political rebel, Barabbas, to be released, and for Jesus to be crucified, shouting, "We have no king but Caesar!" Even after his Resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, two of his disciples, not recognizing Him, told Him about the crucifixion and said: "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." (Luke 24:21) And at his Ascension, his disciples asked him, "'Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'" (Acts 1:6) The lust for worldly dominion had not dissipated from the time of Samuel, even at the end of the earthly mission of Christ himself.

The shout, "We have no king but Caesar!," echoes throughout the subsequent ages, and in our own times even more loudly than before.

Jesus, in the flesh, turned out to be a great disappointment to messianic hopes, as He remains to this day. Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, in words similar to those spoken by the Controller in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (Huxley 2014, 200-202), echoed this disappointment. Why did God send his Son into the world to confirm man in a liberty that he does not want and does not know how to use? Why did Jesus the Christ insist on making things more difficult for us, rather than easier, in going so far as to demand that we "must be perfect, as [our] heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), in insisting that we deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24)? We do not really want freedom under God, but bread, glory, and power, the three things Satan offered to Jesus, and which Jesus refused. (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) In a sense, then, Jesus of Nazareth is not only the Person in human history Who provides man with the most cause for hope; He is the greatest disappointment. Voegelin said that because "the very essence of Christianity" is "[U]ncertainty," ideologies emerged to give man the sense of certainty that Christianity lacked. (Voegelin 1969a, 121-122) While Voegelin's point is understood, his language leaves something to be desired. The very essence of Christianity is not uncertainty, but faith.

The gulf between the sacred and the profane recognized by archaic man, between the divine and the temporal orders, is indicated by the extent to which Jesus avoided a political role. Here is the root of liberalism as a political order. The tension in the thought of Plato and Aristotle between the spiritual and the temporal is decisively broken. Politics is most clearly seen to be a limited order, and not salvific. Jesus came to proclaim His Father's kingdom, a kingdom not of this world. Furthermore, as noted above, Jesus did not come to make things easier, in worldly terms. He ratcheted the measure by which the human person was to be thereafter judged up as high as it could

possibly go, to "perfection." He ordered each of His followers to deny himself and take up his cross and follow Him.

But—and this is the great paradox of Christianity--He also told them that His yoke is easy, and His burden light (Matthew 11:28-30): "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (Matthew 10:38-39; Matthew 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-36; Luke 9:23-25; Luke 14:27) In the political order, Jesus's saying is evidenced especially in the history of tyrants.

St. Augustine

With the clear differentiation of the spiritual and temporal orders with Christ, the question remained of the proper relationship between them. The temporal sphere was not to be neglected. On the contrary, Christ ordered his followers to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. (Matthew 22:21) But the temporal sphere was subordinated to the spiritual because Caesar was under God. We do not have time or space to consider the very earliest Christian thought on politics. Instead we move forward to a theologian and philosopher whose thought did touch on politics in very important ways, St. Augustine, of whom Gerhart Niemeyer said:

> From Cicero to Augustine, fully 450 years, most philosophers did not touch politics at all. In the fifth century A.D., however, Augustine did give a great deal of attention to politics, and not as an epigone, but in the context of a most innovative ontology, cosmology, anthropology, and ethics. Even this brief glance would tell us that, in view of earlier Church Fathers who dismissed public order from the perimeter of Christian concerns, Christianity, without Augustine, might not have developed a civilization of its own, or else might have developed an apolitical culture resembling, for instance, Buddhism. The rank of a landmark philosopher, then, cannot be denied Augustine even in the field of politics. (Niemeyer 1988, 268)

Augustine has a narrow view of politics, deeming the state to be "necessary only because of men's vitiated natures." (280) Peace is then, for Augustine, the highest social good, and it may

be shared in this life by the citizens of both the City of God and the City of Man. As a result, "We note the emergence in Augustine's thought of an independent political function beyond and besides the mutually exclusive loyalties within the culture, the perception of an autonomous task of political rule." (Ibid.) Earthly peace is limited, however; real peace, eternal peace, can only be achieved in union with God after death. Earthly peace, however, the peace achievable through politics, "is still something that admits of intelligible distinctions, of grades of goodness, and of recognizable perversity." (282)

Augustine's political theory was limited, but its accomplishments were significant, especially considering the historical moment. Augustine refuted "those Church Fathers who declared utter unconcern of Christians for the state." (283) On the contrary, Augustine maintained that "'The things which this city desires cannot justly be said to be evil, for it is itself, in its own kind, better than all other human good.' Not only is the state not unimportant, but among relative goods of this earth it holds top rank, so that Christians have a duty of loyal political participation." (Ibid.) Augustine also put a stop to the thinking of some Church Fathers who saw in the growth of the Roman Empire a providential spreading of the Gospel. Augustine did not believe in "steady Christian progress." (Ibid.)

Fallen man, his nature vitiated, could not look for true happiness to the state, or in this life for that matter. In this life, he could only hope that his "pilgrimage" would be peaceful, allowing him to make good use of the things of this life, in hope of the next. And so while Augustine's political theory may have been limited, perhaps his greatest achievement was to be the first theorist of the limited state, and therefore the first liberal:

> While Augustine's emphasis lies on . . . otherworldly fulfillment . . . his most telling achievement is to have taken the state from the height of its pedestal. The state, administrator of the earthly peace which even in the most corrupt cases is "not to be lightly esteemed," has still the supreme authority, but that authority

has none of the salvific elements that we find in Plato and Aristotle. Political order in this world, then, cannot be an "all-or-nothing" proposition. Salvation is of God, and, in this world, represented by those who have spiritual help to give. The limitation of the state's authority in favor of a spiritual order is obviously implied. Augustine is the intellectual father of the concept of the limited state, even though Pope Gelasius did provide the effective slogan. To this notion of a somewhat demoted secular power corresponds the other one: the concept of pilgrimage as the mode of historical continuity. (285)

Aquinas

Unlike Augustine, Aquinas did not think that the state was made necessary only because of original sin. With Aristotle, Aquinas held man to be a political animal, whose nature could only be fully developed in a polity. Political life would have been necessary even if man had not fallen. Aquinas was not quite as deprecatory of the things of this world as Augustine was. This was at least in part what Chesterton meant when he said that Aquinas saved the Church from being too spiritual and mystical. (Chesterton 1956, 29-31) Certainly we cannot imagine Augustine writing, as Aquinas did, *On Kingship: To the King of Cyprus*. (Aquinas 1982)

Still, Aquinas's concept of the state was also limited. Here we will mention only the "Treatise on Law" from the *Summa Theologica*. Laws, after all, are what the state promulgates, enforces, and adjudicates.

Aquinas embedded law in a rich ontological context by differentiating five "kinds" of law: the eternal law, which is the government of the whole community of the universe by Divine Reason; the natural law, which is the rational creature's participation of the eternal law; human positive laws, which are the particular determinations devised by human practical reason from the general and indemonstrable principles of the natural law for the government of the political community; and divine positive laws, both the Old and New Laws. (ST I-II, Q. 91)

While the ultimate source of all law is God, and while ". . . all laws," said Aquinas, "in so far as they partake of right reason, are derived from the eternal law," we might think of each kind

of law as marking out a particular jurisdiction. There is overlap, but human law has its own very definite limits. For example, while the natural law is the rational creature's participation of the eternal law, its precepts are general and few (ST I-II, Q. 94, A. 2), and so God has left it up to man to develop in freedom the details of the human laws by which he will be governed.

And in considering whether it is useful for laws to be framed by men, Aquinas said:

Now it is difficult to see how man could suffice for himself in the matter of this training [for the acquisition of virtue]: since the perfection of virtue consists chiefly in withdrawing man from undue pleasures, to which above all man is inclined, and especially the young, who are more capable of being trained. Consequently a man needs to receive this training from another, whereby to arrive at the perfection of virtue. And as to those young people who are inclined to acts of virtue, by their good natural disposition, or by custom, or rather by the gift of God, paternal training suffices, which is by admonitions. But since some are found to be depraved, and prone to vice, and not easily amenable to words, it was necessary for such to be restrained from evil by force and fear, in order that, at least, they might desist from evil-doing, and leave others in peace, and that they themselves, by being habituated in this way, might be brought to do willingly what hitherto they did from fear, and thus become virtuous. Now this kind of training, which compels through fear of punishment, is the discipline of laws. Therefore in order that man might have peace and virtue, it was necessary for laws to be framed: for, as the Philosopher says (*Polit*. i, 2), "as man is the most noble of animals if he be perfect in virtue, so is he the lowest of all, if he be severed from law and righteousness"; because man can use his reason to devise means of satisfying his lusts and evil passions, which other animals are unable to do. (ST I-II, Q. 95, A. 1)

The purpose of human law is limited, as it was in Augustine, and its primary purpose is to keep the peace.

Further, it is necessary that persons be ruled in the temporal order not by other persons but by laws. Objection 2 in ST I-II, Q. 95, A. 1 refers to judges as "animate justice" and argues that since animate justice is better than inanimate justice, which is contained in laws, therefore it would be better for the execution of justice to be entrusted to the decision of judges than to frame laws in addition. Aquinas replies to this Objection as follows:

As the Philosopher says (*Rhet*. i, 1), "it is better that all things be regulated by law, than left to be decided by judges": and this for three reasons. First, because

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it is easier to find a few wise men competent to frame right laws, than to find the many who would be necessary to judge aright of each single case. Secondly, because those who make laws consider long beforehand what laws to make; whereas judgment on each single case has to be pronounced as soon as it arises: and it is easier for man to see what is right, by taking many instances into consideration, than by considering one solitary fact. Thirdly, because lawgivers judge in the abstract and of future events; whereas those who sit in judgment of things present, towards which they are affected by love, hatred, or some kind of cupidity; wherefore their judgment is perverted.

Since then the animated justice of the judge is not found in every man, and since it can be deflected, therefore it was necessary, whenever possible, for the law to determine how to judge, and for very few matters to be left to the decision of men.

This is the philosophical explanation for what we call "the rule of law."

Aquinas's next question is "Whether Every Human Law Is Derived from the Natural Law?" (ST I-II, Q. 95, A. 2) And his answer illustrates the distinction between natural and human law. He begins by citing Augustine, who said, "that which is not just seems to be no law at all." Aquinas continues: ". . . wherefore the force of a law depends on the extent of its justice. Now in human affairs a thing is said to be just, from being right, according to the rule of reason. But the first rule of reason is the law of nature, as is clear from what has been stated above (I-II: 91:2 ad 2). Consequently every human law has just so much of the nature of law, as it is derived from the law of nature. But if in any point it deflects from the law of nature, it is no longer a law but a perversion of law."

But that leaves out a crucial distinction, to which Aquinas then turns:

But it must be noted that something may be derived from the natural law in two ways: first, as a conclusion from premises, secondly, by way of determination of certain generalities. The first way is like to that by which, in sciences, demonstrated conclusions are drawn from the principles: while the second mode is likened to that whereby, in the arts, general forms are particularized as to details: thus the craftsman needs to determine the general form of a house to some particular shape. Some things are therefore derived from the general principles of the natural law, by way of conclusions; e.g. that "one must not kill" may be derived as a conclusion from the principle that "one should do harm to no man": while some are derived therefrom by way of determination; e.g. the law of nature has it that the

evil-doer should be punished; but that he be punished in this or that way, is a determination of the law of nature.

 Accordingly both modes of derivation are found in the human law. But those things which are derived in the first way, are contained in human law not as emanating therefrom exclusively, but have some force from the natural law also. But those things which are derived in the second way, have no other force than that of human law.

Thus again Aquinas asserts the proper autonomy of human law, the extent to which it must so often be the work of man, not of God. Some things are derived from the fundamental precepts of the natural law by way of conclusions from premises, but more often specific determinations at a further remove from the level of precepts and conclusions are required, and the quality of these depend upon the virtues of the lawgiver, especially the virtue of prudence. Further, Aquinas answers the Objection that if human laws were derived from the natural law, it would follow that they would be the same everywhere, which is clearly false, by saying: "The general principles of the natural law cannot be applied to all men in the same way on account of the great variety of human affairs: and hence arises the diversity of positive laws among various people."

While all virtuous acts belong to the natural law (ST I-II, Q. 94, A. 3), and while human law may prescribe the acts of all the virtues (ST I-II, Q. 96, A. 3), it does not belong to the human law to repress all vices (ST I-II, Q. 96, A. 2). Aquinas is again clear on the limits of human law:

 As stated above (Question 90, Articles 1 and 2), law is framed as a rule or measure of human acts. Now a measure should be homogeneous with that which it measures, as stated in *Metaph*. x, text. 3,4, since different things are measured by different measures. Wherefore laws imposed on men should also be in keeping with their condition, for, as Isidore says (*Etym*. v, 21), law should be "possible both according to nature, and according to the customs of the country." Now possibility or faculty of action is due to an interior habit or disposition: since the same thing is not possible to one who has not a virtuous habit, as is possible to one who has. Thus the same is not possible to a child as to a full-grown man: for which reason the law for children is not the same as for adults, since many things are permitted to children, which in an adult are punished by law or at any rate are open to blame. In like manner many things are permissible to men not perfect in virtue, which would be intolerable in a virtuous man.

Now human law is framed for a number of human beings, the majority of whom are not perfect in virtue. Wherefore human laws do not forbid all vices, from which the virtuous abstain, but only the more grievous vices, from which it is possible for the majority to abstain; and chiefly those that are to the hurt of others, without the prohibition of which human society could not be maintained: thus human law prohibits murder, theft and such like. (ST I-II, Q. 96, A. 2)

If we think of John Stuart Mill as one of the fathers of modern liberalism, and if we think of the "harm principle" as one of the main tenets of his thought, we may be surprised to see that that old liberal, Thomas Aquinas, beat Mill to the principle by about 600 years.

Objections 2 and 3 to Q. 96, A. 2 are also remarkably current in our debates on liberalism:

Objection 2. Further, the intention of the lawgiver is to make the citizens virtuous. But a man cannot be virtuous unless he forbear from all kinds of vice. Therefore it belongs to human law to repress all vices.

Objection 3. Further, human law is derived from the natural law, as stated above (I-II: 95:2). But all vices are contrary to the law of nature. Therefore human law should repress all vices.

Objections like these are often raised by those who blame liberalism for all sorts of societal problems.

Aquinas's Replies read as follows:

Reply to Objection 2. The purpose of human law is to lead men to virtue, not suddenly, but gradually. Wherefore it does not lay upon the multitude of imperfect men the burdens of those who are already virtuous, viz. that they should abstain from all evil. Otherwise these imperfect ones, being unable to bear such precepts, would break out into yet greater evils: thus it is written (Proverbs 30:33): "He that violently bloweth his nose, bringeth out blood"; and (Matthew 9:17) that if "new wine," i.e. precepts of a perfect life, "is put into old bottles," i.e. into imperfect men, "the bottles break, and the wine runneth out," i.e. the precepts are despised, and those men, from contempt, break into evils worse still.

Reply to Objection 3. The natural law is a participation in us of the eternal law: while human law falls short of the eternal law. Now Augustine says (*De Lib. Arb.* i, 5): "The law which is framed for the government of states, allows and leaves unpunished many things that are punished by Divine providence. Nor, if this law does not attempt to do everything, is this a reason why it should be blamed for what

it does." Wherefore, too, human law does not prohibit everything that is forbidden by the natural law.

As noted, Aquinas does maintain that human law is competent to prescribe the acts of all the virtues (**S**T I-II, Q. 96, A. 3). But it is not required to do so. Aquinas's Answer here is again characteristically nuanced:

> The species of virtues are distinguished by their objects, as explained above (I-II: 54:2; I-II: 60:1; I-II: 62:2). Now all the objects of virtues can be referred either to the private good of an individual, or to the common good of the multitude: thus matters of fortitude may be achieved either for the safety of the state, or for upholding the rights of a friend, and in like manner with the other virtues. But law, as stated above (I-II: 90:2) is ordained to the common good. Wherefore there is no virtue whose acts cannot be prescribed by the law. Nevertheless human law does not prescribe concerning all the acts of every virtue: but only in regard to those that are ordainable to the common good—either immediately, as when certain things are done directly for the common good—or mediately, as when a lawgiver prescribes certain things pertaining to good order, whereby the citizens are directed in the upholding of the common good of justice and peace.

In his Reply to Objection 1, Aquinas goes on to note that "Human law does not forbid all vicious acts, by the obligation of a precept, as neither does it prescribe all acts of virtue. But it forbids certain acts of each vice, just as it prescribes some acts of each virtue." And in his Reply to Objection 2, Objection notes the two ways in which an act may be said to be an act of virtue: "An act is said to be an act of virtue in two ways. First, from the fact that a man does something virtuous; thus the act of justice is to do what is right, and an act of fortitude is to do brave things: and in this way law prescribes certain acts of virtue. Secondly an act of virtue is when a man does a virtuous thing in a way in which a virtuous man does it. Such an act always proceeds from virtue: and it does not come under a precept of law, but is the end at which every lawgiver aims." In other words, the law's primary concern is with some of the acts of virtue, before it is concerned with the inner disposition of the person who performs the act. Law is primarily concerned with the external; it is virtue that is concerned with the internal. Both are necessary for personal and political order.

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It is often assumed that for Aquinas, one may, or must, disobey a positive human law that one deems violative of the natural law. But here also Aquinas is most concerned to make appropriate distinctions.

ST I-II, Q. 96, A. 4 askes "Whether Human Law Binds a Man in Conscience?" Aquinas begins his Answer by noting that laws framed by man are either just or unjust. If they are just, they have the power of binding in conscience, from the eternal law which they are derived. And laws are said to be just, first, from their end, that is, when they are ordained to the common good; second, from their author, that is, when the law that is made does not exceed the power of the lawgiver; and third, from their form, that is, when burdens are laid on the subjects according to an equality of proportion and with a view to the common good. But, Aquinas continues:

> On the other hand laws may be unjust in two ways: first, by being contrary to human good, through being opposed to the things mentioned above—either in respect of the end, as when an authority imposes on his subjects burdensome laws, conducive, not to the common good, but rather to his own cupidity or vainglory— or in respect of the author, as when a man makes a law that goes beyond the power committed to him—or in respect of the form, as when burdens are imposed unequally on the community, although with a view to the common good. The like are acts of violence rather than laws; because, as Augustine says (*De Lib. Arb.* i, 5), "a law that is not just, seems to be no law at all." Wherefore such laws do not bind in conscience, except perhaps in order to avoid scandal or disturbance, for which cause a man should even yield his right, according to Matthew 5:40-41: "If a man . . . take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him; and whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him other two."

> Secondly, laws may be unjust through being opposed to the Divine good: such are the laws of tyrants inducing to idolatry, or to anything else contrary to the Divine law: and laws of this kind must nowise be observed, because, as stated in Acts 5:29, "we ought to obey God rather than man."

Note that, excepting laws unjust through being opposed to the Divine good, which would include laws violative of the Decalogue, there may be times when a person should obey even a law that is unjust as being contrary to the human good, "in order to avoid scandal or disturbance."

At ST I-II, Q. 96, A. 6, Aquinas maintains generally that person should obey the letter of the law, but notes also, as Aristotle did, the need for equity:

> Now it happens often that the observance of some point of law conduces to the common weal in the majority of instances, and yet, in some cases, is very hurtful. Since then the lawgiver cannot have in view every single case, he shapes the law according to what happens most frequently, by directing his attention to the common good. Wherefore if a case arise wherein the observance of that law would be hurtful to the general welfare, it should not be observed. For instance, suppose that in a besieged city it be an established law that the gates of the city are to be kept closed, this is good for public welfare as a general rule: but, if it were to happen that the enemy are in pursuit of certain citizens, who are defenders of the city, it would be a great loss to the city, if the gates were not opened to them: and so in that case the gates ought to be opened, contrary to the letter of the law, in order to maintain the common weal, which the lawgiver had in view.

> Nevertheless it must be noted, that if the observance of the law according to the letter does not involve any sudden risk needing instant remedy, it is not competent for everyone to expound what is useful and what is not useful to the state: those alone can do this who are in authority, and who, on account of such like cases, have the power to dispense from the laws. If, however, the peril be so sudden as not to allow of the delay involved by referring the matter to authority, the mere necessity brings with it a dispensation, since necessity knows no law.

ST I-II, Q. 97 concerns the issue of change in human laws. Aquinas recognizes that laws may be improved, and may be changed to account for changed conditions, but also counsels against too frequent changes in laws:

> As stated above (Article 1), human law is rightly changed, in so far as such change is conducive to the common weal. But, to a certain extent, the mere change of law is of itself prejudicial to the common good: because custom avails much for the observance of laws, seeing that what is done contrary to general custom, even in slight matters, is looked upon as grave. Consequently, when a law is changed, the binding power of the law is diminished, in so far as custom is abolished. Wherefore human law should never be changed, unless, in some way or other, the common weal be compensated according to the extent of the harm done in this respect. Such compensation may arise either from some very great and very evident benefit conferred by the new enactment; or from the extreme urgency of the case, due to the fact that either the existing law is clearly unjust, or its observance extremely harmful. Wherefore the jurist says that "in establishing new laws, there should be evidence of the benefit to be derived, before departing from a law which has long been considered just." (ST I-II, Q. 97, A. 2)

Aquinas also accords great deference to custom, maintaining that "custom has the force of a law, abolishes law, and is the interpreter of law." (ST I-II, Q. 97, A.3)

Let us return to an earlier Question raised in the "Treatise on Law" related to liberalism. In ST I-II, Q. 90, Aquinas had defined law as an ordinance of reason, for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated. This definition of the essence of law applies to each of its kinds. Then in Q. 92, A. 1, Aquinas asked "Whether an Effect of Law Is to Make Men Good?," a question to which some forms of liberalism insist on a negative answer. In his Answer, Aquinas quoted Aristotle in the *Politics* to the effect that "the virtue of every subject consists in his being well subjected to his ruler." This raised more questions than it answered, and so Aquinas continued as follows:

> But every law aims at being obeyed by those who are subject to it. Consequently it is evident that the proper effect of law is to lead its subjects to their proper virtue: and since virtue is "that which makes its subject good," it follows that the proper effect of law is to make those to whom it is given, good, either simply or in some particular respect. For if the intention of the lawgiver is fixed on true good, which is the common good regulated according to Divine justice, it follows that the effect of the law is to make men good simply. If, however, the intention of the lawgiver is fixed on that which is not simply good, but useful or pleasurable to himself, or in opposition to Divine justice; then the law does not make men good simply, but in respect to that particular government. In this way good is found even in things that are bad of themselves: thus a man is called a good robber, because he works in a way that is adapted to his end.

This is the way Aquinas addressed one of the principal questions in Aristotelian political theory, namely whether the good man and the good citizen are the same. They are not necessarily, but under good government, they can be.

In sum, Aquinas appears as a moderate liberal. As with Augustine, the state is limited, part of an autonomous temporal order with its own jurisdiction, but related to the higher spiritual order.

Larry Siedentop

Larry Siedentop's *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Siedentop 2017), a work of both history and philosophy, makes the roots of Western liberalism in Christianity abundantly clear. Siedentop shows that liberalism, with its emphasis on the dignity of each and every individual person and freedom of consciences, is the offspring of the Church, and not, as it usually proclaims itself to be, the form of politics that emerged in modernity in opposition to religion. The world, as Siedentop puts it in his discussion of St. Paul, was turned upside down by Christ

Modern Thinkers

Modern thinkers who have defended liberalism as rooted in Christianity are too many to mention and discuss here. We have already cited Murray and Maritain. Yves Simon belongs in this group (Simon 1993). And David Walsh should take rank with them.

VII.   Modern Catholic Social Teaching

Insofar as Walsh defends liberalism, he is also on solid orthodox ground as far as modern Catholic Social Teaching is concerned.

People often assume that the Catholic Church strongly opposes liberalism in politics, that it wishes to regain the hegemony it held over the temporal order for much of its history. (Integralism, for example, seems to wish for a return to those days.) It does not. The Church in its modern Social Teaching has in fact become something of a champion of moderate, tempered political liberalism, as, given that the roots of liberalism are in Christianity, as we have just discussed, it should be. And the story of the modern evolution of the Church's thought on this subject is a fascinating one.

Catholic celebrations of the American liberal political order, such as those of Murray and Maritain, were a far cry from the Church's position in the century before Murray and Maritain

wrote. We recall that as early as the fourth century, Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Thereafter the relationship between throne and altar, although various, was often close. The Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution came as shocks to the Church, which also lost its lands. Given the political and cultural full-scale assault on Catholicism, the Church withdrew into a defensive crouch. George Weigel begins his 2019 book, *The Irony of Modern Catholic History: How the Church Rediscovered Itself and Challenged the Modern World to Reform*, there, with, as he says, Popes Gregory XVI and Pius IX responding to the situation the Church found itself in in the eighteenth century "by hurling anathemas." (Weigel 2019, 10) (Except for the excursus on Samuel Moyn, virtually all of what follows in this Section is taken from Weigel's book.)

On December 8, 1864, Pope Pius IX, a Pope who had serious doubts about the American idea of religious freedom embodied in the constitutional separation of church and state, issued "The Syllabus of Errors" as an Appendix to his Encyclical, *Condemning Current Errors* (*Quanta cura*). The Encyclical and the Syllabus attacked modernity for its anti-clericalism and its secularizing tendencies, for what the Pope perceived, not without some justification, to be modernity's war on the Church itself. The Syllabus, which attracted the most attention, was a list of 80 propositions the Church considered to be heretical and which it therefore condemned. Many of the propositions deserved condemnation, but many other condemned propositions represented aspects of modernity as it had by then emerged, the condemnation of which can only seem very odd to us in retrospect, to say the least.

In the Encyclical, the Pope, referring to "that mutual fellowship and concord of counsels between Church and State which has ever proved itself propitious and salutary, both for religious and civil interests," railed against those who "dare to teach that 'the best constitution of public

society and (also) civil progress altogether require that human society be conducted and governed without regard being had to religion any more than if it did not exist; or, at least, without any distinction being made between the true religion and false ones,'" and against those "who do not fear to foster that erroneous opinion . . . that 'liberty of conscience and worship is each man's personal right, which ought to be legally proclaimed and asserted in every rightly constituted society; and that a right resides in the citizens to an absolute liberty, which should be restrained by no authority whether ecclesiastical or civil, whereby they may be able openly and publicly to manifest and declare any of their ideas whatever, either by word of mouth, by the press, or in any other way.'"

And in Section X, Paragraphs 77-80 of the Syllabus, entitled "Errors Having Reference to Modern Liberalism," the Pope attacked political liberalism, and not just that. For example, the proposition attacked as heretical in Paragraph 15 was: "Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true." And the "error" or "heresy" set forth in Paragraph 80, the final Paragraph of the Syllabus, read as follows: "The Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with progress, liberalism and modern civilization." Weigel refers to this as "a blunderbuss formulation that seemed not so much boldly defiant of the nineteenth century's form of political correctness as simply mindless." (Weigel 2019, 44) Moreover, the formulation seemed completely ignorant of the fact that the roots of the ideas of "progress," "liberalism," and "modern civilization" lay within Christianity and the Church itself!

Weigel traces the history of Catholic social thought from the end of the eighteenth century through the present in its relationship to the modern world, including the political form of the modern world, liberal democracy, through what he calls five "Acts" and the periods between them.

Weigel's theme is that in confronting modernity, the Church itself rediscovered both its own evangelical character and the essential contribution it can make to saving the modern project, again including liberal democracy, from incoherence. This surprising result happened to a large extent through the Church's development of modern "Catholic Social Teaching." And in that development, the Church was not simply reacting to modernity, but attempting itself to shape modernity in the light of the Gospels. The story is thus much more complicated than that usually told in our mainstream media, of traditional reactionaries fighting a rearguard action against modern progressives. The irony in the encounter of the Church with modernity is that ultimately both have benefitted, the Church by the recovery of its original evangelical mission not to resist or embrace modernity, but to convert it, modernity itself thereby being led to a deeper self-understanding, including that it owes a great deal to biblical religion. (8-9)

In Act One of the story told by Weigel, called "Catholicism Against Modernity," lasting roughly from the time of the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century, the modern world and Catholicism were at war with each other. Political and cultural modernity mounted a full-scale assault on Catholicism, and Catholicism reacted in kind. The European Enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century and on into the nineteenth attacked the Church and religion in general. "Elites" rejected the Church. Societies became secularized. Various forms of atheist humanism appeared in the writings of thinkers like Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Comte, and Marx, who did not just deny the existence of God but proposed the elimination of Christianity and its replacement with somethings allegedly much better—Henri De Lubac well described this phenomenon (De Lubac 1969). The Vatican was threatened with the loss of the "Papal States."

The Church developed a siege mentality during this time. It did not know what to say to advancing modernity other than "NO!" The two principal Popes Weigel considers in this "Act" are Gregory XVI and Pius IX.

Pope Gregory XVI, who was Pope from 1831 to 1846, issued an Encyclical in 1832 entitled "On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism." It attacked modernity in very strident language, going so far as to condemn freedom of conscience and freedom of opinion, and claiming that modernity was beset by a "flock of errors."

We have already seen Pope Pius IX's reaction to modernity. With him, the Church became set against virtually the entirety of modernity, especially in cultural and intellectual life. The Church came to equate political liberalism with a religious liberalism that stressed free inquiry, the ultimate authority of reason in matters of faith, and skepticism about many traditional religious and moral truth claims. Pius IX could not see, as Pius XII was later to see, the difference between the jurisdictions.

The problem in Act One was that both the Church and the modern world had false views of one another, believing themselves to be engaged in a battle to the death.

Oddly enough, during this same period, "to everyone's surprise, Catholicism flourishes in the first great modern democracy, the United States of America." (10) But the Vatican had yet to understand America.

Some Catholic theologians during the nineteenth century did accept the fact that the world was changing, and argued that the Church should try to shape and guide those changes, not merely criticize and reject them. They wanted to try to understand modernity with the hope of converting it. They believed that a modernity without Christianity would descend into barbarism—as indeed, in part, it did in the twentieth century in the forms of Fascism, Nazism, and Communism. They

believed that the Church had to become involved in the shaping of public policy. But they were, and remained, a minority.

And so Act One reached its apogee with "The Syllabus of Errors,"

In Act Two, called "Catholicism Explores Modernity, Gingerly," Pope Leo XIII, elected in 1878 as an elderly placeholder to follow Pius IX, ironically began what would become known as the "Leonine Revolution" in the Church "by gingerly exploring the modern project in its political, economic, social, and cultural expressions." (10) He is the pivotal Pope in Weigel's story, having been the Pope who finally made the decision to engage, evangelize, and convert modernity, rather than simply repudiating it. Pope Leo may be thought of as the first "modern" Pope, and the Pope who inaugurated modern Catholic social thought, especially with his Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, issued in 1891, which, among other things, supported workers' associations and condemned socialism in the strongest possible moral terms. So important was this Encyclical that the Church dates modern "Catholic Social Teaching" from *Rerum Novarum*.

What did the Church have to offer to modernity? To sum up Leo's belief, without a grounding of society, politics, and economics in the deep truths of the human condition, available in Scripture, philosophy, and theology, there could be no society fit for human beings. And the Church was a carrier of these truths that the modern world sometimes forgot, ignored, or even rejected. These truths, Leo believed, could not be provided by modern science, which had become so influential in modernity. Only a resort to these truths could answer the essentially moral question at the root of all political thinking since Aristotle: How ought we live together? And Leo addressed his Encyclicals to all persons, not just Catholics, using the vocabulary of "public reason," that is, of natural law.

In *Rerum Novarum*, as in his other Encyclicals, Leo's social teaching challenged modernity to higher and nobler concepts of law, advocating natural law rather than positivism; of freedom, contrasting genuine freedom, the capacity to do what we ought, with license; of the state, which must be limited—Leo strongly criticized socialism on both practical and moral grounds; of civil society, that is, all of the intermediate institutions between the individual and the state, which Leo urged the state to encourage and support.

In *Rerum Novarum*, Leo advanced the first two foundational principles of classic Catholic social theory: (1) The personalist principle, which today would be called the human rights principle; and (2) The principle of the common good, which today would be called the communitarian principle.

Thus, under Leo, what would later be known as "Christian Democracy" was born.

Act Two lasted from the accession of Leo to the Papacy until the Second Vatican Council. Leo was Pope from 1878 to his death in 1903, and while he did not live through all of Act Two, Weigel believes that his spirit guided it, and to a large extent, still guides the Church today. The Leonine Revolution inspired Catholic thought through two World Wars and the Cold War into the first six decades of the twentieth century.

The decision to engage the world, the direction in which Leo took the Church, mirrored the act of its Founder. Christ Himself entered a world that was very troubled, as it always is. He did not come to condemn the world, but to save it. And he strictly charged his followers to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20) Christ intended that His followers should never shrink from this task, even at times and in places that seemed on the verge of rejecting Christianity altogether—perhaps most especially not then and not there. The

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Church was to be light and salt and leaven in the world, not simply to turn its back on the world. Christians are commanded not to hide their lights under bushels or bury their talents in fields.

Pope Pius XI became Pope in 1922, and he would hold office until his death in 1939. Think of the things going on in the world during this time. The Russian Revolution was in 1917. Mussolini and his National Fascist Party came to power in Italy in 1922. Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany in 1933. Pius XI was forced to confront Communism, Fascism, and Nazism, modern totalitarian political ideologies that were idolatrous, attempting to replace God with the State, and leading to nothing but human misery. And it was in this context—the rise of totalitarian power as one expression of political modernity—that Pius XI made his most original and enduring contribution to Catholic social doctrine by formulating the doctrine of subsidiarity in his 1931 Encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, that is, on the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*.

This Encyclical, said Weigel, "cemented a third principle into the foundations of modern Catholic social doctrine, building on the personalist and common good principles Leo had defined. This was the principle of 'subsidiarity,' and on it the Catholic defense of civil society against the encroachments of the modern state in all its forms was built." (99) "Subsidiarity" is not just a negative principle, that is, a teaching against the size of the state, but a positive one, teaching the importance of civic involvement at the most local levels possible as a means of fostering freedom and the virtues Aristotle taught could only be achieved in such settings. Subsidiarity echoes Tocqueville's insistence on the need for intermediate institutions between the individual and the state if the health of any liberal political order is to be maintained. Here is the principle as it appeared in *Quadragesimo Anno*:

> 79. As history abundantly proves, it is true that on account of changed conditions many things which were done by small associations in former times

cannot be done now save by large associations. Still, that most weighty principle, which cannot be set aside or changed, remains fixed and unshaken in social philosophy: Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.

Americans may think of federalism, and of the division of states into counties, cities, and towns as examples of subsidiarity.

In the same Encyclical, Pius XI denounced the twin evils of "individualism" and "statism," the Scylla and Charybdis between which Catholic social thought would thereafter navigate.

It was also Pius XI who created the Feast of Christ the King in the Church's liturgical calendar as a parallel effort in the sphere of the spiritual life, the purpose of the Feast being to remind Catholics of Who is *really* King.

And as the shadows of the totalitarian project began to lengthen across Europe, Pius reminded the Church that all Christian thought about politics and public authority begins with Christ's injunction in Matthew 22:21 to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's"—a powerful reminder that if God is God, Caesar (in whatever guise he appears) is not God.

Pius XI's successor, Pope Pius XII, who was Pope from 1939 to his death in 1958, accelerated the Catholic exploration of cultural and intellectual modernity. As noted, Murray cited him as upholding the necessary distinction between the jurisdictions of Church and State.

In his 2015 book, *Christian Human Rights*, which David Walsh brought to my attention, Samuel Moyn gives a somewhat different account of Catholic Social Teaching in the twentieth century, at least insofar as it bears on the subject of rights. He maintains that "Christian human rights" were "invent[ed] . . . in the era of World War II." (Moyn 2015, 24)

Moyn begins his story with a discussion of the talk given by Pope Pius XII on Christmas Day in 1942, when the outcome of World War II was still in doubt. On that occasion, says Moyn, "the Roman Catholic pontiff . . . had something new to say. . . . the appeal to reaffirm faith in the dignity of the human person, and in the rights that follow from that dignity, reached unprecedented heights of public visibility." (1-2) In the midst of the horrors of the War, the Pope said that "The cure of this situation becomes feasible when we awaken again the consciousness of a juridical order resting on the supreme dominion of God, and safeguarded from all human whims; a consciousness of an order which stretches forth its arm, in protection or punishment, over *the unforgettable rights of man* and protects them against the attacks of every human power.'" (2) Moyn refers to the Pope's emphasis on human dignity and human rights as "a critical turning point, one that has defined history since, if not exactly in ways that Pius XII intended." (Ibid.)

Moyn continues:

> People now treat such affirmations, and especially the notion that human dignity provides the foundation for universal human rights, as a set of conventional and enduring truths. Yet it was all rather new at the time. The Roman Catholic Church had previously rejected the hitherto secular and liberal language of human rights. But now the pope turned to it, making human dignity its new basis. Around the same time, ecumenical formations of transatlantic Protestant elites proclaimed human rights to be the key to future world order. The communion between human rights and Christianity was therefore a novel and fateful departure in the history of political discourse.
> Undoubtedly, the pope's first peace point was the supreme, influential, and most publicly prominent invocation of human dignity during World War II proper and likely in the whole history of political claim-making to that date. It gave Christian "personalism" a broad hearing, attaching supreme ethical significance to human beings agonizingly caught between individualist atomism without community and "totalitarian" statehood without freedom. (2-3)

Moyn acknowledges that his task as an historian of ideas of telling the full story promised by his book's title is complicated by the fact that "Europe and therefore the modern world drew nearly everything from Christianity in the long term. . . . The trouble, after all, is not so much that

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Christianity accounts for nothing, as that it accounts for everything." (6) In any event, in telling

the story of the Christian embrace of personalism and rights in the middle years of the twentieth

century, Moyn raises the question of

> whether Christianity and conservatism were able to change liberalism more than
> they were changed by it. In this period, perhaps the most durable and fateful
> transformation was the start of a new era in liberalism—specifically, the ideological
> origins of religiously inflected Cold War liberalism in the face of the specter of
> "totalitarianism." It was a new liberalism that substantially overlapped with
> conservatism, suitably corrected, after the purgation of the extreme right and for
> the sake of standing down the left, extreme and not so extreme. In many respects,
> that conservative vision of liberalism remains alive and well. (9)

Unfortunately considerations of time and space preclude our further consideration of

Moyn's work, which goes on to discuss, among other things, the critical significance of the work

of Jacques Maritain on human rights; John Rawls's senior thesis at Princeton University written

in the midst of World War II, "long before he became renowned as a philosophical standard-bearer

of secular liberals" (17), to which we will return later; how "'Christian democracy' . . . in the end

. . . became the victorious embodiment of new concepts such as dignity, personalism, and rights"

(22); the significance of Pope John XXIII's 1963 "pivotal encyclical *Pacem in Terris*" (ibid.); the

Irish Constitution of 1937; Emmanuel Mounier and personalism ("Without question the man who

made the intellectual fortune of personalism . . . was Emmanuel Mounier, due to the terrific impact

of his nonconformist journal *Esprit* from the early 1930s" (71)) (on Mounier and Maritain, see

also Amato 2002); Gerhard Ritter as "The First Historian of Human Rights" (101-136); and much

else.

In his Epilogue, Moyn says: "No one interested in where human rights came from can

afford to ignore Christianity. In the middle of the twentieth century, in fact, human rights were part

and parcel of a Christian moment in political affairs." (169) Moyn apparently is not himself a

Christian, because he continues by recounting what many think of as the end of Christianity, at

least as a force for order in the world. No Christian writes like that. He considers whether the human rights movement itself can flourish in the absence of Christianity, saying: "But the truth is that the history of human rights eventually became largely untethered from the profoundly Christian moment in world affairs that helped birth the principles between the 1930s and 1940s." (173) "Human rights" has become the slogan of the secular left. "Yet for all their hard work,"

> the secular gospel of human rights has experienced nothing like Christian success.
> . . .
> . . . no one converts to human rights. If this faith has prophets, they write reports and file lawsuits, and so enjoy only the charisma of the bureaucrat. The cause has judges to its name but no priests for interpersonal succor and local institutionalization. Believers in human rights do not study breviaries or learn catechisms. There is no such thing as prayer in human rights, and devotion to its values is not made beautiful through liturgy nor routinized through emotional rituals . . . unlike Christianity, human rights do not give much of a chance for spiritual transfiguration for the rare authentic seeker of transcendence. Or, if there are knights of faith in the world of human rights, it boasts no churches or cathedrals and has inspired none of the great art that has been Christianity's most impressive contribution to human affairs. And one doubts that human rights will ever move true believers to self-sacrifice or even martyrdom, giving themselves as witnesses to the truth of their faith. (175-176)

David Walsh celebrates human rights as fundamental to the liberalism he supports. And he also sees the concept of rights as becoming untethered to the Christian dispensation that birthed it. However, Walsh's project is to insist on the re-tethering of rights to their roots in Christian personalism. Whether Moyn believes the secular human rights "movement" can gain traction apart from the faith in which it was conceived, Walsh does not. And the lengthy quote from Moyn immediately above is meant to emphasize Walsh's point that in the absence of their Christian orientation, rights, like the larger liberal project of which they are a part, must wither and die.

From our brief excursus into Moyn's work, we return now to Weigel's history, and pick it up with his Act Three, called "Catholicism Embracing Modernity," which begins following the death of Pope Pius XII in 1958.

The irony of the election of Leo XIII as Pope in 1878 was paralleled by the irony of the election of John XXIII as Pope in 1958. The Cardinals both times elected elderly men they did not think would live long or do much. They were to be mere "placeholders." They were very wrong each time! Only three months after his election, Pope John XXIII decided to focus the energies first set loose by Leo XIII through an ecumenical council, and so the Second Vatican Council, known as Vatican II, was born, an event that was to have great consequences for the Church and the world. This effected another "revolution" in the Church. The purpose of the Council was to address relations between the Catholic Church and the modern world. John XXIII opened the Council by calling the Church to convert modernity rather than deplore it. (Weigel 2019, 10) He saw the Church as "the evangelizer of the modern world." Rather than simply opposing the "modern project," the Church would continue to seek to bring the modern world's deepest hopes to fulfillment in the light of the Gospels, for the sake of the modern world itself.

In his opening address, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia, Mother Church Rejoices*, John XXIII stressed that God is the Lord of history, and that there was therefore no need to fear the present or the future—and no need to fear modernity. After all, Providence disposes all things for the good. But the Church had to learn to present the truths of the ancient faith in a way demanded by the times. The Church had to be pastor and witness. As Jesus said to his followers: ". . . 'every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'" (Matthew 13:52)

The work product of Vatican II was 16 documents. Some bore on the subject of "Catholic Social Teaching" in various ways. For example, *Lumen Gentium, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, emphasized that, as Weigel put it, "the Church manifests the reality that Jesus preached and that was confirmed by his Resurrection: the Kingdom of God is here, *now*, within history."

(142) And the Church had been given a mission by its Founder, which was to evangelize the world from within the world.

Dignitatis Humanae, The Declaration On Religious Freedom, was the most important statement of the Council in regard to political modernity, and one of the most important Church documents in any consideration of liberalism. In some ways, it is reminiscent of John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. (Locke 1983) John Courtney Murray, raised in the spirit of religious liberty prevalent in America, greatly influenced the work. While in the Syllabus of Errors, Pope Pius IX had in effect condemned religious freedom in 1864, now *DH* affirmed religious freedom as a fundamental human right, the most basic of civil rights, and endorsed the institutional separation of Church and State as a good in itself, not just as something that could be tolerated for reasons of historical contingency. *DH* reflected the Church's increasing meditation on the meaning of human freedom, and began as follows:

> A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man, and the demand is increasingly made that men should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty. The demand is likewise made that constitutional limits should be set to the powers of government, in order that there may be no encroachment on the rightful freedom of the person and of associations. This demand for freedom in human society chiefly regards the quest for the values proper to the human spirit. It regards, in the first place, the free exercise of religion in society. This Vatican Council takes careful note of these desires in the minds of men. It proposes to declare them to be greatly in accord with truth and justice. To this end, it searches into the sacred tradition and doctrine of the Church-the treasury out of which the Church continually brings forth new things that are in harmony with the things that are old.

In *DH*, the Church was reclaiming what it had once long ago understood to be a proper response to Christ's injunction to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but to God the things that are God's. *DH* proclaimed that the act of faith is only legitimate when it is freely made, and that means there can be no state coercion of conviction or conscience. The Church thus

jettisoned the idea that a close alliance between altar and throne is essential for the Church's mission. The embrace of religious freedom as a fundamental human right was also an essential part of the Church's opposition to modern political ideologies, such as Communism, Fascism, and Nazism, in which no freedom is tolerated, especially religious freedom.

A sense of the continuing importance of *Dignitatis Humanae*, and of the controversy it still arouses, can be gleaned from the many commentaries on it. See, for example, the essays in 2006's *Catholicism and Religious Freedom: Contemporary Reflections on Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Liberty*, which includes an essay by the Chair of our Panel, Thomas Heilke, entitled "The Promised Time of *Dignitatis Humanae*: A Radical Protestant Perspective." (Grasso and Hunt 2006, 87-113)

In terms of the Catholic encounter with intellectual modernity, the crucial document of Vatican II was *Dei Verbum (The Word of God): The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*. The purpose of *DV* was not to address "social matters" as such, but it certainly had implications for not only personal but also social order. For this was the document in which the Church presented its faith. It emphasized that the act of faith is fundamentally a personal encounter with God in Christ, and proposed this encounter in opposition to the spurious alternatives on offer in the modern world, many of them involving placing ultimate hope in merely political solutions.

Finally, *Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope): The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, went so far as to identify itself with the strivings of the modern age, and expressed a desire to enter into dialogue with it. Relative to *Gaudium et Spes*, Weigel, sounding like Henri De Lubac, said: "The atheistic humanists who imagined the God of the Bible to be the enemy of human maturation and liberation had it precisely backward." (184) Man cannot organize the world

for himself without God; without God he can only organize the world against man. Exclusive humanism is inhuman humanism.

Weigel believes, however, that *GS* is now dated because modernity has moved on from what it was when *GS* was written. Modernity is now different—in many ways more hostile to the Church--than it was when Vatican II closed in 1965. *GS* did not anticipate, said Weigel, and perhaps could not have anticipated, the challenges to Christianity that would arise after Vatican II, such as: the continuing quarrel between so-called "liberals" and so-called "conservatives" over the very meaning of Vatican II; "post-modernism" in philosophy; the attack on the very idea of truth as such; the global plague of abortion; developments in biotechnology intending to remake the human person; efforts to re-define the family; the gay and transgender rights movements; radical Islam; de-population; communications-driven "globalization"; the spread of wealth; radical secularism; radical relativism; radical autonomism; decadence in art in all of its forms; and, perhaps of most concern, the replacement of an intellectually assertive atheism by sheer indifference to religion.

Pope John XXIII died in 1963, and was succeeded by Pope Paul VI, who served until his death in 1978. He oversaw the last two years of the Second Vatican Council and brought it to a successful conclusion, something that was not easy, given the various still bitter divisions in the Church. Although sometimes forgotten or ignored, Paul VI was a great Pope.

The great firestorm of Paul VI's Papacy involved, of course, the issue of contraception, which was the subject of his Encyclical, *Humanae Vitae (On Human Life)*, issued on July 25, 1968, a year of great turmoil generally. *HV* has had great consequence for Catholic Social Teaching. As Weigel put it:

> . . . as had become customary during the latter stages of Vatican II, the tendency in
> the world media was to parse all such debates [in this case, the debate over

contraception] in terms of good "liberals" or "progressives" versus bad "conservatives" or "traditionalists."

Pope Paul, however, came to understand that there was more at stake in the Catholic debate on contraception than the Church's ethic of human love. He knew that the Church's doctrine can develop, and he was certainly not committed to an ideology of reproduction at all costs, for he deemed planning one's family to be a moral obligation guided by the virtue of prudence. But as he pondered the raucous debate over contraception within the Church and in the global media, he saw that what was really afoot in the contraception debate was the determination of some bishops and theologians to effect a radical shift in Catholic moral theology: the Church would abandon the ancient claim that some things were simply wrong by their very nature in favor of a judgment of "proportion" that involved a calculus of intentions, acts, and consequences set against the overall moral trajectory of one's life. That, the Pope grasped, would empty the Church's moral teaching of ballast, leading to a moral subjectivism that turned conscience into a mere faculty of choice. And under the cultural pressures of late modernity, that would effect within Catholicism the demise of classic, biblically rooted Christian morality, a collapse into relativism already underway in liberal Protestantism. (176-177)

Humanae Vitae condemned contraception, affirmed the obligation of responsible family planning by natural means, and cautioned against the social consequences of a "contraceptive culture." The Encyclical stressed that the sexual act has two purposes which cannot be morally separated, a unitive purpose and a procreative purpose. "*Humane Vitae*," Weigel said, "instantly became the most controversial encyclical in history, and the Pope was vilified, not least within the Church itself." (177) And the debate over *HV* continues to rage, even though the Encyclical appears, especially in the light of subsequent history, to have been not only right, but profoundly prophetic. Our "contraceptive culture," which figures prominently in some of the most significant American contemporary Constitutional law cases, attests to what happens when the unitive and procreative purposes of sex are separated or discarded.

Much less well known is that Paul VI also issued the apostolic exhortation entitled *Evangelii Nuntiandi (Announcing the Gospel)* on December 8, 1975, which became another significant part of Catholic Social Doctrine, reflecting Paul's conviction that the Church of the

future had to be a *Pauline* or *missionary* enterprise. The Church was *evangelical* in its very essence. *Mission* is what the Church *is*, not simply something the Church *does*. Evangelism transforms and renews the culture, on which all else—including politics and economics--depends. Weigel: "Moreover, Paul insisted, this evangelical proclamation is not some generic call to human decency; rather, it is a forthright, unapologetic call to encounter the living person of Jesus Christ. . . . There could be no imposition here, but neither could there be timidity What the Church had to proclaim was Jesus Christ and his Gospel." (180-181) How to do that? Paul said: "'Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.'" (181)

In Act Four, called "Catholicism Critiques Modernity From Within," as Weigel put it: "In sharp contrast to the anathemas of Act One, a bold Catholic critique of political and cultural modernity from inside modern intellectual premises is developed by John Paul II and Benedict XVI: two Popes who, as younger men, had helped guide the Leonine Revolution through the contentions and controversies of Vatican II." (11) During this Act we get Encyclicals and other writings of great depth from both Popes, men of great philosophical and theological learning, often bearing on politics and its modern form, liberal democracy. (Act Five, called "Catholicism Converting Modernity," is essentially a continuation of Act Four and will not be treated separately.)

"Although the drama of Catholicism-and-modernity is often described in terms of a battle between modernizers and traditionalists," said Weigel, "it is more accurate to think of it as a three-way contest among those committed to resisting modernity in all its forms; those seeking an accommodation with modernity because they believed modernity had made classic Christian truth claims and practices implausible if not false; and those seeking to convert modernity by placing

its noblest aspirations on a firmer, Christ-centered foundation." (186) This third approach would come to dominate in Acts Four and Five. It would also serve to explain the real meaning of Vatican II, which had been disputed by various factions within the Church since its close in 1965.

In the light of Vatican II, John Paul II challenged the Church to rediscover its originating purpose as a missionary enterprise. The Church is not just a missionary to the "Third World," but, perhaps now more importantly, thought the Pope, a missionary to Europe and America as well, where the "cultural crisis of the West" had intensified. The "cultural crisis of the West" included the abandonment by philosophy of first principles; the denial that there is any such thing as objective truth; moral relativism; modern political ideologies; totalitarian regimes; the sexual revolution; attacks on marriage and the family; attacks on the very idea of innate sexual differentiation and complementarity; attacks on the very ideas of "man" and "woman"; decadence in all forms of art; the vulgarization of popular culture; abortion; euthanasia; the "culture wars."

John Paul II, who was deeply educated in philosophy, and who in his life as a native of Poland had experienced first-hand modern political ideologies, was able to confront them as no one else. He also understood the growth of moral relativism in the West. His critique of political modernity from within, and his proposals for renewing and developing the modern political project, including the liberal political order, which he affirmed, built upon the foundations laid by Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* and Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno*. John Paul II, a personalist, insisted that any analysis of political community had to begin with the individual human person. To begin with anything else—for example, to begin, as modernity so often does, with the tribe, or with the social or economic class, or with the racial, ethnic, religious, or gender group—is to begin at the wrong place, and that will inevitably lead to one form or another of authoritarian repression.

John Paul II was also careful to recognize the distinction between the spiritual and temporal orders, saying that in its Social Teaching, "The Church proposes; she imposes nothing."

We can mention only briefly some of the documents promulgated by John Paul II of importance to Catholic Social Teaching. A much longer account of the thought of this Pope is called for.

Laborem Exercens (On Human Work) was issued on September 14, 1981, and this is from its conclusion: "Therefore, while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gains the whole world and loses himself (cf. Lk 9: 25), the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age. Earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom. Nevertheless, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God."

In *LE*, JPII

> . . . sought to restore to work its humanistic and spiritual dimensions. There, the first pope in centuries who had been a manual laborer taught that the essence of truly human work is not making more, and the object of truly human work cannot be simply getting more: through their work, men and women *become* more. Work, rightly understood, is humanity's participation in God's ongoing creation of the world. By sharing in that creative process, those who work (in whatever capacity) live out the capacity for responsibility that is one marker of human dignity. (Weigel 2019, 204)

Redemptoris Missio (The Mission of the Redeemer) ("On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate") was issued on December 7, 1990. It was, said Weigel, "the magna carta of the mission-driven Church of the future . . . [of] the 'New Evangelization.'" (252) It began: "The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of

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the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service. It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God: 'For if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!' (1 Cor 9: 16)." Again, the Catholic Church does not just *have* a mission; it *is* a mission. It especially must evangelize the culture.

Centesimus Annus, meaning *The Hundredth Year*, was issued on May 1, 1991. The title refers to the 100th year after *Rerum Novarum*, deemed the founding document of modern Catholic Social Thought. *CA* is one of the most important of the modern social Encyclicals. In it, the Pope further considered the political and economic orders in light of the Gospels, and affirmed the best parts of capitalism as an economic order.

CA argued that the free societies of the future would involve the interaction of three component parts: a democratic politics in which rights-bearing citizens participate in government; a free economy in which the state is not the chief economic actor, even as it regulates economic life (JPII completely repudiated socialism, as Leo XIII had); and a vibrant public moral culture. The last—the public moral culture—was deemed to be the key to the rest. JPII came strongly to the defense of both liberal democracy and the free market, but with the proviso that they are not machines that, properly designed, can run of themselves. Society requires, before all else, a moral basis. The Church would serve the late modern world by helping to form a public moral culture. Without it, liberty descends to license, license to chaos, and finally chaos to tyranny.

Where, asked JPII, do the habits of mind and heart that make it possible to live in freedom get formed? He answered by stressing the importance of civil society, especially the family, which turns small tyrants into responsible adults, the type of people who can be democratic citizens. He

sharply distinguished freedom from sheer willfulness. Freedom, in its highest reaches, is freedom for excellence.

Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth) was issued on August 6, 1993. This Encyclical challenged the post-modern idea that there is no such thing as truth, especially moral truth, that there is only "my truth" and "your truth." It argued that the natural moral law can be known by reason. It is of fundamental importance in Catholic Social Thought—as Aristotle taught, ethics precedes politics. It suggested the necessary limits to freedom in any genuine liberal political order.

Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life) was issued on March 25, 1995. John Paul II condemned what he called the "culture of death" then developing in modern Western countries manifesting itself in such "wrongs enshrined as legalized rights" as abortion and euthanasia. The Pope attacked the utilitarianism at the heart of these wrongs—after all, who is and is not "useful" was the question asked by the Third Reich and Bolshevism. Each person, the Pope maintained, has an inviolable dignity and right to life from conception until natural death.

Ecclesia in Europa (The Church in Europe) was not an Encyclical, but an apostolic letter written in 2003. It represented a kind of report card on the social, cultural, and political condition of the late modern West a dozen years after the Cold War. In it, JPII bemoaned the fact that the victory of freedom in the Cold War had not led to "a new springtime of the human spirit." Instead, in 2003, the West seemed caught in a self-made trap of "grave uncertainties at the levels of culture, anthropology, ethics, and spirituality." The West seemed to have lost its faith in the future. Solzhenitsyn had sounded a similar theme. Weigel said:

> John Paul . . . saw a late modern West in which too many had squandered their spiritual and cultural patrimony, too many were experiencing an "inner emptiness," and too many felt disconnected and lonely—all of which he attributed to "a kind of practical agnosticism and religious indifference," a self-absorption that shortened the horizon of human aspiration to immediate gratification. A world in which the transcendent was silent, he believed, had profound public

consequences: "Forgetfulness of God has led to the abandonment of man." One stream of the modern political project had deemed the God of the Bible the enemy of human maturation and freedom. But without faith in the God of the Bible, faith in reason was breaking down, and so was rationality in public life.

It was time for Europe, and the rest of the West, to leave the sandbox of infantile God-bashing and recognize the fuller truth of its history: that it was from "the biblical conception of man [that the West] drew the best of its humanistic culture, found inspiration for its artistic and intellectual creations, created systems of law, and, not least, advanced the dignity of the person as the subject of inalienable rights." (Weigel 2019, 213)

John Paul II well understood what was required for a genuine liberal political order.

JPII further added to Catholic Social Teaching the concept of "solidarity," a concept related to that of the common good. Solidarity is a social virtue. In the absence of solidarity in the sense in which JPII meant it, there can be no genuine liberal democracy. Like Solzhenitsyn (1986) and Mary Ann Glendon (1991), the Pope recognized the problems presented by an overly "legalistic" political culture. As Weigel put it:

Solidarity was, and is, a virtue, a habit of mind and heart that allowed the men and women of the late modern world to perceive in the "other" a companion and partner in a great, common enterprise, not just an "other" bound by the same laws. If the only thing that citizens of a late modern democracy knew about each other was that they had the legal capacity to take each other to law when "rights" (or "your truth" and "my truth") came into conflict, then the modern political project was in serious trouble. During the 1980s, through their banned union and movement of national renewal, Poland's dissidents had proclaimed that "there is no freedom without Solidarity." John Paul II extended that intuition by insisting that there can be no democracy without solidarity, the virtue.

How would the men and women of twenty-first-century late modernity discover a new solidarity that would re-enliven their democracies? They might, John Paul II suggested, consider the vision of human dignity and destiny embodied in Jesus Christ and proposed by the Church in a social doctrine that now included solidarity as its fourth foundational principle, building on the triad of personalism, the common good, and subsidiarity. (213-214)

Given our many confusions over sex and gender, we might also mention John Paul II"s response to the sexual revolution of the modern world, "The Theology of the Body," which has yet to be understood. Weigel characterized it thus:

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In the first part of his exposition, John Paul reread the creation stories in Genesis 1-3 through modern literary and philosophical lenses and insisted that the body is not a machine the self happens to inhabit. The body is an integral part of the full human person and the visible expression of the spiritual dimension of man and woman. Thus the body, and its capacity to offer and receive love, discloses truths about the God who breathed the spark of life into Adam and Eve. Treating the body as a machine, even a machine ordered to pleasure, is dehumanizing.

Unpacking Christ's caution against lustful hearts in Matthew 5.27-28, John Paul retrieved and developed the idea of sexual love as self-donation and receptivity, not domination or use of the other. . . . Desire for the other that includes desire for the good of the other is at the center of a passion that is truly human and informs a sexual love in which the other becomes the beloved.

Then, in the third section of his *Theology of the Body*, the Pope made his boldest proposal for reconceiving human sexuality and laid down his greatest challenge to the dehumanization caused by deconstructing sexual love into another contact sport. The God whom Christians confess in the Creed is a Trinitarian community of self-giving love and receptivity. The primordial intuition humans get of that divine reality is through the mutual gift and reception of man and woman in a committed, permanent, and fruitful relationship, a giving and receiving of which sexual love is a privileged expression. Thus sexual love within the bond of marriage, he taught, is an icon of the interior life of God.

Thus John Paul II said to post-Freudian, post-pill modernity, "When it comes to valuing sexual love, the Catholic Church will see you and raise you." (206-207)

We note here especially the Pope's insistence, consistent with the philosophical anthropology of Thomas Aquinas, that the human person is a unity of body and soul, and that the soul may not regard the body as its mere "appendage," as some sort of "machine." We do not merely *inhabit* our bodies, to be able to use them in just some instrumental sense. In a very real way, we *are* our bodies. They are an essential part of the gift of our being. The loss of the sense of these truths is at the heart of the sexual revolution, the contraception-rights movement, the abortion-rights movement, the idea of same-sex marriage, and the transgender-rights movement. The foundation of a liberal political order must be a valid philosophical anthropology, from all the way up to all the way down.

Finally, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was approved and promulgated by John Paul II on October 11, 1992 (in French), and on August 15, 1997 (in Latin, the definitive text), the first

compendium or catechism of Catholic doctrine in more than 500 years. The previous catechism, known as the *Roman Catechism*, appeared after and was related to the Council of Trent, a Council at which the Church was forced to deal with the Reformation. The current Catechism appeared after and is related to the Second Vatican Council, a Council at which the Church was forced to deal with the modern world, a Council in which John Paul II very actively participated when an Archbishop and which his Papacy was dedicated to defending and clarifying.

The modern *Catechism* consists of a Prologue and four Parts. Part Three, "Life in Christ," concerns ethics and politics. Its Section One, "Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit," consists of Chapter One, "The Dignity of the Human Peron," on Christian ethics, and Chapter Two, "The Human Community," which, in concise form, sets out the Church's social doctrine. Section Two of Part Three is then where the discussion of the Ten Commandments appears in the *Catechism*. Some statements "In Brief" from Chapter Two of interest in a consideration of liberal democracy include the following:

> 1890 There is a certain resemblance between the union of the divine persons and the fraternity that men ought to establish among themselves.
> 1891 The human person needs life in society in order to develop in accordance with his nature. Certain societies, such as the family and the state, correspond more directly to the nature of man.
> 1892 "The human person . . . is and ought to be the principle, the subject, and the object of every social organization" (GS 25 # 1).
> 1893 Widespread participation in voluntary associations and institutions is to be encouraged.
> 1894 In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, neither the state nor any larger society should substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals and intermediary bodies.
> 1895 Society ought to promote the exercise of virtue, not obstruct it. It should be animated by a just hierarchy of values.
> 1896 Where sin has perverted the social climate, it is necessary to call for the conversion of hearts and appeal to the grace of God. Charity urges just reforms. There is no solution to the social question apart from the Gospel (cf CA 3, 5).
> . . .
> 1918 "There is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom 13:1).

1919 Every human community needs an authority in order to endure and develop.

1920 "The political community and public authority are based on human nature and therefore . . . belong to an order established by God" (GS 74 # 3).

1921 Authority is exercised legitimately if it is committed to the common good of society. To attain this it must employ morally acceptable means.

1922 The diversity of political regimes is legitimate, provided they contribute to the good of the community.

1923 Political authority must be exercised within the limits of the moral order and must guarantee the conditions for the exercise of freedom.

1924 The common good comprises "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (GS 26 1).

1925 The common good consists of three essential elements: respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person; prosperity, or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society; the peace and security of the group and of its members.

1926 The dignity of the human person requires the pursuit of the common good. Everyone should be concerned to create and support institutions that improve the conditions of human life.

. . .

1943 Society ensures social justice by providing the conditions that allow associations and individuals to obtain their due.

1944 Respect for the human person considers the other "another self." It presupposes respect for the fundamental rights that flow from the dignity intrinsic of the person.

1945 The equality of men concerns their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it.

1946 The differences among persons belong to God's plan, who wills that we should need one another. These differences should encourage charity.

1947 The equal dignity of human persons requires the effort to reduce excessive social and economic inequalities. It gives urgency to the elimination of sinful inequalities.

1948 Solidarity is an eminently Christian virtue. It practices the sharing of spiritual goods even more than material ones.

. . .

1978 The natural law is a participation in God's wisdom and goodness by man formed in the image of his Creator. It expresses the dignity of the human person and forms the basis of his fundamental rights and duties.

1979 The natural law is immutable, permanent throughout history. the rules that express it remain substantially valid. It is a necessary foundation for the erection of moral rules and civil law.

. . .

Much more could be said about the contributions of Pope John Paul II to Catholic Social Teaching, especially about the great Encyclicals *Centesimus Annus*, *Veritatis Splendor*, and *Evangelium Vitae*, and about his thought generally on the person, politics, and modernity. See, for example, Schall 1982; Schmitz 1993; Gneuhs 2000; Kupczak 2000.

But for now we turn to Pope Benedict XVI's contributions to Catholic Social Thought. Benedict expressed an abiding concern with what he called the "dictatorship of relativism," in which coercive state power is used to impose moral relativism on all of society in the name of the autonomous individual and his or her desires. Benedict, like John Paul, proposed a Church that would continue to challenge modernity from within, calling it to live up to its highest aspirations by strengthening its moral and cultural foundations, which were beginning to crumble. We consider briefly four September Lectures given by Pope Benedict between 2006 and 2011.

First, and most famously, was the Pope's "Regensburg Lecture" of September 12, 2006, which threw down something of a challenge to the Islamic World, and ignited a storm of controversy. Noting that Christ was "Logos," the very "Word" of God, Benedict stressed the importance of reason over will, as had the entire classical tradition of the West. The God of the Bible, he said, is a God of reason. Benedict in effect asked if Islam could, from within its own resources: (1) Embrace religious tolerance, even freedom, as Catholicism had, finally and with difficulty, done?; and (2) Find a way to distinguish religious and political authority (that is, some separation of Church and State) in Muslim-majority states, as Catholicism had also, again finally and with difficulty, done?

Second, in Benedict's lecture on September 12, 2008, at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris, a 13th century Cistercian monastery transformed into a 21st century cultural and conference center, the Pope suggested that the monastic vocation—to seek God—was of considerable cultural

consequence, not only centuries ago, but currently. And, he said, God can only be sought because God can be known, and God can be known because God has revealed himself in the People of Israel and in Jesus Christ, that is, in the Old and New Testaments. And so Benedict stressed the importance of the prayerful study and contemplation of the Bible, saying: "What gave Europe's culture its foundation—the search for God and the readiness to listen to Him—remains today the basis of any genuine culture." And culture is (usually) upstream of politics.

Third, on September 17, 2010, Benedict gave a lecture at Westminster Hall--the oldest part of the British Parliament and the site of the trial and condemnation of Sir Thomas More in 1535—on the relationship of ethics and religion to politics. Weigel recounts what Benedict said in addressing perhaps the oldest and most important seat of liberal democracy in the world, the "Mother of Parliaments":

> Reminding his listeners of William Wilberforce's parliamentary struggle to end the slave trade—a decades-long effort motivated by Christian conviction—Benedict suggested that legal positivism, or indeed any notion of law detached from ethics, inevitably led to the abrogation of human rights, to repression, and ultimately to tyranny. Faith and reason had to work together to solidify the moral foundations of late modern democracies. . . .
>
> That proposal then led the Pope into a discussion of religiously informed moral conviction in public life. In Britain as elsewhere in the West, loud voices were demanding that religious conviction be quarantined within the sphere of personal or private life. . . . [For example, the movement to discourage the public celebration of festivals such as Christmas.] These were "worrying signs of a failure to appreciate . . . freedom of religion [and] the legitimate role of religion in the public square." And they were worrisome because they were undemocratic. For if the rights of believers to express their faith publicly and to bring religiously informed moral judgments into public life were denied, citizens of a democracy were being denied the right to bring the deepest sources of their moral judgments to bear in their civic lives.
>
> To bring religiously informed moral conviction into the public square, however, was a matter of appealing to the natural moral law, not to theological principles that could only be fully grasped by believers. The Church was not in the business of designing public policy, "which would lie altogether outside the competence of religion." The Church's role was to be a voice of clarification in

public debates, working to ensure that true moral reason was not confused with mere pragmatic calculation, and reminding late modern politics that, throughout the tradition of the West, politics had always been understood to engage questions of "ought," and specifically the question, "How ought we live together?" The natural moral law that can be known by reason, Benedict suggested, might provide a grammar allowing the divergent voices in the public square to understand each other and wrestle with each other's claims. Keeping that grammar alive in public life was the primary task of the Church. In that sense, he proposed, "Religion . . . is not a problem for legislators to solve, but a vital contributor to the national conversation." (220-221)

Fourth and finally, on September 22, 2011, Benedict addressed the Bundestag in Berlin.

Benedict, a German himself, knew that Germany was in a special position to understand what

could happen when political power is divorced from right. Like King Solomon, Benedict said,

legislators should ask for "a listening heart—the capacity to discern between good and evil, and

thus to establish true law, to serve justice and peace."

Throughout his talks, Benedict would emphasize that the civilization of the West was the

result of a fruitful encounter of Jerusalem (biblical revelation), Athens (faith in reason), and Rome

(confidence in law), and the importance of their recovery. These are, he said, the three pillars of

Western civilization, even in the modern world. Benedict brought this up again at the Bundestag.

And he argued that if the first pillar—Jerusalem (revelation)—was eliminated from public

conversation, the other two pillars (reason and law) would be weakened as a result, and perhaps

ultimately fall completely as well. Weigel recounted that part of Benedict's lecture as follows:

> What happened, [Benedict] asked, when Jerusalem was eliminated from the conversation—which meant eliminating the idea that the God of creation had imprinted the divine reason on the world, such that the world was intelligible? It seems that faith in reason itself—the Athenian factor in the equation—begins to weaken: Was that not the situation of a late modernity in which faith in reason had so atrophied that the best that could be conceded was that there was "your truth" and "my truth"? If that's all there is, however, then convictions about the superiority of law to brute force would soon weaken. Why? Because if there is only "your truth" and "my truth," and neither party recognizes anything as *the* truth, then there is no criterion or horizon of judgment by which to settle the argument. In that circumstance, someone is going to settle the argument by an imposition of power.

And if the imposing "someone" is the state, then we are back to the dictatorship of relativism of which [the Pope had earlier warned us]. (222)

Benedict had long warned that religious fundamentalism--faith without reason, fideism-- becomes irrational and leads to dire social consequences. But now, at the Bundestag, he warned that secular fundamentalism—law without moral truth (that is, legal positivism)—also becomes irrational and leads to dire social consequences. The examples of Hitler and the Third Reich, in which power opposed and crushed right, came readily to mind.

Benedict suggested, though, a way into the future, drawing on Germany's 21st century obsession with the natural environment. He pointed out that "'there is also an ecology of man. Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man is not merely self-creating freedom. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself. In this way, and in no other, is true human freedom fulfilled.'" (223) Without using the term, Benedict thus again invoked the natural law. And he maintained that "Nietzsche was wrong; there was more to more modernity than will; and the rediscovery of that something 'more'—of a reason informed by faith--could lead to a rediscovery of the deep truths about political modernity's great aspiration: freedom." (Ibid.)

As with John Paul II, much more could be said about the contributions of Pope Benedict XVI to Catholic Social Teaching, about his Encyclicals, and about his thought generally on the person, politics, and modernity. See, for example, Ratzinger and Habermas 2006; Ratzinger 2006; Schall 2007; Ratzinger 2018; Ratzinger 2019.

But by way of summary, Weigel suggests that, as articulated by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the gist of the internal Catholic critique of modernity in this drama of Catholicism-

and-modernity, and the Church's proposals for a revitalized modern project, can be summarized under three headings:

(1)   Culture comes first. Liberal democracy and the free market are not machines capable of running by themselves. Democracy and the market depend upon a vital, life-affirming public moral culture informed by virtue and law.

(2)   Reason reaffirmed. There is great irony in the fact that in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the Catholic Church has emerged as the world's chief institutional defender of the prerogatives of reason in human affairs. Given that morality had retreated into the realm of the subjective in modern life, Paul II and Benedict particularly insisted on the rational objective availability of moral truth to all persons. Democracy itself is also dependent on this.

(3)   Freedom for excellence. Freedom is not simply willfulness. Willfulness is an attribute of the immature, and it takes mature citizens to make freedom work in a liberal democracy so that the common good is enhanced. The alternative to freedom-as-willfulness is "freedom for excellence," that is, freedom understood as the moral habit of choosing the good habitually; freedom as a virtue, not just a slogan for self-assertion.

John Paul II and Benedict XVI asked the modern world not to give up its deepest hopes, but to lift up its sights to the transcendent, especially as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, who alone "fully reveals man to himself."

The story told so well by Weigel will continue. Catholicism now understands that it must continue to publicly engage the world through evangelism, and through its social doctrine intended to speak a language everyone can understand. The Church will continue to insist on reminding the modern world that it cannot leave out the story of the Bible or the story of the Church itself. Catholicism's task is now to be "a culture-converting counterculture." No matter how difficult

things get, said Weigel, "the Catholic Church has been the bearer of a message that is of critical importance to the realization of the modern project's highest aspirations" (284), and must continue to be so.

It is often said that the Church, to be "relevant," must "conform itself to things as they are," "must go along with history," "must keep up with the times." Behind these types of statements is the ideological belief that history is our ultimate guide, that it is always moving us forward in the direction we are to go, and lighting our way to a better and better future, perhaps to the realization of some sort of secular utopia, such as in the promises of scientism, or progressivism, or communism, or socialism, or any of the other ism's that have characterized and infected modernity. Behind these statements is also the belief that there are no timeless principles, whether of religion, culture, morality, law, or politics, but that everything is relative to its historical time. The Church must be opposed to this historicism and relativism. The fact that the Church, especially through its Social Teaching, has recognized that it must not be at war with the modern world, does not mean that the Church has simply given in to all of the manifestations of the modern world. On the contrary, the Church has tried to discern what is good in the modern project, to separate it from what is bad, and to redefine itself as a missionary to the modern world, for the sake of the modern world and the project of modernity itself.

For our present purposes, all of this means that the Church will continue to support, we might even say to love, liberal democracy as the political order consistent with the Christian message, but also to criticize and correct it, again out of love, to the extent it departs from that message.

David Walsh's work represents a significant—albeit of course not an "official"-- contribution to the Church's engagement with modernity, especially in its political forms. But

more than "mere" academicians must join the struggle. As an American Catholic, I am particularly concerned that lately the leaders of my Church have often been so reticent to assert in public the principles that our faith requires. Catholicism was not initially warmly welcomed into the United States, and the waves of Catholic immigrants over the years were often subjected to discriminations of all kinds. When Catholicism became accepted in America, and Catholics, like John Courtney Murray, recognized that a good Catholic could also be a good American, it was as if the American Catholic Church wanted to stop at that point. But it must recognize now that Catholicism itself, while under attack by parts of American culture, has something to provide that culture that America sorely needs, namely, a moral guidance which is often not to be found at all in our public debates, a guidance that does not require public acceptance of Catholic theology. American Catholic Bishops, or most of them, cannot afford to simply remain supine.

VIII.   David Walsh on Liberalism

We have mentioned in very summary form Professor Walsh's take on liberalism above. With the other matters we have considered, we may now delve more deeply into Walsh on liberalism and the liberal political order.

"Dostoevsky's Discovery of the Christian Foundation of Politics"

In 1987, Walsh published an article in *Religion and Literature* entitled "Dostoevsky's Discovery of the Christian Foundation of Politics," that appeared again as Chapter One in the 2013 anthology, *Dostoevsky's Political Thought* (Walsh 2013). While an early essay, appearing even before *After Ideology* (Walsh 1990), the essay reflects the spiritual depth of Walsh's consideration of political matters, and of the ultimate justification for the "liberty" that stands behind and grounds liberal democracy.

Walsh began by noting that

. . . by far the greatest obstacle to the acknowledgment of [Dostoevsky's] achievement [as a political theorist] is the radically unfamiliar character of his theory of politics. In an age of unquestioned acceptance of autonomous secular reason as the starting point for all discussion of man, society and history, Dostoevsky had the audacity to reject the reigning assumption out of hand. In its place he maintained that the point of departure for any study of human nature must be Christ, for no personal or political order can be sustained unless it is rooted in a universal, self-sacrificing love. He insisted that the moral regeneration of society could never be achieved without a rediscovery of the transcendent spiritual order from which all reality is ultimately derived. As a consequence, he elaborated the essential elements of a Christian philosophy of politics, and did it outside the context of any confessional apologetics. Therein lies the challenge of his work for contemporary political theory.

Dostoevsky's political vision is the exemplary modern statement of the necessity for Christianity as the foundation of politics, and it is so precisely because Dostoevsky's open exploration of reality followed the logic of experience rather than specific dogmatic preconceptions. It was his own confrontation with the chaos of the modern world that convinced him of the truth of Christ as both the source and criterion of order in human existence. The arguments were not resolved intellectually but were painfully worked out in the harsh reality of life. "My hosanna has passed through a great furnace of doubts." (Walsh 2013, 9-10)

Dostoevsky's project, thus described, is similar to Walsh's own.

In his art, Dostoevsky brought out the great Christian theme. "The characters of his 'novel-tragedies,'" said Walsh, "undergo the most ancient law of the cosmos: wisdom through suffering." (11) Man suffers because he has a tragically dual nature, split between good and evil, a duality mirrored in many of Dostoevsky's characters. Their problem is freedom itself, for "[N]othing predetermines the choices a man will make, and even the principle by which they will be decided must be discovered within the process." (13)

In this early work of Walsh's, we find that there are aspects of liberalism that he disavows. Thus Walsh refers to Dostoevsky's "underground man," the subject of *Notes from the Underground*, as the type Dostoevsky "regarded . . . as the characteristic individual of the modern world." (Ibid.) Such men were "the Russian intelligentsia and nobility of the nineteenth century who had nothing of value to do in their own society and looked slavishly to European liberalism

to define their meaning and purpose. . . . They sought, in a word, the sense of superiority to all. European liberalism with its deism, its faith in reason and science, its trust in the natural goodness of human nature, and its boundless confidence in the ability of progress to bring about the perfection of man and society, had been the starting point." (14) These are aspects of modern liberalism still, and we see here that Walsh would read them out of any liberalism he could support. Indeed, he goes on to say that "The self-defensive cynicism of the underground man was [the] inevitable consequence [of his attachment to this form of liberalism], once the brittleness of such rational expectations stood revealed in the confrontation with reality." (Ibid.)

After considering the "underground man," Walsh goes on to another type found in Dostoevsky, saying "The collapse of rational humanism could just as easily develop into the demonically self-assertive force of the strong personality. . . . the thirst for freedom within [the titanic personality] can only be assuaged by reducing all others to the status of the ant-hill. . . . It is a possibility that is never so close as when it is stirred by love of the dependency of another on oneself. The hollowness of liberal humanitarianism is seen to be motivated at its most fundamental level by the will to power." (Ibid.) Liberal sentiments disconnected from Christ, such as utilitarianism, the next example Walsh gives in a discussion of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*, can easily become demonic. The freedom of the closed self is empty. And so "the tyrant [is] the least powerful individual in the state." (15) Later Walsh will say that "the dream of liberal humanitarianism would become a nightmare if it were not firmly anchored in the spirit of Christian self-sacrifice." (20)

And in The Brothers Karamazov, "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," says Walsh, so effectively portrays Christ "that it has, not without justification, been considered an appropriate addition to the Christian canon." (18) Walsh quotes Konstantin Mochulsky, "'Never before in all

world literature has Christianity been advanced with such striking force as the religion of spiritual freedom. The Christ of Dostoevsky is not only the Savior and Redeemer, but also the Sole Emancipator of man,'" and continues: "It has rightly become the *locus classicus* for an understanding of the political necessity of Christianity in the modern world, for it provides an iconographic image of the unconditioned divine love that is the ultimate foundation of human freedom." (Ibid.) The Grand Inquisitor symbolizes the revolt of all those who believe that man is incapable of shouldering the burden of freedom. Walsh compares the Inquisitor to another character in Dostoevsky, "Shigalov, the ideological planner of the revolutionary cadre in *The Possessed*, [who] expressed [the same concept] thus: 'I have become entangled in my own data and my conclusions directly contradict my original premises. I started out with the idea of unrestricted freedom and I have arrived at unrestricted despotism. I must add, however, that any solution of the social problem other than mine is impossible.'" (29 n17) But God made us for freedom, our politics must take account of that fact, and liberalism, as Walsh conceives it, is the political form that embodies the logic of these propositions.

Walsh returns to Dostoevsky's critique of the liberalism on display in the Europe of Dostoevsky's time, not dissimilar from some variants of our own liberalisms:

> . . . As a modern intelligentsia [the mission of the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century] was to rescue the people from their ignorance, by introducing the light of universal liberal reason everywhere they went. The hollowness of this humanitarian project became all too apparent in its consequences, as Dostoevsky relentlessly exposed the impotence of a merely human love that flourishes in the abstract but finds in practice "that man is physically unable to love his neighbor".... Not that the ideal of a universal love of mankind is false, but that it can never be realized without the true inner transformation in the image of Christ. In turning their backs on the people, the liberal dreamers had, Dostoevsky was convinced, turned away from the one enduring source of this truth. (21)

What Walsh calls "the real nature of this liberal enlightenment did not escape Dostoevsky: contempt for human freedom." (22) Walsh further fleshes out the liberals against whom Dostoevsky wrote as follows:

> . . . They defined themselves by means of segregations. The sense of possessing a superior wisdom in science, material progress and autonomous morality was so pervasive that they felt at last as if they had escaped the human condition. It began to seem as if the road to spiritual growth could be bypassed, if only men were willing to follow the promptings of enlightened self-interest. No more would the attainment of inner maturity involve the painful renunciation of self; the golden age of reason had made realization of the free personality available to everyone for the asking. (21-22)

This liberalism eventuated in modern socialism, which sought to make man "the creature of his social circumstances and his material interests," thereby "depriv[ing] man of responsibility for his actions and, as a consequence, of his dignity as a man." (22) This reached down even into the family, so that "Fathers who saw themselves called to a universal liberal mission felt free to neglect the concrete responsibilities to their children" (ibid.), with consequences not only for the Russian family but for the nation itself. With the disappearance of the moral idea, "the survival of the nation ceases to serve a purpose." (23) For Dostoevsky, "The ideal end of . . . a renovated political philosophy . . . [was] envisioned as 'individual self-betterment' through moral growth" (ibid.), similar to what Walsh proposes for the renovation of liberalism.

Dostoevsky was concerned that in the West, the Church had been absorbed into the State, and believed that the struggle in his country was between European socialism, which he saw as nihilism, and Russian Orthodoxy. Dostoevsky, who confessed that in his youth he had transformed himself into a "European liberal," now saw "the Russian peasants as the one segment of society in which the spiritual reality of man, the core of Orthodoxy, has been preserved without dilution." (25)

In concluding this essay, Walsh said:

. . . A belief in autonomous morality can unfold into an insistence on the absolute independence of man's private conscience from any higher reality, and may be so proposed in the name of human freedom; but the inexorable result will be the radical separation from any enduring criterion of truth. The nihilism of "everything is lawful" sets at nought the value of human freedom itself. A more open unfolding of the moral intuitions of the heart would reveal the law of reality that binds all things because it has its source in God. . . . [Man living rightly] begins to discover the One in whom the victory of good over evil has been completed, and to see in Christ the one in whom the true freedom of man attains its highest recognition. It is Dostoevsky's achievement as a political philosopher to have articulated this dynamic of "living life" and to have recovered, as a result, the vision of Christianity as the core—previously lacking—which alone could provide the only true inspiration of the modern revolutionary movement. (27-28)

Whether Walsh's later treatment of liberalism represents a softening of his criticisms of certain of its modern variants contained in "Dostoevsky's Discovery of the Christian Foundation of Politics" is a question we must leave aside.

The Priority of the Person

We turn to Walsh's subsequent work on liberalism.

Many academics write books. Not all of them have projects of which individual books form a part. David Walsh has a project. He is carrying on work he believes Eric Voegelin, who passed away in 1985, might be doing were he still alive. Walsh's last book provides a sense of where his project currently stands. The book is entitled *The Priority of the Person, Political, Philosophical, and Historical Discoveries*. (Walsh 2020). *Priority*, Walsh's eighth book, is not a "new" book, but a collection of essays Walsh wrote between 2003 and 2018, together with a first Chapter, entitled "The Priority of the Person as the Modern Differentiation," which Walsh apparently wrote just for this book. Personalism is the thread that gathers the essays together, although it may not be the explicit subject of each. As its subtitle indicates, *Priority* ranges over a wide variety of academic fields, attempting as it does to demonstrate the "discovery" of the "person" in politics (Part 1), in philosophy (Part 2), and in history (Part 3).

The Preface to Priority

While our primary interest is in what Professor Walsh has written on liberalism, his recent adoption of personalism is so closely related to his thinking on liberalism that we begin with his "Preface" to *Priority*.

As the subtitle to *Priority* indicates, the priority of the person, "the missing category within the history of thought" and "a decided latecomer" (Walsh 2020 ix), was discovered in politics (Part 1), philosophy (Part 2), and history (Part 3). Referring to *Priority*'s immediate predecessor, *Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being* (Walsh 2016), the first book in which personalism became Walsh's specific subject, Walsh acknowledges that *Priority* may be a more approachable entry into his personalism. While *Politics of the Person* was Walsh's "more systematic attempt" at personalism, he "was aware of the daunting nature of the task that readers had before them" in trying "to follow the conceptual and linguistic overhaul I had attempted and then sprang upon" them. (Walsh 2020, x) *The Priority of the Person* represents "an easier and more accessible way" into Walsh's thought. (Ibid.) The essays in *Priority* gave Walsh "opportunities to think about what it means to be a person in a variety of more concrete contexts and its relation to other issues. . . . In short, this book may present a more accessible inquiry into what it means to be a person because it is unfolded in dialogue with texts and controversies that are more specific." (Ibid.)

To what is the person prior? According to Walsh, everything. His "Preface" begins as follows: "The title of the present work expresses its central assertion that the person, each person, is prior to all else that is. There is nothing higher in the universe or of greater worth. The person is the pivot around whom everything revolves. All that is meaningful in our lives flows from the persons we know and love." (ix)

What is a "person"? That is the more difficult question, and Walsh struggles greatly with it, acknowledging that "Words fail us when we try to define [persons], for they overflow all that even they can say or do." (Ibid.) We have a better understanding of "individual" and "self" than "person," although the terms are sometimes used—wrongly, Walsh would argue--interchangeably. We can only throw other words at "person," such as "Each is an inexhaustible depth in the whole of reality," "persons we know exceed all that we know about them," "Each is a mystery in himself or herself, and just as unfathomable to themselves as to us." (Ibid.) Detective stories aside, when we moderns think of mysteries, even of seemingly unfathomable mysteries, we think of things that will eventually be resolved as modern science continues its inevitable progress. There are, we would say, no such things as unfathomable mysteries, only things we do not currently know. But this is not the kind of mystery Walsh has under consideration. The mystery of the human person, of each and every human person, he would claim, simply cannot be resolved, ever. It is beyond resolution, something we can never get to the bottom of, try as we might, because it has no bottom. No top or sides either. This side of death, the person remains forever mysterious. What then can we even say about persons?

Well, that is a question to which Walsh recurs again and again. Our ordinary language is our problem. We talk about things external to us all the time, but a person is neither a thing nor external to us. "The other is never an object for me." (19) To put it in the paradoxical language Walsh himself is required to use, in saying anything about the mystery of the person, Walsh will be saying what cannot be said. Or to put it another way, what he says can only, at its best, allow us to glimpse the person out of the corner of our eye; the person vanishes back into mystery when we try to look too directly at him or her. "We do not behold what it means to be a person, but we do glimpse it in passing as we live out the primordial responsibility placed upon us." (21-22)

Personalism is more a pointing to rather than an uncovering of. Walsh is clear that his task in submitting a brief for the priority of the person is to use language in an attempt to evoke what is beyond language. The "unfathomability" of the person "means that the language we use in our mastery of a world of things is defeated in the encounter with persons who unmaster us." (Ibid.) We moderns, who are used to mastering things, are "unmastered" by persons. Quite so. But this is not our problem, Walsh would say, but our salvation.

Walsh began perhaps his most ambitious book to date, *The Modern Philosophical Revolution: The Luminosity of Existence* (Walsh 2008), with the sentence: "The dominant force of the modern world is instrumental reason" (1), the reason we use to master the world. That book went on to mine a rich vein of theretofore unmined modern philosophy in which instrumental reason, the subject-object dichotomy, was overthrown in favor of the subject, the person, the interiority of which can only be approached by that reason which is not instrumental. Now, "To sustain our most crucial conviction" of the priority of each person over all else that is, Walsh says that "we must find a way of articulating the metaphysical difference that establishes the radical priority of the person in being." (Walsh 2020, ix)

This "project is formidable, and most of what is included under the rubric of *personalism* is merely an aspiration rather than an attainment of the goal. I am under no illusions concerning the challenge entailed in developing an account of the person that is adequate to the unique inwardness of each. Our linguistic reference to third parties must be displaced to accommodate the imperative of a second-person address." (x)

The reader should not, however, be dissuaded by Walsh's admission of the formidability of the work. An entry into it is available. Reading Walsh is as much an existential exercise as a cognitive one, perhaps more so. And any reader will know, on consulting himself or herself and

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being honest about it, that there is so much more there in interiority than can ever be explained in discursive language. We *know* persons because we *are* persons. And we know that we elude every attempt to grasp ourselves. "[I]t is persons and persons alone who know persons as such. To be a person is to know what it means to be a person, more clearly in others than in ourselves. We do not ask 'What is it like to be a person?' because that is the very beginning of all our questioning. But for that very reason we cannot say what it is like to be a person." (21)

"The person, in the words of St. Augustine," quotes Walsh, "is 'a mystery so deep as to be hid from him in whom it is'" (58). The subject-object dichotomy proposed by philosophers in their attempts to understand the external world simply does not apply when it comes to understanding the deepest subject.

While personalism may be a "modern" development in philosophy, Augustine reminds us that, like all else in modern thought that is worthwhile, its pedigree is ancient. In Augustine's prayers, we also find: "You were more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest" (*Confessions* 3.6.); and "Let me know you, O you who know me; then shall I know even as I am known" (*Confessions* 10.1.). St. Paul, like Augustine, was confounded by himself: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." Romans 7:15. Long before Paul and Augustine, Heraclitus put it this way: "You would not find out the boundaries of soul, even by travelling along every path: so deep a measure does it have" (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1991, Fragment 232 at page 203) And long after Augustine, Pascal said:

> 347. Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The entire universe need not arm itself to crush him. A vapour, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But, if the universe were to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which killed him, because he knows that he dies and the advantage which the universe has over him; the universe knows nothing of this.
> . . .
> 348. . . . By space the universe encompasses and swallows me up like an atom; by thought I comprehend the world.

(Pascal 2002, 56)

All of these sayings stress, as Walshian personalism does, the "transcendence" of the person. Seeing the person as transcendent is the key, we might say, to understanding the person. But it does not reduce, it only increases, the mystery, adding, as it does, another mysterious term to "person," namely, "transcendence."

While he would not want to stress the point, since he is seeking to reach the modern audience, Walsh, who teaches in the Politics Department at The Catholic University of America, is at least as much theologian as political scientist, just as Voegelin was before him (Morrissey 1994). While assigned to academic political science departments, they each grew up in times when politics sought, as it is still seeking, to replace religion, always with disordering, and sometimes with murderous, results. So they were forced to take religion more seriously than even those for whom it was an exclusive focus, even as they were forced to take philosophy more seriously than those "professional philosophers" for whom it had become a game played with words. Personal existence becomes most serious when it is threatened with extinction. For this we have the testimony of those who survived the many and various camps and gulags of the last hundred years. The problem for Voegelin and for Walsh is the modern "climate of opinion," a term Voegelin used to designate our de-cultured culture in which religion-talk is either prohibited or not taken seriously, and in which philosophy has become an academic discipline rather than a way of life.

Voegelin sought and Walsh seeks to recall students and readers to the experience of transcendence as vertically conceived (above time), not as horizontally conceived (within time). To do this, Voegelin focused especially on the premodern. Walsh's "evolution" from Voegelin has been to find positive things in modern thought itself, things rooted in the premodern, but necessarily going beyond it, things that may have escaped Voegelin's close attention. The modern

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reader who believes, not without substantial evidence, that modernity is going-to-hell-in-a-handbasket, may find Walsh disconcerting insofar as he tends to resist that assertion. Walsh may be wrong about modernity, taken as a whole, but he is also illuminating, refreshing, and hopeful in his own way, standing athwart the onrushing force of history not so much yelling "Stop!," as so many of us do, as attempting to separate the wheat from the chaff. After all, Voegelin himself was very clear that only an ideologist claims to know how history will turn out.

And the Catholic Church herself has found much to admire and incorporate into her own teaching in and on modernity, as we have seen. (Weigel 2019) Pope John Paul II, for example, was steeped in personalist philosophy. Perhaps his ultimate statement along these lines, a statement with which Walsh would very much agree, is that it is only in Christ that the human person is revealed to himself or herself. "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light." (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, n. 22. As Archbishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyla was one of the principal architects of *Gaudium et Spes*.)

While, as we have seen, personalism has a lineage that begins much before Walsh comes to it, "personalism" as a separate philosophical movement is a positive "modern" thing, wheat rather than chaff. While personalism has become quite diverse, as philosophical movements tend to do, Walsh has his own take on it. Without limiting that take, we might say that Walsh understands personalism as the mystery of the person's participation in divine transcendence. And there we see also at least a part of Walsh's theology. The professional theologian tries to understand God, who stoops to man. Through personalism, Walsh, the professional political scientist, hopes to understand man as he reaches toward God, and thereby to grasp something of the eternal, something that escapes language, something in the participation of which both personal

and political order ultimately depend. To quote another Fragment of Heraclitus: "The path up and down is one and the same." (Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1991, Fragment 200 at page 188) Walsh himself gives us perhaps his most concise "definition" of "person" in *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*: "A person is an epiphany of the infinite within the finite." (Walsh 1997, 244)

As indicated, Walsh is, as Voegelin was, very aware of the difficulties of conveying these sorts of things in discursive language. Poetry would be better. And sometimes the language of Walsh, as Voegelin's, sounds almost poetic. But even the greatest poets recognize that any use of language always fails to "nail down" that which can never be nailed down:

> So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
> Twenty years largely wasted, the years of *l'entre deux guerres*
> Trying to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
> Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
> By strength and submission, has already been discovered
> Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
> To emulate—but there is no competition—
> There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
> And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
> That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
> For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.
> (Eliot 1971, 30-31)

Chapter One of Priority: "The Priority of the Person as the Modern Differentiation"

We will also consider the first Chapter of *Priority*, entitled "The Priority of the Person as the Modern Differentiation." The consideration is apt, because Walsh also considers the priority of the person as the heart of liberalism, and liberalism itself as the modern differentiation in the order of politics.

What does Walsh mean by entitling Chapter One of *Priority*, "The Priority of the Person as the Modern Differentiation"?

"Differentiation" was a term used by Voegelin in *Order and History* to describe advancing insights into the structure of reality, such as from cosmological symbolism to philosophy and from philosophy to Christianity. "Differentiated" is contrasted with "compact." For example, in philosophy, divine transcendent reality is differentiated from the compact cosmic symbolism in which the gods were part of the cosmos. "Differentiation of consciousness" has been defined as "Voegelin's general phrase for the process by which the discernible features of consciousness as such and its objects are noticed and given expression," and "differentiated" as "Voegelin's term for consciousness in which the distinguishable features of a previously 'compact' field of experience are noticed as distinct." (Webb 1981, 279)

And so in saying that "the priority of the person" is "the modern differentiation," Walsh is claiming something of historical importance for personalism, namely, that it is the farthest we have gotten in our understanding of reality, that the symbol of the "person" gives expression to a discernible feature of consciousness previously submerged in more compact symbols. Furthermore, Walsh is saying that this differentiation is an achievement of modernity, which we may otherwise be inclined to regard as the historical epoch in which there has been loss rather than gain.

As Walsh himself puts it in the first sentence of Chapter One in *Priority*, especially given modernity's seeming principal preoccupation with understanding and controlling the external world through the use of instrumental reason, "It may seem strange to suggest that there is a distinctly modern advance in human self-understanding." (Walsh 2020, 1) The advance is beyond the modern paradigm of the self in search of itself: "We are so familiar with the ubiquitous self in

search of itself that we tend to overlook the condition that sustains its possibility. That is, not the fleeting awareness of the self but the substantive reality of the person. Could it be that it is this metaphysical underpinning that has eluded the preoccupation with the self that has driven so much of modern thought? If it is, then the characterization of our world must appear quite differently." (Ibid.) Walsh thus draws a rather sharp distinction between the "self" and the "person" very much in favor of the latter. We encounter the modern self in, for example, Rousseau's *Confessions* (Rousseau 1953; Hartle 1983), and Charles Taylor has given us a profound study of the sources of the modern "self," which he takes to be the modern identity (Taylor 1989). Walsh maintains that it is the person, rather than the self, that is the deeper reality, and the reality that modernity has succeeded in differentiating. The symbol of the "person" has emerged from the more compact symbol of the "self." "Beyond the self," says Walsh, "is the person that is its reality. . . . The person is the whole." (Walsh 2020, 2) To explain this distinction between the self and the person, Walsh alludes to the Gospel: "Loss of self is only a possibility for a person who cannot ultimately be lost. In the language of the person, we know that it is only those who lose themselves that are found, just as those who die to themselves are raised to life." (Ibid.)

Walsh is saying that the self is an *enclosure* compared to the person, which, or more properly who, is an *opening*. An opening to what? To transcendence. We might say, as Walsh will later say, that the person, made in the image and likeness of God, like God eludes even the ascription of "being," an ascription belonging rather to things. As Heidegger put it: "Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it." (Heidegger 1962, 32)

Walsh makes the relationship of the person to transcendence explicit: "Transcendence is the medium in which the person is, for a person is transcendence." (Walsh 2020, 2) In another

place, Walsh says that "The reality of the person . . . is the ground of being that is beyond being." (12) "[A] person is transcendence" is a definition of the "person" that avoids definitiveness. Referring to the third work of his trilogy, *Luminosity* (Walsh 2008), Walsh says that the realization that a person is transcendence is that toward which "the inchoate stirrings of the modern philosophical revolution strain." (Walsh 2020, 2) The priority of the person *is* the modern differentiation. Modernity, often such a puzzle to itself, has at least birthed the person. In carrying on Voegelin's work, Walsh uses language that Voegelin might have used to declare this modern historical differentiation:

> Before reaching such a glimpse of the person, the provisional attempts may appear hopelessly incoherent, for they can hardly declare what it is toward which they strive. The inquiry recognizes its goal only in the attainment. But that is what the self-transparence of history entails. . . . History is not the history of some other entity of remote and tenuous connection with the present. It is the very meaning of what is present that is at issue. The person as the culminating reality of the whole is nowhere evident but in the moment of self-recognition that underpins the entire movement. It is thus not surprising that the obscure intuitions cannot easily be grasped before they have reached the disclosure of what underpins them in every phase. If history is the apocalypse of the person, then modernity is the moment of its realization. This is why, although the perspective of the person emerges in the preceding two centuries, its connection with the long preparation for it still remains to be clarified. We are often unsure whether to regard the discovery of the person as the culmination or renunciation of the premodern intimations that precede it. (Ibid.)

And here arise questions relative to Walsh's project as it has reached this point. What is the difference between the self and the person? That is still not exactly clear. And what does it mean to say that a person *is* transcendence? Isn't only God transcendence? Haven't all sinned, and come short of the glory of God? (Romans 3:23) What does Walsh mean by "transcendence"? He cannot mean "God," because he cannot mean that the person is God. Does he mean something like Kant meant in referring to his own philosophy as "Transcendental Idealism," in which the person is conceived as part of the material world, but at the same time somehow above it. In *Luminosity*,

Walsh discusses Kant as the modern philosopher who inaugurated "the modern philosophical revolution" after which the book is titled. Later Walsh refers to the person as "*self*-transcendence." (Walsh 2020, 5, 7-13) That helps to distinguish the person from the self, but does "self-transcendence" as a "definition" of the person differ from "transcendence"?

And if the person is "transcendence," what about the material components of a human being? In Aristotelian anthropology, a human being participates in all levels of being, from inorganic to plant to animal to reason (the specifically human) to divine. Has Walsh collapsed this anthropology? Would all of the philosophers Walsh discusses in *The Modern Philosophical Revolution* agree that their striving was toward the differentiation of the person in the Walshian sense? In referring to "The person as the culminating reality of the whole," as the recognition of which "underpins the entire movement," Walsh appears to be saying that the modern differentiation of the priority of the person is the culminating reality of history. And he seems to emphasize this in saying that "If history is the apocalypse of the person, then modernity is the moment of its realization," and in positing the premodern as only "the long preparation," which might even be "renounced." The Christian is entitled to ask, what became of the significance of the Christian differentiation? Was the Incarnation not the ultimate differentiation of the person? If so, the priority of the person may be a differentiation, but it is not modern.

In any event, following this introduction, Chapter One of *Priority* goes on to outline the discovery of the person in politics, philosophy, and history.

Walsh begins with the Greek discovery of mind, "the core of the person" (Walsh 2020, 3), not mind or reason in the discursive, Enlightenment sense, but *nous*, that faculty through which "Each human being is open to a divinity that is universally available." (Ibid.) Authority now shifts from the polity as a whole to the individual attuned to transcendent reality. "Socrates stands as the

great challenge to the collective authority of the city. He outweighs the whole. Something similar occurs with the Hebrew prophets, the Confucian sages, and the enlightened bodhisattvas. The rise of the individual is unmistakable, and becomes the point from which the modern elevation of the individual traces its beginning." (Ibid.) Here it appears that the person is not transcendence itself, but that which has the potential to be attuned to, to be in a relationship with, transcendence, and that the person who has actualized this potential is what Walsh most means by "person."

The example of Socrates illustrates how the discovery of mind posed a problem for politics, which Walsh discusses under "Politics as a Response to the Discovery of Mind." (2-7) If an individual, previously thought of as a part of the whole, now comes to "outweigh the whole," what becomes of our linguistic references to the part and the whole? Walsh traces "The difficulty . . . that there is no language adequate to this recognition of a part that is itself the whole in the most decisive respect of being able to conceive it" (4) from Aristotle through Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, and Jacques Maritain. With reference to Aquinas, Walsh tells us that "The person exceeds the whole of which he or she is a part because each is destined for union with God beyond all worldly associations." (Ibid.) However, that did not resolve the problem on the political level, and it was not until the language of rights emerged in the modern world, as an "historical rather than theoretical development," that "the person became the moral boundary of power." (5) (Here we might again cite St. Augustine who, in addition to his contributions to personalism in the *Confessions*, in *The City of God* formulated the limited state.) While some political thinkers are not excited by the proliferation of "rights talk," seeing at least in its overuse a solvent of political community (Glendon 1991), Walsh disagrees: "A system of rights, it turned out, is not a recipe for atomistic individualism, but the summit of mutual respect by which persons hold and behold one another." (Walsh 2020, 5)

Some Supreme Court opinions might be cited to the contrary, including *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992), in which, in upholding the broad abortion rights license of *Roe v. Wade*, the Court famously said: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." 505 U.S. at 851. The Court's reverence for the individual went so far as to be anarchistic. (Of course *Casey* has now been overturned, together with *Roe v. Wade*, in *Dobbs*.)

Walsh embraces rights as the essential "abbreviated" language of liberalism, the subject of his *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*, and of Part 1 of *Priority*. Liberalism is for Walsh the political expression of personalism, and much of what he says about the one applies to the other as well. For example, liberalism, like personalism, relies on an "abbreviated language" that floats over much deeper roots, and advances through practice before it is comprehended by theory. "What is striking is that, when language has reached its limits, the abbreviations of politics succeed in saying what cannot be said." (Walsh 2020, 12) "Through the struggles of common life," says Walsh, "the central notion of mutuality, as it is abbreviated in the language of rights, is glimpsed long before there is a theoretical framework adequate to its intuition." (6) It is liberalism that has rendered the conviction that "[T]he primacy of the person is what we live by" unmistakable, and that "is a singular moral advance, even if the philosophical rationale is limping far behind." (Ibid.) "The authoritative force of the liberal prioritization of the person over any collective purpose is so conclusive that it is no longer possible to suggest any scheme of subordination." (6-7) Liberalism may appear to be theoretically incoherent and even without foundation, but its durability and strength is accounted for in its practice.

The language of rights is especially important in an age like ours in which religious language has lost at least some of its influence to bind a people together:

> Even in an age when we lack the capacity to name the transcendence that marks the unfathomability of the person we are still compelled to concede that no human being ever reaches the limit of his or her worth. . . . [In the acknowledgement of imprescriptible rights] alone we seem to affirm what remains contested in every other mode of discourse. It may no longer be possible to talk about the immortal soul of each person, the image of God within, but we continue to attest to the unconditional responsibility we owe one another. . . . The practical distillation of human rights jurisprudence is the great moral achievement of our world. It is the way by which what would otherwise be invisible, the infinity of the person, is rendered visible. (7)

Here again the boldness of Walsh's claims raises questions. If, as Walsh maintains, it is "transcendence that marks the unfathomability of the person," how long will we be "compelled to concede that no human being ever reaches the limit of his or her worth" once "we lack the capacity to name" that very transcendence? Is Walsh suggesting that the language of rights will indefinitely remain the only way in which we will be able "to affirm what remains contested in every other mode of discourse"? Can we not hope to regain the language most expressive of the foundations of Western civilization, "talk about the immortal soul of each person" and of "the image of God within"? And in following some of the unmoored wanderings of our highest Court, how can we celebrate "The practical distillation of human rights jurisprudence" as "the great moral achievement of our world"?

Walsh is certainly aware of these sorts of questions and reading him often seems like an exercise in dialectics. Ironically, it is Walsh himself, the great champion of liberalism in *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*, who calls the most attention to the limits of and problems with our modern liberalism. The overriding theme of *Growth* is that in order to survive as our political order in what Walsh acknowledges to be the great moral and spiritual crisis of modern civilization, liberalism must recover and bring to its surface its deepest roots, which are in what Walsh often

refers to as "philosophic-Christianity," by which we take him to mean the genuine sources of order differentiated in history, the theme of Voegelin's *Order and History*. (In discussing Kierkegaard in *The Modern Philosophical Revolution*, Walsh notes that philosophy and Christianity themselves have depths deeper than those that can ever be grasped: "Neither philosophy nor Christianity can ever live up to itself, because no matter how much satisfaction is proposed its mere formulation exposes its mendacity. Existence prohibits us from setting any finite limits." (Walsh, 2008, 26)) Of course, once those roots are recovered, if they ever are, we will have necessarily advanced well beyond the rather bare language of even "imprescriptible rights." And if we advance far enough in recovering the deep premodern roots of liberalism, will what we have still be liberalism, that is, a political order to which all the members of a pluralist society—specifically *our* pluralist society--can repair? How far can liberalism be stretched toward the good and still be liberalism? Can the balance be kept? This is the dialectical tension sensed by the reader of virtually everything Walsh has written about liberalism, and what Walsh has written only appropriately reflects the dialectical tension of his subject. However, the same tension does not appear in Walsh's discussions of personalism, because there the political implications are not paramount.

Walsh continues Chapter One by considering the theoretical history of personalism. "To be persuaded of the priority of the person as the distinctly modern differentiation, however, requires more than acknowledgement of its practical emergence. Conviction remains uncertain so long as it is shrouded in theoretical confusion." (Walsh 2020, 7) He first proceeds to trace in summary the thought of those who founded modern liberalism, the political form of personalism, thinkers whom he discusses in greater detail in *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*. Then he traces personalism in the thought of some of the philosophers he considers, again in much greater detail, in *The Modern Philosophical Revolution*. As in *Growth* and *The Modern Philosophical*

Revolution, Walsh's reading of many of these thinkers is unorthodox--although with at least many of these thinkers there is no such thing as an "orthodox" reading.

For example, relative to liberalism, Walsh finds in Hobbes, a father of liberalism who many consider to have founded the polity of atomistic selves who agree to be united under an autocrat only because of their fear of violent death, a deeper concern with the formation of real community given the condition that there was in Hobbes's time, as there is in our own, only a "bare minimum of moral agreement." (Walsh 2020, 9) "Hobbes's central point," which, Walsh claims, is often missed, is "that it is our mutual covenant with one another that withdraws us from the state of nature." (Ibid.) Hobbes "has called attention to the extent to which human beings can bind themselves by a covenant that transcends their lives. Hobbes's anthropology may have demolished metaphysics and discredited faith, but his politics has restored them in the form of a commitment that attests to both. The kind of persons who can enter into an irrevocable covenant, one that, he emphasizes, is not a contract of convenience, are individuals who are capable of transcending themselves. They live in relation to obligations that exceed all interests and limits." (Ibid.) Who else reads Hobbes like this?

And "A similar identification of the person as the pivot of political reality is provided by Hobbes's great liberal successor, John Locke." (10) Locke, like Hobbes, if often misread. A closer reading of Locke shows that he did not "install[] . . . self-interest at the heart of the social contract." (Ibid.) Even human beings in the Lockean state of nature recognized mutual rights. "We might say that in Locke the inviolability of liberty becomes the most crucial dimension of human life," and that Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* is "his sharpest assertion of the personalist mandate." (11) "Even God, indeed God most of all, affirms the inviolability of the response [given by each person in freedom of conscience to God's call]." (12) (We believe, although Walsh may not, that

it is easier to say positive things about Locke than Hobbes. But if we recall correctly, Voegelin tended to favor Hobbes and to disfavor Locke. Political theory is a fascinating subject.)

Turning to "the opening of the person unfolded in modern philosophy" (17), Walsh contrasts the limits posed by Kant's theoretical philosophy with the expansiveness of his practical philosophy. Kant famously taught that we cannot know things-in-themselves, but only appearances. "Only the suspicion that the knowledge of such limits is already a presentiment of what lies beyond them injected a more expansive possibility into Kant's thought" (14), which Kant enlarged in his practical philosophy. ("Kant resolutely limits himself to a certain circle, and constantly points ironically beyond it." Goethe, quoted at 328, n. 36.) "The self that could not be known beyond phenomenal presentation would become the bearer of a moral imperative that transcended all else in the universe. . . . A categorical imperative implies a person who can be grasped by a primordial obligation." (Walsh 2020, 14) Kant's postulates of God, immortality, and freedom, "despite our inability to ground them in theoretical reflection, turned out to be indispensable in delineating the interior of our practical life. Only a person who transcended all finite existence could respond to the unconditional call of morality." (15) And so Kant served personalism even beyond his variant of the categorical imperative that requires us to treat persons always as ends and never as means.

With Hegel, movement became paramount. "What a person is, therefore, is disclosed most faithfully in the going beyond itself by which it aims at truth." (Ibid.) The person is "unfold[ed] ...within a whole that it perceives and yet never fully reaches." (Ibid.)

But it is Kierkegaard who, according to Walsh, "carried the [modern] philosophical revolution to its limit. He understood that the turn toward existence could not be halfhearted. Even philosophy must be subordinated to the life by which it is sustained. . . . With him the luminosity

of existence has firmly supplanted any inclination toward intentional mastery of it." (Walsh 2008, 24) ("Luminosity" is a term found in the final volume of Voegelin's *Order and History*, *In Search of Order*, and Walsh uses it, as Voegelin did, to designate a way of knowing reality other than through knowing the objects reality presents to us. There is, says Voegelin, a "paradoxical structure of consciousness and its relation to reality. . . . There is a consciousness with two structural meanings, to be distinguished as intentionality and luminosity. There is a reality with two structural meanings, to be distinguished as the thing-reality and the It-reality. Consciousness, then, is a subject intending reality as its object, but at the same time a something in a comprehending reality; and reality is the object of consciousness, but at the same time the subject of which consciousness is to be predicated." (Voegelin 1987, 15-16)) And with Kierkegaard we have the realization that "The only relationship we can have with God is a personal one, for it is impossible to know a person in any other way." (Walsh 2020, 16) Of course in the Christian mystery of the Trinity God Himself is the unity of three separate persons. God is personal. With Kierkegaard, "The personal horizon had become the ineluctable modality of thought." (Ibid.)

In the twentieth century, "Heidegger employed the German word 'Dasein' to denote that which is not simply a being because it can hold itself apart from being. What he meant by it is what we ordinarily know as the person, the one who in him- or herself we know as outside of all that they say and do. The convergence with the liberal elevation of the person, as the inexhaustible pivot of all things, was virtually complete" (17), even if unrecognized.

Others who contributed to personalism, some of whom even considered themselves "personalists," are mentioned by Walsh, including Coleridge, Martin Buber, Levinas, John Henry Newman, Walt Whitman, Karol Wojtyla, John Rawls, and Robert Spaemann. "Without surveying the multiple strands that weave the personalist garment," Walsh says, "we may concede that they

meet in the realization that the person exceeds the whole by virtue of the capacity to transcend itself on behalf of the whole. Rights and dignity are accorded to persons who are ends-in-themselves beyond the whole. That is the conviction that guided the liberal invocation of rights as inalienable and indivisible." (18) Walsh is quick to add that personalism, recognizing as it does the mutual rights of all, is not individualistic or atomistic but affirming of community. Thus he is anything but an "atomistic liberal," a liberal fixated on "autonomy."

Walsh maintains that the problem with personalism, if we may call it that, is that it requires "extensive linguistic overhaul." (Ibid.) That is, we are used to speaking about persons, as about all else in the universe, as things. But persons are the only existents that are not things. "If we were to talk, not *about* the person, but *out* of the person, then we would have to abandon the usual mode of discourse about things. . . . A significant readjustment is required." (Ibid.)

The final part of Chapter One appears under the subtitle "The Person as Beyond Being."

Other subtitles in Chapter One claimed much for the person—"The Person as Self-Transcendence" and "The Person as the Horizon of Thought"—but what can Walsh possibly mean by referring to the person "as beyond being"? In advocating for personalism, is Walsh not again thinking too "highly" of the human person?

Well, Walsh may mean that the person is "beyond being" in the Heideggerian sense that it is only the person for whom Being itself is an issue. But, especially since Walsh now goes on to mention the "heart" and "love" as principal attributes of the person, we will hazard a guess as to Walsh's meaning when he says that the person is "beyond being." The formulation reminds us of the title of a book by Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being* (Marion 2012), with which Walsh is familiar. By his title, Marion does not mean that God does not exist, but that it is limiting to refer to him with the same predicate we use to refer to everything else. "At issue here," said Marion, "is

not the possibility of God's attaining Being, but, quite the opposite, the possibility of Being's attaining to God. . . . Does Being define the first and the highest of the divine names?" (Loc 250) "No doubt," Marion continues, "God can and must in the end also be; but does his relation to Being determine him as radically as the relation to his Being defines all other beings?" (Loc 253) Unlike us, God is absolutely free "with regard to all determinations" (Loc 257), including the determination of "being." We must first *be* before we can *love*. But "are not all the determinations that are necessary for the finite reversed for [God], and for Him alone? If, to begin with, 'God is love,' then God loves before being. He only is as He embodies himself—in order to love more closely that which and those who, themselves, have first to be." (Loc 260) The God revealed as "Being" in the Old Testament (Exodus 3:14) is revealed, "more profoundly though not inconsistently" (Loc 263), as "Love" in the New (1 John 4:8). Marion's "enterprise" is to "shoot for God according to his most theological name—charity." (Loc 280) "God give[s] himself to be known . . . according to a more radical horizon" than that of Being. (Loc 327) God gives Himself as gift. "To give pure giving to be thought—that, in retrospect it seems to me, is what is at stake in *God Without Being*." (Loc 334)

From this brief discursion into Marion's naming of God "as beyond being" we return to the question of what Walsh means by naming the person "as beyond being." He appears to be saying of the person, as Marion said of God, that we would do better to think of the person as a gift rather than as a being, as a center of charity rather than merely an existent. We note that Walsh's focus here is not primarily on the person that is me, but the person that is the other, much as Marion's focus is on God as the Other:

> When the person has become the horizon within which our thinking occurs, then we cannot think about the person as a thing. The other is never an object for me. I cannot survey and master the reality of the other, but I find myself unmastered in the encounter. The observer status has been displaced when I am being observed.

It is quite unlike the dominance that marks our knowledge in all other areas, for we are known before we know. Where usually I can place myself at the center of the gaze I turn toward the world, now I have lost my primacy to find myself in an eccentric viewpoint. The displacement is radical and irrevocable. Our only chance of regaining equilibrium is to submit to the gaze of the other, greeting it with the maximum empathy of which I am capable. (Walsh 2020, 19.)

In the face of the other, Walsh appears to be saying, there can occur the self-emptying of the self, the self-transcendence, that only a person can perform. This self-emptying we also know as "love." The "face" of the other is a concept that appears in Levinas, to whom Walsh devotes a Chapter in *Luminosity*, and also in C. S. Lewis (Lewis 1984).

We recognize this self-emptying in the love artists have for their subjects. Even if the artists participated in their creation, their subjects are somehow still "others." "All artists know that they can only enter into the characters they create by discovering what is lovable about them." (Walsh 2020, 19) Walsh refers to the love of the social photographer Sebastião Salgado for those whose images he captures; of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry for the Little Prince; of James Joyce for Leopold Bloom; of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn for Ivan Denisovich; and of Miguel de Cervantes for Don Quixote. "Through his prioritization of the other the author could manage to give so much of himself, more even than he thought he possessed, to one who is merely a creature of imagination. Sympathy is the bond that opens knowledge of the other." (19-20)

Another example, from the realm of politics, is patriotism, love of country. We hear a lot these days about the sins of America. But on the 4th of July we celebrate America, much as we hope that on our own birthdays those who love us will celebrate us, our many sins notwithstanding.

We are in all cases drawn toward the other whom we love. And the Other may finally be God. As St. Augustine put it: "My weight is my love. By it I am carried wherever I am carried. By Your Gift we are inflamed and carried upwards. We glow inwardly and go forwards." (*Confessions* 13.9) And: "You made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in

You." (*Confessions* 1:1) And from the Gospel: "Where your treasure is, there shall your heart be also." (Matthew 6:21)

It is finally love on which Walsh wishes to focus in his personalism, as Marion wishes to focus in his theology, even as Aquinas did—as, not coincidentally, Christ focused in the Gospels. "It is only with the heart that one sees rightly, as the Little Prince observed." (Walsh 2020, 19) Discursive reason, the subject studying the object, gives way before the heart. There is knowledge and there is love, and the highest form of knowledge is the knowledge gained only through love. Only a person can love. We recall here St. Paul's famous poem on love: "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." (1 Corinthians 13:2) It is only love that never ends. (1 Corinthians 13:8) "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:12) Our happiness, Aquinas says, that for which we do all that we do, consists finally in the vision of the divine essence, in seeing God face-to-face, for only then will all our desiring and seeking be completely satisfied. (ST I-II, Q. 3, A. 8) "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

"Love is generative in all respects," says Walsh, "not simply sexual." (Walsh 2020, 20) The priority of the person is finally, as in charity, a prioritization of the other. We are displaced.

> We must be ready to acknowledge the profound readjustment required. . . . The unmastery that the other effects on my thinking is not in any sense a defect or a weakness but the point of maximum clarity. It is precisely in yielding place to the other that I transcend myself most completely and live most fully in attunement with the transcendent horizon that frames me. There is good reason to suggest that along with the prioritization of the good, the true, and the beautiful, we should add the person as the ultimate priority beyond them.

Just as knowledge consists in putting ourselves in the place of what we want to understand, so its highest form is reached in the most total forgetting of self. (20-21)

Walsh goes so far as to claim that "Rather than constituting a species, each [person] is a species whose membership is limited to one." (21) He cites St. Thomas in support, at *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 50, A. 5. (Walsh 2020, 328, n. 46) However, in Question 50 Aquinas is not considering persons, but angels. Angels are purely spiritual creatures, whereas man is the composite creature, corporeal and spiritual. *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 50, Prologue. In *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 50, A. 4, Aquinas affirms that the angels, as purely spiritual creatures, differ in species, each angel constituting a separate species. He does not say the same about persons. Individual human beings, by virtue of their corporeality, are all part of the same species, but Thomas does say that God directly creates each human soul. *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 98, A. 1. Origen held that human souls and angels are all of the same species, but Thomas disagreed. *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 75, A. 7. Thomas also explained how it is possible for there to be many souls of one species, the human, while it is impossible for many angels to be of one species. *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 76, A. 2, ad. 1. Taking this altogether, while it is therefore incorrect to say, on the authority of St. Thomas, that each person is a species whose membership is limited to one, it is correct to say that each human soul is the product of God's creation. Indeed, some trace the origin of the concept of the person to *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 90, A. 2, in which Aquinas, citing Genesis 1:27, "God created man to His own image," said that the soul cannot exist except by creation, and to *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 90, A. 3, in which Aquinas said that the rational soul is produced by God immediately, who alone can create. And so we must agree with Walsh a page later when he refers to "the uniqueness that each person is," and continues: "When dealing with a species that defeats the idea of a species we are better served by adhering to the singularity that in every instant

remains. Kierkegaard in hewing closely to the imperative of living comes closest to the formulation when he declared, in relation to Abraham, that 'the individual exceeds the universal.'" (Walsh 2020, 22)

Much as Voegelin lamented the separation in Western culture of its great symbols of order form their engendering experiences, Walsh laments the problems, in language and dogma, that keep us from "retaining awareness of the unrepeatable that constitutes each person." (Ibid.) Walsh briefly traces the history of the uncoupling of the experiences of interiority from their formulations. Thus the discovery of mind, *nous*, was "handed on [as a datum] as if [it] could be externally received. . . . Mere repetition, the bane of institutional education, could so easily masquerade for the reality." (Ibid.) We recall Voegelin's lament that the substance of philosophy conveyed with such clarity in the dramas of Plato tended to flatten out in the discursive writings of Aristotle. (Voegelin 1964b) And "even the great opening to interiority in Christianity could not forestall its eventual occlusion in the specification of dogma. . . . Despite the formidable effort of Augustine to articulate the mutual self-giving that is the life of the Trinity, with all of its enormous implications for our understanding of what a person is, he was aware that even there the language of the person was already slipping away. *Prosopon* had been replaced by *hypostasis*, or 'substance,' in the dogmatic formulations." (Walsh 2020, 23) The discursive form of Scholastic disputations was problematic for the experiences relative to which the disputations occurred in the first place. In the late medieval period, there was the rupture of mysticism and theology. The consequences of all of this are that even though "Persons, with their transcendent longings, remain, and, though some are able to find their home within the institutional home of religion, many wander in search of a spiritual fulfillment they are hard-pressed to locate." (Ibid.) Some seek "spiritual fulfillment" where it can never be found, in radical political movements that seek to

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overturn the existing order in favor of a perceived utopia, often to be achieved only by violent means. "Out of this arises radical Islam of today, just as the millenarian mystical anarchists did, and apocalyptic revolutionaries of all stripes. . . . The lethality of human beings without a concept of the person is on full display. This is why the recovery of the person as the horizon of all of our thinking and acting is of such significance. But neither classical nor traditional models can be so easily adopted to the purpose, given their modulation away from the inwardness in which the other is encountered. This was the inspiration that lead to the rise of personalism, including the term itself, in the nineteenth century." (23-24)

And so, Walsh concludes:

> We must be prepared to follow the implication that the person is beyond being. . . . The re-elaboration of a personalist account of persons long predates the emergence of the term. . . . In that way we might reread the history of modern philosophy, and all of the return to the Greek and Christian beginnings, as an attempt to develop what Kierkegaard finally acknowledged as a language of paradox. When we must talk about that which cannot be talked about, then we must adopt a syntax that promptly overturns itself. The person who exceeds everything in the universe also exceeds all that can be said about him or her. Only God can adequately pronounce the name of the other.
> The chapters that follow are an attempt to acknowledge the priority of the person that not only affirms the principle but continually submits to its imperative. (24)

Talking about persons with the "reverence" owed to them is an especially "formidable" "challenge" because it is "an alternative worldview to reductionistic materialism," seemingly our default position. (24-25) To confront the challenge, Walsh intends to call upon not just philosophy and revelation, but also art, which "In some respects . . . possesses a unique advantage, for it does not have to establish its bona fides on the basis of a divinity or an order beyond itself. . . . In a world from which spirit has been expelled, art proves its inextinguishably." (25)

And so Walsh's personalism as beyond being is finally grounded in charity. Love precedes being as the name for the person even as it precedes being as the name for God. Personalism is not

a matter of atomistic individualism, privacy, or the wholly inward. The person is revealed in the response to the call of another, as Mary was called by the angel to "the possibility of the Incarnation." (26) God's "call has rendered us, too, vulnerable. Revelation occurs only when it is glimpsed through the self-revelation of the other. The person who can give the response of yes is the epiphany of what a person is." (Ibid.)

We have spent considerable time on Chapter One of *The Priority of the Person* because it is the only Chapter written especially for the book, and because it summarizes Walsh's personalism, the theme that runs, usually implicitly but sometimes explicitly, through the remaining Chapters of the book, including those on liberalism, to which we will soon turn.

The Growth of the Liberal Soul

Part 1, Chapters Two through Six, of *Priority*, entitled "The Political Discovery," focuses on liberalism, which Walsh sees as the "political discovery" of personalism. The political discovery of the person occurred in and through liberalism. Walsh's examination of liberalism is much more thorough in his book-length treatment of the subject, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* (Walsh 1997), and so we will consider *Growth* before returning to Part 1 of *Priority*.

Walsh is a great champion of liberalism, but he has struggled with it. A year before *Growth* came out, he published an article in *First Things* entitled "Rights Without Right" (Walsh 1996), which might be categorized with the critiques of liberalism *per se* discussed above. Ironically, it appeared in the same issue of *First Things* in which the famous Symposium on "The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics" appeared. (Bork 1996, 18-42) In his article, which was not part of the Symposium but which fit with its theme, Walsh insisted that human rights, the center of any liberal order, were senseless unless tied to the moral right, to the good (Walsh 1996, 10-11), and of course the liberal order is ostensibly structured to prescind from

considerations of the good. We have, Walsh noted, many rights, including rights to enjoy

pornography, to burn the American flag, to abort fetuses, to euthanasia. But are these rights right?

Walsh insisted, *contra* Rawls, that the good ought to prevail over the right. While a certain

latitudinarianism "has preserved the liberal democratic peace" (10), "The problem is that concrete

moral issues have been preempted by the liberal presumption of privacy, and the relentless

extension of the liberal language of autonomy has removed a common moral framework from our

society." (Ibid.) Walsh lamented that "Somewhere we have lost our hold on the sense that there is

a moral order independent of our choices and wishes" (10), and wondered what had caused so

momentous a loss. He answered that question as follows:

> We can point to many suspects in history as the cause of this loss, but only
> their common character really matters. It is the fate of a liberal political tradition to
> progressively consume its own moral substance. By removing more and more of
> the controversial issues from the public sphere and placing them in the private
> realm, it conveys the inexorable sense that there is no common moral order. There
> are only the "values" we choose to apply to ourselves. All that matters is that we
> are legally right in asserting our rights claims, and the legal order is finally accepted
> as the only moral order. (Ibid.)

In his 1996 article, Walsh thus blamed liberalism for disconnecting us from the common

moral world; predicted the fate of a liberal political tradition as the progressive consumption of its

own moral substance; and denigrated the concept of rights as collapsing the moral into the legal.

This was as harsh a criticism of the liberal order as could be found. Even then, however, Walsh

did not advocate the rejection of liberalism. "The problem is to find a way to make [the

independent] moral order a presence in the public square amidst the dominant ethos of relativism."

(Ibid.) He proposed that we refuse to collapse morality into law, and use law rather to "establish

that what was legally permissible . . . was nevertheless not morally acceptable." (11) Walsh cited

the examples of Lincoln and slavery, and the proposed federal legislation to make partial-birth

abortions illegal. "What one could do [own slaves] and what one should do were quite different

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matters [for Lincoln], and while it was not possible to prohibit the former it was certainly possible to restrict and anathematize it. Lincoln expected that, over time, slavery would disappear as a result of this strong disapprobation." (Ibid.) There is "an order of right beyond rights," Walsh said; "What we have a right to do may not in fact be right to do." (Ibid.)

One year later, *Growth* evidenced that Walsh's views on the nature of liberalism had changed, to say the least. A leap of sorts had occurred. Some conservatives criticized *Growth* on the basis of arguments Walsh himself had made in his 1996 article. But while *Growth* does not mention "Rights Without Right" (in listing Walsh's publications up to that point, the article itself does say that *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* is "forthcoming" (Walsh 1996, 11)), it would be unfair to say that the Walsh of 1997 simply stood in contradiction to the Walsh of 1996. A careful reading of *Growth* reveals that it still contained the most hard-headed critique of liberalism possible, and sought to resuscitate liberalism, not to bury it. What changed was that Walsh had come to appreciate that liberalism is capacious, durable, and with "thick" roots in what Walsh called "philosophic-Christianity" anchoring what might appear to be a "thin" surface. On Walsh's re-reading, liberalism was capable of assuming not just the form in which he found it in "Rights Without Right," but other forms as well, forms in which it did not "consume its own moral substance," but recovered and grew from that same substance. Walsh had come to think of the liberal order the way Chesterton thought of the Catholic Church, that it appears much larger when one is inside it than it appears if one is just looking at it from the outside.

Growth was the middle book of what Walsh came to regard as his trilogy, comprised of *After Ideology: Recovering the Spiritual Foundations of Freedom* (1990); *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* (1997); and *The Modern Philosophical Revolution: The Luminosity of Existence*

(2008). Each book built on what came before, and each book can be considered an exercise in personalism in different manifestations.

After Ideology (1990), the first book of the trilogy, appeared to be consistent with many other works produced in the twentieth century with the theme that modernity itself had gone terribly, murderously wrong in its issuance into totalitarian political ideologies. Voegelin and many others, profoundly disturbed by the turn things had taken in the twentieth century, had themselves written along similar lines. (For example: Talmon 1960; Cohn 1961; Manuel 1965; Lowith 1967; De Lubac 1969; Voegelin 1969; Talmon 1970; Niemeyer 1971; Chambers 1980; Crossman 1987; Voegelin 1990; Muravchik 2002; Voegelin 2007. The popular dystopian novels of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley might also be cited.) These works, or many of them, and many others, might be thought of as "conservative" in the sense that the strongest opposition to modern political ideologies came from conservatives, although Voegelin, for one, refused all labels, including "conservative."

While Walsh also refuses that label, or, for that matter, any other currently fashionable label, *After Ideology* was consistent with conservatism insofar as it bemoaned what modern political ideologies had wrought. The book came out shortly after the collapse of Communism. To answer the most important questions left in the wake of the disintegration of what Walsh called "[T]he last of the great ideological movements" of the twentieth century (Walsh 1997, xi),[1] Walsh turned to the four thinkers who were the focus of the book, namely, Dostoevsky, Camus, Solzhenitsyn, and Voegelin.

A deeper reading of *After Ideology* shows that it distinguished itself from other works that described modern political ideologies *from without*. Walsh selected Dostoevsky, Camus,

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[1] Of course, as noted earlier, in retrospect we cannot say that the ideological movements of the twentieth century are dead and buried. Quite the contrary.

Solzhenitsyn, and Voegelin because they had, in various ways, *descended into* ideologies and *suffered them* before *ascending out* of them. *After Ideology* sounded themes that run through all of Walsh's subsequent work, which is existential rather than discursive, practical rather than theoretical, and focused on the depths revealed in and through the human person. It was itself a book of "existential personalism," seeking to understand not so much the abstract questions of philosophy as the lived experiences of those whose lives required them to approach the deepest and most concrete questions with the most seriousness. Its focus was on the mystery of persons who, through suffering, somehow found the resources to refuse to be mastered by the evil so close to them. How was it, Walsh was asking, that a single person, such as a Solzhenitsyn, surrounded by the lies of an entire society, not unlike Socrates, came to "outweigh the whole"? (Walsh returns to Solzhenitsyn in Chapters Twelve and Thirteen of *The Priority of the Person*.) As Solzhenitsyn himself put it, quoting a Russian proverb, "*One word of truth outweighs the whole world.*" (Solzhenitsyn 1972, 27) (One of the things Walsh most appreciates about liberalism is that it gives persons the freedom to find the truth. Of course liberalism's critics might say that it does little to help them find it, but, as we will see, Walsh proposes that liberalism "grow" in the direction of truth.)

At the end of *After Ideology*, the reader's sense was not so much of the differences among the thinkers (Camus was not a Christian, and Voegelin at least arguably was not a Christian in an orthodox sense), but of what they held in common: suffering the experience of ideology had compelled them to recover the deepest moral and spiritual dimensions of existence denied by the ideologists themselves. As Walsh was to say in *Growth*, "We are participants within reality, not spectators above it. What we know can be gained only from the intimations available to us from within the participatory experience." (Walsh 1997, 231) This participatory perspective unites all

three works of the trilogy, and the essays in *Priority*. The insight Walsh gained in *After Ideology* "into the priority of existence over all formulations of it became the thread for exploring the impressive achievement of political order that also characterizes our world" (Walsh 2008, xi), that is, the achievement of the liberal order as explored in *Growth*. The same insight then later became the thread for exploring modern philosophy in *Luminosity*. The theme of *Growth* is that philosophy and Christianity, "philosophic-Christianity" as Walsh often calls it, are the basis of the liberal order, and Walsh says of them that "like all the great symbolic traditions, [they] can only be understood from within the order they articulate. . . . We cannot step outside the perspective of human beings to gain any more objective viewpoint on the whole. We cannot penetrate beyond the mystery of the process within which we find ourselves, nor reach any more definitive account of the inescapable structures of order that compel us." (Walsh 1997, 260-261)

We might say that whether Walsh planned it in advance or not, *After Ideology* led to *Growth* led to *Luminosity* led to personalism, and that the themes of the later works can also be found, albeit sometimes only in nascent form, in the former.

If *After Ideology* was about persons struggling *against* ideology, the next work in the trilogy, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* (1997), presented Walsh himself struggling *with* liberalism, as he had in "Rights Without Right," but in a rather different key. *Growth* stressed that the ultimate foundation of liberalism, which seems at times to be a foundation-less order, is the freedom and dignity of the human person revealed in the tradition of philosophic-Christianity. Rather than proceeding through *Growth* in the order in which it was written, we will limit ourselves to discussing important aspects of it.

First, Walsh finds modern liberalism, despite its seeming lack of roots, to be remarkably durable. Especially given that "Rights Without Right" did accurately describe a variant of

liberalism, and perhaps the one most thought of as the paradigm of liberalism, Walsh was initially most struck by the question of how liberal democracies managed to defeat the robust ideologies of communism, fascism, and nazism. Upon what resources did liberalism draw? In what principles, if any, did liberals deeply believe? Walsh noted that even "the most eminent liberal statesman of the twentieth century, Winston Churchill," uttered "scarcely a word that explained why a liberal order is superior to a fascist one." (Walsh 1997, 79) And Walsh quoted T.S. Eliot post-Munich:

> We could not match conviction with conviction, we had no ideas with which we could meet or oppose the ideas opposed to us. Was our society, which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premises, assembled around anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends? (quoted in *Growth*, 20.)

Walsh wanted to examine the "unexamined premises" of liberalism, to discover how, perhaps to the surprise of the liberal orders themselves, they had defeated totalitarianism both "militarily and politically." (Walsh 2008, xi) And he found that it was "liberal political practice [] which recurrently called forth an actualization of the virtues indispensable to sustaining it. . . . The abbreviated language of rights, it turns out, contained within it the possibility of the growth of the soul by which responsibilities are eventually served. A surface incoherence conceals an inward coherence that is nowhere revealed except through existence itself." (Ibid.)

Second, on a fuller reading of *Growth*, "practice" is only a partial explanation for the strength of liberalism. The "unexamined premises" of liberalism that explain its strength, that account for the durability of its practice, turn out to be what Walsh often refers to as "philosophic-Christianity." There is a tension in Walsh's hopes for liberalism. At times he appears to be saying that the practice of liberalism as it currently is will continue to be enough to sustain it. More frequently he says that, to endure, liberalism must recover and make public its own roots in

philosophic-Christianity. Or perhaps he is saying that the practice of liberalism itself will eventually lead to the recovery of those roots.

In any event, Walsh's defense of liberalism is not based on the usual reasons, such as that it is a necessary compromise in a pluralistic society. Rather, Walsh, using the Voegelinian concept of "differentiation," which, as we have seen, he also used to discuss personalism in Chapter One of *The Priority of the Person*, finds that the liberal order is the political order most fully differentiated within the philosophic-Christian tradition itself. He calls for the reinvigoration of liberalism by the existential recovery of the philosophic-Christian tradition in which it was birthed.

While many are in agreement with Walsh's concept of the origins and roots of liberalism in Christianity, as we have also seen, many do not share this view.

Walsh considers the history of modern liberal thought in some detail in *Growth*, and his reading of it refutes the argument that Christianity and liberalism are discontinuous. Walsh finds some contemporary liberal theorists, for example, Michael Oakeshott, helpful, but limited by their failure to root liberalism in transcendent reality. In contrast, he finds that the fathers of modern liberalism generally support his thesis as to liberalism's roots in philosophy and Christianity. Here he explores in detail, and, as we have said, sometimes in perhaps unorthodox readings, readings with which other thinkers might generally disagree, Hooker, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Tocqueville, and Mill. (Walsh's concern is with modern liberalism, and he does not return to the Biblical and subsequent Christian sources we have discussed above.) On Walsh's account, each of these thinkers faced different aspects of social fracture, each evidenced a concern for the moral and spiritual underpinnings of the society so fractured, and each contributed to the development of genuine liberal theory. That is, while none of these thinkers sought to root the societies of their times wholly in philosophic-Christianity, which in any event would not have been

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possible, they each sought to root it in as much of that tradition and the requirements of social cohesion as their times would permit. Their efforts were intended not to overcome philosophic-Christianity, but to carry as much of it into the public order of their times as possible. Their interest was to save philosophy and Christianity, not to bury them.

But the modern thinker who, according to Walsh, provides the deepest grounding for a liberal order was not a philosopher, and not a thinker most would consider in this context, but a novelist, Fyodor Dostoevsky. We considered Walsh's 1987 essay on Dostoevsky above, and we now turn to Walsh's subsequent thought on Dostoevsky as a political thinker.

As previously indicated, Walsh finds in Dostoevsky, though a "mere novelist," the greatest "theorist" of the liberal order, much as Henri de Lubac found Dostoevsky to be the greatest "prophet" of the modern world. (De Lubac 1969, ix) It is in Dostoevsky's stories that we find the secret to "living life," rather than just theorizing about it, "the priority of existence over all formulations of it."

We should mention here that Walsh did not just find philosophic-Christianity at the bottom of liberalism; as suggested by "Rights Without Right," not to mention the critics of liberalism, Walsh also found a certain nihilism lurking there. Conservatives who read *Growth* as a panegyric to liberalism miss the parts of it that contain the strongest possible criticisms of the liberal order. They exist alongside those parts that point to liberalism's greatest strengths. *Growth* is an exhausting read, going, as it does, dialectically back and forth between the weaknesses and strengths of liberalism. One is at times never quite sure how it will all come out, and in that way Walsh's reading of liberalism mirrors the reality of the thing. Given Western knowledge of and even participation in some of the greatest evils of the twentieth century, "the suspicion of nihilism as the truth of the liberal tradition comes as no surprise. It is only shocking to liberals themselves

who had always assumed that they stood for something more. . . . Like the rest of the modern world, the liberal tradition can only overcome its own nihilism by going through and beyond it." (Walsh 1997, 24-25)

In *Growth*, because of the nihilistic possibilities within liberalism, Walsh often profitably plays Dostoevsky off against Nietzsche. (In *Luminosity*, Walsh argues that Nietzsche has been misunderstood, places him in the context of the modern philosophical revolution that Walsh so much admires, and devotes an entire Chapter to him.) In *Growth*, Walsh admires Nietzsche's great scorn, similar to Tocqueville's, for unreflective, self-satisfied liberalism. (Walsh 1997, 26) Only the English, thought Nietzsche, were so stupid as to believe that the great structure of Western morality could survive without God. "Both Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky defined the crisis of the age in almost identical terms as the recognition that God is dead and that everything is permitted." (259) "Like many of Dostoyevsky's heroes, [Nietzsche] could not live in a world without God. He experienced the abyss opened by the loss of God with a depth unknown to liberal self-assurance." (29) And Walsh's principal concern, as that of Voegelin before him, is the recovery of sources of personal and political order eclipsed in modernity after "The very foundations of morality had collapsed" with the "murder of God." (27)

Nietzsche recognized the need to overcome nihilism, and thought he could go through and beyond it via the overman. But there was an alternative to the idea that man could extend grace to himself. "The crisis of the Christian world (which is, after all, what the crisis of the modern world is about) could just as easily lead to a deeper rediscovery of the Christian truth. That is the path uncovered by Nietzsche's great contemporary explorer of the spirit. At the same time that Nietzsche was struggling with these issues in Germany, Dostoyevsky was undertaking a parallel spiritual journey with very different results." (29) In contrast with Nietzsche, it was Dostoevsky

who finally overcame nihilism by going through and beyond it--to Christianity. And the principal theme of *Growth* is that liberalism itself must also overcome nihilism by going through and beyond it to philosophic-Christianity. "It was the Christian idea of the soul whose origin and destiny is transcendent that first made it possible for the individual to stand over against society and the world, as a reality that can never simply be contained by them. This was the source of individual rights. To this, Christianity added the related idea of the equality of all souls before God." (28) Here we see Walsh's "personalism"—paradoxically, as Walsh might put it in the language he uses to say the unsayable, the person can never be contained by that within which the person is contained.

Dostoevsky, who appeared in *After Ideology* as one of the figures who had worked his way through the horrors of ideology, now reappeared in *Growth* to rescue liberalism from the criticism that it is nihilistic. And it is in the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* that Walsh finds the ultimate justification for liberalism, and liberalism's ultimate roots in Christianity. In the figure of the Grand Inquisitor we find the sharpest possible brief against any order that permits the mass of mankind their freedom. The Inquisitor maintains, literally in the face of Christ, that man cannot be happy as long as he is free, and that Christ, in refusing the three temptations of the Devil, "condemned" man to be free. The Inquisitor tells Christ, "We have corrected Thy work and have founded it upon *miracle*, *mystery* and *authority*. And men rejoiced that they were again led like sheep, and that the terrible gift that had brought them such suffering [freedom], was, at last, lifted from their hearts." (Dostoevsky 1957, 237) It is only by taking away human freedom, the source of the problem, that mankind can be made happy, "for nothing has ever been more insupportable for a man and a human society than freedom." (233)

But in eliminating man's freedom, the Inquisitor "cannot care for man because there is no longer any means of knowing what it is that makes man worthy of care." (Walsh 1997, 31)

It is Christ's silence in the face of the Inquisitor's accusations, says Walsh, that "establishes the most profound connection between Christ and the defense of human freedom." (Ibid.) Not everyone may appreciate the political implications of the Legend for liberalism, but Walsh does. In the Legend, "the defense of freedom is pushed to its limit. When the attack against it comes from the most radical perspective, the nihilistic overturning of all values, only the spiritual truth of Christ is sufficient to withstand the assault." (Ibid.)

"Dostoevsky understood," says Walsh, "as no one before him had so clearly, that Jesus is not only the spiritual redeemer of mankind but also its political emancipator. . . . Through his willingness to suffer all the consequences of human freedom, including his own crucifixion, he makes unmistakably clear the value he places upon it. Through the unconditioned love of God for man, human freedom is made possible." (32) The gift of human freedom is the necessary condition that makes it possible for each person to develop, or to fail or refuse to develop, his or her full potential as a person. We may, and so often do, make a mess of things because we are free, but to take away freedom is to take away "the very thing that makes life itself worthwhile." (31) "Those who have rediscovered human freedom on the far side of nihilism affirm its spiritual foundation. The question now is whether the liberal tradition itself can rise to the truth of liberty discovered outside of it." (32) While this question structures the remainder of *Growth*, Walsh has, through Dostoevsky, made his essential point that the significance of liberalism is that it is the greatest possible political bulwark of human freedom, and that, while it may be silent, as Christ was, as to the depth of its commitment to freedom, that depth is always there, beneath its surface, waiting to be rediscovered and brought to public consciousness.

The political significance Walsh assigns to the Legend is emphasized by his return to it later in *Growth*, at 226-233. There he advances it as the answer to "the fundamental question" that the founders of modern liberalism and its exponents failed to confront because they had not gone far enough. Instead they had turned liberalism into a form of "secularized Christianity," "and [their] failure contributes more today than ever to the confusion afflicting the liberal tradition." (Walsh 1997, 226) The fundamental question is, "Is liberty worth the risk?" (Ibid.) The Inquisitor, answering with the firmest of "No's," eliminated the risk by eliminating liberty. But Dostoevsky was able to provide the other answer to the question because his "spiritual depth enabled him to reach a level of insight indispensable to, yet not easily accessible from, the liberal perspective. Fyodor Dostoyevsky provided the most profound defense of liberty of the century in large measure because he was not tied to the boundaries of the liberal vocabulary." (Ibid.)

And so Walsh again considered the Legend, in which Dostoevsky, prophetically recognizing that in modernity liberty was about to come under the most ferocious attack, especially in his own country, set out through his narrative its essential defense by "articulat[ing] the connection with transcendence that was inchoately present but nowhere fully explicated within the liberal tradition itself. Dostoyevsky uncovers the Christian depth of the liberal impulse." (227) The Legend makes it plain that man must live in the tension resulting from the freedom that causes his suffering but also expresses his humanity, his personhood, and permits its full unfolding, even unto the transcendent. "The tensions endemic to the liberal construction find their resolution only in that movement toward transcendent being that is their inspirational source." (275) Liberty is not just worth the risk in secular terms, but divinely sanctioned.

"Without God," Walsh concludes, "the mystery of the interrelationship of freedom and irresponsibility becomes insupportable. . . . The liberal faith is at its root the Christian faith that

the value of a human being cannot be quantified. . . . Dostoyevsky's meditation establishes a limit beyond which the secularization of liberal politics cannot go. It is incompatible with dogmatic atheism." (231-232)[2] Liberalism, as noted, is the political expression of personalism. As Walsh later puts it, "At the heart of the liberal order is a lively respect for the mystery of the person, the concrete individual before us, whom we sense is always more than he or she has or will disclose. A person is an epiphany of the infinite with the finite." (244)

From his second meditation on Dostoevsky's meditation, Walsh then turns in the last part of *Growth*, Part III, "Outline of a Renovation," to his own "attempt to reformulate liberal political theory," to "explore the extent to which it can continue to be a living tradition of retrieval and reevocation today. How is it possible to enlarge the liberal soul in the present?" (233) We do not have time to explore Part III in any detail, but his answer to that question is at least suggested in what we have already said. "Our own reflection on the character of liberal order," Walsh says in Part III, "has brought to light its dependence on spiritual and moral sources that are only adequately unfolded within the premodern traditions of philosophy and Christianity. The difference is that we have reached it by way of a meditation from within the liberal tradition." (259) The effort to

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[2] In a Note, Walsh cites Konstantin Mochulsky as "among the few commentators who recognize the deep significance of Dostoyevsky's 'Legend,'" and quotes Mochulsky:

> . . . the accusator's speech becomes the greatest theodicy in world literature. . . . With unheard-of force [Dostoevsky] affirms *freedom* as the image of god in man and shows the Antichrist principle of power and despotism. Without freedom, man is a beast, mankind—a herd; but freedom is supernatural and superrational; in the order of the natural world there is no freedom, there is only necessity. Freedom is a divine gift, the most precious property of man. . . . *Freedom is an act of faith*. Atheistic lovers of mankind reject God, in that evil exists in the world. But evil exists only because there is freedom. Under this false compassion for the sufferings of mankind is hidden a diabolic hatred of human freedom and the "image of God" in man. Here is why, beginning with love of mankind, it ends in despotism. . . . Never in all world literature has Christianity been advanced with such striking force as *the religion of spiritual freedom*. The Christ of Dostoevsky is not only the Savior and the Redeemer, but also the Sole Emancipator of man. (Walsh 1997, 349, Note 15)

Walsh has also written on the "Grand Inquisitor" in an essay entitled, appropriately for our purposes, "Dostoevsky's Discovery of the Christian Foundation of Politics." (Walsh 2013) *See also*, Sandoz 2000. For a wonderful concise analysis of *The Brothers Karamazov*, *see* Morson 2021.

recover the premodern traditions of philosophy and Christianity, without which liberalism cannot survive, and which was prompted by "the depth of the moral disintegration of the contemporary world" (263), was the great work of Voegelin, among others, from whom Walsh, as his student, has greatly benefited, as he acknowledges. (And here Walsh mentions, in addition to Voegelin, Gadamer, Strauss, Gilson, Maritain, and MacIntyre, and he calls them, and others like them, "The new traditionalists." (260))

Walsh and Father Ernest Fortin thus both recognize the need to "improve" the liberal order, and they each call on premodern sources to do it. In addition to the paramount fact that Fortin does not think very much of liberalism, while Walsh admires it greatly, the other difference between them is that Fortin, who does not see any connection between liberalism and Christianity, seeks to impose those premodern sources from without. Walsh, who maintains that the premodern sources of liberalism are already within it in the forms of both philosophy and Christianity, seeks to expand the liberal soul by having it meditate more seriously from within its own tradition.

Walsh, like Fortin, is an academic who writes primarily for other academics. How successful can an academic effort be to renew an entire public order? Well, we know that academic writings have greatly affected the real world, for better and, in modernity, for worse. And the effort to affect the liberal order, not just the only order we have but the only political order on the horizon, by suggesting how it might be improved, even if contained in an academic journal or book, is a noble effort, and reminds us of Voegelin's hope for his own *magnum opus*:

> I have spoken of remedies against the disorder of the time. One of these remedies is philosophical inquiry itself.
> . . . ever since Plato, in the disorder of his time, discovered the connection, philosophical inquiry has been one of the means of establishing islands of order in the disorder of the age. *Order and History* is a philosophical inquiry concerning the order of human existence in society and history. Perhaps it will have its remedial effect—in the modest measure that, in the passionate course of events, is allowed to Philosophy. (Voegelin 1969b, xiv)

Third, and this point is a key to a conservative's appreciation of Walsh's approach to liberalism, Walsh maintains that liberalism does not entail progressivism, indeed, that it is "the illusion of progress" itself that is "The factor that has prevented liberal self-understanding from recognizing the need to attend to its own foundations." (82) There are progressive liberals, so many in fact that the term is almost a redundancy. Walsh is not one of them. Progressivism is, after all, an ideology, perhaps *the* ideology, the ersatz religion, of our day, although it takes many forms.

Some traditional conservatives reject liberalism because it appears to be necessarily or at least usually tied to the ideology of progressivism in one or another of its various forms. And of course not just left-liberals, but some right-liberals, insist on attaching progressivism to their brand of liberalism. The question necessarily arises, then, of whether in championing liberalism Walsh is also thereby championing progressivism, and, if so, is Walshian liberalism after all just another political ideology, rather than a form of genuine political order?

On the contrary, Walsh calls for the conceptual separation of liberalism and progressivism for the sake of liberalism itself. There is, he believes, no necessary relation between liberalism and progressivism. In fact, he sees progressivism as the great temptation that rushed in to fill the void vacated by philosophy and Christianity in modernity, a temptation that threatens the human freedom promoted by liberalism rather than supporting it. Sounding very much like Voegelin here, Walsh says:

> When the philosophic-Christian presuppositions had sunk below the level of articulate discourse, becoming bare, silent presuppositions, then it was possible for a variety of distorting influences to shape the context as well. One of the most potently seductive was the idea that the burden of moral struggle would gradually be relieved through the inexorable effect of progress. The attraction of this myth is perennial since the human condition imposes the necessity of struggle as the price of growth in every age. Inevitably, the painful nature of the requirement invites imaginations of its abolition. What renders such perennial musings so fatal in the modern period is that, in the absence of the rationality derived from philosophy and

Christianity, they are not subjected to critical examination. Indeed, the fantasy of progressive self-perfection can even clothe itself in the residual appeal of salvation history. (Walsh 1997, 82)

T. S. Eliot put this same thought in poetic form:

> They constantly try to escape
> From the darkness outside and within
> By dreaming of systems so perfect
>   that no one will need to be good.
> But the man that is will shadow
> The man that pretends to be.
> (Eliot 1934, Loc. 669 et seq.)

Christianity is rejected, especially in modernity, because Christ failed to perform the Messianic-political operation many expected of him. As Dostoevsky illustrated, in rejecting the Devil's three temptations, especially the last, which would have given him rulership over all the kingdoms of the world, Christ left man with his freedom. And in the exercise of that freedom, Christ enjoined man not just to be "good," but to be "perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

Recognizing that liberalism does not mean progressivism is one of Walsh's most important insights. Progressivism in its various forms, an ersatz religion, is the great temptation of liberalism, especially insofar as liberalism chooses to remain publicly unconscious of its real foundations in philosophy and Christianity. Since progressivism is arguably now our public religion, and since liberalism is inarguably our public order, the two are often conflated, and it may not be possible to keep them apart. Progressivism rushes in to fill the void left by a retreating Christianity. But Walsh sees that liberalism can and indeed must stand on its own. Progressivism is just another ideology. It may usually be more benign that the most apocalyptic ideologies, but it posits "second realities" nonetheless, with the consequence that personal and political contact with the "first reality" is lessened and may eventually be lost. Liberalism, while itself representing a "progress" in the forms of political order, is in fact a "conservatism" when divorced from progressivism.

Walsh notes that "There is not the slightest hint of an expectation of the moral improvement of humanity in the urbanely austere reflections" of two of the greatest liberals of the twentieth century, Michael Oakeshott and Friedrich Hayek. (83) Indeed, if liberalism was actually rooted in progressivism, that would completely upend Walsh's thesis that it is rooted in philosophic-Christianity. Those who criticized *Growth* on the basis that Walsh had embraced liberalism may not have seen that an embrace of liberalism need not be an embrace of progressivism, although it so often is, as it is with, Walsh notes, Rawls, Mill, Dworkin, and Rorty. To invoke Voegelinian language, the eschaton is not immanentized or immanentizable, even gradually.

But concerns remain.

First, not many would deny that our present political order is deeply troubled. The causes are many. To what extent is liberalism itself to blame, the question raised, as we have seen, by so many anti-liberals? To what extent progressivism? To what extent the both of them together? Even if we see a distinction between liberalism and progressivism, can we shift all of the blame to progressivism?

Second, can liberalism and progressivism really be separated? Walsh lays out the condition that has caused their linkage, that is, the loss of the genuine sources of moral and spiritual order in our modern culture. Walsh's concern is that if liberalism remains in its present state, without attachment to its deeper roots, it will not be able to resist the continuing seductions of progressivism. Not only nature, but also culture, abhors a vacuum. But there is a larger question here. In order to overcome progressivism, will it not be necessary for philosophic-Christianity to revivify not just liberalism, but, first, Western culture generally? Can liberalism be revivified at all without the revivification of the larger culture of which it is only the political form? Again, is

Walsh himself being utopian in thinking that progressivism can effectively be separated from liberalism?

Fourth, in his writings on liberalism, Walsh has distinguished himself not only from those conservatives who have given up on liberalism entirely, including those who level a total critique at liberalism, but, more subtly, from his own intellectual predecessors as well.

As for the first group, both they and Walsh agree that a profound civilizational crisis of meaning has engulfed the modern world, but they and Walsh disagree as to a way out. They urge that liberalism be abandoned or at least shunted off to the side. Walsh urges that the depths of liberalism be brought to its surface. These other thinkers are various, as we have seen, and we do not do full justice by labeling them all as merely "anti-liberal," given the rich profusion of their thought. As indicated above, we might include among their number Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, who has emphasized the extent to which Christians have become more and more "strangers in a strange land" (Chaput 2017); Rod Dreher, who has bemoaned our current situation to the point of urging that we take "The Benedict Option" and drop out of it altogether (Dreher 2017); also Anthony Esolen, who sees the modern world as "ashes" (Esolen 2017); and Patrick J. Deneen, who has stated flatly that liberalism has "failed" (Deneen 2019).[3] Given that conservatives trace much of their anger to what the United States Supreme Court has made of our polity, we might also again cite the Symposium in the November 1996 issue of *First Things* on "The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics" (Bork et al. 1996, 18-42), in which Walsh's article on "Rights Without Right" also appeared, and about which two books were published (Muncy 1997; Muncy 1999).

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[3] Deneen reviewed the other three books in *First Things*. (Deneen 2017, 49-54) Deneen, who has emerged as one of the foremost critics of the liberal order, had published an earlier article in *First Things* entitled "Unsustainable Liberalism" (Deneen 2012), to which Daniel J. Mahoney (Mahoney 2012) and Paul J. Griffiths (Griffiths 2012) responded.

While *Growth* came out in 1997, before more recent events further disturbed the liberal order, it is not clear that any events since 1997 would have changed Walsh's fundamental attitude toward liberalism, or his hope for its existential growth. His tribute to liberalism was not based on an analysis of its manifestation at any historical time, but on what he took to be its essential characteristics, now at least partially eclipsed. Walsh is not an historicist as far as liberalism is concerned. Compared to authors like Chaput, Dreher, Esolen, and Deneen, Walsh is both more sanguine about our current order, and more hopeful about the possible growth of that order still from within its liberal form. And he suggests that their longing for some order other than liberalism is itself a form of utopianism, a devastating, but here a penetrating, criticism to hurl at any conservative. Notwithstanding that criticism, one would at least like to hear more from Walsh on what he thinks of "current events"—for example, the continuing availability of abortion, same-sex marriage, the proposition that there are (perhaps many) more than two genders, the fact that our nation is borderless, the fact that many members of one of our two major political parties have openly embraced socialism, that fact that variants of Marxism are taught in our public schools, and the fact that many believe our social order is so rotten that it must be torn down and begun over with something completely new. What might he say is the relationship of these "current events," if any, to the fact that we live within a liberal political order?

As for the second group, if *Growth* distinguished Walsh from many conservative thinkers, it also, and more startlingly, distinguished him from those academics he counted as mentors, including Voegelin and others like Voegelin who have been suspicious of the legitimacy of the liberal order without having considered it to the extent or in the way Walsh has, thinkers who implicitly or explicitly long for a return to a more "substantive," "thicker" political order. Walsh addresses this significant "break" at two places in *Growth* (98-101 and 238).

First, Walsh notes that a thinker of the rank of Alasdair MacIntyre hopes for the "transformation of the liberal tradition into one of the earlier, more coherent traditions," but without saying "[H]ow such a conversion might come about and how the process might be set in motion." (98) "In this regard," Walsh continues, MacIntyre

> is representative of a very formidable movement of thought that has been gaining momentum since the beginning of the [twentieth] century. The discovery of the richness and depth of premodern philosophical traditions, such as the classical and the medieval, has convinced many thinkers that only the infusion of truth from these sources can save the liberal ethos. Left to itself, the tradition remains irretrievably bankrupt. This is particularly the conclusion of the generation of European émigrés, such as Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, who witnessed the corruption and disintegration of liberal democratic regimes before the onslaught of totalitarianism. Arendt, too, often sounds as if she is speaking from a Greek perspective, with her emphasis on the immortality of publicly effective action. The long-standing Catholic critique of liberalism from Leo XIII to John Paul II is similarly rooted in the conviction of the superiority of natural law and solidaristic perspectives over liberal atomistic individualism. (Ibid.)

Walsh notes that these thinkers "are all friendly critics of liberal democracy in the sense that, unlike revolutionary ideologues, they wish to see it improved rather than abolished. . . . But they cannot see any way that the moral residue of liberal order might be coherently expanded to secure it against its inherently centrifugal tendencies." (98-99) Given the emphasis liberalism places on "individual autonomy," it must be replaced by a tradition "with 'more substantive presuppositions of truth.'" (99)

Walsh separates himself from this "very formidable movement of thought," a movement of thought in which he himself was nurtured, by saying that "despite [its] evident merit," despite the fact that "the charges directed against the liberal construction are largely valid, and the greater cogency of premodern spiritual and philosophical traditions is indisputable," "it is also difficult to avoid the suspicion that the evaluation too is tinged with a certain utopianism," "an element of escapism." (Ibid.) Rather than giving up on liberalism, Walsh advocates its remediation for the

sake of "the growth of the liberal soul" that is the subject of his work, while understanding that "those who have reached a personal viewpoint of greater meaning and depth," such as Voegelin and Strauss, are tempted to simply give up on liberalism altogether. (Ibid.)

Later Walsh, noting his own conclusion that "Liberal philosophy cannot be satisfactorily expounded within the immanent framework of liberal formulations" (238), put the point this way:

> Many commentators, such as MacIntyre, Strauss, Voegelin, Grant, and others, have largely concluded there is nothing more to be said and that liberal democracy is therefore a hopelessly incoherent symbolism. There is no denying the plausibility of this conclusion, especially as we witness the spiraling cacophony of voices in our own public square. But even if it is a case of a fool rushing in where angels fear to tread, I cannot altogether suppress the equally powerful evidence of an order that works despite its manifest and multiple deficiencies. For all its incoherence, liberal democracy continues to function as the overarching framework of our large and complex social existence and, despite everything, is the one authoritative measure of moral truth accepted in the relativized plurality of spiritual traditions. None of this can be counted a negligible achievement, nor is its order merely ephemeral. For better or worse we must live within this tension-ridden order that is the only publicly available definition of our world. (238)

Fifth, Walsh very appropriately describes liberalism as a "tension-ridden order."

As Walsh confessed, on approaching the subject he was initially struck by, on the one hand, liberalism's undeniable durability, and, on the other hand, by its seeming lack of theoretical coherence. As he put it in the Preface to *Luminosity*, he wrote *Growth* "to address this mystery of inexplicable success."

Liberalism, he found, exists in a paradoxical tension that explains both its durability and its seeming theoretical lack. Liberalism, as Walsh conceives it in *Growth*, is like an iceberg, with just enough revealed on the surface to show that it is there and that it has to be taken into account, but with that much greater mass that sustains it and keeps it afloat submerged in the depths.

The first aspect of the liberal paradox is that the very strength of the liberal order is that it requires public adherence to very few principles on its surface, such as that government should be

limited, that persons have rights, and that freedom is of primary importance (although now at least the first of these principles seems to be in virtually total eclipse, with the consequence of impairing the other two), and so can sustain political order in a modern pluralist society in which the hold on "the common" in the Heraclitean sense is limited. And yet this strength of the liberal order is at the same time its weakness. Because it requires adherence to very few public principles, those residing within a liberal order may begin to doubt that there are any strong principles holding it up, that it has any ability to hold the whole together. They may even come to doubt that there are any principles that can be held in common, and even to doubt the existence of objective truth itself. The whole idea of the "common good" may disappear. A kind of centrifugal force may develop as the members of a liberal order chase after their various desires, their various perceived goods, some real, most only apparent, and they may then go their separate ways to such an extent that the liberal society in which they live itself begins to dissolve. Some think this is now happening within the American liberal order, that liberty has become only license. And some analysts of liberalism stop with that very dark scenario and call liberalism itself into question as a viable order.

Walsh, however, returns us, dialectically, to the second and greater aspect of the paradox of the liberal order, which is that the very few, seemingly prosaic principles on its surface are anchored in the deepest philosophic and Christian insights of the West, and that those insights demonstrate that freedom, "liberty," the term from which "liberalism" itself is derived, properly understood, is a necessary condition for the unfolding of the full potential of every person and of every society. No other political order provides that condition. To express it most simply, liberalism is based on the public recognition of the dignity and unsurpassable worth of each and every person. Walsh's attraction to liberalism prefigured his later attraction to personalism. As we have noted, for Walsh, liberalism is the modern political differentiation as personalism is the

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modern philosophical differentiation. Liberalism is not just an order completely caused or made necessary by historical forces, such as the decline of medieval Christendom, the wars of religion, and the Reformation; not just a necessary but unfortunate political compromise as the only order that is acceptable given our deculturated society and modern pluralism; not just an order founded on Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, or any other single individual thinker; but the political order most fully differentiated and required by philosophy and Christianity. "Liberal order itself," Walsh argues, "represents an advance within [] a frame of reference" similar to "the eruption of the great spiritual movements, philosophy and the world religions"; "it is not simply a compromising response to the disintegration of the medieval Christian order." (Walsh 1997, 83)

Sixth, *Growth*, like Walsh's other works on liberalism, leaves us with difficult questions. If the liberal order grows as Walsh wishes it to, will it still be a liberal order? And if it can grow and still remain liberal in the Walshian sense, will it lose many of its modern members who embrace variants of it that, for example, repel orthodox Christians?

Because of the tensions within liberalism, balance is essential. If liberalism lacks enough substance on its surface, the liberal order will dissolve for lack of coherence. If liberalism raises too much substance to its surface, the liberal order will dissolve for lack of adherents.

What did Walsh mean by "The Growth of the Liberal Soul"? He did not seem to mean primarily that liberalism had grown morally and spiritually in the course of its historical development, although he seems to have meant that as well, and certainly demonstrated it, but that liberalism has to grow in the future if it is to confront and survive the great moral and spiritual crisis of modernity. While liberalism is the only order we have, and while it is utopian to wish for an altogether different order, liberalism itself cannot stay as it is.

As Walsh said as a prelude to Part 3 of *Growth*, in which he set out his "Outline of a Renovation": "We have seen how liberal political order has been sustained in the face of the difficulties that confronted it; now we must explore the extent to which it can continue to be a living tradition of retrieval and revocation today. How is it possible to enlarge the liberal soul in the present?" (Walsh 1997, 233) How can liberalism "grow"? Walsh found most contemporary liberal thinkers, including Oakeshott, perhaps his favorite among the moderns, wanting. Walsh's proposal is that liberalism grow by recovering its own roots in philosophy and Christianity. Such a recovery would have to occur on the level of public consciousness. But if Walsh is right that liberalism is rooted in philosophy and Christianity, and if he is also right that those roots must now be brought up from the depths into the light of day, is he not risking the liberal order itself? Again, in his own hope for its growth, is Walsh himself being utopian?

Ironically, given the nature of liberalism, raising the question of whether liberalism has a foundation, and what that foundation is, threatens the liberal order itself. We noted earlier Walsh's statement: "Those who have rediscovered human freedom on the far side of nihilism affirm its spiritual foundation. The question now is whether the liberal tradition itself can rise to the truth of liberty discovered outside of it." (Walsh 1997, 32) If the liberal tradition *cannot* rise to the truth of liberty discovered in philosophy and Christianity, then will it be something Walsh cannot champion? If the liberal tradition *does* rise to the truth of liberty discovered in philosophy and Christianity, then will it still be liberalism? If the liberal soul grows too much, will it burst the liberal order? "Secular liberalism" is almost a redundancy, like "progressive liberalism." And the two often go together, so that to say the one is to include the other. Think of Eric Voegelin's characterization of secularism as the re-divinization of society, as the second phase of immanentization in which, following the first Joachite phase, the connection with Christianity was

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lost. (Voegelin 1969a, 106 and 117-121) It is the modern secular liberal who is most at home in liberalism today, and while the modern secular liberal may be satisfied to live in an order that does not uphold any conception of the good, will he or she be willing to live in an order recognizably philosophic and Christian?

This is the tension the reader notices throughout *Growth*, a tension of which Walsh himself is also certainly aware. Does Walsh's insistence on some public recognition of the ultimate roots of liberalism not bring him out on the side of those who claim that liberalism, in its modern forms, has failed and must be replaced by the much stronger traditions of philosophy and Christianity? Is *Growth* the Trojan Horse by which Walsh seeks to sneak philosophy and Christianity back into our public order? Or is Walsh saying, as he says in other places, that it is liberal *practice* itself that will revive liberalism, that will "call[] forth an actualization of the virtues indispensable to sustaining it"? Since virtues are habits, can virtuous liberalism be practiced even by those who are not in touch with its philosophic and Christian roots, which are also the roots of the virtues themselves? Or does the practice of liberalism issue forth not just in an actualization of virtue, but in the recognition that the virtues are themselves rooted in the tradition of philosophy and Christianity?

Walsh's examples of liberalism's strengths usually involve its confrontations with orders that seek to destroy it, such as Communism, Fascism, and Nazism. In those confrontations, it was the liberal political orders that emerged triumphant, often to their own surprise. But can liberalism reconnect to its deeper roots in the absence of confrontations as serious as those?

Even though he emerges as a champion of liberalism, Walsh is not a champion completely enamored of his cause. His high praise of liberalism co-exists with his sharp critique of it. He does not seek to maintain liberalism as it currently is, but to "transform" it, albeit in the direction of

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what he takes to be its original meaning. He admits flatly that "Whether reading MacIntyre, Strauss, Voegelin, or Arendt, one comes away with a very strong sense of the power of the Platonic or Thomist viewpoint on the world and of how paltry the confused gropings of modern liberal philosophy really are by comparison." (Walsh 1997, 99) Where Walsh parts from these thinkers is in his "realization that the liberal conception is the only option available to us for the foreseeable future," and in his willingness "to think through the way it might be internally redirected to overcome its manifest defects." (Ibid.) "Without some concrete indication of how liberal democracy might be nudged toward the transformation," says Walsh, "it is difficult to resist the conclusion that the discussion has been merely an exercise in longing for an irrevocably vanished past. After all, what is the purpose of reflecting on the superiority of the premodern traditions if it is not to draw them into this world as a source of order? . . . A way must be found to give the philosophic-Christian tradition a public voice; otherwise, it will go the way of all traditions compelled to shrink to a wholly private level." (99-100) This sounds as if Walsh's concern is primarily with the recovery of philosophy and Christianity, and with liberalism only as a way to bring philosophy and Christianity back into the public square. He is clear, after all, that "Liberal philosophy cannot be satisfactorily expounded within the immanent framework of liberal formulations." (238)

Walsh believes that modern liberalism can be "redeemed" by an infusion into it of the premodern. We join him in that belief and in that hope. For Walsh, "the liberal conviction [is not] an unalterable fixed quantity." (100) It is a tradition on which, as with all traditions, it is possible to build. "The principal object of this study is to show how such a meditative expansion within liberal politics can take place. . . . It is crucial that we at no point depart from the liberal self-

understanding." (101) Some would ask, Is it possible to undertake a meditative expansion within liberal politics *without* departing from the liberal self-understanding?

In any event, Walsh is engaged in a precarious balancing act. If liberalism itself represents, at least to a certain extent and certainly in some of its variants, the rejection of the premodern, how much of the premodern can be injected into liberalism without rendering it something other than liberalism? And for liberals of the most secular and progressive variety, will not the injection of anything premodern, anything that rejects, even partially, "liberal neutrality," anything that looks like the advocacy of some good, constitute not a legitimate expansion of liberalism but anti-liberalism? Is Walsh's proposed "meditative expansion" of liberalism to spell its remediation or its transformation into something else? And at what point would we know if Walsh has crossed that line? Further, how can Walsh accomplish his objective without "depart[ing] from the liberal self-understanding"?

Well, Walsh has a different conception of the origins of modern liberalism than many other modern liberal thinkers, arguing that the modern liberal tradition was conceived not against philosophy and Christianity, but with a view to absorbing as much of philosophy and Christianity as possible into the public order of the times within which the greatest modern liberal thinkers emerged. With that conception, Walsh is engaged in a brave attempt to resuscitate the liberal order from within its own tradition, even if it seems easier to take another path and declare simply that liberalism is dead and should be buried.

But these sorts of questions remain, in part because liberalism itself is such a protean concept. At the conclusion of Part I of his study in *Growth*, Walsh tells us that in Part II, he will "delve more deeply into the liberal tradition to discover what resources might be available to renew it from within," and that then in Part III, "With that deeper understanding of its nature in mind,"

he will "take account of the limitations and strengths that conjoin to form the liberal tradition. In that way we will have a means of exploring the extent to which the limits can be expanded and the strengths exploited to constitute a more substantively moral politics. The conversion that MacIntyre and others look to must, like all true conversions, occur within the soul of the penitent." (101)

But again this brings us back to the question of the nature of modern liberalism. Is it not a political order that abjures a "substantively moral politics," "conversions," "souls," and "penitents" altogether? We, with Walsh, hope not.

Seventh, what is the proper relationship between freedom and authority in Walshian liberalism? (As a relevant aside, we understand that Professor Walsh's next book may be on the subject of authority.)

Authority takes many forms, including the authority of culture, religion, morals, law, and education. Authority limits freedom, but there can be no society, and no common good—and no liberal political order--without it. Should political theory devote more attention to authority than to freedom?

Vukan Kuic begins his "Introduction" to Yves Simon's *A General Theory of Authority* (Simon 1980) as follows: "With her sure insight into the human condition, Hannah Arendt suggested some years ago that the reason why we no longer understand the idea of freedom is that we no longer understand the meaning of authority. She was right, of course, and what is more, this situation cannot be said to have improved since." (Simon 1980, 5) And Simon begins his work on authority as follows: "The issue of authority has such a bad reputation that a philosopher cannot discuss it without exposing himself to suspicion and malice. Yet authority is present in all phases

of social life. . . . Why is it that men distrust so intensely a thing without which they cannot, by all evidences, live and act together?" (13)

Walsh himself frames the issue in this way:

> Liberal political philosophy has long been in need of a coherent means of integrating its emphasis on the inviolability of individual liberty with a recognition of the substantive moral order whose actualization is the justification for the preeminence of liberty in the first place. Can we on the one hand insist that men and women must be free to make up their own minds and follow their own mode of life and on the other that there are certain moral principles by which they must be guided and toward which they might be encouraged and constrained to submit? This is the well-known conflict between liberty and authority that has bedeviled liberal politics in one form or another from its inception. Is there not some root incompatibility between freedom from all pressure and the subtle and not-so-subtle conjunction of pressures in a particular direction? Equally, is there not something profoundly contradictory in the defense of a liberty that is exercised only in the direction of reducing and even destroying the capacity for self-realization itself? (Walsh 1997, 268)

Getting the relationship between freedom and authority right is a fundamental part of the balancing act to which liberalism commits itself.

Part 1 of The Priority of the Person

We return now to Part I of *The Priority of the Person* (Walsh 2020), the Part in which Walsh explores the political manifestation of personalism that is liberalism. It consists of Chapters Two through Six.

Chapter Two of Priority: "Are Freedom and Dignity Enough? A Reflection on Liberal Abbreviations" (2003)

Chapter Two of *Priority*, entitled "Are Freedom and Dignity Enough? A Reflection on Liberal Abbreviations," which we touched on above, first appeared in 2003, six years after *Growth*. The essay echoes many of the same themes sounded in *Growth*.

Walsh takes the term "liberal abbreviations" from Oakeshott, as mentioned, one of his favorite modern liberal thinkers. "Political language, Michael Oakeshott has taught us, consists of

a set of abbreviations for a far more concretely extended knowledge." (Walsh 2020, 29) The language of rights in liberalism constitutes "liberal abbreviations."

Walsh contrasts two views of liberalism. On the one hand, "Traditionalists have increasingly concluded that the situation is hopeless" (30), and that the liberal project was misconceived from the start. On the other hand, "The assessment hardly fares better when we turn to the contemporary standard-bearers of the liberal impulse—the progressive liberals" (ibid.). Walsh's example of the second group here is John Rawls. "There is no way to articulate a conception of right that utterly avoids taking a position on the good." (31) In contrast, says Walsh, "The burden of this book [essay?] is to suggest that both of these perceptions are mistaken." (Ibid.) The reasons for their mistakes are similar to those advanced in *Growth*. Liberalism has been undeniably durable, precisely because it "evok[es] a substantive reality far deeper than the critics' misgivings." (Ibid.) "[T]he failure to perceive the hidden liberal strength . . . lies in the misunderstanding of the genre of liberal abbreviations. . . . Not only are [the] principles [of liberal regimes] merely summative of a larger philosophy of existence, but they have been developed to function without explicit reference to that sustaining moral universe." (31-32) As in *Growth*, Walsh's point is that "the surface manifestations [of liberalism] may conceal a larger underlying reality, from which crises and confrontations can draw forth reserves of virtue that surprise even the practitioners themselves. To appreciate this possibility we must examine the structure of liberal political thought." (32)

Walsh posits three characteristics of a liberal regime.

First, it is based on a minimum consensus, just enough needed to sustain a political order. Here he acknowledges that "In our own day the contraction of consensus has perhaps gone so far that many suspect we may have reached the vanishing point. Whether we have is a question to be

tested, but, before hazarding a conclusion, we should make sure we understand more clearly what is entailed in the concept of a limited consensus." (33) As in *Growth*, Walsh finds that "Liberal principles emerge . . . as the residue of resonances that remain of the Christian evocation of the transcendent finality of the person. At the heart of the liberal construct is the recognition of the person as an inexhaustible source of value." (34) The "limited" liberal consensus, so conceived, is thus not as limited as it appears.

This leaves us, again, with the question of whether a "residue" can long maintain a political order. And here Walsh seems to go further than he went in *Growth*. He says that "To the extent that the articulation takes place outside of an explicitly Christian context, it represents a secularization of the Christian revelation, but it is not for that reason any the less durable as an acknowledgment of our common self-understanding. Indeed, the very stability of the liberal formulation arises from the residue of Christian resonances that remain within a social setting from which explicit theological reference has largely withdrawn." (Ibid.) Liberalism may "be a way of preserving spiritual openness with a less substantive theology." (35) In *Growth*, we thought Walsh was urging that liberalism assume a *more* substantive theology in order to survive. But he is not done—see the third characteristic below.

The second characteristic of a liberal regime is that it heightens the dignity of the person. "What makes a secularized spirituality more likely to prevail is explained by the second characteristic feature of the liberal construction. Beyond the formation of consensus on implicitly transcendent principles, there is also a distinct heightening of certain aspects of individual dignity." (Ibid.) The importance of the concept of "autonomy" as central to liberal self-understanding makes its appearance here—although, considering what the United States Supreme Court has made of this word, we have our doubts about its propriety. "[A] moral advance," Walsh continues, is sensed

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in these principles. (36) "[Liberalism] has been able to establish itself as the primary moral framework, despite its inarticulateness, because it has derived its central conviction from the preceding traditions of philosophy and Christianity." (37)

Consideration of the third characteristic of a liberal order brings back Walsh's principal theme in *Growth*:

> If it is to lead toward substantive enactments and not dissipate the impulse in vacuous idealism, the focus on human rights must still draw upon the richer background of spiritual communities and traditions. A militantly secular liberalism can scarcely be sustained. This broader dependence on the differentiated religious traditions, especially Christianity, is the third essential characteristic. The relationship may be indirect, but it is nevertheless crucial. To the extent that the liberal construction represents a secular derivation of the central Christian opening toward transcendent divinity, it is inextricably involved in the relationship with revelation. However, the expression of that relationship can run a wide gamut ... The transcendent dignity of the person can only be preserved in its relationship to that which is itself transcendent.
> The problem is that this dependence is impenetrable from the secular liberal perspective. . . . the relationship of the liberal movement to the spiritual tradition whence it received its birth, and on whose sustaining depths it still depends for its resonances, is one of great ambivalence. . . . Without any clear relationship to transcendent Being or any developed account of the human trajectory, one has difficulty sustaining the rationale for treating each human being as the only inexhaustible center of value in the universe. (Walsh 2020, 37-38)

Walsh's statement here of the principal problem of the liberal order is set forth with more clarity and concision than in *Growth*. What is not clear is whether Walsh himself thinks our liberalism is "militantly secular." Many do think that it is, and if they are right, it cannot, on Walsh's account, be sustained without what would amount to a "social conversion" of sorts, that is, its own acknowledgement, at least in some form along the "wide gamut" of its dependence on Christianity. But that is, again on Walsh's account, seemingly the last thing it wants to acknowledge. Liberalism's dependence on Christianity "is impenetrable from the secular liberal perspective." Walsh seems to be at an impasse in his attempt to grow the liberal soul. Either it does

not wish to grow, or, at best, it is ambivalent about growth in the direction toward which Walsh is urging it.

But Walsh is not finished with his essay, or with his attempt to defend and at the same time to resuscitate liberalism. He carries on (39-51), raising some of the same questions we have raised above, and sounding by turns both optimistic and pessimistic about the future of liberalism.

Referring to "the peculiarly stable instability of the liberal political tradition" (41), he argues that liberalism has always been stable and unstable at the same time, and yet has endured down to the present. He points to the "fragments of coherence" already present within liberalism by virtue of its "abbreviations." "It is a serious category mistake, Oakeshott has shown, to search among political abbreviations for the source of political convictions." (40) Walsh notes that even those who have "rediscovered the great fount of wisdom in the past [in which group he would perhaps include Voegelin himself] [have] hardly taken on the task of surpassing the liberal conception of order." (41) He urges that "autonomy" has a substantive moral basis, as does "rights." He argues that the right and the good, "Far from being mutually opposed … are inseparable partners," indeed that "Rights-talk cannot be severed from purpose-talk," and that liberalism therefore implies "the recognition of a teleological order of the good." (43) "The liberal language of rights can . . . be trusted to disclose and sustain the reality of moral truth." (44)

Mary Ann Glendon, of course, has also advocated for rights, but in a less celebratory manner than Walsh. (Glendon 1991)

As he did in "Rights Without Right," and turning to the coherence of liberalism disclosed in practice, Walsh cites Lincoln's treatment of slavery as a paradigm for how the liberal order can discover its strengths when confronted with the greatest of moral crises:

> Rather than reverting to some more comprehensive mode of discourse, such as the
> divine law of the Bible or some variant of natural law, he stuck with the

superficially thinner but ultimately evocative terminology of the Declaration of Independence.

        The effect was to resuscitate the founding consensus in such a way as to activate its most powerful sentiments. . . . Lincoln saw to the depth of the liberal construction, that it is rooted in a moral order from which it cannot detach itself. ... Liberty is most powerfully invoked and illumined when it encounters its greatest threat. (Walsh 2020, 44-45)

We might counter that the terminology of the Declaration of Independence is evocative precisely because it is patterned after the language of the Bible and natural law, and that it loses its effectiveness when invoked in a culture over a century and a half after Lincoln that has lost contact with any comprehensive modes of discourse, including those of the American Founding, with the principles of which Lincoln was still in intimate contact.

Walsh suggests that we use Lincoln's approach, the language of human rights, as "the most effective rhetorical means of opposition" in dealing with the most intractable moral and political issue of our times, namely, abortion. (45) Abortion remains "the most intractable moral and political issue of our times" even after *Dobbs*, and shows no signs of abating as such. Walsh's suggestion, together with the medical facts, does seem to be the only effective way of opposing abortion in our culture, but, in the many years since *Roe v. Wade*, and even after *Dobbs*, it has not succeeded in overthrowing the broad abortion license, which itself uses the language of rights, "the right to choose," to support itself.

The final subtitle in this Chapter is "Growth of the Soul a Reality," in which Walsh seeks to do for liberalism what he did for it in *The Growth of the Liberal Soul*. Here Walsh again sounds optimistic about this part of his project, notwithstanding some of his earlier comments suggesting an impasse.

What accounts for the fact that we know we must treat one another with unwavering dignity and respect?, Walsh asks, and answers again by pointing to liberal practice:

Whence emerges that transcendent imperative within a seemingly flat assertion of rights? The answer, and the reason for the impressive resilience of liberal political regimes, is in the practical struggle for the right alignment of rights. The liberal practice, we have emphasized, repeatedly calls forth more than it seems to possess. The only way in which this is possible is through enacting what is never fully adumbrated in theory. Liberal politics is, as Twain quipped of Wagner's music, better than it sounds. What takes place in the invocation of rights, conscientiously pursued through robust public exchange, is an indefinable growth of the soul that escapes linguistic containment. It is not that further information is reached or that social reality is modified in any fundamental way. Growth of the soul is an enlargement of the human persons themselves rather than anything outside of them. All the great liberal thinkers are cognizant of this dimension, and Tocqueville most of all. He refers to the dynamic repeatedly and isolates "the dangerous exercise of liberty" as the pivotal means for the preservation of liberty. The change is inner, but the effect is far from private. It puts the individual participant in touch with the most real dimension of reality, providing an indubitable sense of contact with what is most enduring. The transformation is that which occurs when ordinarily self-absorbed individuals are galvanized into action in the service of what they perceive to be more important than their own private worlds. (46-47)

The observer of our current politics, and the rhetoric in which it is carried out, is entitled to ask, Where do we see a genuine "invocation of rights, conscientiously pursued through robust public exchange"? In our bitterly divided politics, sides shout rather than debate, and very little public clarity is achieved. In the pursuit of power, intention is often disguised. Can we, as a nation, any more be "galvanized into action"? Do we, as a people, recognize more than our "own private worlds"? Ever since the 1960's, have we not been more divided than united, and now again increasingly so? Many of our citizens now apparently believe our country is so rotten that it cannot, absent radical, not liberal and prudential, change, be remediated.

Walsh is not deterred. "Even the crises that recurrently afflict liberal regimes," he says, "many of them self-generated, are thus not the worst outcome. Rightly viewed, the debates that fracture such polities can be the means of promoting a deeper grasp of the principles on which the whole construction depends. A far greater danger is that liberal societies might yield to the temptation of avoiding debate." (47) That certainly is the far greater danger, and the danger to

which our liberal society has, at least to as significant extent, yielded. The American Left has become highly ideologized, and has also seized most of the high ground in American culture. To paraphrase something Irving Kristol said several years ago, the culture war is over, and our side has lost. If politics is, as Aristotle said, the continuous debate about how we should order our lives together, what happens when the ordering of our lives *together* has become impossible?

Walsh cautions, however, that all is never completely lost in a genuinely liberal society, which, he assumes, ours still is:

> The growth of the soul is an event that the incompleteness of a liberal configuration invites, and virtually requires, as the means of surmounting the tendency toward disintegration. All that is required is the willingness to undertake the struggle and the confidence that below the surface are unsuspected moral resources for the revitalization of the present. The struggle with its own incoherence is both the necessity and the means by which liberal abbreviations are rendered coherent.
>
> The task of enlarging the liberal soul through engagement with the challenges concretely presented to us does not imply any prediction, pessimistic or optimistic, concerning the outcome. What matters is that the strategy is the only viable one. (Ibid.)

Growth was published in 1997 and the article we are discussing in 2003, and things have gotten much worse in our common life since then. Whether Walsh was too optimistic even in 2003, his wise, calming voice at least, even now, brings us back to our duty as citizens. There is no other "viable strategy" than the one he suggests, just as there is no other political order than the liberal order which we still have—although it might be said that its continuance as a liberal order is more in doubt now than ever. Well, all the more reason to hold onto it and not let it go. Freedom is not the usual lot of mankind, and we are most fortunate to still have it at all. Walsh's celebration of liberalism reminds us of that. Benjamin Franklin would probably be surprised that we have been able to keep our republic as long as we have. And Abraham Lincoln would certainly want us to do everything we can to ensure that a nation conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal, endures.

Walsh's project relative to liberalism is not ideological. The opposite is the case. It is a necessarily modest, prudential project, and Walsh is clear that, while liberalism, personal freedom, must be upheld, he does not know how our liberalism will turn out. "What is certain," as he reminds us,

> is that unless the challenge is faced, evil will flow unrestricted. Equally certain is that centers of resistance will be forthcoming, since the good too cannot be eliminated from history. The interesting political question is whether such centers of resistance will find an answering response in the wider social reality. Without making any claim to prophecy, I have tried to point toward the unsuspected possibilities of the liberal political tradition rooted in a reverence for the transcendent dignity of the person. At the very least this means that, if liberal polities cannot find their way toward a moral resolution of the conflicts that pervade them, they cannot find their way toward any resolutions at all. Conflict itself remains the most powerful evidence of the moral imperatives that liberal politics cannot discard without also rejecting its own most basic moral commitments. (48)

Having urged his readers on to the inevitable struggle, and wanting to finish his essay on the strongest possible note, Walsh points to five ways in which "the liberal configuration," "When seen in the full amplitude of its dynamic . . . exhibits a very different perspective than that suggested by its customary abbreviations." (Walsh 2020, 48)

First, "the respect for individual dignity and autonomy is fully compatible with, although not necessarily cognizant of, the Christian or transcendent worldview." (Ibid.) "[N]o one can doubt," says Walsh, "that this is the dynamic fount of [liberalism's] inspiration" (ibid.), although, as we have seen, some do.

Second, the very narrowness of the liberal conception heightens the sense of the dignity of each individual. "This can even extend to the claim of a superior standpoint to Christianity" (49), says Walsh, a claim that seems to go too far. We would agree with Walsh's next comment, however, which is that "even within the Christian tradition, the liberal elevation of the autonomy of the person can provide an invaluable clarification of the direction in which its own moral and

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political influence should unfold" (ibid.), as indeed it has in the unfolding of modern Catholic Social Teaching.

Third, "therefore . . . the liberal order is the closest approximation of the Christian valuation of the human being." (Ibid.) This was one of Walsh's principal points in *Growth*. Although there cannot be any "Christian political form" as such, and although "liberal politics is an expression of an anonymous faith," that faith is Christian. (Ibid.) How long "an anonymous faith" can survive is another question. (As discussed before, here is where occurs the Walshian formulation that is part of the title of this Paper: "A liberal order of rights is more appropriately viewed as a Christian refraction of politics." (Ibid.))

Fourth, and following from the third "implication," Walsh says that "a liberal political order represents in a more profound sense the most adequate political expression of Christianity." (Ibid.) More profound, the reader might ask, than what? More profound, Walsh answers, than any political order that tries to make the transcendent immanent. "Transcendence cannot be preserved once it is drawn into tangible public expression. Then it suffers the fate of everything finite; it becomes available for manipulation and devaluation." (50) Political theologies inevitably fail. As Augustine realized, the spiritual and temporal orders are related, but distinct.

Fifth, "The only danger is that silence can lapse into ignorance. A fifth implication is that the preservation of the transcendent tension of a liberal order requires continuing openness to the appropriately transcendent symbolizations of the mystery. Agnosticism and a confused atheism are compatible with a liberal preservation of human dignity, but a dogmatic rejection of the transcendent is not." (Ibid.) This would seem to bring Walsh back to the problem of the inherent and necessary limitations of liberalism—how far can a liberal order go in "openness to the appropriately transcendent symbolizations of the mystery" without losing its character as

liberalism, and thereby ceasing to hold the social order together? Isn't the predominant thrust of our culture toward the naked public square? Haven't many of our citizens become agnostics or confused atheists? Or even dogmatically rejected the transcendent? Where is the tipping point, or have we gone beyond it?

In closing out this essay, Walsh says:

> . . . the liberal focus on rights strikes us as peculiarly ill-equipped to unfold the rationale for our opposition [to the reduction of social science to the rational calculation of costs and benefits]. For all of the vaunted merits of the essential consensus and the ray of light it casts on the indispensability of each one, it is still not a language in which the development of a meditative self-understanding can take place. Abbreviations may work well in practice but not when the question of justification arises. Then the liberal compression must look toward what is available in the great spiritual traditions of mankind, those streams in which the deepest and richest quest for self-understanding has taken place. Its own derivation from the resonances of transcendent openness makes liberal reflection a close relative of the world religions, especially Christianity from which it has originated. The viability of liberal convictions depends therefore on the preservation of this relation of friendship in which it recognizes its own inner filiation. The liberal language of rights may have been developed to avoid the necessity of taking determinate theological positions, but it cannot survive the utter rejection of all theological discourse. Beginning in the conviction that the value of the person matters more than all finite differences, liberal principles still find their deepest confirmation in the movement toward the transcendent God in whose love all mankind is united. (50-51.)

Walsh, who before had extolled rights-talk and liberal abbreviations generally, now notes their significant limitations "when the question of justification arises." Does he think that question has arisen? He does not say. Many would argue that the question has arisen, and even that it has already been answered in the negative as far as the continuation of our liberal order is concerned. If we assume that the question has arisen and that the answer has not yet been given, even liberal practice, on Walsh's account, will not be enough to save liberal order. Our "liberal compression must [then] look toward what is available in the great spiritual traditions of mankind." God-talk, previously restricted in favor of rights-talk, will have to supersede even rights-talk. Will that spell

the end of liberalism itself? Is there still enough of a "relation of friendship" between liberalism and Christianity for God-talk to be allowed back into the public square? More essentially, is there still enough of a "relation of friendship" between our culture generally and Christianity so that the issue can even be explored?

These are vexing questions, but Walsh has given us a great deal to think about. In particular, he has gone more deeply into the subject of liberalism, and taken it more seriously, than other contemporary thinkers, some of whom now reject liberalism out of hand. What Walsh brings to his treatment of liberalism that is sorely lacking in so many others is his concern not only for the moral but also for the spiritual on which the moral is ultimately based. And he has succeeded in establishing his principal points, namely, that liberalism is extraordinarily durable, that it is the only political order on the horizon, that its origins are in the tradition of philosophic-Christianity, and that it is the farthest differentiation of a political order within that tradition. Whether liberalism can re-embrace its tradition so as to continue to survive as our political order, the question Walsh leaves us with, is a question no one can yet answer, but Walsh has advanced the question to its furthest extent.

Chapter Three of Priority: "The Unattainability of What We Live Within: Liberal Democracy" (2007)

Walsh continues with his thoughts on liberalism in this Chapter, first published in 2007. As the title of the Chapter suggests, his language here often takes the form of paradox, and so many of his meanings are difficult to unravel. We will not consider if the Chapter suggests that Walsh's views of liberalism have changed between 2003 and 2007, as they might have. Instead we will only discuss a couple of the themes that appear in the Chapter.

First, Walsh notes, as Tocqueville did, the tension between freedom and equality in the liberal tradition, which must issue with the triumph of freedom. "A society that places the primacy of emphasis on equality has already signaled its willingness to abandon liberty." (Walsh 2020, 56) Given that many liberals seem to think that freedom and equality can go together, this is an important point to make.

Second, it is not clear what Walsh means in his treatment of "founding" in this Chapter. Many conservatives emphasize a return to America's founding principles, especially as they are expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, as a way to restore American life. America was, after all, founded as a liberal political order. They argue that those principles are timeless and true, and that we have forgotten them as they have been submerged under the regnant American progressivist ideology. See, for example, Kesler 2021 and Pestritto 2005. It is not clear if Walsh intends to address their argument, but he refers to a "founding" and "refoundings" as things that must take place in every generation. "Every generation," he says, "is a founding generation, and every generation depends on the founders who came before it. . . . It is because the founding of democracy is the work of democracy that it can have no foundations. To secure the foundations of democracy beyond peril is to lift it out of the movement by which it is constituted. It is to bring history to its conclusion." (57)

Walsh does not seem to be saying, as the conservative constitutionalists do, that each American generation must keep the principles of the historical American Founding alive, as Lincoln did, although he may be saying that. He seems rather to be saying that each generation founds anew, imposing its own principles on its own political order. But if that is what he is saying, how does it differ from historicism? Would Walsh subscribe to the jurisprudence that goes along

with this, namely, the jurisprudence of the "living Constitution"? But if so, it is that approach to our fundamental law that has given us the regime of abortion rights, which Walsh strongly opposes.

Later a subtitle in the Chapter is entitled "Founding as Refounding." There Walsh says that

> No generation is spared the burden of founding, least of all one that lives during a moment when the crisis of foundation looms. . . . All founding is a refounding that is necessitated by the impossibility of founding. Just as there are no ready-made answers, so there is no already-made founding. The burden cannot be shifted to our predecessors for the life we are called to live. . . . A blueprint to living would deprive living of its life, because living is precisely the capacity to follow more than a blueprint. . . .
> The founding can therefore mean nothing apart from the persons whose founding it is. . . . Founding is always in the mode of nonfounding. Neither the burden of living nor the exercise of responsibility is lifted by the articulation of principles achieved. (Walsh 2020, 67-68)

American traditional constitutionalists would respond that the act of American Founding was the act of "our predecessors" in the founding generation; that "the articulation of principles [is what was] achieved" by that generation; that they were the principles of a liberal political order; that they were intended to serve as the continuing principles of our liberal political order; that they constituted "ready-made answers" to the question of how we ought to order our lives together, but answers "ready-made" in the deepest wisdom of Western culture; and that "Neither the burden of living nor the exercise of responsibility is lifted" by following those principles, given that those principles were instantiated precisely to establish a stable political order in which it would be possible for citizens to assume the burden of living and to exercise responsibility without always having to worry about the fundament of the order in which they live. As John Courtney Murray put it in words we have previously quoted, ". . . only in a disintegrating society does politics become a controversy over ends; it should be simply a controversy over means to ends already agreed on with sufficient unanimity." (Murray 1988, 73) A society that requires constant refounding is necessarily also a constantly disintegrating society. To advert to one of Walsh's

favorite political theorists, Oakeshott, the American Constitutional order was intended to establish a civil association, not an enterprise association, and so an association that makes possible the broadest range of human freedom, a "blueprint" to facilitate, not impede, the living of life.

We would like to hear more from Walsh on these issues involving the American Founding.

Chapter Four of Priority: "The Person and the Common Good: Toward a Language of Paradox" (2012)

Chapter Four, first published in 2012, takes its theme from *The Person and the Common Good* by Jacques Maritain (Maritain 1985), a short but profound work of personalism that takes up and distinguishes the concepts of person, collectivity, individual, self, society, the common good, the temporal common good, and the eternal common good. Maritain opposed the concept of the human person "to both the idea of the totalitarian state and that of the sovereignty of the individual" (Maritain 1985, 12), thus rejecting both collectivism and atomistic individualism. He took his personalism from Thomas Aquinas, saying: "The human person is ordained directly to God as to its absolute ultimate end. Its direct ordination to God transcends every created common good—both the common good of the political society and the intrinsic common good of the universe." (15) Maritain also cited John of St. Thomas, who interestingly somehow managed to prefigure even Kant: ". . . the free act of the human person, considered in its pure and secret intimacy as a free act, is not of this world. By its liberty, the human person transcends the stars and all the world of nature." (20)

The distinctions drawn by Maritain have profound implications for political order. Maritain is especially concerned to shed light on the paradox, arising from the synthesis of Aristotle's political science with the Christian differentiation of the person, that the person is a part of a social whole without really being a part. Individuals can be parts, but not persons, because individuality

is material while personality is spiritual. Persons are wholes. "To say, then, that society is a whole composed of persons is to say that society is a whole composed of wholes." (Maritain 1985, 56-57) Maritain quotes two texts from Aquinas: "'Each individual person is related to the entire community as the part to the whole,'" and "'Man is not ordained to the body politic according to all that he is and has'" (70-71). Maritain succeeds in shedding light on one of the most difficult concepts of political science, the "common good," without oversimplifying it, without diminishing the tension between the person and the common good, without denying either the importance of the person to society or of society to the person, and without falling into anarchism or totalitarianism.

In a final Chapter entitled "Contemporary Problems," Maritain criticizes "the materialistic philosophy of society in its three principal forms; bourgeois individualism, communistic anti-individualism, totalitarian or dictatorial anti-communism and anti-individualism. All three disregard the human *person* in one way or another, and, in its place, consider, willingly or not, the *material individual* alone." (91)

Walsh begins this essay, appropriately entitled, "The Person and the Common Good: Toward a Language of Paradox," by saying, "The chapter title has been chosen to recall the masterpiece of concision that Jacques Maritain published under the same heading. He too had concluded that the political language by which we juxtapose the 'individual' and the 'common good' had doomed the possibility of recomposing them." (Walsh 2020, 79) In his own way, Walsh then works through the same problems that confronted Maritain, trying to go beyond him in fashioning a language even more suitable to the paradox at the center of those problems, the paradox of the part that is at the same time not a part but a whole. Maritain and Walsh would both agree that a paradox remains a paradox no matter what can be said about it. And Walsh, like

Maritain, is anxious to go beyond the boundaries of our language to explain what can never be fully explained. As Walsh says, echoing a theme from *Luminosity*, "A truly personalist mode of discourse requires a very different kind of thinking from the prevailing objectivist patterns. . . . The perspective of the person is not one that can be reached by assuming an external vantage point, but rather it is one available to us only by virtue of our own reality as persons." (Walsh 2020, 82) Walsh's concern with language and liberalism structures the Chapter.

Walsh goes so far as to assert that a new understanding of language is required, that even classical and Christian accounts of philosophical anthropology are "opaque." (83) Voegelin of course was also concerned with the opacity of our usual language. "Treating the individual as a specimen of a universal nature, they fail to acknowledge that the person in every instance exceeds the category of which it is an instance. This is the danger that arises when we forget that even the language we are using derives from the same participatory perspective as what we seek to articulate. . . Is it not strange that the rights of a single human being can outweigh the pressure of the entire world?" (83-84) Walsh cites abortion as an issue in which the language of persons has been "transposed into the language of entities." (84)

Some progress has been made in the language used publicly to refer to person in the sense that "Over more than five centuries we have hammered out a language of individual rights and we have anchored our political constitutions within it." (91) However, as in his other considerations of liberalism, Walsh insists that the source of rights must now be made explicit to overcome the problems generated by the obscurity of that source. He sounds something of a clarion call in saying, "That is where we stand today, on the threshold of a conversation to which Christians and Jews with their historic understanding of man as *imago Dei* have much to contribute," while at the same

time acknowledging that "Even Christians have to struggle to find the linguistic means to render their convictions more transparent." (Ibid.)

Walsh cites Tocqueville, one of his favorite liberal fathers, and the one who most emphasized the importance of voluntary intermediate associations, for the proposition that the freedom permitted to persons in liberal political orders is what can call forth their "growth." (93) "… the common good was evoked when individuals ceased to act merely as individuals but instead stepped out of their private sphere to take upon themselves responsibility for the common." (Ibid.) This is the origin of Walsh's argument that the liberal soul is enlarged through practice, and especially, but not exclusively, the practice required in situations in which the common good itself is under attack. The liberal is not limited to the private. He or she may be publicly disclosed.

Walsh mentions the three dimensions of social life, the family, civil society, and the state, saying that "All three constitute a way of life integrating the individual and the common at successively more self-conscious levels." (95) Walsh cites Hegel for his insight that each level requires "love" to sustain the common good, an insight from which the decline of our own political order can be measured. (96) It is love that calls forth and sustains the "social contract" by which society is, according to classical liberal theorists, constituted. The "social contract" is not just a contract. This is often a point on which Walsh insists, in contrast to many who find the problems with liberalism traceable to its concepts of the "state of nature" and the "social contract" as opposed to the Aristotelian position that man is, by nature, a political animal.

As in his earlier work, Walsh again cites the historical beginnings of what would later become known as personalism in the Greek discovery of the innermost core of the person in mind or *nous*, which Voegelin referred to as "the sensorium of transcendence" (Voegelin 1969a, 75), and which Walsh refers to "as distinct from the mere application of *logos*." (Walsh 2020, 98)

Christianity then following Greek philosophy "was, of course, the beginning of a wider awareness of the inexpressible depth of each human being." (Ibid.) But while in the wake of Christianity, "A fully personalist mode of discourse is already in evidence" (ibid.), more was necessary, and on two accounts, because "even Christianity did not follow out its implications for the world of politics, or even for the revised understanding of language that it contained." (Ibid.) We see here, again, the importance Walsh assigns to the development of liberalism as a political order, as he claims that the translation of the implications of personalism already present within Christianity "into political terms was the work of the modern liberal democratic development, which is, at its core, the most quixotic of all political forms." (Ibid.) And he means "quixotic," going so far as to say that while liberal democracy is not utopian or without its own prudence, it "takes its stand on a principle that departs utterly from any judgment of mundane success. Instead of focusing first on the pragmatic outcomes, it insists that, despite the consequences, human beings must be entrusted with their own responsibility" (98), much as parents must eventually trust their children. We are reminded of Walsh's discussion of the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor" in *Growth*, although Walsh does not cite it here. Rather than referring to liberal democracy as "it," perhaps it would have been better here to have said that instead of focusing first on the pragmatic outcomes, it was the human beings who have constituted liberal democratic regimes themselves who, despite the consequences, insisted that they be entrusted with their own responsibility. That certainly describes the American Founding.

Relating liberalism to the common good, Walsh says that "Liberal democracy is the political expression of the common good of persons, even if it still has a way to go to understand and develop a language of corresponding transparency. That is a language of paradox." (99) We saw above that the revision of language was the second aspect of personalism left to be developed

in the wake of the Christian differentiation, following the development of liberal democracy as personalism's political form. A large part of Walsh's project may be seen then as, first, upholding liberal democracy against its critics as the political form most expressive of personalism (and Christianity), and, second, as developing a language to make personalism transparent. To this development of language Walsh has turned a great deal of his attention, not only in his writings on politics, but in his writings on philosophy and history as well. Following Kierkegaard, Walsh believes the language to be developed for the sake of personalism is the language of paradox, a language on full display especially in *Luminosity* (Walsh 2008), *Politics of the Person as the Politics of Being* (Walsh 2016), and some of the essays in *Priority* (Walsh 2020). It is itself paradoxical that Walsh chooses the language of paradox to make personalism "transparent," but Walsh believes, again with Kierkegaard, that in its depths reality itself is paradoxical, and so only the language of paradox can mirror it. Henri de Lubac, as previously quoted, said the same thing.

Turning back to his defense of liberalism, Walsh takes on the assertion that "liberal polities constitute a neutral framework within which the plurality of private satisfactions can be pursued." (Walsh 2020, 99) This is certainly the most concise definition of perhaps the principal modern variant of liberalism advanced by both liberalism's greatest modern defenders and its greatest modern critics. Walsh rejects it as

> . . . only the most superficial appearance of liberal democracy. Its deepest truth is the realization that the only common good worthy of the name is the common good that involves the mutual giving and receiving of persons. It is not that one counts more than all but that only such a scale can adequately respect what is always owed in relation to persons. We become persons by giving ourselves. The political community simply announces and invites that possibility as its own deepest realization.
> . . .
> . . . "Everyone is responsible for all" is a saying of Dostoevsky's that can be received on many different levels. But surely its deepest is that all of goodness is gained or lost in the action of every individual. (99-100)

Which way will our contemporary liberalism develop? Will we pursue private satisfactions, most of which cannot satisfy? Or will we be responsible for one another, "for all" in Dostoevsky's sense? A liberal order involves, as Walsh reminds us, a great risk, and its fate, as they say, is in the balance. But Walsh also reminds us why it is a risk worth taking, and, in reminding us of its deepest resources, has called on the better angels of its nature.

Chapter Five of Priority: "John Rawls's Personalist Faith"

In a book of essays on personalism, Chapter Five (the date of its publication is not indicated, and it may have been written for *The Priority of the Person*) is of particular interest because here Walsh deals not with "persons" in the abstract, but with an individual person, the political philosopher John Rawls, who is something of a secular personalist/liberal doppelgänger to Walsh. The Chapter is also of interest because, as it turns out, Rawls was not as "secular" as many thought, and Walsh's views on him appear to have evolved.

As we have seen, in his 1996 *First Things* essay, Walsh had opted for the good over the right. And Walsh had discussed Rawls's political philosophy at some length in *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* in 1997. There Walsh spoke highly of Rawls, putting him forward as the most significant modern liberal theorist, at the same time pointing to the limits Rawls imposed upon himself by virtue of his secularism. (Walsh's liberalism itself is the attempt to go beyond those limits.) Then in 2009, remarkably, Rawls's previously unknown "religious" writings were discovered and published. (Rawls 2010) Some were shocked to find out that Rawls, the great modern secular liberal who had elevated "the right over the good," took religion so seriously. Walsh was not shocked. On the contrary, the fact that Rawls was "religious" confirmed Walsh's thesis, set forth in *Growth*, that even modern liberalism still harbored its Christian roots, even if they were, depending on the individual modern liberal theorist, trampled over, ignored, or existent

only in the unconscious. As indicated, I do not know when Walsh wrote the essay that now appears as Chapter Five of *Priority*, but the purpose of the essay is to reflect on Rawls's "religiosity" as revealed in the 2009 publication, and the light it sheds back over Rawls's political philosophy. It is interesting to compare what Walsh had to say about Rawls in 1996 and 1997 with what he now says about him in Chapter Five of *Priority*.

To begin with *Growth*, Walsh there referred to *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls's principal work, as "the only work [of the last generation] that outlines a comprehensive philosophy of liberal order. . . . Almost for the first time since Mill and perhaps even longer, the liberal tradition acquired intellectual credibility" (Walsh 1997, 21); and to Rawls as having the same intellectual stature as Mill, saying "The liberal tradition as a whole has been so bereft of major theoretical exponents that almost a century separates John Stuart Mill and John Rawls without the appearance of a figure of comparable intellectual stature" (80). However, Walsh also found Rawls wanting in that, as with many liberals, he succumbed to "the illusion of progress" (84-86), and, more importantly, he did not fully comprehend the transcendent dimension of the person. Furthermore, even the concept of the priority of the right over the good,

> . . . the very cornerstone of *A Theory of Justice*, dissolves before the admission that liberal order is not based on the right that is compatible with every conceivable conception of the good. Some formulations of the good cannot be contained within liberal democracy, and the struggle to eject such representations can be won only at the cost of the liberal claim to universality. The suspicion is confirmed that liberal order has not escaped connection with a particular affirmation of the good. It was only that Rawls's skillful construction had temporarily obscured that realization. (36)

The later Rawls, said Walsh, came to "recognize[] that there is a very specific conception of the person and the human good that underpins the theory of justice," and to acknowledge "[T]he problem ... that there may well be certain issues or values whose importance outweighs the social

and political agreement," such as abortion. (36-37) "What can we say," asks Walsh, "when toleration becomes intolerant?" (38) This is a question of great moment today.

Toward the end of *Growth*, in contemplating the incompleteness of the liberal order and the necessity of a recognition of the transcendent to complete it, Walsh returns to the inadequacies of Rawlsian liberalism, referring to the "the primacy of right over the good" as a "crude liberal formulation[]," especially in contrast with "the classic analysis" made possible by "[T]he recovery of the classical philosophic tradition" in modernity (Walsh 1997, 267), by thinkers such as Voegelin and Strauss.

> Contemporary Rawlsian liberals are compelled to defend the indefensible position that their liberal order presupposes no conception of the good and, when this defense is rendered impossible, retreat to the incoherence of admitting the historical arbitrariness of their convictions. What they sorely lack is the flexibility of the classical insight into the in-between character of existence, which can maintain the free indeterminacy of human life without abandoning all notion of the good toward which it is straining. . . .
> Liberal political philosophy has long been in need of a coherent means of integrating its emphasis on the inviolability of individual liberty with a recognition of the substantive moral order whose actualization is the justification for the preeminence of liberty in the first place. Can we on the one hand insist that men and women must be free to make up their own minds and follow their own mode of life and on the other that there are certain moral principles by which they must be guided and toward which they might be encouraged and constrained to submit? This is the well-known conflict between liberty and authority that has bedeviled liberal politics in one form or another from its inception. (267-268)

This is similar to the issue we raised above as to how far liberalism can go in the direction of the more profound philosophical and theological traditions of the West and still remain liberal. In *Growth*, Walsh is clear that movement in that direction must at least be made, or perish liberalism, and that Rawls, while a significant modern liberal thinker, is not equipped to take us far enough, in large part because of his secularity. Is complete secularity a necessary condition for a liberal order? Walsh's principal point is that it is not, but he knows that this entangles him in one of the thorniest problems of modernity:

Suspicion that the full realization of human freedom is incompatible with the acknowledgement of a divine creator might be regarded as one of the central, if not *the* central, self-reflection of the modern world. It is an attitude whose greatest impact has been manifested in the revolutionary ideologies that aspire to re-create human nature; but it has played a role within the liberal tradition itself, as is evident in the suspicion with which Mill regarded the notion of the deity and in the militant antiecclesiastical spirit that dominated the Continental liberal spirit. Even within the more moderate Anglo-American setting exemplified by Rawls, there is a noticeable disinterest in anything remotely resembling a theological frame of reference. (269)[4]

In a footnote at the end of this passage, Walsh, citing Rawls's discussion of God toward the end of *A Theory of Justice*, says, "What is clear [in the discussion] is that the opening of the soul toward God plays no role in the illumination of our moral existence." (355-356*n*29)

The dialectical Walsh of 1997 did, however, sense a connection between even modern liberal thinkers, like Rawls, and the deeper sources of liberalism in philosophic-Christianity. At pages 51-53 of *Growth*, in discussing the "Depth Unspoken" of liberalism, Walsh referred to its "prediscursive faith" (Walsh 1997, 51), and characterized modern liberal intellectuals not as nihilists but as "more in the manner of lost souls who carry within them the flickering sense of that for which they search. The darkness is not total because they continue to know what is right even

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[4] Walsh goes on to say that "The source of the objection in all cases has been a profound misunderstanding of what the relationship to God means to human freedom." (269)

One thinks here of the reason given by C. S. Lewis for his early atheism, a reason that may explain the atheism of more atheists than anything else. Rationalism and materialism may have presented him with a "grim and deadly" world, "but at least it was free from the Christian God" (Lewis 1955, 171), and Lewis longed for that kind of "freedom," that kind of "autonomy," more than anything else. He felt "it something of an outrage that I had been created without my own permission. To such a craven the materialist's universe had the enormous attraction that it offered you limited liabilities. No strictly infinite disaster could overtake you in it. Death ended all. And if ever finite disasters proved greater than one wished to bear, suicide would always be possible. The horror of the Christian universe was that it had no door marked *Exit*." (Ibid.) What Lewis wished to avoid above all was any "interference":

> But, of course, what mattered most of all was my deep-seated hatred of authority, my monstrous individualism, my lawlessness. No word in my vocabulary expressed deeper hatred than the word *Interference*. But Christianity placed at the center what then seemed to me a transcendental Interferer. If its picture were true then no sort of "treaty with reality" could ever be possible. There was no region even in the innermost depth of one's soul (nay, there least of all) which one could surround with a barbed wire fence and guard with a notice No Admittance. And that was what I wanted; some area, however small, of which I could say to all other beings, "This is my business and mine only." (172)

though they can no longer give a fully satisfactory justification for it." (Ibid.) As evidence, Walsh adduced "the 'metaphysical' language of the sacred" that frequently "crop[s] up in the writings of contemporary liberals" (ibid.), and, said Walsh, "John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* is replete with [such language]" (ibid.), a point Walsh went on to illustrate. Further, "It is not only the language that evidences a metaphysical or religious inspiration, but the very structure of the argument is pervaded by the same realization as well" (52), even though the structure is deontological rather than teleological, viewing the right as prior to the good. Walsh continued:

> The later writings in which Rawls concedes the objections of his critics—that is, that his account of the right is itself a substantive conception of the good that permits and excludes certain other goods—does not alter the core. He merely accepts that the liberal conception of right cannot be demonstrated in any neutral fashion and continues to assert that it is, nevertheless, right. The assertion of nonfoundationalist approaches among liberal theorists is perhaps the strongest evidence of the prerational source of their commitments. (53)

Growth, published in 1997, reflected Walsh's views of Rawls at that time. But, as indicated above, something happened between 1997 and Walsh's essay on "John Rawls's Personalist Faith" as it appears in *Priority* that provided the basis for the essay, in which Walsh sees Rawls in something of a new and different light. That "something" was at least in part the discovery and publication in 2009 of works by Rawls apparently theretofore generally unknown, and certainly unknown to Walsh, in which Rawls revealed his own religious faith. The works were published as *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith--With "On My Religion*." (Rawls 2010) *A Brief Inquiry* was written by Rawls *circa* 1943 as his senior thesis while a brilliant young undergraduate at Princeton, before he went off to War and "lost his faith." "On My Religion" was written *circa* 1997, toward the end of Rawls's life. (Rawls was born in 1921 and died in 2002.) As noted, while Walsh detected a "sacred spark" in the secular Rawls even in 1997, Walsh had also said in 1997 that "Even within the more moderate Anglo-American setting exemplified by Rawls, there is a

noticeable disinterest in anything remotely resembling a theological frame of reference," and that in Rawls's discussion of God toward the end of *A Theory of Justice* it was "clear . . . that the opening of the soul toward God plays no role in the illumination of our moral existence." Rawls's "private religious" writings published in 2009 caused Walsh to re-think the "public secular" Rawls.

We turn now to "John Rawls's Personalist Faith" in *Priority*.

Walsh begins his essay by claiming that Rawls's elaborations of his theory of justice "never quite capture the inspiration from which they spring. The publication of *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith* enables us to glimpse the long-submerged origin in one of its most touchingly unguarded moments. We are led into the inner hidden Rawls, and begin to see a whole new way of perceiving this emblematic figure of contemporary liberal political thought." (Walsh 2020, 103) The essay elucidates this "whole new way of perceiving" Rawls, or at least the new way in which Walsh now perceives him following Walsh's reading of these unearthed works.

In *Growth*, Walsh's theme was that liberalism originated within Christianity, and that it is incumbent upon liberalism in modernity to recover those origins. Of course many modern liberals either deny that liberalism's origins were Christian; or maintain that if they were, modern liberalism's distance from those origins is a virtue, not a vice; or maintain that they do not care what liberalism's origins were because they like its current secular manifestation, the more secular the better, in any event. As noted, the Walsh of *Growth* saw Rawls as a modern liberal who at least greatly distanced himself from anything religious, especially because it is religion that is most apt to disturb the thin peace of the liberal order for which Rawls contended. Now Walsh is gratified to see that Rawls after all is closer to Walsh's side of things than even the Walsh of *Growth* sometimes thought:

> It certainly complicates the notion of secular public reason to be reminded of its
> genesis within Christian theology, but that is equally a complication from the

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perspective of Christian theology. Yet it is not as if the affinity of Rawls's philosophy with a deeper spiritual strain was unknown. That was visible to any careful reader of the texts.[5] What is new in *A Brief Inquiry* is the revelation of just how many of the main parameters of his *philosophical* thought were worked out within a theological-personalist horizon.

This was something of which Rawls himself remained aware and in which he remained deeply interested. (Walsh 2020, 103-104)

A Brief Inquiry and "On My Religion" thus shed light back over all of Rawls's public works of political philosophy and confirm their "deeply spiritual strain." The "secular liberal/personalist," Rawls, and the "religious liberal/personalist," Walsh, are not so very far apart after all. And this confirms not only Walsh's "earlier reading" of Rawls, but the core of Walsh's project relative to liberalism, which is to show that its roots are spiritual, a fact latent within the writings of even the greatest of modern liberal theorists.

A Brief Inquiry ("ABI"), written as Rawls's senior thesis at Princeton, and "On My Religion" ("OMR"), "a private reflection on [Rawls's] own religious convictions from 1997 (at the latest)" (Walsh 2020, 104), written when Rawls was in his 70s, provide something of a bracket to Rawls's life and spiritual journey. OMR "makes clear [Rawls's] continuing deep engagement with the Christian beginnings from which his odyssey had set forth. . . . Here Rawls shows that even what is left behind is never really left behind, for even when he concedes that he is no longer a Christian in any conventional sense, the question of his relationship to faith remains ineluctable." (Ibid.) Like Bodin, Rawls "arrived at toleration, not on the basis of skepticism, but on the basis of faith." (Ibid.)

Rawls's upbringing was "conventionally Christian," but "it was only in his last two years at Princeton that he 'became deeply concerned about theology and its doctrines.'" (104-105) He

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[5] In a footnote following this sentence, Walsh says: "I take a minor satisfaction in finding my own earlier reading of the deeply spiritual strain of Rawls confirmed. See David Walsh, *The Growth of the Liberal Soul* . . . esp. 51-53." (Walsh 2020, 334*n*3)

graduated from Princeton and enlisted in the United States Army in 1943, and saw action as an infantryman in World War II, some of it horrible. "It was only at the end of the war that his faith underwent a shattering change that marked not so much a loss as the realization that he was 'no longer orthodox.'" (105) Three incidents precipitated the crisis: a Lutheran pastor declared that God aimed American bullets at the Japanese but protected G.I.s from Japanese bullets; another man was by mere chance killed in Rawls's place; and Rawls learned about the Holocaust. (Ibid.) Walsh comments: "Cumulatively [the three matters] amounted to an assault on the very idea of divine justice. . . . It is not difficult to discern the unity of these incidents as defining the core preoccupation of Rawls's professional life: justice as fairness." (Ibid.) Unlike a Marx, however, who revolted against God, "both Rawls and liberal societies return to the question of their relationship to religion." (Ibid.) On a personal level, "Five years before his death, we encounter Rawls asking himself whether he has given God all that is his due." (Ibid.)

How to explain this deeply religious, previously hidden side of Rawls? He had written religious and metaphysical discourse out of public life. "A consistent liberal," says Walsh, "would have no need to write about his religion; having firmly closed the door on all its confounding perplexities. But Rawls was no Rawlsian. He could not let go of what had after all been the wellspring from which his thought had flowed. This is the significance of the publication of the unnoticed thesis by a brilliant, deeply sensitive Princeton undergrad." (106) The publication of OMY with ABI demonstrates that even though Rawls may have lost his early college faith in the wake of World War II, his religious life was not "a closed chapter to which he never looked back." (Ibid.) "We may not reach the real Rawls in the undergraduate thesis, but we do catch something of the person who is far less visible in the writings of the professional philosopher. It brings us

close to the motivating experience, even if such a core permanently eludes us, of the theory of justice." (107)

Rawls is of special interest to Walsh: "As the voice of contemporary liberal political thought, Rawls is more than Rawls. What is hidden within him is, by extension, also hidden within contemporary liberalism, even one that embraces the full logic of a public reason shorn of theological adumbrations. . . . Is there any longer a secular public reason when its genealogy is tinged with neo-orthodox Christianity?" (Ibid.) Walsh suggests that even though faith in God can no longer be invoked in our public life as it used to be, there is a faith that sustains political liberalism. How to characterize this faith? Walsh sees it as still participatory in transcendence vertically conceived, not just "faith in historical progress," and that "It may well be that *A Brief Inquiry* gives us the clearest insight into the faith of liberal democracy itself." (Ibid.) This is the faith the Walsh of *Growth* hoped to have liberalism recapture, and now he discovers that it may have been the faith of Rawlsian liberalism all along.

Walsh contrasts this faith with the "liberal dogmatism [that] had seemed to echo the religious dogmatism it had opposed." (108)

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