

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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## Conservatism: An Autopsy

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**Editor's note:** *An earlier version of this essay first appeared in The Journal of Christian Reconstruction in 1978. (Those were the days when Reconstructionism was underdeveloped, and the movement was still semi-Biblical.) Current events spark this essay's revision and republication.*

*Despite being written almost 25 years ago, this essay remains relevant, for little has changed for the better. If anything, those who profess to be Christians are more gullible, confused, and compromised today than they were 25 years ago. For 50 years Christians in America have been bamboozled by Romanists like Patrick Buchanan, William Bennett, and William F. Buckley, Jr., into supporting their Antichristian programs, candidates, and theologies. The rise of the Religious Right—Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, D. James Kennedy's Center for Reclaiming America, and Rousas Rushdoony's-Gary North's-Greg Bahnsen's Reconstructionist movement—has exacerbated, not corrected, the situation. Now Romanists are invited to address D. James Kennedy's political conferences, and putative Protestants endorse books by devout Romanists, and become Romanists and Orthodoxists themselves. And the Reconstructionist movement and its allies and offshoots, by substituting political and cultural action for the proclamation of the Gospel, by substituting eschatology for soteriology, and by mangling the Gospel itself, have become tools of Romanist political action. The lessons of this essay have been ignored.*

"If, during the next few years, that is, during the period with which practical politicians are alone concerned, a continued movement toward more government control in the greater part of the world is almost certain, this is due, more than anything else, to the lack of a real program, or perhaps I had better say, to a consistent philosophy of the groups which wish to oppose it. The position is even worse than mere lack of

program would imply; the fact is that almost everywhere the groups which pretend to oppose socialism at the same time support policies which, if the principles on which they are based were generalized, would no less lead to socialism than the avowedly socialist policies."

—Friedrich Hayek<sup>1</sup>

It is not the purpose of this essay to provoke an altercation with any conservative or with any Christian who believes that conservatism is good and ought to be defended. This essay is rather a recognition of an already existing state of hostilities between Christianity and conservatism—hostilities initiated by the conservatives themselves. It may come as a surprise to some readers that there is a distinction between Christianity and conservatism—let alone a state of hostilities—and for that reason alone this essay is necessary.

### Conservatism as Non-Christianity

The trouble with conservatism is the same as the trouble with liberalism: It is not Christian. If one were to scrutinize the index of George H. Nash's classic, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*,<sup>2</sup> he would be hard-pressed to find even one Christian listed there. It is safe to say that of the twenty-four contributors to an anthology of conservative thought edited by William F. Buckley, Jr., not one, including Buckley himself, is a Christian.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Hayek, " 'Free' Enterprise and Competitive Order," *Individualism and Economic Order*. University of Chicago Press [1948] 1969, 107.

<sup>2</sup>Basic Books, 1976.

<sup>3</sup>William F. Buckley, Jr., *Did You Ever See A Dream Walking?* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1970). The contributors include Buckley himself, Garry Wills, John Courtney Murray, S. J., L. Brent Bozell, Frank S. Meyer, Michael Oakeshott, Albert Jay Nock, Henry Hazlitt, Max Eastman, Milton Friedman, Harry V. Jaffa, Willmoore

At this point a reader might question my definition of a “Christian.” I am using “Christian” in contexts that demand either of two senses: First, in the Biblical sense of a regenerate, justified man; second, in the much broader sense of a person who is not regenerate but who does, inconsistently, accept the Biblical view of the state and politics. In neither sense do the men listed by Nash and edited by Buckley qualify as Christians.

There are many non-Christian philosophies represented within conservatism. First and foremost, there is Roman Catholicism. Nash writes:

The new conservatives’ brand of Christianity was often of a decidedly [Roman] Catholic, even medieval cast... (60).

One of the most remarkable features of this movement [conservatism] was that, in a country still substantially Protestant, its leadership was heavily Roman Catholic, Anglo-Catholic, or critical of Protestant Christianity (80).

One is even tempted to say that the new conservatism was, in part, an intellectual cutting edge of the postwar “coming of age” of America’s [Roman] Catholic minority (80-81).

A disproportionate number of conservative intellectuals in the 1950s were [Roman] Catholics (127).

Today, of course, this Romanism has flooded out of political into theological circles, and the so-called evangelicals and many sympathetic to Reconstructionism have more or less consciously adopted pro-Romanist, pro-Anglo-Catholic, or anti-Protestant views. This may be seen in many ways, including their enthusiastic reception of neo-medievalist Anglo and Roman Catholics such as C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and J. R. R. Tolkien as though they were Christians.

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In addition to the ubiquitous Romanists, there are atheists (Ayn Rand and Max Eastman), pagans (Leo Strauss and Ernest van den Haag), religionists (Edmund Opitz and Leonard Read), pragmatists (Milton Friedman and Garry Wills), Southern diehards (Richard Weaver), natural lawyers (Murray Rothbard, Peter Stanlis, and John Hallowell), anti-natural lawyers (Ludwig von Mises and Willmoore Kendall), and so on. Of course, some of these men belong to more than one classification. But amidst all this variety there does not appear a single Christian man.

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**Conservatism as Antichristianity**

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Kendall, James Burnham, Ernst van den Haag, Mortimer Smith, Jane Jacobs, Russell Kirk, Hugh Kenner, Leo Strauss, Christopher Dawson, Eric Voegelin, Jeffrey Hart, Whittaker Chambers, and Frederick Wilhelmsen.

Conservatism as a political movement displays as much variety of thought as liberalism. Yet both liberalism and conservatism are united in their Antichristianity. Both are “tolerant,” but neither will tolerate Christianity. It is a mistake to think that conservatives and conservatism, as opposed to liberals and liberalism, are neutral on the issue of Christianity. There is and can be no neutrality. The conservatives seem to recognize this, but unfortunately the Christians do not. Many Christians still believe that politics is an endeavor that can be pursued shoulder-to-shoulder with conservatives. They believe that there is common ground upon which both Christians and conservatives can stand and build—or rebuild—a free society.

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To disabuse Christians who believe this, let us listen to what some leading conservative intellectuals have written about Christianity. I will not cite the views of the libertarians in opposition to Christianity, for this opposition is well known.<sup>4</sup> I will restrict my citations to the more traditional conservatives for the purpose of showing that Antichristianity is not confined to the libertarians but pervades conservatism as a whole.

The first conservative leader I will mention is L. Brent Bozell, brother-in-law of William F. Buckley, Jr., and editor of a now-defunct periodical called *Triumph*. (Bozell’s son, Junior, is now prominent in conservative circles in Washington, D.C.) Among other things, Bozell was the ghostwriter of Barry Goldwater’s *Conscience of a Conservative*, the book that gained the Republican presidential nomination for Goldwater in 1964. In February 1968 *Triumph* published an article titled “Hippie: Son of WASP.” Bozell asked his readers to believe that the hippie culture was the offspring of Protestantism.

As a good Romanist, Bozell was pro-fascist, as well as being anti-Protestant. Nash notes that he was not alone: “Spain exerted a powerful influence on several American conservatives, including [Willmoore] Kendall, Francis Wilson, Frederick Wilhelmsen, and L. Brent Bozell” (196). Bozell’s admiration for Spanish fascism led him to educate some of his children there. The oppression of Christians in Spain is, unfortunately, a story too few Christians are familiar with—and conservatives failed to tell them. They had to rely on the reporting of men like Paul Blanshard, whose book, *Freedom and Catholic Power in Spain and Portugal*, provided a credible answer to the question: How much does the Roman Church-State believe in liberty when it has the power to destroy liberty? In my 1999 book *Ecclesiastical Megalomania*, I demonstrated that the Roman Church-State has an interest in liberty only when

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<sup>4</sup> The works of Ayn Rand are as good as any to mention as examples of Antichristian libertarian polemics. But there seems to be less danger of confusing her atheistic views with Christianity than, say, of confusing the views of medievalists like Lewis and Tolkien with Christianity, since many people confuse religion with Christianity.

its minions are incapable of wielding political and social dominion; when they are dominant, they implement the Church-State's own views, which are collectivist and totalitarian.

The second conservative intellectual I will mention is Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, who Nash also indicates was enamored of the fascist regime in Spain. Wilhelmsen has correctly maintained that to understand contemporary conservatism we must understand medieval tradition. His statement, however, is not merely analytical and heuristic, for he has blamed (not praised) Calvinism and "Manchesterism" (free market economics) for shattering the medieval tradition. He has lamented the loss of "our kings and our chivalry; our craftsmen...and our peasantry."<sup>5</sup> Ah yes, conservatives and many professed Christians lament the loss of our kings and especially our peasantry. (As for craftsmen, there are probably more craftsmen in the United States today than there were in all of Europe during the Middle Ages.) Medieval romanticism infects even so-called Presbyterian and Reformed churches, and ersatz-evangelicals like Charles Colson lament the loss of the unity of the institutional church and praise the Roman Church-State for its handling of heretics.<sup>6</sup>

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Third, one might mention Michael Oakeshott, a British conservative whose book, *Rationalism in Politics*,<sup>7</sup> was enthusiastically received in conservative circles this side of the Atlantic. In a notable perversion of history, Oakeshott referred to "The 'godly prince' of the Reformation and his lineal descendant, the 'enlightened despot' of the eighteenth century...."<sup>8</sup> Oakeshott, whose *bete noir* is rationalism, has also expressed his distaste for Calvinist America: "Long before the [American] revolution, then, the disposition of mind of the American colonists, the prevailing intellectual character and habit of politics, were rationalistic. And this is clearly reflected in the constitutional documents and history of the individual colonies."<sup>9</sup> What Oakeshott meant by "rationalistic," of course, was that the Protestant American colonists

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<sup>5</sup>Frederick Wilhelmsen, "The Conservative Vision," *Commonweal*, June 24, 1955, 295-299.

<sup>6</sup>John Courtney Murray, S. J., in a passage in his book, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* that William F. Buckley, Jr., thought important enough to include in his anthology of conservative writing, called the Inquisition "a Committee on Un-Christian Activities," drawing a parallel between the Inquisition and the House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities. This same misleading analogy was drawn by liberals. But Murray, as a Jesuit, liked the Inquisition, and the liberals correctly hated it. See Buckley, 44.

<sup>7</sup>Basic Books, 1962.

<sup>8</sup>Oakeshott, "The Masses in Representative Democracy," in Buckley, 111.

<sup>9</sup>*Rationalism in Politics*, 27. We shall mention below the conservatives' opposition to written laws and documents.

thought truth was intelligible and could be understood; that Romanist "mysteries" were foreign to Christianity; that all things, especially government, ought to be done decently and in order; and that the written word and hence written constitutions were superior to oral tradition and habits. Oakeshott's attack on these ideas was part of the conservative anti-intellectual movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Another Antichristian conservative we might mention is Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, a longtime associate of William F. Buckley's magazine, *National Review*. Kuehnelt-Leddihn discovered, *mirabile dictu*, the intellectual roots of Nazism in the Reformation,<sup>10</sup> a position similar to that held by Leonard Peikoff, a disciple of Ayn Rand, and many Romanists.

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Perhaps the best academic example of an Antichristian conservative is Eric Voegelin. Voegelin was the author of several fat, boring books and had an enormous influence on other conservative thinkers. Voegelin called himself a "pre-Reformation Christian."<sup>11</sup> Voegelin, who believed that "Uncertainty is the very essence of Christianity,"<sup>12</sup> is certain that the Reformation, Calvinism, and Puritanism are the *fons et origo* of the spiritual, moral, and political decline of the West. He wrote:

...a clear epoch in Western history is marked by the Reformation, understood as the successful invasion of Western institutions by the Gnostic movements [134].<sup>13</sup>

In order to start a movement going, there must in the first place be somebody who has a "cause." From the context in [Richard] Hooker [s *Ecclesiastical Polity*] it appears that the term *cause* was of recent usage in politics and that probably the Puritans had invented this formidable weapon of the Gnostic revolutionaries (135).

Hooker's description of the Puritans so clearly applies also to later types of Gnostic revolutionaries [such as Nazis and Communists] that the point need not be labored.... The portrait of the Puritan resulted from a clash between Gnosticism, on the one side, and the classic and Christian tradition represented by Hooker, on the other side.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>See Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, *Liberty or Equality: The Challenge of Our Time*, Caxton Printers, 1952, 268.

<sup>11</sup>See Russell Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things*, Arlington House, 1969, 254.

<sup>12</sup>Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*. University of Chicago Press [1952] 1969, 122. Alister McGrath, an academic darling of the ersatz-evangelicals, affirms this also.

<sup>13</sup>Of course, this is echoed today by many apostate Christians who decry Protestantism as gnosticism. See, for example, Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics*, Oxford University Press, 1987, a book warmly endorsed by some Reconstructionists.

<sup>14</sup>Voegelin was candid enough to recognize that there is a problem with his analysis and categorization of Puritanism, and dishonest enough to try to resolve the problem *ad hoc*. He wrote:

Hooker discerned that the Puritan position was not based on Scripture but was a “cause” of a vastly different origin. It would use Scripture when passages torn out of context would support the cause, and for the rest it would blandly ignore Scripture as well as the traditions and rules of interpretation that had been developed by fifteen centuries of Christianity (138).

In order to make the Scriptural camouflage effective, the selections from Scripture, as well as the interpretation put upon them, had to be standardized .... The systematic formulation of the new doctrine in Scriptural terms...was provided by Calvin's *Institutes* (138).

For the designation of this genus of Gnostic literature [the genus to which Calvin's *Institutes* belonged] a technical term is needed; since the study of Gnostic phenomena is too recent to have developed one, the Arabic term *koran* will have to do for the present. The work of Calvin, thus, may be called the first deliberately created Gnostic *koran*. A man who can break with the intellectual tradition of mankind because he lives in the faith that a new truth and a new world begin with him, must be in a peculiar pneumopathological state (139).

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**Voegelin was ardently Antichristian, and he has many disciples, many of whom are ignorant even of his name, and some of whom tout themselves as Reformed.**

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The work of Calvin was the first but not the last of its kind.... In the eighteenth century, Diderot and D'Alembert claimed koranic function for the *Encyclopedie francaise*.... In the nineteenth century, August Comte created his own work a *koran* for the positivistic future of mankind.... In the Communist movement, finally, the works of Karl Marx have become the *koran* of the faithful, supplemented by the patristic literature of Leninism-Stalinism (139-140).

This last sentence causes one to wonder whether Voegelin, in his hatred for knowledge (*gnosis*) and the binding nature of the word, a hatred shared by other traditionalist conservatives, regards the Bible itself as a *koran*. He believes, like C. S. Lewis, that the Bible contains myths<sup>15</sup> and that Gnosticism appears in the

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“Of the major European political societies, however, England [not Roman Catholic Spain, Portugal, France, or Italy—editor] has proved herself most resistant against Gnostic totalitarianism; and the same must be said for the America that was founded by the very Puritans [whom Voegelin libeled as “Gnostic revolutionaries”] who aroused the fears of Hobbes [and Voegelin].” The explanation Voegelin attempts for these embarrassing facts does not solve the problem the facts pose for his theoretical analysis. But hey, when the medievalists once again exercise dominion over men, they can rewrite history, just as they did in the Middle Ages, and fabricate a story of the West to fit their false theology.

<sup>15</sup>See Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation*, Volume 1 of *Order and History*. Louisiana State University Press [1956] 1969.

writings of the Apostles John and Paul.<sup>16</sup> Whatever the case, it is clear that Voegelin was ardently Antichristian, and that he now has many disciples, many of whom are ignorant even of his name, and some of whom tout themselves as Reformed.

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**Conservatives believe that there are at least two methods of obtaining knowledge: some combination of science, revelation, reason, tradition, and sensation.**

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The reader, however, may yet be unconvinced. I have given citations indicating a hatred for Christianity among leading conservative intellectuals, but what about the movement as a whole? Is conservatism—regarded as a philosophy rather than as a collective name for conservatives—Antichristian? The answer to that question, which I believe is in the affirmative, is at least as important as the citations given above to corroborate the contention that leading conservative intellectuals are Antichristian.

**The Conservative Denial of Total Depravity**

Conservatives are fond of saying that they, unlike the liberals, believe that man is depraved; that he is not by nature either good or perfectible. It is not enough to say that man is depraved, however, when one is discussing the relationship of Christianity to conservatism. The question is whether conservatives accept the Biblical doctrine of man's depravity—and the answer is that they do not. This can be most clearly seen in two areas: epistemology and ethics. Conservatives—and many professed Christians—do not accept the Biblical view that propositional revelation alone is the source of knowledge.<sup>17</sup> They believe that there are at least two methods of obtaining knowledge: some combination of science, revelation, reason, tradition, and sensation. This epistemological syncretism is common to virtually all conservatives, and common to all conservatives without exception who allow any role to revelation in obtaining knowledge. In short, conservatives do not believe in total depravity, for they believe that man's mind can, apart from divine revelation, discover knowledge. This syncretism—this Thomism—is an essential characteristic of contemporary conservatism.

The second area in which conservative disbelief in total depravity appears is in the field of ethics. While conservatives insist that men are mixtures of good and evil (and not wholly good), and that divine commandments may have some role to play in ethical guidance, they are concerned to make clear that (1) man is not totally evil; and (2) some ethical principles can be discovered by man's reason, or may be found in several religions.

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<sup>16</sup>*The New Science of Politics*, 126.

<sup>17</sup>See 1 *Corinthians* 2:6, 8-10, 14-16; 3:6-9; *Ecclesiastes* 2:19, 26; *Job* 32:8; 38:36; 39:16-17; *John* 14:6; 16:13; 1 *John* 5:20; 1 *Kings* 3:9, 12; *Luke* 24:45; *Matthew* 16:17; *Proverbs* 1:7; 2:6; 3:5; 9:10; 20:27; *Psalms* 119:30, 98; 2 *Timothy* 2:7; etc.

Drawing upon their epistemological syncretism, conservatives espouse the Great Tradition in philosophy; the Great Books in academia; and the natural law and natural rights theories enunciated by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and the Stoics, and in C. S. Lewis' case, the Chinese as well. Libertarians, like Murray Rothbard and Ayn Rand, prefer the Lockean theory and have enlarged upon that variant of natural law theory. It is important to realize that just as virtually all conservatives adhere to an epistemological syncretism and all reject the axiom of revelation, so do they virtually all adhere to some form of natural law theory, and reject the ideas that our only source of ethical knowledge is Scripture and that men are totally depraved in action as well as in thought. Nash wrote:

To many writers of the 1950's, classical political philosophy meant, above all, natural law. In the *Moral Foundation of Democracy*, John Hallowell argued its tenets. Describing himself as a "classical realist," Hallowell enunciated three principles: (1) "there exists a meaningful reality," an "orderly universe," independent of the knower; (2) man can, by the use of his reason, discern the nature of reality; and (3) "knowledge of what man should do in order to fulfill his human nature is embodied in what has traditionally been called the 'law of nature' or the 'moral law'" (62).

Russell Kirk, to whom conservatism is greatly indebted, tirelessly "stressed the eternal verities which commanded conservative allegiance: 'belief in a transcendent order, in an unalterable human nature, and in a natural order'" (195). Stephen Tonsor wrote: "The leaders of the new conservatism are not now, nor will they be, identified with the American business community. They are clearly identified with natural law philosophy and revealed religion."<sup>18</sup> Tonsor is supported by the Jewish sociologist Will Herberg, who wrote: "Conservatives, true to the classical tradition of our culture, whether Hebrew or Greek, of course affirm the doctrine of the higher law as the very cornerstone of their moral, social and political philosophy."<sup>19</sup>

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### **Natural law is, of course, antithetical to Christianity.**

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Natural law is, of course, antithetical to Christianity. It is a form of creature worship, for the creature—deified as Nature—is studied in order to "discover," venerate, and obey her laws, while the doctrine and laws of God revealed in Scripture are ignored or rejected. At best, Scriptural commands are accepted and acceptable only if they repeat or are compatible with what has already been "discovered" by reason. Historically, natural law theory predates Christianity. Logically, natural law theory is antithetical to Christianity. Ethically, it is the worship of the

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<sup>18</sup>To the editor, *Reporter*, August 11, 1955.

<sup>19</sup>Will Herberg, "Conservatives, Liberals, and the Natural Law," Parts I and II, *National Review*, June 5 and 19, 1962.

creature rather than the Creator. It was invented by unregenerate men who sought to provide ethical knowledge apart from revealed moral law. Far from being endorsed by the Apostle Paul in *Romans* 1 and 2, as even some nominally Reformed teach, natural law is an example of the unrighteous suppression of revealed truth. As such, and as a fundamental motif of conservatism, it is one of the basic reasons that conservatism is not Christian, and why Christians, insofar as they are Christians, cannot be conservatives.

The willingness of some natural lawyers to play fast and loose with history is illustrated in the following passage:

Historically, this tradition [of natural law] has found, and still finds, its intellectual home within the [Roman] Catholic Church. It is indeed one of the ironies of history that the tradition should have so largely languished in the so-called [Roman] Catholic nations of Europe at the same time that its enduring vigor was launching a new republic across the broad ocean.

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### **Murray's historical account relies on "ironies" and "paradoxes," because, given his theological assumptions, he cannot make sense of America.**

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There is also some paradox in the fact that a nation which has (rightly or wrongly) thought of its own genius in Protestant terms should have owed its origins and the stability of its political structure to a tradition whose genius is alien to current intellectualized versions of the Protestant religion, and even to certain individualistic exigencies of Protestant religiosity.... The point here is that [Roman] Catholic participation in the American consensus has been full and free, unreserved and unembarrassed because the contents of this consensus—the ethical and political principles drawn from the tradition of natural law—approve themselves to the [Roman] Catholic intelligence and conscience.<sup>20</sup>

Murray, intent upon crediting the creation of the American Republic to Romanist philosophy, not only pads his history account, but even implies that the countries in which the Roman Church is dominant are not really Roman Catholic countries at all. If they were, the contrast between them and the American Republic would be too great for even the most clever Jesuit to explain. As it is, Murray's historical account relies on "ironies" and "paradoxes," because, given his theological assumptions, he cannot make sense of America. Suffice it is say here that it was not the Roman Catholic tradition of natural law that was the genius of America, but the faith of its colonists—Calvinism. John Calvin, not Thomas Aquinas, was the virtual founder of America.

### **Conservatives and Free Will**

The second respect in which conservatives differ from Christians in the field of ethics is on the question of free

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<sup>20</sup>John Courtney Murray, S. J., as quoted in Buckley, 50.

will. A prominent contemporary conservative has stated the ubiquitous conservative argument this way: "Ultimately, the author of human liberty is almighty God, who endows each human being with free will. Every human being since Adam has been free to obey the laws of God, or to disobey them.... God Himself does not constrain our wills: In His infinite majesty, He respects the choices made by men."<sup>21</sup> Mrs. George (Laura) Bush also denied the sovereignty of God in a recent televised interview with Timothy Russert.

Usually this Antichristian idea is elaborated upon by men such as Frank Meyer—a longtime editor of *National Review*—to prove that political freedom is essential to allow personal virtue to emerge and flourish. The enormous confusion in such an argument is not dispelled but only camouflaged by invoking the name of God and his infinite majesty. Free will and Christianity are antithetical. Precisely because God is omnipotent, he controls our wills. It is logically absurd and contrary to Scripture to believe otherwise; it is Antichristian to believe otherwise. Anyone who doubts this should study the Bible—not consult it as a religious *Bartlett's*—and learn what Christianity is.

### Conservatism, Logic, and Tradition

In our discussion above of the Antichristian views of leading conservative intellectuals, we made passing mention of the conservative dislike for writing things down. Given the choice, a conservative would prefer an unwritten constitution to a written one. Michael Oakshott finds the constitutional documents of the American colonies indications of a rationalistic cast of mind in the colonies. Voegelin is so opposed to writing (though he inconsistently wrote many books) that there is reason to believe that he thinks the Bible itself, as the written revelation of God, is "koranic." At any rate, the Bible is Gnostic and mythic, according to Voegelin.

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**It is not writing *per se* to which conservatism is opposed, but the systematizing required to make writing coherent. Conservatism is, by its nature, an enemy of systematic thinking.**

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In its opposition to written documents, conservatism displays not only an affinity for the Romanist perspective that makes oral tradition equal if not superior to Scripture, but also a kinship to the dishonest man who is reluctant to put agreements in writing. More fundamentally, however, it is not writing *per se* to which conservatism is opposed, but the systematizing required to make writing coherent. Conservatism is, by its nature, an enemy of systematic thinking. Voegelin finds the construction of philosophical systems "gnostic." Oakshott finds it an indication of "rationalism." Other conservatives disparage systematic political theory as "ideology": "...no conservative cosmology whose every star and planet is given in a master book of coordinates is very likely to sweep

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<sup>21</sup>Senator Jesse Helms, *When Free Men Shall Stand*. Zondervan, 1976.

American conservatives off their feet. They are enough conservative and anti-ideological to resist totally closed systems, those systems that do not provide for deep and continuing mysteries."<sup>22</sup>

Now where have we heard this mumbo-jumbo about mysteries before? Sunday School? Seminary? Ah, yes. Now I remember. It was in the books and sermons produced by so-called Reformed and Protestant theologians, who, like conservatives, hate logic and system, and want to maintain their control over the peasants by theological doubletalk. Theological mysteries, unlike a perspicuous written revelation, allow the upper classes (and how conservatives and medievalists long for those upper classes, and the distinctive clothing they wear!) to lord it over the peasants. Any Christian can read a perspicuous revelation, but paradoxes and mysteries always require expert interpretation. You see, dear reader, there is indeed an ecclesiastical motivation for the assertion of theological nonsense: dominion. The Romanists have known this for centuries.

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**Theological mysteries, unlike a perspicuous written revelation, allow the upper classes to lord it over the peasants.**

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This anti-logical strain in conservatism can hardly be exaggerated, for it characterizes virtually all of conservatism (but not all of libertarianism). One spokesman for this irrationalism (though he vehemently denied that he was a conservative) was the Nobel Laureate Friedrich Hayek, whom I quoted at the beginning of this essay on the logical implications of the principles adopted by conservatives. Hayek's *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*<sup>23</sup> is a secular argument for irrationalism in politics. Like Karl Popper, Hayek made a great issue of defending the free society on the basis of skepticism. Life, particularly the life of societies and social institutions, is deeper than logic. What Hayek emphasized—and what all traditional conservatives emphasize—was not merely the limitations of the human mind, but the desirability of avoiding logical, systematic thought. This attitude used to be deplored by Christians, some liberals, and libertarians, for unsystematic, non-ideological thought is what ought to be avoided, not praised. Surely any Christian who has ever heard of systematic theology ought to accept the idea that if systematic thought is desirable in theology, it is equally desirable in political theory. There is no virtue in possessing disjointed, unsystematized, perhaps contradictory ideas, that is, in being confused. Yet that is precisely what conservatives regard as commendable. They place their trust, not in logical thought, but in illogical, unsystematic, disconnected, *ad hoc* habits. Secular irrationalists like Hayek are more akin to John Dewey than to medievalists. But they all agree that intuition, habit, and tradition—not logic and certainly not propositional revelation—are the primary tools of politics. But intuition,

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<sup>22</sup>Buckley, xxii.

<sup>23</sup>University of Chicago Press, 1973ff. Hayek seems to be both a secular irrationalist and an advocate of a "program" in politics.

habit, and tradition can offer no guidance as to the best form of government or society, or even the very practical question of the proper way to punish a criminal.

Conservatism is a political philosophy that professes to be practical and grounded in reality—not in ideological or utopian dream worlds—yet it cannot furnish a coherent answer to a very practical question: What is the proper punishment for a thief? Even ignoring the big questions—What is the ideal government? Is there an ideal government? Is any government justified? What is the proper relationship between church and state?—conservatism cannot answer a small question. If conservatism cannot offer a justified answer to a small question, it probably cannot answer larger questions.

In the 1970s (and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) conservatives advocate the imprisonment of the thieves for arbitrary—that is, logically unjustified—periods of time. That is what all the talk about tougher judges, stiffer sentences, and more prisons amounts to. Yet what are the conservatives' reasons for saying this? The first is custom: Criminals have been thrown in jail for hundreds of years. E. J. Carnell once remarked that truth cannot be discovered by counting noses. To the conservatives we say, Truth cannot be discovered by counting the noses of ancestors. The logical fallacy is the naturalistic fallacy. It simply does not follow that because imprisonment has been a method of punishment, that it ought to be a method of punishment.

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**Truth cannot be discovered by counting the noses of ancestors.**

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The second reply to our question might be that the laws of the state demand imprisonment. Let the judges simply enforce the laws. Do not tie the hands of the police. This is not the naturalistic fallacy; it is the fallacy of begging the question. The laws of the state cannot justify imprisonment; the laws themselves need to be justified. This consideration applies equally to the constitution of a state: It cannot justify, unless it is first justified.

This brief discussion of a practical problem has led us to theoretical problems to which the conservative can give no coherent answer. Sooner or later (mostly sooner) the conservative will start thinking in natural law terms that is, in Antichristian terms. Custom can furnish no answer to practical questions.<sup>24</sup> Neither can intuition or present practice. The conservative, in fact, will grasp at almost any straw before—if ever—he acknowledges that propositional

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<sup>24</sup>The conservative emphasis on tradition at one point became too much for even Richard Weaver to bear. Criticizing Russell Kirk's veneration of "the wisdom of our ancestors," Weaver remarked that the important question is: Which ancestors? "After all, Adam was our ancestor.... If we have an ancestral legacy of wisdom, we have also an ancestral legacy of folly..." ("Which Ancestors?" *National Review*, July 25, 1956). Of course, picking a different set of ancestors does not solve the problem either. The conservatives' appeal to tradition is a thinly disguised attempt to advance surreptitiously and without logical argumentation their own opinions, because they must use their opinions as the standard by which to select the traditions they espouse and to identify the traditions they reject.

revelation alone can provide answers for both theoretical and practical questions.<sup>25</sup>

**What Is To Be Done?**

I hope that the reader is now convinced that Christianity and conservatism are two different things, and that conservatism is as Antichristian as liberalism. It was the conservative James Burnham who pointed out that "Liberalism is infected with communism in the quite precise sense that communism and liberalism share most of their basic axioms and principles, and many of their values and sentiments."<sup>26</sup>

It ought now to be recognized that conservatism is infected with liberalism and fascism in the quite precise sense of sharing their basic principles, values, and sentiments. Conservatism, liberalism, fascism, and Communism find their common ground in opposition to Christianity. Each differs from the others, but all agree that Christianity is false and intolerable. Conservatism uses religious language to undermine, distort, and deny Christianity, and in that way it may be the most insidious enemy of Christianity.

If conservatism is Antichristian and at bottom both liberal and fascist, it explains the failure of conservatives to stop the growth of government in the past 50 years. It is not the lack of money, for tens of billions of dollars have already been spent by Christians and conservatives on political and social action in the past 50 years, and government continues to grow, especially under conservative presidents (such as Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bush and Bush), and freedom continues to wither. (The latest attacks on freedom are campaign finance laws that deny freedom of speech and press, the suspension of civil rights in the name of fighting terrorism, and the compassionate fascism of subsiding faith-based organizations.)

Christians ought to dissociate themselves from conservatives by articulating a distinctively Biblical position in politics. Gordon Clark outlined that position in *A Christian View of Men and Things*. It is the basis for an articulation of a complete Christian political philosophy.

Conservatism has no ideology, so systematic thought. But the Christian's system is Christianity—not the compromised "Christianity" of the Judeo-Christian tradition, nor the superstitious "Christianity" of the medievalists, nor the irrational "Christianity" of the ersatz-

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<sup>25</sup>Even when a conservative grasps a Biblical principle, he tends to pervert it. A case in point is William F. Buckley's suggestion some years ago that victims of crimes be granted restitution (a Biblical concept). According to the Bible, the restitution is to be made by the (non-violent) criminal, who is not imprisoned, but compelled to pay part of his wages or wealth to his victim. According to Buckley, however, it is not the criminal who should pay the restitution, but the government, while the criminal is imprisoned. In Buckley's plan, the criminal is to be supported at the taxpayers' (including the victim's) expense, and the victim is to be paid at the taxpayer's expense. This perversion of the Biblical idea of restitution compounds the injustice of the present method of punishing criminals.

<sup>26</sup>*The Suicide of the West*. John Day, 1964, 289.

evangelicals and Romanist-reformed—but the clear, logical, and robust Christianity of the Reformation. The proclamation of that Christianity must begin with the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What we call Western civilization, including the freedoms we still enjoy in the United States, is the product of the bold proclamation of the Gospel in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. If the freedom we still possess is to be kept and enlarged, it can be done only if Christians clearly teach, and the Holy Spirit makes many believe the Gospel they hear. That is the way freedom emerged the first time, and that is the only way it can be maintained. To quote Whittaker Chambers in one of his more lucid moments, “Political freedom, as the Western world has known it, is only a political reading of the Bible.”<sup>27</sup> But freedom is first a soteriological reading of the Bible.

For 50 years conservatism has assisted in the creation of an apostate religious society in the United States. Christians, both nominal and genuine, have contributed greatly to its efforts. But Christians must stop confusing Christianity with Arminianism, Romanism, and medievalism. A Christian society is one that grows out of the truths of the Bible alone, not from the melange of Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism, and pagan superstition that characterized Europe for a millennium under the hegemony of the Roman Church-State.

The wisdom of this world, as the Apostle Paul said, whether that wisdom be conservative or liberal, is foolishness. Christians, like Paul, must not come to the public square with excellence of speech or of wisdom, but leave behind persuasive words of human wisdom, and speak only the words the Holy Spirit teaches. Christians must be determined not to know anything among men except Jesus Christ and him crucified, for only in that way will their faith be established by the power of God and not by the wisdom of men.

*“If you abide in my Word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

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<sup>27</sup>*Witness*. Henry Regnery [1952] 1969, 16. Chambers refused to call himself a conservative; he was a “man of the Right.”