Leadership University *Reprint*

Reprinted from First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life • December 1992• Number 19

The Public Square

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The Real John Dewey

This writer has sometimes puzzled friends and critics alike by expressing a firm, though qualified, admiration for John Dewey. John Dewey?! You mean that arch–secular humanist, that despiser of religious "supersitition," that progressivist despoiler of our once commonsensical public schools? Yes, that John Dewey. He got an awful lot of things quite wrong, but Dewey did understand, as few intellectuals today do understand, that the American democratic experiment is indeed an experiment. He knew that it is an experiment that cannot be sustained without a public philosophy, and that such a public philosophy must be grounded in moral truth. Those were some of the great things that John Dewey got right. Regrettably, the public philosophy he proposed was, in our judgment, wrong on its merits, and it was and is shared by few Americans. A philosphical foundation for democracy that is neither understood nor accepted by the people who constitute the democracy in question is of limited use in sustaining that democracy.

We have sometimes described the purpose of this journal and its related enterprises in terms of "advancing a religiously grounded public philosophy for the democratic experiment in freedom and virtue." John Dewey would have been at home with such a formulation, except the religion that he had in mind was his very uncommon "common faith" that he contrived as a replacement for the "traditional religion" that he thought hopelessly outdated. Much of what Dewey got right, however, is brilliantly and readably set forth by Robert B. Westbrook of the University of Rochester in a major new book, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Cornell). Westbrook laments the fact that relatively few thinkers today pay much attention to Dewey. Even more lamentable, many who are interested in Dewey have come to him through Richard Rorty, the philosopher turned literary critic who claims to be Dewey's apostle in our time.

As faithful readers know, this writer has his own problems with Richard Rorty (see "Joshing Mr. Rorty," December 1990). Robert Westbroook's concerns are closely related to those problems. He begins by noting, very delicately, that Rorty's appropriation of Dewey "is a controversial one." Rorty himself has on occasion admitted that his self–identification with Dewey should not be taken too literally. "Sometimes," Rorty says, "when we think we are rediscovering the mighty dead, we are just inventing imaginary playmates." Exactly, says Mr. Westbrook. He then goes on to detail some of the dramatic differences between Rorty and Dewey. "Rorty urges philosophers to abandon claims to knowledge and rest content with 'edifying,' 'therapeutic' criticism; Dewey, while also warning sternly of the 'conceit of knowledge,' worried as well that philosophy that was *merely* edifying would degenerate into little more than an expression of 'cloudy desire.' Rorty sees philosophy as playful; Dewey insisted it was, as an *intellectualized* wish, hard work. Rorty argues that there is no need for social theorists to consider such topics as 'the nature of selfhood, the motive of moral behavior, and the meaning of human life.' Dewey thought that as a social theorist he had to say something about such things. 'On the Deweyan view,' Rorty says, 'no such discipline as 'philosophical anthropology' is required as a preface to politics'; Dewey's view was quite otherwise. Rorty seeks to deconstruct philosophy; Dewey sought to reconstruct it. As Richard Bernstein has said, what Rorty slights or dismisses as 'trivial' or 'mistaken' in Dewey's thought is his primary concern with 'the role that philosophy might play *after* one had been liberated from the obsessions and tyrannies of the 'problems of philosophy.' Perhaps the best way to sum up briefly the differences separating Dewey and Rorty as philosophers is to say that, while both ruthlessly undercut the quest for certainty, Dewey believed effective cultural criticism still might profit from the general 'ground–maps' that philosophers could provide. Finding such maps useless and unnecessary, Rorty argues for cultural criticism that flies entirely by the seat of its pants."

Although Westbrook doesn't put it quite this way, he suggests that Rorty, very unlike Dewey, is something of a poseur, a morally as well as intellectually frivolous figure. "Pressed by critics to make clearer his moral and political commitments," writes Westbrook, "Rorty has said enough of late to suggest that his social hope as well as his view of the responsibilities of philosophy differ significantly from Dewey's. Refusing to accept the ethical postulate conjoining self–realization and the social good which was at the heart of Dewey's ethics throughout his career, Rorty has argued for a 'liberal utopia' in which there prevails a rigid division between a rich, autonomous private sphere that will enable elite 'ironists' like himself to create freely the self they wish–even if that bares a cruel, antidemocratic self–and a lean, egalitiarian, 'democratic' public life confined to the task of preventing cruelty (including that of elite ironists). For Dewey, of course, democracy was a 'way of life' not merely a way of public life–an ideal that 'must affect all modes of human association'–and he would not have accepted Rorty's contention that 'there is no way to bring self–creation together with justice at the level of theory' for that would have required him to give up a principal article of democratic faith. Rorty contends that the belief that 'the springs of private fulfillment and of human solidarity are the same' is a bothersome Platonic or Christian hangover. If so, Dewey suffered from it."

John Dewey deserves to be rediscovered, and *John Dewey and American Democracy* should help that to happen. Dewey had the right project, no matter how flawed his prosecution of it. Like other public philosophers such as Walter Lippmann, John Courtney Murray, and Reinhold Niebuhr, he understood that the self–evident truths on which this experiment is premised are not self–evident to most people; they have to be rediscovered and rearticulated in every generation. Dewey's great mistake was to think that he could break those truths away from their necessary and continuing dependence upon biblical religion. He lived in a time when the best and the brightest were miseducated to believe that traditional religion was simply beyond the pale of plausibility for the truly enlightened. The cultural hegemony of that rationalist dogma is no longer very secure. Indeed it is collapsing all around us. Perhaps some young scholar reading *John Dewey and American Democracy* will aspire to become a new John Dewey, only this time advancing a public philosophy that is in critical conversation with a common faith that is enduringly common.

The Catholic Church As Interest Group

In 1976 the Administrative Board of the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC) issued a 3,400–word voter guide called "Political Responsibility." They've been doing it every few years since then. The 1992 edition, "Political Responsibility: Revitalizing American Democracy," is 8,700 words. In tone and substance the guide hasn't changed all that much over the years. The current statement is more explicit in pushing affirmative action in order to, it says, overcome the results of racism in the past.

The political positions endorsed by the USCC are clustered in issues under letters "A" to "Q." (Foreign policy is bunched together under "P.") The politically correct who watch their Ps and Qs are warned at the end of Q: "This is not an exclusive listing of the issues that concern us. . . . Thus, we are advocates on many other social justice concerns such as welfare reform, the civil and political rights of the elderly and persons with disabling conditions, the reform of our criminal justice system, and the protection of the land and the environment." That comes after a seemingly interminable list of things that concern the USCC, just in case anything was left out. A leftward activist group in Washington, D.C., has the name now, but it seems increasingly appropriate that the USCC offices should be designated The Center of Concern.

There are trenchant statements on protecting the unborn and on the evil of active euthanasia, together with a call for equitable tax support for school choice and support for increased immigration. But the bishops propose an awfully long list of things on which they want the Catholic faithful, and indeed the entire citizenry, to take them seriously. (A USCC staffer, reminded that the bishops had declared abortion to be the Number One issue for the Catholic Church, responds, "True enough, but you must remember we have at least seven or eight Number One issues.") Apart from the issues mentioned, the positions and directions endorsed by "Political Responsiblity" are pretty much those of the *New York Times* editorial page. Nor is the form and substance of argument that much different.

The document bears all the marks of apparatchiks grinding out a party line according to bureaucratic schedule. The document issues from a staff–driven and schedule–driven process. It is not done because there is an outcry from the faithful wanting political guidance from the bishops on a hundred and one issues. It is done because it was done before. Busy bishops in brief assembly are presented with one more item for approval on a crowded agenda. Those who had time to read it in advance are reluctant to take up the time of the meeting in debating this issue or that, never mind raising the question of whether the Church or the nation really needs a Political Platform of the Catholic Church. Such statements are made, in largest part, because there is a structure for making them. And because other churches and interest groups in Washington, all of whom have a position on almost everything, expect the Catholic Church to have a position on agricultural appropriations, trade policy with Japan, or whatever is agitating some Congressional subcommittee tomorrow morning. Inside the beltway, not to have a position is not to be. How refreshing it would be were the Catholic Church, or any church, to defy the imperiousness of that political ontology. But, alas, it seems that is not to be.

Efforts Well Understood

It is likely that considerably fewer people will read "Political Responsibility" than will read this commentary on it. So maybe we should just ignore it. But that would be a mistake. For numerous lobbyists and activists in Washington and state capitals, it is an imprimatur for the pursuit of their political penchants. To the satisfaction or irritation of politicians and journalists, it reflects "the Catholic position" on a host of disputed questions. The bishops protest that the Church is not merely an interest group, but the protest will be lost on anyone paying attention to this political platform. The bishops insist that they are not taking partisan positions. Their concern is "revitalizing American democracy." "Ironically," they write, "when people in other parts of the world are embracing democratic values and struggling to participate in public life, many Americans seem increasingly disinterested or disenchanted with politics." Perhaps one reason some people are uninterested or disenchanted is that they are weary of political factionalism dressed up in religious garb as a disinterested search for the common good.

"What we seek," the bishops say, "is not a religious interest group, but a community of conscience within the larger society, testing public life on these central [moral] values. Our starting point and objectives are neither partisan nor ideological, but are focused on the fundamental dignity of the human person, which cuts across the political categories of our day." It was, as we recall, George McGovern who first had the cheek to dub his faction "the constituency of conscience." The bishops say they must speak out to lift up "the human and moral dimensions" of public policy–dimensions with which others are presumably less concerned. Such unseemly boasting will not be welcomed by conscientious Christians and Jews who do not have the luxury of pontificating from the sidelines. As for cutting across political categories, the positions favored by the bishops–with the very important exceptions noted above–run the gamut from Mario Cuomo to the groupies on the left of the senior senator from Massachusetts.

"Unfortunately," the bishops acknowledge, "our efforts in this area are sometimes misunderstood. The church's participation in public affairs is not a threat to the political process or to genuine pluralism, but an affirmation of their importance." But most of those who "misunderstand" what the bishops are doing with this kind of political platform are not worried about the threat that it poses to the political process. They are worried about the threat that it poses to the integrity of the Church; they are worried about the corruption of the teaching office of the bishop; they are worried about Catholicism following mainline/oldline Protestantism into the swamps of politicized religion. Those who criticize the politicized institutional habits represented by "Political Responsibility" understand all too well what is happening.

The remedy for such statements is not to make them more "balanced," never mind more "conservative." The remedy, for the most part, is not to make them at all. *When it is not necessary for the Church to speak, it is necessary for the Church not to speak.* "Political Responsibility" is issued in the name of the bishops, but the voice is that of partisan players in the political games that keep Washington in thrall to its overweening delusions of self–importance. With the exceptions noted, the statement proposes no warrant or necessity for the bishops to speak apart from their putatively superior moral concern and wisdom. With the exceptions noted, all that they say is being said loudly and incessantly by numerous other groups. "Political Responsibility" reads like a banal, imitative, and dismally dull political broadside from yet another liberal interest group. The Catholic Church, indeed any church, should aspire to doing better than that, to *being* more than that.

The Sources of Tolerance

James Davison Hunter's *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (Basic Books) is receiving a good deal of deserved attention. Hunter, an important participant in the program of the Institute on Religion and Public Life, elaborates in careful sociological fashion some of the foundational ideas that brought this journal into being. The most important of those ideas is that politics is in largest part a function of culture, and at the heart of culture is religion (whether it is called religion or not). Thus, as we have said so often, American public life is best understood in terms of a *Kulturkampf*, a battle over the ideas, moralities, stories, and symbols by which we will order our life together. The great merit of Hunter's work is that he has taken those ideas and fleshed them out with sociological theory and very useful data.

An extended review of *Culture Wars* will appear in a forthcoming issue. Our purpose here is to comment on one and, we expect, one fairly typical reaction to the *Kulturkampf* argument. It is by Alan Wolfe of New York's New School, writing in *The New Republic* (November 11, 1991). Wolfe observes that Americans are peculiar in the way that they invest their public energies in cultural rather than properly political issues. "It is not because Americans are politically sophisticated that they constantly frustrate those who would understand them," he writes, "but because they are politically innocent. Unable to abolish war, they have abolished politics; the state has not withered away, but the amount of attention paid to its affairs has withered badly." In what Hunter describes as a war between cosmologies–with secular modernists on the one side and orthodox believers on the other–Wolfe is beyond doubt on the modernist side. He admires the way that Hunter "remains neutral" in his analysis of the war, but he finally thinks such neutrality impossible.

Wolfe writes: "Nowhere is the difference between these worldviews clearer than in the fundamentalist assumption, cited numerous times throughout Hunter's book, that we are a Christian nation. At the risk of seeming intolerant of those who hold this position, we are not. There are Jews, Muslims, and any number of other non–Christians who live here and claim the rights of citizens. Fundamentalist language excludes them; liberal modernist language includes them. This is the reason, finally, that Hunter's evenhandedness fails: only one side in this war can live with the other. And the other side cannot reciprocate the respect."

The liberal modernist, says Wolfe, is willing to grant the "fundamentalist" the right to dissent, just so long as religion doesn't get in the way of the liberal ordering of society. At the heart of that order is the axiom of "faith in private and toleration in public"–i.e., the naked public square. Wolfe, and so many of like mind, just don't get it. Their notion of compromise is, "Let's compromise, we'll do it our way." Their notion of tolerance is, "We'll tolerate you so long as you don't trouble us with your different ideas." Some compromise. Some tolerance.

The simplistic worldview espoused by Wolfe is apparently impervious to the fact that even his liberal tolerance cannot stand on its own feet. He repeatedly adverts to democratic "process" and "procedure" as though the style of public discourse he favors is self–evidently right and therefore requires no justification. He does not offer an argument, he simply states a prejudice. The prejudice is most specifically against religion in public. "In a nation composed of people with diverse religious beliefs, no single religion can provide the moral framework for a public vocabulary," he writes. If a "single religion" can mean the Judeo–Christian tradition broadly construed, the assertion is obviously false. That tradition does provide the public vocabulary. Historically and at present, it also provides the way of including other vocabularies, such as that of ancient Athens and even of the secular liberalism that Wolfe favors.

In a magazine as sophisticated as *The New Republic* sometimes is, it is remarkable to find the tired complaint about this not being "a Christian nation." Of course this is not a Christian nation in the way that the Puritans intended the Bay Colony to be a Christian commonwealth. Our public life is manifestly not characterized by Christian virtues. But demographically and culturally it is equally obvious that this is a Christian nation. More than 90 percent of the American people claim to be Christians. Unless Mr. Wolfe is prepared to impose a theological or moral test for "true Christianity," it seems rather willful of him to deny that these people are Christians.

Would the Wolfes of our secularized elites deny any other generalization about this society that was borne out in the case of 90 percent or more of the population? How about the assertion that America is an English–speaking nation? It seems very doubtful that Mr. Wolfe would respond to that assertion by writing, "At the risk of seeming intolerant to those who hold this position, we are not. There are Spanish–speakers, and Chinese–speakers, and the speakers of any number of other languages who live here and claim the rights of citizens." America is Christian in the way that it is English–speaking. Relatively few speak the language very well, there is little agreement on how it should be spoken, some speak it hardly at all, but they all live here and claim the rights of citizens.

What James Hunter obviously has not gotten Alan Wolfe to understand is that the overwhelming majority of Americans derive their moral vocabulary and moral judgments, directly or indirectly, from religion. Whether we like that or not, it is the social fact. And the religion in question is overwhelmingly Christian of a sort that is comfortable in affirming a Judeo–Christian tradition. In private and in public, most Americans speak Christian–although when speaking in public many of them think it is their Christian duty (or a constitutional requirement) that they pretend that they are not speaking Christian. The secular dogma, propounded by Wolfe and many others, that religion must be contained entirely in the private sphere only encourages the pretense. The result, ironically, is that many Americans are discouraged from making in public the religiously grounded moral arguments for tolerating liberal secularists such as Alan Wolfe.

Evangelicals Onward and Upward

It has long been recognized that church membership statistics are notoriously unreliable, not least because different churches define membership in dramatically different ways. For instance, a Lutheran parish that counts as members all who have been baptized may have 600 members but only 250 at Sunday worship. Some large evangelical "megachurches," on the other hand, have done away with membership rolls altogether. Other evangelical churches may have several thousand at Sunday services but count only 300 members. That is because they have more exacting criteria of religious experience and commitment for membership.

Evangelicals, says Randall Balmer of Columbia University, have always been a larger percentage of the population than the usual statistics suggest. "Indeed," says Balmer, "the chances are good that, due to widespread popular disillusionment with liberal Protestantism, someone whose name appears as a member of a mainline denomination actually shows up for worship at an evangelical church." Balmer concludes: "Despite published statistics, there can be little doubt that now in the final decade of the twentieth century, the real energy of American Protestantism lies, for better or worse, with the evangelicals. For them, membership statistics tell us very little about their influence within the larger culture."

That observation may find support in a recent nationwide poll that asked 1,060 adults about their impressions of various denominations. Twenty–nine percent had a "very favorable" impression of the Baptist, 23 percent of the Roman Catholic, 18 percent of the Methodist, 12 percent of the Lutheran and Presbyterian, and 6 percent of the Mormon. Why no church gets more than a 29 percent "very favorable" rating is something that the pollsters do not attempt to explain.

Behavior–Borne Disease

There has been much debate over mandatory AIDS testing of medical workers. Columnist Charles Krauthammer thinks mandatory testing is a very bad idea. It would, he says, be fiscally reckless and impracticable. HIV is spread by people who already have HIV, and finally the only answer is an ethical one of "reveal or refrain." Either such people reveal their condition or refrain from the behavior that infects others. Krauthammer writes:

"In the public mind, the allocation of blame for AIDS has seen three stages. When the cause of AIDS first became known, AIDS patients were seen as victims of their own appetites. Then, with Ryan White, the young hemophiliac, they began to be seen as victims of fate. Now, AIDS activists are trying to portray AIDS patients as the victims of society: of an indifferent majority, of public silence, of government inaction, of drug company avarice, of Catholic homophobia.

"Some epidemics can be laid at the feet of government and some cannot. Cholera is a government–controllable and, in some ways, government–induced epidemic. If you don't treat the sewage, people will die. But that model does not apply to a disease that is not waterborne, or airborne but behavior–borne. In a free society, government can do little to influence the spread of a behavioral epidemic, and AIDS is the quintessential behavioral epidemic.

"The main role of government is to protect the civil rights of AIDS sufferers and to try to find a cure. (The federal government spends a staggering $3.7 billion a year on AIDS, $1.2 billion of it on research.) The rest depends on the private decision of individual citizens and, in particular, of the only ones in a position to spread AIDS: HIV carriers."

Responding to the "Sects"

We have commented from time to time on the growing rivalry between Catholicism and evangelical/fundamentalist Protestantism, especially in Latin America. And we have worried that Catholic leaders have sometimes, in their polemic against "the sects," run the risk of compromising the Church's ecumenical understanding of the ways in which all Christians are, however imperfectly, already one in Christ and His Church. Speaking to this set of problems in its North American context (which is in large part an immigrant extension of the Latin American experience), Bishop Roberto O. Gonzalez of Boston, writing in *America* (October 19, 1991), has some important counsel for Catholics: "To speak of the new evangelization and of catechesis for Hispanics in this country, one must address the topic of the sects. I think that it should be said a thousand times that part of the success of the sects is their evangelical foundation, their unabashed rootedness in the Gospel–that they seem to present Christ in all His power as the foundation of new life, of conversion, of forgiveness of sins. Their preaching seems to be based solely upon the person and power of Christ. Thus, when speaking of a catechesis for a new evangelization, this catechesis should include a presentation of the gospel with these same characteristics, teaching how everything in Catholic life is related to its foundation, the person and power of Christ. . . . From the point of view of religious phenomena, sects will always be with us. We thus have to be careful lest an anti–sect mentality rule our response to them. For the sects can remind us of the need to be more faithful to our religious identity and mission. In this sense, the sects challenge us to be more serenely faithful to our mission of preaching the Gospel, of evangelizing, of catechizing. The more we are faithful to our mission, the fewer the people who will defect and the fewer the inroads the sects can make. Sects present an opportunity for us to be stronger in our faith, more Catholic, more evangelical, more convinced–which we ought to be anyway. The sects, in this sense, have a providential dimension. We cannot appear, therefore, to be competing with the sects, because then we become another sect. We succumb to an intra–sect battle. The church is not a sect. Yet the church is called by the Lord to be more church."

While We're At It

- We came across this nice twist. TV journalist Linda Ellerbee contends on the op–ed page of the *Times* that women should recognize that there is a time and a season for everything. For instance, in the conflict between career and rearing children, choices must be made. Children are more important, she says, mainly because mothers are more important to children than to corporations. "If she has any doubts about devoting less time to her job and more time to being a mother right now, she should remember that while corporations don't always keep score, children do," writes Ellerbee. A couple of years ago, Ellerbee went to a conference of the American Association of University Women. Looking over the program, she noticed a workshop called "Having It All: How you can juggle career, children, love life, and leisure activities and keep your sanity." She protested to the president of the association that the promise of the workshop was a deception. No way can a woman do all that and keep her sanity. The president said they had cancelled the workshop. "Oh, really," said Ellerbee, "Why did you do that?" "Well," said the president, "we just couldn't fit it in." It seems even the American Association of University Women can't have it all.

- " . . . pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death." Peter Berger says all religion is mankind's waving of its banners of defiance in the face of death. Ernest Becker writes about the denial of death as the motor force of human ambition. Books beyond number have been written about preparing for "a good death" by the right ordering of the soul in dependence upon the mercy of God. Forget about all that. HarperCollins has just brought out *Easing the Passage: A Guide for Prearranging and Ensuring a Pain–Free and Tranquil Death via a Living Will, Personal Medical Mandate, and Other Medical, Legal, and Ethical Resources.* There we have it. A guaranteed tranquil, if not good, death. The ultimate extension of the pleasure principle to the conquest of what St. Paul–what did he know about such things?–called the last enemy. Had Herbert Marcuse not so spoiled the term, this might be dubbed the final triumph of "one–dimensional man."

- Robert Bernard Martin makes much of the poet's homosexuality in his new biography *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (HarperCollins). Had he not been working so hard at repressing his sexual yearnings, says Martin, he might have been a much greater poet. Reviewing the book for the *The Spectator*, Charles Moore thinks that Martin misses the point. "[Hopkins] felt the dangers of mortal beauty, but he was able, in his art and his religion, to establish its right relation with 'God's better beauty, grace.' Even his last, great, miserable poems 'The Terrible Sonnets' do not defy orthodoxy; they express Hopkins' failure to reach the joy which he knows is in God. As a Jesuit, Hopkins had often to undergo what was called 'the discipline of the eyes,' forbidden to look at anything for a space. This must have been a worse torture for him than for anyone else, but it was also a necessary one. He could not have seen as deeply or as clearly if he had not learnt to deny what he wanted in order to gain something he wanted even more."

- In 1965 there were 479,000 divorces in the U.S. In 1985 there were 1,190,000. In 1969 there were eight states with no–fault divorce provisions. Fifty states had such provisions in 1987. The growing divorce rate is but one reason why many people are reconsidering the wisdom of the "no–fault revolution" of the 1970s. Law professor Lynn Wardle of Brigham Young University joins those who point out that no–fault has had devastating consequences for women and children who are the frequent victims of "quickie" divorces. He writes in the University's law review, "The time has come to consider reforming the first generation of no–fault divorce laws. This does not mean that we should 'turn the clock back' and reenact 1950s–era divorce laws. But we should be unafraid to ask hard questions about the laws we have inherited. It is time to adopt a new generation of divorce law reforms." It is a persuasive argument. At the same time, however, we are pondering the observation that the growing influence of conservatism means that there is no going back to the time when you couldn't turn back the clock.

- Those crazy right–wingers are prone to the most bizarre hyperbole. Consider this evaluation of the influence of the far left ("the party of change") in American Catholicism: "The party of change seems to embrace just about every active minister in the Church, with the exception of a large number of bishops and some conservative younger clergy. It dominates the fields of liturgy, religious education, justice and peace offices, campus ministry, Catholic higher education, much popular spirituality, and the discipline of theology as a whole." The speaker is not some fevered traditionalist but Father Richard McBrien, former Chairman of Theology at Notre Dame, in a keynote address to a "Future of the Church" conference in Washington, D.C. He also called for stripping the papacy of its powers by "decentralizing" the Church. In his vision, local churches would elect their own bishops and "send a letter to Rome just to let them know, as a courtesy before they announce it." McBrien acknowledged that some people "find it very difficult to see how someone like me and others who criticize the authority of the Church are at the same time absolutely loyal to the Church." Among the enemies of change, whom he compared to the Stalinist coup leaders who tried to oust Gorbachev, McBrien puts at the top of the list Pope John Paul II and his doctrinal aide Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. At a press conference he hinted that Ratzinger might have a Nazi past. "Keep in mind," he said, "Cardinal Ratzinger was a teenager during the Third Reich. We don't know what he was doing. Was he in the Hitler Youth? Some suggest he was." This may not be a new low in leftist smear tactics, but it is surely a candidate for that distinction.

- We see from their bulletin that the folks at the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs are taking on some heavy subjects. Louis Henkin, a world order expert, gave a lecture on "Who's Ethics." We don't know whose mistake that was. Maybe the bulletin's editor. A forthcoming topic listed is "Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* : 50 Years Later (1932–1992)." Perhaps those who flunk arithmetic go into ethics.

- Nobody would dispute the observation that Carl Braaten is among the most respected theologians on the American scene. (See his "Protestants and Natural Law" elsewhere in this issue.) Recently he surprised almost everyone by announcing that, after many years of teaching there, he is leaving the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago to set up an independent institute for theology in Northfield, Minnesota. His friend Robert Jenson of St. Olaf College in Northfield reflects on why Braaten is leaving LSTC. What Jenson says about Lutheran seminaries has, we are sure, application far beyond the boundaries of Lutheranism. Jenson writes: "Long ago, the church's demand for various sorts of 'practical' and therapeutic 'experiences' in the seminary curriculum reduced their space for theology below the viable quantity. Biblical, historical, and systematic theology are hard disciplines, to which only the very most able and well–prepared can catch on quickly. For decades, a seminary teacher of serious theology has had to look out at his/her classses in the certain knowledge that with most of the students the labor was in vain. With those few gifted ones, teaching theology was a joy. But it was a joy dampened by guilt and panic over the innocents being graduated and the parishes they would serve.

- "A few years ago the situation futher deteriorated as the recruitment of students changed. Seminary students now for the most part arrive with no appropriate higher education whatsoever. More disastrously yet, a decisive number seem somehow to self–select from the least catechized segments of our in–any–case secularized churches. This of course changed the curricular situation from calamitous to hopeless. And such students are defenseless over against the next–to–be–named set of evils.

- "In the seminaries of the ELCA there is now a theological censorship of a stringency previously unknown in Lutheranism outside the Missouri Synod. The new reactionaries of course enforce a different selection of nineteenth–century sectarianism than did those of Missouri; alas, it is one even less compatible with theological enterprise or formation. Its chief axioms are perhaps: (1) biblical and historical study is for the purpose of liberating from the language and opinions of the Bible and the tradition; (2) 'God' is a complex of metaphors, projected from our religious needs and social valuations; (3) the church is a volunteer society of the religiously like–minded, which we continuously re–institute as our religious minds change; and (4) Western civilization is no damned good, and neither can Christianity be insofar as it is responsible for Western civilization. Probably a majority of professors dissent from this position, but the pietism and/or existentialism of most provides no stable basis of resistance, and the remaining margin is just that.

- "And finally there is the quota system of faculty appointments–and don't let anyone tell you there isn't one. Faculty who worry about congregations out there fight again and again to appoint the best available scholars and teachers–and maybe even an unabashed Christian or two. But how many of these battles can one sustain in an ecclesial culture which regards such standards as wicked?"

- In his homily at a recent service of ordination John Cardinal O'Connor of New York quoted from an unpublished manuscript of the late Hans Urs Von Balthasar. That distinguished theologian is discussing the need to make room for the Holy Spirit if the Church is to be renewed. He wrote: "Too frequently we have been tempted to make for ourselves a postconciliar ideology of the Church–as a democratic, charismatic people of God, with certain offices whose meaning is fought over–and we expect the Spirit to be channeled through the pipes of this ideology. He will not do so; that much we must admit today, even though reluctantly. . . .

- "The pipes freeze; there is a whirl of new official positions which unceasingly spew forth designs, plans, synodal papers, and the like, far too many even to read much less be able to put into practice. The new national [institution] is one which, like Moloch, not only absorbs in itself and incinerates the best spiritual energies of the land, but furthermore paralyzes what really matters, the genuine personal decisions of individuals. . . .

- "And so we must try to discover, as with a divining rod, where in the Church (and in the world), an underground spring of the Spirit bubbles, which possesses a sense for the futile, for the readiness for anything, for prodigality. We must try to discover persons who do not unfold their lives according to their own plans, but who are prepared to allow themselves to be cast in the Spirit, and through the Spirit, wherever, into whatever, the Spirit needs."

- *Izvestia* asked Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Republic, why so many political leaders seemed to be "turning to God." Yeltsin replied: "I will speak for myself. First of all, I am baptized. My name and date of birth, as was the rule, are written in the baptismal registry. My grandparents were believers, as were my father and mother, until we left the country for the city. Later, in the course of a disproportionately ideological formation at school and in university, I constantly heard, read, and–why hide it–felt and shared the most insulting opinions concerning the Church and religion. This education was gravely wrong and seriously unjust, as was the classification of persons into believers and non–believers, a distinction which today is somewhat blurred. Having said this, I have the greatest respect for the Orthodox Church, for its history, for its contribution to Russian spiritual life, for its moral teachings, its tradition of mercy and charity. Today, the Church is moving ahead in these areas, and our duty is, in turn, to reestablish the rights of the Church. It is not rare for us to meet the Patriarch and other clergymen. When I am in a Church I take a candle. A religious service lasting four hours bores neither me nor my wife. And often, when I leave a church, I feel that something new, something luminous, has come into me. And yet, I cannot make the sign of the cross in public. Something keeps me from doing so. To tell the truth, there is no room for half–way belief. Generally speaking, the process is an ongoing task for the soul and which is no easier, in its way, than putting totalitarianism into question." The connection with totalitarianism is insightful. Faith is a matter of total commitment, or at least of willing a total commitment. Whether such totality of devotion results in spiritual life or death depends entirely upon the object of devotion. The spiritual life as a "task for the soul" says it very nicely.

- The Institute on Religion and Public Life cooperated in holding a conference in Washington, D.C., on the centennial of *Rerum Novarum* a while back. Among the many speakers was Max Stackhouse of Andover–Newton and a contributor to this journal. He addressed the social teachings of mainline/oldline Protestantism or, as he prefers, "ecumenical Christianity." He thinks there are changes in the offing as we approach the twenty–first century. "It is clear that we will face a form of Protestantism differing from the one a hundred years ago. It is a less confident Protestantism, only now beginning to get its own house in order once more. The signs are no bigger than that of a cloud the size of a man's hand, but some of the most vocal Sandinista Christians are quietly moving (or being moved) to other positions. It has not been entirely lost on key Protestant leaders that the Catholics are winning the arguments, the Evangelicals are winning the people, and, besides that, the Republicans are winning the elections. Something has to change."

- Joe Klein of *New York* magazine isn't buying the portrait that Charles V. Hamilton draws of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (*Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.: The Political Biography of an American Dilemma*). Contra Hamilton, Klein says Powell did not contribute to racial progress but set it back by entrenching corruption and "the badass style" among those who claim to be black leaders. The replacement of the search for equality with strident demands for quotas and endless entitlements took the civil rights cause off track, says Klein. Masters of outlandishness such as Al Sharpton and Leonard Jeffries (the City University of New York professor who preaches that whites are inferior because they don't have the right stuff in their skin) are, according to Klein, the true heirs of Adam Clayton Powell. Klein concludes: "The empowerment, and the celebration, of these outrageous sorts has enabled whites to get off the hook too easily. If Sharpton, Jeffries, and anomic children with Uzis define the new popular image of blackness on the evening news, it will be easier to ignore the vast majority of black people who work hard, who dread crime, who struggle to build a better life for their kids. In the end, the legacy of Adam Clayton Powell isn't progress or pride. It's showtime."

- Speaking at Trinity Church, Wall Street, former President Jimmy Carter got a big hand when he criticized the United Nations for condoning war in the Gulf "without totally exploring a peaceful resolution to the conflict." Like, for example, Saddam Hussein might have been willing to agree to be *very careful* in using the nuclear weapons that, it is now generally acknowledged, were within months of being ready for deployment.

- Peter Singer, the Australian philosopher who champions "rights" for animals and infanticide, euthanasia, and population control for human beings, writes at length in *The New York Review of Books* about those awful German universities that have, under pressure, been "disinviting" him from conferences. It seems that many German professors and students detect a disturbing similarity between Singer's arguments and their unhappy political experience of the not–so–distant past. Singer complains: "Germans . . . both in academic life and in the press have shown themselves sadly lacking in the commitment exemplified by the celebrated utterance attributed to Voltaire: 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.' No one has, as yet, been asked to risk death in order to defend my right to discuss euthanasia in Germany, but it is important that many more should be prepared to risk a little hostility from the minority that is trying to silence a debate on central ethical questions." The Germans, it seems, will defend free speech to the death–meaning up to but not beyond the point where a speaker advocates, as Singer does, death for those who evidence a deficient "quality of life." It was not very long ago that liberals would have applauded such Germans for having "learned the lesson" of their horrific history. But then, Peter Singer is no liberal.

- In January of 1975 a group of ecumenical theologians meeting at Hartford Seminary, Connecticut, issued "The Hartford Appeal," a call for churchly renewal. Recently the Lilly Endowment convened another meeting at the same site, this time bringing together former top executives from the oldline Protestant churches that have generally experienced in the intervening years whatever is the opposite of renewal. The focus was on the churches and public life, and the question posed was, "What have you learned?" Arie Brouwer, former head of the National Council of Churches (NCC), has learned that oldline churches "continue to act as if they are established institutions," when in fact they have been largely sidelined. Claire Randall, who headed the NCC before Brouwer, counseled that leaders should "be patient and keep trying." William P. Thompson of the former United Presbyterian Church and Doris Anne Younger, who once directed Church Women United, "stressed the need to develop creative ways of communicating." Bishop James K. Mathews of the United Methodists opined that the church must "take the real issues of our time with the utmost seriousness" and act on them. To judge by this RNS report, the Lilly Endowment project succeeded in learning that, except for Arie Brouwer, these leaders have learned little or nothing. Perhaps they might take another look at that Hartford meeting of 1975.

- The simultaneously pensive, boyishly curious, and ever so sensitively concerned Bill Moyers is public television's candidate for America's Number One Public Philosopher. A fawning interview in the *Washington Post Magazine* concludes with this reflection: "The single greatest loss in my time has been the idea that we are moral agents. Religion helped a great deal here. Religion taught that we are accountable for our own actions. Tribute is still paid to it today, but all that we have been talking about indicates that nobody really expects it anymore. One thing you can say about Lyndon Johnson is that he finally paid for his excesses. I don't think you can say that about anyone in American politics today." (1) Who does Mr. Moyers talk with to get the impression that Americans don't take religion and moral responsibility very seriously any more? (2) Dare we suggest that readers send him their lists of politicians who have, and are, paying for their excesses? (3) In the culture wars of which he styles himself as the moderator, Mr. Moyers is manifestly a belligerent–on the wrong side, alas. (4) But then, he is, in the words of Joseph Campbell, "following his bliss," and he knows with dogmatic certitude that nobody else has a right to have a judgment about the rightness of that. (5) It is true, we tend to find the electronically ubiquitous Mr. Moyers an insufferable prig, especially when he is being so winsomely nostalgic about the "old values" to which we cannot return.

- The Holy See's secretary for relations with states, Archbishop Jean–Louis Tauran, gave a major address at the United Nations a while back, and it touches on the debate over whether the Pope has jettisoned just war doctrine in favor of some kind of pacifism. "It is absolutely necessary to exhaust all the peaceful means which international law places at the disposal of all to find solutions worthy of man before unleashing a war of any kind," the Archbishop declared. "And it is necessary always to judge in conscience whether the evils which are to be created are proportional to the objectives for which a decision to fight is made." That, be it noted, is classical just war doctrine. Asked by a reporter whether the address was to be understood as a criticism of the UN role in the Gulf war, Tauran emphatically denied it. War is not inevitable, he said, but efforts for disarmament cannot succeed unless they are accompanied by progress in eliminating injustice and securing respect for human rights. In sum, war is a bad business but it may sometimes be required by justice.

- In the great tradition of their founder, Ignatius Loyola, the Jesuits at the Campion Renewal Center in Weston, Mass., offer weekend retreats employing the "spiritual exercises" in updated form. There is, for instance, this: "THE BROADWAY MUSICAL AS A 'BROADWAY' OF PRAYING. The best of both prayer and the American Theatre celebrate what is real and life–affirming in the human experience. The spiritual exercise of listening to, and singing, our favorite songs often reflects our own dreams, joys, sorrows, and foibles. This weekend will present in a prayerful, and reflective, way some of the traditional and contemporary themes of Spirituality as they are found in the music of Broadway." The director of good feelings for this event, a Father Thomas J. Gallagher, appears to believe that Ignatius would agree that Christ of "Chorus Line" is a great improvement over Christ crucified. The "Enneagram" is big at the Campion retreat. The Enneagram is a Muslim Sufi teaching that analyzes nine different personality types and how to get in touch with your authentic self. There is also "Bio–Spirituality" for focusing on the signals your body is trying to send you. Like many other institutions, the Campion Center's literature says much about its being "Jesuit" and "Ignatian," but little about being Christian and nothing about being Catholic. Which suggests once again the urgent need for ecumenical dialogue on Jesuit–Christian relations.

- The editorial director of Fortress Press, Marshall D. Johnson, didn't like our recent comment on the shambles of theological publishing. He is apparently quite proud of what they're doing at Fortress and sends along their new catalogue with the comment, "If you find in it significant works by liberationists, feminists, and deconstructionists, please call this to the attention of your readers." We don't know if the works are "significant," but the new catalogue abounds in books that reinforce our earlier comment, and that surely confirm folk in their hunch that they're not missing much by not reading current theology. The lead book in the catalogue is *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism, and Christianity* by Anne Primavesi, who teaches at Schumacher College in England and previously co–authored *Our God Has No Favorites: A Liberation Theology of the Eucharist*. The new work is described as "a compelling call to rethink theology in the light of ecological crisis." It leaves us uncompelled. Then there is *The Open Door* by Gerd Theisen of Heidelberg. "Gerd Theissen," we are told, "has produced yet another fresh and imaginative approach to understanding biblical texts and stories." Just what we needed, "yet another" fresh and imaginative approach. Ah, but this one really is different. The catalogue continues: "Traditional ways of understanding the Bible are challenged." Well, it's about time somebody did that, especially with a fresh and imaginative approach. And so it goes through the offerings of Fortress and most of contemporary theological publishing. There are outstanding exceptions. For instance, Carl Braaten's *No Other Gospel: Christianity Among the World's Religions*, which will be reviewed in a forthcoming issue. And H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Meaning of Revelation*. Of course the latter, now being reissued, was first published fifty years ago. Out of charity, we hesitate to mention *New Adam: The Future of Masculine Spirituality* by Philip Culbertson, a book that is sensitive to feminist insights and that will "help men to forge a new spiritual life that is more relational, caring, and creation–centered." There is also *After Nature's Revolt: Eco–Justice and Theology*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel, which promises to expose "Western social, economic, and technological patterns, even as it critiques Christian theology's own anthropocentrism." Suffice it that the political rectitude of today's theological guilds makes ordinary political correctness look downright, as Fortress might say, fresh and imaginative.

- "Citizen Christians: Their Rights and Responsibilities" is a brief, vigorous, and thoroughly intelligent little tract by Dr. Richard D. Land, director of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (901 Commerce, Nashville, Tennessee 37203). While tuned especially to Baptists, the argument is applicable across the denominational board. Readers might want to write for a copy and give it to their friends (and foes).

- The Network Television Association is a high–minded outfit. Formed by the three networks to fight increasingly effective boycotts, the Association has sent a letter to thousands of advertisers and opinion makers solemnly pledging the networks' continuing devotion to the best in American values. According to the American Family Association, in a typical month this year the networks showed 164 depictions of sex outside marriage, carried programs including 407 references to premarital intercourse and 171 skin scenes. Here is a striking figure: 93 percent of the sex incidents depicted in network shows is extramarital. (Can you imagine what happens to the brains of the people who actually do the counting of all this stuff?) In any event, there are those who think what is happening on network television should not be dismissed lightly. Syndicated columnist Don Feder comments: "Television Sex is so lighthearted, so delightful, so free of unforeseen consequences. Unforeseen consequences? In 1988, 65.3 percent of adolescent births were out–of–wedlock, up from 29.5 percent in 1970. Each year, 2.5 million adolescents contract a sexually transmitted disease. Would condoms help? Doubtless, if they made them large enough to fit over television screens, thus obscuring the picture. . . . That the networks are dying a slow ratings death is a source of grim satisfaction, even if cable (with its nudity and graphic violence) will inherit the broadcast earth. In the meantime, as our society hurtles full throttle toward the abyss, network executives are stoking the engine."

- The autobiography of Father Theodore Hesburgh (well, not quite "auto," since it was written "with Jerry Reedy") is titled *God, Country, Notre Dame* and is reportedly selling briskly. The dustjacket carries this blurb from the *Washington Post* review: "Fascinating . . . Engaging . . . The man is a wonder–worker, a Catholic version of Averell Harriman or George Ball–the man popes and presidents call upon when things get stuck." We would, in charity, like to think that Father Ted is not responsible for the dustjacket either.

- Each year all the Catholic parishes in the country are asked to contribute to the Campaign for Human Development. The CHD budget last year was $9,820,000. *Organization Trends,* a publication of the Capital Research Center in Washington, D.C., has been tracing how the CHD money is used, and concludes that there is serious cause for concern. "The most important general criticism to be made," the study reports, "is that CHD funds so many projects that are directly political (and leftist) in nature. Expanding Communications to Empower Indian People of Fort Berthold ($33,000); Health Care for All ($30,000); Amnesty Farmworkers Organizing Project ($25,000); Campaign for Accessible Health Care ($40,000); or Build Homes Not Bombs ($20,000)." The authors are even more concerned, however, by what they view as CHD's undermining of Catholic social teaching as reflected, for instance, in Pope John Paul II's recent encyclical, *Centesimus Annus*. They write: "Not only are there few, if any, CHD–funded programs which encourage [the virtue of economic enterprise]; many of them exist to perpetuate precisely the opposite vice. Nowhere in CHD literature does one read of the need to start with the human heart, of the need for self–control, temperance, and a view toward the common good. Instead, one finds the political vocabulary of power, rights, and entitlement. This is even more tragic when one considers this admonition from *Centesimus Annus*: 'It is on this level [of teaching the aforementioned virtues] that the Church's specific and decisive contribution to true culture is to be found. The Church promotes those aspects of human behavior which favor a true culture of peace, as opposed to models in which the individual is lost in the crowd . . . and in which his greatness is posited in the arts of conflict and war.' Considering this dichotomy, it is not difficult to figure out which describes the Campaign for Human Development, whose philosophy is so roundly rejected in *Centesimus Annus*." (For a copy of the October, 1991, report, write Capital Research Center, 1612 K Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20006)

- The wisdom of "coming out of the closet" is a sometimes thing. It depends on what one is coming out about. Consider this little item by Matthew Parris in *The Spectator* (London): "I was telephoned from Australia this week by a friend who for years has been struggling with the question of whether to conceal his homosexuality. I have always urged him not to, assuring him the best people respect honesty, modern society in Britain is tolerant of every human type, one should be true to oneself, etc. He recently came to the same conclusion and acted upon it, so far without ill–effect. But he had not telephoned about that. 'Matt,' he said, joyously, 'I've become a Christian. I'm born again. I went to this evangelist's meeting and the Lord Jesus came to me. I wanted to tell you immediately. I want to tell everybody. I want to shout 'hallelujah!' All I could do was mumble, 'I'm pleased for you, Charlie.' Inwardly I thought, 'I hope he doesn't feel he has to tell everybody about it; it would be pretty embarrassing. At dinner parties, I mean aren't some things best kept to oneself?' and, out loud to him, I caught myself saying, 'It's a big step to announce this sort of thing, Charlie. You'll lose friends. You ought to think twice and maybe keep it to yourself. . . . ' "

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